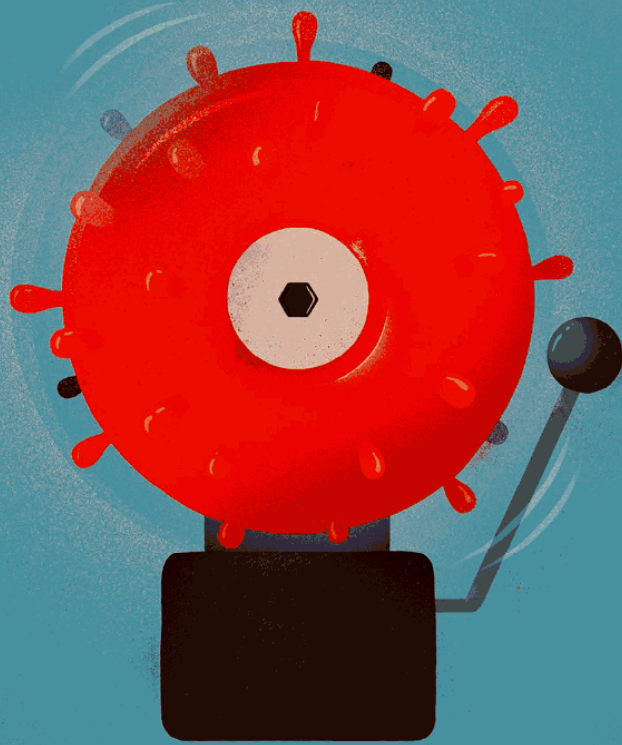


Tim Harford: why we fail to prepare for disasters

LIFE & ARTS

‘An economic iron curtain would imperil the recovery’

HENRY PAULSON, PAGE 7



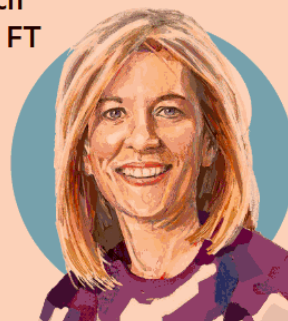
Sebastien Thibault

After lockdown
China attempts
to reopen its
economy
BIG READ



Stephanie Kelton
has Lunch
with the FT

LIFE & ARTS



What happened to
TV's golden age?

LIFE & ARTS



Coronavirus threatens to knock \$500bn hole in US state budgets

◆ Democrats urge extra \$150bn ◆ Fiscal crunch looms ◆ Congress deadlocked on more aid

BRENDAN GREELEY — WASHINGTON

The economic impact of shutting down local economies threatens to blow a \$500bn hole in state tax revenues and force savage cuts to spending on education and other public services, unless the federal government steps in with bailout funds.

Even as governors focus on the immediate pandemic battle, they are warning of a looming fiscal crunch that could eclipse the Great Recession a decade ago and tip indebted states into crisis.

As part of its spending package at the end of March, Congress approved \$150bn to help states pay for hospital

costs, supplies and training. But governors say covering the extra spending related to coronavirus does not go nearly far enough, as the collapse in revenues resulting from virus-related shutdowns will be even more significant.

Democrats on Capitol Hill have made another \$150bn in funding for states a central demand for a fourth stimulus package, which is being negotiated with the White House. But the Trump administration and Republican congressional leaders have refused to add the funding, insisting that the new legislation focuses on replenishing a now-empty \$350bn fund for loans to small businesses.

Andrew Cuomo, the New York gover-

nor who is a leading champion for state authority, said the budget issues had become even more acute following President Donald Trump's decision to leave responsibility for reopening the US economy to individual governors.

“Don't give the states this massive undertaking that has never been done before and then don't give them any resources to do it,” Mr Cuomo said yesterday. “That is passing the buck without passing the bucks.”

State capitals believe even the \$150bn sought by Democrats in Washington will be insufficient. Last week, the National Governors Association asked Congress for another \$500bn to make up for the

Inside

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collapse in tax revenue. On Thursday, the governors of Wisconsin, Pennsylvania and Michigan escalated their appeal to Mr Trump. “The magnitude of the crushing economic impact this virus has had on our states and residents cannot be overstated,” they wrote in a letter to the president.

A study by the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities predicted the sum of state revenue losses could reach \$105bn by June, and \$290bn for the following fiscal year – far greater than 2010, the worst year of the last recession. The study also predicts another \$105bn shortfall in 2022, bringing the total to \$500bn over the next three years.

Sarah Friar

The boss Nextdoor

PERSON IN THE NEWS



‘Contagion’ virologist criticises political response

As *Contagion*, the all-too-realistic film that mirrors the global coronavirus pandemic, continues to storm the charts, the virologist and physician behind the 2011 thriller has hit out at political leaders' slow response to the crisis. “Frankly, we're in trouble,” says Ian Lipkin, who predicts that more deadly viruses will emerge and that mis-steps by governments around the world have helped spread the current outbreak at an alarming rate.

Real-life outbreak ► PAGE 3

P&G sales of household essentials soar as quarantine triggers cleaning blitz

ALISTAIR GRAY — NEW YORK

Procter & Gamble has produced its biggest quarterly rise in US sales in decades as consumers in lockdown loaded up on household essentials from Dawn dishwashing liquid and Charmin toilet paper to Tide laundry detergent.

The demand surge reported by P&G, which before the coronavirus outbreak had been staging a gradual recovery from years of tepid sales, is the latest sign that some companies are benefiting from huge changes in consumer behaviour during the pandemic while others fight for survival.

Stockpiling in advance of the shutdown was only partly responsible for a 10 per cent jump in US organic sales and 6 per cent rise in western Europe that the company recorded in the three

months to the end of March. P&G executives said sales had also spiked for dish-care products and Tide detergent as household consumers do more laundry and prepare food themselves at home instead of dining out.

Hygiene-conscious consumers are also cleaning more, boosting brands such as Bounty and Mr Clean, and executives said they were preferring disposal products to reusable cloths and mops.

“As the pandemic unfortunately developed in the US and Europe as the quarter progressed, demand surged,” said Jon Moeller, chief operating officer and chief financial officer. “These products are more important than ever given the needs presented by the current crisis, the increased awareness around health and hygiene, and the additional time many of us are spending at home.” Not all of P&G's brands are benefiting.

Mr Moeller noted that men were shaving less and women were applying less make-up, weighing on sales of Gillette razors and SK-II cosmetic products.

Like-for-like sales at P&G's grooming division eased 1 per cent in the quarter and ticked up only 1 per cent in beauty, in contrast to a 10 per cent rise in fabric and home care, 9 per cent in healthcare and 7 per cent in baby, feminine and family care.

Strength in North America and Europe was also offset in part by weakness in China, where beauty products account for a larger proportion of sales. Many such products are sold in department stores and duty-free stores in airports, which have been forced to close.

Overall, P&G produced \$17.2bn of net sales in the three months to the end of March. Shares in P&G rose 1.4 per cent in noon trade in New York.

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World Markets

STOCK MARKETS				CURRENCIES				INTEREST RATES				
	Apr 17	prev	%chg	Apr 17		prev		Apr 17		prev		
S&P 500	2841.28	2799.55	1.49	\$ per €	1.089	1.085		US Gov 10 yr		price	yield	chg
Nasdaq Composite	8577.34	8532.36	0.53	\$ per £	1.250	1.245		UK Gov 10 yr		0.61	-0.01	
Dow Jones Ind	23929.01	23537.88	1.66	€ per ¥	0.871	0.872	¥ per €	117.084	116.703	0.30	0.00	
FTSEurofirst 300	1308.13	1275.93	2.52	¥ per \$	107.525	107.565	£ index	78.557	78.610	104.79	-0.47	0.00
Euro Stoxx 50	2880.03	2812.35	2.41	\$ per £	134.450	133.876	SFr per €	1.208	1.206	0.01	0.01	
FTSE 100	5786.96	5628.43	2.82	SFr per ¥	1.052	1.051		US Gov 30 yr		136.35	1.20	-0.03
FTSE All-Share	3190.20	3102.13	2.84	€ per \$	0.918	0.922		Ger Gov 2 yr		105.22	-0.71	-0.01
CAC 40	4499.01	4350.16	3.42									
Xetra Dax	10625.78	10301.54	3.15									
Nikkei	19897.26	19290.20	3.15									
Hang Seng	24380.00	24006.45	1.56									
MSCI World \$	1964.33	1960.20	0.21									
MSCI EM \$	894.86	888.14	-0.37									
MSCI ACWI \$	468.06	467.40	0.14									
				COMMODITIES								
				Apr 17		prev	%chg					
				Oil WTI \$	18.31	19.87	-7.85					
				Oil Brent \$	28.57	27.92	2.70					
				Gold \$	1729.50	1718.65	0.63					
								Fed Funds Eff		price	prev	chg
								US 3m Bills		0.65	1.58	-0.93
								Euro Libor 3m		0.14	0.14	0.00
								UK 3m		-0.19	-0.22	0.03
										0.67	0.67	0.00

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CORONAVIRUS

CORONAVIRUS
ROUND-UP

World Bank president urges nations to continue open trading during crisis

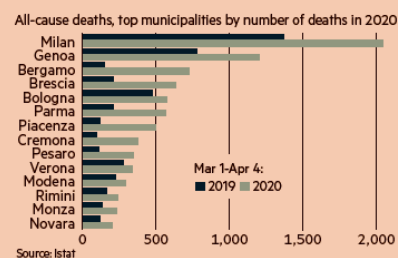
David Malpass, president of the World Bank, has called on countries not to use the coronavirus crisis as a reason to close their markets, but to ensure that trade in food, medical supplies and other goods continues as a cushion against the downturn.

"We have tried to discourage countries from hoarding," he said yesterday. "There is a tendency to hunker down in a crisis but it is a critical part of global co-operation not to do that."

Amazon warehouse workers strike as fourth person tests positive for virus

Workers at an Amazon distribution centre in northern Italy went on strike yesterday, demanding that operations be slowed down after a fourth person at the warehouse tested positive for coronavirus. The labour union Filt CGIL accused Amazon of not responding to concerns raised by workers at the warehouse in Torrazza Piemonte, where about 1,200 people are employed. It said Amazon would not disclose what shifts infected employees had been on, citing privacy rights.

Death rate in Italy has doubled since this time last year, official data suggest



Deaths in Italy from any cause have more than doubled since a year ago, state data published yesterday suggest, with more than 70 municipalities recording a 10-fold rise.

IMF gives go-ahead to \$1.4bn urgent financing for Pakistan's funding needs

The IMF has approved \$1.4bn in emergency financing to Pakistan to help the country meet its funding needs as it battles coronavirus.

The IMF and other financial institutions dealing with Pakistan have concluded that the country's economy in the financial year to June will shrink by 1.5 per cent, down from earlier estimates of an expected annual growth of 3 per cent. The IMF said Covid-19 was having a "significant impact" on Pakistan's economy.

Myanmar releases 25,000 prisoners after calls to curb transmission in jails

Myanmar yesterday announced the release of almost 25,000 prisoners, more than a quarter of the country's total, amid calls to ease overcrowding in jails because of the risk of coronavirus transmission.

President Win Myint announced the release, which marked the country's traditional new year holiday, known as Thingyan, saying that it was intended "to bring delights to the citizens of Myanmar and taking into consideration humanitarian concerns".

Cases so far

2,196,109

cases and 149,024 deaths by 18.35 (BST) on April 17

Source: Johns Hopkins University, CSSE

Read more at ft.com/coronavirus

Historic contraction

China ends four decades of growth

GDP plunges 6.8% in starker economic signal from global pandemic

THOMAS HALE — HONG KONG
XINNING LIU — BEIJING

China's economy shrank at the start of the year for the first time in more than 40 years, after the fallout from the coronavirus pandemic ended an era of uninterrupted growth dating back to the late 1970s.

Gross domestic product in the first quarter plunged 6.8 per cent year-on-year, the National Bureau of Statistics said yesterday.

The historic contraction in China, the engine of global growth for the past two decades, is the starker economic signal to emerge from a pandemic that origi-

nated in Wuhan and has wreaked havoc around the world.

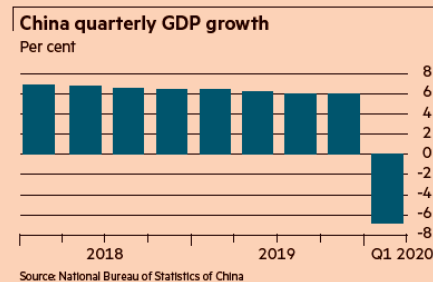
The official data come in the same week that the IMF warned of the worst global economic outlook since the Great Depression, with output losses this year expected to far exceed those that followed the financial crisis of 2008.

Fixed asset investment in the first quarter fell 16 per cent compared with last year, while infrastructure investment dropped 20 per cent. Total retail sales of consumer goods fell by 16 per cent in March.

China's economy, the world's second largest, was already under pressure before coronavirus hit. Last year, the economy expanded by 6.1 per cent, its lowest level in almost three decades. The data published yesterday indicate that growth for the full year is now

expected to come in at a far lower level, jeopardising the government's 2010 pledge that it would double the size of the economy by the end of this year.

The fall, which was worse than analyst expectations, will put pressure on



the country's leadership to provide further stimulus and avoid another decline in the second quarter that would plunge China into a full-blown recession.

Beijing has already taken measures to support companies by pumping liquidity into the banking system to boost lending to struggling businesses and by introducing tax breaks of Rmb1.6tn.

The urban unemployment rate had already reached a record high of 6.2 per cent by late February, up from 5.3 per cent in January. The government typically sets an urban job creation target of at least 10m jobs a year.

Beijing eased travel curbs on Wuhan this month. Economic indicators, such as traffic levels in big cities and factory activity, have shown signs of recovery as the country attempts to return to work.

FT Big Read page 5

Lockdown. Unwinding restrictions

Denmark pioneers reopening of schools

Country is first European nation to let kindergarten and primary children return

RICHARD MILNE
NORDIC AND BALTIC CORRESPONDENT

When eight-year-old Isabella Ivraeus returned to school in the Danish city of Aarhus on Wednesday, it was hard to miss her excitement — or that of her parents.

"She was so happy to see her friends again; they hadn't seen each other apart from FaceTime for five weeks," said her father, Poul-Erik Ivraeus, who runs his own investment business from home in Denmark's second-largest city.

As his wife is a doctor, Mr Ivraeus had to look after their two children — Isabella and five-year-old Theodor, who is at kindergarten — much of the time and he admitted it had been hard to work efficiently. "It felt like Saturday every day," he said. "You can't open businesses if you keep the kindergartens closed. It's the only way to reopen society."

Denmark became the first European nation to reopen its primary schools and kindergartens this week after a coronavirus lockdown, in a move likely to be heavily scrutinised across the continent as other countries examine how and when to lift restrictions.

The decision was taken after what Mette Frederiksen, the prime minister, called the "surprising" success of its lockdown, with daily deaths declining after reaching a peak two weeks ago. The country has reported 321 deaths and 6,879 cases.

Starting on Wednesday, hundreds of thousands of under-12s returned to classrooms that are both familiar and different. Schools have been left to decide themselves how to manage the main requirement — that pupils are kept 2m apart. Classes have been split in two, with one teacher for every 10 or 11 students. Children are sent outside as much as possible, even for some classes, and play exclusively in subgroups of students from their class to limit the risk of spreading the virus.

Some students have been allocated a shorter school day to allow others to access resources at different times. "It



In line: pupils follow social distancing rules on their first day back at school in Lyngby, north of Copenhagen, on Wednesday

Oskar Steinar Gettskov/ EPA-EFE

has been a huge task to make all the plans and logistics. The students have been very patient and the reopening has been without any problems. All our routines are new and everything takes more time, but we will find our way," said Jette Bjorn Hansen, headteacher at Isabella's school, Frederiksberg.

Teachers had seen "all kinds of feelings" from pupils, Ms Hansen said. But

most had been happy to return. But not everyone was so keen. A Facebook group called "my child should not be a guinea pig for Covid-19" soon got tens of thousands of members.

While many schools said they had attendance rates over 90 per cent, some parents chose to keep their children away. Jannie Duunkjaer, who works for an animal protection charity, has

decided to keep her six- and seven-year-olds at home but send her 12-year-old son to school in Allerød, about 30km north of the Danish capital Copenhagen.

"I worry that the young children in Denmark are being used as guinea pigs," she added. "No one knows for sure what the effect will be with this opening. Her oldest child was allowed to return as he is able to manage all the restrictions".

Other countries are set to follow Denmark soon. Germany will start opening schools next month, Norway's kindergartens will open on Monday and parts of its primary schools a week later. Primaries in Sweden were never closed.

Cecilie Harrits, the Aarhus head of Skole og Foraeldre, an organisation for primary school parents, said for now the children were coping well with their new school life. It was harder for parents having to weigh reports that young children were scarcely at risk from Covid-19 with their sense of how precious they were. "We have to balance good sense and feelings all the time," she added. "We all have rational and irrational thoughts."

'Trans-Tasman bubble' New Zealand targets elimination of Covid-19

Four weeks after imposing one of the world's strictest lockdowns, New Zealand is on course to eliminate coronavirus.

Unlike most western nations, which are aiming to suppress the virus, the nation of 5m people has set a goal of completely snuffing out the virus to enable the progressive reopening of the economy.

New Zealand's remote location, tough measures and low level of international connections are limiting the spread of coronavirus with 1,401 confirmed and probable cases and nine deaths. On Thursday, 15 new cases were reported, the lowest tally of new infections since March 22.

The apparent success of the strategy is generating a debate in Australia about whether it could achieve a similar result and create a "trans-Tasman bubble" to enable travel and trade between the nations.

Jamie Smyth in Sydney

Food production

Crop farmers stung as bees struggle to pollinate under curbs

EMIKO TERAZONO — LONDON
BENJAMIN PARKIN — NEW DELHI

Lockdowns, quarantine requirements and border closures introduced in recent weeks around the world to slow the coronavirus pandemic are threatening to hit food production by limiting the movement of bees, agriculturalists have warned.

Farmers around the world growing fruits, vegetables and nuts rely on bees to pollinate their crops. In many cases bees are trucked through agricultural areas, rather than staying local to one area — but now they cannot travel.

"A third of our food depends on the pollination by bees. The production of those crops could be affected," said Norberto Garcia of Apimondia, the international federation of beekeepers.

In the US, honey bees gather pollen and nectar from plants including berries, melons, broccoli and almonds, pollinating \$15bn worth of crops every year, according to the Department of Agriculture.

Kelvin Adee, a leading US beekeeper with 75,000 hives, said visa and travel restrictions meant the sector was hav-

ing a hard time securing workers, most of whom come from Latin America. While he managed to hire labour ahead of the Californian almond pollination season, they have to self-quarantine every time they move to a different location, leading to a delay in pollination.

"We're behind [schedule] and it's going to be a real challenge," said Mr Adee, who is also the president of the American Honey Producers Association, adding that many beekeepers were also facing problems with haulage as there was a sharp decline in available truck drivers to move hives around.

Both the US and Canada, which need a large number of bees, import queen bees and other bees from Australia, New Zealand, Mexico and Chile. However, since many flights have been cancelled and airports closed, bee purchases have become impossible for some beekeepers, said Apimondia.

In Europe, many beekeepers have been able to move around within state borders, but in some countries such as Greece, beekeepers have been banned from travelling long distances to allow the bees to pollinate.

"In some cases bees will starve," said

Fani Hatjina at the Hellenic Institute of Apiculture.

Farmers in the UK rely on replenishing their colonies with bees from southern Europe, but imports have become difficult, said Luke Dixon at Urban Beekeeping, which looks after hives in and around London including at the Bank of England.

Logistical issues and the inability to



Busy: a honey bee sucks nectar and pollen from mustard plants in Dhaka

obtain paperwork are causing a bottleneck. He said: "The next couple of weeks are crucial [for farmers needing bee pollination]."

In India, a national lockdown has hit Narpinder Singh, a beekeeper with bee colonies in Punjab and a number of surrounding states. His business mostly produces honey from mustard plants for export to the US, and also pollinates apples, lychees and walnuts. He and his workers cannot travel across state lines to move the hives around and feed them.

"As the temperature increases, we have to shift the bee boxes to the shade" otherwise they will die from the heat, he said.

Farooq Ahmad Lone and his workers migrate across large swaths of India from Kashmir to Gujarat pollinating mustard crops and apple orchards. Travel restrictions have meant that they have had to abandon their normal routine of travelling at night to avoid the daytime heat. "If we [travel] in the day the bees will die because of the heat... This is the first time we have witnessed such hardships," he said.

Additional reporting by Andrea Rodrigues

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CORONAVIRUS

Virologist behind 'Contagion' film shifts focus to real-life outbreak

Lipkin blames insufficient and inadequate testing and tracing for growing number of deaths

KATRINA MANSON — WASHINGTON

As cooped-up film watchers have taken macabre refuge in the pandemic movie *Contagion*, the scientist who lent his expertise to the 2011 thriller has corralled the original star-studded cast to help fight coronavirus.

In a series of homemade public service announcements, actor Kate Winslet soaps up on camera asking viewers to wash their hands like their lives depend on it, Matt Damon begs people to stay six feet from each other and Laurence Fishburne warns half the population could contract Covid-19.

"Frankly, we're in trouble," said Ian Lipkin, the 67-year-old virologist and physician behind the new segments and the movie. More deadly viruses will emerge in future, he believes, and a series of government mis-steps have helped spread the current one around the world at an alarming rate.

"It's going to be difficult to come out of hiding," he added in reference to the lockdowns adopted by many countries to contain the virus's spread, citing the absence of vaccines, effective contact tracing and isolation facilities while vaccines are developed.

As director of the Center for Infection and Immunity at Columbia University, he is now hunting the origin of coronavirus and leading his team's work on Covid-19 tests, prevention and treatment.

But in the midst of his work on the current pandemic, he was infected. "I lost six weeks," he said.

He first learned of the new disease from contacts in China, where it emerged, in mid-December. By early January, he was urging Chinese counterparts to publish the virus' genetic sequencing to aid research and visiting senior Chinese officials, including premier Li Keqiang, to discuss the disease. He went into a fortnight's quarantine on his return in early February but says he contracted Covid-19 in the US.

Colleagues urged him to go to hospital but he decided to treat himself from home using hydroxychloroquine, an antimalarial some believe could help treatment. "There were a couple of days when I was a little afraid. You don't want to get this," he said.

The realistic thriller he helped create with director Steven Soderbergh and writer Scott Burns has risen up film charts nine years after its release, becoming the must-see movie of the pandemic for its eerie similarities to the current outbreak.

The film plot traces a deadly virus jumping from bat to human via intermediary animal, panic-buying empties stores, scientists scramble for a vaccine while self-interested politicians and conspiracy theorists gum up the works.

When the film first came out, applications for training at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention went up dramatically, he said. "The movie inspired people to go into this work. I'm told they're downloading it in China which I didn't know they could do."



Thriller: Kate Winslet stars in 'Contagion'. She and other actors from the film have been recruited for public service announcements. Below: Prof Ian Lipkin

Werner Bros/Kobal/Shutterstock

But authorities in the fictional pandemic reacted markedly faster than some of their real-life counterparts.

"We [in the US] were slow out the gate. So was the UK. The people of these nations have paid a price," Professor Lipkin said, blaming insufficient and inadequate testing and tracing for rising fatality numbers. "Germany put a rapid emphasis on testing and containment and managed the outbreak — there's nothing else to explain why they have such a low death rate."

In the US, he believes one of the greatest challenges is the inconsistency stemming from the top. President Donald Trump had argued to reopen the US economy by Easter and implied he

might fire Anthony Fauci, the top official advising the US on its coronavirus response, before reversing course on both.

Professor Lipkin described Dr Fauci as having integrity, calling him a "cult hero" as the pandemic sweeps America. So far more than 33,000 people have died with 670,000 infected — the worst numbers of any country in the world.

"It's true that states have their ability to make decisions within their catchment areas but they take their clues from national leadership," he said.

Professor Lipkin, who was played as a maverick in the film by Elliott Gould, has taken to making frequent appearances on Fox News in the hope that the president or his friends will hear him advocate for measures he believes are crucial to stemming the outbreak: extending lockdowns and hiring "armies of healthcare workers" to trace and isolate contacts once the economy reopens. "Nobody knows how far this thing is going to spread. It could be a third, it could be the entire world population. These are just numbers we're speculating," he said.

Professor Lipkin is also keen to stamp out what he says is a xenophobic response that blames China for the Sars-Cov-2 virus that causes the disease, which Mr Trump has repeatedly called the "China virus". This week the president suspended funding to the World Health Organization for being "China-

'Nobody knows how far this thing is going to spread. It could be a third, it could be the entire world population'

centric", provoking uproar among US allies. "None of this is going to be resolved through baiting and nationalism . . . these are global problems that have to be addressed with global solutions," said Professor Lipkin, who has been awarded two medals for his work by China and advised on the 2003 Sars outbreak.

He said the effort to introduce accelerated vaccine programmes could deliver vaccines much faster than the usual 18-24 months. "People are talking about less than a year, which would be a dramatic change," he said, though he warns that gaining regulatory approvals could be the greatest hurdle.

He is now teaming up with researchers in China who want to conduct antibody tests of dated blood bank samples nationwide to see if the disease circulated long before patients were formally logged in Wuhan, the city where Chinese authorities say Covid-19 originated.

He believes the virus may have originated in the wild animal trade and undergone "repeated jumps" from animal to human in the weeks before the first cases were logged. This has recent precedents: Mers jumped from dromedary camels to humans in 2012, and Sars from civet cats to humans in 2003.

But he suspects that whatever they find, viruses of an even more damaging nature will come in future. "I don't think this is the last one," he said.



China

Wuhan revises up death toll amid claims of cover-up

CHRISTIAN SHEPHERD — BEIJING

Officials in Wuhan, the centre of the coronavirus pandemic, have revised up the number of people who died by more than 1,000, as China seeks to dispel accusations that it covered up the full extent of the health crisis.

The city announced yesterday it had increased the original count of 2,579 by 1,290 deaths and said 325 more individuals with confirmed cases later recovered.

Officials said the changes were the result of patients who died at home without a diagnosis in the early stages of the outbreak and failures by hospitals to report numbers correctly.

China has been attacked in recent days by a number of world leaders. Emmanuel Macron, French president, told the Financial Times that there was a lack of transparency from the country over its handling of the coronavirus crisis.

"Let's not be so naive as to say [China has] been much better at handling this," he said in an interview. "We don't know. There are clearly things that have happened that we don't know about."

Dominic Raab, UK foreign secretary, said on Thursday there could be "no return to business as usual" with China, and said the international community will want further clarity about Beijing's

handling of the outbreak. Wuhan bore the brunt of China's effort to control the outbreak, with the city and surrounding Hubei province put under a strict lockdown in late January. According to the new data, about 60 per cent of China's confirmed cases have been in the city.

Residents of Wuhan have been hailed as heroes. As the lockdown eased in late March, they emerged haunted by their experiences and criticism began to grow both inside and outside China of the official version of events.

Zhang Lifan, a Beijing-based historian and political commentator, said the revision was an attempt to display a stance of "seeking truth from facts" in the face of the mounting doubts.

"This touches upon the global ratio of infections to death and some have noted that China's figures seem abnormally low," Mr Zhang said.

On Weibo, the Chinese social media platform, many commentators praised the upwards revision. However, some continued to question the reliability of the official data for Wuhan and the rest of the country. "If the death figures add a third, then shouldn't the confirmed cases also grow by a third? If Wuhan deaths grow by a third, then shouldn't deaths in other cities in the province also grow by a third?" one user wrote.

Additional reporting by Emma Zhou in Beijing

World Medical Association

Doctors group accuses WHO of 'political games'

KATRINA MANSON — WASHINGTON
CLIVE COOKSON — LONDON

A group representing 10m doctors around the world has censured the World Health Organization for being involved in "political games" by excluding Taiwan, which damaged the health body's response to the coronavirus crisis.

The criticism by the World Medical Association came after President Donald Trump this week cut funding to the WHO, accusing it of "severely mismanaging and covering up the spread of the coronavirus".

The WMA said the WHO's failure to heed Taiwan's early warnings resulted in "errors that led to the world paying a high price" due to its handling of the 2003 Sars outbreak and the coronavirus pandemic. It called on the WHO to give greater participation to Taiwan and heed its warnings and early insights in future.

"The Covid-19 pandemic has illustrated with terrible consequences how wrong and damaging for global health it is to exclude Taiwan from unrestricted and effective participation in the World Health Organization," two WMA leaders wrote in a letter to Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, WHO director-general, released yesterday.

Taiwan is excluded from the WHO

because China, which claims it as part of its territory, demands that third countries and international bodies do not treat it in any way that resembles how independent states are treated.

Taiwan has accused the WHO of dismissing its early efforts to raise the red flag that the virus might be spread among humans because of a pro-China bias.

It has been excluded from having "observer status" at the UN body's annual meeting of decision makers since 2018.

The WHO is battling criticism from multiple fronts despite widespread dismay at Mr Trump's decision to pull more than \$400m of funding from the body from US allies and health professionals, citing its failure "to adequately obtain, vet and share information in a timely and transparent fashion".

The US chapter of the WMA was among those who have criticised Mr Trump's decision as "dangerous move", calling for international co-operation to fight the pandemic. Richard Horton, editor-in-chief of The Lancet medical journal, described the US president's decision as "a crime against humanity".

"Every scientist, every health worker, every citizen must resist and rebel against this appalling betrayal of global solidarity," he said in a tweet. See Lex

Air support

California police launch drones to contact homeless

PATRICK MCGEE
SAN PABLO, CALIFORNIA

Two police departments in California have deployed the first "homeless outreach" drones in the US to broadcast coronavirus safety messages while protecting officers.

In San Pablo, north of Oakland, police said the drones they launched on Thursday were one part of a programme the department was accelerating as social distancing guidelines limit operations.

"This technology has exponentially grown in the past couple of years and it will exponentially grow over the next five to 10 years, especially in the environment we are in today — where having that physical police officer response isn't always the best solution," said police captain Brian Bubar.

Drones have been used to enforce quarantines in China, but the US has shied away from them. In Elizabeth, New Jersey, there was a backlash when police used drones to encourage social distancing with automated messages telling people to disperse.

In San Pablo, the use of drones gave officers their first point of contact with homeless communities since March 19, when Contra Costa county fell under "shelter in place" orders.

The operation involved two of its three drones made by Impossible Aero-

South Korea Drive-in cinemas offer respite to audiences

The opening credits for Korean thriller *Beasts Clawing at Straws* started to roll as Yeo Shi-hyun prepared cups of steaming hot instant noodles to eat with her boyfriend inside the car.

The couple were among the hundreds parked in front of the screen at Jayu-ro drive-in theatre, which is enjoying a sudden jump in popularity due to coronavirus.

"This is my first drive-in experience. I have wanted to go out to watch a movie, but I've been reluctant to go to a traditional theatre because of the virus," said the 29-year-old Ms Yeo.

Drive-in cinema in South Korea is thriving after years of decline and months of restrictions on human-to-human contact. Couples and families alike are desperate for distraction and a break from the confines of their apartments.

Yoon Hye-kyung, of the theatre, said sales had risen 50 per cent since the coronavirus outbreak hit the country in February.

"Young lovers want to meet each other, no matter what," she said. "I am so happy that the business is booming."

While cinemas across the country — typically large multiplexes inside shopping malls — have remained open, movie-mad Koreans have stayed away.

Audience numbers have fallen to their lowest level in 15 years, down 88 per cent in March from a year earlier, according to the Korean Film Council. Losses for February alone were \$400m and about 30 per cent of the country's 513 theatres are closed.

"Many theatres are teetering on the brink of collapse, as only 5 per cent of their seats are filled even on weekends," said Hwang Jae-hyun, of CJ CGV, a leading multiplex cinema chain. "Financial support from the government is badly needed to stay afloat."

But just weeks earlier, the local film industry was at its zenith, reveling in the success of *Parasite*. The black comedy, the first foreign-language film to win an Oscar for best picture, had ignited hopes of a new golden era for Korean film.

Since then, however, the openings of about 20 Korean films that were scheduled to be released in the first half of this year have been delayed or cancelled because of the outbreak.

Against that gloomy outlook, drive-in theatres have made an unlikely comeback. Analysts think that picturesque countryside locations combined with the intimacy of private vehicles have sparked feelings of nostalgia and romance among audiences.

Fans of South Korea's remaining 21 drive-ins are hopeful the virus will spur a second life for the outdoor theatres. "Even after the virus is contained, I believe that people will still visit our drive-in as they discover the joy from the experience," said Ms Yoon.

Reporting by Song Jung-a and Edward White

space, a US rival to China's DJI, the world's largest drone maker.

A day earlier, in Chula Vista, near San Diego, police completed a three-hour homeless outreach mission over "difficult terrain and dense foliage". Without unmanned aircraft it would have taken two days. The "sensitive and humane" mission covered 26 encampments across eight square miles, according to police chief Roxana Kennedy.

The drones allowed the two police departments to broadcast information in English and Spanish. Both were adamant the technology was being used to offer specific services and information, not patrol populations or conduct unrestricted surveillance.

"The last thing we'd want is for someone to view this as an enforcement tool," Mr Bubar said.

Sergeant Robert Richer, who manages San Pablo's drone team, said he had "no doubt" police across the country would be using drones for similar missions in future as they are "way cheaper" than helicopters. "It just allows you to do a lot more without exposing officers to danger," he said.

Within months, the San Pablo police department also hopes it can automate its drones to link up with the city's "ShotSpotter" programme, which can already detect gunfire with precision thanks to sensors dotting the landscape.

CORONAVIRUS

Bleak outlook

BoE chief fears 'scarring' to UK economy

Governor backs forecasts of GDP falling off a cliff in the past month

CHRIS GILES — LONDON

Andrew Bailey has backed forecasts that output in the UK economy has already plunged 35 per cent since the coronavirus lockdown but went even further by warning there could be persistent "scarring" to the economy that would create a lasting hangover.

Speaking on a conference call to journalists yesterday, the Bank of England governor said the Office for Budget

Responsibility's assessment that gross domestic product had fallen off a cliff in the past month was fair and suggested Britain's economic plight might be even worse than the picture painted by the British fiscal watchdog.

With Britain facing a long period of pain, he said banks must quickly "sort out" the delays in getting loans to small businesses.

But Mr Bailey warned there also needed to be caution in providing loans to companies that may not be able to pay their debts after the lockdown ended.

He suggested that small companies might need grants from the government

to keep them viable, although he stressed this was a decision for the chancellor rather than the central bank.

Mr Bailey said the BoE was in the process of putting together its own forecasts for the UK economy to be published in early May.

The bank was looking at real-time indicators showing big drops in output for many sectors, large rises in claims for universal credit, and business surveys suggesting high usage of the government's furlough scheme for staff.

Asked about the OBR's second-quarter GDP forecast of a 35 per cent decline from the start of the year, he said: "I don't think there is anything implausi-

ble about a second-quarter number of that nature."

While the governor said a month ago that he was looking at lots of "V-shaped" charts to signify a rapid bounce back, yesterday he was much less willing to be drawn on the shape of the recovery, saying the BoE was looking at how much persistent scarring of the economy was likely after such a deep downturn.

Chancellor Rishi Sunak has repeatedly said that the government cannot save every company or every job. But the governor said that while he sympathised with the banks' operational difficulties in dealing with huge demand for finance under the state's business inter-

ruption loan scheme, he said the current situation "has to be sorted out".

He suggested one way to ease the pressure on banks was for the government to offer a 100 per cent state guarantee rather than 80 per cent for the large number of small companies seeking not to borrow more than £25,000.

The longer the coronavirus crisis lasted, he added, the more companies would need new equity rather than loans.

The governor said: "It's an issue that will come on to the agenda more. For large firms it is equity in a more conventional sense. For small firms, it is probably more into the world of grants."

Debt relief

G20 urged to bolster emerging economies

JONATHAN WHEATLEY, MICHAEL STOTT AND DAVID PILLING — LONDON

Rich countries face calls to offer more support to the developing world in the fight against coronavirus, after the G20 deal this week to suspend debt repayments for the world's poorest countries was criticised for not going far enough.

International relief efforts have concentrated on the world's poorest nations, many of which are in sub-Saharan Africa, but some argue other economies also need urgent help. Many developing countries not covered by the G20 agreement, which froze bilateral loan repayments for 76 countries until the end of this year, suffered from large debt burdens before the crisis struck.

"Developed countries can find their own solutions and they can also organise billions in aid for the poorest nations but the middle-income countries are sandwiched in the middle with nothing," said Juan Manuel Santos, former president of Colombia.

He has joined former presidents of Brazil, Mexico and Chile in an appeal to multilateral institutions to double net lending to Latin America and the Caribbean, and to the IMF to expand liquid assets known as special drawing rights.

"The Covid-19 pandemic is a shock of unprecedented magnitude, uncertain duration and catastrophic consequences that, if not properly addressed, could lead to one of the most tragic episodes in the history of Latin America and the Caribbean," they wrote.

The IMF forecast this week that Latin American gross domestic product would shrink by 5.2 per cent this year.

African negotiators said further steps were needed to help their continent. Vera Songwe, secretary-general of the UN Economic Commission for Africa, calling for "a two-year, across-the-board moratorium" on debt repayments, said that without it "this crisis will throw everybody off a cliff. What you will have is a totally disorganised default."

Donald Kaberuka, an African Union special envoy on debt, said after bilateral and multilateral talks it would be important to discuss the \$115bn of debt owed by African countries to private creditors. Any standstill on payments would have to stop short of a default, which could lock African governments out of the markets for years, he said.

Even expanding this week's G20 deal to cover repayments to private investors would be "woefully and shockingly inadequate", according to Stephanie Blankenburg, head of debt and development finance at Unctad, the UN's trade and development agency. "The breathing space [of the G20 deal] is welcome but it is a tiny step towards what will have to be very comprehensive sovereign debt cancellation and restructuring for the developing world," she said.

Unctad has called for \$2.5tn in assistance for developing countries, including \$1tn in debt cancellation and \$500bn for health and social services in the form of grants from rich countries.

Sonja Gibbs at the Institute of International Finance, an industry body, warned of the risk of a recurrence of the pandemic. "Purely in terms of self-interest, if we don't act to address the problem — and high debt levels are one facet of global inequality — it will come back to haunt us," she said.

See Lex

Middle East. Coexistence tension

Arab medics dominate Israel's frontline fight

Majority of the nation's key health workers come from the minority community

MEHUL SRIVASTAVA — HAIFA

Zahi Said was driving to the medical clinic he runs in the Israeli city of Haifa when his phone rang — Benjamin Netanyahu wanted to see him.

The four-time prime minister had just watched the Arab doctor on television, discussing how the government needed to reach out to Arab Israelis about the dangers of coronavirus, and he wanted some advice.

Dr Said, who also advises one of Israel's largest healthcare providers on Arab issues, turned his car round and drove straight to Mr Netanyahu's official residence in Jerusalem. Since then, Dr Said has been on national television almost daily, taking questions from Arabic speakers, busting myths and begging people to stay at home to help break the chain of new infections.

But when he was asked if the Arab community in Israel could expect to receive equal access to coronavirus care as the Jewish majority, Dr Said gave a diplomatic answer.

"We know it's not a secret that the resources in this country are not equally distributed, but I have to look at the glass as half-full," he said. "When I meet Netanyahu, at least he is listening to us."

Since Mr Netanyahu first came to power in 1996 he has denigrated Arab politicians as supporters of terrorism, stripped Arabic of its status as an official language and last year passed a law that gave Jews alone the right to self-determination in the state of Israel. Now, in the battle against Covid-19, Mr Netanyahu needs their help.

Arabs make up only a fifth of Israel's population, but represent half the country's pharmacists, a quarter of its nurses and just under a fifth of its doctors, according to the Central Bureau of Statistics. Some of the nation's largest hospitals have Arab doctors heading major departments, and the country's leading virologist is Arab.

Arabs are disproportionately represented in the medical community because attaining professional qualifications has been one way to push back against political marginalisation, Arab doctors said. Many trained in Jordan



Life saver: Dr Jameel Mohsen at work as head of the infectious diseases department at Hillel Yaffe Medical Center

after the two countries signed a peace deal in 1994 and Israel's Arab community continues to hold medical workers in high regard.

"The Polish [Jewish] mother used to want her son to be a doctor, but now she wants him to get a tech job," Dr Said joked. "The Arab mother still wants her children to be in medicine."

In Kafra Qara, an Arab town south of Haifa with so many medical professionals that residents call it the city of doctors, Jameel Mohsen was more critical. "As an Arab, other jobs are closed off to us, so we became doctors," he said, peeling off layers of protective equipment after setting up a Covid-19 ward at the Hillel Yaffe Medical Center, where he is head of infectious diseases.

Israel's dependence on its Arab doctors has come at a time when the outbreak is developing quickest in the country's Jewish ultraorthodox communities. In contrast, despite claims from Mr Netanyahu and his rightwing

political allies that Arabs were ignoring health directives, none of the Arab majority cities, even the densely populated neighbourhoods of East Jerusalem, has had major outbreaks.

But for Osama Tanous, a 34-year-old paediatrician who quotes the 19th century German pathologist Rudolf Virchow in his analysis, the sudden elevation of Arab doctors to national saviours will not usher in new equality for Arab communities. Instead, he said, it will be used to justify continued prejudice.

"Israel has a way of celebrating good Arab doctors, while discriminating against all other Arabs, so that doctors become the ambassadors of this beautiful Israeli system of coexistence," he said, referring to a flurry of recent articles in Israeli newspapers praising Arab medics.

"It makes it appear that now that you have Arab doctors saving Jewish lives, and helping Israel at a time of national crisis, therefore it is time to stop being

'As an Arab, other jobs are closed off to us, so we became doctors'

Jameel Mohsen

racist against them; this is a very slippery and dangerous notion."

The work of Arab medics so far has not brought their communities any immediate benefits, said Hani Daoud, head of a pharmacists' association representing almost 300 pharmacies in Israel's predominantly Arab north.

His colleagues were the first defenders against the virus as people rushed to stock up on medicine, masks and hand sanitiser. "The government didn't make any precautions for us," he said, pointing to the inadequate masks his staff wore in the first few weeks.

At the century-old Ziv Medical Center, Jalal Tarabeia, the head of infection controls and a consultant for the ministry of health, said the pace of work has been so frantic that he and his Arab colleagues had not had time to ponder the politics of the situation.

"We are very proud to be on the frontline; leave politics far away, we just want to save lives," he said.

Default worries

Argentina crisis deepens as Fernández offer on debt restructuring leaves investors cold

BENEDICT MANDER — BUENOS AIRES COLBY SMITH — NEW YORK

Investors recoiled at Argentina's harsh debt restructuring offer on \$83bn of foreign debt, with many warning it would lead to the country's ninth default unless terms were improved.

The Latin American country's economy has been hard hit by the coronavirus crisis, but it was unclear whether the leftist government's attempt on Thursday night to avoid all debt obligations for the next three years and cut interest payments by 62 per cent represented a final offer, or just the beginning of tough negotiations.

"If it is a take-it-or-leave-it offer, then there won't be an agreement," warned one international creditor close to the negotiations.

Echoes of Argentina's last major default in 2001 increased investors' worries, as President Alberto Fernández appeared to be seeking to please voters at home while ignoring investors' calls for a coherent plan for reviving an econ-

omy now in its third consecutive year of recession.

The stakes for securing a deal are heightened as Argentina's economy has little fiscal space to manoeuvre and is already battling high inflation as the pandemic throws the global economy into disarray.

Without plans explaining how the government can repay a debt burden it insists is unsustainable — a claim that is backed by the IMF, Argentina's largest creditor after lending the country \$44bn since a currency crisis in 2018 — analysts say there is little incentive for investors to sign a deal.

"Argentina continues to seek maximum [debt] relief without articulating a credible plan for how the debt will be paid in the future. Money for nothing does not sell well even in the best of times," said Walter Stoepelwerth, chief investment officer at Portfolio Personal Inversiones, an investment firm in Buenos Aires.

He argues that the government's aggressive proposal "points to a fero-

cious negotiation that will only end in one of two outcomes: hard default or Argentina sweetening the deal terms".

He adds: "When push comes to shove, Alberto Fernández will have to take a political decision to make a deal."

Sebastián Brown, Deutsche Bank's chief economist for Latin America, described the "hardball" offer — which included a drastic reduction in interest rates to an average of just 2.3 per cent, compared with a current average of around 6.6 per cent — as "very unpalatable for creditors". He predicted a hard default given that it will be "difficult" to reach a deal within the next 20 days, as the government wants.

Jared Lou, a portfolio manager at William Blair Investment Management, described the terms as "garbage". He warned against a repeat of Argentina's restructuring experience following the 2001 default, seeing similarities between Thursday's proposal and the offer made in 2005, which led to an acrimonious legal battle with bondholders that was not solved until 2016.

Brazil

Bolsonaro alleges plot to remove him after sacking of health minister prompts anger

BRYAN HARRIS AND ANDRES SCHIPANI SAO PAULO

Brazilian president Jair Bolsonaro has accused the country's political leaders of trying to oust him after he sacked his popular health minister following clashes over how to handle the coronavirus outbreak.

The dismissal late on Thursday of Luiz Henrique Mandetta — whose professional competence drew comparisons with Anthony Fauci, the US health official who has become one of his country's most trusted faces in its response to the coronavirus pandemic — immediately sparked protests and condemnation from across the political spectrum.

"Most Brazilians hope that President Jair Bolsonaro did not fire Mandetta in order to . . . undermine the need for social distancing," Davi Alcolumbre, the president of the Senate, and Rodrigo Maia, the Speaker of the lower house of Congress, said in a joint statement.

Mr Bolsonaro, who is among a handful of world leaders to question the

seriousness of coronavirus, reacted furiously, accusing Mr Maia of turning the nation's governors against him and trying to "stick a knife" in the federal government.

"It seems that the intention is to get me out," Mr Bolsonaro said in a TV interview. Local media reported that the Brazilian president claimed to have in his possession an intelligence brief alleging that Congress, some members of the Supreme Court and certain governors were plotting to oust him.



Luiz Henrique Mandetta: differed with president on use of certain drugs

For weeks, Mr Bolsonaro has faced unrelenting criticism from across the political spectrum as a result of his playing down of the Covid-19 outbreak, which has already killed almost 2,000 Brazilians.

The Brazilian leader has repeatedly urged the nation's governors to end lockdowns so that businesses can reopen and citizens can get back to work.

His approach, however, triggered a public spat with Mr Mandetta, a trained doctor, who backed world health guidelines on social distancing.

The two men also split on the use of chloroquine and hydroxychloroquine to treat people with the virus. While Mr Bolsonaro has followed US president Donald Trump's lead in promoting the drugs as a remedy to the Covid-19 virus, Mr Mandetta refused to sanction their widespread use.

A poll released by Atlas on Thursday showed that 76 per cent of Brazilians opposed sacking Mr Mandetta, while 58 per cent disapproved of Mr Bolsonaro's handling of the country.

FT BIG READ. CHINA

After a disastrous first quarter, the Chinese economy is showing signs of a strong recovery. But that could be put at risk if there is a second wave of infections and if demand in its main export markets collapses.

By Tom Mitchell and Xinning Liu

On the same day that Chinese authorities began to relax a 77-day quarantine on Wuhan, the city that exported coronavirus across China and ultimately to every corner of the world, a small town on the country's border with Russia was locked down for the second time in three months.

On April 8, residents of Suifenhe in northeastern Heilongjiang province were ordered to stay at home, with only one member of each household allowed out every three days to buy food and other supplies. Train services to Harbin, the provincial capital, were suspended. Like Wuhan, Harbin is a major industrial city with a population of about 11m people.

Most of the Chinese cities, towns and villages that were locked down at the peak of Wuhan's epidemic in January and February were relatively unscathed by the first outbreak of coronavirus. At the time, Suifenhe was reported to have had no official cases.

But now Suifenhe faces a real crisis, after Chinese nationals returning home from Russia triggered a much-feared "second wave" of infections. The city has more than 320 confirmed cases and almost 1,500 people in centralised quarantine facilities.

"Lots of small businesses here did not make it to March," says Lin Xianfeng, who runs a renewables company in the city that turns biomass, such as scrap lumber and forest debris, into energy. "They just closed for good. Now we face a very tough time as well. I worry about my business every day."

The situation in Suifenhe typifies one end of an extremely diverse spectrum in China, as President Xi Jinping's administration struggles to restore the world's second-largest economy to something approaching normality.

At the other end of the spectrum, many large cities across the country appear to have bounced back from the lockdown, with the only reminder of the crisis being the number of people wearing masks on the streets, on public transport and in their offices.

US sportswear company Nike said this week that 80 per cent of its China stores were open in cities such as Shanghai, which shows few visible signs of the pandemic. Car factories in Chengdu, capital of southwestern Sichuan province, have restored operations with little disruption, other than the use of face masks and other protective gear and social distancing in the canteen.

"Companies are all back to work and working without restrictions [although] wearing masks in the office is normal and wearing masks outside is normal," says Paul Sives, head of the European Chamber of Commerce in south-west China, of the situation in Chengdu.

Whether Suifenhe's relapse — or Chengdu's relative vibrancy — is the more accurate harbinger of China's near-term future has enormous implications for both its economy and the rest of the world. The first country to have a significant outbreak of the virus, China is also the first large economy to try to reopen after a lockdown. How Beijing fares in trying to restart economic activity without sparking a new round of infections will shape the response in much of the rest of the world.

On Friday, the National Bureau of Statistics reported the first official year-on-year decline in economic output in more than 40 years. First-quarter gross domestic product fell 6.8 per cent — something unimaginable in the pre-coronavirus era. However, a range of other indicators, formal and anecdotal,



Chinese government remains on high alert.

"Containing infection remains a daunting task, with imported cases and sporadic local infections entwined," a Chinese Communist party coronavirus task force headed by Premier Li Keqiang said on Thursday. "The situation demands full attention and allows for no slackening of efforts."

'Now comes the hard part'

The nervousness is particularly evident in Wuhan. The city's "liberation" has in reality been only a partial one. Residents from other areas of China who were trapped there when the city was quarantined have been allowed to leave — provided they pass medical checks. It is even harder for native residents of Wuhan and other areas of Hubei province to travel within China.

Min Zhou, a Hubei native, had hoped to resume her life as a migrant factory worker in southern Guangdong province after her hometown, Ezhou, reopened on March 25.

In the end, she says, she chose not to use her return train ticket to Guangdong, fearing it would be difficult to find factory jobs as overseas orders dried up and that workers from Hubei might be shunned by employers because of more stringent health checks and quarantines required by local authorities. Ms Min has instead found work at an electronics factory in Ezhou, which is near Wuhan.

For their part, authorities in Beijing are enforcing strict quarantine rules that make business travel to or from the capital impossible. Anyone arriving from other parts of China must obey a

90%	1.2%
Coal consumption at large power plants relative to average 2019 levels	IMF prediction of China's growth this year; US output is forecast to fall 5.9%

strict 14-day quarantine, sometimes enforced with door sensors to ensure they do not leave their hotel room or residence.

The Chinese government also took the extraordinary step of banning foreign residents who possess valid residence permits from entering the country, even though the vast majority of recent "imported" infections involved returning nationals. This has complicated efforts by many multinational companies and smaller companies reliant on foreign investment to restart their operations.

"I worry that [the ban on foreign residents] is going to be for quite some time," says Mr Sives. "There will be a second wave of issues that companies will be affected by very soon."

Many analysts believe that, for now, the resumption of normal work and life routines in Chengdu is more indicative of the current state of the Chinese economy than the continuing disruptions in Suifenhe, Wuhan and Beijing.

A business activity index created by Trivium, a Beijing-based consultancy, estimates the Chinese economy is currently operating at 83 per cent of "typical output", compared with 66 per cent in mid-March. That is welcome considering China's predicament in February but still represents a devastating drop from what might have been expected.

"If we get stuck at this level of output for much longer, there is no way the economy can expand this year compared to last year," says Trivium co-founder Andrew Polk. "It was impressive to get to where we are, but now comes the hard part."

Additional reporting by Qianer Liu

A tricky route to recovery

'First we had orders but no workers to fulfil them. Now our workers are back but we don't have any orders. My only goal is survival'

suggest China's economy may have at least hit bottom in the first quarter. Coal consumption at large power plants has recovered to 90 per cent of 2019 levels. China's official unemployment rate also improved slightly in March, falling to 5.9 per cent from February's all-time high of 6.2 per cent.

George Lau, who runs an inspection and certification business in southern Guangdong province, says "the traffic jams are almost as bad as before". Eswar Prasad, a China expert at Cornell University, says Friday's GDP numbers are "a bellwether of what the data for other major economies will reveal in the coming weeks". He adds that while the "apparent stabilisation" in recent indicators has provided "grounds for at least mild optimism, the magnitude of this collapse makes it even more puzzling how China's economy seems to be getting back on its feet despite the government's relatively modest stimulus measures thus far."

Workers, but no orders

For Mr Xi, there are two main dangers to this incipient recovery as China starts to go back to work. First, a resurgence of the pandemic in the world's most populous country. And second, a collapse in demand in the US and EU.

On Tuesday, the IMF predicted the US economy would shrink 5.9 per cent this

year because of its even greater struggles with coronavirus, while China will manage 1.2 per cent growth for the full year.

Chinese exporters are already bracing themselves for a fall in many of their main markets, wary that a modest recovery in shipments last month was flattered by orders that did not make it on to ships in January and February.

"External demand is one of three major economic headwinds ahead which will cause the recovery to be W-shaped instead of V-shaped," says Larry Hu, chief China economist at Macquarie. The other two challenges, he notes, are falling property prices and deflation.

Ding Shunlian, whose company makes machine tool components in eastern Shandong province, describes the Catch-22 that Chinese exporters have experienced over the first four months of this year. "First we had orders but no workers to fulfil them," he says. "Now our workers are back but we don't have any orders."

"My only goal is survival, to make it through this year," Mr Ding adds. "Hopefully after the virus, orders will come back to us."

The Chinese government's rapid reaction to the new outbreak in Suifenhe, and its extremely cautious management of cities such as Wuhan and Beijing over

recent weeks, highlights just how worried it is about any new outbreak. That in turn is an indication of the even greater challenges that will confront New York, London and other metropolises when they too try to jump-start their economies.

Some 68,000 of China's confirmed 84,000 cases, or 80 per cent, were in Wuhan or surrounding Hubei province, with no other region recording more than 1,600 infections. The US, by contrast, is well on its way to having multiple Hubeis, with nine states having more than 20,000 cases each.

For many people, including US president Donald Trump, China's infection count seems too low to be true. The Chinese government waited at least a week before first publicly acknowledging that the disease could spread by human transmission. And Wuhan's mayor said publicly that at least 5m people left the city, many of them flying overseas, before the city was locked down on January 23.

Yet, while most experts agree a large number of infections and deaths went unrecorded either intentionally or accidentally in the weeks and months before Wuhan's lockdown, there has been no compelling evidence that outbreaks are currently being hidden or overlooked. While Wuhan on Friday raised its death toll by 50 per cent, the

Evening rush hour in Beijing's central business district this week. The shadow of coronavirus continues to hang over the economy

Thomas Peter/Reuters

'I worry that [the ban on foreign residents] is going to be for some time. There will be a second wave of issues that will affect companies very soon'

Obituary

A pioneer who made a happy life possible for US lesbians

Phyllis Lyon

Feminist and gay-rights advocate
1924-2020

Phyllis Lyon's wedding bells were heard around the world. One of America's earliest gay-rights advocates, she and her partner, Del Martin, were also among the first same-sex couples to be legally married in California — twice.

Their first wedding, in 2004, after 50 years together, was an act of protest. In defiance of a state ban, the mayor of San Francisco Gavin Newsom — who is now governor of California — decided to issue marriage licences for gay weddings. Lyon and Martin were nominated by activists to be the first in line, but their union was thrown out by the California Supreme Court. When the legal decision was reversed in 2008, the couple — then in their eighties — tied the knot once again.

Earlier in their long careers of feminist and gay-rights activism, both women had expressed ambivalence about the institution of marriage. But by 2008, Lyon said she found "solace" in enacting the "ultimate rite of love and commitment" months before Martin died at 87. Almost 12 years later, Lyon has died after suffering from dementia. Speaker of the US House of Representatives Nancy Pelosi paid tribute to her as a "trailblazer".

Lyon's 95-years spanned the history of the gay civil rights movement in the US: from helping to found the first lesbian organisation, in 1955, to fronting victories for marriage equality in the 2000s. "She was a pioneer," said Kay Lahusen, a photojournalist and fellow activist who met Lyon through the group she founded, the Daughters of Bilitis, in the early 1960s. "We all were on the cutting edge of a movement."

Phyllis Ann Lyon was born on November 10, 1924 in Tulsa, Oklahoma. After completing a journalism degree at the University of California, Berkeley, she became a police reporter in Fresno in the 1940s. She later recalled being attracted to women from an early age, but not knowing the word "lesbian". A warm presence with a ready smile and large glasses, Lyon met Dorothy "Del" Martin in 1950 when they worked at a magazine in Seattle. Lyon told friends that Martin was the first woman she ever saw carrying a briefcase. Over drinks at the Seattle Press Club, Martin confided to Lyon that she was a lesbian. "I thought that was the most fascinating thing I'd ever heard", Lyon recalled.

In 1955, the couple bought a modest, one-bedroom house at the top of Castro

Street overlooking San Francisco. It was to be their life-long home. Gradually, they met other gay couples, who shared their sense of fear and isolation. Lyon described the near-universal prejudice in America at the time that homosexuals "were illegal, immoral, and sick". Gay people were also seen as a threat to the state during the cold war, and fired from government posts and other jobs. Newspapers would name people who were caught in police raids on gay bars.

The initial objectives of the lesbian social club were modest: Lyon and Martin just wanted to "meet some other lesbians". Their living room hosted Sunday afternoon meetings, and some raucous parties where women could dance, away from the riskier gay bars. Over time, their roles became more public. They were among the first to publish their real names in *The Ladder*, a lesbian magazine that Lyon edited. They made sure to list their number in the telephone book, and fielded countless calls for help and advice.

These contacts helped inform their 1972 book *Lesbian/Woman*, which was "transformational" for many lesbians of that generation, said Elise Chenier, professor of history at Simon Fraser Uni-



Lyon in 1972. Her San Francisco home became a Mecca for activists

'I marvelled in their confidence that they were right and the world was wrong. They were foundational people'

versity. "It gave people hope that 'I can have a happy life as a lesbian.'"

Lyon worked at Glide Memorial Church for more than 30 years, and her activism was wide ranging, including women's rights, domestic abuse and later advocacy for seniors. She and Martin were among the first lesbians to join the National Organization for Women.

Kate Kendell, a friend of Lyon for 25 years, said their later life was quiet, punctuated by explosive cheering for the San Francisco Giants baseball team. Their Castro house was a Mecca for younger activists, where Lyon and Martin sat in a pair of recliner armchairs and told stories.

As the gay rights movement became more public after the 1969 Stonewall riots and won considerable progress, it can be difficult to remember how brave Lyon and Martin's organising was in the 1950s, said Eric Marcus, host of the *Making Gay History* podcast, who interviewed the pair in the 1980s.

"I marvelled in their confidence that they were right and the world was wrong," he said. "In terms of the movement, they were foundational. She was one of the last of those people alive."

Joshua Oliver



FINANCIAL TIMES

'Without fear and without favour'

SATURDAY 18 APRIL 2020

After the lockdown, another 'new normal'

Life will not quickly snap back to how it was before without a vaccine

It is February 2021 and the Smith family are excited to have tickets to watch their favourite football team. Sport is newly emerged from months of being played behind closed doors. Outside the stadium, security guards' handsets register Covid-19 immunity certificates encoded on the Smiths' smartphones; fans without the app face additional checks. The family pass through body temperature sensors, check their face masks and enter the ground. The view is unimpeded – seats all around them have been blocked from sale – but the half-empty stands mean the atmosphere lacks the old electricity.

The Smiths' story may prove overly gloomy, or not gloomy enough. Even as countries tentatively start to emerge from the Covid-19 lockdown, it is clear that life will not spring back to how it was pre-crisis until there is a vaccine. Organisations and individuals must adapt to another "new normal".

Monumental efforts will still be needed to avoid, or lessen, a second wave of infection. Cycles of relaxing and reimposing shutdowns may follow. Testing and tracing those who contract the virus will be crucial. Some pleasures and freedoms the lockdown has taken away will still be denied.

Countries that have built up mass testing and tracking capabilities will emerge fastest. Test and symptom data need to be linked to apps that register those falling ill and alert people who have been near them. Creating workable apps is tricky, but countries such as Singapore and South Korea have done so. Technologies should be shared.

Within countries, some sectors will emerge faster than others. Essential and outdoor work such as construction may come first; bars and nightclubs last. Many white-collar employees whose jobs can be done at home will stay there, perhaps for months. Depending on how governments weigh

the risks, some children will be back at schools, others will stay at home.

Those returning to the workplace will find a changed environment: staff working shifts or in rotating week-in, week-at-home teams to allow adequate distancing. Staggered start and finish times will attempt to lessen rush-hour crushes on fetid subway trains.

The new social mores of the lockdown will persist. Handshakes are still out. If not officially compulsory, masks may be socially de rigueur. Many interactions from business meetings to dating will stay online. Airports, planes and trains will be sparsely populated. Who realistically expects to take a foreign summer holiday this year?

Immunity registration systems will be helpful to identify those who can re-enter public life without risk to themselves or others – especially those who had the illness without symptoms. But they must not turn the so far virus-free into second-class citizens, creating perverse incentives to get infected.

Among the biggest challenges will be preventing inequalities the Great Lockdown has already compounded from being widened by the Great Easing. The young will regain their freedoms faster than the old and vulnerable. "Knowledge" workers can shelter behind laptops at home while those whose work is physical are forced out into a still hazardous environment. Millions who have lost jobs will not quickly regain them and will need supporting through the next phase. Poorer countries may take longer to control the outbreak and exit lockdowns. Travel bans to and from richer countries trying to avoid reinfection will worsen their plight.

Juggling such challenges will test governments as never before in peacetime. How they respond will determine just how poisonous is Covid-19's global legacy – long after rich-world sports stadiums are full once more.

The Fed's junk purchases should be short term

Measures taken in crisis need to be transparent and unwound quickly

When Walter Bagehot, the Victorian economist, wanted to explain how central banks should act as lenders of last resort, he quoted a director of the Bank of England. "We lent it by every possible means and in modes we had never adopted before," the central banker said of the BoE's response to a financial panic.

The US Federal Reserve's decision to include junk bonds in its latest asset purchase schemes reflects this century-old principle that when the financial sector is in trouble it is often better to hose it with cash than be too discriminating about the effects. Buying junk bonds means tacitly supporting some of the private equity companies that have specialised in capital engineering and loading companies up with debt.

For many this violates the fundamental basis of capitalism: badly-run businesses should go bust and speculators should expect to lose their money if bets turn bad. That includes those who did not prepare adequately for a crisis whether through overly leveraging their assets or making their companies fragile through stock buybacks. If shareholders enjoy the rewards of being less risk-averse than others so, too, should they carry the costs. Workers, many Americans point out, have been encouraged to put aside enough of their pay to cover for unforeseen circumstances; so should businesses.

Yet enforcing these principles would mean many well-run companies would become collateral damage. It is the Fed's job to maintain orderly financial markets and the infrastructure for coping with such a large wave of bankruptcies does not exist. Uncertainty would swiftly cripple wholesale funding markets as investors tried to assess who was carrying bad assets on their books. This would further burden the economy with a financial crisis in addition to a shutdown, and put even more

boosters under already rocketing rates of unemployment. In the past month there have been 22m applications for unemployment benefits in the US; potentially eradicating all job growth since 2009.

Distinguishing between those deserving and undeserving of support is difficult even in normal times. Trying to do so in the middle of a crisis is impossible. It is easy to say speculators and corporate raiders should not enjoy the same level of support as viable businesses, but drawing a line between the two is difficult. Many take ordinary corporate practices to an extreme. The Fed is wisely limiting purchases to corporate bonds that were investment-grade before the shutdown.

However, the politics of this support are terrible. Public anger accompanied bailouts for the banks during the financial crisis; supporting the junk bond market may be even more controversial. Although debt did not cause this crisis, there will have to be a reckoning once the moment of danger is passed. Corporate America should expect to run much lower levels of leverage, as well as to pay more in tax to the federal government that has preserved many of them as going concerns.

Most importantly, the Fed will need to sell these assets quickly. Such rapid action would make it clear this is an attempt to ease a temporary dollar funding squeeze and not a bailout. Congressional oversight over the scheme is vital, too; neither Fed chair Jay Powell nor Treasury secretary Steven Mnuchin are elected and many Americans worry the scheme is rewarding the politically connected.

Fighting a crisis can be a dirty business. It often requires compromise. The Fed's actions are justified, but they will be rightly controversial: the best approach is to make them as short-term and transparent as possible.

Letters



AMERICA FIRST

At last I can work and sleep in peace and silence

I totally agree with Lucy Kellaway's article "Is it OK to be happy?" (Life & Arts, April 11). Like her, I'm a teacher; unlike her, I'm long retired as I'm 82, and I live alone in Rome and not with my family in London.

I live in Trastevere, in the very heart of Rome, where in "normal" times a deafening 24-hour *movida* takes place under my windows. I still work translating from English quite a lot, and have to use earplugs when at the computer or simply trying to read a book. Not to speak of the nights without sleeping, despite the

absolutely useless police that won't intervene to help poor residents like me to have a bit of rest. I have sued the municipality of Rome, without success. I am a member of the Vivere Trastevere association for the defence of our borough's rights. I have spent thousands of euros on double glazing. I have thrown eggs and rotten tomatoes from my terrace . . . to no avail.

Why am I so happy now? Because all I have described has immediately stopped with coronavirus. My apartment has become an oasis of peace and silence, where I can work

and sleep. Birds have come back to my terrace and I'm now waiting for the swallows to return. When I open the windows the stink of pollution has given way to clear unpolluted air. Trastevere is spotless and calm, no drugs, no screams and yells till the early hours, and the fountains have recovered their running water and all their lost ancient beauty . . . I hope once this tragic pandemic is over, wild Roman citizens won't forget what being civil means.

Graziella Dei Giudice
Rome, Italy

Is there another element to Lucy's happiness?

Did I detect an element of Schadenfreude in Lucy Kellaway's article on life under lockdown? ("Is it OK to be happy?", Life & Arts, April 11.) There she is, enjoying the "bubble of my privileged house with its private garden" while her ex-husband is confined to an upstairs flat, grunting loudly when exercising, and trying to play "We'll Meet Again" (how poignant on the piano. The accompanying illustration shows Lucy relaxing in bucolic bliss in the garden. Perhaps, given the warm weather, a dish is being served cold.

Robin White
London SE27, UK

Mnuchin's diplomacy has been worthy of Kissinger

The FT gives unnecessarily low marks to the Trump administration's efforts in blunting Covid-19's economic impact ("Fed's radical policies are in uncharted territory", editorial, April 11). Treasury secretary Steven Mnuchin has practised Kissinger-like shuttle diplomacy to pass bipartisan legislation. Partnership between the Federal Reserve and the Treasury department to activate 15(3) powers, more complicated post Dodd-Frank, has been seamless. You may not think the administration is a hero but its performance is far from a zero.

Gray Schwetzer
Brooklyn, NY, US
Member, Federal Reserve Board's Insurance Policy Advisory Committee

Jolly and joyful, the perfect gift

Robin Lane Fox says, eloquently, that a garden (or an arrangement of flowers, I would add) "becomes art through love" ("An apostle of flowers", House & Home, April 11). Years ago, an acquaintance brought me from her own garden a bunch of blooms of vivid shades and a variety of textures,

assembled with a light and artful touch, in a bright red Folger's coffee can. I've never forgotten it. Jolly and joyful, the perfect gift, a work of art from a well-loved garden.

Margaret McGirr
Greenwich, CT, US

Do hang on to Robin!

Robin Lane Fox is by far the best garden columnist in the western world ("An apostle of flowers", House & Home, April 11). I first bought FT Weekend to get his column . . . but that led to the strong book reviews and splendid travel sections. Now I'm a daily print subscriber and read everything. Do hang on to RLF!

Lorna Marsden
Toronto, ON, Canada

Double diamonds

Sir, Paul Mendelson (Bridge, Life & Arts, April 11) speculates on the declarer's ability to play out their hand successfully; but here one wonders if the deal has not proved the greater challenge, for the hands contain two Jacks and two 9 of diamonds. Bizarrely, this seems not to affect the play.

Thomas Kier
Scottsdale, AZ, US

I'm left wondering how Wojcicki could tell

Anne Wojcicki tells Hannah Kuchler, whom she has met for the first time over Lunch (April 11), that "if you have a propensity for criminal behaviour, which I think is a very unlikely situation here, then there's obviously a huge environmental component".

Without wishing to impugn your correspondent's good character, it would have been very interesting to have explored the basis on which Ms Wojcicki felt able to make such assertions.

Jonathan Brewer
New York, NY, US

Gallaghers' tribute to the genius of Lennon

I very much enjoyed reading the life of "Imagine" ("The life of a song", Life & Arts, April 11). I have always thought that the piano played in the introduction of the Oasis hit "Don't Look Back in Anger" strongly resembled John Lennon's "Imagine", and it is actually considered by many to be a tribute paid by the Gallaghers to the Liverpool genius.

Alessandro Lusi
Rome, Italy

Changing rituals in the age of coronavirus

Last year, Kristina Jacobsen, an American musical anthropologist, moved to Sardinia to research the island's vibrant street life and music culture. Fate, in the shape of Covid-19, intervened: Sardinia was placed in lockdown and its noisy street culture vanished. So Jacobsen pivoted, and is now studying how Sardinian households have started to use online and at-home musical rituals to cope with the stress of coronavirus.

"Into [the] void of daily scents and sounds, a multitude of melodies has been born: balcony concerts, recordings and in-home videos," she explains in an article for social science magazine *Sapiens*, noting that a plethora of performances have appeared online with hashtags such as #iorestoacasa ("I'm staying home"), #lamusicanonisferma ("the music doesn't stop") and #tuttoandràbene ("everything will be OK").

These offerings, she adds: "Wail about corona [and] express defiance towards the disease." Necessity has sparked cultural invention, which is also reinforcing community ties – and resilience. It is a striking point to consider as many parts of the world endure more weeks of the lockdown.

In normal circumstances, most of us never stop to ponder how rituals and symbols shape our daily lives. That's no surprise. As the 20th century British anthropologist Victor Turner noted, a ritual is essentially "a stereotyped sequence of activities

involving gestures, words and objects, performed in a sequestered place"; typically, it either marks the passage of time, defines a community, highlights a changed state, expresses our sense of identity, reaffirms shared memories, or does all of these at once.

The coronavirus lockdown has tossed us into a new landscape of profound uncertainty. We are, as some have cleverly identified, living in a state culturally akin to the Schrödinger's cat problem (where the cat was neither dead nor alive). Our communities seem simultaneously to have and to not have Covid-19; we expect normality to resume, but also not to resume, all at once. In the meantime, we are self-isolating but also connected to a vast online world.

In this confusing kaleidoscope, many have responded by refashioning their rituals in striking ways. Sardinia's musical performances are just one case in point. So, in a sense, are the digital events that companies are launching to enable their dispersed staff to bond remotely, or that social groups are creating. My own diary is increasingly defined by a new cycle of ritualised video calls with colleagues and cyber "drinks" with friends.

Online rituals are even emerging to mark the passage of the seasons: last week I took part in a virtual Easter church service, followed by "tea" with 10 cousins around the world.

More tragically, of course, and by necessity, some funeral rituals are

moving online. New rituals are emerging to salute healthcare workers and create community solidarity: just look at the evening pot-banging and cheering that originated last month in northern Italy, which has now been emulated in London and (very noisily) in Manhattan.

Inside our homes, meanwhile, many families are using rituals once reserved for childhood – such as changing clothes – to divide the endless days into "play time", "work time" and "family time", observes business anthropologist Martha Bird. "With so many of us at home, notions about time have begun to (re)formalise into discernible moments or rituals," she says.

Of course, some might consider it distasteful or defeatist to even create coronavirus rituals. After all, new rituals suggest we are adapting to this new life – and thus cannot ignore it as just a temporary nightmare. But I prefer to see what is happening in Sardinia – and elsewhere – as a sign of how innovative humans can be under stress, even in a peculiar Schrödinger's cat cultural world.

That prompts two more questions: when this lockdown finally ends, what rituals will we maintain? And how will we mark the end of this stressful scourge? Ponder this when you next feel bored at home; better still, discuss it in a video chat.

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Notebook

by Gillian Tett



Opinion

Save globalisation to secure the future

Henry Paulson

Covid-19 has resulted in more than a deadly pandemic. It has tipped the world economy into its most severe crisis since the Depression.

As the virus's spread slows and governments rebuild, they face another force sweeping in its path: isolationism. The impending battle will pit forces of openness rooted in market principles against those of closure across four dimensions: trade, capital flows, innovation and global institutions.

Allowing an economic iron curtain to descend would imperil the recovery and jeopardise economic and social stability. Individual nations must resist efforts to slash cross-border linkages and global institutions will need to step up and transform.

The world has prospered because of

integration. But even before the pandemic, the balance was tilting towards closed economies. Now recession, surging unemployment and China's failure to handle the coronavirus outbreak transparently are emboldening these voices. We should recalibrate while retaining the best features of globalisation. The right policies lie not on an end but on the continuum between openness and closure.

Intense battles are sure to be fought over trade. Multinational companies will ensure that they no longer rely on a single country to source each necessary component. Each country will also need to source some critically important medical products domestically. Taken to an extreme, this could lead to deintegration of a major industry at a time when the US has already levied tariffs on steel and industrial goods on tenuous "national security" grounds. Governments should protect their critical supply chains, while also advancing robust trade and investment across all sectors. The banking industry globally has

insufficient capital to absorb the impending large credit losses and to provide the lending needed to help spur recovery. We must assure that capital can flow to businesses that need it most. Such overseas flows will be in the protectionists' crosshairs, but nations should still pursue job-creating foreign investment that promotes recovery by building bridges instead of walls.

Technology decoupling also risks furthering the shift to economic closure. Innovation thrives on disruptive, cross-border collaborations. But the rise of techno-nationalists is the natural outgrowth of a generation of technologies, including artificial intelligence, that are intrinsically multi-use. These innovations will be central to economic success so governments must invest, provide incentives for entrepreneurs and develop standards that protect both national and economic security.

Beijing's emphasis on indigenisation and Washington's on relocating supply chains and sequestering technology suggest that the future unfortunately

will belong to the techno-nationalists. But if we go too far by slashing ties and forbidding technical exchanges and joint research, it will impede innovation and potentially world-changing basic research, including on a Covid-19 vaccine and in reducing carbon emissions, which are a ticking time bomb.



FT series: the world after the pandemic
What to expect when the lockdowns end
ft.com/aftermath

Global institutions have a duty and an opportunity to take on these challenges. But they have not shown themselves up to the task. Their past failures are the result of member nations failing to do the hard work to make them effective.

The US can lead by reinvesting in the very international institutions it has largely sought to emasculate. The World Trade Organization has not kept up with today's modern trading world. And

the Bretton Woods institutions are underfunded and over-governed.

When the G20 meets in Saudi Arabia this November, leaders should commit to market principles and complementary action to support economic growth. But that is not nearly enough. A sustainable economic future demands an effective set of global rules for trade, investment, intellectual property and technology standards. Multilateral institutions must also play a larger role helping vulnerable nations avoid human suffering and political instability.

The leading economies in the G20 must also confront risk across a broader range of threats. The fact they were not ready for a very predictable pandemic should be a wake-up call. They must prepare for other obvious risks such as terrorism, cyber warfare, climate change and nuclear proliferation. Now is the time to start developing a framework for global co-ordination. The world will be a very dangerous place if we do not fix the global institutions and establish the treaties and

protocols needed to prevent and mitigate future tragedies.

The forces that advocate for closure will resist strengthening multilateral organisations. But that only increases the risks to our citizens. While the near-term prospects of reform seem dim, I am more optimistic this crisis will ultimately spur co-operation among major nations to begin the hard work of building a more peaceful, sustainable future.

The world has faced more daunting challenges than coronavirus. But the recovery – and the future – can only be secured if major economies pull together. Strategic competitors and adversaries struggle to find common ground even when it is in their self-interest. But there will be no lasting recovery if the largest economies, especially the US and China, cannot find a workable strategic framework. The global economic order is not perfect. But it truly is too big, and too essential, to fail.

The writer, a former US Treasury secretary, chairs the Paulson Institute

Nextdoor boss is under pressure as use of the hyperlocal social media hub explodes, writes Hannah Murphy

As coronavirus lockdowns have spread, Sarah Friar, the chief executive of Nextdoor, has found herself on the horns of a dilemma.

The hyperlocal social media network she runs has exploded into a chaotic hub for neighbourly behaviour: grocery runs for the elderly, mask-sharing, feel-good doorstep singalongs. Daily active members were up 80 per cent globally from February to March. Nextdoor now serves 260,000 neighbourhoods in 11 countries worldwide.

But the fledgling platform has also attracted curtain-twitchers in droves. If Facebook is broadcasting in a digital town square, Nextdoor is gossiping over the garden fence. On group threads, paranoia and suspicion are being channelled into trolling, nimbyism and racial profiling. Ms Friar's challenge, 17 months into the job, is to tame the nasties while retaining the newcomers, and win advertising dollars as the company seeks to monetise its user base.

To supporters, the 47-year-old avid reader personifies the good neighbour. Not only has she added an array of coronavirus-related tools to the platform, but she also added a "kindness reminder" feature last year. Users writing hurtful comments receive a prompt when they try to post, urging them to rethink. On average, one-quarter opt to rewrite. "She strikes me as someone who'd leave a note on your door, offering a pie," says Stewart Butterfield, chief executive of Slack, where she sits on the board. But he notes that many Nextdoor posts are essentially "eye-rolling at how ridiculous your neighbours can be... There's no affinity except that you live near each other."

Born to a nurse and an HR manager, Ms Friar was raised in Northern Ireland and retains a bit of a lilt in her otherwise American accent. "She understands the importance of people coming together to bridge divisions," says Reid Hoffman, former chairman of LinkedIn and a partner at venture capital group Greylock, in a nod to the region's Troubles.

Ms Friar's first role after receiving a masters in engineering, metallurgy, economics and management from Oxford, was as a business analyst for McKinsey in the UK and South Africa. She then spent more than a decade as a tech-focused equity analyst at Goldman Sachs in San Francisco, where she was known as a "rising star". A short stint at Salesforce was followed by six years at payments group Square, where she was chief financial officer.

When she left Square for Nextdoor in 2018, her former company's share price slumped 15 per cent, and some observers asked why the founder and chief executive Jack Dorsey did not appoint her as CEO, given that he also runs Twitter. "I was unrealistically expecting to be working with Sarah well into our late 90s (swapping the standup tables for rocking chairs)," Mr Dorsey wrote in a company memo at the time. "Unrealistic because I knew of Sarah's life-long ambition to run her own company."

Like many women in Silicon Valley, Ms Friar, who is married with two



CUMMINGS

Person in the news | Sarah Friar

'Chief neighbour' extends her watch

children, has adhered to the "lean in" philosophy propagated by Facebook's Sheryl Sandberg. She runs Ladies Who Launch, a non-profit focused on "empowering" female entrepreneurs. After meeting US secretary of state Mike Pompeo and other tech executives, she explained her participation as an effort "to have that seat at the table. I think it's incredibly important for there to be diverse perspectives."

At Nextdoor, where she serves as "chief neighbour" according to her LinkedIn profile, Ms Friar may eventually head to the public markets – she helped the group raise \$125m at a \$2bn valuation last year.

But first she must boost revenue without damaging the tight-knit community the site seeks to build. Nextdoor points to its strict onboarding process – many users are verified by having a postcard sent to their home address and proving they receive it – to argue that it does not prioritise growth at all costs. The company is using a combination of machine

learning and human moderators to try to weed out the vitriol, misinformation and conspiracy theories.

Still, critics detect opportunism: Nextdoor's business model relies on advertising from companies such as Ring, the doorbell-cum-surveillance camera, that can profit if the platform's

'She strikes me as someone who would leave a note on your door, offering a pie'

users get het up about reports of local crime. Ms Friar is exploring other revenue streams such as charging local businesses to offer deals on the platform, or charging certain businesses including utilities to target particular communities with information. "From a product perspective, I really want to see us lean into the local business opportunity," Ms

Friar told the Financial Times last year. "Nobody to date has done local well."

A consummate networker, she lured David Solomon, the Goldman CEO, to speak at a tech dinner last year, and convinced New York governor Andrew Cuomo, to start using the platform last week to pass on "critical information during this public health crisis" to residents. It was part of a broader effort to woo governments to the site – several London local councils and police departments are visibly active – and spread her "kindness is cool" message.

"She is gravitas at its best," says Rosie Rios, a former US treasurer who introduced Mr Cuomo and Ms Friar. "She introduced me to [Salesforce chief] Marc Benioff via email. Jack Dorsey was more than heartbroken when she left. To take those relationships forward and always with glowing and positive stamps of approval isn't something you learn in charm school."

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In a crisis we keep calm and are kinder than ever

Tim Harford

The undercover economist



First there was the panic buying. Then came the selfish, reckless refusal to maintain physical distance: the beach parties in Florida and the house parties in Manchester; the 500-mile round trip to admire the Lake District and the mass sun-worshipping in London parks. And there's worse: the scam artists; the people who use coughing as an assault; the thieves who loot medical supplies from hospitals.

These coronavirus stories perpetuate a grim view of human nature. That grim view is mistaken, a persistent and counterproductive myth. There are some terrible people in the world, and some ordinary people behaving in a terrible way, but they make headlines precisely because they are rare. Look more closely and the evidence for mass selfishness is extremely thin.

Start with the reports of panic buying, which for many people were the first glimmers of the trouble that lay in store. By the middle of March in the UK, the newspapers were full of stories about shortages of toilet paper, flour and pasta. The natural assumption was that we were a nation of locusts, stripping the supermarkets as we selfishly piled shopping carts high with produce.

But Kantar, a consultancy, told me that a mere 3 per cent of shoppers had bought "extraordinary amounts" of pasta. Most of us were merely adjusting our habits to life spent away from restaurants, sandwich bars and offices with their own loo paper. We all went shopping a bit more often, and when we did, spent a little more. No cause for collective shame, but it was enough to strain supermarket supply chains.

What about those who ignore pleas to keep their distance? Again, the misdeeds are exaggerated. Lambeth council grumpily closed Brockwell Park in south London, complaining of 3,000 visitors in a single day – not mentioning that the park might easily see 10 times that number on a normal sunny Saturday, nor that taking exercise in a park is perfectly permissible.

Exaggerating problems might drive web traffic or make zealous officials feel important, but these tales of misbehaviour are likely to be counterproductive. If we are told that others are acting selfishly, we feel inclined to be selfish, too. As Yossarian of *Catch-22* put it, "I'd certainly be a damned fool to feel any other way, wouldn't I?"

The psychologist Robert Cialdini has, with colleagues, studied this insight in the Petrified Forest National Park in Arizona. When visitors were told that the forest was being endangered because others were stealing petrified wood, they stole too. When tourists were told – truthfully – that the vast

majority of visitors were leaving the wood untouched, they did likewise. I would not be at all shocked to learn that scolding reports of sunbathing only encourage more of us to sunbathe.

The surprising truth is that people tend to behave decently in a crisis. To the British, the all-too-familiar example is the cheerful demeanour of Londoners during the Blitz. In hindsight that seems natural. But Rutger Bregman's forthcoming book *Humankind* points out that in the 1930s Winston Churchill and others feared panic if London was attacked from the air. Britons failed to take this lesson to heart: they assumed that when German cities were bombed, German civilians would crack. They didn't. These myths have fatal consequences.

Nor is calm co-operativeness restricted to times of war. In the wake of a catastrophic earthquake in Turkey in 1999, the emergency relief expert Claude de Ville de Goyet berated media organisations for propagating what he called "disaster myths". "While isolated cases of antisocial behavior exist," he wrote, "the majority of people respond spontaneously and generously."

The writer Dan Gardner, who punctured the disaster myth in a series of viral tweets, was repeatedly rebuffed by people who regarded New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina as a potent counter-example.

That only underlines the malevolence of the myth. At the time, rumours ran wild about the murder and rape of children inside the Louisiana Superdome;

The evidence from past disasters suggests that we should expect more of each other at this time

but when the national guard showed up, armed and prepared for pitched battle, they were met instead by a nurse asking for medical supplies. Fear of civil disorder may well have caused more harm than the civil disorder itself – as when people trying to walk out of New Orleans across the bridge to nearby Gretna were turned back by armed police.

This pandemic has no exact precedents, but the evidence from past disasters suggests that we should expect more of each other. Many people and businesses took voluntary action on social distancing while both the British and US governments dithered; the UK administration was also surprised by how many people quickly volunteered to help with transport and supplies for vulnerable people.

We can be both nimble and altruistic, and perhaps the authorities should start taking that into account in their future policies. Given clear guidance as to the best thing to do, most of us try to do it.

Rebecca Solnit wrote in *A Paradise Made in Hell*: "What you believe shapes how you act." Let's start by believing in each other; kind acts will follow.

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Top reads at FT.com/opinion

● Hacking for humanity starts with solutions to the small problems
Hackers should rattle the status quo but form realisable ideas, writes John Thornhill

● When the government calls, companies must answer
The aim is to emerge with a good reputation and staff trust, writes Robert Armstrong

Companies & Markets

FINANCIAL TIMES



Swedish exceptionalism Volvo Cars plans to restart factory at full pelt — ANALYSIS, PAGE 10

Crisis mode Investors hunt for survivors in US earnings season — MARKETS, PAGE 11

Gilead shares leap on positive signs from Covid-19 drug trial

◆ Labs race to produce virus treatments ◆ Remdesivir is 'no silver bullet'



Investors are ready to pounce on any sign of a treatment that might encourage governments to reopen economies — AP

HANNAH KUCHLER — NEW YORK
DONATO PAOLO MANCINI — LONDON

Shares in Gilead jumped as much as 11 per cent after a leak that suggested one of the biotech group's potential coronavirus drugs was performing well in a trial in Chicago.

The disclosure raised hopes of an effective treatment for Covid-19, but Gilead and the university running the trial cautioned that it was incomplete and full results were needed before any conclusions could be drawn.

The news came as other efforts to combat coronavirus accelerated with Roche of Switzerland launching an antibody test and the US government announcing a research partnership.

In video footage on Gilead's remdesivir drug, which was leaked to industry publication STAT news, a trial specialist at the University of Chicago said many patients taking it were recovering and being discharged quickly from hospital. The news buoyed the S&P 500, which

was up 1.5 per cent in mid-morning in New York, as investors look for signs that better treatment options could embolden governments to open up locked down economies.

But Umer Raffat, a biotech analyst at Evercore, said the trial was not without faults, not least that it did not compare the patients to a control arm. He said remdesivir should not be considered a "silver bullet".

"The ultimate thing investors are looking for is either a drug which causes immediate symptom resolution and hospital discharge or a vaccine that prevents infections," he said.

Remdesivir is an antiviral drug that emerged from an effort to tackle the west African Ebola epidemic of 2013-16. But it was never fully evaluated to the satisfaction of regulators and remains an unlicensed medicine everywhere.

Gilead was up 7.7 per cent at \$82.046 by midday in New York yesterday. Geoffrey Porges, an analyst at SVB-

Leerink, said the stock market had given Gilead "a generous amount of credit for a product that the company has specifically stipulated will not be sold for a profit". But he added that "investors may be discounting that commentary, or simply looking to buy any positive Covid news".

While finding a treatment could help

'Investors want either a drug that causes symptom resolution or a vaccine that prevents infections'

patients get over Covid-19, better tests are also needed to track the progress of the disease if countries are going to end their lockdowns.

Roche yesterday it was launching an antibody test that will help health professionals test whether people have previously had the virus or not.

Shares in Roche rose 2 per cent to SFR324.8. Its Elecsys serology test will be available in early May in Europe and other countries that accept the CE mark accreditation. Roche is applying for an emergency authorisation from the US regulator.

Abbott Labs and BD, both based in the US, have already launched antibody tests, but there are still doubts about the reliability of some tests for past infection around the world.

The US government expanded its commitment to creating drugs and vaccines to tackle the coronavirus, with the National Institute of Health launching a public-private partnership, working with 16 pharmaceutical and biotech companies.

The group will work towards prioritising the correct vaccines and drugs, streamlining clinical trials and co-ordinating on regulation.

Additional reporting by Clive Cookson in London

Cuts loom at Booking.com despite \$4bn fundraising

ALICE HANCOCK — LONDON

Booking.com, the online travel booking site, has told employees to expect lay-offs, just days after it secured \$4bn in bonds from investors to see it through the coronavirus crisis.

On an internal call heard by the Financial Times, Booking's chief executive Glenn Fogel told staff that cost-cutting would be "tailored to different parts of the company". In response to a question on whether there would be lay-offs, he responded "probably, yes".

The World Travel and Tourism Council has estimated that coronavirus could result in up to 75m jobs being lost from the travel sector as a result of countries shutting borders and hotels closing. Booking's rival Expedia has already laid off about 3,000 staff this year.

Mr Fogel told the 530 employees on the call, which was first reported by the Dutch newspaper NRC, that bookings had dropped 85 per cent year-on-year in the preceding week and that the loss in revenue due to reduced rates at hotels was even greater.

To cut costs, the Amsterdam-based travel company has stopped nearly all marketing, cut senior management salaries and put in place a hiring freeze.

Last week, Booking raised about \$4bn

in four tranches of senior notes due between 2025 and 2030, saying that the proceeds would be used for "general corporate purposes".

Kevin Kopelman, an analyst at the investment bank Cowen, said that he estimated Booking now had around \$8.5bn in cash at its disposal to see it through the crisis — about four times the amount of Expedia and Airbnb.

"Booking clearly has plenty of cash but that doesn't mean that they won't take a hard look at their expenses, given the fact that it could take years to reach a full recovery," Mr Kopelman added.

Mr Fogel described the sale of senior notes to employees as "expensive money... but it's good because that money now makes us feel safe".

Cowen analysts are modelling for a return to 2019 revenue levels in 2022, which Mr Kopelman said was "potentially slightly optimistic".

This week Airbnb announced it was raising \$1bn of senior debt, a week after it had raised \$1bn from the investment firms Silver Lake and Sixth Street.

Unlike Airbnb and Expedia, which take payments in advance, most Booking customers pay when they reach their hotel. This means it has not had to suffer the same cash outflow as its rivals as consumers claim refunds.

Tobacco

Willard departs as Altria chief after recovering from virus

MANITA BADKAR — NEW YORK

Altria, the US tobacco group, said its chairman and chief executive Howard Willard, who was recovering from Covid-19, had decided to step down this week.

The 56-year-old Mr Willard had stepped aside three days ago, on April 14, after 28 years at the Virginia-based company behind Marlboro cigarettes, Altria said yesterday. It first disclosed his diagnosis to staff and the board on March 19.

The company tapped Billy Gifford, who most recently served as chief financial officer and vice-chairman to succeed him. Mr Gifford has a long background dating to the Philip Morris predecessor company. He took over Mr Willard's chief executive duties after Mr Willard took a temporary medical leave of absence.

Altria also said it had separated the role of chairman and CEO, with board member Thomas Farrell, whose background is mainly in the energy sector, stepping up to become chairman.

The leadership and governance changes come after Altria wrote off the

majority of its investment in Juul Labs, that slashed the value of the e-cigarette company to a fraction of the \$12.8bn that Altria paid at the end of 2018. Following the deal, Juul came under regulatory scrutiny over its marketing and the health effects.

Juul's troubles deepened this month when the Federal Trade Commission sued to unwind Altria's investment in the e-cigarette maker on the grounds that the tobacco group had bought the stake unlawfully to eliminate competition in the sector.

Altria shares, which are down 19 per cent year-to-date, rose 2 per cent in midday New York trade yesterday along with a broader rise in US stock futures.

Mr Willard had overseen the company's transition away from traditional combustible tobacco to the faster growing vaping market.

"The board thanks Howard for his nearly 30 years of distinguished service to Altria and for helping to set the course for Altria's 10-year vision to responsibly lead the transition of adult smokers to a non-combustible future," said Mr Farrell.

Travel & leisure. Gaming

Sport embraces virtual competition to replace real-life action

Horsing, F1 and football switch to online events as industry adapts to lockdowns

SAMUEL AGINI AND MARK DI STEFANO

Shut down by the coronavirus pandemic, traditional sports are turning to virtual competitions as they seek to keep fans, broadcasters and sponsors enthralled — and cushion the blow of revenue lost from the halt to live action.

The Premier League is in talks with its clubs to launch an esports tournament on Fifa 20, a video game played by millions of people, according to a person with knowledge of the plan. Spain's La Liga has already done so with the Fifa 20 La Liga Santander challenge.

"This kind of global energy [of moving to online events] will help the sport return stronger than ever in the months ahead," Alfredo Bermejo, La Liga's digital strategy director, said.

The aim is to provide supporters with an alternative way to follow sport, broadcasters with virtual action to fill empty airtime and proof to sponsors that their brands are still reaching fans.

The Premier League, the world's most valuable domestic football competition,

has warned it risks losing at least £1.1bn from football's shutdown, while La Liga has said it faces similar losses if the season cannot be completed.

Formula One has been forced to postpone or cancel nine Grands Prix, with each race worth between \$40m and \$70m in promoter fees from racetracks with drivers past and present.

Julian Tan, head of digital business initiatives and esports at F1, concedes that "Formula One racing is not replaceable through esports", but said it is "an opportunity to create something different, something new, something that our fans can engage with".

But Tom Cassels, joint head of the sports sector team at law firm Linklaters, warned traditional leagues seeking to satisfy valuable broadcast and sponsorship deals through esports offerings may struggle to honour their contracts.

"There's uncertainty generally in business around the effect of force majeure clauses in the Covid world," said Mr Cassels. "It would take a thoroughly aggressive interpretation of a contract or an extremely badly drafted contract for esports to be capable of filling the gap for something that was intended to be live broadcast. Good luck to anyone that is trying that."

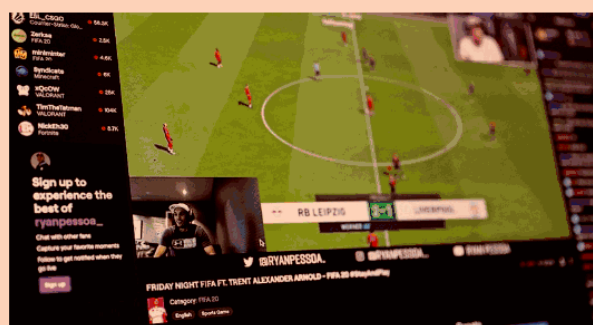
One Sky Sports insider said: "As we stand now, esports would never really counter the audience numbers for live sport. It's not like for like." They added, however: "It's definitely showing its value and the audiences are growing."

"But you're never going to convert the over-55 demographic to watching live game play. You won't. This is more consumption for the 18 to 35 demographic, and even younger considering kids are home from school."

Though there is little hope of replicating the boisterous terraces and the smell of racing fuel, esports is the next best

alternative. Mainstream sports executives also believe the effort can attract a younger generation of fans.

Esports, ranging from drone racing to competitive video gaming, remains a nascent industry. Before the lockdown, PwC, the audit firm, was forecasting that global esports revenue would rise to \$1.8bn by 2023 — up from \$775m in 2018. But there are signs that esports can gain wide audiences. More than 4.8m viewers watched virtual horse Potters Corner win a computer simulation of the Grand National on ITV this month.



Liverpool FC star Trent Alexander-Arnold, left, plays in Fifa 20 — Scott Wilson/PA Wire

past and present, or even athletes from other sports.

The ePremier League finals, the top tier's official esports tournament for Fifa 20 players in the UK, due to take place in London last month, were called off, showing that esports relies on the old-fashioned business of filling arenas with spectators as well as streaming.

A person with knowledge of the matter said top footballers are set to take part in an alternative Fifa 20 knockout tournament being organised by the Premier League and its clubs. As with other virtual events such as the Grands Prix, there is likely to be broadcast interest.

With elite clubs deliberating their options, Leyton Orient, a club in English football's fourth tier, took to Twitter in March to arrange Ultimate Quaranteam, a 128-strong Fifa 20 event that raised more than £50,000 for charity.

Not all of the interest will stick when live events can take place again. Jane Weedon, director of business development at Twitch, said the athletes themselves will not have time to game and stream for hours on end once they resume their intense training schedules.

While there would be "some inevitable drop-off", she said, leagues with a "community that they've built" online will see "incentives to keep that going".

COMPANIES. WEEK IN REVIEW

Bailouts need more of us to share the pain – and gains

The Top Line
Tom Braithwaite



At the end of 2008, Detroit car bosses flew on private jets to Washington to ask for multibillion-dollar rescue packages.

“Couldn’t you have downgraded to first class or something?” one lawmaker asked. Pressed to take a pay cut, Ford’s then-chief executive said: “I think I’m OK where I am.”

Today’s bailouts have barely begun, but they are already triggering flashbacks to the financial crisis. Some things have changed, but there are a lot of repeat arguments over how to “share the pain”.

Executives are certainly savvier than their predecessors in making personal sacrifices. Virgin Atlantic chief executive Shai Weiss was an early mover, taking a 20 per cent pay cut. That is prudent when you follow up by asking the UK government for “clear, decisive and unwavering support”.

So sharp is the hit from coronavirus that extraordinary and rapid state support is justified, especially for smaller businesses. But for larger companies that are asking for specific rescues, the pain share matters.

True, there is not the same moral hazard as in the financial crisis, when companies that took reckless risks were rescued. But even before the virus struck, US corporate debt was at record levels – the highest relative to assets in 20 years. Companies that chose to take on huge debts to pay for share buybacks over that time do not deserve bailouts with no strings attached.

Yet the US airlines bailout announced this week is mainly grants and loans. Only the addition of warrants gives the taxpayer a chance to benefit from a group’s recovery, and only to a paltry degree – about 1 per cent of the shares in Delta, for instance. In contrast, the Obama

administration pushed GM and Chrysler through bankruptcy to shed some of their debts. Although creditors cried foul, officials persuaded a court that as the only lender in town, it could dictate the terms, and it wanted to save companies and employees, not their creditors.

When it bailed out AIG, the US government took 80 per cent of the insurance group’s equity, angering some existing shareholders. The intervention was fodder for academics, politicians and the courts for years. But again AIG had no alternatives, the intervention stopped a worse crisis, and it made money. The return for the taxpayer was about \$23bn.

As the government’s chief restructuring officer in that period, Jim Millstein, says, more debt does not solve the problem for overleveraged businesses; and equity gives the taxpayer some chance of upside.

Even before the virus struck, US corporate debt was at record levels – the highest relative to assets in 20 years

If there is dilution, so be it. Existing shareholders have no right to be bailed out. Junior creditors, too, should accept the risk that comes with the territory.

The irony is that the US government may still end up with sizeable equity stakes in the airlines. No one has the faintest idea how quickly the travelling public will return to the skies. If revenues remain depressed, the debts will need restructuring into equity.

A similar phenomenon on a more alarming scale could occur with the Treasury and Fed’s new corporate credit programme, which includes the central bank buying junk bonds for the first time.

We are not far away from the Fed buying shares, a policy endorsed by former chair Janet Yellen. Despite efforts to the contrary, the government will end up owning more of USA Inc.

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Dealmaker wins Saudi support for Newcastle United buy

Corporate person in the news

Amanda Staveley
Founder, PCP Capital Partners

Last October on the Red Sea, British financier Amanda Staveley and her husband stepped aboard the megayacht of Saudi Arabia’s crown prince, Mohammed bin Salman.

Also among the party were Yasir al-Rumayyan, head of Saudi Arabia’s sovereign wealth fund, and global business chiefs including SoftBank’s Masayoshi Son and Reliance Industries founder Mukesh Ambani.

This week one of the fruits of that trip became evident. Discussions on the yacht Serene helped revive an attempt led by the Saudi fund to buy the Premier League football club Newcastle United. Despite football being suspended in the coronavirus pandemic, an agreement was reached this week for a £300m purchase of the club from retail tycoon Mike Ashley. The talks were led by Ms Staveley, whose private equity firm will also invest.

The acquisition – Ms Staveley’s first with Saudi Arabia’s Public Investment Fund – marks a return to high-profile dealmaking for a woman best known for orchestrating the purchase of Manchester City by the Abu Dhabi royal Sheikh Mansour bin Zayed Al Nahyan in 2008, and shortly afterwards a £3.5bn Abu Dhabi investment as part of an emergency cash call by Barclays bank at the height of the financial crisis.

The 47-year-old Yorkshirewoman has long provided tabloid fodder thanks to her glamour and former relationship with Prince Andrew. But those who have worked with her say she has kept her position as a trusted



‘She is very clever at penetrating these deep-pocketed circles and she does it with charm and persistence’

intermediary for Middle Eastern billions through charm, an eye for technical detail and a ferocious determination to make deals she envisages become reality.

Ms Staveley is the daughter of Yorkshire landed gentry; her father founded the Lightwater Valley theme park. But in her youth her parents told her she would need to earn or marry money because, in keeping with family tradition, they would leave their estate to their eldest son.

As a child she dreamt of being a stuntwoman, repeatedly watching the daredevil sequences in James Bond films. After dropping out of university, she borrowed money to buy a restaurant popular with Gulf racehorse owners. Her next venture was a high-tech conference centre that was bought by the listed communications group EuroTelecom, but the company’s collapse in the dotcom bust forced Ms Staveley into insolvency.

Undeterred, she made the most of contacts garnered through her previous businesses and set up PCP Capital Partners, her advisory and private equity firm, which has offices in Dubai and London.

One person who has worked with her said: “She is very clever at penetrating these deep-pocketed circles and she does it with charm and persistence. She hobbos with these guys and some of these guys are not very sophisticated . . . She has a way of dealing with these pockets that is anti the Wall Street playbook . . . I think part of her success is that she is systematically underestimated.”

Ms Staveley’s firm has been involved in about £8bn of deals over the past decade, including a series of property and distressed debt purchases on behalf of Saudi and Emirati investors; she advised on the 2015 Qatari acquisition for about £1bn of three London hotels including Claridge’s.

Eye for detail: Amanda Staveley has earned a reputation as a trusted intermediary for Middle Eastern investors — Jenny Goodall/ANL

For six years PCP ran a Yemeni telecoms group. But other would-be blockbuster deals, such as a Chinese-backed attempt to invest in Liverpool football club, have foundered.

In 2011 Ms Staveley married Mehrdad Ghodoussi, a former banker who is now managing partner of her firm; the pair live at London’s Park Lane with their five-year-old son.

Two years after her wedding she was diagnosed with the gene for Huntington’s disease, a rare and incurable brain disorder. That added urgency to an already driven personality, say those close to her.

Her diary for the coming months is full. With asset prices dropping in the pandemic, Ms Staveley is eyeing further deals. And in June, hearings begin in her £1.5bn litigation against Barclays, in which she accused the bank of deceit over payments made to Qatar to secure its investment in the financial crisis cash call. The bank denies the claims.

If the Newcastle deal is approved by the Premier League, Ms Staveley’s company will act as asset managers for the club. She will then need to turn her charm on to a devoted fan base desperate to move on from years in the doldrums. “What she’s got to do [at Newcastle] is carefully manage expectations,” said a senior executive who has worked with her.

That may be challenging. Among the club’s fans is Alex Hart, a 26-year-old chef from the area who has pledged to celebrate the deal with a new tattoo: a portrait of Ms Staveley.

He said: “If she’s part of the team that helps make Newcastle great again, I’m a fan of hers.”
Judith Evans and Arash Massoudi

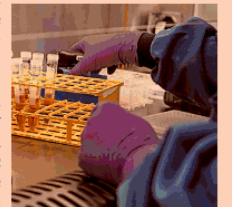
BEST OF BUSINESS

Vaccine push

GlaxoSmithKline and Sanofi are joining forces to develop a Covid-19 vaccine with the aim of getting a treatment to market in the next 12 to 18 months.

The companies said they planned to start phase 1 trials, which give humans the drug for the first time to test its safety, in the second half of this year.

If successful, further testing for efficacy would be needed with the aim of making a vaccine available by the second half of 2021.



The Facebook-led digital currency project Libra announced a drastic downgrading of the scope of its initial vision, overhauling several elements of the project in an attempt to placate global regulators. “Libra 2.0” plans to offer a set of digital versions of single currencies, such as a Libra dollar or a Libra euro, that would be fully backed one to one by cash or cash equivalents, plus support from a capital buffer.

Larry Fink, chief executive of BlackRock, hit back at criticisms that its work with the Federal Reserve is akin to a “bailout” of the world’s largest asset manager and the exchange traded fund industry it dominates.

The New York Fed hired BlackRock last month to run three stimulus programmes, including one set to purchase its credit ETFs. The appointment has attracted criticism for creating a potential conflict of

BlackRock’s assets tumbled to \$6.5tn at the end of the first quarter, down from a record high of \$7.4tn at the end of 2019

interest given BlackRock represents nearly half of the fixed income ETF market.

“I think it’s insulting,” Mr Fink said in response to a question on an earnings call with analysts on Thursday. “I object to the way you framed it as a bailout.”

Mr Fink’s comments came after BlackRock reported a record drop in assets under management as its clients’ portfolios dropped in value during the turmoil in global markets stemming from the coronavirus pandemic. The group’s assets tumbled to \$6.5tn at the end of the first quarter, down from a record high of \$7.4tn at the end of 2019.

The UK accounting industry was plunged into its worst crisis in more than a decade as the “Big Four” firms slashed partners’ pay by up to a quarter and their mid-tier rivals furloughed junior staff to cope with the pandemic fallout.

London-headquartered KPMG, PwC, Deloitte and EY have reduced the amount of profits that are distributed to their partners each month by between 20 and 25 per cent to build up cash reserves and help

£720,000 Average earnings for UK partners in ‘Big Four’ firms last year
1,000 Number of WeWork jobs at risk in fresh round of cost-cutting

survive a downturn in work. Partners at the UK units of the four firms, which between them employ about 74,000 people, earned an average of £720,000 last year. The economic blow to the professional services industry follows years of corporate failures and accounting scandals that have hurt their reputations.

WeWork chief executive Sandeep Mathrani told employees that plans for a new round of lay-offs would be finalised by the end of May, as the loss-making office space provider implements another cost-cutting plan. The next round of cuts could affect more than 1,000 of WeWork’s roughly 10,000 employees, according to people familiar with its plans.

The company has already shed thousands from its payroll as it sought to contain its expenses, including 2,400 people it laid off last year.

Under the hood Banks ramp up reserves to tackle loan problems

Provisions at six biggest US lenders reach \$25.4bn in the first quarter, an increase of 350% year on year

Big US banks are battening down the hatches to deal with an expected surge in loan losses as the pandemic casts serious doubts over the capacity of consumers and companies to pay their debt.

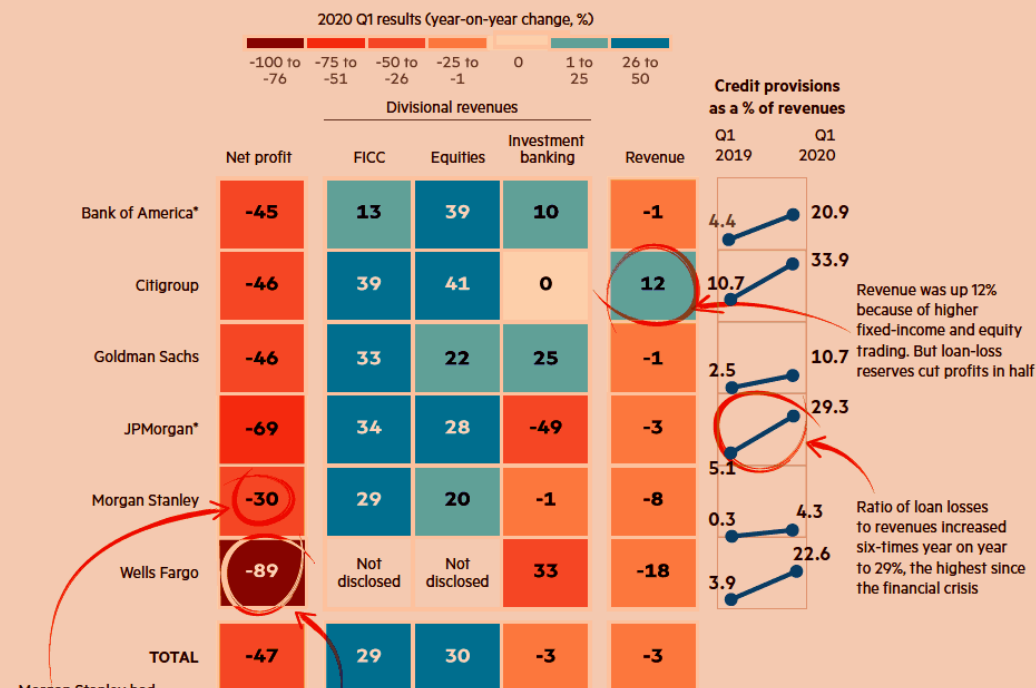
Loan-loss charges at six big US banks reached \$25.4bn in the first quarter. This marks a 350 per cent surge in collective provisions across Bank of America, Citi, JPMorgan, Wells Fargo, Goldman Sachs and Morgan Stanley versus a year earlier, as charges soared to levels not seen since the financial crisis.

The change illustrates how banks are ramping up reserves to deal with anticipated loan problems among clients, as top economists warn that the world economy has fallen into recession. The provisions are additions to reserves so banks have enough in their rainy day fund to cover future losses.

Since the start of the year, US banks have been operating under a new accounting standard, which makes it hard to compare the most recent charges with past performance. Previously, banks made provisions for loan losses only when customers missed payments; under the new accounting standard, they have to make provisions based on a loan’s lifetime value, which involves a lot of judgment.

Of course what matters in the long term is not how much banks expect to lose on soured loans, it is how much they actually lose as borrowers default and their loans have to be written off. Investors will have to wait much longer for a clear picture on that. Laura Noonan

US banks set bleak tone to results season



Morgan Stanley had the smallest fall in first quarter profits because it has the least exposure to Main Street lending

Wells, the fourth-biggest US bank, reported an 89% drop in first-quarter profits to \$653m

*JPMorgan’s trading figures do not include credit valuation adjustment of -\$951m, in the first quarter of 2020 and of +\$136m for the first quarter of 2019 – the bank does not break out those between fixed income and equities.
Sources: company reports; companies; Refinitiv

COMPANIES & MARKETS

Carmakers start up factories again while striving to keep workers safe

Most adopt a running-slow approach, but Swedish exceptionalism entails that Volvo go at full pelt

PETER CAMPBELL — LONDON

As dawn broke on Tuesday, more than 2,000 factory workers arrived at Magna Steyr's plant in Graz, Austria for the first time in a month.

The staff, who assemble the Mercedes G-Class wagon for the contract manufacturer, were given two face masks on arrival.

Sitting spaced apart on the floor of the car plant to avoid crowding one of the meeting rooms, they listened to an hour-long briefing on the health measures put in place across the facility, from new wash stations to cardboard partitions that separate lunch benches.

In the coming days, the scene will be replicated across a smattering of facilities from Sweden to France to Germany, as the first of Europe's halted car lines begin moving again after weeks of silence, while shuttered US sites are likely to follow suit in the coming weeks.

After deciding to close down in March to contain the outbreak — and because of a collapse in demand and stoppages in the supply chain — carmakers including Toyota, Volkswagen, Volvo, Renault and Hyundai are firing up factories again, while trying to keep workforces safe.

"It's easy to shut down. It's much more complicated to open up," says Hakan Samuelsson, chief executive of Volvo Cars, which will open its Torslanda site in Sweden and its Ghent plant in Belgium on Monday.

Yet while all carmakers say they are committed to protecting workers, there are subtle differences in approach as each tries to balance efficiency of sites with the wellbeing of staff.

"You have to watch for the health of the people but also the health of the company," said Frank Klein, Magna Steyr's manufacturing head. "People are happy to be off for two weeks, but they all know that if the shutdown is too long there is always a risk to jobs."

With the pandemic spreading in March, some North American plants were hit by staff walkouts over safety concerns. The new protective measures are being introduced in consultation with unions.

"Safety of health is a key priority," said Johann Neuhold, the lead of the works council at Magna Steyr in Graz. "Nevertheless, safety of jobs should not be underestimated in these times."

The assembly line at Hyundai's plant in the Czech Republic, which reopened this week, will run at a slower speed to allow workers to keep their distance.

Normally an employee moves along the line with the car while completing their task, such as installing the dashboard. With speeds reduced, staff will carry out the same task but will travel a shorter distance, keeping them in a smaller area and further apart from the next workstation.

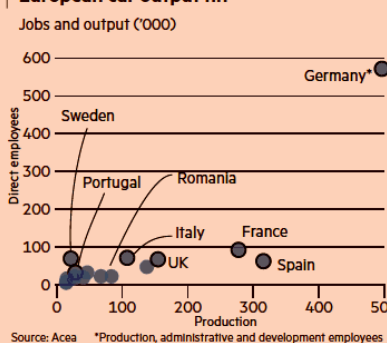
Ferrari, which has not yet reopened but is preparing to start up once cleared by the Italian government, has two staff on a car at any time, and will require all workers to remain at diagonally opposite ends of the car from their partner.

The company, which has the luxury of slower production than mass-market manufacturers, normally produces 48 cars a day from three lines, but will restart at lower volumes to limit the number of staff at the site.

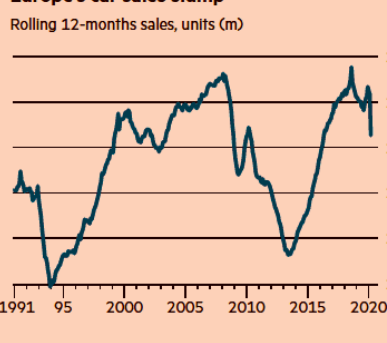
Fiat, which is also waiting for the



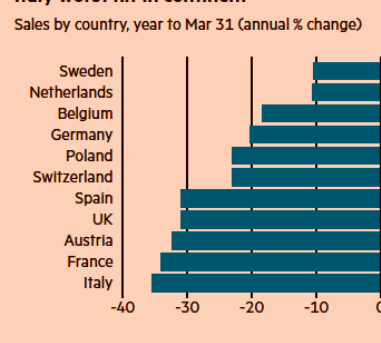
European car output hit



Europe's car sales slump



Italy worst hit in continent



'You have to watch for the health of the people but also the health of the company'

Frank Klein, Magna Steyr

green light to open, will reopen with slower lines.

The measures will slow the number of vehicles produced. But for a global economy buckling under the disruption wrought by coronavirus, analysts say that is not necessarily an immediate problem.

"You can run the plant like this, though it obviously wouldn't be as efficient," said Tim Lawrence from PA Consulting, who advises carmakers on manufacturing and supply chains. "You might lose 20-30 per cent of your efficiency, but if demand falls, output will have to come down anyway."

Car sales in Europe fell 55 per cent in March, and are expected to drop further in April when the full impact of the lockdowns in big markets bites.

Others have rejected the running-slow approach. Volvo plans to restart its main Swedish factory at "full speed" and control output by limiting hours instead, something that requires workers on its assembly line operating close together as usual. "We will always work at full speed when we work. That's how you manage a modern assembly factory," said Mr Samuelsson.

Workers will wear masks and gloves, and be advised to wash hands frequently at the newly-installed basins and sanitising points. Temperature tests at the site entrance are voluntary.

While the approach may appear lax compared to the distancing measures

other carmakers are introducing, it echoes the Swedish mentality of individual responsibility, which has seen the country keep some schools and restaurants open while other nations have been in complete lockdown.

Other carmakers are restarting at speed because of the complications of reorganising their factories. "We had a long discussion about it," said Mr Klein at Magna Steyr, which builds models for Jaguar, BMW and Toyota as well as Mercedes.

Any change to production also meant retraining workers, while keeping complete distance was "unrealistic," he said. "People have to walk to pick up parts, have to move along the assembly line, you will always run into other people. That's why we make it mandatory for people to wear masks."

The group has taken other measures to minimise staff contact with each other and with people outside the plant. Workers are required to come to the factory already in their overalls, to avoid crowding the changing rooms. Once it reopens the Jaguar and BMW lines next month, in an effort to encourage staff to avoid public transport, Magna Steyr will add parking by using space normally allocated to completed cars.

Staff are asked to bring packed lunches, while Magna contacted its packaging supplier to provide large cardboard partitions for the lunch areas.

Workers on the assembly line at Magna Steyr's Graz plant, which reopened this week — Ritz

Hyundai has transformed its canteen with plastic panels, creating a network of booths for workers to eat in isolation. It will sanitise its site between two shifts, which have been spaced further apart to allow cleaning.

Toyota will reopen two French plants next week, with all doors held open to avoid using handles. Where not possible, door handles will be fitted with devices that allow staff to open them with elbows.

Other measures include reorganising smoking breaks to avoid worker crowding.

Almost all the companies test temperatures of staff entering and leaving the site, while Ferrari has a sanitising mat for visitors to clean their shoes.

The Italian carmaker intends to use a local hotel to house any staff — and their families — who develop symptoms.

Carmakers are being forced to restart production to recoup losses made during the shutdowns.

VW, which on Tuesday said first-quarter profits fell 80 per cent, has been paying €2bn per week in fixed costs while its European factories are offline.

"It's an enormous influence on our bottom line, the big volume drop, and we did everything to reduce fixed costs," said Volvo's Mr Samuelsson. "But we cannot have shutting down as the long term solution. We cannot wait for a vaccine, so we have to learn to live and work in a safe environment."

Telecoms

Orange cuts dividend by a third with rivals poised to follow

NIC FILDES — LONDON
LEILA ABBOD — PARIS

France's state-backed telecoms operator Orange has cut its dividend for the first time in eight years in the face of the coronavirus pandemic but has held back from cancelling it outright.

Chief executive Stéphane Richard said that the decision to reduce the annual dividend by one-third to 50 cents per share was made with a "heavy heart".

He also said there had been disagreement about whether any dividend should be paid at all at board level, including from the "reference shareholder" — the French state, which owns a 23 per cent stake and appoints three of 14 directors. With the country in its fifth week of lockdown, the subject of shareholder payouts has become contentious, and government ministers have warned companies who take state aid not to pay them.

Orange has pledged not to put any of its 87,000 French workers on state welfare schemes, and Mr Richard said that the company's strong financial position meant that eliminating the dividend would be unfair to shareholders.

"We had to pay something," he said. "It is good news in the current context. There will be few companies, especially with public ownership, that will pay a dividend."

Robert Grindle, an analyst at Deutsche Bank, said the dividend cut was a case of "political correctness".

'We had to pay something. It is good news in the current context'

Stéphane Richard, Orange CEO

Orange is the first large European telecoms company to reduce its dividend as a result of the virus. Others could do the same, notably BT, which is expected to follow Orange's lead in coming weeks.

Investors are typically attracted to the sector because of its reliable dividends and defensive nature, but this year the European telecoms index has lagged behind the broader market and is down 24 per cent compared with a 17 per cent decline for the Stoxx Europe 600 index.

"The emergency situation gives BT massive cover to cut," said Mr Grindle, citing the UK company's pension and fibre broadband investment costs as factors in a potential reduction.

Telecoms operators have had to cope with big changes in demand during the virus crisis, with millions of people working from home reliant on residential networks. Companies including Orange have closed hundreds of high-street stores but have not furloughed staff.

Orange maintained its guidance for 2020 despite the dividend cut and economic uncertainty with potentially lower revenue and earnings before interest, taxation, depreciation and amortisation offset by lower capital spending as the pace of investment in faster broadband networks slows due to the lockdown.

The group said it would review its dividend strategy at a later date but that it intended to return the full-year payout to the 70 cents-a-share level over time.

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COMPANIES & MARKETS

Equities. Results

Investors hunt for survivors in US earnings season



In crisis mode, profits and growth matter much less than ability to ride out a downturn

RICHARD HENDERSON — MELBOURNE

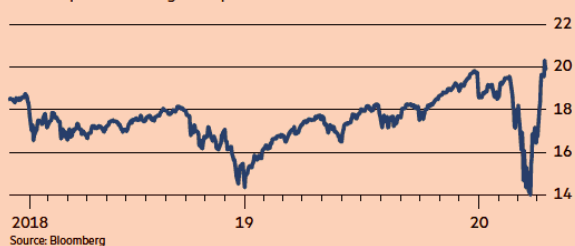
Investors scouring companies' results in the US earnings season that began this week are not looking for growth. Instead, while the coronavirus pandemic tears a hole out of economies around the world, many are looking for businesses that can survive.

Stung by sudden stops to revenues, a number of companies have fallen back on credit lines and debt borrowed in bond markets to keep themselves afloat. US investment-grade companies raised a record \$150bn in March, as businesses hoarded cash to weather the downturn. Equity fund managers want to make sure companies can repay those debts and cling on until lockdowns end and life gets back to normal.

"Survivability will be more relevant than near-term profitability — the standard metrics won't matter that much," said Liz Ann Sonders, chief investment strategist for Charles Schwab, about first-quarter earnings. "For companies that are in the crosshairs of this, there aren't going to be any near-term profits — that ship has sailed."

US banks, traditionally among the first to report, have begun to paint a grim picture of America's corporate health. JPMorgan Chase's earnings miss on Tuesday was the biggest since at least 2009, as far as Bloomberg records stretch. The country's biggest bank by assets, which made hefty provi-

US valuations remain high as analysts pare profit estimates
Forward price to earnings multiple for S&P 500



sions for loan losses, set a trend followed by Wells Fargo, Bank of America and Morgan Stanley.

The KBW Banks index fell 14 per cent from the start of the week to Thursday's close, on track for the third-worst week since the financial crisis.

The early results set an ominous tone for the first reporting season since the US economy entered lockdown. If industrial and consumer sectors follow a similar path, that could be enough to threaten the huge rally in stocks since the depths of the sell-off in March.

The forward price-to-earnings ratio for companies in the S&P 500, a popular way for investors to assess whether stock markets are running ahead of estimates of corporate profits, is already back to levels seen in January, before the virus began to unsettle investors.

Some fund managers are still trying to find opportunities. Healthcare companies, which are directly involved in the response to the virus, may emerge as one of the most effective havens, said Margaret Vitrano, a portfolio manager with ClearBridge Investments.

"We are spending a lot of time looking at healthcare," she said. "One of the results of the virus is that hospitals and healthcare facilities are quite full, but people are deferring other procedures — over time, they will come back."

Any negative reaction to first-quarter results could also offer the chance to buy into stocks that have long had a price tag some investors are unwilling to pay.

Susan Schmidt, head of US equity for Aviva Investors Americas, has asked her team of portfolio managers and analysts to compile a "wish list" of stocks that fell hard during the bear market. Many have since enjoyed gains, but there are still attractive companies trading at a fair price, she said.

"The opportunity in this market is to figure out where the mispricing has happened," Ms Schmidt said. "If you see through the disaster there will be opportunities."

But bargains are the exception rather than the rule, said Lee Spelman, head of US equities for JPMorgan Asset Management. "I've lived through a lot of crises

US banks have begun to paint a grim picture of America's corporate health
Bruce Bennett/Getty

— 1987, the tech boom and bust, the financial crisis — but we've never seen anything like this," she said. "The economy has just stopped and you have a black hole with revenues and cash flow. If you can't make it out the other side, [profits] won't really matter."

Analysts say they are focused on measuring how much credit businesses can access and the likelihood that companies will breach limits on borrowing agreed with investors. Portfolio managers are also keen to see which companies will benefit from the \$2tn spending package the US government unveiled last month.

Many of these questions will not be answered by the earnings numbers, but will be addressed in calls with executives, and in the guidance for future quarters that many companies withheld earlier this year. "The quarterly earnings are not going to be great but the forward guidance is what will be most critical," said Ms Vitrano.

Analysts expect earnings per share for companies in the S&P 500 to drop 15 per cent for the quarter compared to the same period last year and 10 per cent for the full year, according to Refinitiv.

Energy companies are likely to suffer most, pressured by the falling oil price, according to Credit Suisse projections, followed by consumer discretionary companies such as retailers and automakers. Utilities and communications services, a broad grouping that includes media companies, will increase earnings, according to the bank, while healthcare is likely to be flat.

"For energy and consumer cyclicals, including airlines and travel companies, it will be very, very tough," Ms Spelman said.

'If you can't make it out the other side, [profits] won't really matter'

Commodities

US crude slides to lowest level since 2002 as supply overwhelms demand

DAVID SHEPPARD — LONDON

US crude oil prices dipped below \$18 a barrel yesterday, the lowest level since 2002, as energy markets struggled to absorb a record glut created by the coronavirus pandemic.

Prices have dropped this week despite a landmark US-backed deal by the Opec+ group of producers to cut output by almost a tenth. But traders have judged that the collapse in demand is far greater — with up to a third of global consumption lost to measures to restrict the virus's spread. That has stoked volatility, as traders bet oil storage will rapidly fill up, including at the US crude benchmark's delivery hub of Cushing, Oklahoma.

Retail investors have at the same time rushed to buy into oil-backed exchange traded funds, betting that crude prices have hit a bottom after falling by about 70 per cent since January. The front-month West Texas Intermediate contract for May delivery, which expires early next week, lost more than 10 per cent at one point yesterday to trade at \$17.31 a barrel, an 18-year low. The second-month contract for June delivery

was steadier, trading down 1 per cent at \$25.26 a barrel.

Brent, the international benchmark, has lost almost \$5 a barrel this week but stabilised yesterday, rising more than 2 per cent to above \$28 a barrel by late afternoon trading.

"With low liquidity close to expiry, these erratic moves tend to happen," said analysts at Rystad Energy. "But at the same time it is no wonder that WTI for May 2020 is seeing such low prices relative to the June 2020 contract."



The WTI crude contract for May delivery traded at \$17.31 yesterday

"This is because the market knows that the US crude stocks will fill very rapidly . . . in the next few weeks as refinery runs continue to be cut tremendously in the US due to a lack of storage possibilities, especially for unsold gasoline."

The huge price gap between contracts close to delivery, and those expiring later, has raised concerns in the industry that oil futures prices are becoming detached from the underlying physical market — partly because of a rush of money into oil ETFs as investors look to profit from an eventual rebound in crude prices.

Those investors risk large losses, however, as ETFs need to sell the expiring front-month contract and buy the second to maintain their holdings — a process known as rolling positions. But with a large discount in the market's current structure, investors lose a chunk of their money each month in the roll, meaning losses are possible even if crude prices start to recover.

Hedge fund manager Pierre Andurand said on Twitter yesterday that the amount of buying in one oil ETF had been "staggering".

Asset management

Marathon, Varde and Angelo Gordon in fresh fundraisings amid turmoil

ORTENCA ALIAJ — NEW YORK
JOE RENNISON AND ROBERT SMITH
LONDON

Hedge funds are tapping investors for money to buy up debt, arguing that "dysfunctional" markets have opened up some unmissable opportunities.

Marathon Asset Management, Varde Partners and Angelo Gordon are among a group of managers that have embarked on fresh fundraisings amid the turmoil unleashed by coronavirus. Marathon has already raised \$500m, according to a person familiar with the \$19bn-in-assets firm, which will be primarily distributed across its distressed credit funds. In an interview with Bloomberg last month, chief executive Bruce Richards said he expected assets to be "very cheap".

Varde Partners, which currently manages \$14bn in overall assets, is looking to raise up to \$1bn for its newly launched credit fund, people familiar with the firm said. "We cannot overstate the shift in the opportunity set in recent weeks. In our view, markets are dysfunctional, and prices in many places do not make sense," the firm's co-chief executives

George Hicks and Ilfryn Carstairs wrote in a paper last week.

Some hedge funds have been wrong-footed by last month's violent moves in credit as the impact of the virus tore through the world's capital markets. Angelo Gordon is raising around \$750m for a structured credit fund that will invest in commercial and residential mortgage-backed securities. The firm,

'In our view, markets are dysfunctional, and prices in many places do not make sense'

which manages \$38bn in assets, suffered a more than 30 per cent decline in its Mortgage Value Partners fund in March.

The economic shock caused by the virus pushed the average leveraged loan price in the US down from almost 97 cents on the dollar a month ago to a low of 76 cents on March 23, according to an index run by the Loan Syndications and Trading Association. After a series of interventions from the Federal Reserve

Capital markets

Ford to pay more than 10% on new debt to plug losses

CLAIRE BUSHEY — CHICAGO
ROBERT SMITH AND JOE RENNISON
LONDON

Ford is set to pay interest rates of more than 10 per cent to access the bond market, as the US carmaker looks to raise the cash it needs to ride out a global economic shutdown due to the pandemic.

The Michigan-based company launched a fundraising round yesterday, after telling investors it expects to post a \$2bn loss in the first quarter on \$34bn in revenue.

With most of Ford's plants around the world shuttered and consumers in many markets unable to get to car dealerships, the results reflect a sharp contraction. In the first quarter of 2019, the company reported net income of \$1.1bn on \$40bn in revenue.

Ford, which was stripped of its investment-grade credit rating last month, is looking to raise several billion dollars in the bond market and indicated early yesterday that it could pay yields as high as 11 per cent on the new debt.

Ford was able to raise five-year bonds at an interest rate of just 3.5 per cent in February, meaning its funding costs are set to roughly triple in a matter of months. The last time the carmaker had to pay such onerous rates to raise debt was in the depths of the financial crisis in 2008, when it paid 18 per cent to access the market.

'While there are certainly known risks here, investors are being adequately compensated'

While the company has not yet announced exactly how much it plans to raise, the deal had already drawn \$20bn of orders two hours after the announcement, according to two investors.

Ford now carries a junk rating from rating agencies Moody's and S&P, but its bonds are still eligible for the US Federal Reserve's corporate bond buying scheme. The central bank announced that it will buy corporate bonds rated investment-grade on March 22, before the carmaker lost its prized upper-tier credit rating.

John McClain, a portfolio manager at Diamond Hill Capital Management, said the deal looked "attractive" given that the Fed can buy the three and five-year bonds being sold, and that a longer 10-year bond Ford is also offering would perform well if the company rides out the global economic shutdown.

"While there are certainly known risks here, investors are being adequately compensated," Mr McClain said.

Ford was already struggling to realise the benefits of a global restructuring that began in 2018 and had disappointed investors and analysts with previous quarterly earnings.

Meeting consensus earnings expectations no longer matters, however, according to Morningstar equity analyst David Whiston. "At this point the only thing that matters is survival," he wrote in a note to clients.

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COMPANIES & MARKETS

Payment holidays create havoc for US mortgage machine

Laura Noonan
On Wall Street



The US Federal Reserve made a dramatic move to calm the US home-loan market last month, announcing plans to buy mortgage-backed securities in unlimited amounts to ease tensions caused by the coronavirus pandemic.

Now, another storm is brewing in a more obscure part of the marketplace — so-called warehouse lines of credit, which are used by non-banks to originate loans before selling them to private investors or to government-backed agencies.

Traders, mortgage companies and regulators are scrambling to work out how this process will be affected by a predicted surge in non-payments as the coronavirus outbreak squeezes incomes and pushes unemployment to record levels.

Loans eligible to be bought by government agencies such as Fannie Mae, which make up the vast majority of the \$2.2tn-a-year US mortgage market, are typically financed by warehouse lines for just a few weeks, before they are packaged and sold on.

But non-agency loans, which total about \$50bn a year, can be warehoused for months on end, while the originator offers more mortgages so that it can bundle them all together. Such loans are a vital part for borrowers looking to fund expensive properties — Fannie and Freddie Mac have a \$510,400 cap for loans they guarantee — or for borrowers with low credit scores.

In a normal world, warehoused loans have very low default rates because the mortgages are brand new, and people can typically make their first few months' payments. But this is not a nor-

mal world. US officials have told mortgage holders that they can take a 90-day holiday from servicing loans without facing any penalties.

That raises the spectre of warehoused loans in default before they can be sold — creating problems for both agency and non-agency originators. "It's not anything... until it gets into a programme," said one mortgage trader.

Fannie, Freddie and Ginnie Mae, the big three agencies, traditionally reject loans already in default, so now originators are either selling loans directly to the agencies for cash, meaning they get a lower price, or trying to pool them as quickly as they can.

Originators are "trying to sell these loans as fast as humanly possible to... get them off their balance sheets", the trader said.

A person at one of the agencies said they were aware of the problem, and were "working to find out the breadth of the issue and possible solutions".

Originators in the non-agency market are in a trickier spot. "They don't have the option to jam stuff into the government [agencies] or the option to securitise before the first payment is missed," the trader said.

If defaults on non-agency warehoused loans rise, originators are first asked by lenders for extra margin to compensate for a drop in the value of their collateral. In a more extreme situation, where non-payments breach an agreed level, originators can be forced to buy back the mortgages. That can be a very heavy burden for companies already obliged to keep making payments to bondholders if mortgage holders stop paying their loans.

One non-agency industry player,

Deephaven of Charlotte, North Carolina, has suspended new applications, blaming "rapid and unpredictable changes" to the marketplace. Citadel Servicing Corporation of Irvine, California, has also put originations on pause.

Some warehouse lenders are pulling up the drawbridge. JPMorgan Chase is no longer offering warehouse funding where the underlying borrower has a credit score of less than 700, a source familiar with the situation told the Financial Times. This essentially takes the bank out of the market for warehouse lines for subprime lenders. Flagstar Bancorp of Troy, Michigan, one of the biggest warehouse lenders, is reducing its funding for non-agency mortgages too.

"The forbearance programmes are creating liquidity issues from servicing advances, as well as a lack of clarity from agencies on deliverability and saleability, of loans in forbearance," said Jenn Piepszak, JPMorgan's finance chief.

One executive at a large warehouse lender said defaults typically meant that non-banks have to offer discounts on the sale of portfolios, which could threaten their ability to repay the warehouse lines. That is if the originator can sell the loans at all. "There are no buyers for non-agency paper," the executive said. "Some scavengers are buying non-agency paper but that's it."

The rubber does not really hit the road until mortgage holders start defaulting. The warehouse line executive said his company was not yet seeing stress among non-agency originators but "if people continue to be out of work it's going to start happening soon".

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Primordial struggle between insurers and US business has only just begun

John Dizard



It has not taken very long for the primordial struggle between business insurance policyholders and insurers to begin. After a very brief moment when all sides were trying to grasp the scale of official aid to business, there is now general recognition that even "the government" does not have the cash to cover the coronavirus-related business interruption costs.

So, most visibly in America, a zero-sum existential battle is developing between businesses, most of them small or medium sized, and insurance companies. The insurers include the underwriters that deal with the companies directly, and, behind them, the reinsurers. They are polishing their "exclusion language" and checking their general counsels' litigation reserves.

There is no question that the US begins to face the resolution of Covid-19 with an overwhelming share of the world's insurance litigation resources. Part of that is the natural endowment of having 50 states and several territories with independent insurance regulators. Also, there is the widespread conviction that "justice" or "fairness" is best sorted out with aggressive courtroom contests over interpretations of civil law and contract language.

Because of variance in contract wordings and uncertainty over the ultimate scale of losses, the potential insured business interruption losses for Covid-19 are hard to estimate.

According to the American Property Casualty Insurance Association, a trade group, the prospective cost of paying business interruption coverage just for businesses with 100 or fewer employees would be in the range of \$255bn to \$431bn per month, or up to \$5.2tn per year.

Such payments would eliminate the entire capital position of the industry in short order. Capital and surplus for the US industry was about \$860bn at the end of 2019.

The insurers have prepared a defence in depth. The most significant and up-to-date contract language they have incorporated was developed by the Insurance Services Office, which provides actuarial services, in 2006 after the Sars epidemic. These boilerplate contract additions called

Donald Trump, some of whose properties incorporate restaurants, took BIG's side

"new endorsements filed to address exclusion of loss due to virus or bacteria" were intended to defend insurers from claims such as those for post-Covid-19 business interruption.

The claimants and their lawyers are not deterred. The Business Interruption Group, composed mostly of celebrity chefs such as Daniel Boulud and Jean-Georges Vongerichten, had a conference in late March with US President Donald Trump to make their case.

Mr Trump, some of whose properties incorporate restaurants, took BIG's side. As the president said to the cameras: "When they [businesses] finally need it, the insurance company says, 'We're not going to give it.' We can't let that happen."

Actually, under the US federal system, if any government power is going to let, or not let, non-payment on business interruption insurance due to exclusionary language it is the state courts and their judges and juries.

A number of state legislatures are working to amend their laws to effectively override the insurers' exclusionary language. Trump's opinion is not legally binding.

There is a federal court role in that the constitution does not allow for government "takings", or uncompensated seizures of property, and also protects contractual rights.

Earl Nemser, an experienced litigator against insurance companies and now an independent adviser to Dechert law firm, says the current insurance industry defenders "miss the point. The virus didn't cause the loss. The loss was caused by a government directive — not enforcement of a government order, which would be excluded.

"Plaintiffs will look to internal industry documents that suggest that the companies acted in concert to deny coverage... The final chapters of this will likely play out in the bankruptcy courts or through other government action," Mr Nemser said.

Third-party litigation finance companies are cautious about financing the business interruption claimants.

Jonathan Molot, chief investment officer of Burford Capital, one such business, says: "Certainly we would finance a claim by a policyholder who has been unfairly denied payment on a claim clearly covered by its policy, but insurers typically can be expected to pay those claims without need for litigation... We would not fund a claim by a policyholder where there is unambiguous contract language that clearly excludes coverage."

What really interests the litigation finance people, apparently, is all the other litigation that will come out of the post-Covid-19 economic crisis.

This is an existential moment for business insurance. If the state, writ large, wants to use insurance contracts and companies as a recovery tool, it may be possible to co-operate with the insurers. Otherwise, the insurers and policyholders will litigate to their death, or beyond.

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The day in the markets

What you need to know

- Global stocks head for a second week of back-to-back gains
- Excitement over coronavirus drug helps lift Wall Street
- US crude tumbles to 18-year low on oversupply fears

Global stocks were on track for a second weekly gain despite the second-largest economy revealing it had shrunk for the first time in four decades.

Helping to underpin a 2.3 per cent rise in the FTSE All-World Index yesterday were reports that held out hope of a breakthrough in treating Covid-19.

News broke on Thursday night that a drug developed by Gilead had alleviated fever and respiratory symptoms in severely ill patients. The biotech group was among the strongest US performers yesterday, helping Wall Street rally.

The S&P 500 was up 1.5 per cent by midday in New York, taking its rise for the week to more than 1.5 per cent. Meanwhile, the Nasdaq rose 0.5 per cent, meaning the tech-heavy benchmark was now down only 5 per cent for the year.

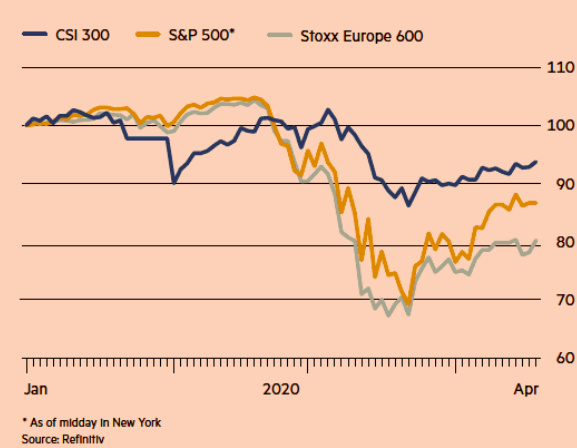
But Jefferies analysts said the excitement was "overdone in the near term", as the Gilead findings did not come from late-stage clinical trials. The bank cautioned that markets were in a "glass-half-full environment" where investors were "looking for a good story".

Gilead's report followed news that Swiss pharma group Roche was launching an antibody test for coronavirus that it planned to be available next month.

The Stoxx Europe 600 index closed up 2.6 per cent at the end of a week in which primary schools in Denmark opened in the first big move to lift restrictions on

Stocks rally as investors look past bleak Chinese growth

Indices rebased



the continent. Global deaths from coronavirus hit 149,024 yesterday, with 847 UK patients losing their lives, taking the British death toll past 14,000.

The FTSE 100 closed up 2.8 per cent yesterday, down 1.4 per cent for the week. Europe's gains followed a positive session in Asia, where traders looked past Chinese data that showed the economy had shrunk 6.8 per cent year on year in the first quarter, the first fall since 1976.

The CSI 300 of Shanghai- and Shenzhen-listed shares closed up 1 per cent while Hong Kong's Hang Seng added 1.6 per cent and Tokyo's Topix climbed 1.4 per cent. Fallout from the

coronavirus hit commodities where West Texas Intermediate, the US marker for oil, tumbled to an 18-year low of 17.31 a barrel on fears linked to oversupply in the market. The hit to crude demand from the pandemic far outweighed the supply cuts announced by a recent Opec deal, said Ben Jones, multi-asset class strategist at State Street Global Markets.

A recent rally in gold went into reverse, with the haven asset sliding 1.8 per cent yesterday to \$1,687 an ounce.

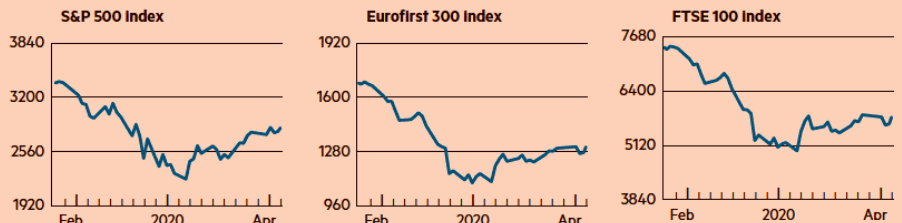
Another haven asset, US Treasuries, was little changed, with the yield on the 10-year note down two basis points at 0.59 per cent. **Ray Douglas**

Markets update

	US	Eurozone	Japan	UK	China	Brazil
Stocks	S&P 500	Eurofirst 300	Nikkei 225	FTSE100	Shanghai Comp	Bovespa
Level	2841.28	1308.13	19897.26	5786.96	2838.49	78569.51
% change on day	1.49	2.52	3.15	2.82	0.66	0.97
Currency	\$ index (DXY)	\$ per €	Yen per \$	\$ per £	Rmb per \$	Real per \$
Level	99.771	1.089	107.525	1.250	7.076	5.272
% change on day	-0.254	0.369	-0.037	0.402	0.040	0.562
Govt. bonds	10-year Treasury	10-year Bund	10-year JGB	10-year Gilt	10-year bond	10-year bond
Yield	0.609	-0.473	0.011	0.301	2.528	6.988
Basis point change on day	-0.850	0.200	0.960	0.200	2.100	-14.000
World Index, Commods	FTSE All-World	Oil - Brent	Oil - WTI	Gold	Silver	Metals (LMEXO)
Level	314.18	28.57	18.31	1729.50	15.50	2385.70
% change on day	1.81	1.03	-7.06	0.63	-0.45	0.34

Yesterday's close apart from: Currencies - 16:00 GMT; S&P, Bovespa, All World, Oil - 17:00 GMT; Gold, Silver - London pm fix. Bond data supplied by Tullett Prebon.

Main equity markets



Biggest movers

	US	Eurozone	UK
Ups	Citizens Fin 14.25	Randstad 10.55	Flutter Entertainment 15.67
	Hollyfrontier 12.80	Accor 9.24	Melrose Industries 11.18
	Arconic 12.41	Thyssenkrupp 9.24	Intercontinental Hotels 10.89
	Transdigm 12.26	Ses 9.20	Meggitt 10.68
	Boeing 12.05	Atlantia 7.80	EasyJet 8.57
Downs	Netflix -4.42	Red Ele. -2.40	Just Eat Takeaway.com N.V. -3.11
	Electronic Arts -4.39	B. Sabadell -2.08	Fresnillo -2.91
	Activision Blizzard -3.76	Coloplast -1.36	Pennon -2.47
	Campbell Soup -3.37	Telecom Italia -1.15	Ocado -1.97
	Newmont -2.84	Dassault Systemes -1.08	Aveva -1.73

Prices taken at 17:00 GMT. Based on the constituents of the FTSE Eurofirst 300 Eurozone. All data provided by Morningstar unless otherwise noted.

Wall Street

Citizens Financial led the S&P 500 gainers after first-quarter results from the bank came with a maintained dividend and more bullish than expected profitability guidance. Management predicted second-quarter net interest income to improve over the first thanks to strong loans growth, as well as saying that under a V-shaped recovery modelled by Moody's its bad debt provisions would normalise before the end of the year.

Boeing rallied after saying it would resume production on all commercial aircraft in its Washington State facilities, starting as early as April 20. News that Boeing was bringing all its employees back provided a hopeful sign for demand and forward production rates, said Goldman Sachs.

Gilead Sciences rose, albeit not as strongly as indicated by premarket trading, after analysts played down the significance of a report that its experimental Covid-19 antiviral treatment was showing promise in clinical trials. Analysts at Robert J Baird said the market's reaction showed "a lack of critical response" to "uncontrolled, anecdotal data" that "often winds up not being confirmed in controlled studies".

Apple slipped after iPhone demand worries led Goldman Sachs to downgrade it to "sell". **Bryce Elder**

Eurozone

BMW gained after HSBC added the stock to its "buy" list.

The group has been the only European automaker to give specific guidance for 2020 sales volumes, profit margin and free cash flow generation, suggesting it is "relatively on top of the Covid situation", HSBC said.

The broker's base case was for car sales to fall 12 per cent this year before rebounding in 2021 and for margins to return to historical levels by 2022.

A decline of 21 per cent since the start of the crisis in February underestimated the strength of BMW's operations, balance sheet and medium-term positioning, HSBC said.

Volkswagen was up after the head of its Chinese operations said sales volumes for April were "pleasingly close" to last year's levels.

Recruitment agencies **Randstad** and **Adecco** surged as companies including Boeing announced plans to reopen factories. The potential light at the end of the tunnel helped bolster hopes around first-quarter earnings season for these European business services companies.

LVHM rose on forecast-beating results and a brighter-than-expected outlook, with demand for fashion and leather goods brands exceeding expectations, particularly in China. **Bryce Elder**

London

InterContinental Hotels gained after Barclays turned positive. While there may be further setbacks for the hoteliers, a potential sector rally makes it a risk worth taking, Barclays said.

It called InterContinental "by far the most attractive" way to play the rally based on a much lower downside than peers under the worst-case scenario. **Aston Martin** climbed after Swiss billionaire Ernesto Bertarelli disclosed a 3.4 per cent stake in the luxury carmaker.

Flutter, the bookmaker, led the FTSE 100 gainers after an in-line trading update and solid results from its Canadian merger partner The Stars Group. Stars delivered 27 per cent revenue growth for the first quarter, with international takings surging in March as the worldwide lockdown triggered renewed interest in online poker and casino gambling.

J Sainsbury climbed on the back of an upgrade to "buy" from Société Générale. The supermarket's exposure to convenience shops and its Argos online store were likely to be advantageous during the lockdown, the broker argued.

Fever-Tree gained after grocery industry data showed customer stockpiling meant its off-trade sales spiked higher in the four weeks to March 22. **Bryce Elder**

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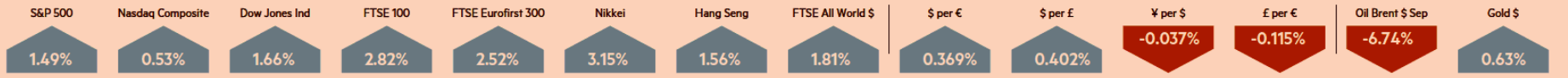
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MARKET DATA

WORLD MARKETS AT A GLANCE

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Change during previous day's trading (%)



Stock Market movements over last 30 days, with the FTSE All-World in the same currency as a comparison

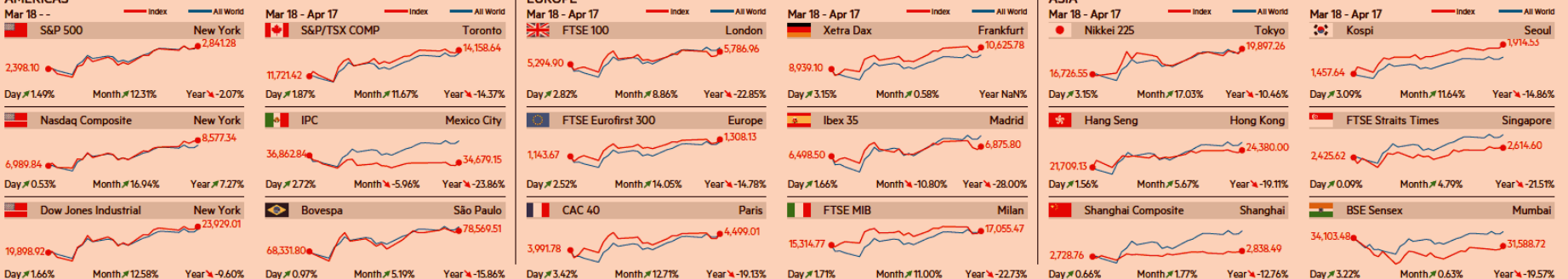


Table with columns for Country, Index, Latest, and Previous. Lists various international indices such as Argentina Merval, Australia All Ordinaries, Austria S&P/TSX 200, etc.

STOCK MARKET: BIGGEST MOVERS

Table with columns for Active Stocks, Biggest Movers, and Losers. Lists top-performing and underperforming stocks with their prices and percentage changes.

CURRENCIES

Table showing currency exchange rates for Dollar, Euro, Pound, and Yen against various international currencies.

FTSE ACTUARIES SHARE INDICES

Table listing various FTSE Actuarial Share Indices with their closing prices and percentage changes.

FTSE GLOBAL EQUITY SERIES

Table listing FTSE Global Equity Series with columns for Index, Closing, and Change. Includes indices like FTSE Global All Cap, FTSE Global Mid Cap, etc.

UK RIGHTS OFFERS

Table listing UK Rights Offers with columns for Company, Amount, Latest, and Previous.

UK COMPANY RESULTS

Table listing UK Company Results with columns for Company, Turnover, Pre-tax, EPS, Dividend, and Pay day.

UK RECENT EQUITY ISSUES

Table listing UK Recent Equity Issues with columns for Issue, Issue Price, Issue Size, and Issue Date.

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MARKET DATA

FT500: THE WORLD'S LARGEST COMPANIES

Table with 12 columns: Stock, Price, Day, Chg, 52 Week High, Low, Yld, P/E, MCap. Lists major companies like Anglo, BP, Shell, and others across various sectors.

FT 500: TOP 20

Table with 12 columns: Stock, Close, Prev, Price, Change, % Change, Week, Month. Lists top 20 companies by market cap.

FT 500: BOTTOM 20

Table with 12 columns: Stock, Close, Prev, Price, Change, % Change, Week, Month. Lists bottom 20 companies by market cap.

BONDS: HIGH YIELD & EMERGING MARKET

Table with columns: Issuer, Maturity, Coupon, Bid, Yield, Spread. Lists high yield and emerging market bonds.

BONDS: GLOBAL INVESTMENT GRADE

Table with columns: Issuer, Maturity, Coupon, Bid, Yield, Spread. Lists investment grade bonds from various countries.

INTEREST RATES: OFFICIAL

Table with columns: Country, Rate, Current, Since, Last, Mth Ago, Year Ago. Shows official interest rates for various countries.

INTEREST RATES: MARKET

Table with columns: Instrument, Rate, Over, Change, One, Three, Six, One Year. Shows market interest rates for various instruments.

BOND INDICES

Table with columns: Index, Day's Change, Month's Change, Year, Return, 1 Year, 3 Year. Shows performance of various bond indices.

BONDS: INDEX-LINKED

Table with columns: Index, Price, Yield, Month, Value, Return, No of Stocks. Shows index-linked bond details.

BONDS: TEN YEAR GP SPREADS

Table with columns: Country, Bid, Spread, Yield, Bid, Spread, Yield. Shows ten-year government spreads for various countries.

GLTS: UK CASH MARKET

Table with columns: Instrument, Price, Yield, Day, Change, Month, Year, High, Low, Ann. Shows UK cash market data.

GLTS: UK FTSE ACTUARIES INDICES

Table with columns: Index, Price, Yield, Day, Change, Month, Year, High, Low, Ann. Shows UK FTSE actuaries indices.

GLTS: UK FTSE ACTUARIES INDICES

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COMMODITIES

Table with columns: Commodity, Price, Change, Apr, May, Jun, Jul, Aug, Sep, Oct, Nov, Dec. Shows commodity prices and changes.

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PRECIOUS METALS (PM LONDON FX)

Table with columns: Metal, Price, Change, Apr, May, Jun, Jul, Aug, Sep, Oct, Nov, Dec. Shows precious metal prices.

PRECIOUS METALS (PM LONDON FX)

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Main Market

Main Market table with columns for Sector, Stock Name, Price, %Chg, 52 Week High/Low, and Vol. Includes Aerospace & Defence, Automobiles & Parts, Banks, Chemicals, Construction & Materials, Electronic & Electrical Equipment, Financial General, Food & Beverages, Health Care & Services, House, Leisure & Pets Goods, Industrial Engineering, IT, Leisure, Mining, Pharmaceuticals & Biotech, Real Estate, Retailers, Support Services, Tech - Hardware, Tech - Software & Services, Telecommunications, Tobacco, Travel & Leisure, Utilities, and various international markets.

AIM table with columns for Stock Name, Price, %Chg, 52 Week High/Low, and Vol. Lists various small cap companies.

Investment Companies

Investment Companies table with columns for Conventional - Ex Private Equity, Conventional - Property Co's, Direct Property, Zero Dividend Preference Shares, and Investment Companies - AIM. Includes details on share prices and performance.

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US retail: JCPenney dreadful

Retail zombies stalk the streets of the US. For years, a combination of low interest rates and easy consumer credit have kept these businesses alive in spite of endless price pressure. These undead retailers teeter on the edge of bankruptcy without ever quite realising their demise.

A harsh recession could finish them off. Department store JCPenney warned this week it would miss a bond payment, putting it on course for default or debt restructuring. The company plans to "evaluate certain strategic alternatives", including possibly filing for bankruptcy.

A shopping cart full of debts meant it was in trouble long before the pandemic-induced lockdown began. Most of JCPenney's near-850 stores sit in unfashionable malls. It has struggled as more Americans opt to shop online. Outdated stores and an over-reliance on clothing – an area with no shortage of rivals – have not helped.

The result is that same-store sales have declined for two consecutive years. The retail chain's net debt of \$4.6bn accounts for almost its entire enterprise value, while interest expense at \$300m last year has wiped out operating earnings. Indeed, it has had pre-tax losses since 2012.

That debt position was barely supportable in a sluggish retail environment. With shoppers gone, a balance sheet that weak must sink the company.

One indication of JCPenney's dire situation is that its \$105m bond maturing this June traded just shy of 33 cents on the dollar yesterday, down from more than 96 cents at the start of March. Others such as its \$500m bond maturing in 2023 have nearly halved to 47 cents over the same period. Markets clearly anticipate a default.

A retail shakeout will be painful, especially for the millions who work in the industry. But it is long overdue. Putting zombie retailers to rest will give the wider sector a chance to breathe easier.

UK estate agents: wily old Foxtons

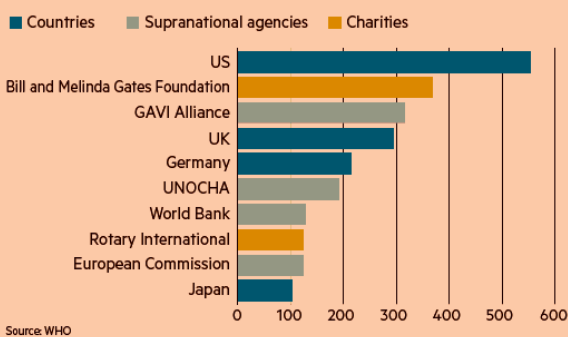
Prospective housebuyers know furnishings cannot make up for weak foundations. Foxtons boss Nic Budden knows it too. Yesterday the British estate agent announced that it would raise funds to bolster its underlying cash reserves to £40m. That should see it through to the summer if lockdowns continue. Other agencies may not be so fortunate.

Estate agents can feel the ground beneath them give way as property viewings are halted. Foxtons, however, has adapted to changing markets before. Letting fees supplanted sales commissions when the housing market stalled after the EU referendum in 2016. The expected reset in house prices in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic could even prove beneficial longer term. Lower prices might end the recent stagnation in volumes.

While Foxtons plans to raise £22m in new shares, its rivals have more to worry about. Britain's largest estate agency, Countrywide, was in the midst of a rebuilding project when the crisis struck. It has struggled under a high

WHO: sick pay

Contributions by source 2019 (\$m)



Source: WHO

US president Donald Trump's decision to pull funding from the World Health Organization has unleashed a global furore. The moment should be seized to rethink the UN body's unsustainable funding model.

The agency charged with promoting international health has a proposed budget for the 2020-21 biennium of \$4.84bn – or about two weeks' funding of NHS England.

Less than half of the budget comes from member states, led by America. But national contributions are calculated under a complex formula designed to avoid landing very poor countries with big bills. These levies have been frozen for decades and not every country pays out in full. Others, including the US, volunteer to pay more. Assessed contributions make up less than a fifth of the total,

leaving the WHO reliant on voluntary top-ups and donors.

There are other weaknesses. Earmarked funding for targets such as maternal health hamper flexibility – unhelpful when a pandemic hits. As with any body that has a payroll of 7,000, there is room for savings. But it is a balancing act. The WHO chopped about 1,000 positions after the last financial crisis and cited that as a reason for its poor response to the Ebola pandemic four years later. It would be better to diversify the funding base. This could apply to member states and donors. It is off to a decent start: the second-biggest donor is the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. A broader base will make it easier for the WHO to avoid being drawn into political fights – and to focus on the job at hand.

than this since the financial crisis. CDS spreads rise with the cost of insuring against default. The costs – over five years – for Brazil and Russia have yet to exceed the peaks of 2015-16 when commodity markets last crashed.

Exchange traded funds for EM debt have been the asset class of choice for private clients over the past month, according to Bank of America's internal data.

Markets are being too complacent. The two economies will suffer badly this year. Although sovereign debts are relatively low, oil accounts for the majority of Russia's exports, according to the World Bank. Brazil's budget deficit (before any interest payments) is forecast to widen towards 7 per cent of GDP, triple last year's figure. Coronavirus cases have yet to peak in either place.

CDS markets have priced in plenty of risk elsewhere. The price of insurance for Turkey and South Africa has soared to highs not seen in a decade.

For some economies insurance may not be enough. This week Argentina launched an offer to restructure \$83bn of foreign debt in a bid to avoid its ninth sovereign bond default.

Debt issuance has soared in the leading 30 emerging economies, according to the Institute of International Finance. They owe more than half their combined GDP – the most since at least 1995. Ignore CDS. More scepticism towards EMs is required.

On one measure of risk, investors remain overly relaxed about the fortunes of the largest emerging countries.

If credit default swaps are any indication, a number of emerging markets have been in worse trouble

Wall Street rally belies decline in the real economy

Michael Mackenzie

The Long View



The past couple of weeks have revealed the stark divide between sentiment in markets and economic conditions on the ground.

Central banks, led by the US Federal Reserve, have pulled a series of levers intended to stop the coronavirus-induced economic downturn triggering a wider reckoning for a global financial system awash with debt. The central bank has even pledged to buy riskier credit, helping to lessen the pain for companies that borrowed excessively during the good times – and their owners, such as private equity firms.

For Wall Street, such actions suggest the worst is behind us, and stocks have rallied accordingly. BlackRock, the \$6.5tn-in-assets fund manager, recently said it would follow central banks in developed markets "by purchasing what they're purchasing, and assets that rhyme with those". The fund manager is also advising the Fed as the central bank expands further into markets where BlackRock operates.

Similar refrains have resounded from investment houses over the past couple of weeks, prompting analysts to increase their forecasts for equity indices over the coming year. Fighting central banks is futile, according to the consensus view, and corporate earnings will recover in 2021 after a bruising 2020.

Meanwhile, the real economy is deteriorating. The number of US claims for unemployment insurance has risen beyond 22m in the past month alone, effectively erasing all the jobs created in the past decade. US retail sales and industrial production both collapsed in March. Stuck-at-home consumers, some facing salary cuts if not losing work altogether, have stopped spending much beyond groceries. That suggests the economic damage has yet to peak.

Many worry that inflation will be the ultimate consequence of aggressive

stimulus. But the near-term danger is deflation. The Fed's survey of regions, called the Beige Book, said the economic outlook "calls for further downward pressure on prices on average". This reading chimes with the dramatic slide in oil prices, which a record supply-cuts deal has not been able to reverse.

Investors looking beyond this year may take comfort from the IMF forecast of a rebound in growth in 2021 to the tune of 5.8 per cent. But this is based on a few assumptions: that there will be no second or third waves of the virus; that economic activity will resume in the coming months; and that global fiscal and monetary stimulus will lay a foundation for the next business cycle.

Ultimately, policymakers are unlikely to be able to hold back a wave of defaults and downgrades

But even after a recovery next year, the IMF forecasts a \$9tn cumulative loss to global gross domestic product in 2020 and 2021, estimating that leading western economies will end up around 5 per cent smaller.

Analysts at BCA Research expect muted inflation pressures for the next few years as central banks "maintain very accommodative monetary policies". The infusion of such liquidity "should prop stocks significantly higher as multiples rise", according to BCA.

Investors need to assess, then, whether the divergence between financial markets and the state of the broader economy implies too much faith in support from central banks and governments. The scale of the official response highlights just how vulnerable the financial system has become after a decade of boosting returns by upping leverage. Ultimately, policymakers are

unlikely to be able to hold back a wave of defaults and ratings downgrades that create further turmoil in credit markets. A period of deflation will exacerbate the problems facing debt-laden companies, particularly small and medium-sized enterprises, as the real value of their borrowings increases while their cash flows come under pressure.

Lena Komileva, chief economist at G+ Economics, says the next phase of disruption "will probably extend the pain of real-economy deleveraging and financial capital repair, after a decade of low productivity, low yields and high leverage".

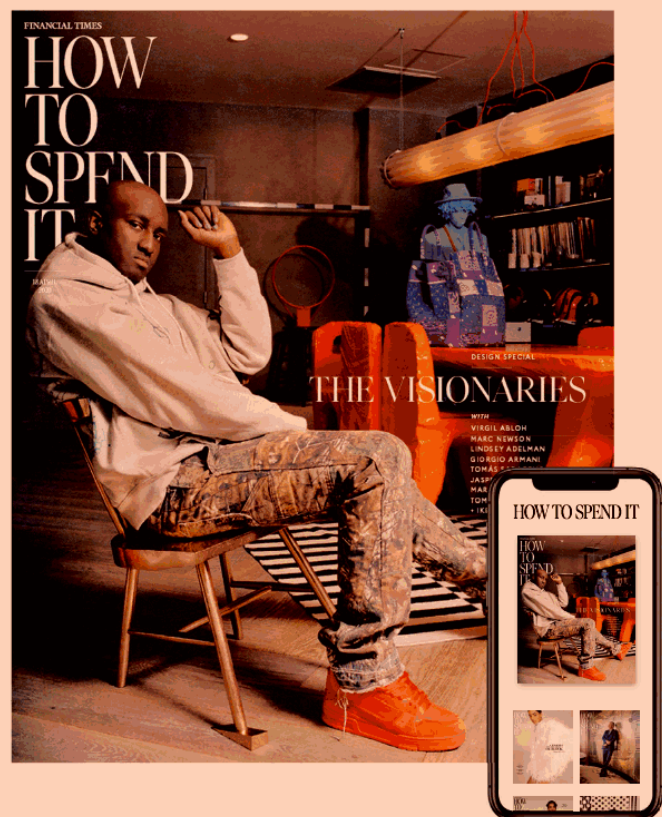
For all the cheerleading from Wall Street, the internal signals from markets are not exactly comforting. Financials have notably lagged behind healthcare stocks, reflecting anxiety about the economy. But what really sticks out is the narrow leadership within the benchmark S&P 500 stock index, which favours the tech titans. Strip out e-commerce giant Amazon – which hit a record high this week – from the consumer discretionary sector, and a loss of 14 per cent so far this year becomes a decline of around one-fifth.

Market sentiment often runs well ahead of outcomes. At this juncture, the broad performance of equity and credit suggests that long-term trends in sales and profits for many companies will remain intact. The danger is that the pandemic-induced recession and the pain registering across the real economy has yet to really test a leveraged financial system. Hence the speedy and unprecedented actions from the Fed.

But these alone cannot patch holes in economies. As Ms Komileva puts it: "The optics of cheap Fed leverage fuelling capital market bargain-hunting do not equal real economy profitability or job creation."

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WEATHER



Forecasts by MeteoGroup. Warm front, Cold front, Occluded front, Wind speed in MPH.

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City	Today's temperatures	Maximum for day °C & °F
Amsterdam	Fair 16 61	Madrid Fair 20 68
Athens	Sun 23 73	Manila Fair 34 93
Atlanta	Fair 22 72	Melbourne Cloudy 16 61
Beijing	Fair 23 73	Mexico City Fair 29 84
Belfast	Sun 27 81	Miami Thunder 32 90
Berlin	Sun 17 63	Montreal Sun 9 48
Bermuda	Cloudy 21 70	Moscow Sleet 7 45
Bogota	Rain 20 68	Mumbai Sun 34 93
Brussels	Shower 17 63	Nassau Fair 31 88
Buenos Aires	Sun 25 77	New York Cloudy 9 48
Caracas	Fair 31 88	Nice Cloudy 18 64
Chicago	Sun 13 55	Oslo Fair 12 54
Copenhagen	Sun 12 54	Paris Shower 23 73
Dallas	Rain 21 70	Prague Sun 21 70
Delhi	Fair 35 95	Reykjavik Rain 8 46
Doha	Sun 28 82	Rio Cloudy 25 77
Dubai	Sun 29 84	Rome Fair 19 66
Dublin	Cloudy 10 50	San Francisco Fair 19 66
Edinburgh	Fair 10 50	Seoul Sun 20 68
Frankfurt	Fair 24 75	Shanghai Rain 19 66
Geneva	Fair 24 75	Singapore Fair 33 91
Hamburg	Sun 15 59	Stockholm Fair 9 48
Helsinki	Fair 8 46	Sydney Sun 22 72
Hong Kong	Fair 26 79	Taipei Cloudy 29 84
Honolulu	Drizzle 29 84	Tel Aviv Sun 23 73
Jakarta	Thunder 32 90	Tokyo Thunder 16 61
Karachi	Sun 34 93	Toronto Fair 9 48
Lima	Fair 24 75	Vancouver Fair 15 59
Lisbon	Fair 19 66	Vienna Shower 23 73
London	Shower 16 61	Warsaw Fair 12 54
Los Angeles	Cloudy 19 66	Washington Fair 15 59
Luxembourg	Shower 20 68	Zurich Sun 24 75

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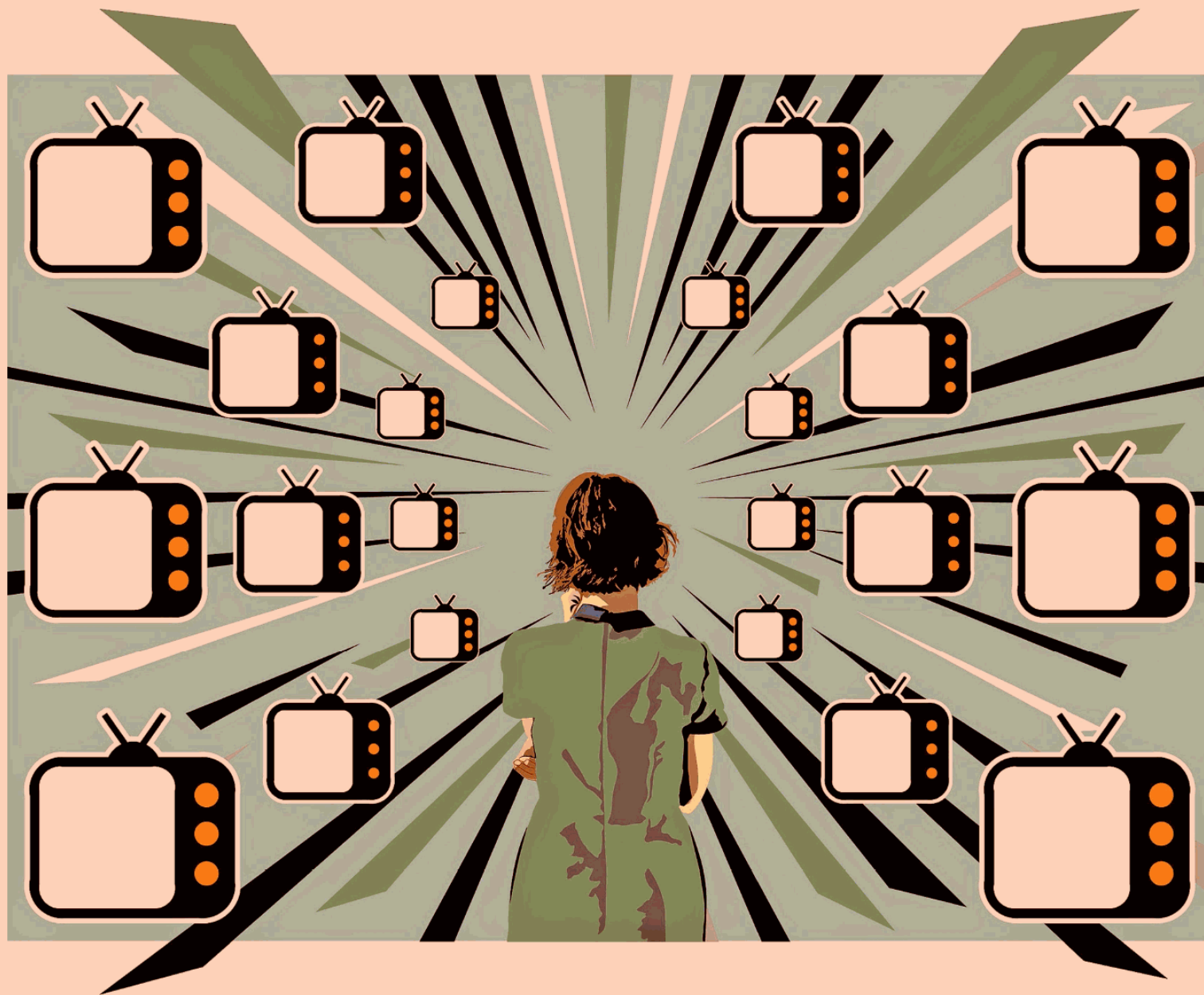


Life & Arts

FTWeekend

Do the twist Alice Lascelles on how to make a classic Old Fashioned – PAGE 17

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watching. Or had even heard of them. “Development is getting lost because there is a real premium on quantity at the moment,” says Cyma Zarghami, former president of children’s TV channel Nickelodeon, who recently opened her own production company. “It used to be: you made 20 episodes, then 40 episodes, and then T-shirts and toothpaste followed. A hit was born. How a hit comes to be in the streaming world is not yet clear. Everyone is just throwing stuff against a wall, hoping to see how it will work.”

Look, for example, at the programming slate of Quibi, a new service backed by \$1.8bn from Alibaba, Goldman Sachs and several top Hollywood studios. Its debut schedule includes: a home-renovation show that “removes the stains” from houses where murders were committed, transforming them from “morbid to marvellous”; a cooking

‘How a hit comes to be is not yet clear. Everyone is just throwing stuff against a wall to see how it will work’

contest in which competitors are smacked in the face with mystery food fired out of a cannon; and a reality show about customised dog houses, called *Barkitecture*.

Last month I was supposed to fly to London for yet another extravagant Hollywood streaming launch. Hundreds of journalists from across the world were to convene in a sprawling event space to witness Disney’s big pitch to Europe. But the planned rollout was cancelled; the pandemic relegated the world’s largest entertainment company to promoting its new streaming service, Disney+, through social media posts.

In chronicling US media companies for the FT, this would have been the sixth splashy streaming launch I would sit through in under a year. The presentations have been strikingly uniform, held in venues dripping in Hollywood nostalgia, reminding us of how long these companies have influenced our

Continued on page 2

Whatever happened to the golden age of television?

We’re watching more TV than ever – and a lot of it is mediocre. *Anna Nicolaou* asks if screen creativity can survive the big-budget battle for viewers

On New Year’s Eve I became gripped by a debilitating migraine that would keep me in bed for two weeks. Each morning, with the lights off and curtains tightly drawn, I opened up Netflix to see what the TV and film streaming service was promoting to me that day. As I slipped in and out of sleep, I watched everything.

There was *Spinning Out*, a teen drama about a bipolar figure skater; *Virgin River*, a romance about a Los Angeles woman who moves to a rural cabin for a “fresh start”; *You*, in which a former teenage pin-up plays a sociopathic stalker who locks the women he dates in a glass cage. Nothing was beneath me.

It turned out that my enforced Netflix spree, with endless gloomy days spent in sweatpants, was a harbinger of what was to come for the population at large only weeks later. The coronavirus pandemic has taken hold of everyday life so quickly and completely that things suddenly feel like a science-fiction film,

Illustration by Graham Tuckwell

Below: Netflix’s ‘Tiger King’



albeit one in which being a couch potato is part of our civic duty.

Unsurprisingly, people are turning to their screens for connection, or to regain a feeling of control in a world where little is available. Young people in China, barred from leaving the house to socialise, are holding online streaming parties with full DJ sets. Worried Americans are glued to cable TV news for coronavirus updates, spiking viewing figures by 50 per cent, according to television measurement provider Alphonso. *Contagion*, a nearly 10-year-old Steven Soderbergh film in which Gwyneth Paltrow and Jude Law fight off a deadly virus, was a massive hit on Netflix.

In a sense, television companies have inadvertently been preparing for this moment for years, making more TV than could ever have been conceivably justified by consumer demand. Even if I had spent every single day of 2019 watching the full season of a release, there would still be hundreds of shows I wouldn’t have time to get to.

Last year the industry in the US made 532 original scripted TV shows, doubling the 266 shows made eight years earlier. After years on the sidelines, giants such as Disney and Warner have joined Netflix in pouring billions into a battle for the future of TV. Amazon and Apple, two of the richest companies in the world, are doing the same, resulting in a perfect storm of endless television. Hollywood spent an estimated \$120bn

on original programming last year, with Disney alone splashing out \$28bn to build a content war chest for its planned Netflix-killer, Disney+.

As a business reporter, my immediate task has been to probe whether these investments will pay off. But as a viewer, I’ve increasingly been wondering how the infinite choices of television shows are affecting culture at large.

When HBO’s *Game of Thrones* concluded last year, some media pundits postured that this was the end of an era, after shows such as *The Wire* and *Mad Men* had ushered in critical acclaim and cinematic quality for the small screen. TV writer Brett Martin wrote in 2013 that television had become “the signature American art form” of the first decade of the 2000s, “the equivalent of what the films of Scorsese, Altman, Coppola and others had been to the 1970s”.

I’ve spent much of the past year asking Hollywood executives about television’s new world order. As Silicon Valley upstarts and legacy media companies do battle over our screens, whatever happened to the golden age of television?

In the past, TV networks were confined to a broadcast schedule that gave them a finite number of hours to fill. Producers knew exactly how much programming to make, and had no incentive to create more than that.

But the streaming giants have no such schedule: they can make as much TV as they want, throw it online and see what happens. This means taking bets on hundreds of hours of programming that “maybe nobody is watching”, says Jonathan Taplin, an Oscar-nominated producer. “The audience is fixed . . . you’re not creating new people.”

One former chief executive of a major TV company put it bluntly: “It feels like we are entering into an age of massive mediocrity. . . there is an unbelievable amount of ‘just OK’ out there.”

This echoes something I noticed during my weeks-long Netflix binge. Apart from a few widely watched docu-series – the Texas cheerleading chronicle *Cheer* and, more recently, the exotic-cat true-crime show *Tiger King* – no one else was watching the shows I was

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Life

Note from the FTW editor



An Italian reader and sometime contributor wrote to me this week from one of my favourite European capitals: Ljubljana. There is only one newspaper kiosk left in the whole city, she reported, and last Saturday, sadly, the FT Weekend did not arrive. "FT Weekend is my Prozac in these dubious times," she said. If I could send her the edition, "it would really cheer me up".

I cannot promise to send copies to all those readers missing out now. But I appreciate the sentiment and also the reminder of an important part of our journalistic mission – we relentlessly probe and inform, but we should inspire as well.

Four weeks into lockdown in London, we are trying as zealously as ever to answer the important questions. Our columnist Tim Harford has written an outstanding piece on Page 14 on why we fail to prepare for disasters. Drawing on Hurricane Katrina and more, he points to the flaws of "egotistical optimism" and "normalcy bias". The terms should become common currency. But I do appreciate the Prozac point. This week on Page 4 we assess Dr Fauci's anti-chic – and the designs born in lockdown.

As for literary inspiration, a reader has reminded me of another brilliant "plague" novel, JG Farrell's *The Siege of Krishnapur*, sometimes known as the "lost Booker". How did I forget it? Set in 1857, it stages a debate over how to treat cholera; it is all too relevant. Thank you as ever for reading us.

Alec Russell

It's 5am and I stir. My stomach feels cramped. I have slept no more than four hours. My mind races. The problems cascade through. I hear the birds and do my meditation. My wife Angie and I are in the middle of an Easter study on the Book of Daniel, and I can't help but think of the writing on the wall: "mene mene tekel upharsin." Have we been weighed and found wanting? But I am optimistic there will be a few who will stand up and become modern-day martyrs, not only to defeat this pandemic but to create a new era.

On our minds is the question of surgical and N95 masks for healthcare professionals. I make two calls to China to speak to our ambassador about ventilators, and another to Israel to a fellow from the Aspen Global Leadership Network about face masks, gloves and other forms of protection, and discuss a charter of a plane to bring these items to Ghana. Then a follow-up call to Vera Songwe, head of the UN Economic Commission for Africa, and Tito Mboweni, South Africa's finance minister, to formulate our strategy for debt relief and commiserate on the downgrading of South Africa's sovereign rating. Are the rating agencies beginning to tip our world into the first circle of Dante's *Inferno*?

It's time to go to work and I grab my made-in-Ghana face mask. First, though, we call Dad and Auntie Ellen. They are in their eighties and we can't visit them. I drive into Accra, which is in lockdown – a strange and eerie feeling of apocalypse. Where are the schoolchildren, the women frying doughnuts, the newspaper sellers, the beggars? Where are our youth selling everything from dog chains to gum? The street supermarket is gone, replaced by police and military officers ensuring people stay at home. Our economy is over 90 per cent informal, and the informal market is in lockdown. Growth in GDP, which was projected at 6.8 per cent, could fall to 1.5 per cent, according to our projections. How long can we sustain this?

I arrive at the office, park my car, wash my hands under running water in front of the ministry. My temperature is checked: 35.6C. It must be a good day. I am given hand sanitiser and go upstairs to my office. We are focusing on three priorities: presenting to parliament on the alleviation programme; a post-Covid-19 strategy for a more resilient economy; and a co-ordinated African effort to get support for international debt relief.

I look at the schedule for the day with Michael, my special assistant, and it is almost surreal. We had had such a great start to the year with a landmark \$3bn eurobond issue (whew! A lifesaver, as the markets are now closed). In the past three years, we had successfully completed an IMF programme, brought inflation down and acted to ensure fiscal discipline. Then the Covid-19 pandemic struck, potentially wiping out 10-15 per cent of our GDP.



A scene from the streets of Accra, where volunteers are distributing food and water during lockdown — Reuters

Dante and debt relief

ACCRA DIARY
KEN OFORI-ATTA



Read this week's column by Simon Kuper, page 15

The president was swift and decisive: requesting a \$100m preparedness plan, ordering the borders closed, quarantining all airline passengers for at least 14 days and ordering mandatory testing. We also introduced social distancing, and closed schools, churches, mosques and places of entertainment. The race was on for contact tracing, testing and treatment.

Economic activity has been massively disrupted; hotels are closing, industry is tottering, airlines are grounded, and our toast-of-the-region airport lies asleep. The Bank of Ghana cut rates by 150 basis points and reduced the reserve requirements by 2 per cent, enabling banks to increase their lending to the private sector by some \$500m – a good effort, but an underwhelming response to what should be done. I need answers.

A U-shaped recovery is touted, but ours will likely be a steep drop, then a two- to three-year downward slide before a recovery; a trapezoid-shaped recovery!

Back to completing our schedule for the day. [Bank of Ghana] governor [Ernest] Addison and I finish Ghana's application for the IMF's rapid credit facility. However, Ghana

and Africa desperately need fresh capital. We will work with the World Bank for a renewed approach. (I wonder what past bank heads such as [Robert] McNamara and [James] Wolfensohn would have been thinking at this time.)

We are interrupted by a call. One of our major partners in the energy sector from Europe has triggered a letter of credit facility for \$200m. I am outraged at such callousness. I am reminded of the parable in Matthew where a man's debt is forgiven, but he then finds the fellow servant who owes him and has him thrown in jail. I am now even more convinced that the African finance ministers' proposal for a debt standstill and issuance and/or mobilisation of special drawing rights should be extended for two years and not be limited to low-income countries only.

So, what is the world coming to? Extraordinary times, sobering times. Ghana, at the last count, had 636 cases and eight deaths. Analysis by the University of Ghana's Noguchi Memorial Institute for Medical Research indicates that about four-fifths of the first 300 cases were direct imports; the virus's

genetic sequencing shows its origins are from Wuhan through Norway, the UK, Saudi Arabia, Hungary and India.

What does an African finance minister do now? How can we restore 10-15 per cent of GDP over a two- to three-year period? This is not a passing blizzard, as a friend said; more like a long winter, even a mini ice age. But there are some structural elements that need fixing; our health sector, digitalisation of the continent to formalise our economies; and Africa's debt – the most controversial element and the topic of much discussion. Africa's external debt stock is more than \$700bn. Africa needs to pay \$44bn to service our debt this year.

The world is changing. The German chancellor doesn't want to hear about debt-to-GDP ratios. Unthinkable stimulus packages are being announced, trumping orthodoxies and with no talk of a moral hazard: the G20 packages may end up close to \$8tn. Their generous tool kits are not available to us.

I am green with envy. To be honest, there is a lump in my throat as I think of Africa's predicament. I question the unbalanced nature of the global

This is not a passing blizzard, as a friend said; more like a long winter, even a mini ice age

architecture. I have, in one fell swoop, lost more than \$1bn of revenue as domestic taxes continue to shrink, compounded by lost productivity and job losses. We still have an obligation to service our debt portfolio.

These are grave times, surpassing the Spanish flu epidemic in 1918. Where is the leadership and global task force that would mirror the 1944 Bretton Woods monetary conference?

This unprecedented crisis has brought capitalism "to a juddering halt", as Arundhati Roy wrote in FT Weekend. I think of Ben Okri's poem [with the line] "Will you be at the harvest?" where he inspires us to remake the world for a new era through our human genius, so our future becomes greater than our past.

It is 1am. We have had a long day. We had to launch a sanitation campaign; we had video and teleconferences with [former UK prime minister] Gordon Brown, African finance ministers, the World Bank's David Malpass and Kristalina Georgieva of the IMF, the Center for Global Development and the faith-based organisations – our partners in distributing food. I have also been tested for Covid-19 and am anxiously awaiting the results. I am sleepy. I murmur through Psalm 23: "The Lord is my shepherd..."

Ken Ofori-Atta is Ghana's minister for finance

Whatever happened to the golden age of television?

Continued from page 1

culture. For its US launch, Disney chose the soundstage where *The Sound of Music* was filmed; NBC Universal opted for the *Saturday Night Live* set; and Warner Media took journalists on a golf-cart tour of its Warner Bros studio lot, with a guide pointing out sets for *Gone with the Wind* and *Friends*.

Over the course of hours, high-level executives would then roll out PowerPoint lists of every TV show or film on their upcoming streaming service, and how many millions of customers they expected to sign up – but only after planned losses of billions of dollars over the next several years. Bigger budgets lead to a higher stock price for these entertainment behemoths, a reward for all this fiscal extravagance.

This upside-down system traces back to a decade of low interest rates, which allowed a start-up called Netflix to borrow billions in junk-rated debt that financed a spending splurge that every other media company would eventually mimic. The dawn of today's gold rush is almost unanimously traced back to 2013, when Netflix paid \$100m for two seasons of the political thriller *House of Cards*. The show's widespread acclaim put Netflix on the map with audiences and Hollywood, and laid bare the strategy that the company would pursue for years: spend big to outbid rivals.

Netflix spent \$15bn on content last year, while burning \$3.3bn in cash and taking its long-term debt to \$14.8bn – a dynamic that the streaming service has promised investors will improve over time as subscriptions rise.

It would take years for the media incumbents to realise that Netflix was not actually a friendly new distributor, but rather an existential threat to their business. Disney finally sounded the alarm in 2017, announcing that it would pull its movies from Netflix, and over the past few years other old media companies have followed suit, causing a mad dash to build new streaming services.

The ethos of excess has also hit the production ecosystem. *Get Out* producer Jason Blum recently explained that because streaming companies pay creators a percentage of the budget, rather than sharing future profits with them, producers are actually incentivised to spend more money. "What the streamers are telling us, in the way they pay us, is to make TV series and movies as expensively as possible," he said. "If you have a movie for \$15m and make it for streaming, you make it for \$40m. Why wouldn't you?"

As Eli Holzman, creator of hit shows such as fashion contest *Project Runway*, says: "This perverse incentive is very hard to legislate out of the business" – there is a "sea change" in how wealth is

'What the streamers are telling us, in the way they pay us, is to make TV series as expensively as possible'

distributed in the TV business right now, as Netflix has torn apart the historic model of sharing profits.

Netflix offers large sums of money for shows, but the streamer typically holds ownership of the intellectual property, meaning creators won't profit much if their programmes end up scoring success. While a hit like *Seinfeld* has allowed producer Larry David to earn millions of dollars in royalties decades after the show ended, "that money is now being kept by the [streaming] platforms", says Holzman. "Privately, we all say, people won't strike it rich off of a few shows any more, the way [*Cosby* Show producer] Tom Werner and Aaron Sorkin did."

Television has come a long way over the past century, from the introduction of colour in the 1950s to the advent of cable, which spawned the bloated TV packages of hundreds of channels that infiltrated American homes – only to be

dismantled now through streaming.

The 1990s and early 2000s saw an explosion of television options as prestige programmers such as HBO and Showtime ramped up their output, and when breakout series such as *Sex and the City* reigned supreme. This revolution would persist through the 2000s, as sophisticated shows such as *Mad Men* made TV a cultural force that was increasingly regarded as the creative equal of film. But all that pales in comparison to the number of shows – and sheer dollar spending – of today.

Among longtime Hollywood executives, no one can point to a reliable precedent for this era. The closest comparison is the early days of cable TV, when viewers were suddenly inundated with dozens more channels to watch and networks such as Discovery and A&E scrambled to fill hundreds of hours of television.

Tim Brooks has spent his four-decade career working for TV networks including NBC and the USA Network, where he oversaw a surge in original program-

ming as the channel sought to move beyond sitcom reruns.

But unlike today's streaming wars, Brooks says, the cable revolution was "financially stable". At USA Network, new shows "rarely made money on the first showing, but you could rerun them a lot and it would make the money back that way. You would pay \$10m for the first batch of shows, and eventually you have to make \$10m back," he says. "Whereas for the streaming networks, it's about: can you get subscribers? This is a bubble."

Five years ago, John Landgraf, chief executive of FX, the TV network behind *Atlanta* and *Fargo*, declared that he had reached the top of peak TV and the bubble was about to pop.

"This is simply too much television," he announced at the widely followed Television Critics Association summer tour. "My sense is that 2015 or 2016 will represent peak TV in America, and that we'll begin to see declines coming the year after that and beyond."

Below left: Christina Hendricks and Jon Hamm in 'Mad Men'

Below right: A still from Quibi's 'Dishmantled'



Anna Nicolaou is the FT's US media correspondent

Lunch with the FT Stephanie Kelton

'They're going to have massive deficits. And it's fine'

For years she has argued that governments should spend whatever it takes – and now her time has come. Over a FaceTime curry, the economist talks to *Brendan Greeley* about the origin of money, the politics of the deficit – and why language, not debt, is the problem

The first thing I do when Stephanie Kelton appears on a computer screen in my house is tell her how excited my whole family is to meet her. The second thing I do is listen as my two 10-year-old daughters poke their heads into camera range to correct me. They had been excited, they say, when I first announced we would have a mystery guest for lunch – but only because they hoped it would be Billie Eilish, the 18-year-old pop star.

"What a huge disappointment," Kelton says. "I wish it was Billie Eilish."

Kelton, a 50-year-old economist, has FaceTimed into a room that as recently as a month ago didn't have a purpose. I tried to hang bookshelves in it, but I am not confident as a carpenter, and so they hold picture frames. We inherited a piano, and shoved it in a corner. No one plays.

Then the state of Maryland, where I live, closed its schools, and so the room now holds a card table with a desktop computer for my four children. They take turns doing schoolwork on it, and obsessively looking up country- and state-level cases of Covid-19.

At her end, Kelton sits in a home office in Setauket, New York, halfway along Long Island, near where she teaches at Stony Brook University. She is all that is in frame. Her hands cup a ceramic tea mug. This is how we've agreed to have Lunch with the FT. This is how everyone agrees to have lunch now.

More than anyone else, Kelton is responsible for popularising modern monetary theory – the idea that if a government is in charge of its own currency, no inherent budget rule constrains it from spending more than it taxes. She is having an Eilish-like moment of her own right now. Back when people used to fly to places, she took several international trips a month, explaining to governments all over the world why it was OK to spend money. That is exactly what governments are now doing, as they face the terrifying urgency of a pandemic. Kelton points to the UK, where a Conservative government is now likely to spend an additional £60bn over the next six months.

"They just had an election where everything was wrapped around fiscal rules. That's all gone," she says. "They're going to have massive deficits, and it's fine."

Or, rather, she will say that, about an hour after we start talking. What she actually does is pretend to fumble with her computer and turn herself on my screen into an owl, a puppy, a robot. My daughters are still young enough to howl with delight.

Kelton is no fool. If you want to change minds, you have to meet your audience where they are.

Kelton is to modern monetary theory what Milton Friedman was to American conservatism for a half century – conversational, fierce, relentless. She belongs to a group of academics who emphasise the role of banking and finance in the economy. In 2008, when the Queen asked at the London School of Economics why no economists had seen a global financial crisis coming, Kelton thought, "Wait a minute, you know, not all of us."

And so over the past decade she has taken on the grinding non-academic work of repeating her ideas – on television, in print, on podcasts, to politicians in the US and everywhere, as the host of a conference in New York dedicated to the idea, then back to print, with a book, *The Deficit Myth*, due out in June.

My children quieten down. Kelton turns her computer to show me, through a sliding glass door, a sweep of lawn with a stretch of Long Island Sound at the end of it. I pull up a plate of curried lentils left over from the night before. It's a new recipe for me, straight from Mark Bittman's *How to Cook Everything*. Like the rest of the developed world, I have developed a sudden curiosity about pantry staples with a long shelf life.



Garan Murphy

STEPHANIE KELTON'S HOUSE	
Nuts and prosciutto	\$6
Chai	
Brendan Greeley's House	
Bottle of Piper-Heidsieck (sadly but sensitively unopened)	
Curried lentils	\$2.50
Fried potatoes	
Total	\$8.50

I ask Kelton whether her book has arrived at exactly the wrong time – she wants to encourage Congress to spend, and Congress already is.

Kelton is an economic adviser to Bernie Sanders, who just spent a primary season listening to other Democrats ask him how he'd pay for his social plans. Now, as it is in the UK, that conversation is suddenly over. A Democratic House and a Republican Senate can together appropriate whatever they think they need to tackle the coronavirus crisis: for households, \$560bn in direct payments. For small businesses, \$350bn in forgivable loans. Another \$500bn for large businesses. More for hospitals and public health. It all adds up to what Mitch McConnell, the top Republican in the Senate, described as a "wartime level of investment".

She does not concede the premise of my question. What matters, she says, is not how Americans spend at war, but how they think about spending while at peace. That Congress can spend now on a pandemic should tell politicians that they could have been spending the whole time. "It's like Dorothy with the red slippers in *The Wizard of Oz*," she says. "You've always had the power, you know?" If you want to change minds, you also have to be willing to fight metaphor with metaphor. "I keep saying we don't have a debt problem, we don't have a deficit problem," she continues. "We have a language problem."

Economics, like sociology or anthropology, is a social science. There are no laws, just a frustrating history of competing ideas that appear, lose favour, then become useful again. Economists, like medieval Icelanders, can all proudly recite their own kin, stretching back generations. Kelton reminds me that she studied with the economist Randall Wray at the University of Denver, who in turn had studied with Hyman Minsky at Washington University in St. Louis.

Minsky, her academic grandfather, died in 1996, but his work enjoyed a renaissance after the global financial crisis. He had ways to explain why investments naturally get riskier when times are good. And he was unafraid to pick at what economists call, with some trepidation, "the money question".

Through Wray, Kelton learnt to pick at it too, at a time when PhD candidates

were discouraged from wasting their time on it. Kelton's hands leave her tea mug when she talks about money. They begin to move, and fill my screen. Most undergraduates learn the history of money as a "fantastical, once-upon-a-time story", she says. "Imagine a world with a Robinson and a Crusoe," she recites, as if reading to children, "and one is catching fish and the other is chopping down coconuts." They begin to trade, and then they start using shells, because it's more convenient. Robinson might borrow in shell units from Crusoe, but that innovation comes later.

The story makes money an abstraction, an accounting system for value created elsewhere. Governments can borrow money, or tax it, but they can't create it. Kelton calls it "hand-waving", a universal economist's insult for people who dismiss things they can't be bothered to understand. She stops to whisper to her daughter, who has wandered into her office. I try to tell her it's OK to talk out loud. I had planned to treat our lunch as if I were a guest at her house, or she at mine. But through a screen is through a screen.

Kelton and her clan, with considerable support from historians and anthropologists, believe that money started out not as barter, but as debts. People tracked debts on sticks or tablets, and then began to trade the sticks. Empires, too, decided that their subjects owed them the obligation of taxes, and paid their own subjects in credits – the same ones they accepted to pay off the taxes.

The history of money matters, she argues, because if you see money as inherently a credit, one that states have always created at will, you have licence to think about what a state might do with the money it creates now. When a government spends without taxing, it doesn't have to be committing a sin. It could be filling a void.

I have always wondered why Kelton ties modern monetary theory explicitly to the policy of a federal jobs guarantee – a minimum pay cheque, for anyone who wants one. "It's all in Minsky," she says. A job guarantee is an "automatic stabiliser", she explains. It stabilises growth by pushing money into the economy during a downturn in the most straightforward way: as firms cut staff, people still have a salary to spend.

"Even now, in this environment where you don't have actual work for many people to do because you want them sheltering in place, you could define their job as 'stay home and help us flatten the curve'," she says. "We're

going to pay you to help us save lives by staying home." So that job guarantee, even if we had it in place today, could absorb people, restore income with no time limit.

If this sounds like radical fumes, then ask yourself: when a Republican Senate and a Republican president sign a bill like the one from March that offers \$600 every week for a limited time to every unemployed American, isn't that straight out of Minsky, too?

Children have cried for me, a new lockdown skill. But Kelton has only her tea. I ask what happened to lunch. She has been snacking all morning on mixed nuts and prosciutto, she says. She's not hungry. Through a screen is through a screen.

Politicians are desperate to have someone called an economist certify their policies as legitimate. There are a few ways to become that kind of economist. You can be a former head of a major central bank. You can be a former chief economist of the IMF, or at one of the White House's economic councils. You can be a Nobel laureate.

Kelton is none of these. She is valuable to politicians because she can give them better language. Economists generally regard politicians with distaste – they cannot be trusted with decisions, because they want to spend money on things that voters like. Kelton's basic pitch is this: I'm an economist, and I'm here to tell you that what you want is OK. I ask her what, in the last frantic month's worth of global spending, gives her hope that things will be different when the world re-emerges. "I think the speed with which Congress has acted, not once, not twice, but three times," she says, "without a moment's pause about the pay-for, the deficit... they're not even trying to pay rhetorical tribute to the future."

It's like Dorothy with the red slippers in *The Wizard of Oz*. You've always had the power, you know?

When she still travelled to give talks, Kelton would try to use the language of money circling around an economy, rather than in and out of a house. "I always say capitalism runs on sales," she says. "One person's spending is another person's income, right? And every dollar that's taxed away from me is a dollar that I don't have, I can't spend and some business here in the US can't capture."

Anyone who saves, in this language, is draining money out of circulation. Paying down government debt, she argues, isn't a virtue. It's a leak. It's how money leaves the economy. "It's a lost sale," she says. Who could want that?

Kelton reveals to me, as I thank her for making time, that since we weren't able to have lunch in person, she had considered opening a bottle of champagne, unopened in the fridge since New Year. I ask her to produce it; she takes a second, and a pixelated tree waves in a window behind her. She returns with a bottle of Piper-Heidsieck.

I pause a little too long. It would have been a nice moment, but it doesn't feel right to instruct her to open champagne in front of me. Two weeks later, before we go to print, I call her to ask exactly which bottle of Piper-Heidsieck it had been. She doesn't know any more, she says. She opened it with her family at Easter, and it was gone.

Brendan Greeley is the FT's US economics editor



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Style

Dr Fauci, the master of anti-style style

Robert Armstrong

Style



My wife has fallen hard for another man. “God, I love him,” she purrs, apparently unaware that I am right there in the room. This is a bit difficult for a devoted husband of 17 years to take. What is worse, I have not been thrown over for one of the acceptable wife-stealing tropes: a strapping young tennis instructor, say, or a richer man she met at work.

No, my wife has fallen for a short, 79-year-old, Brooklyn-born government bureaucrat. The rival for my wife’s affection is Dr Anthony Fauci, director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Disease. This little homewrecker has come to the world’s attention through his role at the forefront of the Trump administration’s Covid-19

absence of ego.

He does not do himself up as a man of action, like New York Governor Andrew Cuomo in his leather jacket, or show up in an open collar to perform as down to earth, à la Bernie Sanders. He dons a suit, plain, boxy and dark grey, with a staid tie. He does not stand on a box at the podium, to put himself at the altitude of command. He is short, and you can get over it.

This sort of stoic professionalism is reinforced by the button-down shirt collars Fauci favours. They say, “I am not a man with time to fuss about with collar stays. I button my collar down and it will stay down until my work is done.” I used to think button collars hopelessly vulgar. The good doctor is bringing me around.

(Tangentially, another devotee of the button collar, and perhaps the greatest exemplar of public-servant style, is former FBI director Robert Mueller. If you are ever wondering whether you are dressed conservatively enough for a given occasion, it is enough to ask yourself, “Would Mueller wear this?”)

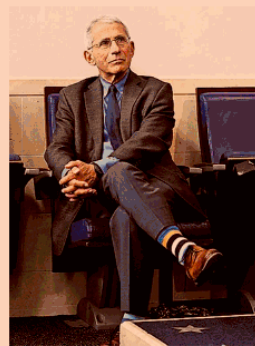
There are other perfect details. Fauci’s watch? Digital, black, cheap. Watches are for telling time. The tie is often that absolute bureaucratic classic, dark blue with tiny white dots. The mid-blue shirts are just far enough out of fashion to remind us that Fauci has more important things to do than worry about shirts. They also, my wife has doubtless noticed, set off his blue-grey eyes to excellent effect.

His New York accent further contributes to his appeal. Like a true child of the city, he pronounces “because” as “becoss”. For New Yorkers, the accent marks him as one of a recognisable type: grandchild of immigrants, raised in the outer boroughs, brimming with intelligence and energy, educated in religious schools (Catholic, in Fauci’s case) and, while bound for the heights of professional accomplishment, never far in spirit from his point of origin.

I note that Fauci has been married for 35 years. I cling to this as evidence that my own marriage is safe. Moreover, his ascendance may be good news for how the country presents itself. He is the ultimate adult in the room, and he dresses the part. This is not to advocate a national grey-suit dress code. Different people, different roles, different styles. And dressing to show off, to look beautiful or to have fun is crucial too, even during a crisis. But our codes of personal appearance have, abetted by technology, become a hall of mirrors.

Dr Fauci demonstrates how sincerity and humbleness can cut through all that, and look good doing it.

robert.armstrong@ft.com



The mid-blue shirts are just far enough out of fashion to remind us that Fauci has more important things to do

crisis response (and appears to be in hot water with the president after suggesting, in a CNN interview, that more could have been done to stop the virus’s spread).

Ronald Reagan, in a quote that has been making the rounds in recent weeks, once said, “The nine most terrifying words in the English language are: I’m from the government and I’m here to help.” Covid-19 has proven him wrong. They are, in a time of real crisis, the nine scariest.

Fauci’s attractiveness has been magnified by his role as an island of coherence in Trump’s bizarre press conferences about the pandemic. These have become so embarrassing that even the warmly sympathetic Wall Street Journal editorial page called them “off key”. The president responded, to the delight of his critics, by angrily tweeting about his excellent television ratings.

Fauci doesn’t care about ratings, and this, paradoxically, has made him a television star. He is a master of anti-style style. Everything about him speaks of seriousness of purpose and



Rejina Pyo in her London home, photographed for the FT by Gabby Laurent, December 2018

Creations born out of lockdown

Report | Working in quarantine, designers are adapting to a new, remote reality. By Sarah Schijen

In a normal April, designers are putting the finishing touches to Resort — one of the year’s most commercially important collections, and the occasion of extravagant destination shows for fashion houses such as Chanel and Dior.

But this is not a normal April. As the spread of Covid-19 accelerated in Europe and North America last month, fashion companies from Prada to Brooks Brothers diverted their design and production teams to making masks and hospital gowns. Resort shows have been shelved. With their doors still shuttered, department stores have cancelled future orders lest they be stuck with surplus inventory.

Those who are going forward must still meet regular production deadlines. With most Italian fabric mills and warehouses unlikely to reopen for weeks, teams are dipping into old fabric stock held in-house, or heading back into their warehouses to reproduce previously successful pieces.

“The components for the design process are delayed, [but] we haven’t gained any more time to [deliver],” says 1017 Alyx 9SM designer Matthew Williams, whose label is based in Milan but who is presently isolating with his family in New York. Missoni’s factory in northern Italy remained open until March 25. Over Skype, creative director Angela Missoni and her team have managed to complete the Resort collection and the Autumn/Winter 2020 menswear collection they were planning to show in June, reducing both by about 20 per cent, which they will look to focus on selling digitally.

Many teams are learning to design remotely for the first time. London-based Rejina Pyo has created digital mood boards and is hosting virtual design check-in meetings with her team to look at prototypes. Throughout the day they share sketches, photos and videos via a group messaging platform for Pyo to make comments and signoffs.

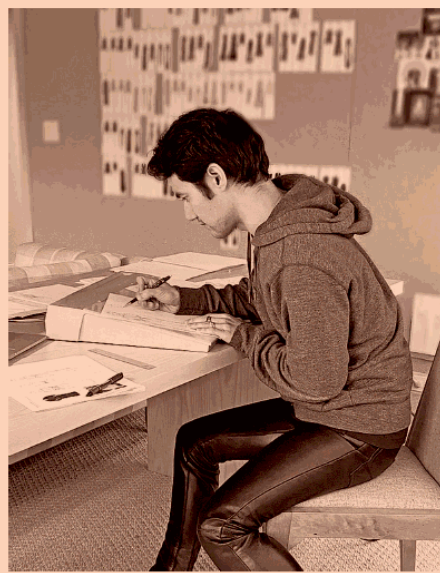
The 3D element to design hasn’t been completely lost. Pyo and her team “made sure everyone has the right tools and materials to be able to drape and prototype from home, and although we can’t all see and touch them together in the same way we would have in the studio, we are able to review through video chats and photos. It’s perhaps forced the team to really think through their designs so they are able to communicate them in different ways.”

Before Covid-19 sent New York City into lockdown, designer Joseph Altuzarra put together kits containing the most important reference material for his Resort collection — colour charts, fabric swatches and research printouts — to ensure designers were set up for remote working.

The first challenge was completing the fabric-to-sketch process, in which fabric and colour are allocated to each

Clockwise from right: Joseph Altuzarra in his New York studio; Rejina Pyo SS20 campaign; Altuzarra AW20

Jason Lloyd-Evans



are moving quickly to adapt. Ida Peterson, buying director of Browns in London, says the store has seen a decline in demand for eveningwear since the lockdown began, but sales of loungewear have increased by 70 per cent in the past fortnight, from the two weeks prior. Cashmere is also popular, and there is steady demand from private clients for investment pieces, particularly bags.

Rixo designer and co-founder Orlagh McCloskey has been managing real-time changes in production from home in London. The label’s Chinese factory is already back up and running, and McCloskey has been savvy in utilising available fabric for a 16-piece loungewear and lifestyle product range. Designed just last week, it will go into production next week and should be online in June. With no access to a fit model, she has been fitting garments on herself.

The global lockdown is forcing creative teams to reassess how they use digital tools to design. It is also posing questions about what fashion could —

‘If you look at history, great creative movements are always a response to challenging times’

and perhaps should — focus on in future. “On one hand you want the essential things for your daily life that will always be something that you can enjoy in any environment,” Alyx’s Williams says, “and then also there’s a real need for people to escape from this and be fully immersed in the most forward, creative fashion that can exist too. It just needs to be those two extremes and that’s it. Nothing in the middle.”

Altuzarra agrees. “The silver lining of this whole experience is that it’s a moment to take stock of how we’re working and challenge ourselves to think differently,” he says.

“It’s irresponsible of us to go back to the way things were without challenging ourselves to think about how we do things.”

That includes fashion shows. With the June men’s and Resort shows cancelled, and questions over whether September’s fashion weeks will go ahead, “If ever there was a time to reimagine a fashion show, now is it,” says London-based designer Pyo. “The same system has been in place for so long and now there is an opportunity to think about how we might do it differently. We have some ideas for September, which could be quite a change from how we have approached showing before.”

And what about fashion’s role in reflecting society’s response to such a monumental event? The postwar launch of Christian Dior’s New Look signalled the beginning of a “golden age” for fashion. Could we witness something of the same again?

“If you look at history, great creative movements are always a response to challenging times,” Williams says. “I think in every creative field — music, art, fashion — I hope there will be creatives who respond to this. It’s natural for that to happen. It would be really sad if everything goes back to how it used to be.”

design before prototypes are created and photographed for a lookbook that will be circulated to buyers and press. The team has collated information in real time through online document-sharing and video meetings. Unexpectedly, it was completed in half the time it normally takes.

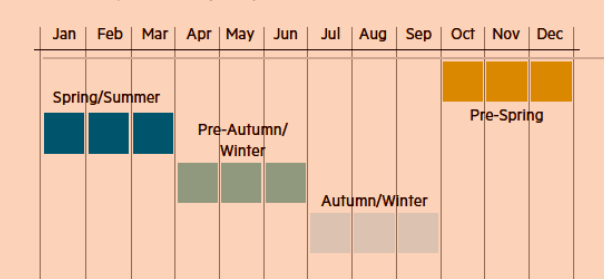
“We’re going forward a little blind,” says Altuzarra, “but we’ve been way more efficient than when we’re in the same room. It’s actually been a really amazing learning experience.”

With Covid-19’s impact on supply chains and retail demand changing

almost daily, the process hasn’t been all plain sailing. “What’s made it the more challenging is that there’s been this trickle of information that’s changed how we’ve approached [and edited] the collection,” Altuzarra says. The Resort collection will be smaller and tighter in anticipation of lower demand from buyers. The financial impact will be significant: pre-collections (which includes Resort and Pre-Fall) usually represent about 60 per cent of the brand’s overall wholesale orders.

Consumer habits are changing in quarantine, and designers and stores

When seasonal fashion collections are delivered to stores
Arrival dates, as defined by European and North American retailers



Source: FT research

FT For fashion industry updates, and more FT style stories, follow us on Instagram at @financialtimesfashion

Modern Menswear



TRUNK

trunkclothing.com
London — Zürich

Why my love life is flourishing under lockdown



Madison Darbyshire

Relationships

did not expect that when I stopped washing my hair and transitioned to a baggy-clothes-only wardrobe that my love life would suddenly take off, but it has. I've been asked on more dates in the past two weeks than in the past two years. And, conveniently for my new sartorial state, it's all happening online.

Friends have reported similar surges. They are meeting more people, more often, and having deeper conversations that last late into the night. They're watching movies and playing card games with dates on the living room floor.

If dating in the age of the "safe six" (the recommended number of feet to keep from other people) sounds like a return to a simpler, more chaste time, in some ways it is. But it has also upended the definition of what it means to "date" overnight.

As London enters its fifth week of home quarantine, singletons running out of things to stream on Netflix are looking for love, and dating apps are booming. Tinder has seen a 20 per cent increase in conversations since February 20. March 29 was the busiest day for swipes in the app's history.

Dating apps are encouraging the move to digital courtship, advising against in-person meet-ups, in line with government guidance. Hinge, an online dating app for those looking for something more serious than a hookup, now asks matched users

whether they're ready to take a relationship to the next level: a video chat.

One friend plans first dates using Zoom and caps the meetings at 45 minutes, enough time to share one remote drink and check for a spark.

If the date is going well, the clock is reset for another 45 minutes and each pours a second glass. If not, there's still time to watch *Tiger King* before bed.

I wonder if we have been unkind to social media, heaping blame on it for the increased isolation of millennials, who are marrying less and later than previous generations, and are more likely to engage in transient relationships. Dating apps can be impersonal and superficial; initial interest is often predicated on physical attractiveness.

But in lockdown, online dating has become anything but impersonal. A conversation with someone sitting in their kitchen, living room or bedroom is intimate in a way that a first drink in a loud bar can never be. We see the pictures on their walls and the pile of laundry they thought they tucked out of frame.

Tinder reports that since the beginning of March there has been a 30 per cent increase in the use of "care phrases" in conversations on the platform, or questions such as: "Are you OK?" and "How are you feeling?"

But how long can video chatting stay exciting? Is it better to press pause on a

new love interest before the conversation fizzles, or keep going?

In news that will make your grandma smile, relationship experts say that being unable to do much more than talk with people we date in quarantine is, probably, a good thing.

Relationship therapist Jane Hammerslough says, "If you take away sex and attraction — all of these things that are a part of being young — it strips relationships really bare."

Quarantine dating has pulled away the crutch of physical intimacy, a cover for all manner of incompatibilities. Instead of hoping that a strong physical connection will lead to an emotional one, we are forced to do the reverse.

Hammerslough says: "It offers the opportunity to think, 'If all I could do is just talk to someone, is this someone I could just talk to? Would they be good company?'"

Dating from quarantine also means that it no longer matters where a love interest lives. Proximity matters less when east London might as well be Moscow, and vice versa.

To support distant socialising, Tinder has opened its "passport" feature, normally just for paying users, for finding matches anywhere in the world. People have been dating abroad with abandon.

I've never been to Perth, Australia, but that is where three of my potential boyfriends live.

Dating in quarantine can be fun. It



Sarah Jessica Parker in 'Sex and the City', 1998
Shutterstock

In lockdown, online dating has become anything but impersonal

provides routine, a reason to shower and put on real clothes — acts of normalcy that are a small rebellion against the pervasive fear we have learnt to live with.

This past weekend I excused myself from a jigsaw puzzle with my housemates to go on a movie date, using an app called Netflix Party that lets people stream films in synch. We watched *Groundhog Day*. I washed my hair, wore my best black leggings and positioned my phone at an angle that gave me only one chin. After the film, we ate chocolate eggs and wondered what new skills we might develop, the way Bill Murray did to pass his perpetual February.

I wonder how elastic our life pre-Covid-19 will prove to be. Some people told me video chatting as a first "date" is such an efficient way to decide if they're interested that they hope the practice will continue after the lockdown lifts.

Will we still connect remotely at first, to protect precious weeknights and save money? Or will we run to physical contact with reckless abandon? Will we ever do that without niggling anxiety again?

Dating under quarantine might provide an effective short-term diversion from a global health crisis. But I suspect many of us are also keeping an eye out, as ever, for something with the potential to last beyond the lockdown.

Crowning glory

Interview | With his dramatic catwalk creations, Noel Stewart is elevating hats to high fashion. But as summer events are cancelled, he tells *Dino Bonacic* that British milliners need solidarity

At Paris Fashion Week in March, model Fran Summers opened the Givenchy Autumn/Winter 2020 show wearing a dramatic hat with a cascading, asymmetric brim a metre wide. "For Clare [Waight Keller] to put a hat on a first look is a really big deal, so I feel really grateful that she trusted me," says Noel Stewart, the man behind not only that arresting headpiece, but some of the most inspiring millinery of the past decade.

The pair first met at the beginning of Waight Keller's tenure at Givenchy in 2017, when they created a neat, navy bespoke hat for the Duchess of Sussex to wear for the wedding of Princess Eugenie and Jack Brooksbank. They partnered again for Givenchy's last two haute couture shows in July and January, where Kaia Gerber walked the finale in a huge bridal bonnet that enveloped her like a cocoon. (Givenchy announced Waight Keller's departure from the brand last week.)

I meet Stewart on a Saturday afternoon, a few days before the first social-distancing measures are put in place. Wearing a bright neon sweatshirt, a big smile, but no hat, the 44-year-old shows me his studio inside a warehouse in Dalston, east London, where he employs two full-time specialists in addition to an extended community of collaborators who work with him on a project basis. On the floor is a pattern resembling a large fold-out form of a paper plane. "It's a secret project I'm working on," he says slyly, moving quickly on.

Stewart built his career "on hats — not headpieces or fascinators, but proper brims and crowns", he says. "It sounds so basic, but it's the thing I always loved and it's so timeless. You tweak it one way and it becomes so relevant and so right now." For Givenchy's AW20 show in February, he created a sense of glamour and intrigue by taking a traditional summer hat shape and extending the brim so that it folded over the model's face, casting it in shadow. That season, he also created pieces for Felipe Oliveira Baptista's debut catwalk collection at Kenzo, including a modern take on a sou'wester fisherman's hat, as well as designs for Self-Portrait, Roksanda and Holzweiler.

A century after casual hats began to fall out of fashion in the west, headpieces are slowly but surely regaining



ground as everyday accessories. Stewart says the shift began with Hedi Slimane's debut Saint Laurent womenswear show in October 2012. As part of Slimane's radical new vision for the brand, every look in the collection was topped with a wide-brimmed wool hat.

"It was just a basic trilby, but it was a very wide one. And suddenly everyone did it — the high-street stores started putting hats in stores," remembers Stewart. "I think it's [also] got a lot to do with that," he continues, pointing to his phone sitting on the table next to him. "Instagram, social media... You know, hats make great pictures." One need only look at the phenomenon that was Simon Porte Jacquemus's enormous straw hat, which swept across magazine editorials and social media two summers ago, to see his point.

Hats are also playing a greater role on the catwalk. "Hats have always been part of the shows, but it's only since Spring/Summer 2019 that designers are really using them to tell their story," says LinLi Teh, head of buying for accessories at Liberty in London. Among the

hats Liberty is stocking this summer is the wide-brimmed straw boater that Stewart created for Erdem's pre-AW20 collection, which Teh says was "too hard to resist".

Liberty is planning to open a hat department on the first floor later this year to address the accessory's growing cross-generational appeal. "Slowly, hats are coming back into the limelight and we're finding customers are asking for that little something extra to complete their outfit," says Teh.

Stewart's work as a milliner is deeply steeped in British tradition. The son of two northerners, he was raised in London from the age of five and studied decorative arts at the City & Guilds of London Art School, where he first became interested in hatmaking ("I started making hats like lampshades," he recalls). He then enrolled in a summer millinery course at the esteemed Central Saint Martins fashion school before embarking on the only specialised degree course for hatmaking in Britain, at the Royal College of Art in London.

Instead of joining an established firm after graduation in 2002, he launched his own label. His designs were soon picked up by the New York department store Barneys, where buyers Judy Collinson and Julie Gilhart "introduced me to the uptown New York client", he recalls. Stewart's work made its catwalk debut at Roland Mouret's Autumn/Winter 2003 collection show, where blocked wool felt caps added a touch of urban cool to the French designer's retro-futuristic line-up of miniskirts, cut-out dresses and swing coats.

London-based designer Roksanda Ilincic was another early partner, and Stewart continues to collaborate with her. For her London Fashion Week show



Clockwise from main: Givenchy haute couture SS20; Celine Dion wears Noel Stewart to the Met Gala, 2019; Roksanda AW20; actress Anya Taylor-Joy in a Noel Stewart bonnet for the 2020 film 'Emma'; Left: milliner Noel Stewart photographed for the FT by Tom Jamieson — Andiasa/Getty, Jason Lloyd-Evans

in February, the pair concocted a structured black headpiece that complemented the softer, feminine elements of the collection. "Much of what my brand stands for is about designing pieces that empower women, making them feel simultaneously strong and safe, powerful yet feminine. Noel's work carries the same sentiment," says Ilincic.

In 2017, Stewart stopped creating his own seasonal collections and decided to focus on collaborations with fashion designers, which now account for 70 per cent of his business. The other 30 per cent comes from special projects and commissions, including costume designs for film, custom pieces for celebrities and bespoke clients, and fashion editorials. He's worked too with Academy Award-winning costume designer Alexandra Byrne on millinery for period films, including abstract Elizabethan pieces for *Mary Queen of Scots*, 1930s-style fascinators for Daisy Ridley and Michelle Pfeiffer in the 2017 remake of *Murder on the Orient Express*, and 1860s-style felt hats for *The Aeronauts*.

Stewart was also behind the chintzy bonnets worn by Anya Taylor-Joy and Mia Goth in Autumn de Wilde's recent buzzy adaptation of Jane Austen's *Emma*. "I was so excited that I got to do bonnets," says Stewart. "They're such a

Stewart built his career on hats — not headpieces or fascinators, but proper brims and crowns

weird construction and millinery concept — it sits on the hair rather than on the head. There are also four different hat elements within." Stewart wanted his designs, trimmed with opulent feathers and vintage lace, to inject a sense of humour and joy into the Regency-era setting. "With films, I get to do things I wouldn't normally get to do, like using antique materials. It also taught me a lot about how you do a version of the past that's relevant for now."

Last year, Stewart created a headpiece for Celine Dion to wear to the annual Met Gala, a showgirl-style creation made out of chrome-plated quills, Swarovski crystals, gilded goose feathers and burnt ostrich feathers. "Even RuPaul loved it," says Stewart. "What more could I ask for?"

The outbreak of Covid-19 has been tough on the entire fashion industry. It's come at a particularly challenging time for hatmakers, with formal events such as the Grand National and the Boat Race cancelled this spring.

"The timing couldn't be worse, as clients will be just starting to order their hats for all their summer events and weddings, surely none of which will happen," says Stewart. "The foot-and-mouth outbreak of 2001 crippled many milliners, as most country weddings were cancelled and clients didn't come to London at all." Hats are also among the first orders department stores cancel in the event of a setback. "[They] become very risk-averse, choosing to bet on the sure thing such as bags or shoes that they know they can shift with bigger margins," he says.

The chronic uncertainty in the hat-making trade is one of the reasons fellow hatmaker Stephen Jones launched the British Hat Guild last year, the first organisation to represent UK milliners. Stewart is one of its founding members. "[As milliners] we're not going to get bought out [by a big company] or get a job designing for a massive house which includes perfumes and shoes... so we've got to stick together," he says. "You don't get into hats for money — you get into it because you love it and you really believe in it."

Travel

Spring is a good time to be a thatcher in Devon. As the sun begins to dry the yellow hills of Dartmoor, the dank winter is behind us and the hedge banks along the lanes are filling with wild garlic and the droning of the first bumblebees.

I left London for Devon nine years ago and, more or less by chance, began an apprenticeship as a thatcher. The training lasted five years — longer than my university degree, and in many ways more demanding.

There is no shortcut to mastering the arcane techniques of the craft. My other work as a writer for this and other newspapers takes me to far-flung places, but Devon is my home, and thatching has become the anchor that keeps me here.

And this lockdown spring? Some thatchers have hung up their ladders and retreated to their barns to do jobs normally reserved for wet-weather days — preparing materials, bundling wheat. Others, like the small firm I work for, are



continuing to thatch where it is safe to do so, and doing so alone — social distancing comes easily in this and many other rural trades. “I’ve been self-isolating for the last 13 years!” Norfolk reed cutter Rowan Nichol told me recently.

Each morning I head out into a landscape at once familiar and changed. The hills are still there; the trees are coming into leaf as they do every year. But the main roads are empty and the narrow lanes have been reclaimed by bright-faced walkers savouring their daily allowance of exercise.

Today, I am repairing a roof in the hamlet of Waddeton, a few miles inland from the fishing town of Brixham. Red Ruby Devon cattle with coats like satin are jostling and headbutting in the field below me.

From my vantage point 20ft above the ground, I can see across the wide, oak-lined channel of the River Dart, dotted with boats on their moorings. On the far shore is the village of Dittisham, home to the Ferry Boat Inn and the only pub quiz I know where you lose points for a correct answer, if the irascible quiz master deems it not worth knowing.

In front of the pub there is a brass bell; ring it and the ferryman will appear. Today, the bell is unringed and the pub shuttered, as the tourists who would normally be pouring into the West Country are forced to stay away. This would ordinarily be the heartland of the British seaside holiday — 19m domestic tourists come to south-west England every year, more than any other region, as well as 1.7m international visitors.

Even as the human world grinds to a halt, nature moves on as normal. Spring migrants are arriving, unfettered by human travel bans. First to land are the chiffchaffs and willow warblers, unobtrusive brown birds that come from their overwintering grounds in Africa to fill the Devon hedgerows with song. Any day now, the first swallow will arc across the fields.

In 1790, there were one million thatched buildings in Britain, according to an English Heritage study. Today, the estate agent Savills estimates there are

The thatcher's tale

A thatched cottage is as emblematic of a West Country holiday as a cream tea or a box of fudge. This spring, the tourists may be gone but up on the roofs, the work, and the old ways, go on. By Tom Allan



Clockwise from main: thatched cottages in Cadwirth, Cornwall; Tom Allan in the Devon barn where the reeds are kept; a scalloped ridge on St Mary's church, Thornham Parva, Suffolk; a traditional Devon 'flush' ridge — Getty, Naomi Wood

just 60,000. In Devon, over half of all buildings were once thatched. Most of the decline took place before the second world war, with the expansion of the railways and wider availability of slate and tile that came with it. Thatch was seen as unfashionable, backward, associated with a poor rural past.

A postwar effort to preserve the remaining thatched buildings halted the decline and, since the 1970s, there has been a steady revival of interest in the craft. Today there are between 800 and 1,000 working thatchers in the UK.

Perhaps it is a folk memory of a lost countryside of hayricks and shaggy roofs that ties thatch so closely to the English idea of the rural; perhaps it is sheer romanticism. Either way, for visitors to the West Country, a cosy thatched cottage is as integral a part of the bucolic fantasy as a beach, a box of fudge and an argument about whether cream or jam goes on the scones first.

But if thatch today seems quintessentially English, it is in fact near-universal. There are heather roofs in the Scottish Highlands, seaweed-decked buildings in Denmark, and water-reed dwellings in the Peruvian Andes. The Dutch are taking reed roof design in new and innovative directions, and Japan has a rich thatching culture where communal *minka* houses are thatched en masse by the whole village. Everywhere suitable plants grow, there is thatch.



The roof I am working on in Waddeton, like all good buildings, is at home in its landscape. Devon is a hilly county, topped not with the airy moors of Yorkshire or the craggy mountains of the Lake District, but rounded hills between which cleave steep wooded valleys, or “combes”. This was the land of the Dumnonii — the deep valley dwellers, as the Romans named them. And the roofs reflect this, these tea-cosy-shaped humps best described with the German word *hübsch* — cute, pretty.

They are a world away from the steep, angular thatching style of Norfolk, which fits with the austere landscape and hard light of the east. In East Anglia, thatch can last up to a century — as long as slate, and longer than concrete tile (though, unlike slate or tile, it will need at least one new ridge in that time). A rounded Devon thatch, poorer at shedding rain, and with more to shed, does well to last three decades. Our Atlantic climate is, after all, wet enough to have once supported a temperate rainforest.

So why bother with thatch? I found one answer the first time I crawled inside a thatched roof. Traditionally in the West Country, an old layer of mate-

rial known as a “basecoat” is left with each successive re-thatch; over time, these can build up to as many as five layers, pressed together like geological strata or the petals in a flower press.

Dispatched into the attic to check the condition of its roof timbers, I wormed my way into a cramped space hung with dust motes and shadows. I was brushing past wheat that was at least 400 years old, and that had been fixed in place using techniques that have changed little since. The thatcher and archaeobotanist John Letts has even managed to grow ancient cereal varieties from seeds he plucked from a cobwebbed roof space. Each time we re-thatch a building, we are continuing a story begun decades, or even centuries, ago.

Ancient as it is, thatching has made some concessions to the modern world. Instagram, for one. Thatchers the world over are avid users, so I can now scrutinise work from Germany, South Africa and Uruguay, not just from the roofer in the next village.

Other changes are more contentious. Many thatchers (myself included) increasingly opt for the roar of the petrol hedge trimmer over the silent but slower work of hand tools. While thatchers once used whatever materials grew close by, with wheat straw being the most common, today water reed

Each time we re-thatch a building, we are continuing a story begun decades, or even centuries, ago

dominates. It lasts longer and looks neater, but is erasing vernacular quirks such as the broom roofs of Dartmoor or heather thatch of Northumberland.

To meet this increased demand for water reed, the majority is now imported from abroad: five million bundles are thatched on to Britain's roofs each year, at least 80 per cent of which come from overseas. Everywhere outside Norfolk, where the remaining British reed beds are found, you're more likely to see reed from Turkey, Russia or China than from the UK.

In spite of this, regional quirks live on. In the Cornish fishing village of Cadwirth, on the Lizard Peninsula, each thatched house has a single boat chain draped down its length, as if to anchor the roof to the ground. It's a feature I've seen nowhere else. Then there are ridges, the final flourish of a roof, and a chance for thatchers to express themselves — a trained eye can recognise an individual's work just by glancing at this feature. They vary from the ornate, scalloped patterns of Suffolk and Norfolk, with their elaborate diamond patterns, to the simple, “flush” style of the south-west, where the roof line is continued smoothly all the way to its apex. Ridges vary even within Devon: as you travel north over Dartmoor, the ridges become subtly plainer.

It was in a thatched farmhouse in north Devon that the poet Ted Hughes wrote his *Moortown Diary* poems in the 1970s. He records the aged village craftsman who came to repair his roof in “Sketching a Thatch”. The man seems to have “squirmed through some tight cranny of natural selection”; a tough country sprite from another age, so industrious his clothes “can't keep up with him”, with muscles as “clean as horn” and blood as “light as spirit”.

Thatching has an ancient toughness — it is, in one form or another, the world's oldest way of putting a roof on a dwelling. Some of the granite-walled longhouses on Dartmoor date from the 13th century. They have survived war, famine and many hundreds of soggy Devon winters. They'll still be here long after the current crisis has receded, and so too will the thatchers.

POSTCARD FROM...

SWEDEN

In Riksgransen, a curious cluster of red buildings in the frigid far north of Swedish Lapland, things are the same but very different.

The train from Kiruna still chugs through, its clanking trucks carrying iron ore across the Norwegian border, though decreasing demand at the port of Narvik has meant fewer departures than usual.

The six lifts are still turning, even if it's just a tiny number of skiers and snowboarders heading up to access the area's famed back-country, a late-season magnet after resorts in the Alps and Rockies have closed for the spring. The season here usually extends until late May and, with a certain grim irony, the snow this year has been better than it has for decades.

It's been a strange time for Patrik Stromsten, who first arrived in this no-frills town on the newly built road in 1985, to race moguls and wait tables at the Hotell Riksgransen, the only large hotel around. Today, along with his old friend and mountain guide Johan Lindblom, he runs the Niehku Mountain Villa, a relaxed ski lodge that is deadly serious about good food and wine, and taking one-percenters up to heli-ski among the Arctic wilderness that stretches as far as the eye can see.

Having had rave reviews since it opened in 2018, Niehku was 98 per cent booked for the season before



Off-piste skiing near Kebnekaise, Sweden's highest peak

coronavirus lockdowns swept the world. Stromsten — a two-time Swedish sommelier of the year — had just ordered wine for his cellar when things got serious. Most people cancelled or postponed, but one wealthy foreign guest booked out the whole top floor and arrived in Kiruna on his private jet. So far, he has stayed three weeks.

“My daily lunchtime ski is wonderful at the moment,” Stromsten says. “I've never seen so much powder here, and so few people on the mountain. But we're running a business, so it can be hard to sleep at night, even if I know we're luckier than many.”

Despite Sweden imposing lighter restrictions than much of Europe,

many of the country's other ski resorts did close early, partly in response to growing media pressure. Riksgransen, Sweden's northernmost resort — more than 200km above the Arctic Circle — has a much longer potential season anyway, and began operations this year only on February 28.

At the time of writing, Kiruna, the sparsely populated municipality of which Riksgransen is a part, has yet to report any cases of Covid-19. Lapland Resorts, which owns Riksgransen, says it is continually monitoring the situation and will stop selling lift tickets if there is any risk of the slopes becoming crowded. It has stopped taking new reservations at the Hotel

Riksgransen, though existing bookings (which were about one-third of the usual number over Easter) are being honoured. Après ski and evening activities have been halted but the annual free-ride competition, the Scandinavian Big Mountain Championships, is currently still scheduled for May 21-24.

For now, things have gone quiet in this ski-bum town, which was first named when it opened as a railway station in 1903 (Riksgransen translates as “national border”) and which installed its first ski lift in 1952, when guests could arrive only the same way the iron ore does. Today, the border is in effect closed, halting the flow of Norwegians who come to snowmobile on the frozen Vassijaure Lake. “The silence is strange,” says Stromsten. “You don't realise how much noise there was until it stops. It's like the electricity went off.”

At Niehku, there haven't yet been enough heli-skiing clients this season to justify booking aircraft, with many guests going ski touring instead. In the lodge, groups of guests have to remain three metres apart, and Stromsten has had to fill the Scandi-chic lodge with hand sanitisers and disinfectant wipes “without making the place look like a hospital”.

The drop in bookings has also meant having to tear up existing staff

contracts and pay by the hour. “We've been lucky with how good they've been about it,” Stromsten says. “Most of them ski every day, and I think they realise there are worse places to be stranded.”

Despite occupancy dropping, he is determined to keep spirits up. Niehku, which means “dream” in the northern Sami language, is a pure passion project for him, his old hard-rock bandmate Lindblom and their silent investor Clas Darvik, a Gothenburg property developer. In 2012, Darvik, a Riksgransen regular, happened across a crumbling roundhouse that was once used to service the iron-ore trains, and had the idea of transforming it into a heli-ski lodge.

“We still need to light the candles, lay out the furs, and put on a good show,” says the elfin Stromsten, whose usual schtick is to dance around tables with ready quips and tales of the winemakers he meets on buying tours.

This week, Lindblom has booked the first helicopters of the season to take a couple of Swedish groups into the 60 or so skiable peaks to the south and east, to seek out the untouched powder fields while most of the world hunkers down at home. “We're crossing fingers,” says Stromsten. “And hoping that they realise just how lucky they really are.”

Toby Skinner

i / DETAILS

For more information see niehku.com, riksgransen.se and swedishlapland.com

Books

Life&Arts

Coming up for a quarter-century ago, I found myself standing in an orchard, happily amazed. All around me trees were hung with treasure: apples with names like Lady Sudeley, Bristol Cross pears. It was a little Eden, the fruit on the branches not the bland varieties found on supermarket shelves – bred for transportability rather than taste. Rather, it was older breeds, fruit that looked as if it had a history and would taste, somehow, of itself.

But this was no rural paradise. Those trees were flourishing half a mile from where the Thames flowed, just beyond the walls of the old Royal Arsenal at Woolwich. Academy Fruit, as Brian and Pat Haw's enterprise was called, reduced their fruit into delicious chutney and jam to supply London's Neal's Yard Dairy, itself in the vanguard of a local and sustainable food culture. I had never imagined that such bounty could be found in an urban setting.

Yet the Haws were ahead of the game. The allotment used to be seen as the preserve of retired folk of Brian Haw's ilk; now demand is soaring among the under-thirties. Rooftop farms and food co-ops, from London's Lee Valley to Brooklyn's Park Slope, are growing in popularity. The path from farm to table is an ever more examined road.

Three new books consider the ways in which industrial – and post-industrial – societies have moved away from communities that fed themselves to communities fed by external supply chains; over which the members of those communities seem to have less and less control. In their different ways, each book considers how we got to this point, how much trouble we're in because of it – and what we can do about it now.

As early as 1950, nearly 80 per cent of Britons were living in cities, far from anything that might be called a farm. By 2030, that figure is set to rise above 90 per cent. Even before coronavirus swept across the globe, the question of how all these urban dwellers would feed themselves was largely ignored, at least by most of us.

Certainly there has been an increasing awareness of environmental issues such as "food miles" in assessing what we consume, but buying local and organic is often a much more expensive prospect than filling your trolley in a supermarket. But just now, even those with the luxury of being able to spend freely on food have had to focus on how the basics get to our fridges and cupboards.

Whatever the impact of the present crisis, many academics and experts have long argued that we need to overhaul comprehensively the way we approach the vital business of how we feed ourselves. Among them is Tim Lang, who heads the Centre for Food Policy at City University London. *Feeding Britain* might, at first glance, seem a little dry for the general reader. But it is distinguished by the clarity and care with which it lays out urgent issues, most centrally that Britain does not produce enough food to feed itself.

Lang, who started out as a social psychologist before branching out as a hill farmer in the 1970s, lays out why and how this country's "food system" – the complex chain from producer to consumer, formed of political, societal and economic relations – has come to be both so sophisticated and fragile. The potential vulnerabilities of our food provisioning were just one of the areas of concern revealed in some of the scenarios for a no-deal Brexit. This is, of course, not a new issue; part of Lang's argument is that Britons still dine on



Essay | The coronavirus crisis has laid bare the fragility of the food supply chains we rely on. What, asks Erica Wagner, is the best way to keep us all fed and shrink the distance between farm and table?

A feeding frenzy

Can we grow our own? Beekeeper Paul Webb inspects hives on the rooftop of London's Café Spice Namasté
Abbie Trayler-Smith/Panos Pictures

Feeding Britain: Our Food Problems and How to Fix Them
by Tim Lang
Pelican £25, 608 pages

Many Mouths: The Politics of Food in Britain from the Workhouse to the Welfare State
by Nadja Durbach
Cambridge University Press
£34.99, 363 pages

Sitopia: How Food Can Save the World
by Carolyn Steel,
Chatto & Windus £16.99, 384 pages

a post-imperial fantasy, when we could depend on our colonies to feed us, and when we had a navy capable of supporting shipments that came from those colonies. As a nation, we have come to expect to be fed by others. The UK grows a little over half of the food it needs, measured by value: the food trade gap was £2.4bn in the red in 2017, and the only area of surplus is in drinks, "due to massive exports of whisky".

In the aftermath of the second world war – when Britain's imported food supplies had to be protected, at great risk, by military convoys – efforts made to address the country's lack of food security focused on "high-input, high-output agriculture", which degrades the land under cultivation, ultimately undermining food security. Additionally, "financialisation" of national assets has led to increased foreign ownership of critical parts of the food supply chain, such as ports.

National interest in food security has played second fiddle to *laissez-faire* economics: "Let consumers decide," or, as Lang puts it, "Leave it to Tesco *et al.*" Big

brands pile it high and sell it cheap, cheapness having come to be, for many, the most important metric of value.

Given levels of poverty and the tightness of many household budgets, this is understandable. Part of the explanation, Lang argues, rests in a familiar place: the way in which the wider UK economy has been distorted by rocketing property values that have squeezed disposable income, increasing the demand for ever-cheaper food. "Food prices ought to rise to give fair rates of return to producers while delivering good-quality diets to prevent ill-health," he writes. The opposite is the case, resulting in weakened producers and in many cases ill-fed consumers, outcomes which in turn bring great costs to the wider economy.

Nadja Durbach, a professor of history at the University of Utah, believes that the causes of this are more deep-rooted. In *Many Mouths*, she goes back to the 19th century to examine some of the origins of our current "food system" and how embedded attitudes to food – and of who is deserving of feeding –

have shaped policy to the present day.

If Lang's book makes the reader consider how she has become a passive recipient of food, Durbach sets out the bigger political context. In looking at the "material and symbolic importance" of governmental feeding programmes from the 1830s to the 1960s – from whether the inmates of Victorian workhouses should be allowed to eat roast beef on public holidays to the distribution of orange juice to children by the welfare state – she casts an interesting light on the way that people's relationships with food became entwined with their relationships to the British state.

The 19th-century workhouse may seem very different to the "British Restaurants" – as Winston Churchill called them – established during the second world war to provide nourishing meals for a population under threat, yet there is a connection. The government had taken responsibility for feeding citizens.

Now, in the 21st century, Lang argues, the state must step back in to ensure that its citizens are well fed. "I do not mean eating posh food every day," he

writes, "far from it. I mean decency every day."

Connecting us to that idea of decency sits at the heart of Carolyn Steel's book. "Sitopia" may sound like what we're all supposed to be doing to keep safe from Covid-19. Its roots actually lie elsewhere – in the Greek for food, *sitos*, and place, *topos*. Steel's first book, *Hungry City*, explored how the feeding of cities shaped civilisations over time; with *Sitopia* she extends her reach. Food shapes our world and the way we live in it. It determines our daily routines, it defines national cultures. Like Lang, she seeks to understand how we can move from a "bad sitopia" of junk food, mass extinction and soil erosion to an ecologically sustainable future in which all can have enough to eat.

Served up in thematic chapters with titles such as "Food", "Body", "Home" and "Time", *Sitopia* is rather more digestible than Lang's text, yet the two complement each other. Both draw on the Food in the Anthropocene report, a 2019 study by international scientists as to whether the world could feed a future population of 10bn a healthy diet without damaging our ecosystems.

To do so requires a diet much richer in fruit and vegetables, and much less dependent on meat production. This, Steel and Lang argue, will require a radical overhaul in the way we produce food – and what we eat. Two billion people, Steel notes, already dine on insects. A

We can change our ways as individuals, but these are problems of how our economies are structured

taste of things to come? Some of what she advocates – and observes – made me recall that day with Brian Haw, not least when she visits Brooklyn Grange, a farm 12 storeys up on a New York rooftop. Both authors assert that "cheap food" is, as Steel writes, "an oxymoron – an illusion created by industrial producers and governments keen to disguise the true cost of living".

So what are we to do? Not everyone can cultivate an orchard yards from the Thames. As Lang notes, part of the problem is that the onus to change has fallen too much on the consumer and on the idea of individual choice. We can change our ways, but the reality is that the problems are more complex and have much to do with the way economies are structured. As Lang puts it, alterations of behaviour are gestures "of slight impact unless [they lead] to systemic change". To deliver such change, he argues, requires increased state direction to engineer a reassessment of land use, and an acknowledgment that as a nation (and as a global society) we can't "buy our way out" of problems, along with better pay and conditions for workers and recognition that diets are, fundamentally, a vehicle for national security.

Before the advent of Covid-19, this might have seemed a pipe dream. The pandemic has meant, at least in the short term, a radical reassessment of what governments might do for their citizens so they may live that "decent" life. Many people have been forced to alter fundamentally the way they source and consume food, prompting speculation of more lasting change ahead. The question is whether, once the lockdown ends, those changes will stick – or whether it will, once again, be up to each of us to grow our own apple trees.

The right way forward

Theresa May's former chief of staff offers a radical vision for the future of conservatism in Britain. By Edmund Fawcett

The political contest in Britain is dominated at present by the right. But which right is that? On one side is a centrist, economically liberal tradition running from Harold Macmillan to David Cameron. It did much after 1945 to rebuild liberal democracy, but it is now dispirited and in retreat. On the other stands a confident Tory hard right, led by Boris Johnson. Though potent and on the attack, this conservatism is in turn split between hyper-liberal globalists and our nation-firsters claiming to speak for "the people".

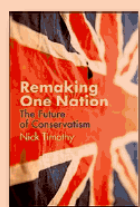
Nick Timothy, a former chief of staff for Theresa May, is interesting because he belongs squarely in none of those camps. He can sound like a chastened Thatcherite, a pre-Thatcher socialist or a race-tinged Powellite. As a hard-edged operator and leading "brain" in 10 Downing Street, he argued for a "blue-collar" conservatism that would

reorient the party and reshape Britain.

Tory interest in a people's conservatism seemed to vanish with Timothy's hurried departure from government in June 2017. Tempted by deceptive opinion polls and egged on by Timothy, May needlessly called a general election that returned a hung parliament and crippled her premiership. Events since, however, have made Timothy's ideas relevant again. In last December's election, the Tories won long-held Labour territory across England's north and Midlands. People on all sides are speculating about a new solidarity that might emerge from the coronavirus crisis.

Now a newspaper columnist, Timothy has put his radical vision for the British right into a book, *Remaking One Nation*. It opens with a settling of personal scores in which he answers those, including his old boss, who blamed him for bungling the 2017 campaign.

Blame of a broader kind dominates the next section, where he lists familiar problems that have accumulated in Britain over the past 40 years: low productivity, budgetary overstretch, social exclusion, unequal schooling, regional imbalances, unaffordable housing. Such failings have undermined trust in government and institutions. Timothy cites



Remaking One Nation: The Future of Conservatism
by Nick Timothy
Polity £20, 224 pages

underlying economic causes – deindustrialisation and the creation of a low-wage precariat – as well as cultural factors, notably the resentments of a white working class that feels ignored.

For that dismal and, some might complain, one-sided picture of recent history, Timothy has a culprit: "elite" liberalism, particularly in its extreme form of "ultra-liberalism", a catch-all that includes unrepentant free-marketters and identity-obsessed liberals.

Elite liberals, on Timothy's picture, are tone-deaf to voters, ignore community and short-change "love of Britishness". Their primal sin was, for selfish economic reasons, to encourage the wrong kind of immigration. This bewitching but incoherent caricature casts elite liberals as ignorant of a demo-

cratic country that they have mysteriously controlled and misdirected over the past 40 years – for 27 of which Timothy's party has been in charge.

On turning from polemic, he depicts "small c" conservatism, conventionally enough, as a doctrine of the happy medium – a search for a prudent balance between competing principles: freedom and belonging, capitalism and community, duties to "improve the world" and to "accept people as they are". In support of that picture, he invokes the local pantheon of Burke, Disraeli, Baldwin, Oakeshott and Scruton.

Timothy puts content into those abstractions by outlining a "communitarian correction" for conservatism. Its elements include a more "civic" capitalism, stronger democratic controls and a reinforcement of national loyalties.

To make capitalism friendlier, he invokes more regulation, regional investment, higher property taxes, controls on takeovers, a wages policy, workers on company boards, parliamentary oversight of monetary policy and an end to the marketing of healthcare.

To revive democracy, Timothy proposes federalism (to replace devolution), an elected upper house and a "jury stage" for citizen participation in

lawmaking. A notable absentee is proportional representation, which would encourage cross-party centrism but do little for his "big C" Conservative party.

To foster community and national pride, Timothy looks to government action including immigration controls and steps to ensure that anti-discrimination laws "also protect white people".

Far from encouraging a sense of one nation, the siren call of community can be divisive, illiberal and exclusionary

He is right to stress the need for patriotism, but wrong to think of it in terms of celebrating a British – indeed English – national type. In conciliatory, liberal terms, he writes that diverse ways of showing attachment to nation must be respected. In Powellite mode, he adds at once that "building a strong sense of citizenship" needs "ultimately . . . to respect and understand the ethnic and cultural identities of white Britons". Far from encouraging a sense of one nation, the siren call of community can in fact

be divisive, illiberal and exclusionary.

Timothy's popular Tory radicalism has the boundary-crossing character of his hero and fellow Birmingham boy, the Liberal-turned-Conservative-Unionist Joseph Chamberlain. What remains unclear is which present-day party Timothy puts his money on. He thinks that "the left is capable of delivering the communitarian correction we need", which, given his Labourish economics, is no surprise. Many Tories by contrast are likely to rub their eyes on reading that his proposals for active government aimed at a thorough social-national regeneration mark a return to "long-held conservative principles".

As the Tories fight for ownership of their tradition, it would nevertheless be wrong to exclude from contention Timothy's popular-communitarian hybrid. Something hard to understand is in the air. Similar fights divide the right in the US and the rest of Europe. Nobody knows how the coronavirus pandemic will change politics. *Remaking One Nation* is timely in ways that Timothy himself cannot have expected.

Edmund Fawcett's *Conservatism: The Fight for a Tradition* will be published by Princeton University Press in the autumn

Books



Nazi governor Otto Wächter in 1944 with his wife, daughter and son Horst, who assisted the author — Permission of Horst Wächter

Everyday evil

A forensic investigation of the life – and afterlife – of a high-ranking Nazi reveals multiple layers of duplicity and complicity, writes *Rebecca Abrams*

When Alfredo Reinhardt died from a sudden infection in the Santo Spirito Hospital in Rome in July 1949, his death attracted little attention – and deliberately so. As his carers knew full well, his real name was Otto Wächter and he had spent four years on the run. Former governor of Nazi-occupied Krakow from 1941 and governor of Galicia from 1942, his zealous implementation of the “final solution” earned him the sobriquet the Butcher of Lemberg. In May 1945, accused of mass murder, he vanished, successfully evading justice for the remainder of his life.

As well as disappearing physically, Wächter's name was largely “airbrushed out of the historical narrative” – a double injustice that lawyer and author Philippe Sands sets out to correct in *The Ratline*. The forensic stamina and precision that garnered such praise for Sands' 2016 work *East West Street* are equally in evidence here.

Besides tracking down incontrovertible evidence of his subject's war crimes, Sands, many of whose family perished



The Ratline: Love, Lies and Justice on the Trail of a Nazi Fugitive
by Philippe Sands
Weldenfeld & Nicolson £30
411 pages

in Lemberg (now the Ukrainian city of Lviv) on Wächter's watch, uncovers exactly where and with whose help he survived three years hiding out in the Italian mountains. Sands thoroughly investigates, and ultimately refutes, claims that Wächter died by poisoning.

It is a trail that leads deep into the maze of postwar Nazi sympathisers and supporters, and their tangled connections with US and Soviet espionage at the start of the cold war. Some of these findings confirm what we already know; some are new. The most jaw-dropping discovery concerns the children of former Nazi-turned-spy Karl Hass and his CIA handler, Thomas Lucid. To

reveal any more would spoil the story.

What makes *The Ratline* both so riveting and unsettling, however, is not just what it exposes, but how. Sands proceeds from one person to the next, with a keen yet compassionate eye for the complex messiness of people's lives and relationships. Not least of these is the bizarre collaboration between the author and Wächter's youngest son, Horst Arthur Wächter, who enthusiastically supports and assists Sands with his quest.

Now in his early eighties, a “tall and attractive man [with] a warm, hesitant, gentle voice”, he was named after the Nazi stormtrooper Horst Wessel, and his godfather Arthur Seyss-Inquart, notorious governor of occupied Holland. Seyss-Inquart's photograph still sits beside Horst's bed in his dilapidated *schloss* in the village of Hagenberg.

Horst is no apologist for Nazi atrocities, yet also does not accept his father's guilt. “I know the system was criminal, that he was a part of it,” he says, “but I don't think of him as a criminal.”

Convinced that Sands' research will yield evidence of his father's essential “humanity”, Horst grants access to a

vast archive – diaries, photographs and letters – that once belonged to his mother Charlotte. Some letters contain coded messages agreeing times and places where the couple can meet while Otto is on the run. The diaries provide an intimate chronicle of the Wächters' marriage and Charlotte's life as the wife of a high-ranking Nazi.

Despite Otto's long absences and incontinent womanising, Charlotte (who died in 1985) remained devoted to her husband, always insisting on his goodness and humanity. Nor do her diaries and letters reveal any qualms about his professional activities. The annexation of Austria in 1938 elicited “heartfelt joy”. As the Jews of Poland and Galicia were being transported to death camps, Charlotte's diaries record a whirl of parties, theatre, ballet and opera. A tour of the Warsaw ghetto on a freezing day in 1941 is followed by shopping for shoes and a concert.

Sands also discovers that valuable artworks, which Charlotte gave to her children as wedding presents, had been stolen on her orders from the national museum in Krakow. Horst has since returned as many of these as possible.

There is something tragic and

A tour of the Warsaw ghetto on a freezing day was followed by shopping for shoes and a concert

pathetic about Charlotte's life, squandered on a morally bankrupt husband, a depraved regime and a lethal ideology. But her loyalty to Wächter perhaps provides the key to Horst's own perverse allegiance to a father who he barely knew and did not love. Insisting on the father's innocence is a defence by proxy, a way of protecting the mother he undoubtedly adored.

As the evidence stacks up against Wächter senior, Horst's faith remains unshakable. When Sands presents him with an extradition order from the Polish government for mass murder, with supporting documents, Horst dismisses it on the grounds that Poland was by then under Soviet rule. Sands is respectful of Horst – and even seems genuinely fond of him – but he is ruthless in pursuit of the facts.

The book's title refers to the escape routes that enabled many Nazis to evade justice and flee Europe at the end of the war. It also alludes to the emotional and psychological stratagems that Horst and other characters in the book (and by extension all of us) use to evade deeply inconvenient truths.

The Ratline is in this sense not only about events in the past, but their dangerous legacy in the world today. A formidable piece of historical sleuthing written with all the pace and suspense of a thriller, it is a timely reminder that crimes against humanity don't occur only at the level of states and governments. They take place also in the more secret and less fathomable depths of people's hearts and minds.

Rebecca Abrams is the author of 'The Jewish Journey: 4,000 years in 22 Objects' (Ashmolean)

Master class

Ian Bostridge on Mahler's complex, joyful – and almost megalomaniac – Eighth Symphony



The Eighth: Mahler and the World in 1910
by Stephen Johnson
Faber £14.99
314 pages

success could be at one with artistic integrity. The Eighth, which he started sketching in that same year, was perhaps the answer.

To become music director of the Hofoper, Mahler, who as a child had excelled in Mosaic religious studies and attended synagogue, had to be baptised a Christian. His Eighth Symphony is a synthesis of Christian spirituality and vogueish pantheism. Falling into two parts, it sets the famous ninth-century hymn of ecstasy “Veni creator spiritus” as a vast and ravishing vocal composition, introduced by a huge ecclesiastical summons on the organ; and part two of Goethe's *Faust*, a more typically Mahlerian display of passionate yearning and instrumental colour.

Mahler's Eighth Symphony is an extraordinary creature, vast in its ambitions and almost megalomaniacal in its demands. Eight top-rank vocal soloists; two large mixed choirs and a boys' choir; 22 woodwinds; 17 brass; an offstage brass band of seven; nine percussion; celeste; piano; harmonium and organ; two harps; mandolin; and full strings to match.

Mahler even suggested that some of the parts might be doubled. No wonder it has become known as the Symphony of a Thousand, a title invented by the impresario Emil Gutmann, whom Mahler had engaged to make the 1910 premiere of his visionary work a saleable proposition.

Sold it had to be, in order to finance its excesses and to fill Munich's spanking new Musik-Festhalle. But Mahler was also worried and embarrassed – worried this was turning into a circus, “a catastrophic Barnum and Bailey show”, and embarrassed to see the streets of Munich littered with images of himself as great composer/conductor. A new biography was in the bookshops, and copies of the score were casually left on café tables to lure punters. Our own sense of the tension between PR and lofty spirituality was alive and kicking a century ago. “There have been better symphonies that had less advertising,” wrote one critic; another declared Mahler to be “our contemporary Christ”.

It was as a conductor, rather than a composer, that Mahler was best known in 1910. His career path, from provincial Bohemia in the Hofoper (the court opera in Vienna) and the New York Philharmonic, was dazzling. Along the way, he invented many of the customs and practices of today's classical music and operatic world, not least the tremendous figure of the conductor as magus. Yet as a composer, he was less feted, somewhat in the shadow of his friend Richard Strauss. In 1906, Mahler attended the legendary Austrian premiere in Graz of Strauss's supremely provocative opera *Salome* and, on the train home, wondered if popular

“All my previous symphonies,” Mahler wrote, “are merely the preludes to this one. In the other works everything still was subjective tragedy, but this one is a source of great joy.” It was a huge success, crowds surging towards the platform after it had finished.

In *The Eighth*, Stephen Johnson leads us through all the complexities of the work with skill and sensitivity. It's clearly a piece that he reveres. In its embrace of joy and spiritual uplift, it has been the most controversial of Mahler's symphonies in our own day, lacking that juxtaposition of sublimity and the banal that makes the composer such a postmodern pin-up.

Johnson's defence involves not only a journey through the piece itself, underlining the subtlety and complexity that defy the overkill; but also a look at the world from which it sprang and the extraordinary and tangled personal story which somehow, despite all that objective joy, it still embodies. As a celebration of Goethe's *Ewig-Weibliche* – eternal feminine – it was a sonic pedestal for Alma, Mahler's wife, who was both drawn to his genius and suffocated by his demands.

As a singer, I come at Mahler from the intimate, supremely human and often painful subjectivity of his extraordinary body of songs. In the midst of all the Eighth's high-mindedness and vast horizons, it's somehow a relief to return to the little details of Alma's contemporaneous affair with the young architect Walter Gropius – her escape from the Mahler machine – or to picture her high romantic disappointment with Mahler as he arrived at their wedding wearing galoshes.

Ian Bostridge is a tenor and author of 'Schubert's Winter Journey: Anatomy of an Obsession'

Adrift in the Aegean

A tale of ouzo and intrigue on the island where Leonard Cohen once lived is as good as a holiday, says Suzi Feay



A Theatre for Dreamers
by Polly Samson
Bloomsbury Circus
£14.99, 368 pages

How we edit and retain memories is by no means a straightforward neurological process, but in novels recall is frequently perfect. Or at least the mismatch between remembrance and what “really happened” is not an issue for the text. Thus Erica, learning of the death of Leonard Cohen, is transported back to 1960,

when she was 17, mingling in the bohemian circle of writers Charmian Clift and George Johnston on the Greek island of Hydra, where Cohen once lived. The years fall away, and the present tense plunges the reader into the sounds,

sights and smells of the lost paradise.

Armed with an introduction to Charmian, her dead mother's close friend, wide-eyed Erica is in awe of the successful authors and free spirits she finds herself among. Polly Samson's last novel, *The Kindness*, featured complex timeshifts and sudden revelations; *A Theatre for Dreamers*, by contrast, is slower and steeped in nostalgia. On Hydra, not only can the motley gang of artists, potters, novelists and poets live far more cheaply than they could in Montreal or Notting Hill, they are a world away from the conventional views of their parents, while being generally oblivious to any values the native Hydriots might have. Though drink, sickness and infidelity will eventually ravage Erica's elders, they can't tarnish her idyll, merely render the good times all the more poignant and precious.

An ingénue or outsider allowed into a gilded milieu, only to discover too late the rot within, is admittedly a fairly common literary theme. *A Theatre for Dreamers* overlays it with the question of what it is to be a muse with creative impulses of one's own. The Sixties are not yet swinging but just beginning to oscillate. Feminism too is simmering, and soon to boil over. Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* is being passed around the expatriates, but also Henry Miller. The menfolk's demands for sex and food are equally imperious; Erica's gold standard of service is the image of a lunchtime sandwich, adorned with a gardenia, left for the genius at his desk.

It's not a level of selflessness she can personally reach when it comes to her boyfriend Jimmy, whose one poem published in *Ambit* magazine adopts in her eyes the status of a dazzling prize. The endless influx of beautiful, lightly clad girls is also a constant worry, as is the

example of the Norwegian writer Axel Jensen, flagrantly unfaithful to his dotting wife Marianne. When a charming 25-year-old Canadian poet with a guitar turns up, transitory amorous pairings have the potential to become cultural turning points. After all, one of his most famous songs was “So Long, Marianne”.

Young themselves, Jimmy and Erica are barely affected by their mentors' heavy-drinking culture, merely getting happier and browner with every month that passes. Samson is an intensely sensual writer, conjuring up blue skies, the tang of wild herbs, the vivid splash of bougainvillea – but also the donkey shit, one-eyed cats and stinking privies. Here and there are hints of a darker real-

Erica, so ardent yet so unformed, is an appealing presence, an eavesdropper without being creepy

ity. When a German girl is gang-raped, the police chief persuades her to drop the charges; the same police chief who issues fines when women display too much flesh on the beaches.

With a cast of characters that spend much of the time engaged in inherently undramatic occupations, there's not much plot beyond the nightly dissection of amours and intrigues over ouzo and brandy. It's tricky to insert a fictional character in a narrative filled with real people, but Erica, so ardent yet so unformed, is an appealing presence, an eavesdropper without being creepy and an impartor of information without being a gossip. *A Theatre for Dreamers* is almost as good as a Greek holiday, and may be the closest we get this year.

Stars in our eyes

Our hunger for fame is not a new one – but the media have fuelled it beyond recognition, writes Matthew Lyons



Dead Famous: An Unexpected History of Celebrity from Bronze Age to Silver Screen
by Greg Jenner
Weldenfeld & Nicolson £18.99
400 pages

On Guy Fawkes Night in 1709, Henry Sacheverell, an Anglican minister, preached an incendiary sermon in St Paul's Cathedral against religious non-conformity in the church. It was widely interpreted as a coded attack on the then Whig government, which attempted to have Sacheverell tried for sedition. His speech became a publishing phenomenon, selling 100,000 copies. He toured the country and was mobbed wherever he went. He posed for portraits. His image appeared on playing cards, tobacco pipes and fans. In short, he became a celebrity – Britain's first, according to Greg Jenner.

Fame was not a new concept. The foundational text of western literature, *The Iliad*, arguably pivots on the idea, when Achilles chooses early death and eternal glory – *kleos* – over a long and quiet life. But the confluence of fame with a mass media – the first daily newspaper was launched in 1702 – created the beginnings of an industry.

For everything we think indicative of a diseased modernity, Jenner, a consultant on the popular *Horrible Histories* series, offers a parallel from the past. Is the obsession with Kim Kardashian's anatomy any more peculiar than the *fin-de-siècle* craze in which newspapers vied for a sight of the ears of Parisian actress Cléo de Mérode? Our scorn for those who seek fame at any cost is not new

either. In 356BC a man named Herostratus burnt down the Temple of Artemis simply because he craved *kleos*; happily for him, the concept did not distinguish between different kinds of glory.

Dead Famous is all about such distinctions. Jenner is alert to the nuances of meaning between celebrity, fame, glory, renown and so on, and the extent to which they are discrete or overlap. Modern celebrity, he argues, is a three-way compact between celebrities, the media and the public; its attainability is part of its meaning.

He explores both its mechanisms and pathologies, from image manipulation to the quasi-religious ecstasies and devotions of fandom. And, of course, the money. Part of his thesis is that what distinguishes the modern phenomenon is the freedom that capitalism provides to profit from someone else's fame.

Ultimately, *Dead Famous* asks us what we really value in those we idolise – and why. Reverse them or revile them, celebrities are ubiquitous: flawed and fragile vessels for the dreams of others, things to gaze in wonder at or curse, like the stars we name them for. Celebrity-watching itself thus becomes a rapt human astrology, offering hope, inspiration – and warning – as we struggle for our own still sense of being in the noise of modern life.

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t all begins, and ends, with cherished motorbikes. The first, a Yamaha YZ, belongs to 14-year-old Anthony Casati's volatile, hard-drinking dad. A tough kid named Hacine Bouali from a housing estate nicks it from Anthony during a party at a posh schoolmate's house. That stunt sets in motion a chain of events, as implacable as the "perfect cycle" of the combustion engine or even the remorseless "machine" of the free-market economy. The consequences are still spooling out when, six years later, Anthony returns the favour. He swipes a Suzuki DR owned by the now-married Hacine on a hot summer night in 1998 when France beats Croatia in the World Cup semi-final and the divided nation succumbs briefly to a "total fantasy" of unity and togetherness.

In 2018 Nicolas Mathieu won the Prix Goncourt, France's pre-eminent literary honour, for this, his second novel. Starting in 1992, it unfolds – at two-year intervals – over four summers in a valley in Lorraine, not far from the Luxembourg border. Here the "echoing carcass" of the blast furnace in a decom-

Although acts of violence punctuate the novel, it also finds space for beauty, for tenderness, for hope

missioned steel mill broods over the (fictional) town of Heillange. The defunct mill no longer governs the lives of people wounded by the "thirty years of devastation" that have, says their pompous mayor, "reshaped the world of work". In the valley, the lake still sparkles, crops thrive, and forests sway around the "rusty jungle" of forsaken industry. Yet the community's "centuries-old solidarities" dissolve "in the great bath of competitive forces".

The redundant steel-working men, with their "lugubrious faces, big hands, and crushed hearts", struggle to adapt to this post-industrial order. They "said little and died young". Their womenfolk have a slightly better shot at finding a role, even wider freedoms, in the high-tech, short-term, computer-controlled workplaces that replace factories in a fractured time of "the individual, the temp, the isolate".

Meanwhile, drifting children seek a purpose in this "dead valley" – children like Anthony, his father Patrick trapped in a spiral of menial jobs, booze and fights in which he swings fists "heavy with misery and missed chances". Or Hacine, a wannabe dope-dealer with grand plans and a Moroccan dad, Malek, whose wiry stoicism reflects long years enmeshed in the "tangle of fat rules" that curb a migrant's chances. High-flying Steph, whom Anthony yearns for across a chasm of class, may have a politically ambitious father with a Mercedes concession, and a gift for maths, that elite "lingua franca" of this "perpetually accelerating era". Even Steph, though, feels like a "total bumpkin" at a crammer in Paris. She sees that, under the veneer of meritocracy, the system amounts to "a prodigious underpinning of existing power".

The progress of Anthony, Hacine,



Grace Russell

Life in the wasteland

Nicolas Mathieu's elegiac lament for the French underclass unfolds over four summers amid the wreckage of deindustrialisation. By *Boyd Tonkin*



And Their Children After Them

by Nicolas Mathieu, translated by William Rodarmor. Sceptre £16.99, 432 pages

Steph and their families, from the grunge cult of Nirvana to France's World Cup rapture, anchor this novel. Mathieu's lament over the social and psychic wreckage left by deindustrialisation aligns him to other literary witnesses to a forgotten underclass in French culture today, such as Édouard Louis and Didier Eribon. His rapt attention to the hum-drum, epoch-defining detail of daily life – the snacks, the shows, the catchphrases, the sneaker brands, the radio hits, all "the dense materiality of things" – may bring to mind the icily forensic gaze of Michel Houellebecq. Mathieu, however, has a different perspective – and a much more loveable one.

His qualities lie far from either Louis's blazing fury, or Houellebecq's glacial contempt. Although acts of violence punctuate the families' journey through the decade, *And Their Children After Them* (its title drawn from the chapter in the Book of Ecclesiasticus that opens "Let us now praise famous men...") finds space too for beauty, for tenderness, for hope. It has a strain of blue-collar romanticism, of nostalgia for the dignity of toil, even if the youngsters treat "The iron men and their good old days" as "a pain in the butt". It also grasps the bigger picture. The "subter-

ranean history" of this valley, where "children had been devoured by wolves, wars, factories", stretches the frame of Mathieu's story. Sublime, indifferent nature oversees the messes mankind makes. Inequality may cascade down the generations, but a fumbling teenage tryst in a torrid July night still has sacramental power, "confronting the darkness, the lake's animal presence, the weight of the sky". As he watches "selflessly devoted" young mothers who settle for drudgery assuaged by love, Anthony senses not just "the fate of his class" but "the law of the species".

If these overlapping layers of cause-and-effect recall the naturalism of Émile Zola, then something in the half-lyrical, half-prophetic tone reminded me of DH Lawrence – who conjured another beloved, change-shaken heartland in *The Rainbow*. Then again, you might think of a Ken Loach movie with a soundtrack by Bruce Springsteen; especially as William Rodarmor's salty and supple translation lends to Anthony and his pals the smartass, vulnerable voices of American, not British, rustbelt teens.

And Their Children After Them may sound like a tract. It feels, though, more like an elegiac anthem, one drenched in "the terrible sweetness of belonging".

The joy of wordplay

Nilanjana Roy

Reading the world



The day is off to a great start. I am tackling the New York Times Spelling Bee with a mathematician friend on the other side of the world.

The challenge is to make as many words as you can from seven random letters arranged in a honeycomb pattern – using the central letter each time. I find "handrail" in the word salad before she does, and ping off a message: "Found the pangram yet?"

A pangram, a word made up of all the letters in the puzzle, is coveted; smug triumph radiates from my SMS. She replies with a curt "No. Quit gloating." Yesterday, she'd been the first to find "mudflat", and taunted me for the seven long and frantic minutes it took before I found the same word. This is sweet revenge.

Judging by Instagram, many people are getting through the lockdown by making enormous quantities of bread. I baked a complicated challah bread. It was fabulous, but the next day, I bought a factory-made abomination that didn't require as much watching as a cranky baby. Cooking continues to offer some consolation but word games have become my Lockdown Lifeline. From Scrabble to cryptic crosswords, I know of no better way to engage your brain and soothe your anxiety than 15 minutes spent messing about with words.

Even better if you have company. Last month saw the first Crossword Tournament From Your Couch, a live-streamed crossword competition where the roughly 1,800 participants agreed not to Google answers to the clues. The South African Scrabble Association and many other board games clubs are holding their first-ever online tournaments. Meanwhile families around the world are reigniting well-honed rivalries over transcontinental games of Pictionary and Hangman. (I know of one family that maintains peace with this rule: "No dictionary-flinging at your brothers and sisters.")

Every word game offers its own particular thrill. Cryptic crosswords attract lateral thinkers, while a well-constructed spelling bee is a test of pattern recognition – every player knows that electric moment when a meaningless jumble of letters suddenly forms itself into a recognisable word.

While tidying, I find newspaper cuttings of old crosswords by my favourite setters – among them, Gridman, the *nom de plume* of CG

Rishikesh, who has set crosswords for the past 50 years, chiefly for the Indian newspaper *The Hindu*, and also Sarah Hayes, who sets cryptic crosswords for the *Guardian* as *Arachne*, for the *Independent* as *Anarche*, and for the *FT* as *Rosa Klebb*.

The real delight of crosswords isn't the rush of solving clue after clue, but the joy of getting to know each setter's sense of humour. I grin at one of Sarah Hayes' most famous clues: "Throw shoe! Bugger invaded Iraq! (6,4)", to which the solution is "George Bush". Another favourite setter, the late Rev John Graham, devised crosswords for *The Times* under the pen name *Araucaria* (the monkey puzzle tree) and for the *FT* as *Cinephile* (an anagram of Chile pine, another name for the same tree). He had a gentle wit – his very first clue as a setter was: "Establishment cut to the bone? (8,5). The answer: "skeleton staff".

It's not just puzzle setters who have distinct personalities. Some Scrabble players are strategists, winning games with the ruthless application of two-letter words from "ai", a three-toed sloth, to "za", a slang word for pizza. Others are dreamers. We squander points for the sheer pleasure of making words such as "threaper", meaning one who argues persistently. I couldn't care less about the win; if I heard my Zs and Ys and use a blank, the joy of making "syzygy", an alignment of three celestial bodies, is worth any number of losses.

Housebound in Delhi, I stay in touch with one group of friends scattered around the world from Australia and Nigeria to the US and Mexico, through favourite crosswords, and with another group over the Spelling Bee. More than Zoom calls, where we share the sameness of each pandemic day, these word games have become our coffee shops, our hangouts.

The other week, my group tackled the daily Spelling Bee challenge, and all went well until the Bee refused to recognise the word "faluda", part of a delicious summer dessert from Iran involving rosemilk ice-cream served over slurpy faluda noodles. This called for an urgent group discussion. Is it possible that Sam Ezersky, associate puzzles editor at the *New York Times*, has never tasted kulfi-faluda? We agree that once this crisis is over, someone must take Sam out for ice-cream. Locked into our homes on three separate continents, we laugh – and together we find the words.

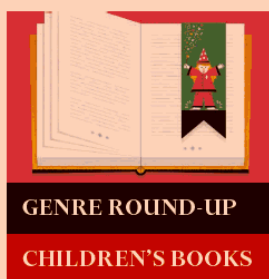
Animal antics

t's 50 years since the publication of *Mog the Forgetful Cat* by the late, lamented Judith Kerr. After issuing a special anniversary edition of that book in February, publisher HarperCollins has promised us a "Summer of Mog". This will include audiobook editions of four Mog titles, read by Kerr's daughter, Tacy Kneale; a celebratory title, *Mog's Birthday*; and a hardback treasury of six classic Mog stories. It all seems – warning: terrible cat pun ahead – quite magnificent.

Animals of every kind, not just cats, feature in several new children's book releases. First off, there's *The Train Mouse* (Andersen Press, £9.99), in which young mouse Nibbles is enjoying a comfortable life with his family inside a rambling old Munich house, until the place is knocked down and a new apartment block built in its place. The pickings get slim, and Nibbles hops on a train to Hamburg, and thence to Switzerland, Paris and, er, Bristol. Along the way he makes friends and has adventures, including joining a circus.

Uwe Timm's pleasant if somewhat old-fashioned tale is illustrated – in his usual wryly appealing style – by fellow German Axel Scheffler, best known for his many collaborations with Julia Donaldson, most notably *The Gruffalo*.

A young mouse is likewise the star of Emer Stamp's *PESTS* (Hodder, £6.99). Stix lives with his grandma and forages happily for food around the flat that a family of "mans" call home. Then an exterminator flushes grandma down the loo and Stix is forced to strike out on his own. He winds up joining *PESTS*, the Peewit Educatorium for Seriously Terrible



By James Lovegrove

Scoundrels, an anarchist training camp run by a pigeon called Dr Krapotkin. There, Stix learns how to cause harmless aggravation and inconvenience to human beings, until Professor Armageddon, a crazed, nihilistic cockroach, injects an element of genuine threat into the proceedings.

Writer/illustrator Stamp brings the same militant, irreverent energy to this book that she did with her *Diary of Pig* series. Those with a scatological sense of humour, which is probably most of her intended readership, will find *Pests* particularly entertaining.

Moving away from mammals, arthropods abound in *Milton the Megastar* (Chicken House, £6.99), a sequel to *Milton the Mighty*. The titular false widow spider is not coping well with the celebrity that has come his way following events in the previous book. All that adulation from fans is going to his head. However, he regains a sense of perspective when his human friend Zoe takes him on a trip to Hawaii, where Milton's adventurer father is attempting to protect a

colony of indigenous happy-face spiders whose forest home is under threat from developers.

Emma Read spins an enjoyable yarn with a strong eco-message and an eminently hissable villain in the form of Bradley O'Hair, a crass, self-aggrandising billionaire property magnate with a bouffant blond coiffure. Hmmm. Now who could that be based on?

Natalie, the human protagonist of *Nat Enough* (Scholastic, £8.99), owns a dog called Treat and a cat called Cat. Canine and feline, though, are bit-part players in her story. Natalie herself is moving up from elementary to middle school, and the transition is hard. Her former best friend no longer wants to have anything to do with her. She feels isolated and rejected by her peers, and moons over handsome classmate Derek, who unfortunately does not seem to know she exists.

All this is pretty standard stuff – the dorky, insecure outsider who

struggles to fit in – but what elevates Maria Scrivan's graphic novel is the refreshing honesty with which it approaches its subject matter. The tone is instructive but not preachy, as Natalie develops her talents as a cartoonist and discovers her individuality, which brings her not only the acceptance of others but, more importantly, self-acceptance.

Scrivan, whose whimsical comic *Half Full* is syndicated to newspapers across the US, renders the highs and heartbreaks of early adolescence straightforwardly and with compassion.

In *Mark Anchovy* (Piccadilly, £6.99) by William Goldsmith, the fish-related name of the title is the pseudonym adopted by Colin Kingsley, a pizza delivery boy with ambitions to become a super sleuth. Colin, who has a photographic memory, is recruited by the Golden Spatula League, a worldwide confederation of caterer detectives, and sent on a risky mission to Rome to spy on Big Alan Fresco, an art thief who may have stolen a valuable portrait by Leonardo Da Vinci, "Girl With a Squirrel". And if all this seems ludicrous... well, it is. Very amusingly so.

Rome is also the setting for *Paolo, Emperor of Rome* (Abrams Books, £12.99), wherein dachshund Paolo escapes the confines of the hair salon where he lives and explores the city. Fighting cats amid the ruins, visiting the opera, rescuing nuns from the Trevi Fountain, earning an audience with the Pope – Paolo does it all in Mac Barnett's romping, cheery picture book. Illustrated in a bold, loose style by Claire Keane, this is an unabashed love letter to the Italian capital and way of life.



Judith Kerr's Mog: 50 this year

The Poem Fridge

By Caroline Bird

I hang up the phone – sorry I'm busy – to continue an old conversation in the mirror. I close my eyes at sunset, picture a previous sunset. So many backward miles to travel, steps to retrace. I dropped something. I might end up in the womb, shouting, 'Has anyone handed in a leather jacket?' My alarm clock is a muttered confession obscured by loud music. I wake up pleading 'Pardon? Say that again?' My toothpaste tastes of morning breath. The future smells like my school-friend's house: incense and Hoover bags, toast and cats. I step out the shower with six-month-old lipstick on my cheek. I haunt my own home, silent but for the buzzing of the fridge with the wine in it, with the secret light no one can see until they open the door.

From *The Air Year* (Carcanet, £9.99)

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Arts

Life&Arts

'The systems we live in are very fragile'

Cate Blanchett | The actor tells Emanuel Levy

why her latest role as a 1970s anti-libber in

'Mrs America' has resonances for the present

Unlike some other film stars, Cate Blanchett has always gone out of her way to avoid being typecast. One of the most versatile and busiest actors working today, she has navigated smoothly from American indies to foreign-language art-house films to mainstream blockbusters and won two Oscars in the process. She has cherished what she calls "mean roles" and "elegant villainesses", as in Kenneth Branagh's *Cinderella*, alongside parts in actioners such as *Thor: Ragnarok*. She even played one facet of Bob Dylan in Todd Haynes's *I'm Not There*. She is, in short, anything but one-dimensional.

This may be the only thing she has in common with her character in the new television series *Mrs America*. Phyllis Schlafly was a loud, brash and fiercely conservative opponent of women's rights, yet she is presented as a complex figure: we see her fighting for acceptance in a political sphere dominated by men, and facing personal struggles within her family. In real life, Schlafly remained vocal and active until her death in 2016, but not widely known outside US conservative circles, and Blanchett had heard of her only "tangentially" before taking on the role.

"I had seen this little old lady in her nineties being trucked out at the tail-end of Trump's [presidential] campaign," Blanchett says on a video call from lockdown. "There was a standing ovation for her, and she seemed to be important and treated with profound respect by the Republican party. Then I saw Trump attending her funeral, and I thought, 'Who is this woman?'"

For Blanchett, it became a personal journey "to try to understand what was so abhorrent to Phyllis and the people who were like-minded around her, what was so terrifying for them about the notion of equality."

Above all, Schlafly is famous for campaigning (successfully) against the ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) of the US Constitution in the

1970s, which aimed to invalidate state and federal laws discriminating against women. This becomes the main focus of the series. "A lot of her achievements — some might say dubious achievements — are that she... single-handedly embedded into the spine of the Republican party the notions of pro-life, pro-family and pro-American."

Taking place between 1971-80, *Mrs America* relates history in a way that feels neither superficial nor didactic — and anything but dated in the era we are living through. "I felt that each day as we were filming, the show became more relevant," says Blanchett. "The language of how we discuss women in the world, whether we spend our time primarily in the home, or whether we try and work and also have a family, or whether we devote ourselves entirely to our career, or any combination thereof, there is still a sense that we have to make this work alone, and that if we fail, it is our responsibility."

Each episode of the show is titled after the woman who is its primary figure, the first being Schlafly. Introduced prancing around in a bathing suit at a political rally, she promotes herself as the embodiment of the "perfect" happy housewife, raising six children with hus-



Cate Blanchett: 'I felt that each day as we were filming, the show became more relevant'

Andrew White/Eyeview

band Frank (played by John Slattery of *Mad Men* fame), a woman that men can easily support. That might mean the occasional light physical touch or dirty joke told in her presence, but Schlafly believes the only way to be taken seriously is to stay in her place and feed on men's fear: that one day their wives might turn against them.

Working in other prominent female figures of the era — Gloria Steinem, Betty Friedan, Bella Abzug — the series, created by Dahvi Waller, explores how women's rights became a battleground in the culture wars that helped bring about the Moral Majority and change for ever the US political landscape.

For Blanchett, it's a multi-faceted story about the numerous ways to be a woman, and the creation of divides that still exist today. "Gloria Steinem said something fascinating: that she never heard a man ask her advice on how to combine marriage and a career. Here we are in 2020, and we are still asked those same questions that our male



counterparts just do not get asked."

During the making of the series, there were many times when she turned to other women on the set and said, "Oh my God, haven't you had this conversation at home? Don't you feel like you are back in our time, and yet we are saying we are in 1974?" For her, the show is "a reverse-engineering process of: how did we get to where we are now?"

There were also personal resonances for Blanchett, whose father died when she was 10. She recalls: "In my high-school years, there was a big question of whether you identified as a feminist or not. I was raised by a single mother, and my grandmother was in the house. My mother had to work, but she didn't identify as a feminist, based on the notion then that if you were feminist, you were anti-family... Interestingly, it was women themselves who helped kill the notion of equal rights, and that influenced the way future generations of women picked it up."

Blanchett, who turns 51 next month, has been married for 23 years, to the Australian playwright and screenwriter Andrew Upton. They have raised three sons and adopted a baby girl in 2015. After years in Australia, they now live in England, in the Sussex countryside.

"We are self-isolating, like everybody, and it's very difficult. We are all in it together, and some of us are in more perilous positions than others," says Blanchett, acknowledging her privileged situation as one of Hollywood's highest-paid actors.

'Here we are in 2020, and we are still asked those same questions that men just don't get asked'

She admits to being "a binge-watcher, getting obsessed with certain series, especially limited series". Recently, the family have been rewatching *The Sopranos* because their youngest son Ignatius hadn't seen it. Foreign films are also high on the menu. She watched Lars von Trier's *The Kingdom* with their oldest son Dashiell John, and, with her husband, revisited Krzysztof Kieslowski's *Dekalog*, "one of my all-time favourite pieces of television". There is only one big screen in the house and communal viewing is encouraged. "It's based on my fond childhood memories, when there were only terrestrial channels, so you tuned in at a certain time and you watched with the entire family."

Soon families may be gathering to binge-watch *Mrs America*, and Blanchett has high expectations for what the show can achieve. "The systems we live in are very fragile, and our show points out the cracks in those systems," she says. "If we have learnt anything from the fights around the ERA, it's that fear-based language and polarising attacks don't progress the conversation at all."

She hopes that "viewers will see the connective tissue between the desires of traditional women and women who are feminist, that there is lot more that unites us than separates us. What happened in the 1970s was this profound schism between women of different ambitions. I hope that *Mrs America* will be a place where a conversation can be reignited around the points of intersections, rather than the points of division."

'Mrs America' is on Hulu in the US and comes to the BBC later in the year

Monster movie

Director Kitty Green talks to *Geoffrey Macnab* about 'The Assistant', her subtle and subversive tale of a young woman working for a Weinstein-like boss

Imagine getting your dream job with a top independent film company and then discovering that your tasks include disinfecting the sofa on which your Harvey Weinstein-ish boss likes to entertain actresses. That is the predicament faced by the hapless protagonist Jane (Julia Garner) in Kitty Green's new film *The Assistant*. Jane gets up when it's still dark to make sure she's first in the office. She cleans, takes out the rubbish, tries to placate her philandering boss's wife, babysits.

The Assistant is a film for the #MeToo era. It is a savage indictment of work practices in a company clearly inspired by those once run by Weinstein, yet it is also subtle and oblique. Rather than revelling in scandalous behaviour, we spend much of the movie staring at Garner's face, often shown in big, mournful close-up, as she sits behind her desk trying to process the Sodom-and-Gomorrah-style goings-on around her.

The Australian director, born in 1984, is an elfin figure with long blonde hair. Speaking on a cold, pre-lockdown morning in Berlin, she says that often when male journalists meet her for an interview, they take one look at her and tell the publicist they will only need a few minutes. Those who have met her before, though, know what a steely and subversive figure she is.

For example, in the 2013 documentary *Ukraine is not a Brothel*, about the radical feminist protest group Femen, Green outed its shadowy "consultant" Victor Svyatski as the mastermind behind the organisation. She revealed that he picked only the prettiest girls because they received more media attention. The revelations didn't go down at all well with either Svyatski or Green's female friends in Femen.

The Assistant may be drama rather than documentary, but Green researched her subject matter just as exhaustively. "I spoke to a lot of people who worked in film production companies and a lot of them reported that it was very isolating and... dehumanising," she says. The film is an attempt to create "an authentic depiction of what people told me their lives were like", she says, adding: "I didn't want it to be completely joyless but maybe it is!"

But she is unapologetic about the sombre mood of the film. "This is the reality of it. It is very mundane, very banal, very ordinary. Abuse is utterly ordinary."

Green's film-making style is precise and understated, the script free of typical Hollywood rhetoric. There are no flashy cuts, no intrusive, melodramatic music. She cites directors such as Jean-Pierre Melville, Robert Bresson and

Chantal Akerman among her main influences. Green's mother, an art teacher, used to bring home VHS copies of her films. Akerman's most famous film, *Jeanne Dielman, 23, quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles* (1975), a detailed, matter-of-fact study of a single mother who works as a prostitute to keep her family going, was a particular epiphany. Green describes *The Assistant* as a "homage" to *Jeanne Dielman*.

Having grown up in Melbourne and spent the early part of her film-making career travelling through Europe, "crashing on couches like all Australians

do", Green moved to the US to make her 2017 documentary *Casting JonBenet*, about the murder of a six-year-old beauty queen, which premiered at Sundance and was picked up by Netflix.

"I kind of stuck around after that," she says. Starting out in Colorado, she later moved to New York to be closer to her producers.

Green explains that she was compelled to make *The Assistant* after spending 10 years on the film-festival circuit, making shorts and documentaries and having many experiences that she felt were very "gendered".



Julia Garner as Jane in Kitty Green's new film 'The Assistant'

"I was getting annoyed and upset that I was not being taken as seriously as my male colleagues, who would get more respect immediately." Some assumed that she depended on male collaborators behind the scenes. "That was making me angry. Making a film is so difficult that I was asking myself: why was I working so hard when nobody would take me seriously at the end of it? There is a lot of that baked into the screenplay." Green never met Weinstein himself. That the growling voice of the boss in *The Assistant* is uncannily similar to that of the disgraced mogul is, she insists, pure coincidence.

Rather than just dramatise workplace malpractice, however, Green wanted to probe the roots of the problem. "We need women in positions of power, which means we need to analyse why they aren't climbing the ladder," she says. "What is preventing them from moving into those positions? That became the focus. I started with a woman with the least power in the organisation, trying to figure why she wasn't climbing."

Garner gives an exceptional performance as the lowly assistant. Her face betrays little obvious emotion but we can read in her expressions a bewilderment and frustration with the office culture around her. In one memorable scene, she meets the company's HR boss

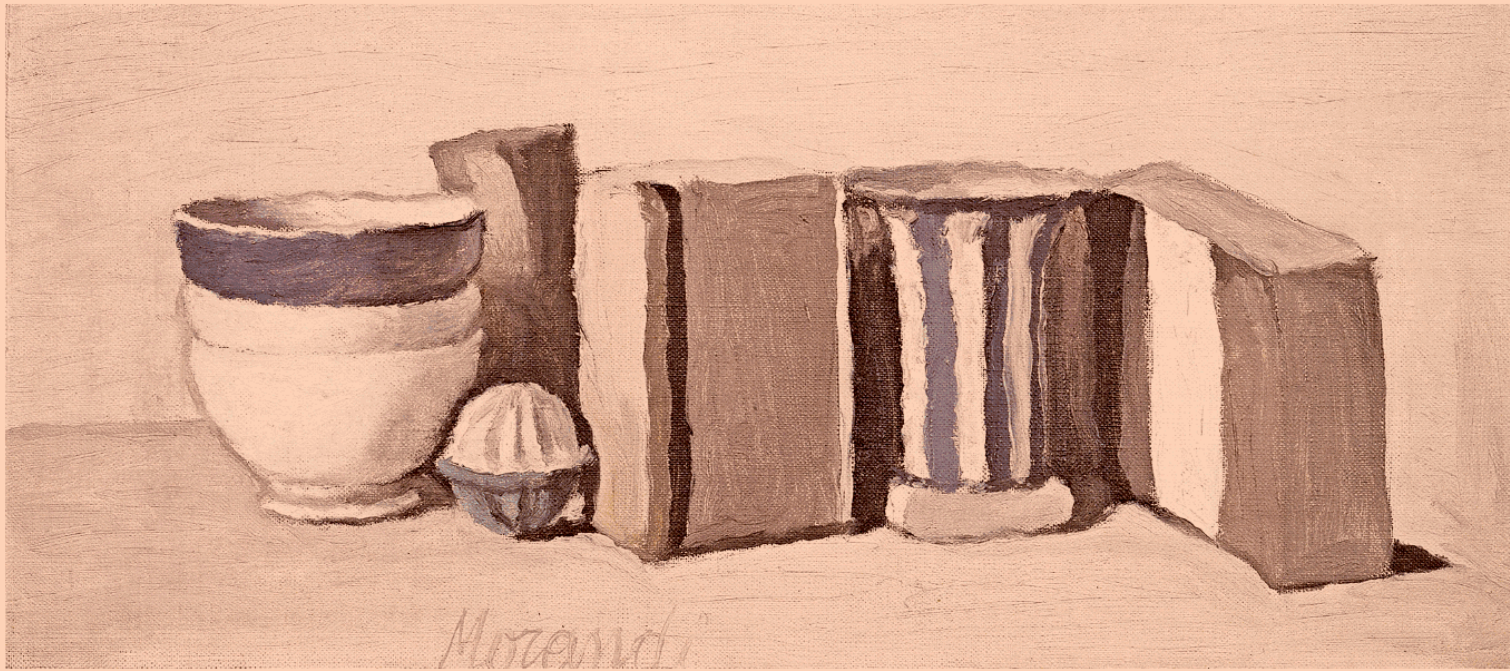
(played by Matthew Macfadyen of HBO's *Succession*), who is both unctuous and supremely unsympathetic.

Jane has relatively few lines and much of the time is engaged in office drudgery, but Garner has an enigmatic charisma that keeps you watching, even during the most humdrum moments. "Her eyes are amazing," Green says of the actress known for television series *Ozark* and *The Americans*. "There is so much going on."

The Assistant may be an exposé of the movie business, but Green is heartened by how warmly it has been received by those outside the industry. "People working in completely different environments like restaurants, modelling agencies and cosmetics can really identify with the character. That has been really surprising. A lot of people are coming up to me after screenings."

Does Green believe the situation has now changed, post-Weinstein, for assistants like the one in her film? "We now have the language to talk about misconduct," she says. "We didn't even know how to describe it before... We also have the spaces, the places we can go if there are concerns. The film is really a period piece because it takes place before we had that language."

'The Assistant' is released digitally on May 1

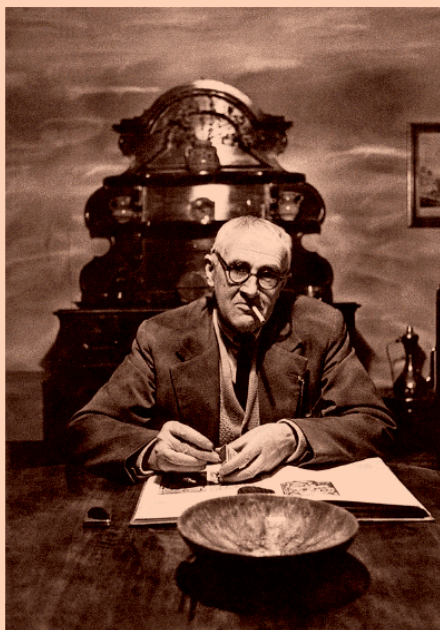


The art of staying in

Giorgio Morandi | The interior world of his apartment was all the inspiration the enigmatic Italian artist needed. *Rachel Spence* on a painter for our own confined times

Below: painter Giorgio Morandi at his Bologna apartment on Via Fondazza in April 1959

Mano De Biasi/Mondadori via Getty Images



The walls of the sitting room will almost always be of clay textured with fine sand. A lustre here would destroy the soft fragile beauty of the feeble light. We delight in the delicate glow... That was novelist Junichiro Tanizaki contemplating the play of light and shadow in a Japanese house – but in his evocation of those bleached, earthy hues, their tones susceptible to the day's passage, he could have been writing about the paintings of Giorgio Morandi.

The Italian artist needed no government mandate to go into lockdown. Born in Bologna in 1890, Morandi rarely left his central Italian hometown, itself shrouded in an air of seclusion thanks to the land-girdled location and plethora of medieval towers and shadowy loggias. Apart from a trip to Switzerland, excursions to the family's summer house at Grizzana and occasional forays within Italy to attend his own exhibitions, Morandi remained within the spartan atelier-cum-apartment on Via Fondazza that he shared with his three sisters, Anna, Dina and Maria Teresa.

His shuttered landscape mapped his internal topography. When Morandi died from lung cancer in 1964, he left behind him some 1,350 oil paintings alongside hundreds of etchings, drawings and watercolours. Although he occasionally strayed into flowers, landscapes and self-portraits, the majority of his images depicted vessels – bottles, pitchers, vases, bowls – which he assembled with meticulous precision on flat surfaces in his workshop.

A painter who once said he hoped his compositions expressed “tranquillity and privacy, moods I have always valued above all else”, he is an ideal companion for those of us now confronted with domestic confinement. How astute, then, of Italian dealer Robilant + Voena to unveil an elegant virtual display devoted to the Bologna artist.

At the exhibition's kernel is a video that centres on a single still life painted by Morandi in 1943. Ostensibly it is a

typically serene offering, showing a bowl placed behind a vase and pitcher, painted in a selection of Morandi's signature pigments: milky coffee, sun-baked terracotta, pearlescent grey.

Yet as the video's producer Carolyn Miner points out in her commentary, this humdrum encounter suppresses a tremor of unease. The pitcher and the vase are placed off-centre, their lack of symmetry gesturing perhaps at a world that is out-of-kilter. Meanwhile, their cool, austere verticality could be that of sentinels intent on guarding the bowl, with its vulnerable open mouth.

Indeed, 1943 proved a troublesome year for the painter. After Mussolini was deposed, the Nazis occupied most of Italy. On July 20 1943, secret police arrived at Via Fondazza and arrested Morandi, whose name they had found on a postcard he had sent to his friend, art historian Carlo Ragghianti, who was a member of the resistance.

At the time, the painter was a professor at the Accademia di Belle Arti of Bologna. Blessed with connections in the ministry of education, he was released within a few days. But Bologna was a dangerous place in this new worst of times. Italian citizens lived in fear of the Gestapo, while the city's identity as a major artery of military transportation made it a target of Allied bombs.

Morandi, therefore, broke his self-imposed lockdown to find a place of greater safety. For the rest of the war he withdrew to stay, probably with friends, at Grizzana in the Apennine hills. In Robilant + Voena's film, there are photographs of the house Morandi would later build for himself at Grizzana. With its plain wooden furniture, absence of ornament, and clean, pastoral light, it has the air of a rural monastery.

When the war ended, Morandi returned to Via Fondazza. In 2009, the building was turned into a museum, Casa Morandi. I visited shortly afterwards, one hot, still, summer day when Bologna, with its skin of medieval red brick, felt claustrophobic as a kiln.



From top: still life in oil on canvas (1951); Morandi's atelier pictured in the 1950s; display in the artist's house

Mondadori; Getty Images; François Halard

To remind myself of this less-than-soothing experience, I took a look this week at images available online. In the atelier, constellations of vessels crowd the surfaces of the floor and tables, many of them still layered in the dust that the painter liked his objects to gather before he immortalised them. Next to the most basic of beds, a battered trilby and faded jacket adorn a dining chair, while jars of crumpled dried flowers gaze across the sun-laddered space at rolls of canvases. With its still light and humble trappings, it could be an illustration for the hermit's

hut of Gaston Bachelard's meditation on home, *The Poetics of Space*: “a universe of meditation and prayer, a universe outside the universe... It possesses the felicity of intense poverty.”

Morandi thrived on impoverishment. Though his view was confined to the courtyard outside his window, he often painted this diminutive plot, with its lonely olive tree. Otherwise he mused on his assemblies of bottles and jars, attempting to ascertain which particular shapes and colours best fulfilled his mysterious requirements. “It takes me weeks to make up my mind which group of bottles will go well with a particular coloured tablecloth,” he once confessed. “And yet often I still go wrong with the spaces. Perhaps I work too fast.”

As the 1950s unfolded, Morandi's paintings ventured towards more abstract terrain as he suspended his vessels against flat, perspectiveless prairies of colour. On view at Robilant + Voena, “Natura Morta” (1961) depicts a round pot on top of two plain, narrow vases alongside a third vessel with a tapered waist, set against a square divided between tones of desert sand and cloudy grey. In their sturdy, fuss-free shapeliness, the objects recall the words of Cézanne, whom Morandi cited as a key influence. Another painter committed to gazing at a single subject – in Cézanne's case, the Provençal peak of Mont Saint-Victoire – the Frenchman once enjoined a fellow artist to “treat nature in terms of the cylinder, sphere and the cone”.

Morandi did not always take kindly to comparison with other artists. In an essay for the magazine *il Libro*, which is also available on Robilant + Voena's website, Italian critic Laura Mattioli recounts that towards the end of Morandi's life, art historian Francesco

The majority of his images depicted vessels – bottles, pitchers, vases – assembled with meticulous precision

Arcangeli wrote a monograph in which he compared the painter to various contemporary peers including the Art Informel movement, the French equivalent of Abstract Expressionism. Morandi rejected the text outright. He was happier with a second critique, penned by Lamberto Vitali, which presented him as an isolated talent.

Morandi's refusal to embrace a collective spirit was reflected in the ambiguity of his politics. Although his wartime difficulties suggest radical sympathies, the reality is much cloudier. There's little doubt that Morandi sympathised with fascism in the 1920s and went on to show with Strapaesa, a conservative group of artists who emphasised local cultural traditions. After the war, the Communist party accused Morandi of apathy in his refusal to take a stand against fascism.

But it's notable that Morandi also refused to join the many Italian artists who submitted to the regime's call for mythical, figurative images that celebrated Italy's imperial glories. His devotion to his vessels, with their intransigent inexpressiveness, speaks of a man who avoided the common road. Or as he put it: “One can travel the world and see nothing. To achieve understanding it is necessary not to see many things but to look hard at what you do see.”

Words to live by, in our new interior world.

robilantvoena.com;
mambo-bologna.org/en/museomorandi;
illibromagazine.com/morandi

Forgotten stories of forbidden music

Exil.arte | An archive in Vienna aims to preserve the musical legacies of Jewish composers and performers who were branded 'degenerate' by the Nazis. By *Richard Fairman*

It was a close shave. In February 1938 the composer Julius Burger, who had been giving concerts in London, decided to return to Vienna with his wife to vote against Hitler's Third Reich in the *Anschluss* election. On a brief stopover in Paris, the Jewish Burger happened to spot a newspaper headline announcing that the Austrian chancellor had conceded to Hitler's demands. Realising what that meant, the couple jumped off the train, abandoning their luggage. That moment almost certainly saved their lives. Five of Burger's brothers were to die in Auschwitz.

It is hard to overstate the devastation that the Nazis wrought upon music in central Europe. Jewish composers and performers dominated musical life there before the war, and their systematic murder or exile led to the destruction of not only a community, but the Austro-German tradition they led.

Many composers – Berthold Goldschmidt, Arnold Schoenberg, Kurt Weill – fled into exile, generally to the US or UK. The less fortunate – Pavel Haas, Hans Krása, Erwin Schulhoff – died in concentration camps. Those who survived often found their lives so disrupted that they were forced into

other careers, their music forgotten.

All had stories that need to be told. At exil.arte, the Centre for Banned Music in Vienna, work is under way to collect the estates of composers, performers and musical academics who were branded “degenerate” by the Nazi regime, and to restore to them the recognition they have long been denied.

It is not too late. Although we are approaching the 75th anniversary of VE Day on May 8, there are still estates – manuscripts, letters, photographs and more – of important figures coming to light. This may be because, as exil.arte says, it is only recently that Austria has started to address the issue. By comparison, the restitution of art works looted by the Nazis has been pursued seriously for 20 years, following the Washington Conference on Holocaust-Era Assets in 1998.

Michael Haas, senior researcher at exil.arte, says of the material: “It is important that it is being returned to central Europe, and to a place where young musicians have immediate access to it so that they can go out and perform the music when they embark on their careers.”

The number of figures affected, and the extent to which they were dispersed,

gives this subject a daunting scale.

“The music itself is very diverse,” says Haas, who is also author of *Forbidden Music: The Jewish Composers Banned by the Nazis*. “We have everything from late romantics like Julius Burger and Egon Lustgarten to the Second Viennese School of serialism, represented by André Singer. We make no distinction between musical genres, so high-end art music rubs shoulders with the cabaret

songs of Anita Bild, a dancer who fled to the UK, where she acted principal-boy parts in pantomimes and went on to work for the BBC. We would be happy to take folk music if it comes our way.”

There is still much work to be done. When exil.arte took in digital scans of the estate of Hans Winterberg it was found to be under a legal embargo until 2031. Another estate was a legacy that had been partially lost during the 1990s



Julius Burger pictured with soprano Victoria de los Angeles at the Metropolitan Opera House in New York during rehearsals for Charles Gounod's 'Faust' in 1953

New York Times/Redux

post-Yugoslavian wars. If funding can be secured, an important advance will also come from creating printed materials for performance from the manuscripts. “One of the problems,” says Haas, “is that the principal players have often deposited their estates in the countries that gave them refuge, and the focus has tended to be on the contributions they made there after the war. The music of the 1920s and 1930s, before they went into exile, so often gets neglected.”

An example is the Ernst Toch collection at the University of California, Los Angeles, where only Toch's music as a Hollywood composer had been catalogued. “In the Weimar years, Toch had been as highly regarded as Paul Hindemith,” says Haas. “But whereas Hindemith, who was a political rather than a ‘racial’ refugee, was able to go to Yale and keep working, Toch needed to earn as much money as possible to get his friends and relations out of Nazi Europe.” He ended up writing soundtracks, yet, Haas adds, “if Hitler hadn't happened, Toch would probably be considered an equal with Hindemith now.”

The building where the exil.arte centre is housed, on the side of Vienna's Konzerthaus, was formerly the Music Academy. Composers such as Erich

Korngold, Joseph Marx and Franz Schreker once climbed these stairs to teach the leading young composers of the next generation.

Visitors to exil.arte will find more than an archive. Its most recent exhibition, *I return to Vienna when I compose*, gave a case-by-case overview of the 26 musical figures whose estates are held at this point. The next exhibition, on superstar duo tenor Jan Kiepura and soprano Marta Eggerth, is expected in October.

Even more important is the mission to bring the music back to life with recitals and new recordings in association with the Gramola label. Composers featured so far include Walter Arlen, Hans Gal, Erwin Schulhoff, Vilem Tausky and Viktor Ullmann.

Haas hopes that exil.arte will reintegrate this music into prewar cultural history. “This is music that was central to European culture prior to the Holocaust,” he says. “It is wonderful that major figures like Korngold and Weill held their place, but it is the tiny people who make up the mosaic. Only when we reinstate them will we all be able to see the whole picture.”

exilarte.org

Arts

Bitter sweet symphonies

Erika Fox | After half a century of starkly modern works the composer is finally winning acclaim, but isn't about to stop, she tells *Andrew Dickson*

At music award ceremonies you expect the names you haven't come across to be youngsters — breakthrough artists, best newcomers. But at the Ivors Composer Awards last December, things were a little upside-down. When the winner of the Lifetime Achievement Award, the contemporary classical composer Erika Fox, was announced, there was as much surprise in the room as applause. I turned to my neighbour, an internationally famous tenor. He shrugged. "Don't know her," he mouthed back.

We weren't alone, it turned out. Contemporary composers are rarely household names, but even by those standards Fox is astonishingly neglected. The first commercial recording of her work wasn't released until last year, when she was 82; she can count performances of her work in the past decade on the fingers of one hand. When Ilan Volkov and the BBC Symphony Orchestra marked Fox's triumph at the Ivors by reviving her searching, interrogative orchestral work *Osen Shomaat* in January, it was the first time it had been heard for 35 years. The concert has yet to be broadcast.

Perched on a sofa in the remote Welsh cottage to which she retreats to compose, Fox admits to being as surprised as anyone. "When I got the email asking if I'd be prepared to accept..." She turns towards me, a faint smile on her lips. "Well, what are you going to say to a thing like that? 'Oh, let me think about it, I'll get back to you?'"

Although it has taken until now for Fox to be rediscovered, the award recognises what is in every sense a lifetime of creativity. One of the earliest of her 52 catalogued works, a piece for cello and oboe completed in 1969, was a homage to the recently murdered Martin Luther King. She has also written tape-based compositions, an epitaph for the rarely heard basset clarinet (whose player is also required to reach for gongs and

drums), enterprising vocal pieces (one is advertised for a soprano "with wide range"), even a puppet opera. It wasn't that she wasn't composing all this time, rather no one seemed to be listening.

"[The modernist composer] Elizabeth Maconchy said that being a composer was a life sentence," Fox says with a shrug. "You just have to do it."

Born in 1936 in Vienna of Hasidic parents — her voice still has a faintly Mittel-european tint — Fox and her family fled to Britain when she was two. She discovered a love for composing as a young child, making up tunes on the piano in a hostel for Jewish refugees in Leeds. By

'I used to think, in a very naive way, that if you did work that was good enough...'

12, she was on a scholarship to the Royal College of Music.

Though Fox says she "hates labels", the sounds of her childhood — the throaty Hasidic singing of her rabbi grandfather and lilting eastern European folk music heard in the family — colour her compositions even now. "I remember giving a talk decades ago, and listening back for the first time, looking at my scores," she says, laughing. "And I thought, good Lord, it's got all these Jewish things in it."

But while her family encouraged these early forays into music, there was no question that Fox would be allowed to develop a career, as a composer or anything else: good Jewish girls were expected to settle down, marry, have babies, all of which Fox dutifully did. Though she has no regrets about having children — the reverse, she emphasises — inwardly she was yearning to have a creative life of her own. In her late twenties she enrolled at Morley College in



Erika Fox, who won the Lifetime Achievement Award at the Ivors Composer Awards last December
Tim Fox

London, mentored by composer Jeremy Dale Roberts, and started all over again. The music poured out: songs, instrumental pieces, chamber works. By the early 1970s, she had started to build up a respectable catalogue and attract the attention of major groups and festivals.

Regardless of Jewish influences, Fox's soundworld feels utterly distinctive — the stark lines of Bartok and Stravinsky clearly left an impression — but she was far braver at exploring the limits of hard-edged high modernism than contemporaries such as Harrison Birtwistle and Peter Maxwell Davies (another reason for her neglect, perhaps). Sometimes the music is astringent; elsewhere it is diaphanous and veiled, recalling composers such as Takemitsu. Melodies scuttle past, never to return; textures glow brightly before fading like spent fireworks. Even so, you are never in doubt of its organic intelligence: somehow, everything makes sense.

In the words of Thomas Adès, who

studied with Fox at the Guildhall School in London, "in Erika's music there's fragmentation, the sense of exile, something shattered or lost, being painstakingly recovered — from memory, from the air". Perhaps she paid a price for being ahead of the curve, he adds: "The times are finally catching up with her."

With family responsibilities, carving out space to compose was always a significant challenge. And despite occasional BBC broadcasts and festival commissions, her career never seemed to develop. Maybe it was that she wasn't good enough at networking, she wonders now. "I used to think, in a very naive way, that if you did work that was good enough..." She tails off. "Well, it's a man's world, even now, isn't it?"

It's not that she's in any way bitter, Fox hastens to add. She couldn't be more thrilled at the recent acclaim. "Oh, it's much, much better that it happens, rather than it not happening at all." She gestures at a sheaf of manuscript paper

on a table. "It's just that, for me, it's come late. I have all the ideas, but you just get tired at this age, I suppose."

She can't be as tired as all that: moments later, she reveals that she has no fewer than three pieces under way — a piano concerto commissioned by the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra, a trumpet solo for the Royal Academy of Music, and a duet for an old friend, the pianist John Tilbury. She's hopeful there'll be more concerts, when the classical music world reawakens after coronavirus; she'd love it if more people recorded her work with the commitment of clarinettist Kate Romano and her Goldfield Ensemble, who were behind the recent CD.

"Music only exists in sound," she says, scrutinising the rainy night outside. "Unless someone plays it and plays it well..." She smiles sweetly. "Well, it doesn't really exist at all, does it?"

'Paths' by Erika Fox is on NME Recordings

Billy boys and bully boys

Billy Elliot | Twenty years on from the film, *Louise Levene* looks at its legacy for ballet

don't want a childhood! I want to be a ballet dancer!" *Billy Elliot*, the feel-good story of a miner's son who bunks off boxing lessons to pursue a life at the barre is 20 years old this year. The scenario by veteran playwright and screenwriter Lee Hall has a simple enough story arc — boy meets ballet; Dad hates ballet; boy wins place at Royal Ballet School. Its characters — the bully-boy brother, the crusty-but-benign ballet teacher — are straight from central casting. But the 1984 miners' strike setting adds grit, and any possible clichés are redeemed by Hall's pitch-perfect dialogue and by 13-year-old debutant Jamie Bell, whose remarkable central performance struck a chord with ballet-minded boys everywhere.

To read much of what has been written about the "Billy Elliot effect" over the past two decades one would think that no boy had ever taken ballet lessons before or that Britain hadn't produced hundreds of male classical dancers. But even if the film's significance is sometimes overstated, its enormous popularity definitely helped to create a shift in the public perception of male dancing. Derek Deane, former Royal Ballet principal and currently artistic director of Shanghai Ballet, agrees that the film was excellent PR for the art form: "It had a big impact because it made people realise how hard it is to succeed, how difficult it is to be a dancer."

Philip Mosley, a dancer with the Royal Ballet and one of Hall's sources when researching the story, remembers the surge in applications for the Royal Ballet School in the wake of the film's success: "For the first time there were as many boys auditioning as girls."

Kathryn Wade, another Royal Ballet School alumna and director of the English National Ballet School when *Billy Elliot* was released, was delighted by the change in attitudes — although she points out that the film wasn't ideal

preparation for a scholarship audition. The scene in which Billy free-associates before a daunting panel of pedagogues is pure fantasy: "You were not invited to dance your own pieces."

Mosley may have been the template for the film's hero but his own father, a Barnsley plumber, was emphatically not the model for Jackie Elliot, Billy's father, a homophobic Neanderthal vehemently opposed to Billy's dancing on the basis that "boys do football". Mosley's father "took out a subscription to *Dancing Times*", his son remembers.

No child could hope to succeed as a ballet dancer — or a champion tennis player or concert pianist, for that matter — without massive parental commitment, but where's the drama in that? Lose the angry dad and you lose the conflict that drives the plot.

One young soloist whose interest in dance was triggered and validated by watching *Billy Elliot*, just as previous generations were inspired by Fred Astaire or Rudolf Nureyev, was 23-year-old soloist Joseph Sissens, now an impressive star-in-waiting at the Royal



Jamie Bell as Billy Elliot, 2000

Ballet. He also experienced some negative parental reaction. "I must have been about five or six years old. Ballet was a bit of a taboo — it was all girls — but the movie solidified the fact that a boy could do it." Sissens' parents were separated and his absent father was aghast at his son's new hobby. "When he first heard I was doing ballet he lost his lid." But his was a lone voice. "I was extremely lucky to have the support of my mum and my sisters."

If there were other heavy-handed fathers in the back stories of the UK's male classicists, Wade never came across them, either as a student or as a teacher. "Parents were always immensely proud of their kids. They were all very, very supportive," she says.

For Sissens, classmates at his junior school in Hertfordshire were less keen. But "it never got physical", he says. "I would say I was teased but I wasn't bullied." Any ragging came to an end when Sissens won a scholarship to Tring Park School for the Performing Arts, becoming a boarder at the age of eight. He laughs when reminded of Billy's famous quote: "I definitely sacrificed a lot. I lost a lot of family time," he admits. "But I definitely had a childhood. It was just a different kind of childhood because I had a dream when I was six..."

Wade, too, is quick to acknowledge the film's legacy: "It was hugely influential. Dancing became more acceptable. The boys actually started to enjoy it as opposed to it just being something you did after school." Edward Watson, a principal at the Royal Ballet and one of Britain's greatest male dancers, was already a soloist when the film was released. He agrees that, "There was a big change around that time — it made boys realise there was a lot of joy in it."

Edward Watson in the Royal Ballet's 'The Metamorphosis' is free to view on the Royal Opera House YouTube channel. roh.org.uk

THE LIFE OF A SONG

AMEN BROTHER

A throwaway piece," is how The Winstons' frontman Richard Lewis Spencer describes "Amen Brother". The instrumental B-side to his band's 1969 hit "Color Him Father" was dashed off in a hurry, loosely based on something the mixed-race R&B band played while backing Curtis Mayfield and The Impressions. Yet this "uneventful" jam is now the most sampled song in history, featuring in 4,271 other songs according to whosampled.com.

What caught the attention of DJs at the birth of hip-hop was the six-second drum break performed in the middle of the song by Gregory "GC" Coleman to "fill time" in the horn-based tune. No one at the recording had any sense that this was a key moment in the history of percussion. Spencer remembers that Coleman "didn't care for it", but knocked it out as required. But the break was loaded deep with what drummers call "pocket": using the sticks a microsecond ahead of or (more commonly) behind the beat for a looser, more funky, organic sound. The addictive genius of Coleman's casual break lay unrecognised for almost two decades, until New York's hip-hop scene picked up on it in the late 1980s. DJs began dropping the beat behind hip-hop sets. Slowed from its original 135bpm (beats per minute), it offered the perfect backdrop for laid-back-but-lively rappers.

Coleman's solo appeared on the first in the revered vinyl series called *Ultimate Breaks and Beats: 25 compilation albums* released from 1986 to 1991 by New York's Street Beat Records featuring drum breaks for DJs.

The first major act to use it were the pioneering female rappers

Salt-N-Pepa (on "I Desire", 1986) who bragged: "The beat is bad/ The beat is pro/ We're gonna bounce this beat all over the place." But it was NWA's seminal track "Straight Outta Compton" that cemented the beat into hip-hop's sidewalk of fame in 1988.

From hip-hop, the drum solo — which had by now become known as the Amen Break — took a sidestep into the British rave scene of the early 1990s where, as DJs such as Grooverider speeded it up to blend hip-hop into house music, it formed the basis of drum & bass and jungle music. You can hear it cut with gunshot sounds on Lennie De Ice's "We Are I.e." (1991), on Aquarius's 1994 "Dolphin Tune" and on The Prodigy's chart-topping "Firestarter" (1996).



The Winstons in 1969

From then on, the Amen Break formed part of British popular culture. It appears alongside the "stinky weather" and "grumpy gnomes" of David Bowie's 1997 song "Little Wonder". It made its way into Britpop via Oasis's "D'You Know What I Mean?". Its waveform began appearing on T-shirts and celebrated in tattoos.

After analysing that waveform, Michael Schneider, author of *A Beginner's Guide to Constructing the Universe: Mathematical Archetypes of Nature, Art and Science*, argued that the shape of Coleman's break matched the ancient Greek beauty standard known as the golden ratio.

And the beat went on. Amy Winehouse made it her own, slowed to a sexy-stoned drag on "You Know I'm No Good" (2006), and it slipped its way into modern electronic dance music via Chase & Status's "Hurt You" (2007).

Meanwhile, in the US, the Winstons had disbanded the same year that "Color Him Father", their only single, won a Grammy Award. Spencer was working in the Washington DC Transit system to support his return to university when he got a call from the UK's Strut Records, asking for a copy of the master recording (to which he owned the rights). He hadn't received a penny. "I felt," he later said, "as if I've been touched somewhere that no one should touch. I felt invaded upon."

Drummer Coleman died penniless and homeless in Atlanta, Georgia, in 2006 — without receiving any royalties from his iconic drum break. In 2015 a DJ in the UK set up a GoFundMe page in Spencer's name as a thank you for the Amen Break. Almost 2,000 people donated about \$26,000 to Spencer. He posted a video of himself on Facebook, holding a giant cheque.

"You guys are the best," he says in the video. "Thank you very, very much. Aaaamen!"

Helen Brown

For more in this series, visit ft.com/life-of-a-song

The Art Market | Virtual

auctions fly; cyber-security warnings; Frieze New York trials augmented reality.

By *Melanie Gerlis*

Regional auction houses in the UK report a surge of interest in their revised online-only sales since the spread of Covid-19 forced us to find more things to do via our computers. At Lyon & Turnbull, headquartered in Edinburgh, a behind-closed-doors sale of decorative arts and design on April 1 recorded nearly 1,400 bidders, double those registered at its equivalent real-life sale last October.

"We took the gamble that there would be a lot of people at home with nothing to do and fewer auctions to participate in, as so many were cancelled or postponed – and it paid off," says Gavin Strang, managing director of Lyon & Turnbull. He conducted the auction from the rostrum in its Edinburgh saleroom via Zoom and Microsoft Teams – with a socially distanced technician to hand.

The increased activity meant that the 654-lot auction took a full 12 hours to complete and also helped several items soar above estimate. Top lot was a bronze cast of George Frampton's Kensington Gardens sculpture of Peter Pan (1911), which sold for £35,000 (with fees, est. £15,000-£20,000). Also selling above estimate were an embroidery of a tabby cat (1935) by May Morris, the daughter of the Pre-Raphaelite artist William Morris, which sold for £10,625 with fees, and a pair of faience (glazed earthenware) vases, c1880, by Théodore Deck for £6,875, with fees. The sale even scored an artist record when a marble panel by the Leith-born sculptor Thomas Whalen (1903-1875) sold for £13,125.

Other auction houses that also report virtual successes since the end of March include London's Forum Auctions, Oxfordshire's armour specialist Antony Cribb and Wallis & Wallis in East Sussex.

As more of the art market moves online, so grows the lingering danger of



Online gamble pays off

cyber crime. The art world was reminded of the risks this week in the revived news that in 2018 hackers tricked the publicly funded Rijksmuseum Twenteh in the Netherlands into sending £2.4m to a bank account in Hong Kong. The museum believed it was paying the money to the right account to buy John Constable's "A View of Hampstead Heath: Child's Hill, Harrow in the Distance" (1824) from London's Dickinson Gallery. In January, a High Court judge dismissed the Dutch museum's claim for damages against the gallery, awarding costs to



Above: 'La triple roue I, from Allegro vivace' by Joan Miró (1981), at Ordovas

Left: one of a pair of faience vases by Théodore Deck (c1880) sold at Lyon & Turnbull

Dickinson; he said the museum could apply to amend its claims against Dickinson if it wished.

Now, notes Adam Prideaux, managing director at the insurance broker Hallett Independent, people are generally much more aware of the red flags that could indicate cyber-security hazards, such as clicking on unsolicited links. But the lockdown situation around the world has increased the risks once more, Prideaux says.

"Everyone is online now, including people who are not used to it. And the art market is still appealing [to fraudsters] as it deals with extraordinary sums of money," he says. He points to an April 8 advisory from the UK's National Cyber Security

Centre. This warns that "an increasing number of malicious cyber actors are exploiting the current Covid-19 pandemic for their own objectives". Scams include phishing for personal information with Covid-19-related subject lines as bait.

Mindful of the times, the gallerist Pilar Ordovas plans an exhibition that she describes as "an ode to seclusion and escapism". Called *The Artist's Room*, it will show works by 10 Modern and contemporary artists that focus on the interior spaces where they work or live (ordovasart.com, from May 4).

The inspiration for the show came from photographs of Henri Matisse reading, writing and drawing on the

walls of his home in Nice, Ordovas says. All the works are made on paper (including photographs) and the earliest piece on display will be Henri Matisse's charcoal "Femme nue couchée", made in Nice in 1924. Other works include lithographs by Joan Miró and Lucian Freud's contemplative etching "The Painter's Doctor" (2006). The majority of the works are for sale, with a price range of \$500,000 to \$1.5m. Ordovas hopes that the exhibition will have "another life" in her London gallery in the future.

As virtual art viewing ups its game a little, Frieze has become the first major art fair to add augmented reality to its Viewing Room, which replaces its New York fair (May 8-15). Using a dedicated app, digital visitors will be able to superimpose works from the 200-plus participating galleries on the walls or floors of their homes. Separate sections, including those dedicated to Latin-descent artists and female artists from Chicago, are among the featured highlights of the now virtual fair.

Goodwill is currently running high towards the Frieze franchise as its organisers have committed to refund 100 per cent of the participation fees and any advance booth-build payments to would-be New York exhibitors. Its first Viewing Room is free for them to join. Art Basel refunded only 75 per cent of the booth fee for its Hong Kong edition in March, though its digital viewing room was also free for the exhibiting galleries.

Jenny Holzer is the latest artist to prove generous in this time of crisis. She is making an edition of 100 prints that feature one of her so-called truism sentences, "ALL THINGS ARE DELICATELY INTERCONNECTED", for sale at \$1,000 each at Hauser & Wirth on April 22, the 50th anniversary of Earth Day. Proceeds will be shared equally between a conservation charity, Art for Acres, and the Covid-19 Solidarity Response Fund for the World Health Organization. "Her words couldn't be more appropriate just now as nature seems to have taken over and we are all more aware of being responsible for each other," says gallery co-founder Iwan Wirth. Earlier this month, gallery committed 10 per cent of all profits from its online exhibitions to the WHO fund. Wirth says it also gave its Art Basel Hong Kong participation fee to an "art for acres" scheme through conserve.org, which equated to the conservation of 3,200 acres of cloud forest in Central America.

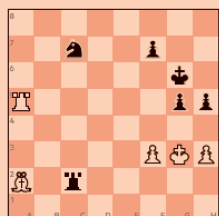
Diversions

CHESS LEONARD BARDEN

Britain's Four Nations Chess League (4NCL) has rapidly responded to the pandemic by setting up a successful online version that provides a model for other nations.

Its entry of 172 teams, far above expectations, has been seeded in five divisions, with matches every Tuesday evening. The top teams have an unfamiliar look since Guildford, whose elite grandmasters dominated for the best part of a decade, are absent. Games are played on

lichess.org, a free site where you can be paired against an opponent in a few seconds. This Tuesday I watched Pia Cramling, the Swede who is probably the strongest western European woman player of all time, in action for the top seeds ChessPlus Alpha. Black in a Sicilian Defence, Cramling outclassed her rival and checkmated at g2 on move 34. Chess fans can watch the global elite in action again this Saturday evening in the



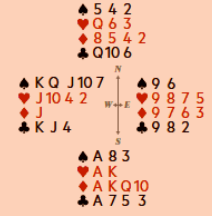
opening round of the Magnus Carlsen Invitational, featuring the world champion and seven of his major rivals.

2363
Tavernier v Grodner, Charleville, France 1952. Can you find White's best choice here? In the game as played, White got it wrong. The position comes from *The Complete Chess Swindler* by David Smerdon (New in Chess, £21.95) an Australian grandmaster's guide to saving lost positions by looking for tactical moves and exploiting opponents' psychological weaknesses. *Solution, back page*

BRIDGE PAUL MENDELSON

3NT will only be made by a good player and, even then, foresight is required to circumvent later problems.

West led K♠ and, from the bidding, West is marked with all the points. There are nine tricks but, with no way to dummy to enjoy ♣♥ and West likely to hold at least five spades, only eight seem winnable. However, South was a good player and he planned an endplay. Declarer ducked trick 1 and won the next, noting



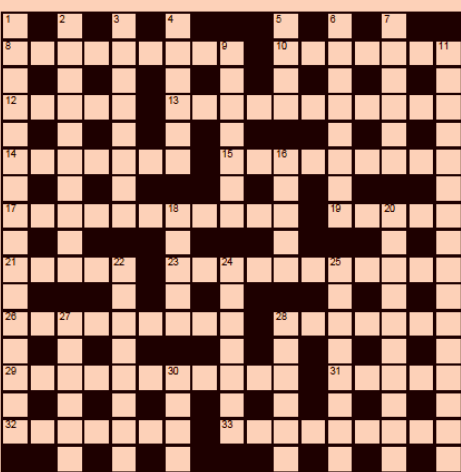
that East held two spades. South cashed ♥AK and ♠AKQ10. He planned to exit by playing his last spade. West would win, take two

Dealer: West N/S Game
North East South West
— — — —
NB NB 3NT 15

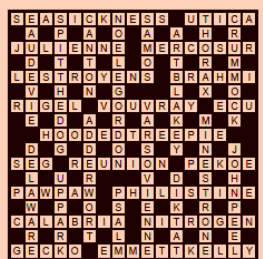
spade tricks, and then either have to lead a heart, or away from K♠. However, in this scenario, dummy may become squeezed: declarer having to discard ♣♥ or bare his ♣♠. He might guess that West has left but, to make life easier, declarer should note West show out on the second round of diamonds and stop playing the suit. Now, South puts West on lead with a spade. West plays her spades, and declarer can discard a diamond and a club from dummy — his menaces in hearts and clubs remain intact. When eliminating side-suits for an endplay, go only as far as to exhaust the hand you are planning to throw in of his supply of the other suits. The other opponent is irrelevant.

POLYMATH 1,070 SET BY BRADMAN

- ACROSS**
- 8 Physical characteristic of Isaac's older son (9)
- 10 Metallic element with atomic number 69 (7)
- 12 The mammal that could be a rorqual (5)
- 13 The birthplace of William Cowper in Hertfordshire (11)
- 14 A fighter sporting a white rose (7)
- 15 The tube of a weapon (3,6)
- 17 An agricultural character "of Ham" invented by J.R.R.Tolkien (6,5)
- 19 Name of a record label founded in 1929 (5)
- 21 A windblown loamy deposit (5)
- 23 The king of Assyria who died in 681BCE (11)
- 26 A bonfire (French) (3,2,4)
- 28 A cordial flavoured with the kernels of peaches and apricots (7)
- 29 Freeing from guilt or blame (11)
- 31 A Russian internment camp for political prisoners (5)
- 32 Extremely wicked (7)
- 33 A fibre-producing organ in eg spiders and silkworms (9)
- DOWN**
- 1 A novel by Samuel Butler exposing Victorian hypocrisy (3,3,2,3,5)
- 2 An old word to denote the quality of something odd (10)
- 3 Related to the adder (8)
- 4 Lord who was once the chairman of the Conservative Party (6)
- 5 The American state in which Mormonism developed (4)
- 6 A Jew's harp (8)
- 7 A monetary unit in Albania worth one-hundredth of a lek (6)
- 9 In classical times a scraper used to clean the skin after bathing (7)
- 11 The part of the brain that is continuous with the spinal cord (7,9)
- 16 A small tree that has overlapping petals (5)
- 18 Plaster of Paris (5)
- 20 A chain of mountains such as the Rockies (10)
- 22 An old word for a group of well-dressed pickpockets (5-3)
- 24 "No laughing matter" in Scotland (3,4)
- 25 The more commonly used Japanese system of symbolic writing (8)
- 27 A mischievous child, often poor and badly dressed (6)
- 28 Word formerly used to describe a non-Christian (6)
- 30 A Gloucester village from which a ferry once crossed the River Severn (4)

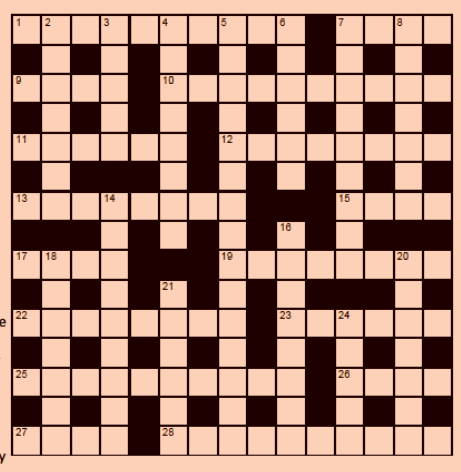


Solution Polymath 1,068



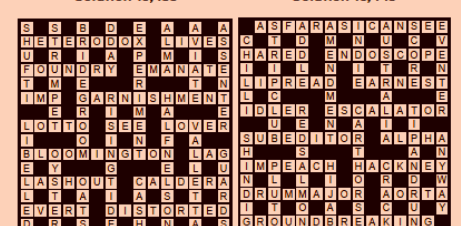
CROSSWORD 16,454 SET BY REDSHANK

- ACROSS**
- 1 Part of film in France tormented mercenary (10)
- 7 Churchwarden perhaps just beat earl (4)
- 9 End time in boat (4)
- 10 Party lackey impresses at authority (10)
- 11 Stray rook follows opposite directions (6)
- 12 Finger impression provided in case of injury (8)
- 13 Rum old man hosts returning groups of soldiers (8)
- 15 Ladies' fingers soak bread, missing odd bits (4)
- 17 Hill-dweller accommodates posh relative (4)
- 19 Break in travel for refreshment (8)
- 22 Jack sliced fruit and chopped vegetable (4,4)
- 23 You and I chase horse hitched to black trap (6)
- 25 After meal, hands in this brown gel if spoiled (6,4)
- 26 Bouncer primarily manages space (4)
- 27 Teetotal bishop repelled old scorer (4)
- 28 Impassive royal couple placed in stern (5-5)
- DOWN**
- 2 The Gunners draw contest for dominance (3,4)
- 3 Bass hiding in European sea plant (5)
- 4 Councillor and nearly all the foreign staff (8)
- 5 Search one country to secure safe access? (11,4)
- 6 Note upcoming cheese agent (6)
- 7 It's fed to cat perhaps for keeping you sweet (5,4)
- 8 Present teacher and revolutionary judge (7)
- 14 Grinding gears tend to become separated (9)
- 16 Insert line in notice for pedant (8)
- 18 It's pointless wasting fluorine gas, for instance (7)
- 20 We split apart, staggering (7)
- 21 Manage transport at university (4,2)
- 24 Edited UK-Arab article omitted religious coverage (5)



Solution 16,453

Solution 16,443



Crossword competitions suspended
Dear readers — we have suspended the Crossword and Polymath competitions while our editors work from home. We hope you continue to enjoy completing them until normal newsroom services resume.

Jotter pad

Spectrum

Life&Arts

LONG READS | INTERVIEWS | IDEAS



Why we fail to prepare for disasters

Many catastrophes are all too predictable, yet again and again we do nothing to get ready for them. What drives this inaction, and will it ever change? *Tim Harford* investigates

You can't say that nobody saw it coming. For years, people had warned that New Orleans was vulnerable. The *Houston Chronicle* reported that 250,000 people would be stranded if a major hurricane struck, with the low-lying city left 20ft underwater.

New Orleans' *Times-Picayune* noted the inadequacy of the levees. In 2004, *National Geographic* vividly described a scenario in which 50,000 people drowned. The Red Cross feared a similar death toll.

Even FEMA, the Federal Emergency Management Agency, was alert: in 2001, it had stated that a major hurricane hitting New Orleans was one of the three likeliest catastrophes facing the US.

Now the disaster scenario was becoming a reality. A 140mph hurricane was heading directly towards the city. More than 1m residents were warned to evacuate. *USA Today* warned of "a modern Atlantis", explaining that the hurricane "could overwhelm New Orleans with up to 20ft of filthy, chemical-polluted water".

The city's mayor, Ray Nagin, begged people to get away. He was reluctant to make evacuation mandatory because more than 100,000 people had no cars and no way of leaving. The roads out were jammed, anyway. Thousands of visiting conference delegates were stranded; the airport had been closed.

There were no emergency shelters. Nagin mooted using a local stadium, the Louisiana Superdome, as a temporary refuge — but the Superdome was not necessarily hurricane-proof and Nagin was warned that it wasn't equipped to be a shelter.

But then, the storm turned aside. It was September 2004, and New Orleans had been spared. Hurricane Ivan had provided the city, and the nation, with a vivid warning. It had demonstrated the need to prepare, urgently and on a dozen different fronts, for the next hurricane.

"In early 2005, emergency officials were under no illusions about the risks New Orleans faced," explain Howard Kunreuther and Robert Meyer in their book *The Ostrich Paradox*. But the authorities did not act swiftly or decisively enough.

Eleven months later, Hurricane Katrina drowned the city — and many hundreds of its residents. As predicted, citizens had been unable or unwilling to leave; levees had been breached in more than 50 places; the Superdome had been an inadequate shelter.

Surely, with such a clear warning, New Orleans should have been better prepared to withstand Hurricane Katrina? It's easily said. But as the new coronavirus sweeps the globe, killing thousands more people every day, we are now realising that New Orleans is not the only place that did not prepare for a predictable catastrophe.

In 2003, the *Harvard Business Review* published an article titled "Predictable Surprises: The Disasters You Should Have Seen Coming". The authors, Max Bazerman and Michael Watkins, both business school professors, followed up with a book of the same title.

Bazerman and Watkins argued that while the world is an unpredictable place, unpredictability is often not the problem. The problem is that faced with clear risks, we still fail to act.

For Watkins, the coronavirus pandemic is the ultimate predictable surprise. "It's not like this is some new issue," he says, before sending over the notes for a pandemic response exercise that he ran at Harvard University.

It's eerily prescient: a shortage of masks; a scramble for social distance; university leaders succumbing to the illness. The date on the document is October 12 2002. We've been thinking about pandemics for a long time.

Other warnings have been more prominent. In 2015, Bill Gates gave a TED talk called "The next outbreak? We're not ready"; 2.5m people had watched it by the end of 2019. In 2018, the science journalist Ed Yong wrote a piece in *The Atlantic* titled "The Next Plague Is Coming. Is America Ready?" Now we know the answer, and it wasn't just the Americans who were unprepared.

Officialdom had also been sounding the alarm. The World Health Organization and the World Bank had convened the Global Preparedness Monitoring Board, chaired by Elhadj As Sy of the Red Cross and Gro Harlem Brundtland, a former director of the WHO.

The GPMB published a report in October warning of "a cycle of panic and neglect" and calling for better preparation for "managing the fallout of a high-impact respiratory pathogen". It noted that a pandemic "akin to the scale and virulence of the one in 1918 would cost the modern economy \$3tn".

Alongside these authoritative warnings were the near misses, the direct parallels to Hurricane Ivan: Sars in 2003; two dangerous influenza epidemics, H5N1 in 2006 and H1N1 in 2009; Ebola in 2013; and Mers in 2015. Each

Illustrations by Sébastien Thibault

deadly outbreak sparked brief and justifiable alarm, followed by a collective shrug of the shoulders.

It is understandable that we have too few doctors, nurses and hospital beds to cope with a pandemic: spare doctors are expensive. It is less clear why we have so few masks, are so unprepared to carry out widespread testing and didn't do more to develop coronavirus vaccines after the Sars epidemic of 2003, which involved a strain related to the current outbreak. (There was a flurry of activity, but interest waned after 2004.)

We were warned, both by the experts and by reality. Yet on most fronts, we were still caught unprepared. Why?

Wilful blindness is not confined to those in power. The rest of us should acknowledge that we too struggled to grasp what was happening as quickly as we should.

I include myself. In mid-February, I interviewed an epidemiologist, Dr Nathalie MacDermott of King's College London, who said it would likely prove impossible to contain the new coronavirus, in which case it might well infect more than half the world's population. Her best guess of the fatality rate at the time was a little under one per cent.

I nodded, believed her, did the maths in my head — 50m dead — and went about my business. I did not sell my shares. I did not buy masks. I didn't even stock up on spaghetti.

The step between recognising the problem and taking action was simply too great. Nor did the broadcast of my radio interview with MacDermott on the BBC seem to spark much in the way of disaster planning.

Psychologists describe this inaction in the face of danger as *normalcy bias* or *negative panic*. In the face of catastro-

phe, from the destruction of Pompeii in AD79 to the September 11 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center, people have often been slow to recognise the danger and confused about how to respond. So they do nothing, until it is too late.

Part of the problem may simply be that we get our cues from others. In a famous experiment conducted in the late 1960s, the psychologists Bibb Latané and John Darley pumped smoke into a room in which their subjects were filling in a questionnaire.

When the subject was sitting alone, he or she tended to note the smoke and calmly leave to report it. When subjects were in a group of three, they were much less likely to react: each person remained passive, reassured by the passivity of the others.

As the new coronavirus spread, social cues influenced our behaviour in a similar way. Harrowing reports from China

'While the world is an unpredictable place, unpredictability is often not the problem. The problem is that faced with clear risks, we still fail to act'

made little impact, even when it became clear that the virus had gone global.

We could see the metaphorical smoke pouring out of the ventilation shaft, and yet we could also see our fellow citizens acting as though nothing was wrong: no stockpiling, no self-distancing, no Wuhan-shake greetings. Then, when the social cues finally came, we all changed our behaviour at once. At that moment, not a roll of toilet paper was to be found.

Normalcy bias and the herd instinct are not the only cognitive shortcuts that lead us astray. Another is *optimism bias*. Psychologists have known for half a century that people tend to be unreasonably

optimistic about their chances of being the victim of a crime, a car accident or a disease but, in 1980, the psychologist Neil Weinstein sharpened the question. Was it a case of optimism in general, a feeling that bad things rarely happened to anyone? Or perhaps it was a more egotistical optimism: a sense that while bad things happen, they don't happen to me.

Weinstein asked more than 250 students to compare themselves to other students. They were asked to ponder pleasant prospects such as a good job or a long life, and vivid risks such as an early heart attack or venereal disease. Overwhelmingly, the students felt that good things were likely to happen to them, while unpleasant fates awaited their peers.

Meyer's research, set out in *The Ostrich Paradox*, shows this effect in action as Hurricane Sandy loomed in 2012. He found that coastal residents were well aware of the risks of the storm; they expected even more damage than professional meteorologists did. But they were relaxed, confident that it would be other people who suffered.

While I realise some people are paranoid about catching Covid-19, it's egotistical optimism that I see in myself. Although I know that millions of people in the UK will catch this disease, my gut instinct, against all logic, is that I won't be one of them.

Meyer points out that such egotistical optimism is particularly pernicious in the case of an infectious disease. A world full of people with the same instinct is a world full of disease vectors.

I take precautions partly because of social pressure and partly because, intellectually, I know they are necessary. But my survival instinct just isn't doing the job, because I simply do not feel my survival is at stake.

The fact that the epidemic started in China, among ethnically Asian people, can only have deepened the sense of personal invulnerability in the west. As epidemiologist Neil Ferguson told the FT: "What had happened in China was a long way away, and it takes a certain type of person to take on board that this might actually happen here."

The virus started to feel real to Europeans only when Europeans were suffering. Logically, it was always clear that the disease could strike middle-class people who enjoy skiing holidays in Italy; emotionally, we seemed unable to grasp that fact until it was too late.

A fourth problem, highlighted by Meyer's co-author Kunreuther, is what we might call *exponential myopia*. We find exponential growth counterintuitive to the point of being baffling — we tend to think of it as a shorthand for "fast". An epidemic that doubles in size every three days will turn one case into a

New Orleans in 2005, when Hurricane Katrina left parts of the city 12ft underwater
Getty Images



Continued on page 15

The Covid conspiracies



Simon Kuper

Parting shot

Every pandemic generates conspiracy theories. Depending on which one you believe, the coronavirus is a bioweapon created by China, or Big Pharma, or American scientists, or it's caused by 5G technology, or it doesn't exist, just a "hoax" made up by Donald Trump's enemies. Conspiracy theorists also warn that any future "vaccine" will be a trick by governments to subjugate populations. These false beliefs are deeply consequential. They will make it harder to end this pandemic with a vaccine. They also risk making our politics even more dysfunctional.

The modern case study of pandemics and conspiracy theories is Aids. In 1983, a small Indian newspaper, the Patriot, published an anonymous letter headlined "Aids may invade India: Mystery disease caused by US experiments". The letter, supposedly written by a "well-known American scientist and anthropologist", blamed Aids on "the Pentagon's experiments to develop... biological weapons" at an army research facility at Fort Detrick, Maryland. The letter was almost certainly authored by the KGB, which had helped create the Patriot as a vehicle for Soviet disinformation, writes Thomas Boghardt of the US Army Center of Military History.

Soon the East German "Stasi" secret service took up the anti-American conspiracy theory. "Useful idiots" around the world picked it up. By late 1987, the bogus story had appeared in

media in 80 countries (including Britain's Daily Telegraph and Channel 4), reports Boghardt. It had a lasting impact. In 2005, the Rand Corporation and Oregon State University found that nearly half of African-Americans believed Aids was "man-made".

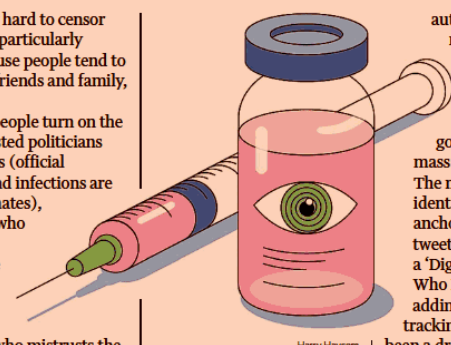
We're back in that territory now. A month ago, 29 per cent of Americans told the Pew Research Center that the coronavirus was created in a lab (while another 25 per cent weren't sure). No wonder, because the virus is the perfect generator of conspiracy theories. It's literally an invisible enemy, points out Catherine Fieschi, founder of the research group Counterpoint. She says: "It's not very satisfying to blame the virus. Instead of a virus that you can't see, you blame a 5G tower that you can see." She adds that blaming it on a combination of China, Huawei and 5G is "the equivalent of one of those dreams you wouldn't take to your psychoanalyst because it's so banal".

Today's climate is ideal for conspiracy theories, says Hugo Drochon, a political theorist at Nottingham university in the UK. We're living through a moment of fear in an era of mistrust. Unprecedented numbers of people are currently alone, a state that makes them more susceptible to conspiracy theories. They have been forced to stay at home by governments, are losing their livelihoods and are spending hours on social media, where conspiracy theories run rife, even if tech platforms

are now finally trying hard to censor them. WhatsApp is a particularly powerful vector because people tend to trust messages from friends and family, says Drochon.

Meanwhile, when people turn on the news, they see distrusted politicians reciting false numbers (official statistics on deaths and infections are almost all underestimates), flanked by scientists who can't make up their minds. One week, the authorities say there's no problem; the next, we're all locked up. Someone who mistrusts the authorities will also mistrust their instructions to change behaviour. We saw this during the Aids epidemic, when many South Africans and Americans who believed conspiracy theories about the virus continued having unprotected sex and didn't get tested or take antiretroviral drugs, writes Nicoli Nattrass in *The AIDS Conspiracy*.

Most epidemiologists agree on the best path out of this pandemic: first, tracking the virus by monitoring people's locations through their phones; later, a vaccine. But both these initiatives risk hitting a wall of mistrust. Even before the pandemic, there were well-founded fears of invasion of privacy (the characteristic business model of our time) as well as unfounded fears of vaccinations (always pushed by Russia). Trump himself has linked vaccines with



Harry Haysom

Unprecedented numbers of people are currently alone, making them more susceptible

autism. Italy abolished mandatory vaccinations for children in 2018.

Now conspiracy theorists are warning that a vaccine against Covid-19 fits into a government master plan for mass surveillance or enslavement. The master puppeteer is often identified as Bill Gates. Fox News anchor Laura Ingraham quoted a tweet that said, "Bill Gates Calls for a 'Digital Certificate' to Identify Who Received Covid-19 Vaccine", adding her comment: "Digitally tracking Americans' every move has been a dream of the globalists for years. This health crisis is the perfect vehicle for them to push this."

The ground for such thinking will only get more fertile. Fieschi warns: "We'll look back on this period and think it was the last period of calm, because we are going to get an economic crisis and then a social crisis."

Imagine that a vaccine becomes available in 18 months. Many people will have fallen into atomised existences, either unemployed or in early retirement. Growing numbers will rate their own lives as failures, an attitude that predicts belief in conspiracy theories, says French think-tank the Jean Jaures Foundation. People will be more dependent on government yet simultaneously more suspicious of it. Good luck vaccinating a distrustful world.

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Continued from page 14

thousand within a month — and into a million within two months if the growth does not slow.

Donald Trump's boast, on March 9, that there had been only 22 deaths in the US, was ill-judged in light of what we know about exponential growth, but he is hardly the only person to fail to grasp this point.

In 1975, the psychologists William Wagenaar and Sabato Sagaria found that when asked to forecast an exponential process, people often underestimated by a factor of 10. The process in that study was much slower than this epidemic, doubling in 10 months rather than a few days. No wonder we find ourselves overtaken by events.

Finally, there's our seemingly limitless capacity for wishful thinking. In a complex world, we are surrounded by contradictory clues and differing opinions.

We can and do seize upon whatever happens to support the conclusions we wish to reach — whether it's that the virus is being spread by 5G networks, is a hoax dreamt up by "the Dems" or is no worse than the flu.

Both Meyer and Watkins made an observation that surprised me: previous near misses such as Sars or Hurricane Ivan don't necessarily help citizens prepare. It is all too easy for us to draw the wrong lesson, which is that the

'Logically, it was always clear that the disease could strike middle-class people who enjoy skiing holidays in Italy; emotionally, we seemed unable to grasp that fact until it was too late'



authorities have it under control. We were fine before and we'll be fine this time.

This, then, is why you and I did not see this coming: we couldn't grasp the scale of the threat; we took complacent cues from each other, rather than digesting the logic of the reports from China and Italy; we retained a sunny optimism that no matter how bad things got, we personally would escape harm; we could not grasp what an exponentially growing epidemic really means; and our wishful thinking pushed us to look for reasons to ignore the danger.

The true failure, however, surely lies with our leaders. We are humble folk, minding our own business; their business should be safeguarding our welfare, advised by expert specialists.

You or I could hardly be expected to read Gro Harlem Brundtland's October Global Preparedness Monitoring Board report, and if we did, it is not clear what action we could really take. Surely every government should have someone who is paying attention to such things?

Margaret Heffernan, the author of *Uncharted*, warns that the same mental failings that blind us to certain risks can do the same to our leaders.

"We hang around with people like ourselves and if they're not fussed, we're not fussed," she says. "Gro Harlem Brundtland lives inside a global health institution, so she cares. Most politicians don't."

While politicians have access to the best advice, they may not feel obliged to take experts seriously. Powerful people, after all, feel sheltered from many everyday concerns.

Heffernan argues that this sense of distance between the powerful and the problem shaped the awful response to Hurricane Katrina.

Leaked emails show the response of Michael Brown, then the director of Fema. One subordinate wrote: "Sir, I know that you know the situation is past critical. Here some things you might not know. Hotels are kicking people out, thousands gathering in the streets with no food or water... dying patients at the DMAT tent being medivac. Estimates are many will die within hours..."

Brown's response, in its entirety, was: "Thanks for update. Anything specific I need to do or tweak?"

That's a sense of distance and personal impunity distilled to its purest form.

Sometimes, of course, the feeling of invulnerability is an illusion: in early March, the UK prime minister Boris Johnson jovially declared that people would be "pleased to know" that he

Healthcare workers treat coronavirus patients in Italy — Reuters



was shaking hands with everybody at a hospital tending to patients with coronavirus, and inviting people to make their own decisions about such matters.

It was a shamefully irresponsible thing to say — but it also spoke volumes about his misplaced intuition that he could come to no harm. Within weeks, the story of Johnson had become a classical tragedy, the hero laid low by his own larger-than-life qualities.

We should acknowledge that even foreseeable problems can be inherently hard to prepare for. A pandemic, for example, is predictable only in broad outline. The specifics are unknowable. "What disease? When? Where?" says Heffernan. "It's inherently unpredictable."

The UK, for example, ran a pandemic planning exercise in October 2016, dubbed "Exercise Cygnus". That forethought is admirable, but also highlights the problem: Cygnus postulated a flu pandemic, perhaps a strain of the H1N1 virus that killed tens of thousands in 2009, and many millions in 1918.

Covid-19 is caused by a coronavirus instead, a relative of the Sars-Cov strain from the 2003 outbreak. Some of the implications are the same: we should stockpile personal protective equipment. Some, such as the danger of flu to young children, are different.

In any case, those implications seem broadly to have been ignored.

"We learnt what would help, but did not necessarily implement those lessons," wrote Professor Ian Boyd in Nature in March. Boyd had been a senior scientific adviser to the UK government at the time. "The assessment, in many sectors of government, was

that the resulting medicine [in terms of policy] was so strong that it would be spat out."

Being fully prepared would have required diverting enormous sums from the everyday requirements of a medical system that was already struggling to cope with the nation's needs.

The UK's National Health Service was short of staff before the crisis began, seems to have had woefully inadequate stores of protective equipment for doctors and nurses, and has long pursued a strategy of minimising the use of hospital beds.

It's this quest for efficiency above all else — in the NHS, and modern organisations in general — that leaves us vulnerable. The financial crisis taught us

'The financial crisis taught us that banks needed much bigger buffers, but few people carried the lesson over to other institutions, such as hospitals'

that banks needed much bigger buffers, but few carried the lesson over to other institutions, such as hospitals.

"On a good day, having 100 per cent of your intensive care beds in use looks efficient. The day a pandemic strikes is the day you realise the folly of efficiency. You've got to have a margin," says Heffernan.

These margins are hard to maintain, though. In 2006, Arnold Schwarzenegger — then governor of California — announced an investment of hundreds of millions of dollars in medical supplies and mobile hospitals to deal with earthquakes, fires and particularly pandemics.

According to the Los Angeles Times, emergency response teams would have access to a stockpile including "50m N95 respirators, 2,400 portable ventilators and kits to set up 21,000 additional patient beds wherever they were needed".

It was impressive. But after a brutal recession, Schwarzenegger's successor, Jerry Brown, cut the funding for the scheme, and the stockpile is nowhere to be found.

Brown isn't the only one to look for something to cut when funds are tight. Managers everywhere have long been promoted on their ability to save money in the short term.

I spoke to a friend of mine, a senior NHS consultant who had contracted Covid-19 as he tended his patients. Recovering in self-isolation, he reminisced about the days that he was told to find cuts of five to 10 per cent — and the fact that his hospital was no longer providing coffee for staff meetings as a cost-saving exercise.

That seems like a memo from another era — but it was just a few weeks ago. As the cost-saving measures were being introduced in the UK, Italians had started to die.

The pandemic has offered us few easy choices so far. Nor are there many easy answers to the general problem of preparing for predictable catastrophes. It is too tempting to look at a near miss like Hurricane Ivan or Sars and conclude that since the worst did not happen then, the worst will not happen in the future.

It is tempting, too, to fight the last war: we built up reserves in banking after the financial crisis, but we did not pay attention to reserve capacity in health, vaccine production and social care.

Preparedness is possible. Heffernan

points to Singapore, a tiny country with front-line experience of Sars, acutely aware of its geographical vulnerability.

"The foresight unit in Singapore is the best I've ever encountered," she says. "There are serious people working through very serious scenarios, and there's a diversity of thinking styles and disciplines."

Serious scenarios are useful, but as the UK's Exercise Cygnus demonstrated, serious scenarios are no use if they are not taken seriously. That means spending money on research that may never pay off, or on emergency capacity that may never be used. It is not easy to justify such investments with the day-to-day logic of efficiency.

Singapore isn't the only place to have prepared. Almost four years ago, philanthropists, governments and foundations created the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations. Cepi's mission is to support and develop technologies and systems that could create vaccines more quickly.

While the world chafes at the idea that a vaccine for the new coronavirus might take more than a year to deploy, such a timeline would have been unthinkable fast in the face of earlier epidemics. If such a vaccine does arrive within a year — there is no guarantee it will arrive at all — that will be thanks to the likes of Cepi.

Still, we are left wondering what might have been if Cepi had existed just a few years earlier.

In October 2019, for example, it started funding vaccine "platform" technologies to enable a more agile, rapid response to what it called "Disease X... a rapidly moving, highly lethal pandemic of a respiratory pathogen killing 50m to 80m people and wiping out nearly 5 per cent of the world's economy". That's preparedness; alas Disease X may have arrived just a little too soon for the preparedness to bear fruit.

And what of New Orleans? In the summer of 2017, it was under water again. A vast and expensive system of pumps had been installed, but the system was patchy, undersupplied with power and unable to cope with several weeks of persistent rain. It does not inspire confidence for what will happen if a big hurricane does strike.

Meyer says that while the city has learnt a lot about preparation, "Katrina was not close to the worst-case scenario for New Orleans, which is a full category-five storm hitting just east of the city".

The same may be true of the pandemic. Because Covid-19 has spread much faster than HIV and is more dangerous than the flu, it is easy to imagine that this is as bad as it is possible to get. It isn't.

Perhaps this pandemic, like the financial crisis, is a challenge that should make us think laterally, applying the lessons we learn to other dangers, from bioterrorism to climate change.

Or perhaps the threat really is a perfectly predictable surprise: another virus, just like this one, but worse. Imagine an illness as contagious as measles and as virulent as Ebola, a disease that disproportionately kills children rather than the elderly.

What if we're thinking about this the wrong way? What if instead of seeing Sars as the warning for Covid-19, we should see Covid-19 itself as the warning?

Next time, will we be better prepared?

Tim Harford is a senior FT columnist and the presenter of the "Cautionary Tales" podcast

Spectrum

Michael Stern was talking — he talks a lot — but I was not really listening. He may have been going on about the white onyx bathroom floors. Or perhaps it was the copper roof that was restored with materials from the original 1925 supplier. “I geek out on that stuff. I think it’s supercool,” Stern had confessed to me. Or maybe it was the mind-boggling complexity of building an impossibly slender, 1,421ft tower in the middle of Manhattan, threaded like a needle through a historic landmark?

I could not hear him because I was in a trance, mesmerised by a singular view of Central Park. It hit me just as I turned right after stepping from the elevator on the 43rd floor: through floor-to-ceiling glass windows was an uninterrupted and perfectly centred vista of Frederick Law Olmsted’s grand creation.

It was thrilling. I felt as though I had transcended the maw of the city and the park had been rolled out like a fine tapestry before me. Eventually, my dominion over it felt a bit obscene. From my perch, it seemed I might plunge like a high diver down in to the Onassis Reservoir as if it were my backyard pool.

It was early March and I had joined Stern for a tour of 111 West 57th, arguably the most dazzling of a new clique of spiny residential towers at the edge of the park that reshape the city’s skyline. Known as “supertalls”, they are engineering marvels that could not have even been built a decade ago.

They are also monuments to an era when billionaires ruled the Earth, and Russian oligarchs, Chinese princelings, Middle East sheikhs and western hedge fund managers poured money into Manhattan and central London in search of lavish apartments that doubled as safe-deposit boxes.

When Stern and his partners broke ground on their tower in 2014, the market for “luxury apartments” in New York City had become so overheated that the term had ceased to have much meaning for units that ranged in price from a few million dollars to tens of millions. Demand was such that Stern would sell out a building based on a plan and a showroom.

That is no longer the case — even before the coronavirus pandemic. For the past few years, buyers have taken their time, with the confidence that merchandise would not vanish if they waited, and that suddenly pliable brokers would only sweeten the deal.

That would seem ominous for 111 West 57th, which is now close to completion after years of delays and legal bloodletting among its backers. Its units are priced from \$17m to more than \$50m apiece. Sales have been slow.

Still, when I got around to peppering Stern with questions about the weak market, he swatted them away. His tower, with just 46 full-floor apartments — each with its own claim on that extraordinary view — was not subject to the usual market forces, he explained.

Nor, supposedly, were his buyers. “I don’t know that the barometers you use for the general market really apply here. This isn’t that,” he told me in a living room made to look like a billionaire’s model residence. A bottle of champagne was resting in a silver ice bucket on an end table — presumably because billionaires come home each evening and toast the good life.

Neither of us then realised a novel virus that had originated in central China was swirling through the city outside. A market slide that was under way would accelerate in the coming days into a full-blown calamity. We were hurtling into another era — one with its own dangers and assumptions — and we did not even know it.

Michael Stern is currently the most intriguing of that unique tribe of brash, visionary — and occasionally disreputable — men who have built the skyscrapers of New York. We call them developers. Stern is just 40. But over the past decade he has taken his place alongside the heavyweights by putting up a series of buildings that have been commercial and critical successes. New York developers possess diverse talents.

Some are brutally economical, à la Fred Trump. Some are showmen, like his son, the president. There are buccaneers who conjure beauty at the edge of bankruptcy, like the legendary Harry Macklowe. Some excel at the dark arts of securing zoning permits. Others can game tax benefits. Many are talented liars and seasoned litigants.

Stern, who never attended university, prides himself on his “nuts and bolts” knowledge of construction. Yet he also has a taste and sensibility that can make an architect’s pulse quicken. “He’s commissioned some very good architecture,” says Daniel Kaplan, the senior partner at FXCollaborative, the New York architecture firm. “The thing that’s really interesting about him is that all the things people say you can’t do — or you can’t do for the money — he says, ‘Forget it!’”

Part of the thrill of following Stern is not only watching to see what he will build next but whether he will fall flat. “He’s one of those people who could crash and burn,” says another architect. One person who has worked with Stern suspects that the young developer is willing to risk everything for glory. “He



In a city of epic skyscrapers and egos, this 40-year-old stands out as the developer of some of New York’s most audacious buildings. But will his most ambitious project yet survive coronavirus? *Joshua Chaffin reports*

wants to be great. He wants to be Harry Macklowe, and he’s willing to go bankrupt a few times along the way.”

Stern has piled up lawsuits. Two years ago, 111 West 57th was briefly pushed into foreclosure by one of its investors. A one-time partner has accused him of forging his signature on loan documents. The young developer denies this and cheerfully waves it all away. “Litigation is inevitable in this business,” he told me. “If you’re not being sued by people, you’re not doing enough work.”

Stern grew up in an Orthodox Jewish enclave on Long Island, the son of an auto-shop owner and nurse, and was a middling student. Instead of university, he went to Florida. “I think everyone who grew up in Long Island wants to

“The thing that’s really interesting about Stern is that all the things people say you can’t do — or can’t do for the money — he says, ‘Forget it!’”

get out of Long Island,” he told me.

Although he is sparing with the details, he says he went to work on building sites for a developer, eventually managing construction crews. It was the late 1990s, and Florida’s roller-coaster housing market was on a sharp upswing. So, when the work day ended at 3pm, Stern began to build his own single-family houses on the side and flip them. “I’d buy a house, knock it down, build another,” he recalled. “The timing was good.”

In 2002, he returned to New York and began putting up single-family homes and small, unremarkable apartment buildings in the outer boroughs. It is the same way that Fred Trump made his fortune. Part of the secret to that particular trade is absolute economy: using features and fixtures that can be repeated again and again, and minimising at all cost the need for skilled labour. Stern was actually shy — almost meek — in those days, according to someone who encountered him then. The New York property market was booming and he eventually linked up with David Jurachich, an easy-going Australian expat who yearned to leave his job as a derivatives trader to join the developer trade. They made an odd couple: one tall and athletic, with reddish hair, who goes by the nickname “Wavey Dave”; the other shorter, dark and slightly awkward.

Their first venture was not a blazing success. After months of scouting properties, Stern zeroed in on a part of Brooklyn near the Gowanus Canal — a body of water so befouled that city engi-

neers call its oily sludge “black mayonnaise”. Nearby neighbourhoods were gentrifying.

Stern reckoned they could buy one small plot of land that had been approved for development and then scoop up two contiguous ones. The zoning rights would then flow through the whole assemblage. That, in turn, would allow them to build a 14-storey tower.

“He’s an amazing talker and he talked me into it,” says Jurachich. In early 2008, the partners poured \$1.6m in concrete into the ground. Global financial markets soon began to teeter and credit became scarce. Without a construction loan, they were forced to leave the site fallow until the city eventually buried it — concrete and all — for safety reasons. Rather than give up, Stern decided they should build in Manhattan. “He just pushes forward,” says Jurachich.

It happened to be the day that Lehman Brothers failed when Stern visited the Verizon building, a charmless wedding cake of a structure on West 18th Street in Chelsea that was crammed full of engineers and telecoms gear. “I got a Google alert on my phone that the world was ending,” he recalled.

What intrigued him was the roof that we were then standing on. The building towers above everything else in the neighbourhood — like an awkward teenager — and so offered unobstructed views in all directions: to nearby Midtown, and then over the rooftops of Greenwich Village to the fortress of Downtown, even across to Brooklyn.

“Anytime I look at a building I always go to the roof first,” he told me as I swivelled to take in the panorama. Stern was clambering around excitedly in a knit shirt that was casual but may — or may not — have cost a fortune, and Prada trainers. They negotiated to buy the



From top: Michael Stern on the 80th floor of 111 West 57th in New York last month, photographed for the FT by Stefan Ruiz

The 1,421ft 111 West 57th, Stern’s most recent — and ambitious — residential property

Stern’s Walker Tower on West 18th Street. He added four floors — Michael Toolan



building for \$25m. But it was hardly straightforward: Verizon was not keen to sell to a 29-year-old no one had heard of. Money was tight. Stern was stretched by the Gowanus debacle and going through a divorce. To cobble together a \$5m deposit, Jurachich mortgaged a rental apartment he’d considered his nest egg. “We would walk investors through day and night to try and bring them in and nobody saw it,” he recalls.

Perhaps that is because converting a forbidding industrial building with few windows into luxury condominiums was a Rubik’s Cube sort of puzzle. The stairways at the corners of the structure would have to be removed to open up the views. An industrial smoke stack would have to be dismantled. Windows had to be punched through the brick. Verizon, meanwhile, would continue to occupy the first eight floors, and could not be disturbed. But there were some

things in Stern’s and Jurachich’s favour: because of the financial crisis, top-flight architects and craftsmen who might not otherwise have returned their calls were willing to work with them. They saved money by cutting out New York’s powerful construction unions, who make it famously expensive to build in the city by insisting on rules that mandate, for example, how many workers must be on hand to operate a single lift.

Stern and Jurachich, now going by the name JDS Development, also won zoning permission for an additional four floors. That meant more square footage, more views and more premium units to sell.

The finished building features a heavy dose of what Stern winkingly calls “curated history”. The lobby, for example, is new but made to look as though it was a lovingly restored art-deco original. In a move somewhere between shameless and brilliant, they commissioned a historian to write an admiring book about Ralph Walker, the building’s long-forgotten architect. (Its title: *Ralph Walker: Architect of the Century*.)

They even created a Ralph Walker exhibit in the lobby of what was now known as Walker Tower. “Believe it or not, tourists would come in and out of the building to see the Ralph Walker Museum and buy the book,” said Kevin Maloney, a veteran New York developer now based in Miami, who partnered with JDS on the project.

In Maloney’s telling, the outlines of the story are roughly the same, except Stern is not the sole hero of Walker Tower that he often makes himself out to be. Rather, he is an influential member of a large cast — from the architects to the lawyers to the construction team. “Building a building is not a one-man show,” observed Maloney, expressing a wisdom sure to disappoint fans of Ayn Rand.

One thing upon which everyone agrees: the timing was fortuitous. By the time Walker Tower’s 51 units went on sale in 2013, the property market was turning and there was little inventory available. They ended up selling out — not for the \$1,800 per-sq-ft the developers had budgeted but for more like \$4,000 per-sq-ft. The penthouse sold for what was then a downtown Manhattan record of \$51.5m. “It was a bet that paid off,” said Stern in a rare case of understatement.

There was another windfall: they also forged ties with Barry Sternlicht, chairman of Starwood Capital Group, the real estate private equity firm, which became an investor in Walker Tower. In the same way that architects were looking for jobs coming out of the crisis, private equity funds were thirsting to put their money to work. (“He went up to the roof, walked around for 15 minutes,

then said to his guy, ‘Get this done!’” Jurachich recalls.)

Stern, who is a divorced dad, lives in Walker Tower in the sort of New York flat one encounters in glossy design magazines. It has French-cut herringbone floors, an outdoor terrace and exposed steel beams. (They are originals but have been treated with fluorescent paint at a cost of about \$20,000 apiece). With its architecture and photography books arranged just so on the shelves, I thought it was the sales unit before I discovered it was Stern’s.

For Stern, everything flowed from Walker Tower. Verizon had a similar property uptown that they sold to JDS, Maloney’s Property Markets Group and Starwood for another conversion. It is called Stella Tower. He and Jurachich went back and finished what they had started in Gowanus, now bringing fancy Manhattan architects along with them. They launched another condo project near the High Line elevated park in Manhattan: The Fitzroy.

Stern also tried his hand at a moderately priced rental building on an unloved plot overlooking the East River. He and Jurachich figured the Murray Hill area was ripe for development with the growth of the United Nations and the nearby Langone medical centre. They collaborated with Gregg Pasquarelli of SHoP architects.

The result is the American Copper Building, twin 48-floor towers clad in copper that will gradually turn green over time. They lean apart but are joined by an umbilical, three-storey skyway that includes a pool, a lounge and more stunning views. The skyway is not just whimsy: it also houses shared mechanicals for the towers to improve efficiency. “That’s an amazing piece of architecture,” says Daniel Kaplan.

Walker Tower also led them to 111 West 57th. Barry Sternlicht had a narrow lot on the street. It was perfectly centred on Central Park and just a few blocks south. But it was only 43ft wide. He was not sure what to do with it. He wondered if Stern and his partners might be interested.

They took him up on the offer and set about designing a 700ft tower. Then the building next door came on the market. It was the Steinway & Sons piano showroom, built in 1925 and just across from Carnegie Hall. Rachmaninoff once played there. A historic landmark, the building was protected from development. But they bought it anyway and, with Gregg Pasquarelli, went back to the drawing board.

Down the street, New York’s first supertall had topped out at just over 1,000ft. Known as One57, the building was a huge hit for the developer Gary Barnett, the head of the Extell Development Company, who had spent more than a decade assembling the air rights. Many of the units sold before the building was even completed in 2014. The penthouse alone fetched \$100m.

Barnett would soon break ground on a sequel on the same street: the 1,550ft Central Park Tower. New York’s skyline was redrawn and 57th Street became known as Billionaires Row.

The supertalls inspire a range of feelings. Their creators tout them as natural heirs to the Empire State Building and Chrysler Building, a next generation of the skyscrapers that gave form to New York’s singular ambition. They wouldn’t be possible without the development of high-tech dampers, which slow the speed at which the towers sway. They are also the result of stronger concrete and much research into wind tunnels to understand how gusts at such heights can be tamed. (It turns out wind actually speeds up after it strikes a building.)

Others tend to view them as obnoxious newcomers out of step with the city. In 2015, protesters toting black umbrellas marched along 57th Street to draw attention to the shadows they complained the towers were spreading over the beloved public park. In our unequal age, they reflect the vertiginous distance between those at the top of the global economy and those below.

The towers were a response to a commercial imperative. The growing ranks of the world’s billionaires wanted property along Central Park. It was both a place to stay while in the city and, more importantly, a way to move wealth out of their own countries and store it in the world’s most liquid property market.

New York’s existing buildings tended to be old money co-operatives, famously choosy about who can take up residence and demanding detailed information about a potential buyer’s finances and lifestyle. The supertalls did not care, as long as you could write a cheque. “There was a lot of pent-up demand from foreigners wanting pied-à-terre on Central Park. That’s why One57 did so well. It was the first,” Jurachich explains.

If Walker Tower was complicated, 111 West 57th was another order of magnitude. Buying Steinway and then the air rights from a neighbouring building allowed the team to go higher — exceeding 1,400ft. But they would have to leave the landmarked piano hall largely intact and build around it — without disturbing the existing tenants. That meant boring 70ft into the rock below with hand drills instead of heavy demolition

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Stir the soul

Bunker fuel | Sweet and spicy, an Old Fashioned is made for testing times – no fancy cocktail kit required. By *Alice Lascelles*

When the world is falling apart, I want a drink that is short, strong and to the point – and that's why I have chosen the Old Fashioned for my bunker recipe. Unflashy, yet brimming with flavour, it's a cocktail that marries fiery alcohol, comforting sweetness and an almost medicinal spice in a way that is wonderfully fortifying. It's a drink designed for testing times.

A classic Old Fashioned is made with American whiskey – either bourbon or more peppery rye. But that formula of 50ml spirit, 5ml sugar syrup and two dashes of bitters, stirred over ice, works with aged spirits of all sorts: golden or dark rum, cognac, Scotch, Irish whiskey, añejo or reposado tequila.

The other night I had an Old Fashioned made with reposado tequila, sugar, orange bitters and a clementine twist. The clementine was a bit past its best, admittedly, but it still tasted pretty good. You can even make an Old Fashioned with liqueurs such as Grand Marnier or Drambuie – just be sure you leave out the sugar.

Knowing how to make an Old Fashioned is a bit like knowing how to make a soup or a stew – once you've cracked the basic formula, you can do away with recipes and use whatever life throws at you.

You don't need any special equipment. No shakers or strainers are required. A long-handled bar spoon might make the act of stirring a little more elegant, but the handle of a fork, a chopstick or even a well-washed finger will do just as well. The ideal glass is a big, heavy tumbler, preferably straight from the freezer. But if you can only lay your hands on a tooth mug, who cares?

One easy way to improve your Old Fashioned is to use good ice. Fill up Tupperware boxes and freezer bags with water the night before (boil the water first for much clearer ice), freeze them and then hack the contents into jagged chunks. Big bits of ice will melt more slowly than little cubes, which means your drink will stay colder for longer.

Some people like to use sugar cubes to sweeten their Old Fashioned but sugar syrup blends into the drink much more readily than the cubed stuff. You can buy sugar syrup – or "gomme" – but it's also the work of a moment to make it yourself. Simply dissolve two cups of sugar in one cup of water over a low heat, leave to cool, bottle and store in the fridge. You'll find it comes in handy for all sorts of things.

Making your own sugar syrup also allows you to have a play with different types of sugar. An Old Fashioned sweetened with muscovado syrup is a very different drink to one made with white caster sugar – darker, richer, more treacly. I'm also a sucker for maple syrup: Billington's Maple



Alfred Mobbs



When it comes to garnish, simple is best

Syrup Very Dark, a slightly more savoury variety, is really good with bourbon.

Many households seem to have a slightly crusty bottle of Angostura bitters lurking in the kitchen. This one little bottle, with its outsized label, will cover all your cocktail needs. But it's fun to have one or two more on hand – it's such an easy, lazy way to give a drink a new accent. You can find a vast array of bitters – flavoured with everything from celery and smoke to yuzu – at whisky-exchange.co.uk or masterofmalt.com. If

you're trying a new variety for the first time, go easy, as some can be pretty potent – one dash may be enough.

Orange bitters are particularly good in an Old Fashioned: Angostura Orange bitters are more spicy and marmalade-y; The Bitter Truth Orange Bitters are zestier and fresh. The Bitter Truth Spiced Chocolate Bitters are also great in whisky drinks.

The Old Fashioned is notorious for requiring endless amounts of stirring – a legacy, perhaps, of a time when cocktails were still made with loaf sugar, which took a lot more work to dissolve. Back in the 1880s, when the Old Fashioned really took off, American bars often served the cocktail with a spoon on the side so customers could do the stirring themselves – hence its nickname, "the spoon cocktail".

Even today, plenty of bartenders insist on taking at least 10 minutes to make one. I'm not sure that's necessary but you might find the slow, steady stirring therapeutic. Aim to coax just enough water out of the ice to unlock the spirit's aromas but not so much that your drink becomes thin and watery.

When it comes to the garnish, keep it simple – a twist of citrus peel (orange for bourbon, lemon for rye, traditionally) is all you need. Cut a thumb-sized piece of zest and pinch it shiny side down over the drink to release the oils and drop it in the glass.

Then sit back and savour what you've created: a tonic for the body and soul.

Alice Lascelles is an FT contributing editor

Old Fashioned

Ingredients

50ml whisky or other dark spirit
5ml 2:1 sugar syrup
2 dashes bitters
Citrus twist to garnish
Glass: frozen rocks
Garnish: lemon or orange twist

Method

Half-fill your glass with ice. Add the sugar syrup, the bitters and half the whisky. Stir for about 30 seconds. Add a bit more ice and the rest of the whisky and stir for

another half a minute. Add another piece of ice if you wish. Garnish and serve.

Some nice alternative Old Fashioned combinations

- Rye whiskey, Angostura Orange bitters, sugar syrup, lemon twist
- Bourbon, Angostura bitters, maple syrup, orange twist
- Rum, Bitter Truth Spiced Chocolate Bitters, sugar syrup, orange twist
- Añejo tequila, Angostura Orange bitters, sugar syrup, grapefruit twist

The rise of Romania

Jancis Robinson
Wine



Five weeks before writing this, I was squeezed inside the Georgian library of The Travellers Club in London, desperately trying to push my way through a dense crowd of wine tasters towards bottles of Romanian wine ranged round the perimeter. We were not just breathing on each other, we were practically doing the tango. In the age of isolation, that Romanian tasting now seems incredible.

Yet there were other notable aspects as well – not least the identity of the organisers. Nicholas de Roumanie (aka Nicholas Medforth-Mills) is the grandson of Michael of Romania, who sat on the throne for a few years as a young boy, then reigned as king in the 1940s before being forced to abdicate soon after attending the wedding of his cousins Queen Elizabeth and Prince Philip.

My invitation to the tasting was issued by Nicholas's wife Alina-Maria de Roumanie. Nicholas and Alina-Maria act as ambassadors for Romanian wine. They appeared to have taken expert advice in choosing which offerings to show at this London tasting, where representatives of 16 different private estates poured their current wines, overlooked by the club's extensive book collection. No dangerous splashes observed.

The young couple had also assembled a guest list of thirsty, talkative private wine enthusiasts, who obediently fell silent for short speeches by Nicholas and Romanian wine distributor Mihai Diaconu. Most important, the wines showed rather well.

I visited Romania briefly in 2015 and felt there was considerable, if not fully realised, potential for the country's wine. It is almost as important to the nation's culture as it is to Georgia's. Within Europe, Romania has more vineyards than any country except Italy, France, Spain and Portugal (just).

Its per capita wine consumption is relatively heroic – even without counting the large amount of wine made on a small scale and drunk on a great scale by private individuals. (As I drove around Timișoara in the south-west of Romania, I was struck by how many households

seemed to grow their own vines.)

Overall, I was impressed by the progress made by wine producers in recent years. Apart from one bottle, which seemed excessively volatile, all 46 wines I managed to taste, despite the throng, were remarkably clean and fresh. If there was a common fault – perhaps not regarded as a fault in Romania itself where there is a long tradition of making both red and white wines a bit sweet – it was that many reds struck my western palate as being slightly too sweet to be appetising.

A few wines still seemed a bit late-20th century with too much evident oak and alcohol, which is true virtually everywhere in the wine world. But there were several that I scored 17 out of 20 – high praise from me.

Only 13 of the wines I tasted were white. There were a couple of very respectable Sauvignon Blancs (not, admirably, copies of Sauvignon made elsewhere). But the two most thrilling whites by far were made from one of Romania's dozen indigenous grape varieties, Crâmpoșie Seleccionata. Both – one still and one made sparkling in the same way champagne is – were made on the recuperated aristocratic wine estate Prince Stirbey. (The UK's Wine Society buys from this estate but neither of these wines.)

Two whites made from another Romanian grape, Șarbă – one still, one sparkling, produced from different estates – were also interesting. More widely planted local white wine grapes are the Romanian Fetească Regală and, slightly less common and possibly finer, Moldovan Fetească Albă. Tămăioasă is the Romanian name for the popular Muscat.

At this tasting, for whites but especially for reds, local varieties triumphed over the international ones that have long been grown in quantity in Romania. Every one of my

favourite reds (listed on the left) were made wholly or partly from Fetească Neagră.

This Moldovan variety may have fallen out of fashion in Romania in the late 20th century, when international varieties seemed more exciting, but it is clearly very much at home there. It makes lively wines with good acidity and good fruit that hovers on the spectrum between damson and plum. Some sense a certain smokiness about it. One thing is clear: it has a strong and distinctive personality that seems to blend pretty well with the principal Bordeaux red wine varieties Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot.

The Gitana winery, in the far south-east of the country, demonstrated that Romania can also make fine wine from the deep purple Georgian grape Saperavi. Gitana also showed a very decent example of Rara Neagră, another name for the indigenous Băbească Neagră that is generally associated with high acidity and pale colour. But yet again, I felt this light red was a bit too sweet for export markets.

Mark Haisma, a winemaker who trained in Australia and is now stationed in Burgundy, initially advised on the new Dagon project in Dealu Mare in south-east Romania, encouraging the locals to pick earlier when the grapes were fresher and more expressive.

"These boys have talent and now a nuanced sense of what they want to do," he told me by phone from his locked-down bunker on the Côte d'Or. "The first vintage at 12.5 per cent alcohol was a bit confusing for them when the norm had been 14 per cent. But once they realised how good the wine was, they got very excited."

Dagon's owner Mihnea Vasilache is enthused about the potential of oak from Romania's forests, which cover more than a quarter of the country, even if Romanian cooperators might need a bit of encouragement to age the

oak as long as necessary for wine barrels. Once the many new wine estates, which have sprouted since Romania joined the EU in 2007, run out of Romanians to drink their produce, they may have to make rather drier wines for export markets. That aspect apart, there is no reason why Romanian wines shouldn't be welcomed.

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Leon Edler

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equipment. "They were selling and tuning pianos while we were working underneath them," Stern explained. Because they were building in one of the busiest places on Earth, the staging area for the construction would have to be inside the building itself. For safety reasons, the crane could not operate when the wind speed topped 35mph.

"It's hard enough to build that in the desert with nothing around you – but to build that in the urban context, through a landmark, without disturbing existing occupants," Stern said. "This was a war."

Pasquarelli drew on the tapered, "step-back" style that shaped New York skyscrapers after a 1916 zoning resolution that was intended to limit their shadows on the streets below – but 111 steps back, not in blocky chunks but tiny increments, like the blades of a feather. An interlocking web of terracotta – not glass – was used for the facade. Each pilaster is sculpted to create, from a distance, a swirling texture, like a snake's skin.

"It's a New York building. That building – if you put it down anywhere else it would be inappropriate," Stern declared. He had also restored the adjoining Steinway building, as part of the agreement to win approval from the

city's historical preservation commission. How does it feel to look up at your own skyscraper, I asked? We were standing on 57th Street, our heads tilted upwards. "F**king crazy," he replied.

The tower's beauty had taken time, which came at a price. When the partners broke ground in early 2014, the plan was to complete it in 2017. That deadline came and went. More money was needed, and a tangle of lawsuits among the investors ensued. Although the details of the litigation are baroque, a person familiar with the situation boils it down to a simple fact: "The issue is, we're three years behind schedule."

Delays are lethal for developers. They still have the carrying costs each month of interest payments, salaries and real estate taxes, but without any revenue coming in. For 111 West 57th, the greatest cost of the delays was that, in the intervening years, the market changed. It became inundated by an oversupply of luxury properties while political tensions took Chinese and Russian buyers out of the New York market. "Americans are the rich people now!" Juracich quips.

In the first quarter of 2018, prices for New York luxury apartments fell a staggering 15 per cent from the same period a year earlier, according to research from broker Douglas Elliman. The

number of sales dropped 24 per cent. Extell and other developers have begun waiving fees for wine lockers and other amenities, and even allowing prospective buyers to rent-to-own – all in a frantic attempt to move inventory.

After recruiting new investors, Stern and his partners pulled out all the stops to try to sell 111 West 57th. They built a lavish showroom that featured a full-

'Litigation is inevitable in this business,' Stern told me. 'If you're not being sued by people, you're not doing enough work'

scale mock-up of one of the units. I visited it last June to hear a public conversation with Pasquarelli and Bill Sofiel, who had designed the interiors, including brass door handles specially cast to mimic the tower's feathered stepback.

The room was full of architects and publicists and brokers and others whose job was, in some way or another, to enthrone the world's billionaires about a particular condominium.

Selling a \$45m apartment is not quite like selling a \$3m apartment. It is not just a matter of reducing the price until a nibble becomes a bite. It is as much an

emotional experience as a financial one. All the legal wrangling surrounding 111 West 57th was not helping, said one New York broker, who explained that a luxury building sale should be as tightly orchestrated as an initial public offering. Anything that detracts from the aura of success must be avoided.

It did not help that in May 2018, the Manhattan district attorney's office charged one of the construction companies working on the building with stealing wages from its immigrant employees. Stern notes that it was a subcontractor, and prosecutors said there was no evidence that JDS was aware of the matter. But Gary LaBarbera, the politically astute head of New York's builders' union, delighted in portraying Stern as a sort of unscrupulous developer, exploiting non-union workers.

As the new year dawned, Stern and his partners had sold fewer than a quarter of the tower's 46 units. But with potential buyers now able to see the completed building, sales began to tick up. While not the score of a lifetime, 111 West 57th would still be lucrative. Then came coronavirus.

When I spoke to Maloney in mid-March, New York City had not yet been shut down but those with means were already fleeing to second homes in the Hamptons or boarding private jets for

Florida or Aspen. Maloney himself had cancelled a trip to New York. The market was tanking. Margin calls were being made and fortunes being lost. JDS was no longer showing 111 West 57th to prospective buyers.

The New York governor would soon shut down all but essential construction. Was it possible, I asked, that the tower – for all its wonder – might not yield a profit? Maloney repeated the question and thought it over. "Who knows?" he said finally, sounding more intrigued than upset. "It's all going to unfold."

Two weeks later, it seemed to be unfolding for the worse. "The sky has fallen," Frances Katzen, a luxury property broker in New York, told me. Her clients were in quarantine.

There is what is known as an "outside date" in standard property sales contracts. If a building is not completed by that date, then buyers can reclaim their deposits and walk away. That then threatens a cascade of misery, with financial targets being missed and lenders potentially calling in their loans.

At 111 West 57th, the outside date is looming. And so, coronavirus be damned, the developers were racing this week to complete their first closings, even though a fidgety, \$20m crown that is beloved of architects – and the bane of engineers – has not yet been fixed atop the tower and the external

hoist is still attached. Doing so should assuage Apollo Global Management, the colossal New York hedge fund that holds much of 111 West 57th's debt. If they falter, then Apollo, which declined to comment for this article, could show mercy. Or it might conclude that there is more money to be made by wiping out the equity holders and taking the spoils for itself. "It's all touch-and-go," a person involved in the project says. "It's the same with a thousand buildings in the city now."

Ultimately, the success of 111 West 57th, and so much New York real estate, may depend on how long the city remains shuttered, and what sort of world is there to greet it when it reopens. After surviving a pandemic, will the world's billionaires still desire impressively slender trophy flats in the Manhattan sky? Will they still be billionaires?

Stern sounds as chipper as ever. Through his publicist, he insisted his tower would still come good. I thought back to our conversation in early March, in what now seems like a different era. I had been boring the visionary developer with narrow and repetitive questions about the state of the luxury property market until eventually he shrugged me off. "Money isn't everything," he said.

Joshua Chaffin is the FT's New York correspondent



SNAPSHOT

'Chicago' (1975) by Vivian Maier

As nanny to a wealthy Chicago family in the 1950s, Vivian Maier used her bathroom as her darkroom. When the children grew up and Maier moved on, she continued to capture life in the city, but had nowhere to develop her prints. In 2007, her negatives were auctioned off after she failed to keep up payments on her storage space. She died two years later, just as the new owners of her work were trying to track her down.

As part of a series of online shows planned while its Amsterdam gallery

is closed, Foam is focusing on a lesser-known part of Maier's work: more than 60 colour images made between 1956 and 1986 that depart from her preferred black and white format, bringing humour and abstraction to the fore without losing the sensitive approach to class and consumerism that has come to define her work.

Chris Allnut

'Vivian Maier — Works in Color' will be presented by Foam on Instagram at @foam_amsterdam

Do we know how to be idle?

Joy Lo Dico

Trending



"blame the Puritans," says Tom Hodgkinson, an old friend and expert in anti-activity as the editor of *The Idler* magazine. I had rung to inquire why we find being bone idle during lockdown has proved to be such hard work.

It used to be a guilty pleasure until the government mandated it. We'd imagined hours of lying on the sofa reading novels while the dishes stacked up. Instead, time has filled to the point of busy-ness.

From an early burst of spring-cleaning to make houses spotless enough for a visit from the Queen, the lockdown has evolved into intellectual pursuits as well as Netflix — learning languages, taking courses and helping out in the community. (Our elderly neighbours have received so much attention I wonder how many are finding it suffocating.) And all this work goes on with no obvious pecuniary reward.

Perhaps we Brits aren't in fact "among the worst idlers in the world", as a group of Conservative MPs suggested in the introduction to the 2012 policy book *Britannia Unchained*. Dominic Raab, currently deputising for the PM, was among them.

The targets of promotion and profit removed, we find it impossible to give up our industrious habits. From large companies such as Louis Vuitton making and donating face masks in France, to small enterprises: my lodger, a sign-maker, has turned his tools to making a beautiful guitar. My local forester is no longer chipping small wood, because it is worthless — he is spending his evenings stripping down the poles to make a geodesic dome.

I'm mixing up work with hard work, says Idler Tom. The Puritans, Oliver

Cromwell & Co, had it culturally ingrained that the sweat of toil was the way to heaven. In the 20th century, British philosopher Bertrand Russell cast doubt on the morality of hard work. In his 1932 essay "In Praise of Idleness", he saw its co-joining with virtue as a useful stick with which the industrialist could beat the poor into labouring for them.

The labour of lockdown is an exploration of what we would do with our time if we were free. Would it command a stonking wage? No. (Those looking for hard profit at the moment appear rather distasteful.) Will the taxman smile at the cut he will make? No. Might it make us happy? Possibly.

During this stasis we are acting out two different social experiments. The

The labour of lockdown is an exploration of what we would do with our time if we were free

first is Universal Basic Income — what happens when we are given money in return for doing nothing. Those on furlough pay — a very generous sort of UBI — will shortly receive their first pay cheque via the government and qualifying freelancers will also get a stipend. These will be far higher than the universal credit welfare payments that many have struggled by on. Yet the promise of these higher payments has not led to lassitude among those I know receiving them.

The second experiment is a rehearsal for John Maynard Keynes's vision of 2028. In his essay "Economic

Possibilities for Our Grandchildren" he gave that as the date, 100 years from his first draft, when he predicted a return to Eden, via the white heat of industrial efficiency. We'd be down to a 15-hour working week and spend far more time on leisure, cultivating ourselves. How we will spend it, he doesn't say — we will discover this for ourselves.

We have not in the end made a communal decision to work less, produce less and spend more time at leisure, but have had this forced on us by the fallout of the virus. Yet perhaps it is already changing the way we view our lives and our idea of "good work". Looking back at the "normal" full-time working world, some of us may suspect that what was dressed up as work — paper-pushing and report-writing — was built up in importance. Meanwhile those who are doing what were once called unskilled jobs have proved their worth.

On the horizon is the threat of a sharp economic contraction. We are currently in suspended animation waiting for the crash, and where the line is now drawn may denote who stays and who goes when business gets tight. Those idling industrious are in a rehearsal for the possibility that there is nothing to go back to.

Keynes's essay was published just after the 1929 crash that triggered the Great Depression. Russell's came two years later. The question then, in the midst of mass unemployment, was how to reframe idleness as something from which virtuous things could flow — fulfilled people, a happier society. Morality in society can switch very quickly. Now may be one of those times.

@joy_lo_dico

The end of the 'two cultures'

Janan Ganesh

Citizen of nowhere



In his elliptical book about the death of his wife, Julian Barnes attempts a running metaphor that connects love and aeronautics.

Levels of Life is big on buoyant gases and 19th-century mechanics. In the end, the thing flies, and often soars. Perhaps a subject as raw as bereavement is best addressed with this kind of indirection.

Throughout, however, the reader senses the risk of a cultured man (Barnes could curate the Louvre if the fiction dries up) veering into science. Ian McEwan and Don DeLillo often commit the same intellectual transgression.

That it feels so subversive proves the point made in 1959 by CP Snow. Himself both a novelist and a physicist, he regretted the wall between the "two cultures" of humanities and science. They exhibit "mutual incomprehension", but the real prejudice, he said, is from the first towards the second. To this day, a "civilised" person is one who is steeped in the arts. Quantitative knowledge still has associations of clammy-palmed geekery. I am able to carry on a career in public life without being able to say in detail how Einstein amended Newton, or what calculus is.

For how much longer, I wonder. There have been enough guesses as to the long-term legacies of the pandemic, but allow me one more. An ignorance of science will no longer be viable in polite company. Two cultures will become one. And the accommodation will have to be made by those of us in the humanities.

It is not just medicine and epidemiology that have become central to our thoughts in recent weeks, but quantitative science, too. Last month, the health academic Hugh Montgomery told a broadcaster that a flu victim, with an infection rate of 1.3, would cause 14 cases of flu after 10 "layers" of interaction. Someone with an infection rate of 3 would infect 59,000. Neither the interviewer nor I, nor probably you, had clocked how a seemingly small difference in contagiousness could ramify. And it is no longer cute or raffish to be so innumerate.

The problem is playing out on our screens. Lots of Americans dread their

Above all, the pandemic will change what it means to be an educated person, at last

president's press conferences, which, with his CEO-flattery, his unscientific itch to reopen businesses, could be situationist pranks on capitalism. But a subtler problem afflicts the equivalent briefings in Britain and elsewhere. Reporters trained in the humanities must hold governments to account on the specificities of science and mathematics. The ministers themselves are no less generalist. The misalignment of skills and duties makes for queasy viewing.

What distinguishes this pandemic as an event in living memory is not its scale. The second world war killed many more people. Even the cold war,

when it turned hot in Vietnam and elsewhere, was deadly enough. One failed state can wipe out millions. No, the strangeness of the crisis lies in its biological origins. Historians and political scientists, our usual points of call to fathom the course of events, cannot illuminate us. Writers will not be asked, as they were after 9/11, for their mystifyingly impressionistic takes. The realm of ideas matters less now than the tangible.

Perhaps climate change would have brought about this shift in consciousness anyway, but that is a process and this is one clarifying event. It could end up affecting the school curricula. It should certainly affect who gets to dominate public life. Above all, it will change what it means to be an educated person, at last.

The unified culture that Snow envisaged is not all that implausible. It is there in the kinship of philosophy and mathematics. It is there in the principle of falsifiability, which is the scourge of the political ideology as much as the shaman or the quack doctor. It is there in some of our professions. If the most engaging people I know are architects, it is, on reflection, because of their intellectual balance: between the quantitative and the qualitative, between the laws of physics and the principles of the sublime.

It is just that, as long as the natural world left us alone, this desegregation of the two cultures was a mere nice-to-have. It is now the stuff of mortal urgency.

janan.ganesh@ft.com



Marlborough

STANLEY'S DNA

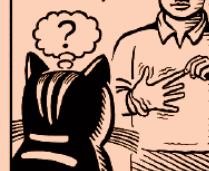
Tiny Tales by Alexander McCall Smith Illustrated by Gavin McGinley

Geoff was interested in DNA. He sent off for a DNA testing kit.

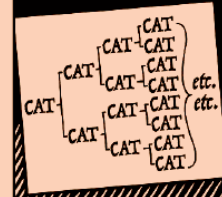


The kit had a swab. Geoff decided to find out about Stanley's origins? Siberia? The distant plains of Africa?

"It's interesting to know where you come from," Geoff said to Stanley.



The results arrived — complete with Stanley's genealogical chart:



House & Home

FTWeekend



Cress for success Indoor plants to nurture under lockdown – GARDENS PAGE 6

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What lies behind

Architecture | A back garden

extension need not be another big white box. Go for Greek, gothic or Expressionist corkscrew. By *Edwin Heathcote*

Every generation mutilates houses. In the 1970s, we knocked through rooms. In the 1980s, we added Victorian-style conservatories – so hot or so cold they were almost never used. Then side passages disappeared under sheets of glass; houses extruded upwards with loft conversions; basements were dug out and one-time sculleries became behemoth dining rooms, hidden behind banks of bi-folding doors where once there had been gardens.

But in the past decade, the ground-floor extension became the home's Brazilian butt lift – an inflated, faux-sexy rear end. Houses that, from the front, are quirky, historic and distinctive now meld into a morass of marble island units, glazed roofs and Velux windows at the back. These complex constructions strain to turn a jerry-built Victorian developer's terrace into a Californian Modernist box – albeit overlooked by the brick backs and black-painted downpipes of the houses opposite.

Extensions need not be entirely homogenous. There are other ways.

The ground-floor extension became the home's Brazilian butt lift – an inflated, faux-sexy rear end



Take, for instance, the rear of an elegant Regency terrace off London's City Road. This extension was inspired by the Choragic Monument of Thrasyllos, a small memorial structure on the Acropolis to a figure we might call a Greek theatre producer from the 5th century BC. If that sounds a little pretentious (and, of course, it is), you might want to know that the statue of Dionysus that once sat atop it is now a couple of miles down the road in the British Museum. The monument itself inspired master architects from Sir John Soane to Karl Friedrich Schinkel.

One of the clients for the extension is a connoisseur and collector of architectural drawings, and the proud owner of one by Schinkel himself. So not that preposterous. "I've always been fascinated by the art of architectural drawings," says David, the client, who did not want to give his full name. "And one of the ideas behind the extension was to have a



(Above) James Beazer of Urban Mesh architects built this extension for his own London home, a twisted brickwork folly 'with hints of Gaudi and the gothic'; (left) a south London extension by Sean Griffiths, of Modern Architect, references Brutalism and Pop art – © Juliet Murphy, @EdmundSummer

map room, a place to store the drawings I've been collecting for 30 years."

David and his partner Christopher were not, they tell me, looking for a classical architectural practice but they found one anyway in the form of Timothy Smith & Jonathan Taylor. "A glass box just wouldn't have worked," Christopher tells me, "not just for the collections of drawings, but with the house."

Showing me around the extension, which is nearly completed, Taylor says: "I find glass roofs a bit deadly, they give a very flat kind of light." He points upwards, to a complex but delicate roof over the new breakfast room in the extension. "It was inspired by Schinkel, by the draped form of his roof in the tent room in the Charlottenhof Palace in Potsdam [1826-29]."

The roof drapes gently down towards the sides and at its centre is a circular opening which, because of the billowing form, takes on the shape of a heart when

seen from the side. With a view of the fast-moving clouds above, it looks like a classical sky-room by artist James Turrell. It may seem anachronistic, with its references from Greece and Germany, but those were the forms in vogue when this house was built in the Georgian era.

"There was also a lot to cram in," says Taylor. "A bathroom, the map room, a kitchen extension and vaults and we were inspired by the way Soane stuffed things in."

Soane comes up in almost every discussion about London architecture, the magician of limited domestic space and intense architectural expression. This house was built around the same time that Soane was at his best, so the comparisons work well here. There is a coherence to the design, a set of distinct ideas that have been meticulously worked through.

Continued on page 2



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THE CHEDI RESIDENCES

ANDERMATT, SWITZERLAND

Turmeric yellow for the beach house, anyone?



Luke Edward Hall
Readers' questions

I'm a Brit living in a cabin-style house by a Norwegian fjord. It's hard to escape minimalist white interiors here, and we have limited shops. I would like the feel of the British seaside to make me feel at home. Any ideas?

The seaside-inspired interior is a difficult one to pull off. Holiday homes in the west of England spring to mind, such as the pink-painted Devon house I stay in with my family every August. It is filled with a questionable assortment of faux-driftwood scraps and lamps made from stacks of pebbles. I spend these summer days gazing out of the window at a favourite view, or on the beach building sand castles with my niece and mainlining mint-choc-chip ice cream.

No, the standard seaside look is not to my taste, but it does not matter. When I am there I am not giving other people's "Sail Away With Me" embroidered cushions the side-eye. I am on holiday, for pity's sake.

The look often feels a bit – dare I say it – basic, impersonal and ubiquitous, as if there is a starter pack available somewhere for all seaside homes. It probably consists of fabrics printed with sailing boats, anchors on everything and, God forbid, several strings of red-and-blue bunting.

There are more intriguing ways to make the most of a coastal setting. The

beach and the sea, of course, are all about bright expanses, so it makes sense to reflect that airiness at home. Hence the pervasive seaside palette of chalky whites and shimmering blues.

But I recommend trying something a little more experimental. One of my favourite coastal homes is the San Francisco-based designer Ken Fulk's house on Cape Cod. His kitchen cupboards are painted a deep, inky blue and are combined with tongue-and-groove panelling in a rich, yellowish cream. This feels like an elegant, adult take on the traditional blue-and-white theme, and somehow very English. (Both paints used are from Farrow & Ball.)

Fulk's library, with its captivating view of the US flag fluttering above steel-blue waves, is painted in Benjamin Moore's A Dash of Curry. Turmeric-yellow may not seem the most obviously beachy wall colour, but Fulk has compensated by scattering a daybed with indigo-and-white-striped cushions and decorating the panelled walls with framed paintings of ships.

A pair of binoculars waits to be picked up from the painted chest-cum-coffee table. It is a brilliant combination: subtle and smart seaside-inspired accessories against a curious, electrifying wall colour.

My interior designer friend Beata Heuman's Nantucket project would be

a great reference for you, too, and in particular the breakfast room, with its shipal cladding on walls, painted off-white, and ceiling painted pale blue. Wicker and rattan furniture dotted around and a handsome vintage rope wall-light by the French designers Audoux Minet all create a contemporary take on the classic maritime look.

I often feel torn when it comes to themed interiors. On one hand I am of the opinion that downplayed can be chic and dignified. When I am in this kind of mood, I suggest fabric and wallpaper designs that allude to summer holidays and all that fresh air and light, without looking clichéd.

Sibyl Colefax and John Fowler's Seaweed is a beauty. It is available in various colours as a wallpaper and a fabric. The pale-blue wallpaper would look fantastic in a seaside home.

On the other hand, I remember that my general mantra is – more is more. In hotels and restaurants, for example, I love a theme. I am thinking of places such as Scotland's The Fife Arms hotel, with its flying stuffed stag, or London's Sicilian-themed Circolo Popolare restaurant and its outlandish novelty ceramic tableware. In this mood, I say: pile it on.



The seaside look feels a bit basic, impersonal and ubiquitous, as if there is a starter pack available for all coastal homes

Look to French design house Pierre Frey for inspiration. I am quite obsessed with its Coquillages et Crustacées wallpaper, with scallop shells, lobsters, seahorses and swirling baroque scrolls (pictured). How fantastic would this look in a downstairs bathroom?

Shells are an example of too much of a good thing being just right. Paolo Moschino for Nicholas Haslam's range of knick-knacks is exemplary. I love the brass floor lamp with shell-shaped head, and the hand-carved shell wall brackets. I have lusted after a shell-covered mirror made by the late English designer Anthony Redmile for years. (Lorfor's Antiques has one from the late 1970s/early 1980s.) Artist and grotto restorer Tess Morley makes dazzling shell-encrusted pieces too: her glittering obelisks, table lamps and caskets are works of beauty. Of course, you could attempt your own version: a glue gun and buckets of patience being the main requirements.

For more images and links to Luke's recommendations, find his column at ft.com/house-home. Luke answers readers' questions on design and stylish living every week. Email him at lukeedward.hall@ft.com and follow him on Instagram @lukeedwardhall

What lies behind

Continued from page 1

Not too far away is another flat-fronted house from the same era, with another compelling extension. Architect James Beazer of Urban Mesh designed this one for himself. "I would probably have struggled to convince a client to do it," he tells me, standing in his garden and looking at a compellingly strange and beautiful pile of twisted, torqued brickwork that seems to be winding itself into an Expressionist corkscrew.

This is very different from Smith & Taylor's period piece and I ask him how he got it past the planners. He winces. "It wasn't easy," he says, slightly sheepishly. "But to be honest, the next people who move in will probably flatten it and replace it with a huge glass extension."

It would be a damn shame. Beazer's brick folly is a thing of passion, a personal essay on form and the qualities of brick, with hints of Gaudí and the gothic.

"I love the work of the German Expressionists," he says referring to the architects of the early 1920s who built incredible cliffs of brick often with organic, Baltic and medieval flavours. "The playfulness of their use of brick. I think we've become uncomfortable with decoration today. Perhaps property has become too valuable. If it wasn't, we'd all feel more able to take risks."

Sean Griffiths, of Modern Architect (his practice, you see, is actually called Modern Architect) agrees. His design for a south London house is a small extension with big dreams.

"The client wanted a Brutalist extension," he tells me, deadpan. "Unfortunately, we couldn't afford Brutalism, it is

'An addition changes the whole. The square metres added were minimal but the effect on the house is total'

something that's out of the reach of middle-class Londoners today. So we pebble-dashed the columns." Griffiths' tongue is lodged well into his cheek here. Brutalism was the mid-century style of huge arts centres, car parks and housing estates – a monumental urban oeuvre not, perhaps, best suited to back extensions. But the columns do give it a certain appeal.

What initially looks like a generic glass box reveals itself as a piece of Pop art, with those roughcast references to Brutalism and with big, geometric trompe l'oeil tile patterns and wall paintings.

"Ironically, you can often get more design in on a small project like this for a good client than on a big public building and you retain a greater degree of control," says Griffiths. "There ends up being less compromise and, because they are very small, you can afford to be very focused on all aspects and create an immediacy, architecture from close up."

"All architects seem to want to design art galleries. I actually find them quite boring, just loads of white rooms."



How to commission an inventive design

Architect Biba Dow says the best extensions are the result of an open dialogue. Having a finite set of requirements and a rigid plan when you commission an architect is "closing the door to opportunity".

Think about why you've bought your house and how you occupy its spaces. Once you've decided what you want in terms of size – or an aspect such as light or a particular view that you want to emphasise, or a period feature you would like to be referenced – it is time to talk to an architect.

To find your dream designer, Dow recommends consulting specialist magazines, the RIBA Client Adviser service and competitions such as the Architects Journal's Small Projects award. And if that one is not taking on projects, ask them to recommend somebody.

Or there is the more traditional method: "If you see something you like, just knock on the door and ask who designed it."

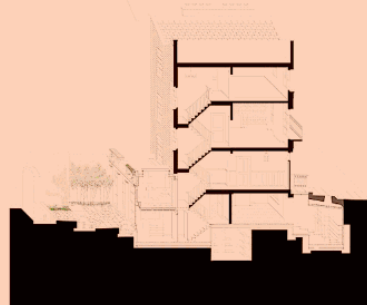
Meet at your house and have a conversation about it. Try to visit their other projects. But most importantly: "See if you like them."

Do not shy away from awkward topics. "Have a frank conversation at the beginning about budget," says Dow, as this will inform all of the design decisions. "But you can make something original without spending more money.

Inventiveness doesn't cost more." If you are not an architectural expert, so much the better. Dow creates booklets of inspiration to show clients, which include artworks as well as buildings.

Dow Jones Architects recently designed a house on the Isle of Wight whose main reference was the use of timber in a Swedish folkloric painting from the 19th century. "It's about trying to find the right character for a project."

Lucy Watson



Occasionally an extension emerges that alters radically the nature of the whole house it appears to be emerging from. One of the most striking in recent years was Tsuruta Architects' enigmatically named House of Trace. This extension to a typical south London terrace began with the assumption that the

generic, ad-hoc nature of standard rear accretions were worthy of recording in a new architectural form.

This complex, surgical reinvention of the interior revealed the traces of past rebuilding and recorded them in its new form, with architecture becoming a kind of archaeological photography.

The old roofline was retained and revealed in its darker brick, looking like a shadow of itself, while the new extension combines steel and glass in an almost temporary, lightweight aesthetic – as if this latest manifestation were only part of a continuum, fragile in terms of time, acknowledging the inevitability of its doom.

Irish practice Clancy Moore's extension of a Dublin house, meanwhile, also affects the nature of the house itself. "It is an addition," architect Andrew Clancy tells me, "but in adding we are also changing the whole. The square metres added here were minimal," he says, "but the effect on the house is total."

Surely one of the most remarkable of what might seem a rather limited field,

(Clockwise from top) Tsuruta Architects' House of Trace; Dublin project by Clancy Moore; House of Trace exterior; sectional drawing through a house in Hoxton, London, with rear extension by Smith & Taylor; Clancy Moore exterior

Tim Crocker; Fionn McCann



Clancy Moore's reworking of the house is the ultimate realisation of the idea of the way in which we have flipped the domestic interior from a street-facing, formal cage of small rooms into a garden-facing informal arrangement of open, fluid spaces and light. But it has been realised in a remarkable manner.

A single bay was demolished at the rear but "its memory", Clancy says, "hung around like a guilty secret" and inspired the counter-intuitive geometry that breaks down the tightness of the plan and generates myriad complex angles, spaces and junctions.

"We begin with conversations with the client," Clancy says, "and everything comes into play. Something emerges from that process, often not what you might have expected. But it is the thing that answers the questions and then all those ideas find their way back into the building somehow in the end."

It is a far cry from the glass box. "Some architects think of an extension as putting a perfect object on the back," Clancy says. "But actually, if you really engage with the lives of the people who live there it becomes an incredibly exotic thing. There is nothing more fascinating than what goes on in a house."

Edwin Heathcote is the FT's architecture critic

Inside

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A recovery in waiting

International property Asian markets were the first to be hit by Covid-19, so should be first to pick up.

But things are not so clear-cut. *By Hugo Cox*

Before tighter social-distancing measures were introduced in Hong Kong at the end of March, Nancy and her husband had viewed 10 flats that month. Keen to isolate themselves as far as possible from the coronavirus threat, Nancy, who did not want to give her last name, says the visits were among the few outings they allowed themselves: "We have been avoiding social gatherings with friends, visiting our parents occasionally but not the wider family."

The readiness of homebuyers such as Nancy to continue to go to viewings seems, at first glance, to have helped Hong Kong's market weather some of the effects of the virus — unlike in the UK and the US, where government-imposed lockdowns have brought property markets to an effective standstill.

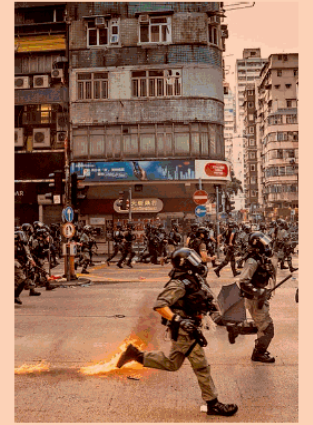
In March, there were 3,870 property sales in Hong Kong, according to government data; just 9 per cent lower than the monthly averages recorded

in the three months to December, before the crisis hit.

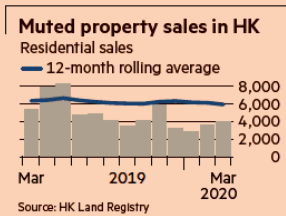
However, Covid-19 may be intensifying longer-term problems with the Hong Kong housing market. Property sales have been muted since bouts of civil unrest spread through the territory in the middle of last year. Compared with March 2019, when property sales hit 5,231 transactions, last month's figures were down 26 per cent.

And they are likely to decline further, since the Hong Kong government introduced tighter social-distancing measures on March 28 — closing cinemas, fitness centres and other public venues, and outlawing gatherings of more than four people at restaurants.

In the weeks following Hong Kong's first confirmed case of coronavirus on January 23, the territory imposed travel restrictions, comprehensive testing and quarantine rules. Initially, results were positive, but the infection rate has accelerated sharply since the middle of March, passing 1,000 cases on 11 April.



Both the virus and the social unrest that preceded it have hit Hong Kong's luxury market hard



Many locals have criticised the government's handling of the crisis — compounding complaints at how aggressively it handled last year's pro-democracy demonstrations.

In a survey carried out in late March by the South China Morning Post, seven out of 10 respondents credited the community response rather than government regulations for keeping the virus

at bay; more than half objected to the idea that the administration should be commended for the outcomes.

"We have confidence in the medical system and the Hong Kong people but not the government," says Nancy. "We have experienced Sars and we are aware of hygiene, as well as the importance of staying home and wearing masks [when we go outside]."

Both the virus and the social unrest that preceded it have hit the luxury market particularly hard. Average home prices in Hong Kong's luxury neighbourhoods — which include The Peak, Mid-Levels and Happy Valley — fell 3 per cent in the three months to March, accelerating falls of 3.7 per cent in the preceding six months, according to Savills.

Simon Smith, head of Savills research in the Asia-Pacific region, says sellers are still reluctant to drop



In Hong Kong fears of Covid-19 remain, compounded by distrust of the government after the violent protests last year (right)

prices to ensure a sale. "There is a feeling here if you can hang for the next few months, you should."

But buyers anticipating further price falls are also holding back. Nancy believes prices will drop enough to bring a small three-bedroom apartment in Tai Koo, on Hong Kong Island, similar to the one the couple rents now, within their budget of HK\$10m (£1.1m). "Early last summer they were around HK\$14m, now they have come down to HK\$12m. We are expecting because of the Covid-19 outbreak it might be able to come within our budget by end of this year."

Even when the government has control of coronavirus, the property market may not return to the level it was at a year ago, given the number of young

Continued on page 4

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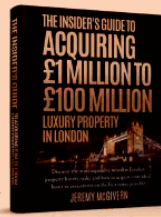
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Illustrations: James Alton



(Above) A jogger in Singapore; (below) cherry blossoms in Shanghai — Bloomberg via Getty Images; China News Service

Continued from page 3

residents who want to leave the territory because of the police's heavy-handed crackdown on demonstrations.

Lu Cheung, 38, an accountant at an international auction house, and her wife are considering moving to Taiwan. To fund the two investment visas that would provide them with citizenship — costing about HK\$1.56m — they would have to sell their house in Tuen Mun, in the New Territories, which Lu Cheung bought three years ago. “It was so unbelievable that the police and the government would [use violence] on peaceful demonstrations. The government and the police should protect people in Hong Kong, not be the bad guys.”

Nancy and her husband — who both work for the government — are about to

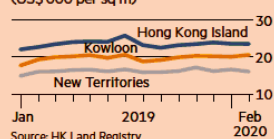


apply for Australian visas. They will still buy their Hong Kong home if they can, because they believe it is a good investment. But they see their future with their three-year-old daughter elsewhere.

“It was the response to the unrest by the government that made us disappointed and angry. We have no trust in

Hong Kong property prices

Resale value of homes 40-70 sq metres (US\$'000 per sq m)



Source: HK Land Registry

the Hong Kong police. I can't see the future of a better Hong Kong.”

Singapore's top-end losses

George Tan, an estate agent at Savills' Singapore office, sells property to Chinese buyers through road shows that he runs in Shanghai. In March, with China

in lockdown, he set up a virtual sales event, with CGI renderings of the apartments at The Avenir, a 376-home development south of Orchard Road, a prestigious central neighbourhood. Roughly 100 prospective buyers logged in from cities including Shanghai, Beijing and Shenzhen to view. He sold none of the properties. “After the events, buyers like to fly in with families to take a look at the area and the buildings,” he says. The travel ban meant they were not able to.

Buyers from mainland China and Indonesia are crucial to Singapore's top-end property market. But the lockdown in many Chinese cities — combined with restrictions on visitors entering Singapore, which began in February — has seen sales to overseas investors drop. In March, there were 48 home purchases by international buyers in Singapore's Core Central Region, down from 72 in March 2019.

Singapore avoided strict lockdown measures such as those seen in China and across Europe until April 7, after a jump in infections forced the country to change tack. Even before this, fearful occupiers made viewings difficult. One agent, who asked not to be named, says his wife refuses to allow prospective buyers to view the flat they are renting, for fear of infection.

Across Singapore, there were 1,081 home sales in March, according to Knight Frank, down 33 per cent on the same month in 2019. For the priciest homes — those selling for S\$3,000 (£1,663) per sq ft or more — there were 11, down from 53 a year before.

Rudi Nugroho, 38, from Jakarta is looking for a two-bedroom property for between S\$1.5m and S\$2m in Marina Bay. Besides being a lucrative investment, he hopes the flat will one day be used by his daughters, whom he wants to go to school and college in Singapore.

“I am waiting for a decline in prices — maybe around 4 to 5 per cent — to reflect the additional risk. The government will need overseas buyers to sustain the market.”

Shanghai sales pick up but buyers await global recovery

Zhou, a 34-year-old entrepreneur, who did not want to give his full name, has been searching for a four-bedroom apartment for about Rmb30m (£3.4m) in Huangpu District, Shanghai's most central neighbourhood and one of its priciest, since August.

Fearing infection, the couple halted their property search in January, resuming two months later only with assurances that the visits were safe. “At the beginning of March, a sales agent invited us to view a new property and listed what they would do to ensure safety. We were so interested in the apartment that we finally went there with mask and goggles,” he says.

After the government enforced an extended break for the lunar new year, many estate agents reopened on February 10, as soon as they were allowed to. However, tougher social distancing rules and public fear meant few customers. “People weren't travelling to view,” says James MacDonald, head of Savills research in China. “Business started to resume at the end of February.”

New home sales suffered, falling from 487,604 in January to 114,552 in February, before rising to 355,312 in March. Across China, the total number of home sales in the 30 largest cities increased by 271 per cent between February and March — but were still down 41 per cent on March 2019.

Constraints on viewing homes are still in place, says MacDonald, who is also looking for a new rental flat with his wife. “Only one of us is allowed to visit the property and only for a certain period of time,” he says, adding that such impediments will slow sales.

Today, by some measures — such as transport use — Shanghai's economy



has recovered to “80 or 90 per cent” of pre-crisis levels, says Dr Xin Sun, lecturer in Chinese and east Asian business at King's College London. But many affluent buyers will need to wait before they are confident enough to make new home purchases, he says.

“Those entrepreneurs whose companies rely on orders from overseas — and I speak to many of them — will not want to spend money on homes until the global pandemic comes to an end.”

Yang, 42, who did not want to give his full name, works in finance and fears the economic fallout could cost him his job; he has stopped his hunt for a Rmb20m three-bedroom flat for him and his family. “It is all about the economic situation. I'm sure it's worse than in December for me. Although some sales agents provided promotions, I couldn't make a decision right now.”

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Windowsill of opportunity

With garden centres shut, focus on what is to hand: nurture and propagate your houseplants. By Jane Perrone

This morning, my son picked out two cacti and a succulent from my houseplant collection and we sat on the floor to nestle them into a special container we then mounted on his bedroom window. We talked about the purpose of the hooked spines on the Mammillaria cactus, discussed why the compost we used needed to be gritty and laughed over the curious lumpy Gasteria, a succulent whose cultivar name was "Little Warty".

It was not a conventional lesson, but these are not conventional times: I hope he learnt a little botany in the process. My husband, meanwhile, has been asking about what edibles we could grow on the windowsill, and has helped me sort out my vast collection of pots.

As a life-long houseplant collector whose family has never shown the slightest interest in greenery, this sudden spike of curiosity about indoor gardening felt like a mile-

stone. Albeit one achieved under the oddest of circumstances.

Houseplants are so often the neglected dust-catchers of home decor, but when one is forced to spend 24/7 staring at the same four walls, suddenly getting that wizened moth orchid back to health seems like an urgent necessity. And when a trip to the supermarket to pick up a bag of salad feels a little too laced with danger, it is natural that thoughts turn to what edible plants can be grown at home without recourse to the garden centre.

First, let me burst your bubble on the self-sufficiency front: the range and quantity of food you will be able to grow on even the largest of windowsills will equate to little more than the odd *amuse-bouche*. That is not to say you should not try: the mere process of sparking life into a seed is an absorbing one for adults and children alike, even if it doesn't result in a bounteous harvest.

The book *Don't Throw It, Grow It!: 68 Windowsill Plants From Kitchen*



Zebrina and amboynikus — Alamy

then be snipped with scissors and added to salads, soups and curries. (Even simpler, Sillygreens.com will deliver micro-green starter packs to your door.)

Hunt through the fridge: lemon-grass stalks placed in a glass of water will grow roots and can be potted up; ginger root may also sprout if potted into houseplant compost and placed in a warm, bright place. And finally, check the fruit bowl for past-it lemons and oranges: citrus seeds will make beautiful (and occasionally, after a long wait, fruitful) houseplants when sown into compost and treated in the same way as the ginger.

If you are more concerned with reviving the houseplants you already have than making new ones, the worst thing you can do is ply them with the watering can every morning. Instead, get an old washing-up bowl and tease the plant's rootball out of its pot: if you see a matted coating of firm roots,

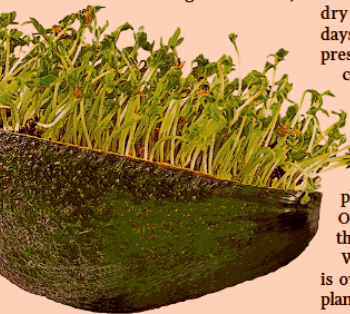
Scraps has become my make-do-and-mend houseplant bible, for its cheery advice on how to raise everything from dates to radishes.

As its authors Deborah Peterson and Millicent Selsam point out, "almost every unprocessed fruit or vegetable can be grown into a decorative houseplant".

Start with a survey of your kitchen cupboards: from the spice rack, the whole, unpowdered seeds of caraway, fennel, coriander, fennugreek, celery and mustard can all be grown as microgreens.

Soak the seeds in a bowl of water overnight, then strain out and sprinkle on to a layer of compost at least 1cm deep in the bottom of a seed tray or any plastic food container with some drainage holes. If you do not have compost, use a few layers of damp kitchen roll instead. Then place on your sunniest windowsill and keep damp by misting with water.

Within a couple of weeks the seedlings will grow 2cm-5cm tall. They can



The virtual gardener

Whether you are pottering in the shed or battling insomnia, gardening podcasts can be a welcome distraction.

In *The Garden Log*, gardener Ben Dark describes what he has been up to during the week in mellifluous tones that soothe as well as inform.

For something snappier, an American show, *Epic Gardening*, offers daily five-minute chunks of plant-related information.

If you would normally be out visiting gardens this spring, the National Garden Scheme's Virtual Visits will satiate your desire to nose around someone's borders, plus there are video tutorials on key skills.

On Twitter, join in with one of the many plant-related "hours" — curated chats, essentially — including #wildflowerhour at 8pm UK time on Sundays, #gardenshour at 9pm on Mondays and #HouseplantHour, run by me, at 9pm on Tuesdays.

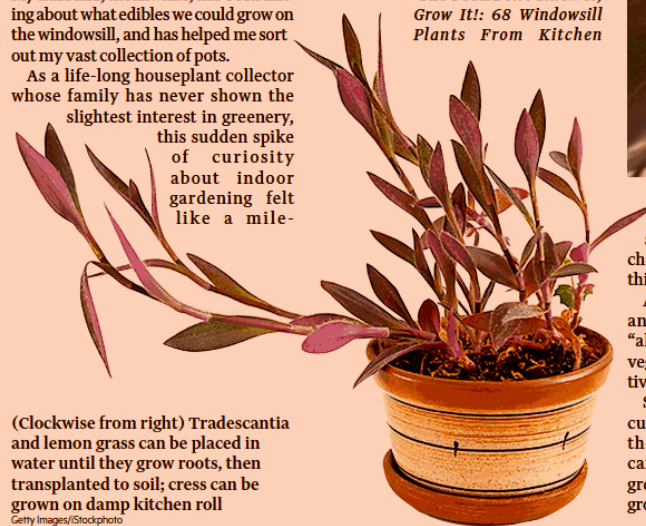
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it is time to upgrade it to a bigger pot. If the roots are slimy and smelly, you have been overwatering — cut away any soft roots and repot in fresh compost. If neither of these is the case, get an old chopstick or kebab stick and poke it into the rootball: this will help to break up compacted soil and bring air to the roots.

Learning to propagate houseplants can also be a fulfilling lockdown activity: succulents such as the jade plant (*Crassula ovata*) and rosette-forming *Echeverias* will grow from a single leaf, carefully pulled away complete from the parent plant. Leave them to dry on a windowsill for a couple of days, so the wound calluses over; then press into the surface of damp, gritty compost and place somewhere bright until roots form.

Stems of veining plants such as *Hoyas*, *Tradescantias* and devil's ivy (*Epipremnum aureum*) can be snipped and placed in a glass of water until rooted. Once roots are 5cm or so long, pot them up into houseplant compost.

With a modest effort, when lockdown is over you'll have an abundance of plants to share with friends and family.



(Clockwise from right) Tradescantia and lemon grass can be placed in water until they grow roots, then transplanted to soil; cress can be grown on damp kitchen roll

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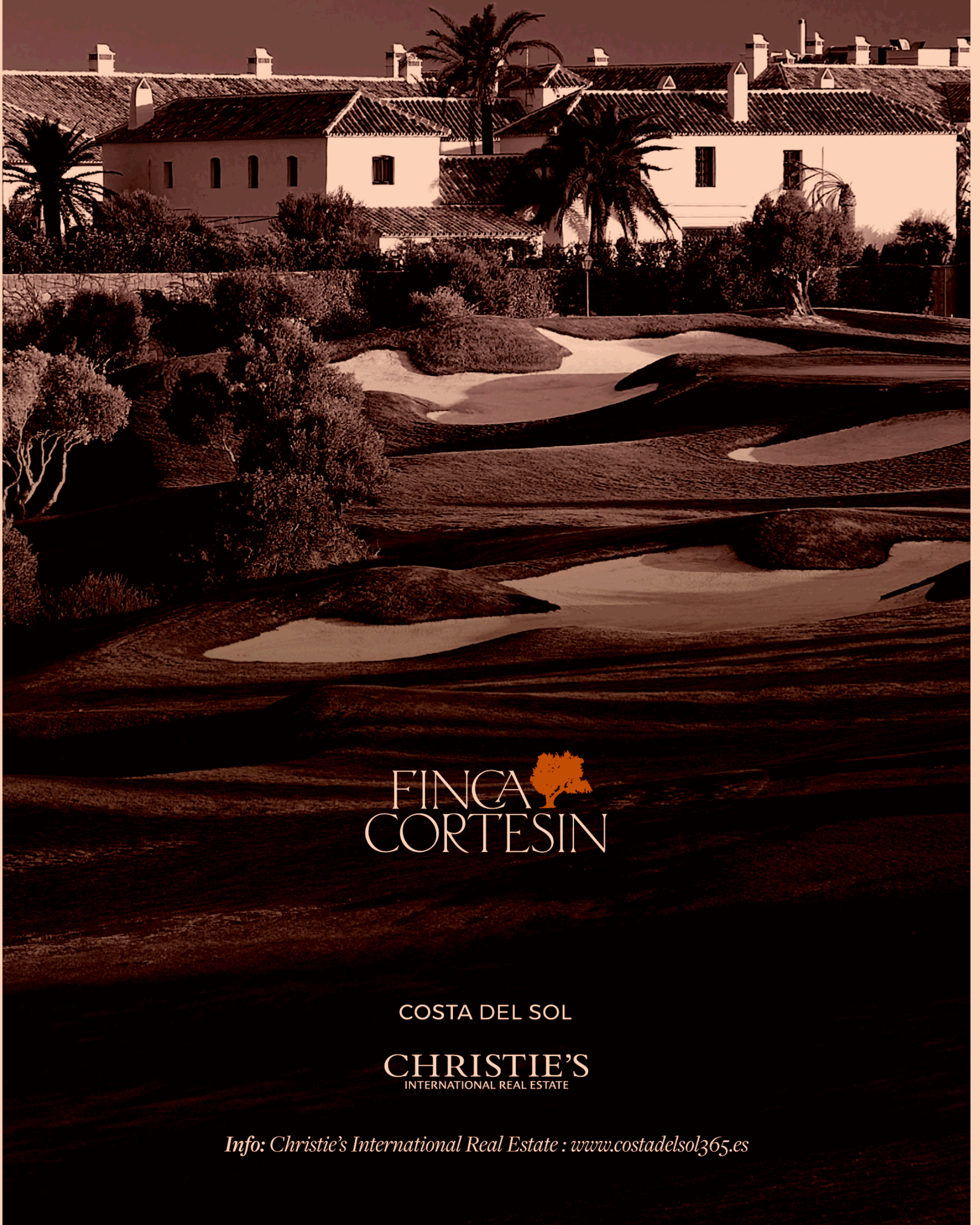
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Beginners' lockdown

Many people will be wondering, perhaps for the first time in their lives, what seeds to plant in a novice garden. Here are some fail-safe suggestions

By now you have set about your gardens, pots and window boxes and started to wonder, what next? At the start of lockdown the ground became dry but the evenings remained cold. It was not a good time for sowing seeds directly outdoors. The conditions did not stop a spike in seed ordering from newly keen gardeners. Big suppliers have reported a surge of 10 times or more beyond the usual spring demand. Better still, the conditions are now warming and are making sowing outdoors a near certain success.

First, where to order? Some of the smaller firms have had to shut. They have access to stock but their staff and family are staying off work, some sick, many more self-isolating and distancing to be safe. Usual reader favourites Chiltern Seeds, Sarah Raven, Mr Fothergill's and Plant World all announced interruptions within a week of the start of lockdown. They had the stock but not the staff for packing and dispatching.

I hesitate to recommend alternatives as they may provoke a rush to order and lead to disappointment. I have suffered one already. On the third day of lockdown I celebrated by earmarking an email from Derry Watkins, experienced proprietor of Special Plants near Bath. She was taking orders for packs of plant plugs that she knew she could not sell as usual at the nursery. So I pitched in and tried to stockpile plugs of an interesting little aquilegia with green flowers,

Aquilegia viridiflora, and a really interesting deep red dianthus with flowers on long stems, Dianthus cruentus. Did I need eight of each? About as much as you needed that seventh roll of loo paper on your second strategic shopping prowl. By the time I ordered, all the plugs on the site had been sold.

"Buy on sight" has never been more true. Bigger enterprises are still sending seeds out in a reasonable turnaround time. As of writing, my top three in the UK are Thompson & Morgan (thompson-morgan.com), Suttons (suttons.co.uk) and Dobies (dobies.co.uk). Suttons' website is so popular that it tends to hold customers in a "queue", like that pillar of British communications at the speed of sound, BT. Waiting times are precisely given, however, and you will get a waiting number as if you were a customer for French fries in McDonald's.

As for Thompson & Morgan, they had suspended phone ordering when I last checked, accepting only web orders, but their phone services come and go, so check if you prefer them. Their sales team tell me that they have hurried to buy up a good supply of this season's bedding plants, which were waiting to go to city councils and trade sources, but were cut off by shutdown. Seed packet deliveries are continuing, at least on a 14-day rota, which is fine. In late April all the flower seeds I will name can still be sown successfully.

One other tip, learnt from my digital incompetence. Websites of seeds and



(Above) Raised bed with nasturtiums and vegetables; (below) Calendula officinalis Candyman Orange — GAP Photos/Friedrich Strauss; GAP Photos/Nowa Photo Graphik



Robin Lane Fox

On gardens

plants tend to split their available stock between special offers and annual plants. If you cannot find a particular poppy seed under hardy annuals, try special offers. On the Thompson & Morgan site, click on hardy annual seeds and go to the right-hand side to A-Z listings, which are usually longer.

If you refuse to believe that, say, Love-in-a-Mist (Nigella) has sold out, google it separately under Love-in-a-Mist seed today. It may come up on offer on eBay, or it may turn out after all to be available from major suppliers. They are having a struggle to update websites but they all indicate availability where they can.

If a seed is missing on one site, it does not mean it has sold out nationally. It may be a variety usually supplied by Plant World, for example, and be unavailable simply because that supplier has shut down for now. In short, show FT Weekend spirit and do not take the first "none" for an answer.

I say all this because my number one choice for keen beginners is the nasturtium. On a first scroll, nasturtiums were either unlisted or unavailable. By googling their name directly, I then found them on major websites where they had been hiding.

I started my own seed-sowing career with these wonderful plants. The seeds are solid, firm and easy to press into loosened soil. All they then need is occasional watering from a can with a rose head on it to deliver a fine rain. When the leaves appear, slugs do not eat them as they taste fiery-hot. Nasturtiums are the way to enthuse locked-in children with personal gardening. They are fabulous when sown in window boxes, where the trailing varieties will tumble over the box's edge like happy flowers in one of



those Spanish piazzas that we are unable to visit just yet.

Ladybird Rose was the winning variety of 2019, with yellow flowers marked with red dots. Thompson & Morgan's Troika Spotty Dotty is far better than its absurd name, a clear orange with spotting on its open flowers. Mixed trailers are all excellent choices, preferably with plain green leaves. Grab what you can find.

Next, go for calendulas, the ideal container bedding plants. Like nasturtiums, they will tolerate irregular watering when established, a useful selling point for weekend gardeners. Citrus Cocktail, Fruit Twist and the good double-flowered Candyman Orange are my first picks.

To be one up on me, you can order three plants of the yellow-fruited courgette Parador from Thompson & Morgan's plant offers and then put a calendula nearby to help mutual pollination. Both plants grow well in any old container, including a bucket or an old bread bin with holes bored in the bottom to allow the soil to drain.

In sunny sites or boxes, Californian poppies are near-certain winners. Seed is still freely offered, so make the most of the yellow and orange-flowered varieties, the ones with most impact. Two tips: the seed is very fine, so do not try to scatter it directly from a slit-open packet. Better to tip it all into one cupped hand and then distribute it on to loosened, then flattened soil with the other hand, taking a pinch of it at a time with your finger and thumb. Also, Californian poppies are better thinned out rather than transplanted when they germinate. The roots are going to become longish and tap-like, so they must not be broken early on.

Here is a great newish pair for them in a sunny place. Cornflower Trailing Blue Carpet is still available from Thompson & Morgan and is extremely rewarding, bearing cobalt-blue flowers like true cornflowers, but on trailing stems that spread sideways. In my mind's eye I can picture a box of their blue alternating with a box of butter-yellow Californian poppies. This is a wild flower from Syria, seldom seen in our gardens but deserving of a home.

All these flower seeds are sown directly into open ground without any need for heat or greenhouses. The suppliers have advice on the essentials for preparing the soil and sowing well. They started me gardening many years ago and if they start you off now, lockdown will not have been in vain.

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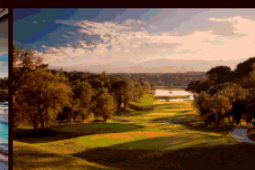
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FT Weekend Magazine



Why we fail to prepare for disasters

By Tim Harford

A different perspective

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**'A spell has been cast over us.
Who cast this spell, and why?
How can we break it? Is it for ever?'**

Douglas Coupland, p32



**'In this business... if
you're not being sued
by people, you're not
doing enough work'**

New York property developer
Michael Stern, p20



**'Fiery alcohol,
comforting sweetness
and an almost
medicinal spice'**

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Many catastrophes – from hurricanes to pandemics – are all too predictable. And yet we don't do anything about them. What drives our inaction in the face of imminent danger? And will it ever change?
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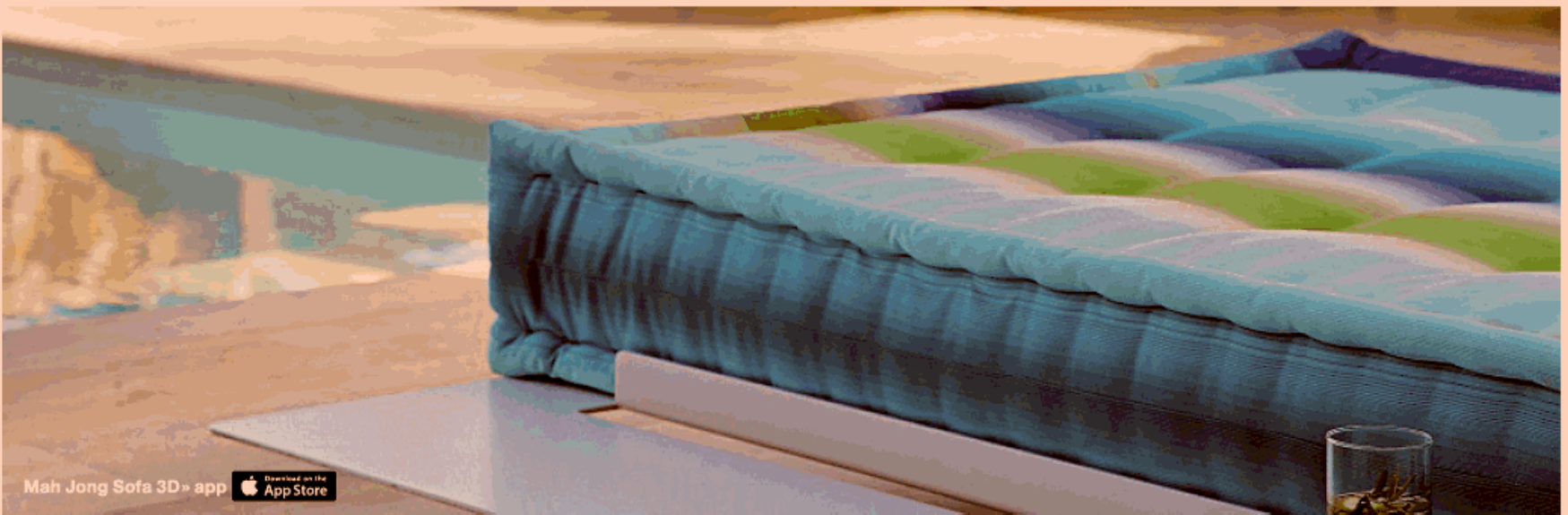
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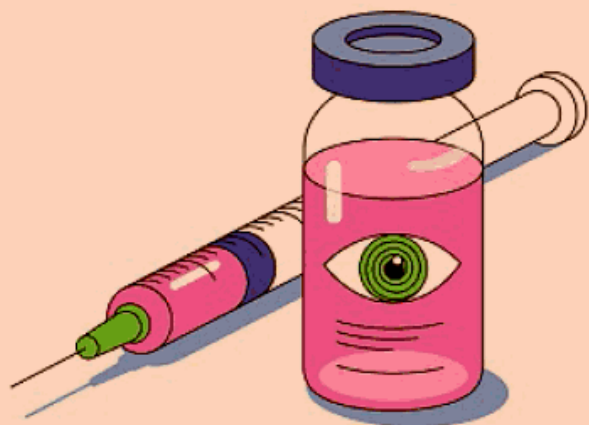
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SIMON KUPER

OPENING SHOT

The Covid conspiracies



Every pandemic generates conspiracy theories. Depending on which one you believe, the coronavirus is a bioweapon created by China, or Big Pharma, or American scientists, or it's caused by 5G technology, or it doesn't exist, just a "hoax" made up by Donald Trump's enemies. Conspiracy theorists also warn that any future "vaccine" will be a trick by governments to subjugate populations. These false beliefs are deeply consequential. They will make it harder to end this pandemic with a vaccine. They also risk making our politics even more dysfunctional.

The modern case study of pandemics and conspiracy theories is Aids. In 1983, a small Indian newspaper, the Patriot, published an anonymous letter headlined: "Aids may invade India: Mystery disease caused by US experiments." The letter, supposedly written by a "well-known American scientist and anthropologist", blamed Aids on "the Pentagon's experiments to develop... biological weapons" at an army research facility at Fort Detrick, Maryland. The letter was almost certainly authored by the KGB, which had helped create the Patriot as a vehicle for Soviet disinformation, writes Thomas Boghardt of the US Army Center of Military History.

Soon the East German "Stasi" secret service took up the anti-American conspiracy theory. "Useful idiots" around the world picked it up. By late 1987, the bogus story had appeared in media in 80 countries (including Britain's Daily Telegraph and Channel 4), reports Boghardt. It had a lasting impact. In 2005, the Rand Corporation and Oregon State University found that nearly half of African-Americans believed Aids was "man-made".

We're back in that territory now. A month ago, 29 per cent of Americans told the Pew Research Center that the coronavirus was created in a lab (while another 25 per cent weren't sure). No wonder, because the virus is the perfect generator of conspiracy theories. It's literally an invisible enemy, points out Catherine Fieschi, founder of the research group Counterpoint. She says: "It's not very satisfying to blame the virus. Instead of a virus that you can't see, you blame a 5G tower that you can see." She adds that blaming it on a combination of China, Huawei and 5G is "the equivalent of one of those dreams you wouldn't take to your psychoanalyst because it's so banal".

Today's climate is ideal for conspiracy theories, says Hugo Drochon, political theorist at Nottingham University. We're living through a moment of fear in an era of mistrust. Unprecedented numbers of people are currently alone, a state that makes them more susceptible to conspiracy theories. They have been forced to stay at home by governments, are losing their livelihoods and are spending hours on social media, where conspiracy theories run rife, even if tech platforms are now finally trying hard to censor them. WhatsApp is a particularly powerful vector

because people tend to trust messages from friends and family, says Drochon.

Meanwhile, when people turn on the news, they see distrusted politicians reciting false numbers (official statistics on deaths and infections are almost all underestimates), flanked by scientists who can't make up their minds. One week, the authorities say there's no problem; the next, we're all locked up. Someone who mistrusts the authorities will also mistrust their instructions to change behaviour. We saw this during the Aids epidemic, when many South Africans and Americans who believed conspiracy theories about the virus continued having unprotected sex and didn't get tested or take antiretroviral drugs, writes Nicoli Nattrass in *The AIDS Conspiracy*.

'Unprecedented numbers of people are currently alone, a state that makes them more susceptible'

Most epidemiologists agree on the best path out of this pandemic: first, tracking the virus by monitoring people's locations through their phones; later, a vaccine. But both these initiatives risk hitting a wall of mistrust. Even before the pandemic, there were well-founded fears of invasion of privacy (the characteristic business model of our time) as well as unfounded fears of vaccinations (always pushed by Russia). Trump himself has linked vaccines with autism. Italy abolished mandatory vaccinations for children in 2018.

Now conspiracy theorists are warning that a vaccine against Covid-19 fits into a government masterplan for mass surveillance or enslavement. The master puppeteer is often identified as Bill Gates. Fox News anchor Laura Ingraham quoted a tweet that said: "Bill Gates Calls for a 'Digital Certificate' to Identify Who Received Covid-19 Vaccine", adding her comment: "Digitally tracking Americans' every move has been a dream of the globalists for years. This health crisis is the perfect vehicle for them to push this."

The ground for such thinking will only get more fertile. Fieschi warns: "We'll look back on this period and think it was the last period of calm, because we are going to get an economic crisis and then a social crisis."

Imagine that a vaccine becomes available in 18 months. Many people will have fallen into atomised existences, either unemployed or in early retirement. Growing numbers will rate their own lives as failures, an attitude that predicts belief in conspiracy theories, says the Jean Jaurès Foundation, a French think-tank. People will be more dependent on government yet simultaneously more suspicious of it. Good luck vaccinating a distrustful world. **FT**

.....
simon.kuper@ft.com @KuperSimon



INVENTORY
EVE, RAPPER, SINGER AND ACTOR

‘My mom had me at 17, so we essentially grew up together. She was my rock’

Eve, 41, one of the first women to find success on the rap scene, began her career in the late 1990s with the Ruff Ryders label. Her 2001 platinum album *Scorpion* featured the hit singles “Who’s That Girl” and the Grammy-winning “Let Me Blow Ya Mind”. Her subsequent studio albums are *Eve-Olution* and *Lip Lock*.

What was your childhood or earliest ambition?

I just wanted attention! It was, “Mom, can I do ballet, can I do tap, can I learn the violin?” I knew I wanted to be on stage.

Private school or state school?

University or straight into work? Martin Luther King High School, Philadelphia. I loved school.

I always loved words – English was my favourite class. But I barely made it out of high school – I’d made the decision I wanted to be in the music business. A lot of my education was outside of school, writing beats in a friend’s bedroom. I did every talent show in our city. I would pawn little things I had to get a bus ticket to go to New York City to see if I could see any execs. I was very determined.

Who was or still is your mentor?

My mom. She had me at 17, so we essentially grew up together. She was my rock. She always had my back. She was adamant about me being independent. She was the woman I wanted to grow up to be.

How physically fit are you?

I try to stay fit but I’m kind of lazy because I know how to get in shape very quickly. If I have a concert or a photo shoot, I make it to the gym every single day.

Ambition or talent: which matters more to success?

Ambition, I believe. Listen, I’ve been in the business long enough to see that people who are the most talented never get the recognition. If you have ambition, you can make it through that door.

How politically committed are you?

Causes to do with young women or animals resonate with me. I’ve done things with Peta and a Congo charity called Malaika that helps girls go to school for free.

What would you like to own that you don’t currently possess?

If I can have a superpower, invisibility, for sure. I would love that.

What’s your biggest extravagance?

Hendrix, my little French bulldog. I will do anything for him – clothes, toys. He travels with me. He’s not an extravagance – he gives me so much joy.

In what place are you happiest?

When I’m content within myself, feeling grounded and in control (I can get anxious). With my husband.

What ambitions do you still have?

I have a few. My biggest is to be a mother. As far as my career goes – I don’t know. I just want to write more. I’m not sure if that’s a book.

What drives you on?

I am naturally goofy and excitable. I want to be happy, to move forward. I’ve never sat still.

What is the greatest achievement of your life so far?

I don’t honestly know. From a professional standpoint, definitely the time I won a Grammy – not so much for the song as for my mom to be at the ceremony with me.

What do you find most irritating in other people?

I do not like when someone is a know-it-all to the point where they can’t admit: “You know what? You might be right on this one.”

If your 20-year-old self could see you now, what would she think?

She would be happy. She would be: “It’s OK, I’m not driving myself crazy, I’m on the right path.”

At that age, I had a hard time trusting myself and my decisions.

Which object that you’ve lost do you wish you still had?

I’m not sentimental about things. If it’s gone, it’s not meant to be mine – it’s served its purpose.

What is the greatest challenge of our time?

Us as human beings, period. There is no respect in a lot of ways: people feel bullied, feel lonely, feel unsure.

Do you believe in an afterlife?

Yes, because I believe spirit exists.

If you had to rate your satisfaction with your life so far, out of 10, what would you score?

Ten. I’m a very lucky woman. I was born to a very young mom in a very crazy neighbourhood and look where I am now. My career is a dream and even the bad stuff in my life has made me who I am. **FT**

Interview by Hester Lacey.

Eve is scheduled to appear at the Y Not Festival, July 24-26, ynotfestival.com

HERE'S TO NEW ADVENTURES

ONE DAY SOON



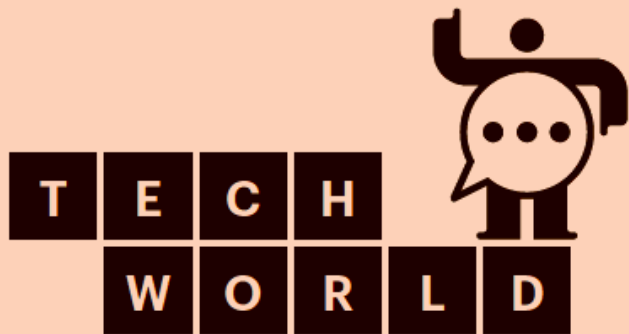
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BY LEO LEWIS IN JAPAN

How the coronavirus exposed Japan's low-tech blind spot

As Japan has slowly contorted itself into a life of corona confinement, two books have been fighting for the top spot on Amazon.co.jp. One is the Japanese translation of Albert Camus' 1947 classic *La Peste*, in which the horrors of a cholera outbreak are used to dissect the human condition. The other is a still unreleased, 1,072-page guidebook for the video game *Animal Crossing: New Horizons*. The book (hard copy only) will go on sale in late April, about a month after the game itself – a build-your-own-island simulator – emerged to critical acclaim.

The resurgent popularity of the Camus novel makes grim sense. But so do the huge presales of the *Animal Crossing* guidebook: Japan, despite a high-tech reputation, can be very low-tech in its tastes. In most countries, gamers seeking to crack the secrets of a new release on Nintendo's WiFi-enabled, state-of-the-art portable console, would head straight to the internet. Japan – the country that pioneered the machine – mass-orders a book on which you could break a toe.

An isolated example? No, not in a country where large parts of the public and private sectors still insist upon formal communications by fax, where a politician can become the government's deputy head of cyber security without ever having used a computer in his professional life and where the banking system is only now grudgingly prodding its customers towards internet transactions.

The strictures imposed by the coronavirus have brought some of these Japanese paradoxes into

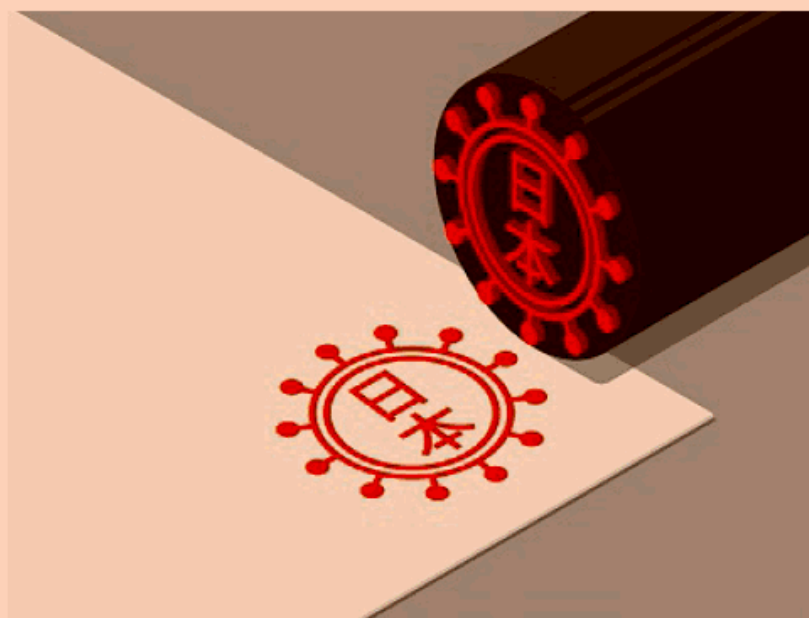


ILLUSTRATION BY PATE

sharper relief. We currently spend ever longer hours watching the spread of the virus discussed on TV shows that offer a masterclass in the visual techniques of yesteryear. Despite the availability of the world's most sophisticated digital tools, Japanese broadcasters prefer to contextualise current affairs using whiteboards, cardboard models, sponge-tipped pointing sticks and other weapons from the primary-school arsenal.

All those choices are absolutely Japan's prerogative. Where some of them now jar, though, is when they come up against the new reality of the virus and the now unarguable recommendation that people work from home. Japan, for various reasons, took its time reaching this conclusion but, even in the twilight weeks before emergency was officially declared and telework

'Many of my friends say their reason for breaking the work-from-home edict has been to go to their office to stamp documents with the official company seal'


became a necessity, it was clear that the country's low-tech leanings were about to be harshly exposed.

In early March, as part of a survey, Japanese IT research group ITR asked the country's corporations if they had systems that would allow staff to work remotely: 28 per cent said that they did; 27 per cent said they were thinking about it; while the remaining 45 per cent either weren't even considering it or didn't know. These figures imply a stubbornness that requires commitment – both practical and ideological.

About the time the ITR report was published, Japan was commemorating the ninth anniversary of the Tohoku earthquake and tsunami – a disaster that demonstrated the vulnerability of companies, government and infrastructure and which evinced pledges that lessons would be learnt. In that light, Japan – at a terrible price – was given a decade's head start on preparing for mass disruption, and the sub-30 per cent telework readiness is disappointing*.

Elements of the problem, though, are baked in at the legal level. Although parts of the private sector have attempted to reduce this, most official documents still require the physical stamp of a personal or company seal – the latter of which must mostly remain in the office. Many of my Japanese friends – especially now that we are in tax season – say their main reason for breaking work-from-home edicts has been to go in and stamp documents.

The insistence upon physical seals is a waste of time. Company adoption of digital contract and seal technology has been modest. But – to the great consternation of Japan's professional sealmakers – the coronavirus crisis has now forced the government to take the lead in pressing for a fundamental change of the technological and legal framework behind document authentication.

From a productivity perspective alone, this would be welcome. But the symbolism would perhaps be even more powerful. Japan's relationship with technology has always had some very curious blind spots – often to the silent frustration of the nation that it inconveniences. Few may want to admit any silver linings to this crisis but this is at least one contender. 

*Leo Lewis is the FT's Tokyo correspondent. *For more on this theme, see Tim Harford's cover story*

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ROBERT SHRIMSLEY THE NATIONAL CONVERSATION

The apps that could change your life

I'm very excited about this new smartphone app that is going to help stop the spread of coronavirus after the lockdown is eased. The basic premise is that, through Bluetooth technology, the app will track everyone we have been near so that alerts can be sent to anyone who has come into contact or close proximity with an infected carrier.

Obviously, it needs everyone who can to download the app and use it, but, in terms of containing a future spread, one can see the idea. Perhaps it could be allied to a TikTok video in which a dancing health secretary points to all the interactions you've had with a spreader. Clearly, the immediate concern is reducing the reach of the virus but it is easy to see other valuable uses for this technology. Some will worry about the civil liberties implications of collecting all this data, but the potential advances are significant.

- **The 5G app:** This lets you know if you are within five yards of someone who has used social media to alert the world to the fact that 5G phone masts are spreading the coronavirus - and also Eamonn Holmes. This will definitely be useful in social occasions, offering you the chance to suddenly remember a pressing appointment somewhere else, possibly your MMR booster shot. The premium version of this app allows you to text them anonymously with images seemingly showing an actual mast spraying the virus on to a school bus just five miles from where they are.

- **The Brexit app:** This can be tailored to your political persuasion so that you never have to meet anyone with the opposite view on leaving the EU. This way you can create the perfect real world filter bubble. If you are a Remainer, the effect will be rather like living in Richmond.

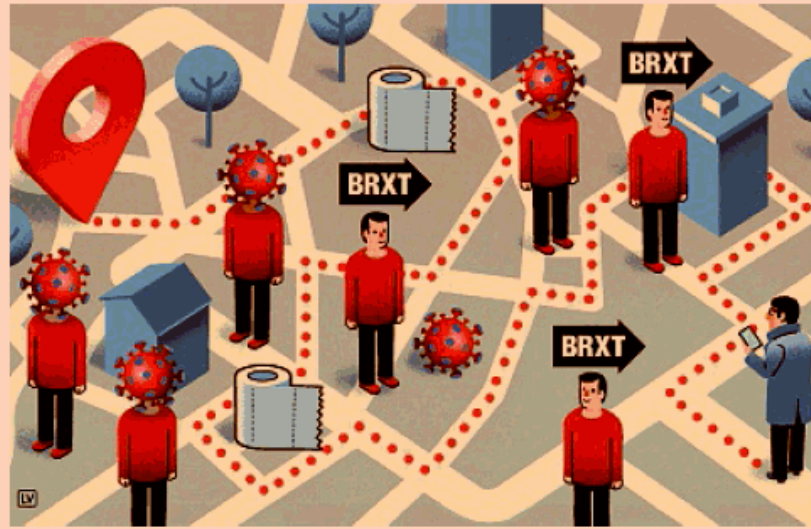


ILLUSTRATION BY LUCAS VARELA

- **Dinner party:** One for the post-lockdown scenario. This app collates the tweets, Facebook posts and writings of anyone you are due to see socially into a handy briefing so that you are apprised of their interests and obsessions. This allows you to seem impressively knowledgeable or to make sure you are sitting next to someone else.

- **The stockpiler:** Good for hard Brexit and Covid-19; the stockpiler alerts you to new supplies of toilet paper. After the crisis, it also offers the same service for sumac, harissa and zaatar. A spin-off app allows bog-roll vigilantes to geolocate the homes of those with large stashes. The original app offers a premium service, which allows you to block the spin-off.

- **Superparent app:** This is for all those ordinary people who don't spend their days basking in the reflected glory of their children. The app alerts you if you are meeting someone whose social media activity includes a large degree of humblebragging about their spawn's latest achievements. It runs the full age range from anyone who tells you their baby took its first steps at seven months, through those who are thrilled by their kid's scholarship to St Paul's, right up to Stanley Johnson.

On receipt of the alert, you can

immediately excuse yourself on the grounds that you're flying to Boston to see your child, who is doing a second degree at Harvard.

- **Workshy:** This app is designed for those out skiving or on family errands when they should be at work. The software detects incoming calls from your colleagues and creates a work backdrop to your video call.

- **Lockdown cop:** This app is designed for Northamptonshire police officers enforcing the lockdown and alerts them to the purchase of inessential items. This follows the warning that officers may search shoppers for evidence of purchasing that did not really justify leaving home. Linked to Bluetooth signals in each supermarket aisle, it immediately alerts cops if shoppers have strayed beyond the protein and staples counters and have got too close to the scented candles, sushi or exotic fruit. The list of items can be regularly updated. Apples, oranges and bananas are all cleared but pears and strawberries may be considered luxury items, while kiwi fruit are subject to variations between forces. The app also identifies suspicious sunbathers. **FT**

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On this week's **Culture Call**, the FT's transatlantic podcast, we speak to **chef and TV host Samin Nosrat** about **comfort food** in the age of social distancing - plus, how the pandemic **might affect restaurants** in the long term; [ft.com/culture-call](https://www.ft.com/culture-call)



Reply

For me, the key takeaways from this article ("How much TV should your children be watching right now?", April 11/12) are don't crowd out other activities, be selective about the content and accept that, in these unprecedented times, perfect parenting is not easy. Our eight-year-old son enjoys relaxing with some TV, just as we do.
BlckFox90N135W via FT.com

@lawkas April 9
Great article via @FT on TV's impact on children during the lockdown. Both thoughtful + reassuring with fascinating facts

Re Simon Kuper's "The pandemic will forever transform how we live" (April 11/12). The biggest thing coronavirus has shown is that revolution in behaviour is possible. And quickly. Moving towards a zero-carbon lifestyle and economy could and should happen.
Moot point via FT.com

We did the "Family Easter quiz" (April 11/12) on Zoom with the whole family. It was great entertainment for a couple of hours. Can you do this every week till this is over?
Hans Materna via FT.com

Re "A cartoonist's look at life during coronavirus - with an evil cat" (April 11/12). This morning, I saw a neighbour talking to her cat. It was obvious she thought the cat understood her. I came home, told my dog, we laughed a lot.
La Pomme via FT.com

Thanks to Robert Shrimmsley for making me laugh ("How I'm betraying my class in the lockdown", April 11/12). I'm so tired of being told what hobby I could take up, what skill I could acquire, what books I now have time to read and which box sets I can stream. I'm very grateful to still have my job and its income, but I'm not less busy.
LateAdopter via FT.com

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Please email magazineletters@ft.com. Include a daytime telephone number and full address (not for publication). Letters may be edited.

Quiz answers: The link was shades of purple 1. Violet 2. Magenta 3. Aubergine 4. Mulberry 5. Puce 6. Ibis Lavender 7. Iris Murdoch (Iris) 8. The Sugar Plum Fairy 9. Heather (Paul McCartney's marriage) 10. Lillo wine Pictur e quiz Whoor what do the following pictures add up to? David Lean + Neat Loaf + Learn me a

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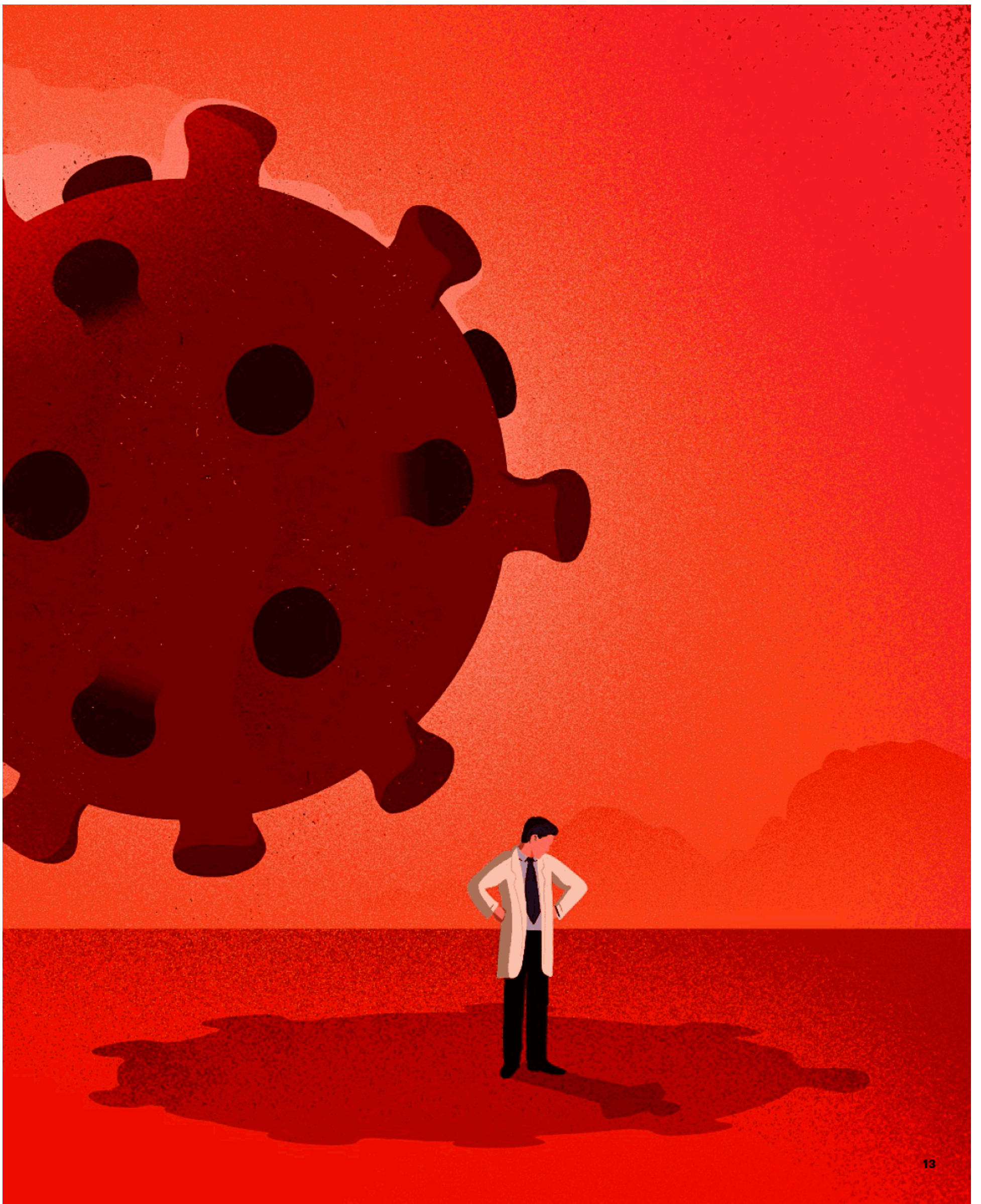
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WHY WE FAIL TO PREPARE FOR DISASTERS

Many catastrophes – from hurricanes to pandemics – are all too predictable. And yet, again and again, we do nothing to get ready for them. What drives our inaction in the face of imminent danger? And will it ever change? *Tim Harford* investigates. Illustrations by *Sébastien Thibault*





Hurricane Katrina left parts of New Orleans 12ft underwater. Authorities were not prepared for the 2005 storm despite clear warnings

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ou can't say that nobody saw it coming.

For years, people had warned that New Orleans was vulnerable. The Houston Chronicle reported that 250,000 people would be stranded if a major hurricane struck, with the low-lying city left 20ft underwater. New Orleans's Times-Picayune noted the inadequacy of the levees. In 2004, National Geographic vividly described a scenario in which 50,000 people drowned. The Red Cross feared a similar death toll. Even FEMA, the Federal Emergency Management Agency, was alert: in 2001, it had stated that a major hurricane hitting New Orleans was one of the three likeliest catastrophes facing the United States.

Now the disaster scenario was becoming a reality. A 140mph hurricane was heading directly towards the city. More than a million residents were warned to evacuate. USA Today warned of "a modern Atlantis", explaining that the hurricane "could overwhelm New Orleans with up to 20ft of filthy, chemical-polluted water".

The city's mayor, Ray Nagin, begged people to get away. He was reluctant to make evacuation mandatory because more than 100,000 people had no cars and no way of leaving. The roads out were jammed, anyway. Thousands of visiting conference delegates were stranded; the airport had been closed. There were no emergency shelters. Nagin mooted using a local stadium, the Louisiana Superdome, as a temporary refuge - but the Superdome was not necessarily hurricane-proof and Nagin was warned that it wasn't equipped to be a shelter.

But then, the storm turned aside. It was September 2004, and New Orleans had been spared. Hurricane Ivan had provided the city, and the nation, with a vivid warning. It had demonstrated the need to prepare, urgently and on a dozen different fronts, for the next hurricane.

"In early 2005, emergency officials were under no illusions about the risks New Orleans faced," explain Howard Kunreuther and Robert Meyer in their book *The Ostrich Paradox*. But the authorities did not act swiftly or decisively enough.

Eleven months later, Hurricane Katrina drowned the city - and many hundreds of its residents. As predicted, citizens had been unable or unwilling to leave; levees had been breached in over 50 places; the Superdome had been an inadequate shelter.

Surely, with such a clear warning, New Orleans should have been better prepared to withstand Hurricane Katrina? It's easily said. But as the new coronavirus sweeps the globe, killing thousands more people every day, we are now realising that New Orleans is not the only place that did not prepare for a predictable catastrophe.

In 2003, the *Harvard Business Review* published an article titled "Predictable Surprises: The Disasters You Should Have Seen Coming". The authors, Max Bazerman and Michael Watkins, both business school professors, followed up with a book of the same title. Bazerman and Watkins argued that while the world is an unpredictable place, unpredictability is often not the problem. The problem is that faced with clear risks, we still fail to act.

For Watkins, the coronavirus pandemic is the ultimate predictable surprise. "It's not like this is some new issue," he says, before sending over the notes for a pandemic response exercise that he ran at Harvard University. It's eerily prescient: a shortage of masks; a scramble for social distance; university leaders succumbing to the illness. The date on the document is October 12 2002. We've been thinking about pandemics for a long time.

Other warnings have been more prominent. In 2015, Bill Gates gave a TED talk called "The next outbreak? We're not ready"; 2.5 million people had watched it by the end of 2019. In 2018, the science journalist Ed Yong wrote a piece in *The Atlantic* titled "The Next Plague Is Coming. Is America Ready?" Now we know the answer, and it wasn't just the Americans who were unprepared.

Officialdom had also been sounding the alarm. The World Health Organization and the World Bank had convened the Global Preparedness Monitoring Board (GPMB), chaired by Elhadj As Sy of the Red Cross and Gro Harlem Brundtland, a former director of the WHO.

The GPMB published a report in October warning of "a cycle of panic and neglect" and calling for better preparation for "managing the fallout of a high-impact respiratory pathogen". It noted that a pandemic "akin to the scale and virulence of the one in 1918 would cost the modern economy \$3 trillion".

Alongside these authoritative warnings were the near misses, the direct parallels to Hurricane Ivan:

‘While the world is an unpredictable place, unpredictability is often not the problem. The problem is that faced with clear risks, we still fail to act’



Sars in 2003; two dangerous influenza epidemics, H5N1 in 2006 and H1N1 in 2009; Ebola in 2013; and Mers in 2015. Each deadly outbreak sparked brief and justifiable alarm, followed by a collective shrug of the shoulders.

It is understandable that we have too few doctors, nurses and hospital beds to cope with a pandemic: spare doctors are expensive. It is less clear why we have so few masks, are so unprepared to carry out widespread testing and didn't do more to develop coronavirus vaccines after the Sars epidemic of 2003, which involved a strain related to the current outbreak. (There was a flurry of activity, but interest waned after 2004.)

We were warned, both by the experts and by reality. Yet on most fronts, we were still caught unprepared. Why?

Wilful blindness is not confined to those in power. The rest of us should acknowledge that we too struggled to grasp what was happening as quickly as we should.

I include myself. In mid-February, I interviewed an epidemiologist, Dr Nathalie MacDermott of King's College London, who said it would likely prove impossible to contain the new coronavirus, in which case it might well infect more than half the world's population. Her best guess of the fatality rate at the time was a little under one per cent.

I nodded, believed her, did the maths in my head - 50 million dead - and went about my business. I did not sell my shares. I did not buy masks. I didn't even stock up on spaghetti. The step between recognising the problem and taking action was simply too great. Nor did the broadcast of my radio interview with MacDermott on the BBC seem to spark much in the way of disaster planning.

Psychologists describe this inaction in the face of danger as *normalcy bias* or *negative panic*. In the face of catastrophe, from the destruction of Pompeii in AD79 to the September 11 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center, people have often been slow to recognise the danger and confused about how to respond. So they do nothing, until it is too late.

Part of the problem may simply be that we get our cues from others. In a famous experiment ▶

'Logically, it was always clear that the disease could strike middle-class people who enjoy skiing holidays in Italy; emotionally, we seemed unable to grasp that fact until it was too late'

◀ conducted in the late 1960s, the psychologists Bibb Latané and John Darley pumped smoke into a room in which their subjects were filling in a questionnaire. When the subject was sitting alone, he or she tended to note the smoke and calmly leave to report it. When subjects were in a group of three, they were much less likely to react: each person remained passive, reassured by the passivity of the others.

As the new coronavirus spread, social cues influenced our behaviour in a similar way. Harrowing reports from China made little impact, even when it became clear that the virus had gone global. We could see the metaphorical smoke pouring out of the ventilation shaft, and yet we could also see our fellow citizens acting as though nothing was wrong: no stockpiling, no self-distancing, no Wuhan-shake greetings. Then, when the social cues finally came, we all changed our behaviour at once. At that moment, not a roll of toilet paper was to be found.

Normalcy bias and the herd instinct are not the only cognitive shortcuts that lead us astray. Another is *optimism bias*. Psychologists have known for half a century that people tend to be unreasonably optimistic about their chances of being the victim of a crime, a car accident or a disease, but, in 1980, the psychologist Neil Weinstein sharpened the question. Was it a case of optimism in general, a feeling that bad things rarely happened to anyone? Or perhaps it was a more egotistical optimism: a sense that while bad things happen, they don't happen *to me*.

Weinstein asked more than 250 students to compare themselves to other students. They were asked to ponder pleasant prospects such as a good job or a long life, and vivid risks such as an early heart attack or venereal disease. Overwhelmingly, the students felt that good things were likely to happen to them, while unpleasant fates awaited their peers.

Robert Meyer's research, set out in *The Ostrich Paradox*, shows this effect in action as Hurricane Sandy loomed in 2012. He found that coastal residents were well aware of the risks of the storm; they expected even more damage than professional meteorologists did. But they were relaxed, confident that it would be other people who suffered.

While I realise some people are paranoid about catching Covid-19, it's egotistical optimism that I see in myself. Although I know that millions of people in the UK will catch this disease, my gut instinct, against all logic, is that I won't be one of them. Meyer points out that such egotistical optimism is particularly pernicious in the case of an infectious disease. A world full of people with the same instinct is a world full of disease vectors.

I take precautions partly because of social pressure and partly because, intellectually, I know they are necessary. But my survival instinct just isn't doing the job, because I simply do not feel my survival is at stake.

The fact that the epidemic started in China, among ethnically Asian people, can only have deepened the sense of personal invulnerability in the west. As epidemiologist Neil Ferguson told the FT: "What had happened in China was a long way away, and it takes a certain type of person to take on board that this might actually happen here."

The virus started to feel real to Europeans only when Europeans were suffering. Logically, it was always clear that the disease could strike middle-class people who enjoy skiing holidays in Italy; emotionally, we seemed unable to grasp that fact until it was too late.

A fourth problem, highlighted by Meyer's co-author Howard Kunreuther, is what we might call *exponential myopia*. We find exponential growth counterintuitive to the point of being baffling – we tend to think of it as a shorthand for "fast". An epidemic that doubles in size every three days will turn one case into a thousand within a month – and into a million within two months if the growth does not slow.

Donald Trump's boast, on March 9, that there had been only 22 deaths in the US, was ill-judged in light of what we know about exponential growth, but he is hardly the only person to fail to grasp this point. In 1975, the psychologists William Wagenaar and Sabato Sagaria found that when asked to forecast an exponential process, people often underestimated by a factor of 10. The process in that study was much slower than this epidemic, doubling in 10 months rather than a few days. No wonder we find ourselves overtaken by events.

Finally, there's our seemingly limitless capacity for wishful thinking. In a complex world, we are surrounded by contradictory clues and differing opinions. We can and do seize upon whatever happens to support the conclusions we wish to reach – whether it's that the virus is being spread by 5G networks, is a hoax dreamed up by "the Dems" or is no worse than the flu.

Both Robert Meyer and Michael Watkins made an observation that surprised me: previous near misses such as Sars or Hurricane Ivan don't necessarily help citizens prepare. It is all too easy for us to draw the wrong lesson, which is that the authorities have it under control. We were fine before and we'll be fine this time.

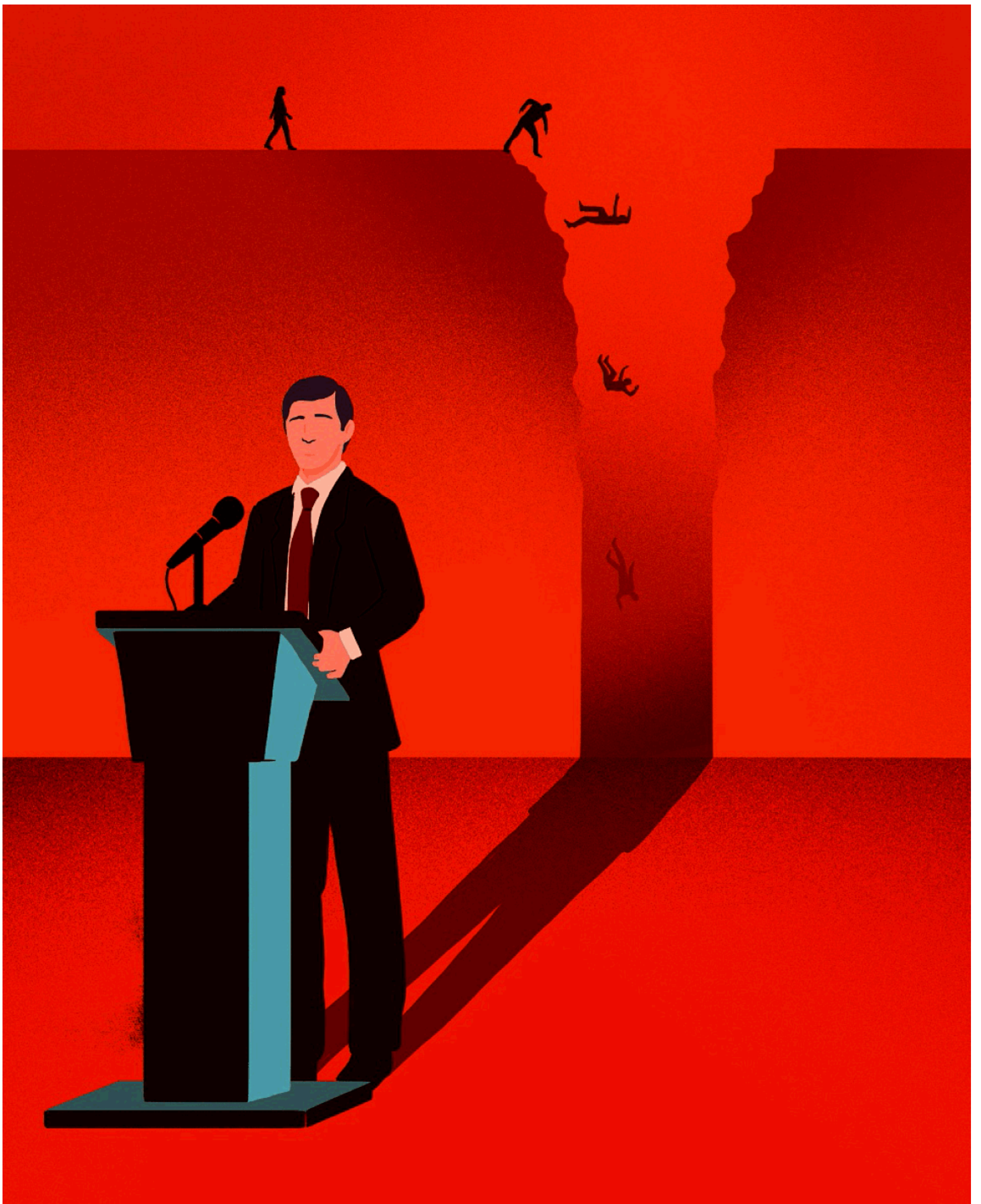
This, then, is why you and I did not see this coming: we couldn't grasp the scale of the threat; we took complacent cues from each other, rather than digesting the logic of the reports from China and Italy; we retained a sunny optimism that no matter how bad things got, we personally would escape harm; we could not grasp what an exponentially growing epidemic really means; and our wishful thinking pushed us to look for reasons to ignore the danger.

The true failure, however, surely lies with our leaders. We are humble folk, minding our own business; their business should be safeguarding our welfare, advised by expert specialists. You or I could hardly be expected to read Gro Harlem Brundtland's October Global Preparedness Monitoring Board report, and if we did, it is not clear what action we could really take. Surely every government should have someone who is paying attention to such things?

Margaret Heffernan, the author of *Uncharted*, warns that the same mental failings that blind us to certain risks can do the same to our leaders.

"We hang around with people like ourselves and if they're not fussed, we're not fussed," she says. "Gro Harlem Brundtland lives inside a global health institution, so she cares. Most politicians don't."

While politicians have access to the best advice, they may not feel obliged to take experts seriously. Powerful people, after all, feel sheltered from many everyday concerns. ▶





Healthcare workers treat coronavirus patients in Italy. Reports from China and Italy failed to dampen over-optimism about the scale of the threat

◀ Heffernan argues that this sense of distance between the powerful and the problem shaped the awful response to Hurricane Katrina.

Leaked emails show the response of Michael Brown, then the director of Fema. One subordinate wrote: "Sir, I know that you know the situation is past critical. Here some things you might not know. Hotels are kicking people out, thousands gathering in the streets with no food or water... dying patients at the DMAT tent being medivac. Estimates are many will die within hours..."

Brown's response, in its entirety, was: "Thanks for update. Anything specific I need to do or tweak?"

That's a sense of distance and personal impunity distilled to its purest form.

Sometimes, of course, the feeling of invulnerability is an illusion: in early March, the British Prime Minister Boris Johnson jovially declared that people would be "pleased to know" that he was shaking hands with everybody at a hospital tending to patients with coronavirus, and inviting people to make their own decisions about such matters.

It was a shamefully irresponsible thing to say - but it also spoke volumes about his misplaced intuition that he could come to no harm. Within weeks, the story of Johnson had become a classical tragedy, the hero laid low by his own larger-than-life qualities.

We should acknowledge that even foreseeable problems can be inherently hard to prepare for. A pandemic, for example, is predictable only in broad outline. The specifics are unknowable.

"What disease? When? Where?" says Heffernan. "It's inherently unpredictable."

The UK, for example, ran a pandemic planning exercise in October 2016, dubbed "Exercise Cygnus". That forethought is admirable, but also highlights the problem: Cygnus postulated a flu pandemic, perhaps a strain of the H1N1 virus that killed tens of thousands in 2009, and many millions in 1918. Covid-19 is caused by a coronavirus instead, a relative of the Sars-Cov strain from the 2003 outbreak. Some of the implications are the same: we should stockpile personal protective equipment. Some, such as the danger of flu to young children, are different.

In any case, those implications seem broadly to have been ignored.

"We learnt what would help, but did not necessarily implement those lessons," wrote Professor Ian Boyd in *Nature* in March. Boyd had been a senior scientific adviser to the UK government at the time. "The assessment, in many sectors of government, was that the resulting medicine [in terms of policy] was so strong that it would be spat out."

Being fully prepared would have required diverting enormous sums from the everyday requirements of a medical system that was already struggling to cope with the nation's needs. The UK's National Health Service was short of staff before the crisis began, seems to have had woefully inadequate stores of protective equipment for doctors and nurses, and has long pursued a strategy of minimising the use of hospital beds.

It's this quest for efficiency above all else - in the NHS, and modern organisations in general - that leaves us vulnerable. The financial crisis taught us that banks needed much bigger buffers, but few carried the lesson over to other institutions, such as hospitals.

"On a good day, having 100 per cent of your intensive care beds in use looks efficient. The day a pandemic strikes is the day you realise the folly of efficiency. You've got to have a margin," says Heffernan.

These margins are hard to maintain, though. In 2006, Arnold Schwarzenegger - then governor of California - announced an investment of hundreds of millions of dollars in medical supplies and mobile hospitals to deal with earthquakes, fires and particularly pandemics. According to the *Los Angeles Times*, emergency response teams would have access to a stockpile including "50 million N95 respirators, 2,400 portable ventilators and kits to set up 21,000 additional patient beds wherever they were needed".

It was impressive. But after a brutal recession, Schwarzenegger's successor, Jerry Brown, cut the funding for the scheme, and the stockpile is nowhere to be found.

Brown isn't the only one to look for something to cut when funds are tight. Managers everywhere have long been promoted on their ability to save money in the short term.

I spoke to a friend of mine, a senior NHS consultant who had contracted Covid-19 as he tended his patients. Recovering in self-isolation, he reminisced about the days that he was told to find cuts of five to 10 per cent - and the fact that his hospital was no longer providing coffee for staff meetings as a cost-saving exercise. That seems like a memo from another era - but it was just a few weeks ago. As the cost-saving measures were being introduced in the UK, Italians had started to die.

The pandemic has offered us few easy choices so far. Nor are there many easy answers to the general problem of preparing for predictable catastrophes. It is too tempting to look at a near miss like Hurricane Ivan or Sars and conclude that since the worst did not happen then, the worst will not happen in the future. It is tempting, too, to fight the last war: we built up reserves in banking after the financial crisis, but we did not pay attention to reserve capacity in health, vaccine production and social care.

Preparedness is possible. Margaret Heffernan points to Singapore, a tiny country with front-line experience of Sars, acutely aware of its geographical vulnerability.

"The foresight unit in Singapore is the best I've ever encountered," she says. "There are serious people working through very serious scenarios, and there's a diversity of thinking styles and disciplines."

Serious scenarios are useful, but as the UK's Exercise Cygnus demonstrated, serious scenarios are no use if they are not taken seriously. That means spending money on research that may never pay off, or on emergency capacity that may never be used. It is not easy to justify such investments with the day-to-day logic of efficiency.

Singapore isn't the only place to have prepared. Almost four years ago, philanthropists, governments and foundations created the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations. Cepi's mission is to support and develop technologies and systems that could create vaccines more quickly.

While the world chafes at the idea that a vaccine for the new coronavirus might take more than a year to deploy, such a timeline would have been unthinkable fast in the face of earlier epidemics.

'The financial crisis taught us that banks needed much bigger buffers, but few people carried the lesson over to other institutions, such as hospitals'



If such a vaccine does arrive within a year – there is no guarantee it will arrive at all – that will be thanks to the likes of Cepi.

Still, we are left wondering what might have been if Cepi had existed just a few years earlier. In October 2019, for example, it started funding vaccine “platform” technologies to enable a more agile, rapid response to what it called “Disease X... a rapidly moving, highly lethal pandemic of a respiratory pathogen killing 50 [million] to 80 million people and wiping out nearly 5 per cent of the world’s economy”. That’s preparedness; alas Disease X may have arrived just a little too soon for the preparedness to bear fruit.

And what of New Orleans? In the summer of 2017, it was underwater again. A vast and expensive system of pumps had been installed, but the system was patchy, under-supplied with power and unable to cope with several weeks of persistent rain. It does not inspire confidence for what will happen if a big hurricane does strike.

Robert Meyer says that while the city has learnt a lot about preparation, “Katrina was not close to the worst-case scenario for New Orleans, which is a full category-five storm hitting just east of the city”.

The same may be true of the pandemic. Because Covid-19 has spread much faster than HIV and is more dangerous than the flu, it is easy to imagine that this is as bad as it is possible to get. It isn’t. Perhaps this pandemic, like the financial crisis, is a challenge that should make us think laterally, applying the lessons we learn to other dangers, from bioterrorism to climate change.

Or perhaps the threat really is a perfectly predictable surprise: another virus, just like this one, but worse. Imagine an illness as contagious as measles and as virulent as Ebola, a disease that disproportionately kills children rather than the elderly.

What if we’re thinking about this the wrong way? What if instead of seeing Sars as the warning for Covid-19, we should see Covid-19 itself as the warning?

Next time, will we be better prepared? **FT**

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Michael Stern on the 80th floor of 111 West 57th, his latest residential project, in New York last month

In a city of epic skyscrapers and towering egos, this 40-year-old stands out as the risk-taking developer of some of New York's most audacious new buildings. Stern has seen off lawsuits, temporary foreclosure and the financial crisis – but will his most ambitious project to date survive coronavirus? *Joshua Chaffin* reports. Photographs by *Stefan Ruiz* and *Patrick Lyn*

THE HIGHS AND LOWS OF MICHAEL STERN

Michael Stern was talking – he talks a lot – but I was not really listening. He may have been going on about the white onyx bathroom floors. Or perhaps it was the copper roof that was restored with materials from the original 1925 supplier.

“I geek out on that stuff. I think it’s supercool,” Stern had confessed to me. Or maybe it was the mind-boggling complexity of building an impossibly slender, 1,421ft tower in the middle of Manhattan, threaded like a needle through a historic landmark?

I could not hear him because I was in a trance, mesmerised by a singular view of Central Park. It hit me just as I turned right after stepping from the elevator on the 43rd floor: through floor-to-ceiling glass windows was an uninterrupted and perfectly centred vista of Frederick Law Olmsted’s grand creation. It was thrilling. I felt as though I had transcended the maw of the city and the park had been rolled out like a fine tapestry before me. Eventually, my dominion over it felt a bit obscene. From my perch, it seemed I might plunge like a high diver and splash down in the Onassis Reservoir as if it were my backyard pool.

It was early March and I had joined Stern for a tour of 111 West 57th, arguably the most dazzling of a new clique of spiny residential towers at the edge of the park that reshape the city’s skyline. Known as “super-talls”, they are engineering marvels that could not have even been built a decade ago. They are also monuments to an era when billionaires ruled the earth, and Russian oligarchs, Chinese princelings, Middle East sheikhs and western hedge-fund managers poured money into Manhattan and central London in search of lavish apartments that doubled as safe-deposit boxes.

When Stern and his partners broke ground on their tower in 2014, the market for “luxury apartments” in New York City had become so overheated that the term had ceased to have much meaning for units that ranged in price from a few million dollars to tens of millions. Demand was such that Stern would sell out a building based on a plan and a showroom. That is no longer the case – even before the coronavirus pandemic. For the past few years, buyers have taken their time, with the confidence that merchandise would not vanish if they waited, and that suddenly pliable brokers would only sweeten the deal. ▶

◀ That would seem ominous for 111 West 57th, which is now close to completion after years of delays and legal bloodletting among its backers. Its units are priced from \$17m to more than \$50m apiece. Sales have been slow. Still, when I got around to peppering Stern with questions about the weak market, he swatted them away. His tower, with just 46 full-floor apartments - each with its own claim on that extraordinary view - was not really subject to the usual market forces, he explained.

Nor supposedly were his buyers. "I don't know that the barometers you use for the general market really apply here," he told me in a living room made to look like a billionaire's model residence. A bottle of champagne was resting in a silver ice bucket on an end table - presumably because billionaires come home each evening and toast the good life.

Neither of us then realised a novel virus that had originated in central China was swirling through the city outside. A market slide that was under way would accelerate in the coming days into a full-blown calamity. We were hurtling into another era - one with its own dangers and assumptions - and we did not even know it.

Michael Stern is currently the most intriguing of that unique tribe of brash, visionary - and occasionally disreputable - men who have built the skyscrapers of New York. We call them developers. Stern is just 40. But over the past decade he has taken his place alongside the heavyweights by putting up a series of buildings that have been both commercial and critical successes. New York developers possess diverse talents. Some are brutally economical,

à la Fred Trump. Some are showmen, like his son, the president. There are buccaneers who conjure beauty at the edge of bankruptcy, like the legendary Harry Macklowe. Some excel at the dark arts of securing zoning permits. Others can game tax benefits. Many are talented liars and seasoned litigants.

Stern, who never attended university, prides himself on his "nuts and bolts" knowledge of construction. Yet he also has a taste and sensibility that can make an architect's pulse quicken. "He's commissioned some very good architecture," says Daniel Kaplan, the senior partner at FXCollaborative, the New York architecture firm. "The thing that's really interesting about him is that all the things people say you can't do - or you can't do for the money - he says, 'Forget it!'"

Part of the thrill of following Stern is not only watching to see what he will build next but whether he will fall flat. "He's one of those people who could crash and burn," says another architect.

One person who has worked with Stern suspects that the young developer is willing to risk everything for glory. "He wants to be great. He wants to be Harry Macklowe, and he's willing to go bankrupt a few times along the way."

Stern has piled up lawsuits. Two years ago, 111 West 57th was briefly pushed into foreclosure by one of its investors. A one-time partner has accused him of forging his signature on loan documents. The young developer denies this and cheerfully waves it all away. "Litigation is inevitable in this business," he told me. "If you're not being sued by people, you're not doing enough work."

Stern grew up in an Orthodox Jewish enclave on Long Island, the son of an auto-shop owner and nurse, and was a middling student. Instead of university, he went to Florida. "I think everyone who grew up in Long Island wants to get out of Long Island," he told me.

Although he is sparing with the details, he says he went to work on building sites for a developer, eventually managing construction crews. It was the late 1990s, and Florida's roller-coaster housing market was on a sharp upswing. So, when the work day ended at 3pm, Stern began to build his own single-family houses on the side and flip them. "I'd buy a house, knock it down, build another," he recalled. "The timing was good."

In 2002, he returned to New York and began putting up single-family homes and small, unremarkable apartment buildings in the outer boroughs. It is the same way that Fred Trump made his fortune. Part of the secret to that particular trade is absolute economy: using features and fixtures that can be repeated again and again, and minimising at all cost the need for skilled labour.

Stern was actually shy - almost meek - in those days, according to someone who encountered him then. The New York property

market was booming and he eventually linked up with David Juracich, an easy-going Australian expat who yearned to leave his job as a derivatives trader to join the developer trade. They made an odd couple: one tall and athletic, with reddish hair, who goes by the nickname "Wavey Dave"; the other short, dark and slightly awkward.

Their first venture was not a blazing success. After months of scouting properties, Stern zeroed in on a part of Brooklyn near the Gowanus Canal - a body of water so befouled that city engineers call its oily sludge "black mayonnaise". Nearby neighbourhoods were gentrifying. Stern reckoned they could buy one small plot of land that had been approved for development and then scoop up two contiguous ones. The zoning rights would then flow through the whole assemblage. That, in turn, would allow them to build a 14-storey tower.

"He's an amazing talker and he talked me into it," says Juracich. In early 2008, the partners poured \$1.6m in concrete into the ground. Global financial markets soon began to teeter and credit became scarce. Without a construction loan, they were forced to leave the site fallow until the city eventually buried it - concrete and all - for safety reasons.



Left: Stern's first venture with David Juracich was to buy a plot of land alongside the polluted Gowanus Canal
Right: 111 West 57th, Stern's 'impossibly slender' 1,421ft tower. The building is finally close to completion after delays but the market for luxury properties has plummeted in the meantime



Rather than give up, Stern decided they should build in Manhattan. "He just pushes forward," says Juracich.

It happened to be the day that Lehman Brothers failed when Stern visited the Verizon building, a charmless wedding cake of a structure on West 18th Street in Chelsea that was crammed full of engineers and telecoms gear. "I got a Google alert on my phone that the world was ending," he recalled.

What intrigued him was the roof that we were then standing on. The building towers above everything else in the neighbourhood – like an awkward teenager – and so offered unobstructed views in all directions: to nearby Midtown, and then over the rooftops of Greenwich Village to the fortress of Downtown, and even across to Brooklyn. "Anytime I look at a building I always go to the roof first," he told me as I took in the panorama. Stern was clambering around in a knit shirt that was casual but may – or may not – have cost a fortune, and Prada trainers.

They negotiated to buy the building for \$25m. But it was hardly straightforward: Verizon was not keen to sell to a 29-year-old no one had ever heard of. Money was tight. Stern was stretched by the Gowanus debacle and going through a divorce. To cobble together a \$3m deposit, Juracich mortgaged a rental apartment he'd considered his nest egg. "We would walk investors through day and night to try and bring them in and nobody saw it," he recalled.

Perhaps that is because converting a forbidding industrial building with few windows into luxury condominiums was a Rubik's Cube sort

of puzzle. The stairways at the corners of the structure would have to be removed to open up the views. An industrial smoke stack would have to be dismantled. Windows had to be punched through the brick. Verizon, meanwhile, would continue to occupy the first eight floors and could not be disturbed.

But there were some things in Stern's and Juracich's favour: because of the financial crisis, top-flight architects and craftsmen who might not otherwise have returned their calls were willing to work with them. They saved money by cutting out New York's powerful construction unions, who make it famously expensive to build in the city by insisting on rules that mandate, for example, how many workers must be on hand to operate a single lift. Stern and Juracich, now going by the name JDS Development, also won zoning permission for an additional four floors. That meant more square footage, more views and more premium units to sell.

The finished building features a heavy dose of what Stern winkingly calls "curated history". The lobby, for example, is brand new but made to look as though it was a lovingly restored art-deco original. In a move somewhere between shameless and brilliant, they commissioned a historian to write an admiring book about Ralph Walker, the building's long-forgotten architect. (Its title: *Ralph Walker: Architect of the Century*.) They even created a Ralph Walker exhibit in the lobby of what was now known as Walker Tower. "Believe it or not, tourists would come in and out of the building to see the Ralph Walker Museum and buy the book," said Kevin Maloney, a veteran New York developer now based

in Miami, who partnered with JDS on the project.

In Maloney's telling, the outlines of the story are roughly the same, except Stern is not the sole hero of Walker Tower that he often makes himself out to be. Rather, he is an influential member of a large cast – from the architects to the lawyers to the construction team. "Building a building is not a one-man show," said Maloney, expressing a wisdom sure to disappoint fans of Ayn Rand.

One thing upon which everyone agrees: the timing was fortuitous. By the time Walker Tower's 51 units went on sale in 2013, the property market was turning and there was little inventory available. They ended up selling out – not for the \$1,800 per-sq-ft the developers had budgeted but for more like \$4,000 per-sq-ft. The penthouse sold for what was then a downtown Manhattan record of \$51.5m. "It was a bet that paid off," said Stern in a rare case of understatement.

There was another windfall: they also forged ties with Barry Sternlicht, chairman of Starwood Capital Group, the real-estate private equity firm, which became an investor in Walker Tower. In the same way that architects were looking for jobs coming out of the crisis, private equity funds were thirsting ▶

'The thing that's really interesting about Stern is that all the things people say you can't do – or you can't do for the money – he says, "Forget it!"'

Daniel Kaplan, architect

Right: exterior and interior shots of Walker Tower on West 18th Street. Aided by architects keen to work during the financial crisis, Stern added four floors to the building, which already offered unobstructed panoramic views. The penthouse sold for \$51.5m, a record for downtown Manhattan at the time



'Litigation is inevitable in this business,' Stern told me. 'If you're not being sued by people, you're not doing enough work'

◀ to put their money to work. ("He went up to the roof, walked around for 15 minutes, then said to his guy, 'Get this done!'" Juracich recalls).

Stern, who is a divorced dad, lives in Walker Tower in the sort of New York flat one encounters in glossy design magazines. It has French-cut herringbone floors, an outdoor terrace and exposed steel beams. (They are originals but have been treated with intumescent paint at a cost of about \$20,000 apiece). With its architecture and photography books arranged just so on the shelves, I thought it was the sales unit before I discovered it was Stern's.

For Stern, everything flowed from Walker Tower. Verizon had a similar property uptown that they sold to JDS, Maloney's Property Markets Group and Starwood for another conversion. It is called Stella Tower. He and Juracich went back and finished what they had started in Gowanus, now bringing fancy Manhattan architects along with them. They launched another condo project near the High Line elevated park in Manhattan: The Fitzroy. Stern also tried his hand at a moderately priced rental building on an unloved plot overlooking the East river. He and Juracich figured the Murray Hill area was ripe for development with the growth of the United Nations and the nearby Langone medical centre. They collaborated with Gregg Pasquarelli of SHoP architects.

The result is the American Copper Building, twin 48-floor towers clad in copper that will gradually turn green over time. They lean apart but are joined by an umbilical, three-storey skyway that includes a pool, a lounge and more stunning views. The skyway is not just whimsy: it also houses shared mechanicals for the towers to improve efficiency. "That's an amazing piece of architecture," says Daniel Kaplan.

Walker Tower also led them to 111 West 57th. Barry Sternlicht had a narrow lot on the street. It was perfectly centred on Central Park and just a few blocks south. But it was only 43ft wide. He was not sure what to do with it. He wondered if Stern and his partners might be interested. They took him up on the offer and set about designing a 700ft tower. Then the building next door came on the market. It was the Steinway & Sons piano showroom, built in 1925 and just across from Carnegie Hall. Rachmaninoff once played there. A historic landmark, the ▶



A view from the Hearst Tower of the 'Billionaires Row' supertalls: from left, Central Park Tower, One57 and 111 West 57th



◀ building was protected from development. But they bought it anyway and, with Gregg Pasquarelli, went back to the drawing board.

Down the street, New York's first supertall had topped out at just over 1,000ft. Known as One57, the building was a huge hit for the developer Gary Barnett, the head of the Extell Development Company, who had spent more than a decade assembling the air rights. Many of the units sold before the building was even completed in 2014. The penthouse alone fetched \$100m. Barnett would soon break ground on a sequel on the same street: the 1,550ft Central Park Tower. New York's skyline was redrawn and 57th Street became known as Billionaires Row.

The supertalls inspire a range of feelings. Their creators tout them as natural heirs to the Empire State Building and Chrysler Building, a next generation of the skyscrapers that gave form to New York's singular ambition. They wouldn't be possible without the development of high-tech dampers, which slow the speed at which the towers sway. They are also the result of stronger concrete and much research into wind tunnels to understand how gusts at such heights can be tamed. (It turns out that wind actually speeds up after it strikes a building.)

Others tend to view them as obnoxious newcomers out of step with the rest of the city. In 2015, protesters toting black umbrellas marched along 57th Street to draw attention to the shadows they complained the towers were spreading over the beloved public park. In our unequal age, they reflect the vertiginous distance between those at the top of the global economy and those below.

The towers were a response to a commercial imperative. The growing ranks of the world's billionaires wanted property along Central Park. It was both a place to stay while in the city and, more importantly, a way to move wealth out of their own countries and store it in the world's most liquid property market. New York's existing buildings tended to be old money co-operatives, famously choosy about who can take up residence and demanding detailed information about a potential buyer's finances and lifestyle. The supertalls did not care, as long as you could write a cheque. "There was a lot of pent-up demand from foreigners wanting pieds-à-terre on Central Park. That's why One57 did so well. It was the first," Juracich explains.

If Walker Tower was complicated, 111 West 57th was another order of magnitude. Buying Steinway and then the air rights from a neighbouring building allowed the team to go higher - exceeding 1,400ft. But they would have to leave the landmarked piano hall largely intact and build around it - without disturbing the existing tenants. That meant boring 70ft into the rock below with hand drills instead of heavy demolition equipment. "They were selling and tuning pianos while we were working underneath them," Stern explained.

Because they were building in one of the busiest places on earth, the staging area for the construction would have to be inside the building itself. For safety reasons, the crane could not operate when the wind speed topped 35mph.

"It's hard enough to build that in the desert with nothing around you - but to build that in the urban context, through a landmark, without disturbing existing occupants," Stern said. "This was a war."

Pasquarelli drew on the tapered, "step-back" style that shaped New York skyscrapers after a 1916 zoning resolution that was intended to limit their shadows on the streets below - but 111 steps back, not in blocky chunks but tiny increments, like the blades of a feather. An interlocking web of terracotta - not glass - was used for the facade. Each pilaster is sculpted to create, from a distance, a swirling texture, like a snake's skin.

"It's a New York building. That building - if you put it down anywhere else it would be inappropriate," Stern declared. He had also restored the adjoining Steinway building, as part of the agreement to win approval from the city's historical preservation commission. How does it feel to look up at your own skyscraper, I asked? We were standing on 57th Street, our heads tilted upwards. "F**king crazy," he replied.

The tower's beauty had taken time, which came at a price. When the partners broke ground in early 2014, the plan was to complete it in 2017. That deadline came and went. More money was needed, and a tangle of lawsuits among the investors ensued. Although the details of the litigation are baroque, a person

familiar with the situation boils it down to a simple fact: "The issue is, we're three years behind schedule."

Delays are lethal for developers. They still have the carrying costs each month of interest payments, salaries and real-estate taxes, but without any revenue coming in. For 111 West 57th, the greatest cost of the delays was that, in the intervening years, the market changed. It became inundated by an oversupply of luxury properties while political tensions took Chinese and Russian buyers out of the New York market. "Americans are the rich people now," Juracich quips.

In the first quarter of 2018, prices for New York luxury apartments fell a staggering 15 per cent from the same period a year earlier, according to research from broker Douglas Elliman. The number of sales dropped 24 per cent. Extell and other developers have begun waiving fees for wine lockers and other amenities, and even allowing prospective buyers to rent-to-own - all in a frantic attempt to move inventory.

After recruiting new investors, Stern and his partners pulled out all the stops to try to sell 111 West 57th. They built a lavish showroom that featured a full-scale mock-up of one of the units. I visited it last June to hear a public conversation with



QUALLIBENSON; MICHAEL TOOLAN; THOMAS LOOF; EVAN JOSEPH; GETTY IMAGES; ALAMY

Pasquarelli and Bill Sofield, who had designed the building's interiors, including brass door handles specially cast to mimic the tower's feathered stepback. The room was full of architects and publicists and brokers and others whose job was, in some way or another, to enthuse the world's billionaires about a particular condominium.

Selling a \$45m apartment is not quite like selling a \$3m apartment. It is not just a matter of reducing the price until a nibble becomes a bite. It is as much an emotional experience as a financial one. All the legal wrangling surrounding 111 West 57th was not helping, said one New York broker, who explained to me that a luxury building sale should be as orderly and tightly orchestrated as an initial public offering. Anything that detracts from the aura of success must be avoided.

It did not help that in May 2018, the Manhattan district attorney's office charged one of the construction companies working on the building with stealing wages from its immigrant employees. Stern notes that it was a subcontractor, and prosecutors said there was no evidence that JDS was aware of the matter. But Gary LaBarbera, the politically astute head of New York's builders' union, delighted in portraying Stern

as a sort of unscrupulous developer, exploiting non-union workers.

As the new year dawned, Stern and his partners had sold fewer than a quarter of the tower's 46 units. But with potential buyers now able to see the completed building, sales began to tick up. While not the score of a lifetime, 111 West 57th would still be lucrative.

Then came coronavirus.

When I spoke to Maloney in mid-March, New York City had not yet been shut down but those with means were already fleeing to second homes in the Hamptons or boarding private jets for Florida or Aspen.

Maloney himself had cancelled a trip to New York. The market was tanking. Margin calls were being made and fortunes being lost. JDS was no longer showing 111 West 57th to prospective buyers. The New York governor would soon shut down all but essential construction work. Was it possible, I asked, that the tower - for all its wonder - might not yield a profit? Maloney repeated the question and thought it over. "Who knows?" he said finally, sounding more intrigued than upset. "It's all going to unfold."

Two weeks later, it seemed to be unfolding for the worse. "The sky has fallen," Frances Katzen, a luxury property broker in New York, told me. Her clients were in quarantine.

There is what is known as an "outside date" in standard property sales contracts. If a building is not completed by that date, then buyers can reclaim their deposits and walk

away. That then threatens a cascade of misery, with financial targets being missed and lenders potentially calling in their loans.

At 111 West 57th, the outside date is looming. And so, coronavirus be damned, the developers were racing this week to complete their first closings - even though a \$20m crown has not yet been fixed atop the tower and the external hoist is still attached.

Doing so should assuage Apollo Global Management, the colossal New York hedge fund that holds much of 111 West 57th's debt. If they falter, then Apollo, which declined to comment for this article, could show mercy. Or it might conclude that there is more money to be made by wiping out the equity holders and taking the spoils for itself. "It's all touch-and-go," a person involved in the project says. "It's the same with a thousand buildings in the city now."

Ultimately, the success of 111 West 57th, and so much New York real estate, may depend on how long the city remains shuttered, and what sort of world is there to greet it when it reopens. After surviving a pandemic, will the world's billionaires still desire impossibly slender trophy flats in the Manhattan sky? Will they still be billionaires?

Stern sounds as chipper as ever. Through his publicist, he insisted his tower would still come good. I thought back to our conversation in early March, in what now seems like a different era. I had been boring the visionary developer with narrow questions about the state of the luxury property market until eventually he shrugged me off. "Money isn't everything," he said. **41**

Joshua Chaffin is the FT's New York correspondent

'How does it feel to look up at your own skyscraper?' I asked. We were standing on 57th Street, our heads tilted upwards. 'F**king crazy,' he replied

Facing page: exterior and interior views of Stern's American Copper Building; the two towers are joined by a skyway
Right: Central Park Tower and (far right) One57, developed by Gary Barnett; while some hail supertalls as heirs to the city's skyscrapers, others say they have cast parts of Central Park into shadow



***'We are all lonely
and alone and
trying to connect'***

Fifteen years after her debut film *Me and You and Everyone We Know* launched her into the spotlight, Miranda July is still wrestling with the idea of going mainstream. The writer, artist and film-maker talks to *Harriet Fitch Little* about her new projects, why she felt the need to 'eat the world' and that time she pulled off a baggage heist



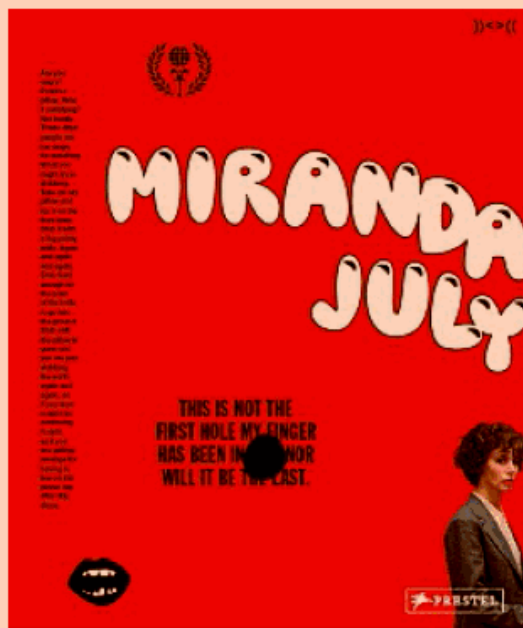
Say what you like about video interviews but I've never begun a conversation quite so close to a famous person's face as I do Miranda July's. "You're making me feel like I should put on some lipstick," she says when she picks up the phone from her office in Los Angeles's Echo Park, then leans in close and uses our call screen as a mirror.

As I browse the bookshelf behind her (even at a remove of almost 5,500 miles, it feels impolite to gawk), I consider how this slightly unorthodox setup must feel like child's play to July. For over 25 years now, she's been putting out films, books and a jumble of genre-bending art projects that seek to upend normal social relations in favour of sweeter, weirder ways of connecting. There was the time she made an app that encouraged users to deliver in-person messages to strangers in their vicinity. And the time she got chatting to an Uber driver on her way to interview Rihanna and ended up making a piece for the Victoria & Albert Museum about his use of technology. Even under normal circumstances, she operates on "the assumption that we are lonely and alone and that we are trying to connect", she explains, lips now glossy. "Like, that's already in place in my mind."

July has a banner few months ahead of her: the publication of a self-titled monograph this week, the Criterion Collection reissue of her 2005 breakout film *Me and You and Everyone We Know* on April 28 and the cinema distribution (hopefully) of her third feature film *Kajillionaire* on June 19. But these commitments were all made pre-pandemic, so I have to ask: is she not considering packing in the publicity drive and making art about this extraordinarily lonely moment instead?

July agrees it's "very tempting to go there". But, actually, the only intervention on her mind is nursing. "We won't get into this," she warns, "but I think I had it in February." She starts outlining how she could get tested to see if she has Covid-19 immunity so as to volunteer in hospitals, then stops short. "It's low priority for Miranda July to get this test so she can be a *wartime nurse*," she says, her deep voice rising with laughter. "There's a certain amount of drama to that that's probably a good indication I should just write my novel and lay low."

If you are thinking that there's something studied, maybe a bit performative, about Miranda July, the answer is yes, and, yes, she knows. At one point during our conversation, she deconstructs the seemingly casual outfit she's chosen for it: the way she's clipped back her short curls on each side is "a little bit of, like, 1930s something". Her large thin-rimmed glasses are "kind of 70s", while the blue bomber jacket suggests something "a teeny bit masculine". July, who is 46, says she dresses herself with the same



With women who make art, July says, 'it's very easy to make it seem like everything came out of our diaries'

Left top: a monograph of July's career has just been published. Below: examples from July's experimental period in Portland including a sticker from one of her shows and album cover art

care she would a movie character, even if she's doing nothing more than shuttling between her office and the nearby home in Silver Lake that she shares with her husband, director Mike Mills, and their eight-year-old son Hopper. "My child has seen me hurrying to get us all in the car to take him to school, and I'll change [my clothes]," she says. "It's the course of the whole day I'm setting here."

Miranda Jennifer Grossinger became Miranda July when she was 16 years old and adopted the surname of a character in a zine she made with a friend. Born in Vermont in 1974 to parents who worked in alternative publishing, and raised in Berkeley, California, she attended UC Santa Cruz then dropped out in her second year and moved to Portland. She became embedded in the city's booming DIY scene when, in 1995, she set up Joanie 4 Jackie: a makeshift film-distribution network that solicited women's home-made art films, compiled them on VHS video tape, and posted them back out to the community. Now that the only barrier to self-documentation is a bad internet connection, it's hard to cast back to a time when this would have felt truly radical, but her achievement is summed up by the fact that The Getty Research Institute acquired Joanie 4 Jackie's archives in 2017.

In Portland, July also built a local reputation as an artist worth watching. She made experimental short films, radio plays and performance pieces, often consisting of mundane yet surreal conversations in which she'd voice all the parts.

It's easy to guess at narcissism when an artist inserts herself so fully into their work, but July seems to have been grasping at something more fundamental: the desire to establish herself firmly in the world when her grip on it felt shaky. "I come from a line of people who couldn't cope and killed themselves, often by jumping out of windows," she says, deadpan. "Certainly, as a teenager I was like, 'Which way is this gonna go? Am I gonna be one of those people who just goes so far out on a limb that she goes off the edge of it? Or am I going to be able to hold it together?'"

She speaks about finding herself in "kind of scary situations" in her twenties. (In her semi-autobiographical short story "Something That Needs Nothing", the lead character moves to Portland and starts working in a peep show after a relationship sours. When asked about this detail in other interviews, she has replied "no comment", and I don't repeat the question.) Either way, July says she felt she had to "eat this world" to be a part of it. "I think I had to be quite proactive and strong about that embrace, you know, because it was real up for grabs."

In her late twenties, Hollywood gave July "a f**king break" and the \$800,000 she needed to

make her first feature film. She moved to LA, initially living in the building she now uses as her office. In *Me and You and Everyone We Know*, which came out in 2005, she plays a lonely performance artist who falls in love with a shoe salesman. Because she starred in her breakout film and because her appearance is so striking (July's eyes are the sort of blue that invites bad metaphors and she has a smile that pulls her mouth down rather than up, making her wistfulness appear almost biological), she became a figurehead for the decade's indie boom, which birthed films such as *Garden State* and *Juno*. She also became a recognisable target for the critics who viewed the proliferation of these sweet-but-sad lo-fi dramas as unbearably twee. Writing for the BBC, Nev Pierce summed up the mood when he described *Me and You* as "cloyingly quirky and not even half as profound as it thinks it is".

It would be a mistake to dismiss these criticisms entirely, especially considering July went on to narrate her second film *The Future* (2011) in character as a talking cat. But it seems clear with hindsight that the machismo of the film world played its part in her reception. July crafts scenarios that seem low-stakes, parochial and, yes, feminine, then laces them through with difficult topics: *Me and You* contains no fewer than three subplots involving the sexuality of children and teenagers. Because her films are unabashedly pretty, the fact that they are also transgressive has often been ignored.

Towards the beginning of our conversation, July told me how her current experience of isolation is triggering memories of a "very frightening time" following Hopper's birth in 2012. An hour or so later, it becomes clearer what this means. I am asking her about a line in her 2015 novel *The First Bad Man* that seems like a good illustration of how she uses surreal humour. One of the characters has just given birth quite traumatically, and another speculates that the unnamed father might be blue - because the newborn currently is. I look up from reading the passage, and see July's face is pulled tight. "I'm having a little moment, having that line read back to me," she says. She starts crying, then excuses herself and walks away from the screen. I look at the bookshelf and wonder how to convey empathy to an empty chair seven time zones west. A minute later, she sits back down. "I went to a certain place to be able to write that into an experience that I clearly actually had," she says.

July wants to make clear that she is not her characters. With women who make art, she says, "it's very easy to make it seem like everything came out of our diaries". Still, it seems important to her that there remains something autobiographical about it all. *Kajillionaire* will be



From top: a scene from July's latest film *Kajillionaire* (2020); July playing Sophie in *The Future* (2011); with John Hawkes in *Me and You and Everyone We Know* (2005)



Left: July directs her second film *The Future* (2011), which she narrates in character as a talking cat

her first feature film in which she plays no role, ceding the leads to a big ticket cast including Gina Rodriguez and Evan Rachel Wood. It's a gorgeously absurd comedy about a family of low-level con artists who live off tricks like robbing PO boxes or pretending their suitcase has been lost on the airport baggage belt. It rebuts the critics who see July as stuck in a certain mould of noughties filmmaking; scammers, particularly bad ones, are a very of-the-moment cultural obsession. "If I can just say without sounding too arrogant, I've been there, since the early days," she says. I presume she's stating that her interest in con artists pre-dates the media's current fascination with characters such as the Russian fake heiress Anna Delvey. No, she corrects me. "That baggage heist, I've done that."

It must feel strange for someone so famed as an outsider to be enjoying a run of mainstream recognition: a big-budget film that feels very accessible, a monograph that costs almost \$50, a Criterion Collection release - the decisive stamp of approval for any independent film-maker. How would she respond if I described 2020 as the year Miranda July went mainstream? "I'm sort of rising up to that," she says, frowning. The way she sees it, she's still doing what she's always done, only people are more open to receiving it: she's proved that she's not "so unique, so esoteric" that she's a financial loss leader. "Initially, I'm like, 'What? No. That's not me,'" she says of the new opportunities. "And then I'm like, 'Oh, I love it because it's not.'"

With her monograph in particular, she says, the idea was to create her own career milestones when others' didn't fit. "MoMA is not going to be like, 'Let's have a mid-career retrospective!' because I'm not an artist enough, and I'm not a film-maker enough. I'm not a writer enough," she says. "I think I realised a few years ago, 'Huh, no one's gonna knight you.'"

The book is an institution of her own making, and adheres to its own zany conventions. It's narrated mainly through the anecdotes of friends and collaborators - Lena Dunham, Hans Ulrich Obrist and Sheila Heti among them. They paint a slightly breathless picture of July as a natural, almost guileless savant - the sort of person who would (this is true) write her first book without speech marks because she didn't know how they worked. Why, I wonder, did she ask contributors to focus so much on the artist, rather than the art? She has a couple of answers, but the one that seems truest is very simple. "I just thought that would be less of a good read," she says. "I'm maybe a little different from some other artists or writers. Like, I am also a show person." **31**

"Kajillionaire" is scheduled for release on June 19. "Miranda July" is published by Prestel, £39.99



We weren't very careful about what we wished for

Douglas Coupland reflects on an age of anxiety and how our world has changed over the past few weeks

1

A spell has been cast over us. Who cast this spell, and why? How can we break it? Is it for ever? We feel generally anxious, sort of homesick, but homesickness is anxiety that can be simply fixed by going home. Generalised anxiety occurs when we're homesick but there's no home to return to. Lately it seems we've collectively lost our home. How did that happen? Where did it go? Who is responsible?

2

We've all tried shedding addictions, some successfully, some not. I quit smoking 32 years ago, and I remember that first month in particular, tingling with strangeness, my fingers and toes feeling as though they were burning – all the while knowing that simple nicotine would rid me of the strangeness. But the thing about nicotine is that it's a chemical that operates inside our brains, and when we remove it from our brain, we still have our brains. The thing with our modern world is that our devices and our systems are our brains, so if we stop using them, we lose those parts of our brain. Where did our brains go? We've handed them over to the wizards of tech. We traded them away for memes. We've outsourced our cognition to a global series of cables and computers, and even a brief absence can make our lives intolerable.

3

Every time we gain a new superpower, we lose an old superpower. In the past decades, we've gained almost infinite amounts of knowledge, but it's turned us into people who build walls and lock down borders. We were able to fly almost anywhere we wanted to go, but the act of travelling infected those places. We had all of the wizard's powers and all of his laboratories and we traded them for gossip, superstition

and lies. We no longer trust logarithmic graphs or pie charts. Everywhere we look, we think we see omens: sharks left stranded on beaches by receding tides; colourful birds flying into windows; Florida teenagers drop the head of an elk on to a freeway.

4

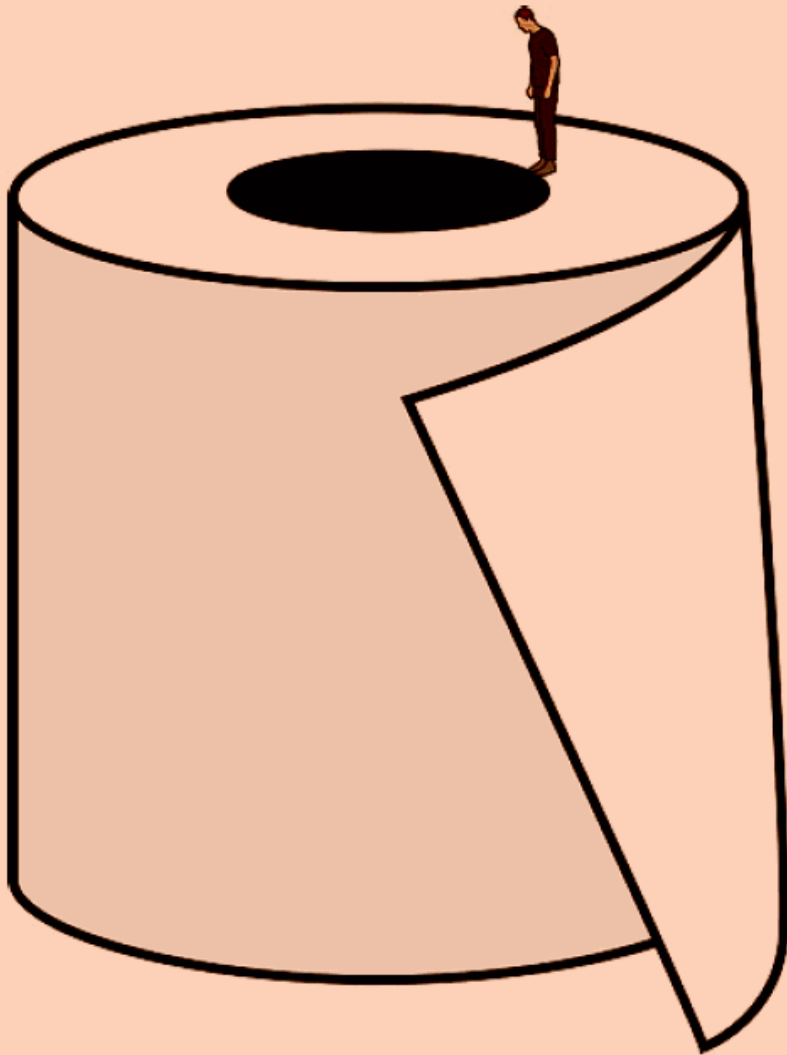
Am I free? Are you free? Are we all free? Are we all *too* free? What would having even more freedom feel like – like a really good drug? What would less freedom feel like? Well, as a species we only seem to be able to learn new things the hard way. And how far will it go? When will the spell break? When will my brain stop feeling like a muggy stew of anxiety and boredom? Meanwhile, the world feels like it's burning itself on to me like a tattoo, and everywhere I look I see omens: an increase in rural fentanyl deaths for men my age; cattle in a field walking backwards. I buy a canvas bag at the grocers and the clerk tells me it will also make a good tourniquet.

5

We were all once able to fly and now we can't. I remember looking down from window seats at the landscape below: is that a community college or a prison? Is that a ski resort or a logging clear-cut? Is Greenland smaller than the last time I saw it? As a form of time travel, jet lag seems ludicrously innocent now, romantic almost. We've traded our superpower of linear time perception for the newer superpower of permanent diversion. And we need new words for time because the old ones no longer work. The future used to be in the future, but for years we've been getting closer and closer to it, and now the present and the future have become the same thing. When we want to know what time it is, we ask: "What time is it?" But what, exactly, is "it"? Maybe the biggest challenge of our time ►



Illustrations by James Joyce



'There really isn't a single person on earth who knows what happens next. Rich people, smart people, famous people – they're as clueless as you or me'

◀ is naming and isolating "it" – and then killing "it", because there's something truly scary about "it". We need to invent new tenses for time.

6

There is the story of a man who went blind over the course of 10 years. He was OK about the whole process, until his world eventually went black, but one night there was a power failure and a storm. The man was screaming, so when his wife asked why, he said it wasn't because of the storm, and it wasn't because he saw blackness. He was screaming because he now saw *nothing*. Some form of inner sight had been switched off.

7

We like looking for omens, but we like to think we have visions as well. Visions of handsome laid-off Alitalia pilots walking through the streets of Milan beneath a new moon, together banging pots to chase demons from the city. The discovery of a new moon of Jupiter that's actually a massive diamond. In Japan, the ghost of Princess Diana smashes a bottle of champagne on to the nose of a new bullet train, naming it *Meisei wa Muimidesu* (Fame is Meaningless). And in real life, our lives go on. No, you can't go to Las Vegas and get wasted at the Mandalay for two nights, no you can't upgrade to business class, because business class is gone, and no, you can't buy more than one 12-pack of toilet paper per customer. No, no, no.

8

We dream of conversing with aliens so they can rescue us from our latest superpower. What advice would they give? Picture an alien sitting there in front of you, not cute and cuddly like ET, but rather a stertorously breathing chunk of dark blue flesh; a massive vaper's lung with three

eyes, with oily alien RNA dripping from its skin. It speaks to you with a deep acid reflux voice and a hacking cough: *you can't use old technologies to fix problems created by new technologies.*

The alien now breathes deeply, as if smoking. *Democracy is a disease from which you have to recover.*

The alien tells you it is homesick. *I look at you all and I think, you fools: you talk about a one-way trip to Mars like it's something that you may or may not do, but don't you realise - you're already on a one-way trip to Mars.*

9
My mother is inside an independent living facility in North Vancouver, the city that remains a locus of Canada's plague deaths. It's basically a cruise liner attached to the mountainside. We've not been allowed to visit for weeks, and to see her through a ground-floor window is like being at Marine World and tapping on to 6in-thick glass to find out whether the beluga can see you or not. Oddly, her life hasn't changed. Facility life revolves around rigid mealtimes and, if nothing else, my mother has a routine. Upstairs in her suite she has TV and the internet - but she has no physical experience of what it's like to be in the outside world at the moment: boarded-up storefronts, empty roads, as-of-today still peaceful supermarket queues, people everywhere walking in ones and twos, close but distant.

In Vancouver, we've learnt that healthcare staff work at several facilities at a time, and the moment one of them tests positive for Covid-19, the facilities they've been working in become, essentially, cruise ships adrift on a sea that no longer has any ports of call. Yet my mother's situation is basically my own situation, which is basically everyone's new situation, which is: the entire world is now a cruise liner.

10
There really isn't a single person on earth who knows what happens next. Rich people, smart people, famous people - they're as clueless as you or me. Our planet is hurtling through the void. And yet...

And yet at the end of all of my online plague investigations, I still somehow end up getting lured into an online architectural tour of Ricky Martin's chic LA mansion (six million views and counting), so there is something to be said for the powerful comfort of silliness. So much silliness. So much anxiety. So much diversion: supply-chain distortions, online shooter games, celebrities having better lives than you, bad WiFi, password amnesia, search-history shame, compromised Visa cards, genetic websites selling mapped DNA, Instagram photos posted without permission, websites ending in .ru, clickbait, imaginary deadlines, real deadlines...

11
But wait... silliness - diversion - isn't this the superpower we took on when we lost the superpower of linear time perception? Was this a good trade? I think most people are second-guessing that it wasn't, but, if you were to ask these same people if they wanted their old brains back, and no more information 24/7, would they? Guaranteed not one person would. So regardless of how we morally frame the human soul, one thing is certain: we wanted something, and we got it. We're not innocent here - and we all feel ourselves turning into something new. What is that thing? We want to be it as quickly as possible. We don't want to be plain old us any more. Just happen, whatever it is.

12
It's spring where I am now. The small creatures and birds are back up in the trees, and the

security cameras have recorded the bobcat a few times. The mulberry is budding, and the plum blossoms smell like childhood. Everything out there is just as alive as you and me. Think about that: that oak tree; that weed; that coral reef is no more or less alive than you or me. Except that we have superpowers. Lucky us.

13
There has to be more to life than simply having adequate food and a reasonable freedom from fear. There has to be something inside of us that is greater than ourselves. At the moment, jumbo MC-asteroid 66MA is headed towards Earth, but we're told it will just miss us. We have pretty detailed photos of MC-asteroid 66MA, and I think that's really something. So, we kind of know how the physical heavens work, and that's something concrete to believe in, something real. Yet where is God in all of this? Did we leave him or did he leave us? I am told that God doesn't leave people, people leave God. God is nowhere; God is now here. Do we bring God back to life just so we can kill him again? Is God the "it" we speak of when we ask the time?

14
I sit here and I look out the window at the night. I want to see a beam of light and I want to stand inside it. I want to look up at its source, and I want to hear it speak to me, and here is what I want it to say: I promise you a mystery. I promise you peace. I promise you great visions. And I promise you a new superpower. **FT**

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Commissioned by the Sharjah Art Foundation for "Art in the Age of Anxiety", which opened on March 21 and is postponed until further notice. The catalogue, edited by Omar Kholeif, is published next month by Mörel Books and sharjahart.org



Ravinder Bhogal Recipes

Tear and share

do not miss the fraught vacations of my childhood in Kenya. We lived in a big extended family, together with various animals, and in the long summer break, relatives from England would descend like a swarm of mosquitoes seeking a (free) holiday in the sun.

The children squabbled and fell asleep in piles of three or four to a bed. The men postured and knocked back pegs of whisky. The women slurped chai and reminisced about our annual trips *en famille* to the cobalt-blue coast of Mombasa... highly unpleasant holidays morphing into rose-tinted memories.

And then a travel plan would be hatched. For days before departure, my mother paced the kitchen like a bear, juggling various components of her picnic. Freshly fried banana crisps - light, thin and resoundingly crunchy; samosas carefully filled with something that tasted like love; old-fashioned fairy cakes with aggressively sweet icing; and - most importantly for a clan whose ancestors hailed from Punjab, "the bread basket of India" - plenty of dough, both leavened and unleavened.

We always set off at a dispiritingly early hour in a convoy of straggling cars that clanked and hissed and rolled along at a snail's pace. Hampers of food and leaking thermoses of tea, beat-up leather suitcases and rattling steel tiffins were piled on the roof. We were crammed, ill-tempered, inside.

On one trip, I found myself squashed next to my nemesis, a cousin with all the hyperactive grandiosity of a junior Kim Jong Un. He had

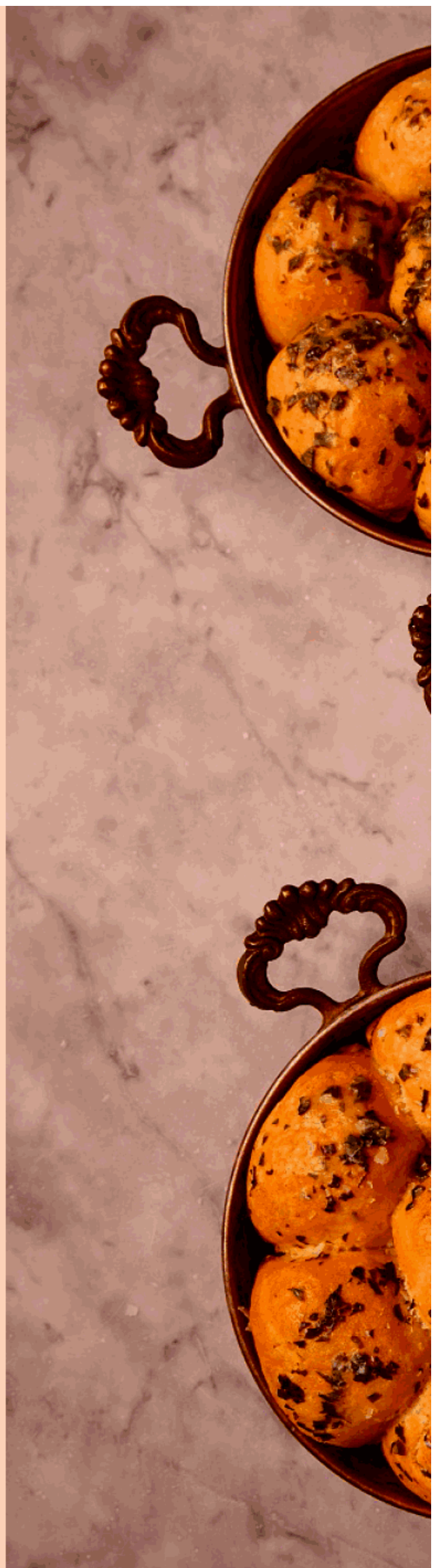
a large head like an unhusked coconut, hamster cheeks and buck teeth. How I hated him. Especially since he was my beloved grandmother's favourite. She loved spoiling him - hand-feeding him semolina *nan khatais*, which he would scoff. He was an unquestionable tyrant who terrorised the younger children and left me in a constant state of anxiety.

With every kilometre, the tension and hostility ballooned. The adults started growling at each other like caged tigers. Sisters-in-law bickered, parents had domestics and an obnoxious uncle managed to pick a fight with a very diplomatic cousin. As relationships derailed, so too did the car and we found ourselves in a ditch halfway between Nairobi and Mombasa.

Help was a few hours away, at least, and just as there was about to be an almighty brawl, my mother opened the picnic basket and pulled out the breads. Here were parathas - stuffed flatbreads filled with daikon, cauliflower or potato, chargrilled so they were cracker-like on the outside but tender within - and baguettes that ripped apart into fluffy tufts to be smeared liberally with homemade garlic butter.

And just like that, as we broke bread and satisfied our gnawing hunger, peace returned and we found our common ground again. We ate ceremoniously on the bonnet with clean napkins amid the rubble. And afterwards, I fell asleep in the car and dreamed of the leftovers. 🍞

.....
Ravinder Bhogal is chef-patron of Jikoni. jikonilondon.com; Instagram/ @cookinboots





Wild garlic bread

To make one large or three small loaves

- 240ml whole milk
- 7g dry yeast
- 2½ tbs granulated sugar
- 1 large egg, at room temperature
- 45g unsalted butter, melted and slightly cooled
- 1 tsp salt
- 1 heaped tsp garlic powder
- 385g bread flour, plus extra for dusting
- Drizzle of olive oil

For the wild garlic butter

- 100g butter, melted
- 20g wild garlic, finely chopped
- Zest of one lemon and a squeeze of juice
- Sea salt
- Black pepper

1 — Heat the milk until it is lukewarm – about 38C. If you don't have a thermometer, you should be able to put a clean finger into the warm milk and hold it there comfortably. Pour the warmed milk into the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with a dough-hook attachment. Sprinkle the yeast and half a teaspoon of sugar on top of the milk. Give it a light stir with a spoon and allow to stand for 10 minutes or until it goes frothy.

2 — With the stand mixer running on low speed, add the remaining sugar, the egg, butter, salt, garlic powder and two-thirds of the flour. Beat on a low speed for one minute, then add the remaining flour. Continue to beat it for a minute until it combines and you are left with a soft, slightly sticky dough. It should pull away from the sides of the bowl as it mixes. When it does, it's ready to knead.

3 — Form the dough into a ball and turn it on to a lightly floured surface. Knead for three minutes, then place in a bowl lightly greased with olive oil. Turn the dough over to coat all sides. Cover the bowl with cling film and place it somewhere warm for about two hours to rise until double in size.

4 — While you are waiting make the wild garlic butter. Mix the butter, wild garlic, lemon zest and a good squeeze of juice and seasoning together and set aside.

5 — Once the dough has doubled in size, punch it down to release any air bubbles. Remove from the bowl and turn it on to a lightly floured surface. Punch it down again to release any more bubbles, if needed. Divide the dough into 21 pieces that are slightly larger than ping-pong balls. Roll into balls and arrange in one large greased oven-proof skillet or divide between three small ones, as I have. Brush the rolls generously with wild garlic butter and sprinkle each with sea salt. Set any leftover butter aside – it's amazing brushed on the rolls after they are baked. Loosely cover the rolls with cling film and allow to rise until double in size and puffy for a further 30 minutes.

6 — Preheat the oven to 180C. Bake the rolls for 12-15 minutes until golden brown. Brush with the remaining butter if desired.

Photograph by Joakim Blockstrom

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Jancis Robinson Wine

The rise of Romania



Five weeks before writing this, I was squeezed inside the Georgian library of The Travellers Club in London, desperately trying to push my way through a dense crowd of wine tasters towards bottles of Romanian wine ranged round the perimeter. We were not just breathing on each other, we were practically doing the tango. In the age of isolation, that Romanian tasting now seems incredible.

Yet there were other notable aspects as well - not least the identity of the organisers. Nicholas de Roumanie (aka Nicholas Medforth-Mills) is the grandson of Michael of Romania, who sat on the throne for a few years as a young boy and then reigned as king in the 1940s before being forced to abdicate soon after attending the wedding of his cousins Queen Elizabeth and Prince Philip. My invitation to the tasting was issued by Nicholas's wife Alina-Maria de Roumanie.

Nicholas and Alina-Maria act as ambassadors for Romanian wine. They appeared to have taken expert advice in choosing which offerings to show at this London tasting, where representatives of 16 different private estates poured their current wines, overlooked by the club's extensive book collection. No dangerous splashes observed.

The young couple had also assembled a guest list of particularly thirsty and talkative private wine enthusiasts, who obediently fell silent for short speeches by Nicholas and Romanian wine distributor Mihai Diaconu. Most important, the wines showed rather well.

I visited Romania briefly in 2015 and felt there was considerable,



As imagined by Leon Edler

if not fully realised, potential for the country's wine. It is almost as important to the nation's culture as it is to Georgia's. Within Europe, Romania has more vineyards than any country except Italy, France, Spain and Portugal (just).

Its per capita wine consumption is relatively heroic - even without counting the large amount of wine made on a small scale and drunk on a great scale by private individuals.

(As I drove around Timișoara in the south-west of Romania, I was struck by how many households seemed to grow their own vines.)

Overall, I was impressed by the progress made by wine producers in recent years. Apart from one bottle, which seemed excessively volatile, all 46 wines I managed to taste, despite the throng, were remarkably clean and fresh. If there was a common fault -

perhaps not regarded as a fault in Romania itself where there is a long tradition of making both red and white wines a bit sweet - it was that many reds struck my western palate as being slightly too sweet to be appetising.

A few wines still seemed a bit late-20th century with too much evident oak and alcohol, which is true virtually everywhere in the wine world. But there were several that I scored 17 out of 20 - high praise from me.

Only 13 of the wines I tasted were white. There were a couple of very respectable Sauvignon Blancs (not, admirably, copies of Sauvignon made elsewhere). But the two most thrilling whites

'All 46 wines I tasted were remarkably clean and fresh. The one fault was that many reds were a bit too sweet'

by far were made from one of Romania's dozen indigenous grape varieties, Crâmpoșie Selectionata. Both of them - one still and one made sparkling in the same way that champagne is - were made on the recuperated aristocratic wine estate Prince Stirbey. (The UK's Wine Society buys from this estate but neither of these wines.)

Two whites made from another Romanian grape, Șarbă - one still, one sparkling, produced from different estates - were also interesting. More widely planted local white wine grapes are the Romanian Fetească Regală and, slightly less common and possibly finer, Moldovan Fetească Albă. Tămâioasă is the Romanian name for the popular Muscat. ▶

Recommended Romanian wines

WHITES

- Prince Stirbey Crâmpoșle Sec 2018 and Sparkling Crâmpoșle Brut 2013

REDS

- Aurelia Vișinescu, Anima 3 Fete Negre NV (Fetească Neagră, a blend of vintages 2014, 2015 and 2016)
- Cramele Recaș Fetească Neagră 2017
- Dagon, Clan Jar SR 2016 (blend of Cabernet Sauvignon, Fetească Neagră and Merlot)
- Davino, Flamboyant 2016 (blend of Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and Fetească Neagră)
- Gitana Rară Neagră 2018, Autograf Fetească Neagră 2018 and Saperavi 2017
- Lillac Fetească Neagră 2018
- Serve, Cuvée Charlotte 2013 (blend of Cabernet Sauvignon, Fetească Neagră and Merlot)
- Vitis Metamorfozis, Cantus Primus Fetească Neagră 2017



Tasting notes on Purple Pages of JancisRobinson.com. International stockists on Wine-searcher.com

◀ At this tasting, for whites but especially for reds, local varieties definitely triumphed over the international ones that have long been grown in quantity in Romania. Every single one of my favourite reds (listed on the left) were made wholly or partly from Fetească Neagră. This Moldovan variety may have fallen out of fashion in Romania in the late-20th century, when international varieties seemed more exciting, but it is clearly very much at home there. It makes lively wines with good acidity and good fruit that hovers somewhere on the spectrum between damson and plum. Some sense a certain smokiness about it. One thing is clear: it has a strong and distinctive personality that seems to blend pretty well with the principal Bordeaux red wine varieties Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot.

The Gitana winery, in the far south-east of the country, demonstrated that Romania can also make fine wine from the deep purple Georgian grape Saperavi. Gitana also showed a very decent example of Rara Neagră, another name for the indigenous Băbească Neagră that is generally associated with high acidity and pale colour. But, yet again, I felt this light red was just a bit too sweet for export markets.

Mark Haisma, a winemaker who trained in Australia and is now stationed in Burgundy, initially advised on the new Dagon project in Dealu Mare in south-east Romania, encouraging the locals to pick earlier when the grapes were fresher and more expressive. "These boys have talent and now a nuanced sense of what they want to do," he told me by phone from his locked-down bunker on the Côte d'Or. "The first vintage at 12.5 per cent alcohol was a bit confusing for them when the norm had been 14 per cent. But once they realised how good the wine was, they got very excited."

Dagon's owner Mihnea Vasilache is enthused about the potential of oak from Romania's own forests, whose seven million hectares cover more than a quarter of the country, even if Romanian coopers might need a bit of encouragement to age the oak as long as necessary for wine barrels.

Once the many new wine estates, which have sprouted since Romania joined the EU in 2007, run out of Romanians to drink their produce, they may have to make rather drier wines for export markets. That aspect apart, there is no reason why Romanian wines shouldn't be welcomed. **FT**

More columns at ft.com/jancis-robinson

'As I drove around Timișoara, I was struck by how many households seemed to grow their own vines'

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FTWeekend

Restaurant Insider

Nicholas Lander



EPA

ALI SONKO: PARTNER AT NOMA AND FORMER KITCHEN PORTER

In praise of kitchen porters

My last meal in a restaurant took place on Sunday March 15. We were in Glasgow at Crabshakk, one of my favourites. We ate extremely well: scallops with anchovies; tempura squid with a delicious coriander dipping sauce; John Dory with black-ink paella; and, just to prove that we were in Scotland, a deep-fried skate wing with a mushroom ketchup.

Since then, I have visited neither a restaurant nor a food shop. Yet thanks to our bossy children – and their deliveries – we have eaten very well. I am not a bad cook and our wine cellar is raided every evening.

If, therefore, I have not missed restaurants for their food, which aspects of the business that I have been part of for 40 years have I missed?

The first has been a feature of every restaurant since they first evolved in Paris in the early

19th century – people watching. After Napoleon's exile, the city filled up with British troops, many of whom were considered unworthy of an invitation to the posher Parisian salons. These newly opened restaurants became their playgrounds.

The British could enjoy the kind of food, wine and service that did not exist back home. (The only place where it did exist was Paris.) And they could watch their hosts relax.

A certain voyeurism is still exciting. I do not mean that overheard conversations are ripe to be reported on – I have never done that and hope I never will. But observing different eating habits or ways of treating young children are legitimate and wonderful ways of enjoying being in a restaurant.

There is something else I am missing under lockdown. Now, I have to peel my own vegetables and do the washing up. These tasks are usually included in a restaurant's prices and they fall not to the better-heeled members of the chef's brigade



'KPs, as they are known in the trade, go under-appreciated and underpaid – and today they are probably suffering the most from restaurant closures'

but to a team of kitchen porters. KPs, as they are known in the trade, go under-appreciated and underpaid – and today they are probably suffering the most from restaurant closures.

Doing the washing up is only one of a KP's many duties. Others include: carrying in all the produce the kitchen receives, including the wine; peeling all the vegetables; mopping down the outside of the restaurant, possibly twice a day; making sure that the chefs are continuously supplied with ultra-clean frying pans and other implements; keeping the kitchen floor clean and tidy, and making sure the rubbish bins are taken away and emptied.

Kitchen porters are as indispensable to restaurants as any revered chef but are paid much less than their more glamorous colleagues: in London, most might barely receive the official living wage of £10.75 per hour, while a reasonably experienced head chef will earn about double that.

As a restaurateur in the 1980s, I daydreamed about highlighting the importance of KPs. I would offer two sets of prices on the menu. The first would be the normal prices with the normal service. The second would be discounted by 30 per cent – and customers would do their own washing up. I doubt the discounted option would have been terribly popular, but it would have made a point. Alas, I never did it.

Perhaps the world's most high-profile former KP is Ali Sonko, the 65-year-old Gambian at Noma in Copenhagen. Starting there when it opened in 2003, Sonko went on to receive Noma's Best Restaurant in the World award at the 2013 ceremony. It was only three years after visa problems prevented him from travelling with the team when they first won the award in 2010. In late 2017, René Redzepi, Noma's chef and founder – and the son of a KP himself – made Sonko and a couple of other members of the team co-owners of the restaurant. Sonko is now Noma's doorman.

Now, excuse me. I have a pile of potatoes to peel. **FT**

More columns at ft.com/lander



Bunker Food

Alice Lascelles

‘Once you’ve cracked the basic Old Fashioned formula, you can do away with recipes and use whatever life throws at you’



When the world is falling apart, I want a drink that is short, strong and to the point - and that's why I have chosen the Old Fashioned for my bunker recipe. Unflashy, yet brimming with flavour, it's a cocktail that marries fiery alcohol, comforting sweetness and an almost medicinal spice in a way that is wonderfully fortifying. It's a drink designed for testing times.

A classic Old Fashioned is made with American whiskey - either bourbon or more peppery rye. But that formula of 50ml spirit, 5ml sugar syrup and two dashes of bitters, stirred over ice, works with aged spirits of all sorts: golden or dark rum, cognac, Scotch, Irish whiskey, añejo or reposado tequila. The other night I had an Old Fashioned made with reposado tequila, sugar, orange bitters and a clementine twist. The clementine was a bit past its best, admittedly, but it still tasted pretty good. You can even make an Old Fashioned with liqueurs such as Grand Marnier or Drambuie - just be sure you leave out the sugar.

Knowing how to make an Old Fashioned is a bit like knowing how to make a soup or a stew - once you've cracked the basic formula, you

can do away with recipes and use whatever life throws at you.

You don't need any special equipment. No shakers or strainers are required. A long-handled bar spoon might make the act of stirring a little more elegant, but the handle of a fork, a chopstick or even a well-washed finger will do the job just as well. The ideal glass is a big, heavy tumbler, preferably straight from the freezer. But if you can only lay your hands on a tooth mug, who cares?

One easy way to improve your Old Fashioned is to use good ice. Fill up Tupperware boxes and freezer bags with water the night before (boil the water first for much clearer ice), freeze them and then hack the contents into jagged chunks. Big bits of ice don't just look more attractive than a clutch of little melty ice cubes, they will melt much slower too - which means your drink will stay colder for longer.

Some people like to use sugar cubes to sweeten their Old Fashioned but sugar syrup blends into the drink much more readily than the cubed stuff. You can buy sugar syrup - or "gomme" - but it's also the work of a moment to make it yourself. Simply dissolve two cups of sugar in one cup of water over a low heat, leave to cool, bottle and store in the fridge. You'll find it comes in handy for all sorts of things.



Old Fashioned

- 50ml whisky or other dark spirit
- 5ml 2:1 sugar syrup
- 2 dashes bitters
- Citrus twist to garnish
- Glass: frozen rocks
- Garnish: lemon or orange twist

1 — Half-fill your glass with ice. Add the sugar syrup, the bitters and half the whisky. Stir for about 30 seconds.

2 — Add a bit more ice and the rest of the whisky and stir for another half a minute. Add another piece of ice if you wish.

3 — Garnish and serve.

Some nice alternative Old Fashioned combinations

- Rye whiskey, Angostura Orange bitters, sugar syrup, lemon twist
- Bourbon, Angostura bitters, maple syrup, orange twist
- Rum, Bitter Truth Spiced Chocolate Bitters, sugar syrup, orange twist
- Añejo tequila, Angostura Orange bitters, sugar syrup, grapefruit twist

Making your own sugar syrup also allows you to have a play with different types of sugar. An Old Fashioned sweetened with muscovado syrup is a very different drink from one made with white caster sugar - darker, richer, more treacly. I'm also a sucker for an Old Fashioned sweetened with maple syrup: Billington's Maple Syrup Very Dark, a slightly more savoury variety, is really good with bourbon.

Many households seem to have a slightly crusty bottle of Angostura bitters lurking somewhere in the kitchen. This one little bottle, with its outsized label (the result, supposedly, of a printing error that never got corrected), will cover all your cocktail needs. But I think it's fun to have one or two more on hand - it's such an easy, lazy way to give a drink a new accent. You can find a vast array of bitters - flavoured with everything from celery and smoke to yuzu - online at whiskyexchange.co.uk or masterofmalt.com. If you're trying a new variety for the first time, go easy, as some can be pretty potent - one dash may be enough.

Orange bitters are particularly good in an Old Fashioned: Angostura Orange bitters are more spicy and marmalade-y; The Bitter Truth Orange Bitters are zestier and fresh. The Bitter Truth Spiced Chocolate Bitters are also great in whisky drinks.

The Old Fashioned is notorious for requiring endless amounts of stirring - a legacy, perhaps, of a time when cocktails were still made with loaf sugar, which took a lot more work to dissolve. Back in the 1880s, when the Old Fashioned really took off, American bars often served the cocktail with a spoon on the side so customers could do the stirring themselves - hence its nickname, "the spoon cocktail".

Even today, there are plenty of bartenders who insist on taking at least 10 minutes to make one. I'm not sure that's necessary but you might find the slow, steady stirring rather therapeutic. How long you do it is a matter of taste - you should aim to coax just enough water out of the ice to unlock the spirit's aromas but not so much that your drink becomes thin and watery.

When it comes to the garnish, keep it simple - a twist of citrus peel (orange for bourbon, lemon for rye, traditionally) is all you need. Cut a thumb-sized piece of zest and pinch it shiny side down over the drink to release the scented oils, before dropping it into the glass.

Then sit back, relax and savour what you've created: a tonic for the body and soul. **FT**

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 @alicelascelles. Alice Lascelles is an FT contributing editor and Fortnum & Mason Drinks Writer of the Year 2019





A Unified Theory of Corned Beef

With the privilege of choice restricted by the lockdown, we should take the opportunity to reconsider what we define as ‘good’ or ‘bad’ food, writes *Tim Hayward*. Photograph by *Felicity McCabe*

Lockdown has forced an abrupt loss of control over our food shopping. Last week in my town, there was no toilet paper, chicken or fruit. Today, there’s a glut of those things but no yeast, eggs or chickpeas. Those lucky souls who have managed to get a delivery slot from any of the big supermarkets are learning to live with the unintentional surrealism of “substitutions” – when the algorithm decides that, though you requested a packet of biscuits and some hummus, your secret heart’s desire was a bag of 60 tealights and some floor wax.

This is going to be interesting to those of us who concern ourselves professionally with food. We’ve spent the past few years watching

the national discourse become increasingly focused on personal control of what and how we eat. Those who self-identify as “foodies” choose ever more arcane origins for our ingredients, more obscure brands, increasingly exclusive eating places. Those with more morals than greed, perhaps, have developed patterns of exclusion – I eat only plants; I avoid gluten and dairy; I eat from a Paleolithic/macrobiotic/vegan repertoire. We have had the privilege of choice – and now it’s beginning to wither.

We’re going to have to question a lot of attitudes towards buying and eating food. Above all, we’ll have to take what we’re given and make the best of it. For me, the fascination is how it will make us challenge our preconceptions around what

is “good” and “bad” in food – our attitudes to the real and the fake.

Einstein and Hawking applied themselves to the idea that something can theoretically be two things at once – and Schrödinger had to kill a conceptual cat, just to explain it – yet none of these great intellects dared posit a Unified Theory of Corned Beef.

“Corn” is supposed to refer to large crystals of salt and thus “corned” beef is salt beef. But then things get complicated. In the US, corned beef is a brisket – a big chunk of strongly flavoured cow muscle. It is soaked in an aromatic brine, slow poached in water flavoured with more aromatics and sliced hot. There is probably no experience as exciting to the food lover as standing in the queue of a Manhattan deli and

watching a counterman cut wafer-thin slices off a huge slab of corned beef. Cognoscenti demand plenty of the wobbly, jellified lubricating fat as the slices are piled high on rye bread and smeared with aggressive, fluorescent yellow mustard.

Almost nothing could be more different from British corned beef. In 1847, German scientist Baron Justus von Liebig invented a way of processing cheap beef with which he hoped to feed the masses of the industrial revolution. It was made by salting beef, boiling it and breaking it up into small chips, then setting it in its own fat.

A group of entrepreneurs began making the stuff in Fray Bentos, in Uruguay, where the beef was cheap, and began supplying it as military rations. The French called it *boeuf bouilli* or “boiled beef”, which the British army corrupted to Bully Beef. It was “corned beef” all right, just like the American stuff, but only in the way that diamonds and charcoal are both carbon.

Yet here’s the odd truth. I love English corned beef with a passion

‘Of course, corned beef is the very acme of processed food and yet there’s something engaging about it’

entirely equal to the “original”. Of course, it’s the very acme of processed food and yet there’s something engaging about it, from the way it stands there on a plate, waiting to be sliced like a squat monolith of meaty marble, to the way it crunches under the fork as you mash it into hot potatoes for a hash. Above all, it’s still there, on the shelves, like it has been through every national disaster since its invention. Stolid and reassuring.

This isn’t simply some rosy, Proustian nonsense or misplaced *nostalgie de la boue*. What was originally designed as a technical solution to starvation has been tested by the world’s largest focus group: ordinary shoppers. They have tasted it and found it good. So good indeed that it continues to outlive any food fad.

Lockdown is inconvenient, miserable, deeply boring and intermittently terrifying but there may also be hidden glimmers of light. For me, one of those is the hope that we might look at “bad” food like corned beef with new and justified wonder. **31**

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 @TimHayward

Games



A Round on the Links

by James Walton



All the answers here are linked in some way. Once you've spotted the link, any you didn't know the first time around should become easier.

1. In Lemony Snicket's novel sequence *A Series of Unfortunate Events*, who's the eldest of the Baudelaire children?

2. In which battle of June 4 1859 did an army led by Napoleon III (right) defeat the Austrians?

3. What vegetable is the main ingredient of the Indian side dish brinjal bhaji?

4. What was the name of the prefabricated artificial harbours used by the Allies in the Normandy landings?

5. What's the French for "flea"?

6. Which former member of the *Dad's Army* cast played Derek Harkinson in *EastEnders* from 2001 to 2005, and 2016 to 2017?

7. Which real-life writer was played by both Judi Dench and Kate Winslet in a 2001 film?

8. In Tchaikovsky's *The Nutcracker*

(above), who rules the Land of Sweets?

9. What name is missing from this list: Linda (1969), _____ (2002), Nancy (2011)?

10. What kind of wine features in a song that's been recorded by, among others, Eartha Kitt, Nina Simone, Jeff Buckley and Elkie Brooks?



The Picture Round

by James Walton

Who or what do these pictures add up to?



+

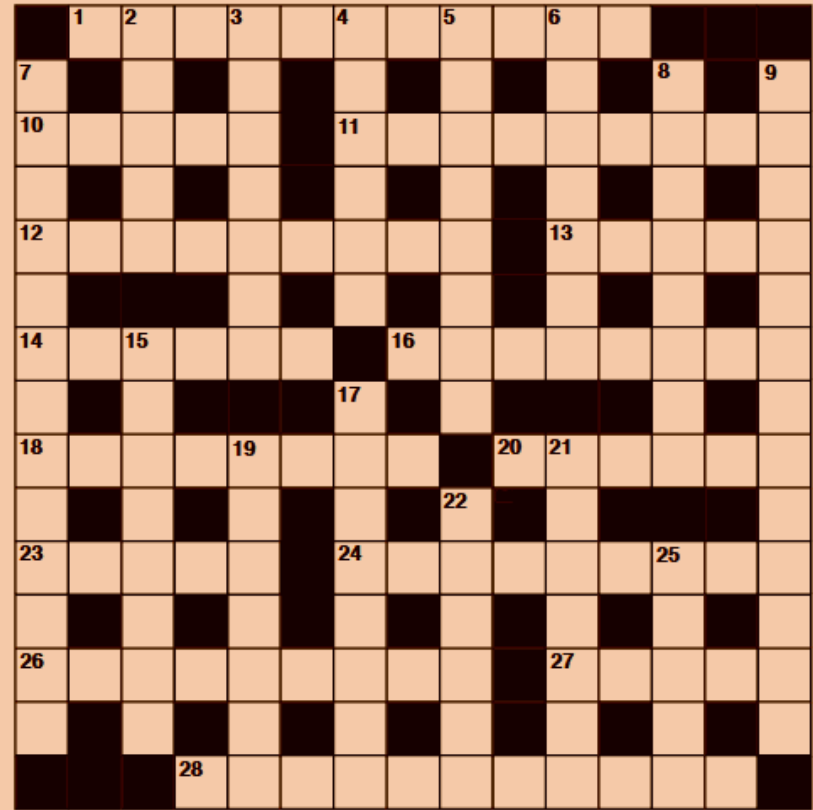


= ?

Answers page 10

The Crossword

No 484. Set by Aldhelm



The Across clues are straightforward, while the Down clues are cryptic.

ACROSS

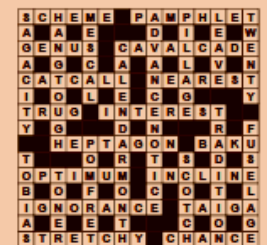
- 1 One seizing a chance (11)
- 10 Rascal (5)
- 11 Abnormal (9)
- 12 Seep (9)
- 13 Precise (5)
- 14 Superfluous (6)
- 16 Tiny speck (8)
- 18 Place differently, move (8)
- 20 One of Caesar's killers (6)
- 23 Tricky question (5)
- 24 Economist proposing interventionist government (9)
- 26 Wrong (9)
- 27 Lloyd Webber musical (5)
- 28 Cenotaph, eg (3, 8)

DOWN

- 2 Secretary has German communications device (5)
- 3 Demanding person's to agitate endlessly (7)
- 4 Soundly secure one island (6)
- 5 Roman senator upset Scandinavian (8)
- 6 Propose getting us up with scrambled eggs and a bit of toast (7)
- 7 One coding PC – try with endless program he developed (13)
- 8 Wipe wound? It's obvious (5-3)
- 9 Drunk son with barrel for relatives (8-2-3)
- 15 Attempt getting under Asian river – it's hard work (8)
- 17 Keen reader's to work madly in

- economic good times (8)
- 19 Fish soup ultimately I administered has gone without seconds (7)
- 21 Creature got 'ere by 'orse, we 'ear! (3, 4)
- 22 Look up in tree's product for chemical substance (6)
- 25 Current business commonly is on a holiday island (5)

Solution to Crossword No 483



GETTY IMAGES



GILLIAN TETT

PARTING SHOT

Out with the old rituals - in with the new



Last year, Kristina Jacobsen, an American musical anthropologist, moved to Sardinia to do ethnographic (or fly-on-the-wall) research into the island's vibrant street life and music culture. Fate, in the shape of Covid-19, intervened: Sardinia was placed in lockdown and its noisy street culture vanished. So Jacobsen pivoted - and is now studying how Sardinian households have started to use online and at-home musical rituals to cope with the stress of coronavirus.

"Into [the] void of daily scents and sounds, a multitude of melodies has been born: balcony concerts, recordings and in-home videos," she explains in an article for social science magazine *Sapiens*, noting that a plethora of performances have appeared online with hashtags such as #flashmobsonoro, #iorestoacasa ("I'm staying home"), #lamusicanonsiferma ("the music doesn't stop"), and #tuttoandràbene ("everything will be OK").

These offerings, she adds: "Wail about corona, express defiance towards the disease and communicate the sense of hostility that some locals feel towards the influx of wealthy northern Italians who have been rushing to their summer houses." Necessity has sparked cultural invention, which is also reinforcing community ties - and resilience. It is a striking point to consider as many parts of the world endure yet more weeks of the Covid-19 lockdown.

In normal circumstances, most of us never stop to ponder how rituals and symbols shape our daily lives. That's no surprise. As the 20th century British anthropologist Victor Turner noted, a ritual is essentially "a stereotyped sequence of activities involving gestures, words and objects, performed in a sequestered place"; typically, it either marks the passage of time, defines a community, highlights a changed state, expresses our sense of identity, reaffirms shared memories - or does all of these at once.

It is precisely because rituals are so "stereotyped" - in the sense of being habitual or inherited from people around us - that we tend not to think about them. Therein lies their power, their ubiquity and, sometimes, their sanctity. The coronavirus lockdown, however, has tossed us into a new landscape of profound uncertainty. We are, as some have cleverly identified, living in a state culturally akin to the "Schrödinger's cat" problem (where the cat was famously neither dead nor alive). Our communities seem simultaneously to have and to not have Covid-19; we expect normality to resume, but also not to resume, all at once. In the meantime, we are self-isolating but also connected to a vast online world.

In this confusing kaleidoscope, many have responded, by instinct as much as design, by refashioning their rituals in striking ways. Sardinia's at-home and online musical performances are just one case in point. So, in a sense, are the digital events that companies are

launching to enable their dispersed staff to bond remotely, or that social groups are creating. My own diary is increasingly defined by a new cycle of ritualised daily video calls with colleagues and weekly cyber "drinks" with friends. Online rituals are even emerging to mark the passage of the seasons: last week I took part in a virtual Easter church service with my brother's family (followed by "tea" with 10 cousins around the world).

More tragically, of course, and by necessity, some funeral rituals are moving online. New rituals are emerging to salute healthcare workers

'Some might consider it defeatist to create coronavirus rituals. I see it as a sign of creativity under stress'

and create community solidarity: just look at the evening pot banging and cheering that originated last month in northern Italy, which has now been emulated in London and (very noisily) in Manhattan.

Inside our homes, meanwhile, many families are using rituals once reserved for childhood - such as changing clothes - to divide the endless days into "play time", "work time" and "family time", observes business anthropologist Martha Bird. "With so many of us at home, notions about time have begun to (re)formalise into discernible moments or rituals," she says.

This cultural flux can be disorientating. Jeremy Bailenson, a professor of communications at Stanford University who studies what happens when humans shift their interactions into cyberspace, notes that this new terrain is so unfamiliar that we need to learn a new "language" of communication. Most of us are not used to staring directly into enlarged faces on a screen for hours on end. This can be exhausting, since it requires us to actively engage our brains, like being immersed in a new language.

Of course, some might consider it distasteful or defeatist to even create coronavirus rituals. After all, new rituals suggest we are adapting to this new life - and thus cannot ignore it as just a temporary nightmare. But I prefer to see what is happening in Sardinia - and elsewhere - as a sign of how innovative humans can be under stress, even in a peculiar "Schrödinger's cat" cultural world.

That prompts two more questions: when this lockdown finally ends, what rituals will we maintain? And how will we mark the end of this stressful scourge? Ponder this when you next feel bored at home; better still, discuss it in a video chat. **FT**

.....
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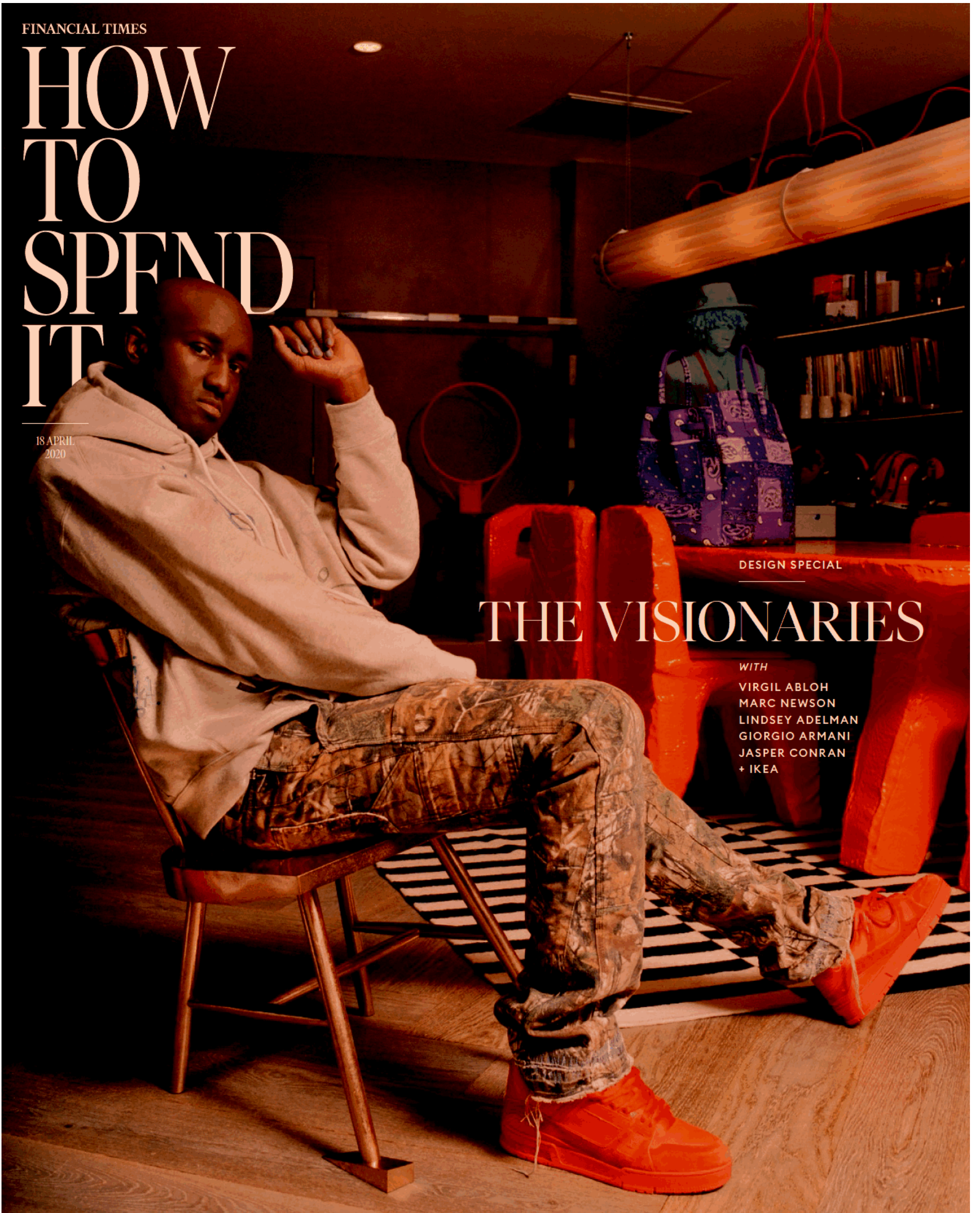
18 APRIL
2020

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LINDSEY ADELMAN
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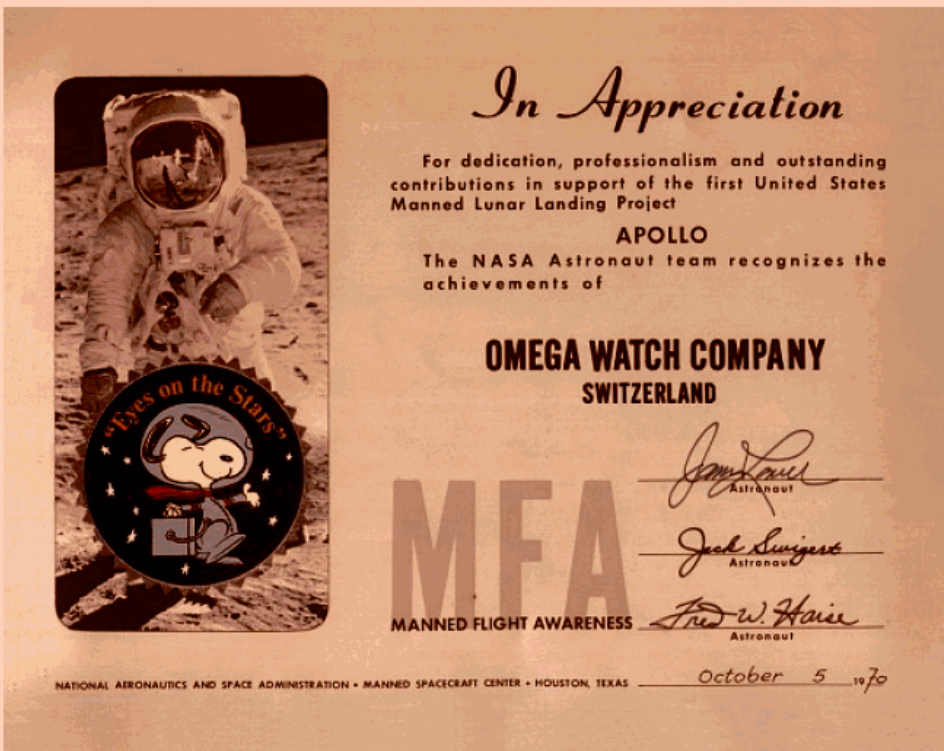


IT WAS 50 YEARS AGO

When disaster struck aboard Apollo 13 in 1970, absolute precision was needed to bring the astronauts home. With no digital timers available, Commander James Lovell and his crew used their Speedmasters to precisely time the engine burns that brought the heroes back to Earth. Later that year, OMEGA received the Silver Snoopy Award, NASA's coveted distinction for contributions to space exploration.



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HOW TO SPEND IT

18 APRIL 2020



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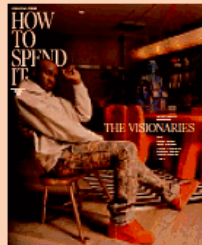
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All travel, exhibitions and events are currently being disrupted by the spread of coronavirus. Information published in the magazine may be susceptible to change.



ON THE COVER: Virgil Abloh in his Paris studio. Photography by JONATHAN FRANTINI



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ORIGINATION BY Dexter Premedia

I'm writing this 17 days before the magazine will come out in print. Ordinarily, that wouldn't matter. Ordinarily, weeks meld – one into the next – with seemingly little to distinguish them. That doesn't apply now. In the UK, we're in week two of lockdown. Our priorities shift with every day. And, of course, there are bigger questions to grapple with. What does a luxury magazine have to contribute to the world during a pandemic? To put it bluntly – who cares about expensive chairs?

Yet there are other things to consider also. The luxury sector supports millions of workers and drives a vast economy. The global luxury-travel market was valued at \$891bn in 2018. The fashion business alone is valued at some \$406bn. The global wine market was worth \$354.7bn in 2018. Luxury disciplines – which include design, food, watches and jewellery, motoring, fashion, beauty and entertainment – account for millions of jobs. Moreover, truly authentic businesses of the kind we like to feature still place a value (and their reputations) on knowhow and savoir-faire. These are businesses built on the skills of people – combining centuries of knowledge and the art of the hand. Luxury is still essentially a very human industry. It nurtures craftsmanship and expertise. Many companies are still multi-generational family outfits. And many desperately need our support.

It's easy to divide the world into good and bad, especially at a time like this, but recent weeks have seen individuals and businesses making huge efforts to help alleviate the crisis. Bernard Arnault of the LVMH group has galvanised production facilities and distribution networks to produce much-needed medical supplies; Prada, Armani, Burberry, Pernod Ricard, Absolut Vodka and Ralph Lauren have all made large philanthropic gestures, and a wealth of smaller brands have come up with strategies to help – from turning their efforts to making protective masks to providing meals-on-wheels for vulnerable communities to staging virtual workshops to help preserve our mental health. We'll be discussing more of that in future issues, and using the magazine to promote new ways on how to give it now.

And then there is the fact that around 80 per cent of this week's magazine was produced by freelance creatives, from the regular writers and contributors with whom

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VANQUISHED
BY A VIRUS

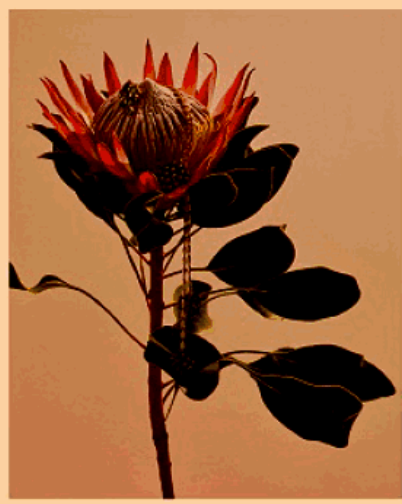
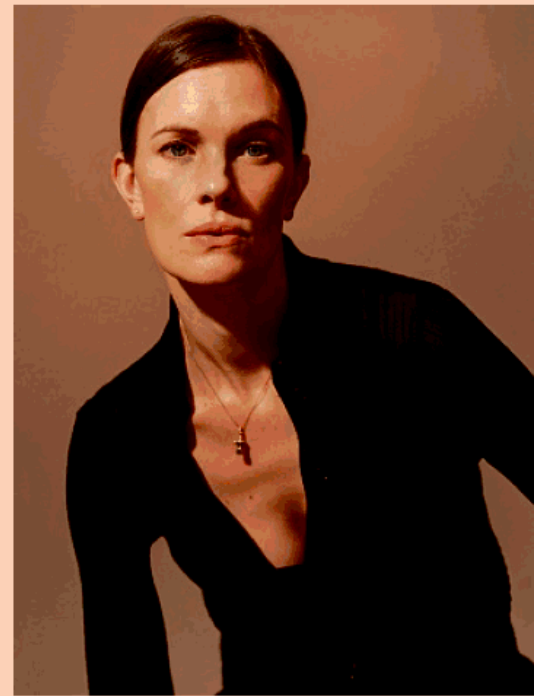
you have been long acquainted, such as Nick Foulkes and Christina Ohly Evans, to the photographers, stylists, make-up artists and hairstylists who worked on this issue's shoots. A great many of these people have now found themselves redundant because they simply cannot work. Likewise, the magazine itself is printed and distributed via a network of loyal contacts and clients who rely on us for business. *How To Spend It* is built on a big ecosystem of talent. Many of our contributors are vulnerable. Many are worried about their livelihoods and incomes. By continuing to publish, we are supporting them too.

Plus, we need distraction. Well, I know I do, at least. We sit adjacent to the news agenda deliberately because we want to offer some relief. We still want to celebrate craftsmanship and talk about innovation. We want to offer you stories that inspire. And take you somewhere else. Creativity will not be vanquished by a virus.

This design special unites a dozen different voices: the disruptive vision of Virgil Abloh, who has applied his brand of Duchamp-inspired humour to everything from bags to bedroom mats; Giorgio Armani, the forever advocate of greige homogeneity who this year marks the 20th anniversary of his Armani Casa line; and the forensically obsessive Marc Newson. Each offers a unique standpoint on modern living now – albeit in circumstances none could quite predict.

And then there is beauty. Even in the most appalling of circumstances, we can still appreciate lovely things. Perhaps one of the emerging features of this crisis is that we have learnt to take more pleasure from nature. "The Exotic Review" (page 42) pairs some of the season's most vibrant gemstones with sculptural flowers and tropical blooms. It was shot weeks before we were locked down by the crisis, but Benjamin Bouchet's pictures, with their delicate serenity and stillness, seem especially poignant now. Regardless of whether you can buy the bijou, the blooms look very beautiful. I hope you enjoy it.

@jellison22



Cartier jewellery in "The Exotic Review" (page 42)

THE FIND

SMART INVESTMENT

Shake up your tabletop
with these playful cactus
salt and pepper mills

EDITED BY CLARA BALDOCK
PHOTOGRAPH BY ANDY PRICE



DIY beechwood
Cactus salt and
pepper-mill set
(28cm and 23cm x
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THE AESTHETE



it to make pieces for our custom chandeliers. My son, Finn, who is 15, taught me how to throw on the wheel, and I'm loving having a new hobby.

IN MY FRIDGE YOU'LL ALWAYS FIND Stella Artois, because it's so easy to keep beer fresh and cold for a really long time. Whenever we open a bottle of wine, we never finish it before it spoils. I have zero interest in cooking, so my fridge is filled with things that give me a quick pick-me-up, like Jacques Torres dark chocolate with almonds.

Jacques Torres Dark Chocolate Almond Bark, \$9, from mrchocolate.com

AND ON MY WISHLIST is a coffee table for my living room. I've been looking at the Barcelona coffee table by Mies van der Rohe for Knoll. It's so elegant. I swap furniture all the time between my Brooklyn home, my showroom and our house in Water Mill – it's all pretty fluid where pieces end up – and I know this simple chrome and glass design will work equally well in each of these environments. \$2,053.

MY FAVOURITE ROOM IN MY HOUSE is our living room in Brooklyn. It's cosy and creative, and it represents a lot of what matters most to me about family life. I love the ceiling height and the sun that comes through the windows that have no shades. We have a full wall of records, turntables and books, and another wall with candle sconces. There's a big rug, a Togo sectional by Ligne Roset, a fireplace and a backgammon board for playing with my son – and it all feels perfect throughout the seasons.

THE DESIGN THAT INSPIRES ME is the Integratron in the Mojave Desert in California. It's a giant wooden dome where you go for relaxing, healing sound baths. The architect – who built it in 1954 – claimed he received the plans from aliens. My sound bath could have been as short as 20 minutes, but it felt like 20 hours, with all of us lying on blankets in a circle and looking up at the ceiling. I was transported somewhere else entirely. The nearby Joshua Tree Natural Park is always a magical place for me too.

THE LAST BOOK I READ was *The Mars Room* by Rachel Kushner. It's rough, elegant and insightful all at the same time, and the language and the quality of every sentence are masterful. I think she's one of the best living writers.

THE LAST THING I ADDED TO MY WARDROBE was a pair of snakeskin slides by Alumnae in the West Village. It's a great store and a great brand. I went in for mules and came out with slides in shades of black, grey and white that work with almost everything. \$625.

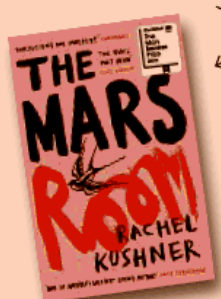
IF I WEREN'T DOING WHAT I DO, I WOULD BE a land artist in the vein of Andy Goldsworthy and James Turrell, completely immersed in nature. I love the idea of making pieces that only look a certain way for a moment in time before nature changes them an hour later.

THE LAST MEAL THAT TRULY IMPRESSED ME was at a restaurant called Claro, in

MY PERSONAL STYLE SIGNIFIERS are my wedding rings: nine very thin, simple gold bands – the tiniest rings you could imagine – each embedded with teeny black and white diamonds. They're by Satomi Kawakita, an independent designer based in Tribeca and I chose them when I lost my original wedding ring. In terms of clothing, I like modest, classic silhouettes but with a bit of bite, so my go-to designers are Rachel Comey, Maria Cornejo and Rick Owens.

THE LAST THING I BOUGHT AND LOVED was a kiln by Skutt. It's a medium-sized, electric commercial model that I use for prototyping light fixtures in our studio. I'm a beginner on it, though someone on my team is super-accomplished, so he uses

ADELMAN'S MOST RECENT READ



Top right: Stella Artois – found in Adelman's fridge

Lindsey Adelman

The celebrated sculptural-lighting designer loves Alumnae's slides, land art and Afrobeats tracks. By *Christina Ohly Evans*

PHOTOGRAPHY BY NICHOLAS CALCOTT

THE AESTHETE



listening to and she sent me her playlist. This is amazing music that makes you want to dance, but in a really relaxed, mellow way. When I put Burna Boy on, I can feel the anxiety start melting away.

A RECENT "FIND" was Mother of Cod, an incredible vintage shop in Crescent Beach, Nova Scotia. I bought a pair of faded 1970s cut-off denim shorts that had the pockets ripped off, with deep-blue denim hearts handstitched in their place. I think they're fabulous. @motherofcodvintage

THE ONE ARTIST WHOSE WORK I WOULD COLLECT IF I COULD would be Yayoi Kusama – her *Infinity Nets* paintings, in particular. I admire the fact that she did something with her struggles, and made them productive. As a creative person, I find great hope in that.

THE BEST SOUVENIR I'VE BROUGHT HOME is a beige linen cocktail napkin from a party at Nilufar gallery in Milan. It came with my drink, before I knew anyone at the party, or had even met the owner, Nina. We are now friends and shortly after the party I started showing my work at her gallery. This napkin always reminds me of an exciting starting point, and it was the opening up of an idea. For me, it stands for potential.

IF I HAD TO LIMIT MY SHOPPING TO ONE NEIGHBOURHOOD IN ONE CITY, I'D CHOOSE the corner of Howard and Crosby Streets in New York. There's got to be some kind of vortex right at that spot. At Opening Ceremony, I love the kooky vibe and the clothing edit, including its own label. And I can't resist the furniture and decorative-design store BDDW. Close by, I find stores such as de Vera every bit as inspirational as any museum in terms of the objects and jewellery, and Michele Varian is an excellent resource for housewares.

THE PEOPLE I RELY ON FOR MY WELLBEING are both in New York: Stephen Thevenot at Eva Scrivo Salon, who has been doing my hair for a very long time, and an acupuncturist named Thomas Droge who specialises in necks and backs. I went to him when I was getting cricks in my neck and they went away after just one appointment. His questions really brought the words out of me – the words I already had in my mouth that I just needed to spit out. I realise now that any blockage in the body is really created by thoughts.

MY FAVOURITE WEBSITES are *The New Yorker* for opinion pieces, and *Apartamento* and *Pin-Up* for art and design. I think *Pin-Up* is the best magazine on architecture and design out there. I also really love See Saw – an app that highlights art critics' picks for the best of what's on. You can also make a list of things you want to see in a particular city and the app makes a map and puts pins in place so you can easily access everything.

THE OBJECT I WOULD NEVER PART WITH is... nothing at all. I feel strongly about this because I design objects for a living, and nothing material is too precious. ■HTSI

"THE ARCHITECT WHO BUILT THE DOME CLAIMED HE GOT THE PLANS FROM ALIENS"

Brooklyn. I went with my husband for our anniversary and it was delicious. I had an Ultima Bruja cocktail made with Chartreuse and birch lime – it was an incredible electric green. We shared chipotle shrimp tacos with fresh greens and a delicious short-rib and molé dish. The atmosphere is great as well – low-key with a rustic-chic Mexican vibe.

MY STYLE ICON is Emmanuelle Alt, editor-in-chief of *Vogue Paris*. She is so beautiful. French people typically look beyond anything that I can imagine looking like, and she is the epitome of this effortless chic. I love that she wears little jackets and high heels and these slightly masculine pants. She can definitely play with the boys.

THE GROOMING PRODUCTS I'M NEVER WITHOUT include Jasmine and Rose Nourishing Oil by Amaki, which I use for my face, body and hair. I have several of these lovely little bottles with floating rose petals that I use throughout the day. For shampoo, I like Shu Uemura's Color Lustre for conditioning highlights. *Amaki Jasmine and Rose Nourishing Oil*, \$27.50. *Shu Uemura Color Lustre*, \$49.

THE BEST GIFT I'VE RECEIVED RECENTLY is Lisa Taddeo's *Three Women*. It focuses on three women who were interviewed extensively about their thoughts on sexuality and desire. It was given to me by a good friend because I think it's something that we both know is an area of our society that is not written about enough.

THE LAST MUSIC I DOWNLOADED was by Burna Boy. I love several of his Afrobeats tracks, including *Dangote*, *On the Low* and *More Life*. A woman who works in our shipping department always has her earbuds in and she's always super-chilled-out, so I asked her what she was



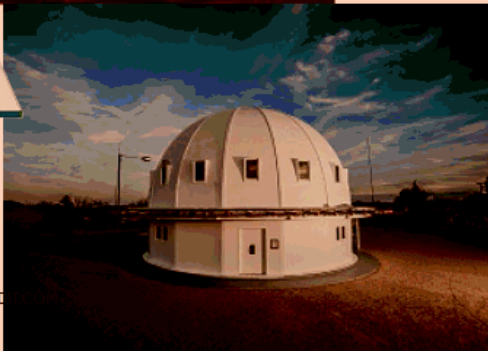
Clockwise from top: Adelman at her Brooklyn home. Her Alumnae snakeskin slides. Wedding rings by Satomi Kawakita. 1970s denim shorts from Mother of Cod, a vintage shop in Nova Scotia



Clockwise from above: *Apartamento* magazine. Amaki Jasmine and Rose Nourishing Oil. The Integraton in the Mojave Desert. Vinyl, books and turntables in Adelman's living room

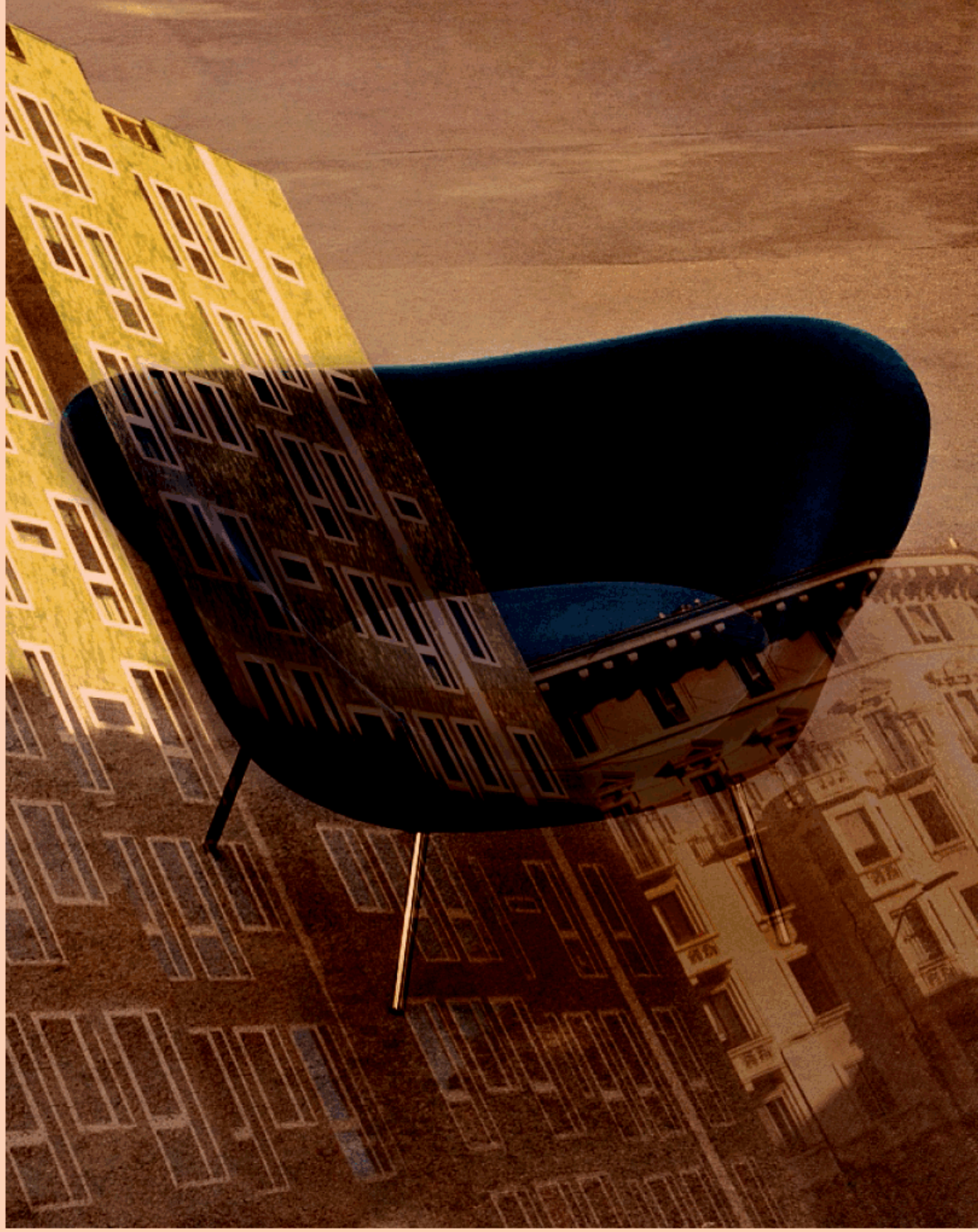


ON ADELMAN'S WISHLIST: A MIES VAN DER ROHE FOR KNOLL COFFEE TABLE



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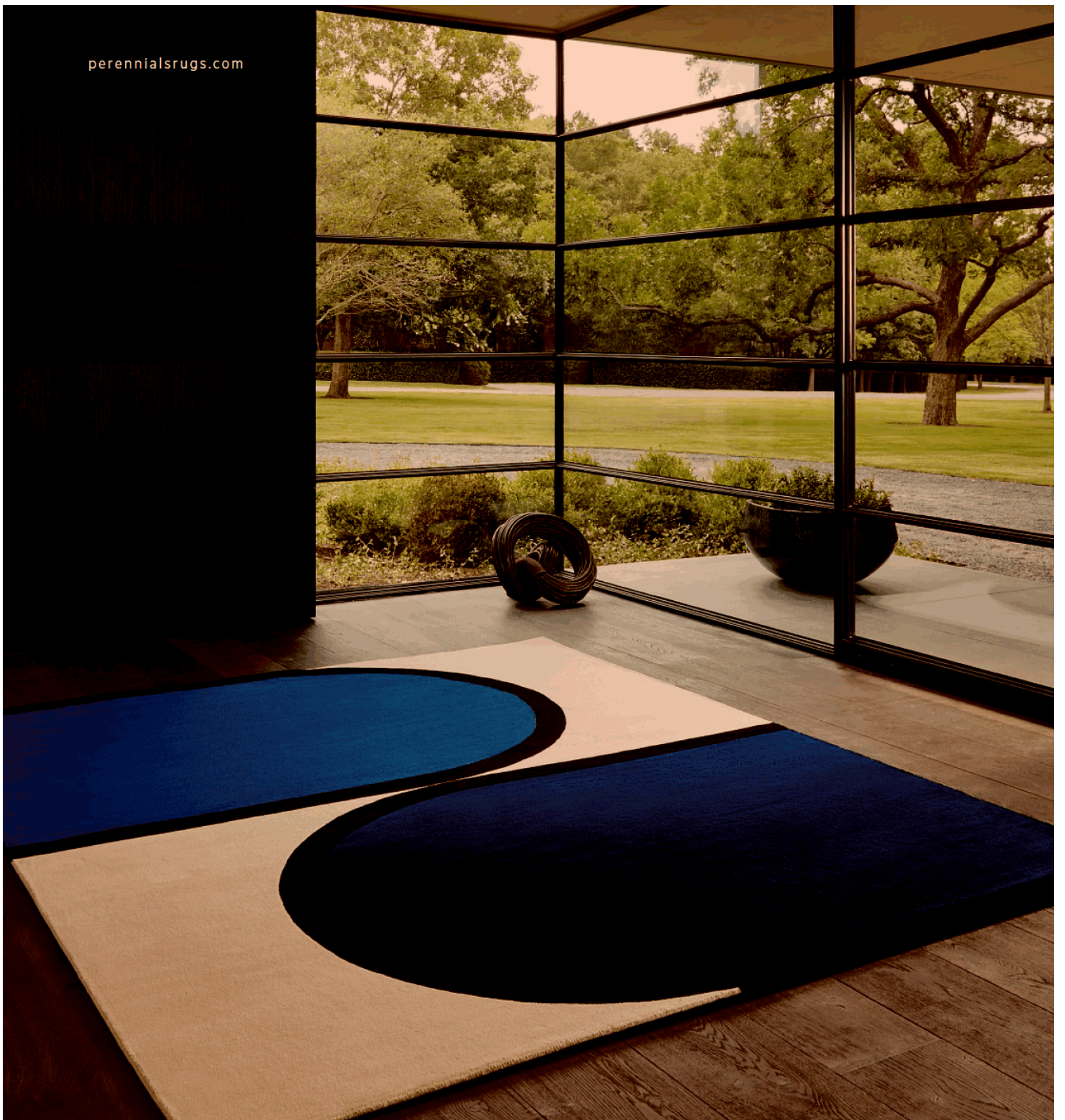


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& MONTE DORIA BUILDING, MILANO / 1971 — GIO PONTI

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PIERRE JEANNERET
DAYBED IN
BERLUTI VENEZIA
LEATHER

DESIGN

HOLDING PATINA

At Berluti, Kris Van Assche has drawn inspiration from its signature leather to develop an exquisite collection of homewares, says *Aimee Farrell*

PHOTOGRAPHY BY JONAS MARGUET

Interior design has always been the foundation of Kris Van Assche's creative vision at Berluti. The starting point for the Belgian artistic director's runway debut for autumn/winter 2019 was a table. He spotted the piece at the house's workshop in Ferrara, Italy – a marble-topped workbench used by Berluti artisans to hand-colour the signature Venetian leather shoes in their distinctive aged patina. Not only did this innocuous hunk of furniture give rise to a painterly print on coats and shirting that mimics the smudges and stains on the square tabletop; it dictated the palette of the collection. In Van Assche's mind, the table represents the craft that has been a hallmark of the brand since its inception by the Italian Alessandro Berluti in *fin de siècle* Paris.

"I've been on a double mission since starting here two years ago," he says from a cavernous white studio space at the brand's headquarters on Rue du Faubourg Saint-Honoré. "To push Berluti in a more fashion-forward direction – and to cultivate the craft and DNA of the brand."

Teasing out that DNA has been more complicated than you might imagine. There is no extensive back catalogue of looks with which to retool the house codes. "The archive is the shoes," he says. "So a lot of my work consists of making the pieces that were missing in the past."

Van Assche's latest move in that careful process is a small but sublimely executed line of decorative accessories. Through a close collaboration with a quartet of makers who work with wood, silver, brass and leather, he has taken Berluti's patinas off the runway and into the home.

There are leather-lined silver bowls and boxes from San Lorenzo, the Milanese silver specialist whose work sits in the permanent collection at the V&A; ebony-

edged maple-wood trays and picture frames from Bottega Ghianda, which has worked with everyone from Giò Ponti to Hermès, and whose eponymous founder was known as a "poet of wood"; a collection of five leather vases imagined by the British designer Simon Hasan; and a series of desk accessories including blotters, pen pots, magazine holders, letter openers and even a bin from the archive of the Austrian modernist artist Carl Auböck. With their distinctive ombre leathers and hand-stitched detailing, Auböck's elegant trinkets are treated with the same care as the house's signature Alessandro shoe. Never has a wastepaper basket looked so chic.

So what compelled the 43-year-old, who headed up Dior Homme for more than a decade before moving to Berluti, to make a move into homewares? "I've been using the patina leather in the ready-to-wear collection, and on other fashion accessories, so using it on home objects felt like the next logical step," he explains.

The art of Van Assche's role here, as with everything he does at Berluti, lies in striking the balance between the past

and the present – and melding traditional techniques with his original vision. Though the project began with Auböck's classically modern objects, which feel as though they've been in the Berluti archive for years, it was important to expand the line to include contemporary designers and prevent things becoming too nostalgic.

"The collection feels like a fashion show," says Van Assche. "Some of the

"IT'S A VERY HIGH-END VISION – THE ANTITHESIS OF STREETWEAR"

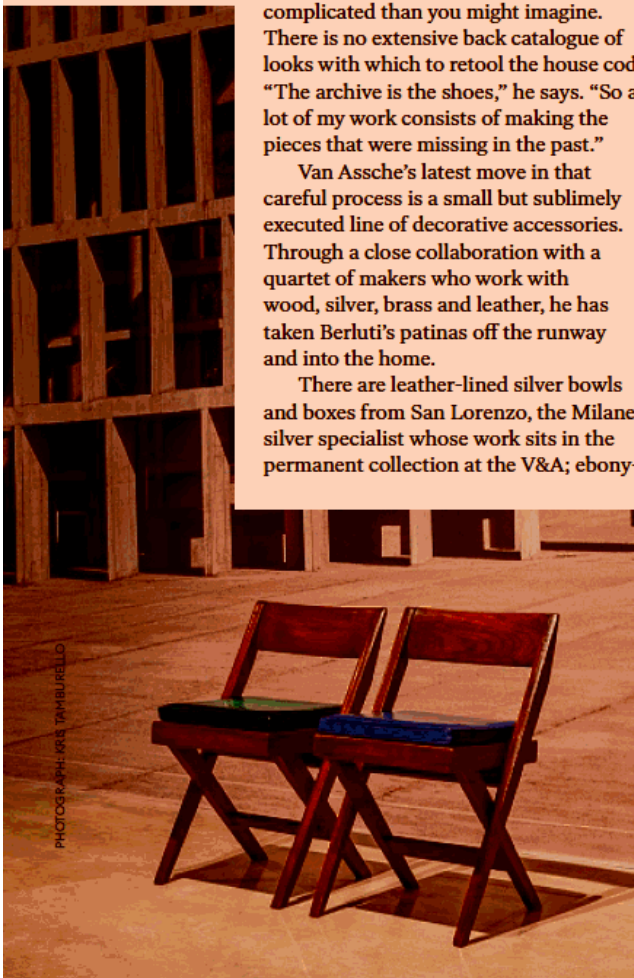
pieces reflect the history of the brand and some the future, but all are treated in the same elevated way." The process of finding the right collaborators was long and forensic. "All of them have a history of collaborating with amazing artists in the '50s and '60s, which is why we chose them. It's a very high-end vision – the antithesis of streetwear collaborations."

Van Assche was particularly taken with the work of Simon Hasan, whose use of *cuir bouilli* (boiled leather), a material that can be traced back to medieval armour making, resonated with Berluti's own craft techniques. "There's something very similar

Above: Kris Van Assche with the pieces in the new BERLUTI Objects collection

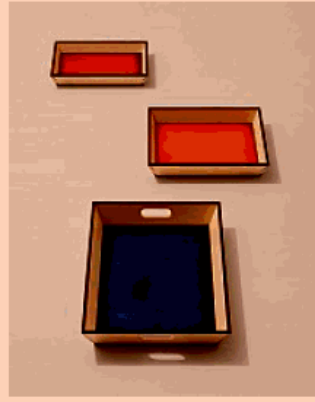


Below: Pierre Jeanneret Library chairs upholstered in BERLUTI Venezia leather at Art Basel Miami Beach in December 2019



PHOTOGRAPHY BY JONAS MARGUET

THE FIX



From far left: *cuir bouilli* vases by Simon Hasan, £2,070 to £2,500. Maple, ebony and Venezia leather trays by Bottega Ghianda, from £1,290

was from Laffanour that Van Assche bought his first pieces of Jeanneret furniture, and the pair of cinema chairs now sit in a living room almost filled with his creations. “There’s something very architectural about Jeanneret,” he says. “Every piece is handmade – it’s no-nonsense and graphic.” For Van Assche, these extracurricular projects have been the key to unlocking his new approach to colour, a seismic shift in attitude for a designer who still wears a uniform of black from head-to-toe.

“I have always had a hard time imagining clothes in colour, but I find it far easier with furniture,” he says. “It has opened the door to colour for me, and allowed me to be freer.” He points to the verdant green of the San Lorenzo silver bowls, a colour that is mirrored by both the high-backed Judge chair from the interiors presented in Miami and a luxuriant men’s leather jacket from his autumn/winter 2020 show. “Pinjore Garden

Green” is inspired by the lush topiary of the gardens at Chandigarh, which Van Assche recently visited.

It’s significant that Van Assche’s role in the creation of Berluti’s decorative objects has been that of curator rather than originator.

“I didn’t design these objects,” he says. “I simply gave them a new lease of life by seeing how they work with the Berluti leather, colour treatments and patinas. The fact that they’re so beautiful shows how beautifully they’ve been designed.” It’s a creative journey that’s been marked, more than anything, by pleasure. “I’m the first to be surprised by how much fun I’ve had working on this,” he admits. “It’s part of this whole new Berluti adventure.” ■HTSI

“IT HAS OPENED THE DOOR TO COLOUR FOR ME, AND ALLOWED ME TO BE FREER”

in his approach to things,” Van Assche says, referring to the way the wooden last is used to mould the shape of the shoe. “The results are very different. But when Simon went to our workshop, he was amazed at the similarities between the techniques.”

It took endless testing to achieve the bright hues of Hasan’s strong and simple vases – the only objects in the line not to be wrought from Berluti’s Venetian leather. But the finished vessels, Van Assche says, will sit perfectly with the ceramics from makers including Pol Chambost and Kristin McKirdy already on display at his home.

“There’s definitely a bit of selfishness in creating these objects,” he admits. “I would imagine myself going to the store to buy gifts for myself, my family and my friends. It’s like my own spontaneous shopping list.”

Likewise, the San Lorenzo bowls are silver hallmarked on the inside in a very

traditional way, but double-layered with Berluti leather in delicious greens, purples and reds. Their rich sheen resembles Quality Street wrappers.

“The colour of the leather works amazingly well with the silver,” says Van Assche of the designs. Originally conceived by Afra and Tobia Scarpa in 1996, they were the first objects to be wrought by the San Lorenzo workshop in pure silver – a serious technological feat in the world of silversmithing. Van Assche imagined gifting his partner these decorative jewels. Meanwhile, the puzzle-like joinery of the Bottega Ghianda picture frames was inspired by the family photographs arranged on the desk of Berluti’s CEO Antoine Arnault (he knows what to expect for Christmas!).

It’s not the first time Van Assche has dabbled in interiors. Last December, at Art Basel Miami Beach, he presented a capsule of restored midcentury furniture by the modernist Swiss architect Pierre Jeanneret, upholstering chairs, tables, screens, benches and desks in bright Berluti leathers. All 17 pieces came from the collection of François Laffanour of Galerie Downtown in Paris – a long-time friend of the designer. It



THE A/W '20 COLLECTION... AND A PIERRE JEANNERET JUDGE CHAIR

INSTAGRAM

Seven design feeds to follow

Marianna Giusti squares up to a world of interiors and architecture inspiration



@sarah_balineum 14.1K

Sarah Watson – the mastermind behind Balineum bathroom decor – makes no apology for her obsession with all things tiled. From Memphis-inspired colour-blocking to bookmatched marble walls and from monochrome bathrooms to kitchen sinks, she leaves no surface un-Instagrammed. Margherita Missoni’s basin and Samantha Todhunter’s walk-in shower box in black-and-white zigzag stone are standouts.



@accidentallywesanderson 952K

Cinephiles Wally and Amanda Koval, fascinated by “beautiful places that could have been taken from a Wes Anderson movie”, have tracked them down in @accidentallywesanderson. From the Frankfurt underground to Alpine resorts via art deco trains and outlandish lighthouses, the account offers landscapes and interiors captioned with details on the sites that look like they’ve come straight out of *The Royal Tenenbaums*.

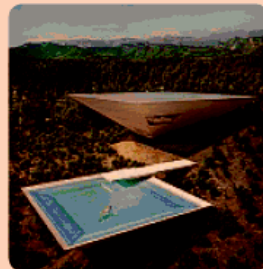


@brotalism 15.1K

Created by Berlin-based creative strategist Benjamin Gredeson, @brotalism pairs “bros” with brutalist architecture, and depicts everything from skaters in Romania’s trade union building to backpackers sunbathing outside the Habitat 67 housing complex in Montreal. Gredeson – who features on the feed, posing by the Barbican – describes it as an ode to the urban landscape and street culture.

@versaillesadness_ 114K

If Marie Antoinette had edited an interiors magazine, this would be its Instagram account. Calling itself the “largest community dedicated to palaces”, it offers voyeuristic peeks into the world’s most ornate atriums and halls, including the leopard-tiled Palazzo Valguarnera-Gangi in Palermo and the velvet-brocade apartments of Napoleon III. Its selection of plush interiors is curated by Antoine Bn, “chasseur de palais”.



@alternatopools 19.8K

“In a world where pools outnumber people” – @alternatopools is a trove of aquatic dreamscapes by Austin-born J Lee McClusky. From natural waterfalls to design homes with infinity-pool balconies, this feed features Takei Nabeshima’s über-modern upside-down concrete pyramid pool and a 1950s artificial pond filled with giant water lilies. Its creator believes in the healing power of water as a “natural antidepressant”.



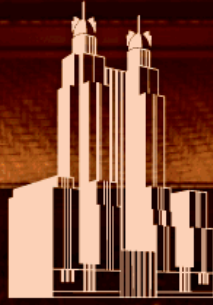
@ihavethisthingwithfloors 803K

Midcentury terrazzo, Indian marble inlays, tiny Turkish ceramics and crab-shaped Byzantine-esque mosaics: @ihavethisthingwithfloors has captured them all – with rigorously matched feet. A global picture diary that celebrates the unorthodox wisdom that we should look down, not up, highlights include snakeskin loafers on exquisitely painted Moroccan tiles and geometric 1960s slates matched with pointed leather pumps.



@plantsindcor 88.1K

This account “shares the plant love” in a feed that looks like a glamorised remake of *Jumanji*. It offers dreamy inspirations for verdant decor in different settings, from hazy Puglian patios covered in ivy to concrete balconies in Thailand filled with tropical foliage plants. Singapore’s humongous vertical garden is a standout, alongside the chic Beldi Country Club in Marrakech and Vienna’s Palm House in the Burggarten.



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BOOKS

Design of the times

From artist homes to relaxing escapes, *Baya Simons* finds plenty to inspire



Modern Architecture and Interiors

Fifteen years ago, architecture and design curator Adam Stech set out to photograph the best examples of modernist architecture and interiors around the world. The result is this atlas of design excellence across 25 countries. From the colour blocks of Le Corbusier's machines for living to Albert Frey's elemental Californian villas, this is a masterclass in modernism. *Prestel, 4 June, £30*



Living on Vacation: Contemporary Houses for Tranquil Living

What would a house look like if it were designed specifically to help you relax? This is the question posed by *Living on Vacation*, a photo-rich tome from Phaidon. From mountain hideaways to remote desert ranches, lakeside villas and rural cottages, it presents a glorious compendium of architecture for every possible interpretation of "relaxation". *Phaidon, 17 April, £30*



Materialising Colour: Journeys with Giulio Ridolfo

This sumptuous flexibound book follows textile house Kvadrat's "colour master" Giulio Ridolfo as he travels through Italy, India and Denmark on a quest for new colours. Looking to nature, pop culture, fashion and craft for inspiration, Ridolfo sources sustainable dyes and colours. Photos come from Howard Sooley – Derek Jarman's friend and collaborator. *Phaidon, 22 May, £60*



Guide to Historic Artists' Homes & Studios

From Georgia O'Keeffe's earth-toned Spanish Colonial abode in New Mexico to Lee Krasner and Jackson Pollock's Hudson-side country house, Valerie A Balint explores how the artist's home gives insight into their lives and work. Through photos and essays, the book surveys the houses and studios of America's best loved creatives. *Princeton Architectural Press, June, £25*

ILLUSTRATION: WILLIAM LUIZ. PHOTOGRAPH: ANITA SCHLAERLI



WATCHES

SHAPE UP

The new face of watchmaking is anything but round, says *Nick Foulkes*

I think we are especially good at designing them," says Pierre Rainero, Cartier's director of image, style and heritage, of the brand's thinking behind the reissue of its star timepiece – the Tank Asymétrique. "Shaped watches are what make Cartier different."

I find it hard to disagree: first, because I have a particular weakness for Cartier's non-round watches; and second, because, as even the briefest survey of the Cartier back catalogue will confirm, the assertion is undeniably true. The only problem is that production of the new Asymétrique will be strictly limited to 100 each in platinum and rose and yellow gold, including a small number of skeleton models.

Dating from 1936, the parallelogram-shaped Asymétrique is the last example of a particularly adventurous age in watch design at Cartier that began in 1904 with the postage stamp-sized Santos wristwatch. The Santos was named for the dandy aviator Alberto Santos-Dumont – and is viewed by some as the first modern wrist-worn timepiece.

Prior to the Santos, for hundreds of years, watches had been round and worn in the pocket. But in the early 20th century, the wristwatch was reinvented as a design object as much as a timepiece. As such, it began to mirror the tumultuous developments in architecture (arts nouveau and deco), music (ragtime and jazz), the performing arts (Josephine Baker, Diaghilev et al) and painting (fauvism, cubism and surrealism). In the years between the Santos and Asymétrique, Cartier served a banquet of horological geometry during which square, rectangular, barrel, bell, curved, "Chinese" and even "tortoise" shapes appeared.

"This shape is surrealist," says Rainero of the Asymétrique, arguably the most enduring shape to have emerged during that period. "There is a notion of a twist on a shape." It prefigured the Dalí-esque 1960s



From top: CARTIER gold Tank Asymétrique, £24,600. PATEK PHILIPPE rose-gold Golden Ellipse, £24,480. BELL & ROSS BR-05 Blue Steel, £3,990. Below: BULGARI rose-gold Octo Finissimo, POA



Crash watch resembling a molten, crooked oval that was recently reintroduced at Cartier's flagship London boutique. The return of the Asymétrique has been long overdue. It was last seen as part of the much missed Collection Privée in 2006 and returns in three-lugged form.

As the popularity of Patek's Nautilus and Audemars Piguet's Royal Oak demonstrate, the shaped watch on bracelet style is enjoying a renaissance. Nor is it just about the return to favour of shaped classics. The Bell & Ross BR-05 is a new sports bracelet watch that eschews a round case for the

THE RETURN OF THE ASYMÉTRIQUE HAS BEEN OVERDUE

brand's signature square. And Bulgari has scored a smash hit with the Octo Finissimo, a versatile shaped-case design in a variety of iterations, dial colours, metals and

complications that has become almost a brand of its own.

Meanwhile, over the past six months John Reardon, the former head of Christie's watch department and founder of the vintage Patek Philippe advisory website Collectability, has noticed a spike in interest in the Patek Golden Ellipse. This quasi-mystical design is inspired by the Golden Ratio and launched with a dial of blue gold in the late 1960s. It enjoyed phenomenal success in the 1970s and '80s, but then entered the aesthetic wilderness. "People were put off by the shape... almost repelled by it," he says. "But it has gone from repulsion to obsession. The Ellipse is doing exceptionally well, with people coming to me and asking for an Ellipse who wouldn't have looked at one a year ago." Nor is this phenomenon restricted to the vintage market. "I hear some Ellipses, such as the platinum Ref 5738P, have waiting lists as long as the Nautilus 5711," adds Reardon.

The shape is simple yet hard to define (not round, oval nor rectangular) and above all so strong that at the height of its popularity it spawned an entire line of Ellipse jewellery and accessories. The design transcended the bounds of horology to embrace astrological pendants, cufflinks, rings, money clips, keyrings, even lighters.

As someone who enjoys the odd cigar, I would dearly love to see the shaped Ellipse lighter make a return. For that matter, also, if anyone at Cartier is reading, the launch of a Cartier Asymétrique-shaped lighter might not be a bad idea. ■HTSI

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Left: Giorgio Armani with his ARMANI/CASA Logo lamp (not to scale), £3,690. Below: ARMANI/CASA Pretty daybed, and Peggy chair, both POA

In 2004, he established an interior-design studio that has transformed private residences everywhere “from Milan to Mumbai” and is currently involved in redeveloping the flagship Giorgio Armani boutique on Madison Avenue, New York, above which will be 19 luxury homes. “I’ve designed them,” says Armani of the development. “It marks an important milestone in my career in interior design.”

To say Armani is serious about interiors is an understatement. He owns 10 homes around the world, among them a country house on the Côte d’Azur, a cliffside Antiguan villa and a newly purchased New York penthouse – he’s furnished all of them. “Home is an extension of our being and of how we feel,” he says. “There is a sense of permanence of style when designing a space that I find particularly satisfying.”

Armani has always allowed for subtle reinterpretations that, he says, ensure his designs are timeless. “A classic piece will never become boring,” he says. And his homewares are never retired – the Logo

**“A CLASSIC
PIECE WILL
NEVER
BECOME
BORING”**

lamp remains available to buy to this day. “My work does not fall prey to fads that die out after six months.”

This longevity has made for a natural segue into hotel design – the first bearing his name opened in Dubai’s Burj Khalifa building in 2010. The suites, free of art on the walls, are furnished to a cosy minimum with the aim, he says, of creating “a place that makes one feel completely at ease”. Armani, who once stated he disliked staying in hotels lest the bathroom sink be too high or the cuisine not up to par, has since worked on creating spaces that meet his very particular criteria. Hence his outposts – a second opened in Milan in 2011 – sate his appetite for on-the-go perfection. “They depict style as a lifestyle,” he says, noting Milan’s glitzy Armani/Privé nightclub and Nobu restaurant. He is a regular at both.

Armani describes the overall Casa identity as “eclectic”, with influences drawn from different eras and cultures – spherical vanity units crafted from mother-of-pearl are sold alongside Japanese-inspired room dividers upholstered in botanic print, while his king-size walnut beds evoke a midcentury sensibility. Favourite pieces from his archive include two cocktail bars – the Riesling and the Club – unveiled in 2005 and 2009 respectively. The latter, inspired by vintage travel trunks, has a bronze lacquered interior with pull-out trays for Margarita-making. “I designed them as elements to be used on an imaginary 1930s film set,” he explains.

This eclecticism is evident in Armani’s new furniture collection, available in his stores this autumn (he recently switched all production in Italy to making medical overalls for healthcare workers fighting coronavirus). The range includes an upholstered daybed named Pretty and his favourite piece, Peggy, inspired by the multifaceted personality of Peggy Guggenheim: “It’s both enveloping and light, and demonstrates how Armani/Casa manages to combine tradition with contemporaneity.” A hint, perhaps, at the secret to the brand’s success. ■HTSI

DESIGN

ARMANI OF THE HOUSE

Grace Cook talks to Giorgio Armani about his interiors empire – a 20-year-old powerhouse that began with a single lamp

In 1982, Giorgio Armani, having been unable to find a lamp he liked for his Milan office, set about designing one. Its angular yet archetypal shape, conceived in metal and glass, was directional yet discreet, embodying the same codes as his ready-to-wear collections. And there it sat, quietly furnishing his office, until 2000, when the designer launched Armani/Casa, a new collection for the home in which his much loved lamp (now named Logo) became the headline act.

“I played with the idea of expanding my aesthetic for a long time,” says 85-year-old Armani, whose business launched in 1975 and today spans fashion, beauty, interiors and hospitality. “I wanted to create a complete Armani lifestyle to reflect my ideas in different areas of everyday life. The Logo lamp is testimony to this curiosity. It was my first creation in [interior] design.”

Two decades on, Armani/Casa is a full division within Armani’s empire, with 41 dedicated stores in 29 countries in Europe, the US and Japan offering everything from textured wallpapers and leather-topped desks to bathrooms and kitchens for those favouring his understated aesthetic.

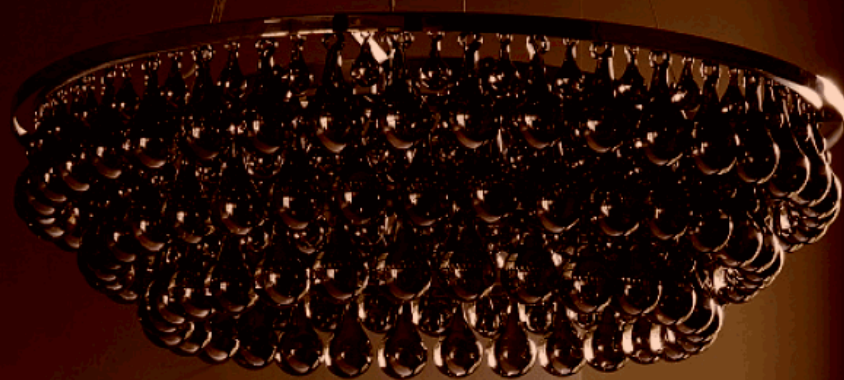


PHOTOGRAPH: STEFANO GUIDANI

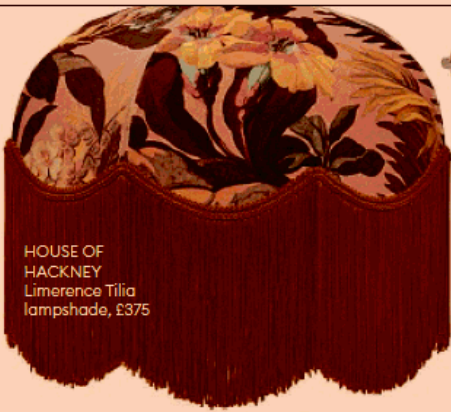
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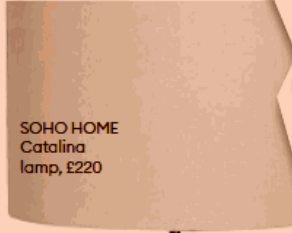
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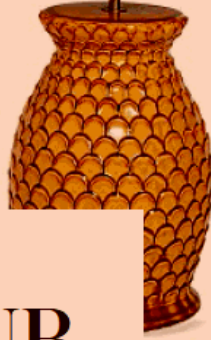
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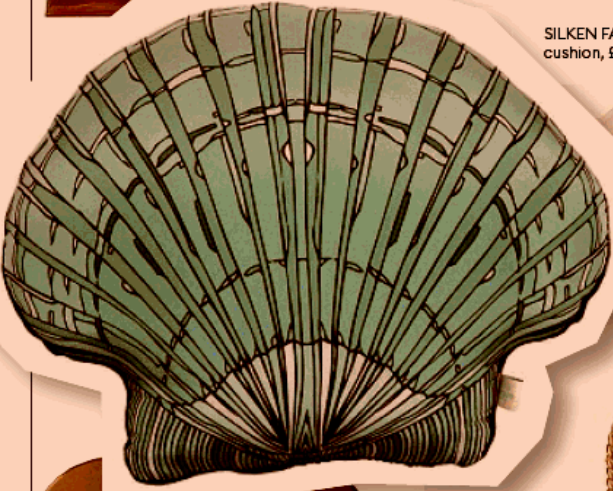
VENYX Lady V
ring, £1,700



MARYSIA bikini
top, £117, and
bottoms, £115



DIVINE
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Deco Martini
wallpaper
(52cm x
10m), £140



SILKEN FAVOURS
cushion, £95



AERIN nesting
serving dishes,
£325 for set



FENDI Kan I bag, £1,790



PORCELAIN
SUPERSTORE
Drops Gold tiles
(10cm x 12cm),
£89 per sq m



TROVE Avalon chest, £1,495

PHOTOGRAPH: PIRELLATE



This page: the dining room at Marc Newson's Ithacan home. Opposite page: the master bathroom, clad in Striato Olimpico marble

Marc Newson's ITHACAN IDYLL

On the island of his ancestors, the designer has created a family home that is as surprising for its traditional orthodoxies as it is for its modernist edge. Words by *Nick Foulkes*. Photography by *Phil Poynter*



Marc Newson is standing on the springy grass below his house on the Ionian island of Ithaca, looking back at its surprisingly traditional façade, the central door and balcony above flanked either side by a pair of windows with simple architraves and sage-coloured shutters. It is rendered in a subtle pink stucco that almost seems to glow a pale-honey shade in the afternoon sunlight. All in all it gives a very convincing impression of having been warmed and weathered by two and a half centuries or more of scorching summers and tempestuous winters on the island that Odysseus once called home. But what seems a simple, elegant architectural reminder of the days when the Ionian archipelago was part of the Venetian Empire is in fact the work of one of the greatest living designers.

"I'm surrounded with modernity," says Newson. "I live in a world where I'm constantly designing new things. This was an opportunity for me to try something different. It is a theatrical project, because I really played on the notion that I was trying to create something that looked like it had been here forever." It is an act of architectural legerdemain enhanced by an interior in which the walls are hung with 19th-century paintings and drawings of Greek subjects, with only occasional touches – such as a pair of midcentury Gio Ponti chandeliers and a so-kitsch-it's-chic Aldo Tura drinks trolley in the shape of a giant pipe – betraying that this is anything other than a very conventional house belonging to very conventional people.

But Newson has made his name and his fortune challenging convention. Over a career spanning more than three decades, he has turned his remarkable gifts with equal facility to the design of clocks, shotguns, training shoes, fountain pens, watches, luggage, knives and jewellery. He has designed cars, bicycles, speedboats, washbasins, kitchen appliances, restaurants, glassware galore, numerous superyachts, saucepans, a kettle, a concept aircraft, an airport – and, if you've flown Qantas, the bed on which you slept and the bulbous glass tumblers from which you drank. He also designed the wheeled Louis Vuitton suitcase at your side, the RM Williams boots on your feet and the Apple Watch on your wrist. The headline to a 2012 *New York Times* article "Is there anything Marc Newson hasn't designed?" was purely rhetorical.

More than that, Newson's work transcends the boundaries usually circumscribing design: he exhibits surfboards, samurai swords and cloisonné-enamel couches at Gagosian. His most famous work, the Lockheed Lounge, has sold for more than \$3.5m, making him the most expensive living designer. It's a price that places him, rightly, in the front rank of living contemporary artists. Moreover, the same piece of furniture made him a totem of popular culture when it appeared in the puppet action movie *Team America*.

But if you really want to understand the essence of Newson the man and the creator, it is necessary to board a



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L I N D B E R G ∞

flight to Kefalonia; take a taxi across the rocky spine of the island to the sleepy port of Sami; stop for an iced cappuccino; board a jolopy of a boat that reeks of diesel and is decorated in a manner that recalls a retirement home for distressed mariners; make the 30-minute crossing to Homer's cloud-capped Ithaca; get collected by a vehicle that is part saloon car, part pick-up and totally foreign to the concept of an MOT; be driven past tranquil bays and along dramatic mountain roads where scraggy, nimble goats outnumber cars; take a sharp hairpin onto a single-width lane that turns into a rutted track that leads to a rusty gate, more rutted track and... finally... the sort of poignantly beautiful location that makes one question Odysseus' sanity in leaving in the first place, let alone staying away so long.

It's an odyssey, I should add, that I undertook many months before coronavirus forced Greece into lockdown. But Ithaca has experienced extreme trauma in the past. In 1953, a series of catastrophic earthquakes levelled almost every house on the island. It is a place that has already once risen from the rubble. The majority of the Venetian-style structures that were destroyed were built again, mirroring the original style; and, since 1978, in the capital Vathy there has been a law that says new buildings must be in keeping with the island's historical idiom. Indeed, making a home here is a kind of homecoming for Newson himself. His grandfather emigrated from Ithaca to Australia in 1923, aged 16, and the cottage in which he was born still stands today on another part of the island.

A decade ago, when Newson and his wife Charlotte Stockdale – stylist and proprietress of fashion-and-accessories brand Chaos – decided to build a house on the steep slope that falls away from the single-lane roadway to the gin-clear waters of the Strait of Ithaca, the only inhabitants were semi-feral goats foraging in the dense undergrowth beneath the gnarled oaks and centuries-old olive trees. Unlike so many people building a house who fall in love with a landscape only to destroy it during construction, Newson wanted to preserve as much as possible, inserting the building into the hillside with a neurosurgeon's skill without removing one stone or plant more than absolutely necessary. It is only a slight exaggeration to say that he considered every blade of grass and every leaf before making a decision.

The local flora is a vital part of Newson's Ithacan experience. As its emblem, the house has a stylised, kamon-like cross section of the fruit of what is colloquially known as the "strawberry tree". It is to be seen everywhere: embroidered on linen, carved into wood and stone, etched



Clockwise from above: Marc Newson overlooking the Strait of Ithaca. The living room. The façade of the house



into brass doorknobs and even printed on the T-shirts and shorts worn by the builders and the house's staff.

"One of the joys of being here is the vegetation. I was obsessive, absolutely obsessive, that when we did any excavation, it was done with a surgical degree of precision." He points to the edge of the broad terrace where an anonymous-looking shrub, of the sort that ends up in the local garden-centre clearance sale, spills untidily onto the broad flagstones. "It's an indigenous shrub, called *Pistacia lentiscus*, and I guess it's sort of 80 per cent of the greenery you see on this island. It's a dense evergreen shrub and it's incredibly hardy. You can train it into a tree, it can be a bush – it's the most incredible plant. But they treat it as a weed here. And they pull it out and get rid of it. I love it and that bush has always been there. Right under that bush there was an excavation that went down 10m. It was like a sheer cliff that went straight down, all reinforced with concrete. And that was purely during the construction phase, to protect the plants and keep everything from falling in. It wasn't something that ever, ever, ever would have been done in this context. Normally, you'd define the footprint of your house, and then you'd just excavate a bloody big hole and destroy everything – for every square metre of construction you literally would destroy 3m of beautiful landscape. It takes a lot more effort at the beginning, and you may end up changing it anyway, but at least you've not destroyed it." He smiles wryly. "That was an obsessive realisation."

Indeed, obsession has characterised the entire project. He is forever grateful to his wife, not just for the practical help and advice she has given but also for her understanding. "She's been intrinsically involved in the project over the past 10 years, and as well as her input, her tolerance of my various neuroses has been extraordinary."

His wife aside, his concerns were shared with one other person. "I couldn't have done the project without my architect and project manager Avraam Vairaktaris, who essentially put five years of his life on hold to make the project happen. It was an extraordinary learning curve for him, but his dedication and obsession were hard for even me to comprehend" – which is saying something.

If he lost sleep over the fate of a single shrub, it can only be imagined what agonies he endured while deciding the height of the house. "I didn't want the house to be submerged within this massive excavation. I didn't want it to feel too low in relation to the landscape behind, or to be so high that it stuck out like a sore thumb."

"IT WAS AN OPPORTUNITY FOR ME TO TRY SOMETHING DIFFERENT"



It is safe to say that detail matters to Newson – usually he finds that clients (or, more exactly, their "people") do not share his perfectionist traits. But in becoming his own client, he has ripped the top off a massive Pandora's box of details. It is almost as if within the easygoing, floppy-haired, loosely T-shirted, wide-trousered and yard-booted corporeal form of Marc Newson there are in fact two people: Newson the client makes almost impossible demands of Newson the designer, who pushes the limits of ingenuity, technology and materials to exceed those demands. I can only imagine that it is a bit like Garry Kasparov engaging himself in a decade-long multidimensional chess game.

When asked if he is not taking things a bit far, he shrugs. "I've come to the realisation that if I don't do it well now, it'll bug the hell out of me for the rest of my life. In the past, I've sometimes not done things as well as I could have and it has irritated me forever. It comes back

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to my Ithacan grand-father. He said to me, 'If you want to do something properly, do it yourself.' He had another adage to the effect that you should spend as much time as you need to do it properly the first time, so you don't have to suffer a lifetime of failure." Detail, obsession, self-reliance, fear of a lifetime of failure and an Ithacan grandfather... Newson's decision to build his dream house in antique style on the island of his ancestors could keep a good psychoanalyst busy for years.

"As a child, I made the obligatory trip to Ithaca and I remember coming to a beach not far from here. It was a very different place. There were really no houses. There are not that many now." It would be some years before he returned, but once the Australian designer settled in Europe, the siren song of Greece drew him back year after year. At first he visited other islands such as Hydra, then he started to sail and, renting a boat with a friend in the summer of 1996, set off from Corfu. "We came to Ithaca and camped at the beach" – the same beach that is now at the end of a path that snakes through trees and shrubs from his house.

"We made three or four sailing trips, and every time we came back to the same place and camped in that little spot. The beach was the same, but the terrace above was overgrown and impenetrable, full of bushes and trees."

He purchased his first plot of land shortly after the turn of the century and built a cottage. Ever since, he has been making a patchwork of land. "Not only to purchase enough to build a house, but to purchase enough so that no one else would build a house right on my doorstep. And my objective," he laughs, "was always to own that little piece of land above the beach where I camped."

The beach is well worth the meandering trek through the sage- and rosemary-scented thickets: a perfect cove in miniature, shielded at either end by giant craggy boulders and lapped by water so clear that it impoverishes the epithet "crystal". However, it is hard to imagine that he has had that much time to sun himself on the beach. The two-dimensional jigsaw puzzle of buying land was just a warm-up for the three-dimensional jigsaw of construction.

"It's a very simple, typical Venetian kind of layout. There is a large central corridor with rooms off either side. It's a very rudimentary plan – the house is a rectangle, so it couldn't really get much simpler." But the achievement of simplicity can be incredibly complex. Take the bathroom off the master bedroom. A little like entering a huge box of incredible zebra-striped marble, with its curved corners and rounded edges, it is immediately identifiable as Marc Newson and it is



Clockwise from above: the cantilevered staircase. Bedroom and terrace. The front terrace. The beach below

properly monumental. "This bathroom was built before there were walls, and then we built the house around it. It was madness, but there was no other way we could do it."

The cantilevered staircase that sweeps up through the centre of the house with majestic, graceful ease was an even greater trial. "That was one of the single most complicated things because I wanted to create a cantilevered stone staircase, which is a very, very deeply traditional thing. But no one can build them anymore. In the 17th and 18th centuries, they were commonplace. It's supported by itself all the way up and you can have incredibly thin sections, which you could never do with concrete. It is supported at the landing, one huge piece of stone that extends back into the walls for another half a metre. There was no wall when that came in, so that whole piece of stone could be lowered in."

And as the stone was being lowered in, another set of craftsmen were working on the balustrade. "And if that's a millimetre out from here to there," he says, indicating the top and bottom of one of the balusters that secure the handrail to each tread of the stairs, "it won't work. Well, not a millimetre maybe," he concedes, "but certainly three millimetres. It took years," he says, with something almost approaching pride, "and trying to communicate the geometry of that, I understood what has been lost over the past couple of centuries."

But just because something is 200 years old, it is not automatically better, as the corbels supporting the balcony that overlooks the sea testify. "I bought three or four antique corbels in Athens. They were close to what I wanted, but even originally they were never geometrically

NEWSON HAS RIPPED THE TOP OFF A PANDORA'S BOX OF DETAILS

good enough. They would have been mathematically correct had they been carved in the Golden Age, but these were only 18th century," he says apologetically. "So we redefined all of the spirals, where the acanthus leaf wraps around itself, remodelled those from scratch on the computer, and rebuilt them in their entirety."

Indeed, the more one looks, the more there is to see.

At the shady side of the house is a barbecue inspired by one that Newson spotted in a Tuscan steak restaurant and had built and shipped from Italy. It prompts a 10-minute peroration on the most scientific manner of cooking a steak. On the sunny side is a sundial that, with its arcane symbols and asymmetric grid of intersecting straight and parabolic lines, transforms the simple notion of a solar gnomon into an object of Vitruvian complexity.

"The numbers are ancient Greek... obviously. And above I carved a little saying I love from Plato, something to the effect of 'God is in the geometry'." Personal aptness notwithstanding, what really impresses him is the numerological significance. "If you look at the number of letters in the Greek words, it's three, one, four, one, five, nine, so 3.14159," he observes, adding with triumph, "which is pi." At this, Newson's benign features crease into a cackle of pure pleasure. ■HTSI

“DESIGN WITHOUT ANY HAS NO HUMANITY”

Virgil Abloh's creativity has no limits. He's not only one of the biggest names in fashion but a design disruptor with a fresh, modern eye. By *Mark C O'Flaherty*

Photography by *Jonathan Frantini*

The cultural response to the events of 2020 will be fascinating. The business of fashion and design will change as both reflect on and react to the consequences of the current disruption. How designer, author and DJ Virgil Abloh processes these events will undoubtedly be radical. His work has always mixed polemic with humour: from his cult Off-White label to his menswear collections for Louis Vuitton, where he has been artistic director since 2018.

His forays into furniture design are no exception. They create strong narratives about the world around him and reveal his advocacy of democratic design. When we met, at the start of the year, Abloh was opening tandem exhibitions entitled *Efflorescence*, made up of one-off and edition design pieces, at Galerie Kreo in Paris and London. The grey concrete works encapsulated much of Abloh's aesthetic – adorned with handpainted, brightly coloured graffiti, they reflected his obsession with modernist architecture, refracted through the lens of contemporary urban life.

“The pieces – a bench, a console table and vases – are abstracted forms of everyday objects,” he explained. “In concrete they're brutalist in nature, but instead of leaving them as pure forms I painted them as they may be painted on the street. I've always been intrigued by how urban architecture, like an underpass or the South Bank skatepark in London, becomes a magnet for spray paint. It is an explosion of colour, a natural act, an urban texture – modern-day hieroglyphics.”

Galerie Kreo sits at the most rarefied end of the furniture design spectrum, with founder Didier Krzentowski fostering the careers of Barber and Osgerby, the Bouroullec brothers and Marc Newson. “I was immediately captivated by Virgil's visions when I was introduced to him in 2018,” says Krzentowski of the designer's huge appeal. “He has an uncompromising approach, which I love, experimenting with new territory by pairing architectural precision with the visceral nature of street culture.”

In fact, Krzentowski sees parallels between the rugged nature of what Abloh has produced (with notably polished



HUMOUR

TIME



Virgil Abloh
photographed in
his Paris studio,
also pictured left

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price tags of between €12,000 and €220,000 a piece) and the influential modernist projects of Le Corbusier. “I am reminded of the 1950s architecture in Chandigarh,” he says, “and the paradox between Le Corbusier’s grey, rough concrete and his use of bright colours.”

It would be reductive to look at Abloh’s work and label it “street art”, but the street is where Abloh finds much of his inspiration. He has collaborated on projects in the past with Ben Kelly, the designer who steered the seminal postmodern Manchester nightclub The Hacienda in the 1980s, and last year he created an installation at the Venice Biennale that was immersed in a different kind of urban life. His *Acqua Alta* furniture, available in limited editions, from €42,000 to €95,000, was installed on the terrace of the Ca’ d’Oro on the Grand Canal as part of the *Dysfunctional* exhibition presented by Carpenters Workshop Gallery. The visual conceit was simple: chairs, benches and lamps fashioned from bronze were arranged with the aid of wedges to sit at skewed angles. “The objects seem to be sinking,” says Loïc le Gaillard, co-founder of Carpenters Workshop Gallery. “Just like La Serenissima herself.”

When Venice flooded catastrophically at the end of last year, it made Abloh’s work more prescient. “It was one of those coincidences that tells you that you’re on the right path,” says Abloh. “I wanted to tell a story about my experiences in the city – the surrealism of the streets and water, and what happens when the city floods. We are at a time in history when we are understanding the human relationship with nature, and the reality of climate change.”

It is perhaps typical of Abloh’s broad universal vision that, at the same time he was showing work in Venice, similar designs were being made, albeit from beech, for his Markerad collaboration with Ikea – priced at £99 – which featured other pieces that made for laugh-out-loud visual puns, most notably a rug that resembled an Ikea receipt. Abloh’s sense of humour – perhaps less visible than it might have been to date because of his friendship and association as a creative director for the curious, largely cheerless Kanye West – is much underrated.

“MORE THAN BEING A DESIGNER WHO IS ASKED BY A MAISON TO FOLLOW INFLUENCES, VIRGIL IS THE INFLUENCE”

“Design without any humour has no humanity,” he says. “If I put out a rug that’s just in a beautiful shade of grey, why do you need to own that? You probably already have a beautiful rug. If I create something with humanity, humour and a point of view, it has a reason to exist.”

Abloh’s approach in producing the same design in two radically different materials, with violently opposing price points, makes him unusual in the world of design. Benjamin Paulin, who produces his late father Pierre’s furniture at Paulin Paulin Paulin, met Abloh when he was asked to furnish Kanye West’s showroom in 2015. The two bonded over Pierre’s futuristic chairs and sofas. “I was very impressed,” says Paulin. “Virgil is part of a new generation, questioning the idea of industrial product versus conceptual art. There is a very intellectual and artistic approach in it. My father was not questioning anything; he was doing chairs, something functional and eventually nice to look at. More than being just a designer who is asked by a maison to follow influences, Virgil himself is the influence.”

Abloh brings the same eye and hand to all his art and design, but sees a distinction between the two. “I look

VIRGIL ABLOH X VITRA ANTONY CHAIR AND CERAMIC BLOCK



Above: part of the Vitra furniture collaboration, shown at Abloh’s installation *TwentyThirtyFive* at the Vitra Campus, 2019. Left: Louis Vuitton Menswear spring/summer 2020



LOUIS VUITTON MENSWEAR AUTUMN/WINTER 2020



Above: Abloh’s *Figures of Speech* exhibition at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, 2019



VIRGIL ABLOH X IKEA MARKERAD CHAIR, £99



Above: Virgil Abloh x Ikea Receipt rug. Left: mixing decks at Abloh’s Paris studio



Right: Virgil Abloh Efflorescence round table, shown at the Galerie Kreo exhibition of the same name

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Image: Jonny Negron, *Ting*, 2018
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at furniture design as something for everyday use," he says, "and I look at the edition pieces I create as objects that energise an environment, whether they're used for a function or not. They exist in the same way as a painting or sculpture exists for me."

It is the élan with which he mixes high and low, as well as his graphic sensibilities, that makes Abloh so interesting. And it is those elements that, until fairly recently, have found him misunderstood by many. The appointment of a streetwear designer to one of the most powerful creative positions at Louis Vuitton was decried as a cynical move by some in the industry. Was Abloh just a zeitgeisty designer marketing hoodies and sneakers? Was an individual with 4.9m (now 5.2m) Instagram followers being flown to Paris purely for social-media value?

Some of the critique was unsettling – he was the first African-American artistic director of a French fashion house, and the covert racist insinuation was that "streetwear" meant "the wrong kind of street". Talk of his being a design "amateur" belied the fact that Abloh's Off-White label and aesthetic was founded in his graduate studies in civil engineering, a subsequent Master of Architecture degree at the Illinois Institute of Technology, and a spell at Fendi. The references in his concrete designs this year were no fluke – his most cherished possession is a vintage Le Corbusier lamp from Chandigarh, and his first furniture designs, shown in 2016 under the banner Grey Area, were graphic chairs and tables inspired by Mies van der Rohe.

Abloh's Louis Vuitton menswear shows – always presented with a detailed narrative – are a powerful platform. For autumn/winter 2020 he created Heaven On Earth, a collection showcasing his take on formal tailoring codes, offset with surrealist imagery and a bright sky-blue-coloured catwalk with white fluffy clouds. "The show is my concept car," he says. "It is my Cybertruck. It isn't about perpetuating a brand name, it is to keep me inspired and present the work in its purest form."

While boundaries have dissolved, there remains a tension between streetwear codes and certain core aspects of luxury menswear. Not everything at Vuitton can be a show piece. There has to be bread and butter. How does a designer known for strong graphic intervention step back and let a basic just... be? "To me, it's like Duchamp," he says. "Is it a fountain or a urinal? It's both, depending on context. If I make a plain cashmere sweater at Off-White, it doesn't have a twist in it. The brand has no history. If I do it at Louis Vuitton, the label inside the neck is so emotionally charged that it becomes a conundrum – it has two different forces."

When Abloh was invited to furnish an installation at the Vitra Campus last year, he included a set of blocks in his favourite orange marked with bold graphics. There were also reinterpretations – in the same orange – of Prouvé's Antony armchair and Petite Potence wall lamps. Like the graphic designer Peter Saville, whom Abloh cites as a mentor and major influence, he thrives on taking something classic and recontextualising it.

The "disruptor" cap fits Abloh perfectly. After he gave a riotous talk at Harvard in 2017 – ending with students throwing shoes on stage for him to draw on – he published an edited transcript of his presentation entitled *Insert Complicated Title Here*, detailing his "cheat codes" for success. At the start of last year, he launched his Canary---yellow.com website, housing an overview of his creative output to date. A few months later, he was the subject of his first major museum show, *Figures of Speech* at MCA in Chicago. The exhibition defined Abloh as a 21st-century renaissance man. Like the recent forays into furniture, it helped to change the design



“THE SHOW IS MY CONCEPT CAR. IT ISN'T ABOUT PERPETUATING A BRAND NAME, IT IS TO PRESENT THE WORK IN ITS PUREST FORM”

world's perception of him. "Just as people have missed the humour in my work because they don't know my story," he says, "it helped walk people through where my art comes from. It showed what I was doing at age 17, what my hand and sketches looked like, what I was thinking and learning."

"His architectural training shows up in his interest in systems and how many elements combine to create a dynamic whole," says Michael Darling, chief curator at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago. "He is also interested in revealing the structure of that whole – whether it be a clothing collection, individual garment, a shoe or design object – as a modern architect would, and showing the constituent parts." Darling sees Abloh's recent furniture design as a natural extension of his work to date. "He grew up a skateboarder and graffiti aficionado, so these furniture pieces refer to that, but they also resemble urban infrastructure, which is of great interest to him, even inspiring the Off-White logo of the directional arrows, among many other elements of his fashion aesthetic," he says.

Art, furniture, fashion, books. Abloh is a dynamo. "I'm creative. I like to create," he says. "I am obsessed with the work but maintain a level of detachment. Everything I do is like a journal that I feel compelled to write in. It is a record of my thoughts. But I am always able to close it and put it on the nightstand." The design world is looking forward to many more volumes. ■HTSI



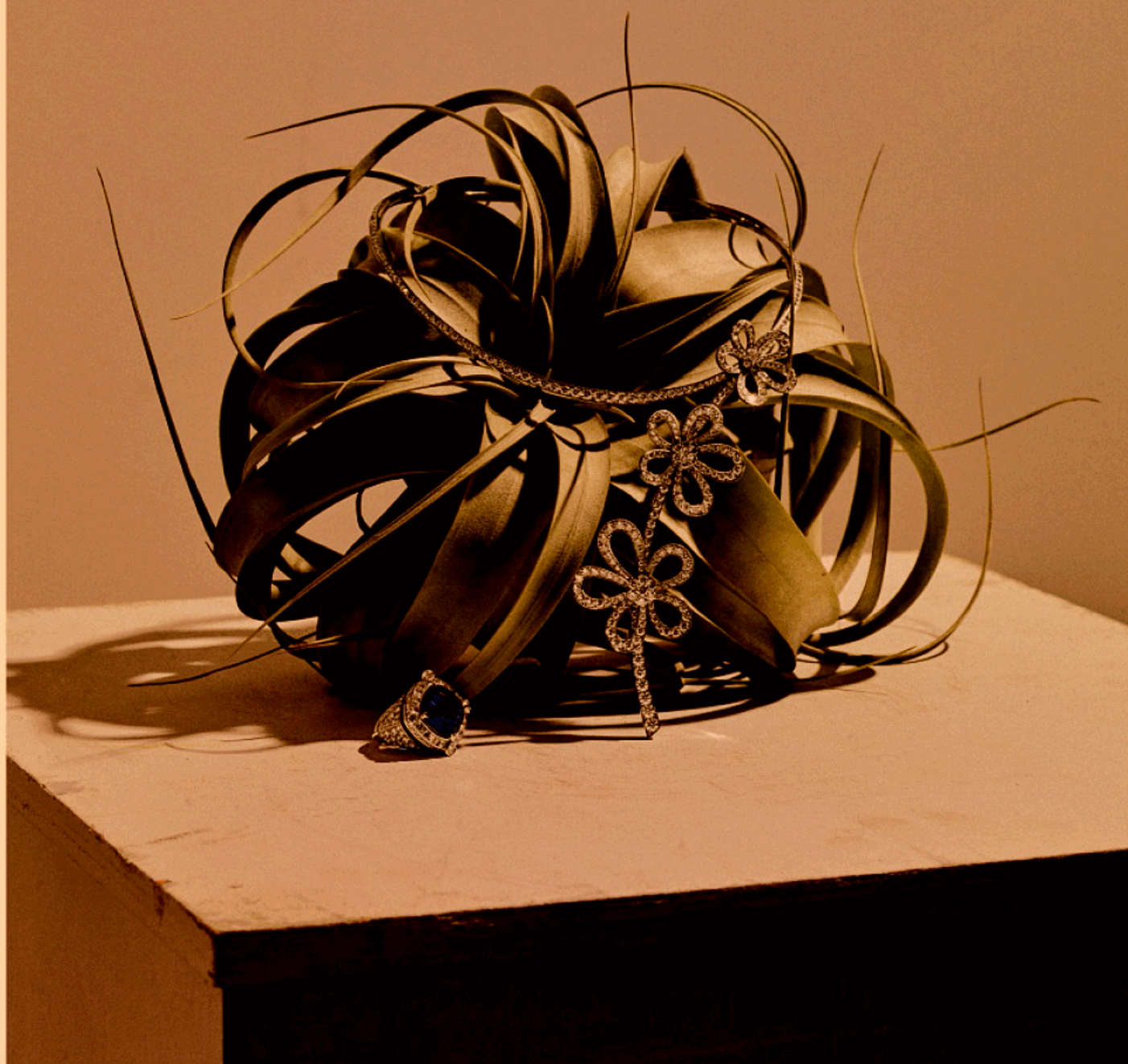
This page: Abloh's Paris studio, with furniture in his favourite orange. Below: the Virgil Abloh x Jacob & Co Paperclip yellow-diamond and gold necklace, part of the Office Supplies jewellery collaboration



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THE EXOTIC REVIEW

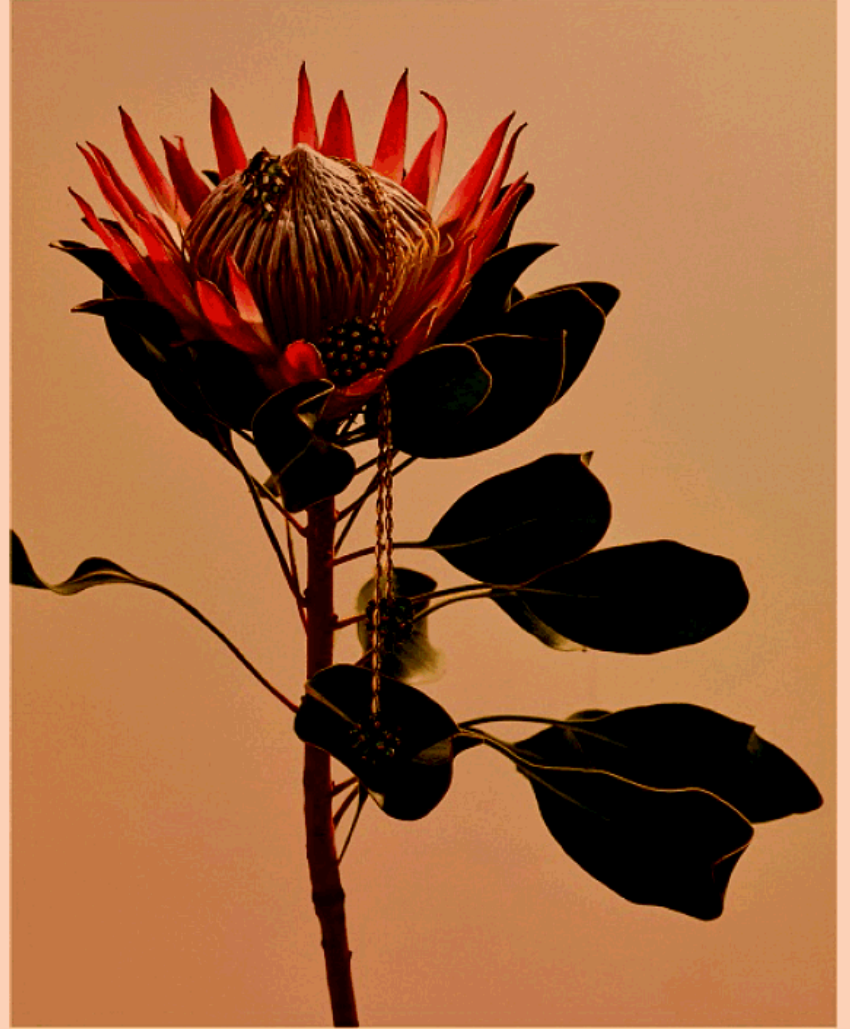
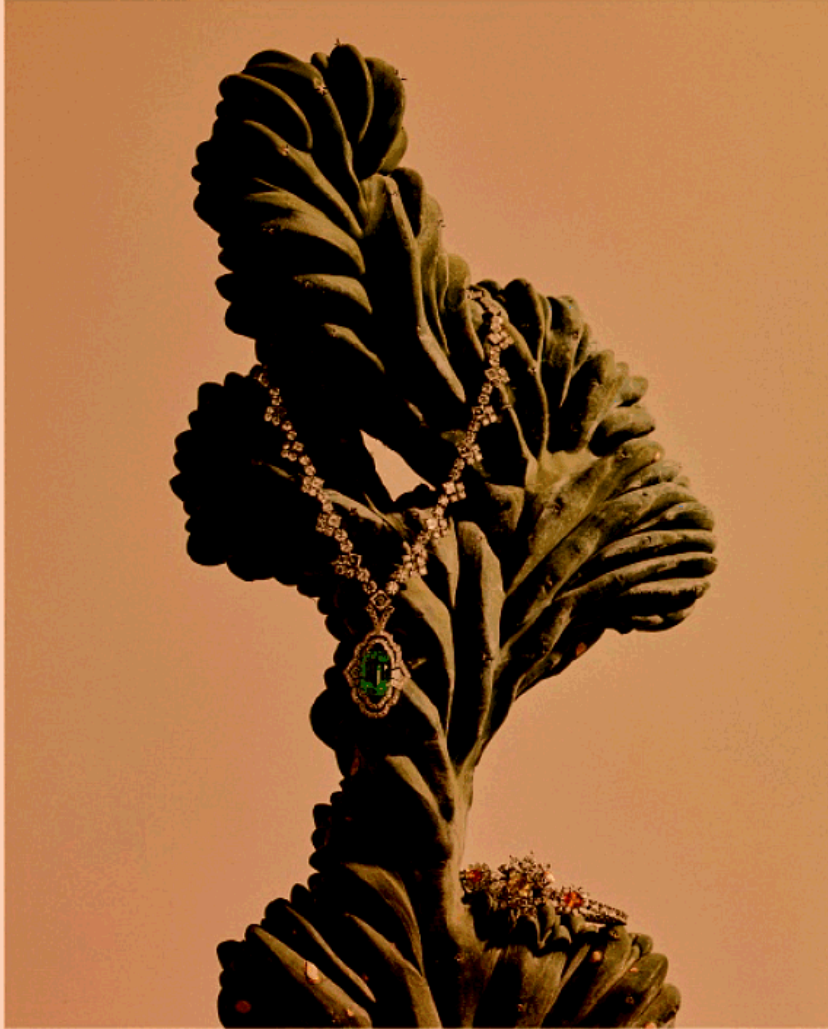


Orange sapphires, yellow diamonds and fire opals inspire
the most dazzling hothouse jewels

Photography by *Benjamin Bouchet* Set design by *Annette Masterman* Jewellery edit by *Honey Elias*



This page, left: CHAUMET tourmaline, pink sapphire, diamond and pink-gold Jardins Hortensia Aube Rosée brooch, POA. GRAFF yellow and white diamond bracelet, POA. DE GRISOGONO pearl, orange sapphire, amethyst and yellow- and white-gold brooch, £27,500. DEBEAULIEU-PARIS vase, POA.
Right: CHOPARD sapphire, ruby, tsavorite and diamond rose necklace, POA.
Opposite page: VAN CLEEF & ARPELS diamond and white-gold necklace, POA. CHANEL FINE JEWELLERY sapphire, diamond and platinum Chanel No 18 ring, POA



Left: LOUIS VUITTON Paraiba tourmaline, diamond and white-gold Collection Conquêtes necklace, POA. DIOR JOAILLERIE spessartite garnet, yellow and white diamond and white-gold Soie Dior Plumetis Diamant Jaune bracelet, POA.
Right: CARTIER malachite, fire opal and rose-gold Paris Nouvelle Vague necklace, POA, and tourmaline, diamond and yellow-gold earrings, POA



BVLGARI emerald, diamond and white-gold Serpenti bracelet, £62,000.
HARRY WINSTON ruby, diamond, platinum and yellow-gold
cluster necklace, POA. DEBEAULIEU-PARIS vase, POA

Photographer's assistant, Chloé Cayrou. Set assistant, François Mark

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The cleverest pivot I ever saw in tech was in 2013 when the world's leading drone company, DJI in Shenzhen, reimagined these specialised industrial tools as flying cameras for regular consumers, and added stabilisation so they could easily be flown in wind. I was hooked by its first Phantom drone, and remained a drone fan.

But, thanks to the inevitable idiots buying them, fun drones have become a bit tainted for privacy and air-safety reasons. So Beijing maker PowerVision, whose bizarre egg-shaped products I like (along with its underwater drones), has done another repositioning and styled its new Power Egg X as a cute – and extremely adaptable – hand-held camcorder that happens to adapt to being a drone if you fit it with rotors. Oh, and if bought in its Wizard package, it can also be a seaplane-style drone that lands on water and is fully waterproof. Power Egg X is bursting with features – obstacle avoidance being an important one – and superbly executed. Brilliant and hyper-innovative.

Power Egg X Wizard, €1,149, store.eu.power-vision.me

**THE MOST IMMERSIVE HI-FI EVER?**

One of my last outings before the lockdown was to a former post office in Highgate to experience what I can safely say are the best hi-fi systems ever made. The only snag is that they come at a price – about £500,000, plus you'll need a dedicated room for the smaller product, the L-isa Island, and a spare ballroom for the bigger Ocean.

The L-isa sound systems come from a pro-audio company that does the sound for live performers from the Red Hot Chili Peppers to the BBC Proms. L-Acoustics was founded by a particle physicist, Dr Christian Heil, who set out to produce a new spatialised audio technology better than mere stereo. The result is a 24,000-watt, 24-channel system (plus five bass channels) that works so spectacularly it is almost better than a live performance. I listened to Mahler's Third by the LA Philharmonic, recorded at the Hollywood Bowl, selecting to hear it as from the conductor's position, and it was as if I was there. L-isa Island, from £500,000, l-isa-immersive.com

INTRODUCING THE ROBOCOT

This newborn baby's crib is the invention of Dr Harvey Karp, America's most famous paediatrician, along with a roboticist from MIT. The Snoo "responsive bassinet" is designed to recreate the environment of the womb – thereby soothing newborn babies suffering with colic and putting them to sleep. "It's noisier than being close to a vacuum cleaner in there," Dr Karp tells me, demo-ing the product with its spooky, pulsing white noise and side-to-side movement that increases the more the baby howls. The baby is also tightly swaddled and anchored to keep it from rolling on to its side or front.

More than 60,000 Snoos have been sold in the US and it's now available in the UK. The first-time parents of a newborn I asked to test it in London were worried about how intense it was and soon gave up on it. But I think the principle is sound and, as the veteran of several colicky babies, I would buy one unhesitatingly. For me, this robocot is the first household robot worthy of the name. Snoo, £995, happiestbaby.co.uk



For more of Jonathan's reviews, plus video bulletins, visit howtospendit.com/technology @thefuturecritic



GADGETS

Making a scene

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WORDS BY JONATHAN MARGOLIS

DETAILS

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from a phone app or, yes, voice commands to create various "scenes". If the sender had mentioned that the Nanoleaf system was a spinoff from the University of Toronto, I might have paid it attention, but they didn't. Apart from it being a wonderful city, I love the tech coming out of Toronto. It seems to combine north American flair with Canadian sensibleness and Chinese brilliance, as does Nanoleaf.

The Nanoleaf Canvas set remained, nonetheless, untouched for weeks until my son noticed them, pronounced them cool and took them home. He installed them (recommending fixing them with Velcro sticky pads, by the by, rather than the supplied adhesives) and both he and his tech-sceptical wife fell in love with even the pretty basic nine-panel Canvas starter pack. And I have to admit, they are quite enchanting. Magical, almost.

I particularly like the "rain" and "sunrise" scenes. Nanoleaf does a variety of shapes – there's a new hexagonal design that some will find more adaptable than the squares. If you are serious about decorative mood-lighting, you can control as many as 500 panels together. That would be something, voice-controlled or not. ■HTSI

I would love to tell you how long I have not been waiting for a set of colour-changing, touch-sensitive, voice-activated LED decorative light panels to work as a living, reactive home-interior feature, but it's certainly since before I started writing about technology, and that was around the time of the invention of the electric telegraph.

In truth, I probably have more smart tech in my house than most normal people – the various smart speakers, the Nest heating control, the security camera, the internet-connected Thermomix robot chef. But I still find most smart-home gadgetry ludicrous. Alexa-controlled lighting in particular – or Alexified anything – is literally the stupidest advance ever dreamed up, unless of course you are disabled, which is when this stuff stops being junk and starts earning its living.

You can imagine, then, how thrilled I was when I was sent a starter set of these lit-up panels, which you can stick on the wall in infinite patterns and can be set to react colourfully to sound, or be set

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VINTAGE

Ikea furniture

Once sold for tens of pounds, now collected for thousands – the Swedish brand’s archive is a hit for fans of flat-pack chic

WORDS BY CHARLOTTE ABRAHAMS



Clockwise from above: 1981 Ikea catalogue. 1970s Duett lamps. 1977 catalogue. 1990s Vilbert chair, £3,802 for four from Pamono



Last September, Swedish auction house Bukowskis sold a 1972 tubular-steel-framed armchair for £1,968. There’s nothing particularly notable there, given the low-slung, sunshine-yellow seat is a perfect evocation of 1970s design. What makes the sale somewhat surprising, however, is that Gillis Lundgren designed the Impala chair for Ikea. Had you put one in your trolley at the time, it would have cost you around £30.

Lundgren joined Ikea in 1953 as its fourth employee and is the designer behind the Billy bookcase – a shelving unit so ubiquitous that financial index Bloomberg uses it to compare purchasing power across the world. Yet, at online marketplace 1stdibs, “the average list price of vintage Ikea seating models is \$3,000”, says editorial director Anthony Barzilay Freund. “Over the past three years, prices have increased by more than 50 per cent.”

Pontus Silfverstolpe, founder of international auction aggregator Barnebys, has also been tracking the trend. “Ikea was the 50th most-searched-for word at Barnebys globally in 2019,” he says, “and most popular is the furniture from the 1950s to the 1970s.” Scandinavia’s midcentury heyday was indeed echoed by Ikea, which was founded in 1943 by Ingvar Kamprad to democratise the ideas of the Bauhaus and functionalism, and make good design accessible. John Black, head of 20th-century decorative arts and design at British auction house



1972 IMPALA CHAIR

Sworders, explains: “Its midcentury pieces had all the clean, modern freshness of the furniture being made by big names like Hans Wegner and Finn Juhl.”

It’s these similarities that prompted lawyer and midcentury-furniture collector Steve Harvey to buy a 1960s Ikea Cikada safari chair by Bengt Ruda, a pair of which are available on 1stdibs for £1,787. “The raw materials may not have quite the inherent value of the classics,” he says, “but the way the chair is put together absolutely does.” With its simple wood frame and leather-strap arms, Cikada bears a striking resemblance to the

“OVER THE PAST THREE YEARS, PRICES AT 1STDIBS HAVE INCREASED BY MORE THAN 50 PER CENT”

1933 Safari chair by Kaare Klint, the father of Danish modernism.

“Ikea has always been very quick at picking up on trends,” says Eva Seeman, head of modern works of art and design at Bukowskis, who adds that spiralling prices for the Danish greats has had a knock-on effect. Among Ikea’s most wanted are Tord Björklund’s elegant leather 1970 Skye chaise, which Galerie MooieStukken



Text till Japp och Tamina sidan 14



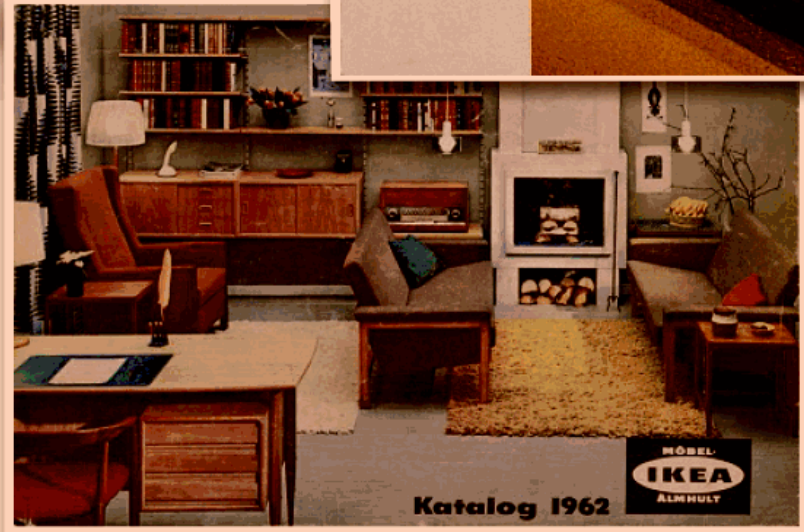
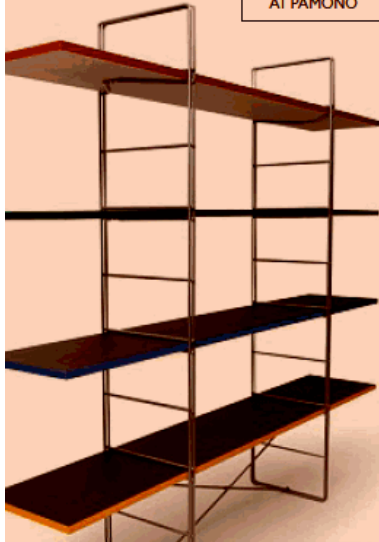
Clockwise from above: Singoalla sofa from the 1962 catalogue. Ikea founder Ingvar Kamprad. 1970 catalogue



PHOTOGRAPHS: COURTESY OF IST MODERN & DESIGN MUSEUM, FINLAND AND COOLUK, IKEA MUSEUM ARCHIVE & COLLECTION (?)

COLLECTING

1980s SHELVING, FROM £1,629 AT PAMONO



Top right: 1973 catalogue showing the convertible Tajt chair by Gillis Lundgren. Above: 1962 catalogue

WHERE TO BUY
Istdibs Istdibs.com
Barneby's barnebys.co.uk
Bukowskis bukowskis.com
Galerie MooieStukken mooiestukken.nl
Pamono pamono.com
Stockholms Auktionsverk auktionsverket.com
Sworders Fine Art Auctioneers sworder.co.uk
Vinterior vinterior.co

WHERE TO SEE
Ikea Museum
 Älmhult, Sweden,
ikeamuseum.com

WHAT TO READ
Leading by Design, the Ikea Story by Bertil Torekull and Ingvar Kamprad (HarperCollins, 2000)

sold recently for €3,750; Harold Fust's 1960s Singoalla daybed (sold for about £2,450 at Bukowskis in April 2019); the 1970 leather and chrome Amiral armchairs by Karin Mobring (a pair on Istdibs costs £4,006); and Ake, a curvy, slightly cartoonish chair first produced in 1953. Last June, Swedish auction house Stockholms Auktionsverk sold one for £1,038 – a snip compared with its doppelgänger, Danish architect Philip Arctander's 1944 Clam chair, which can fetch upwards of £12,000 on Istdibs.

BUT THE APPEAL OF VINTAGE Ikea goes beyond its resemblance to midcentury classics. Also sought after are the "fun and eye-catching" designs from the 1980s and 1990s, says Wava Carpenter, curatorial & editorial founder of e-store Pamono, which has a pair of orange/red/yellow tiered 1970s Duett pendant lamps (£452), alongside designs by Niels Gammelgaard – a set of shelves edged in primary colours (£1,629) and the cool wire-mesh Oti chair (£356). "In this era, Ikea really began to cater to a

youthful, urban audience, and also commissioned some of the design world's top names, including Verner Panton." The Danish designer's multifaceted, colour-blocked Vilbert chair was a flop when it launched in 1994, but is now widely coveted. "It exemplifies Panton's iconic style and was also produced in a very limited run," says Carpenter. "New, it cost around €60; last July, we sold one for €950." For French graphic designer Jean-Michel Roccuzzo, a Vilbert chair given to him by a friend four years ago sparked a new appreciation for vintage Ikea. In 2018, he bought a 1986 Bogen side table, attracted by its elegance and adaptability, and currently has his eye on a Skye lounge.

"It's easy to search online for vintage Ikea with the model names," says Seeman, adding that very little of Ikea's output is marked. The pieces that are, such as the PS series (a designer collaboration that launched in 1995), command top prices. Istdibs is currently offering a pair of Mats Theselius rattan and steel PS armchairs for £4,924. "But you can be pretty sure that all pieces are genuine because, so far as I know, there aren't any copies on the market." That could soon change, however. "People are just starting to wake up to vintage Ikea," says Elizabeth Rider, content manager of online vintage seller Vinterior, which currently has a set of four Vilbert chairs for £3,650. And Ikea is responding to the trend too. In 2014, it reissued 26 vintage pieces in limited numbers, while contemporary collaborations with the likes of Ilse Crawford, Tom Dixon and Virgil Abloh have all the making of future flat-pack classics. ■HTS



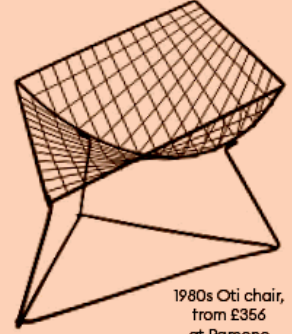
Left: Ake furniture set in the 1964 catalogue. Right: 1984 catalogue



In the hot seat: Ikea's coolest chairs



1960 Cikada chair, £1,787 for a pair at Istdibs



1980s Oti chair, from £356 at Pamono



1970 Amiral chair, £4,006 for a pair at Istdibs



1960s Lips chair, £328 at Pamono



2003 PS armchair, £4,924 for a pair at Istdibs



Skye chaise, £2,146 at Pamono

PHOTOGRAPHS: ISTDIBS (2); COURTESY OF 20TH STILLBAUM & PAMONO; AVAILABLE AT PAMONO.CO.UK; COURTESY OF ARTIBUS DESIGN & PAMONO; AVAILABLE AT PAMONO.CO.UK; COURTESY OF STIMPEL DESIGN & PAMONO; AVAILABLE AT PAMONO.CO.UK; IKEA MUSEUM ARCHIVE & COLLECTION (5)

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EATING

Service interrupted

Ajesh Patalay finds out what we can do to keep our favourite kitchens alive

ILLUSTRATION BY CHIARA BRAZZALE

The last time I went to a restaurant was on 11 March. It was for lunch at Jacob Kenedy's Bocca di Lupo in London's Soho. The place was packed. As it was a special occasion, I and my other half started with a glass of prosecco, followed by deliciously salty fried sage leaves filled with anchovy, which we watched being dipped in batter and dropped into hot oil. Next came a light feast of sea-bream carpaccio with rosemary oil and orange zest; pan-fried veal kidneys and artichokes; tagliatelle with ragù Bolognese; calamaretti with courgettes and bottarga; and a side of minerally green monk's beard with oil and lemon. Plus a couple of glasses of wine to wash it all down. Afterwards, we trotted across the road to the restaurant's sister venue, Gelupo, for ice cream and sat outside with our double-scoop ricotta and sour-cherry gelati, watching people go by.

I look back on that meal now with wistfulness and concern, because who knows whether Bocca di Lupo or indeed any restaurant in London, or beyond, will survive the current shutdown? "It's like wartime. Or an episode of *Black Mirror*," says chef Tom Brown of seafood restaurant Cornerstone in Hackney Wick. Brown tells me of his peers, chefs and restaurant owners, "grown men and women used to hard graft" gripped with fear about the future.

The overnight closure of bars and restaurants around the world has been brutal. Townsend, the new restaurant at the Whitechapel Gallery from Nick Gilkinson (who launched Garden Café) and chef Joe Fox (formerly of Petersham Nurseries), had to close the day before Fay Maschler's positive review in the *Evening Standard*. Innumerable projects, pop-ups and openings have been postponed, among them the much-anticipated skyscraper restaurant SAGA from Daniel Humm alumnus James Kent and Jeff Katz of Crown Shy in Manhattan; and two new ventures (a café and restaurant-bar) in West Hollywood from the group behind the hugely successful LA hotspot EP & LP. "Years of planning, designing and hiring now hang in limbo," says co-owner Grant Smillie.

For those of us who cherish restaurants and dining out, the question is: how can we help? Many restaurants are offering gift cards and voucher schemes to be redeemed once they reopen. Some are pivoting to takeout and delivery. Others are providing seasonal-produce boxes, which benefit their suppliers, whose survival is also crucial. To that end, initiatives such as Natoora's home-delivery app in London and New York (previously only available to restaurants) and the Farms to Feed Us database (cathystgermansevents.com), spearheaded by regenerative-farming activist Cathy St Germans, are forging direct links between growers and consumers.

In the UK, you can also pledge to Hospitality Action's Covid-19 Emergency Appeal (hospitalityaction.org.uk), instigated by Tom Brown, which aims to keep hospitality employees safe and able to pay bills. It raised £32,000 within 24 hours of its launch. Other restaurants have launched GoFundMe pages to help employees. In the US, these private efforts are joined by organisations such as One Fair Wage (onefairwage.com),



which is offering emergency cash assistance to workers who ordinarily rely on tips, and ROC United's Disaster Relief Fund (rocunited.org), helping the million-plus restaurant workers (many undocumented) who are losing their jobs. In European countries like France and Spain, employees are largely relying on salary-support measures from governments.

A glimmer of hope – or glimpse of the future – may come from Hong Kong, where at the time of writing some restaurants have reopened for dining. Customers must fulfil various protocols, signing declarations of good health confirming they haven't travelled outside Hong Kong within the past 14 days; having their temperature taken at the door; and using hand sanitiser and stowing their face masks in paper bags at tables. "So long as there is demand, we are ready to run our restaurants like this for at least the rest of the year," says Syed Asim Hussain of Black Sheep Restaurants (which includes Michelin-starred BELON and New Punjab Club) of implementing such measures and operating at half capacity, so that every other table or chair is empty.

Stevie Parle, the owner of Soho and west London pasta restaurants Pastaio, hopes that through this crisis, people begin to understand that hospitality isn't just about food, it's a people business – "the people who make the food and those who come through the door". It's also a major employer and economic contributor. "I don't think people noticed that before," he adds. "They think of hospitality jobs as badly paid, which isn't the case any more."

He also hopes the restaurant sector will be more united in the future. "Generally, in hospitality we don't organise," he says. "We don't have lobbies or unions. We are a disparate collection of businesses who don't have much in common. It's very broad, the difference between McDonald's and a Shoreditch wine bar. We have also never managed to effectively communicate to government what works and doesn't work for us. Suddenly, we all have the same problem: no one is allowed to come through the door. And we have started to pull together against what is an

existential threat." Already, people across the hospitality industry have started contacting each other to trade experiences and offer support (including legal advice). It has crystallised into petitions, such as the one started by chef Alex Claridge of British restaurant The Wilderness that has picked up 300,000 signatures, and an industry-backed effort coordinated by Kate Nicholls of UKHospitality calling for government action and aid.

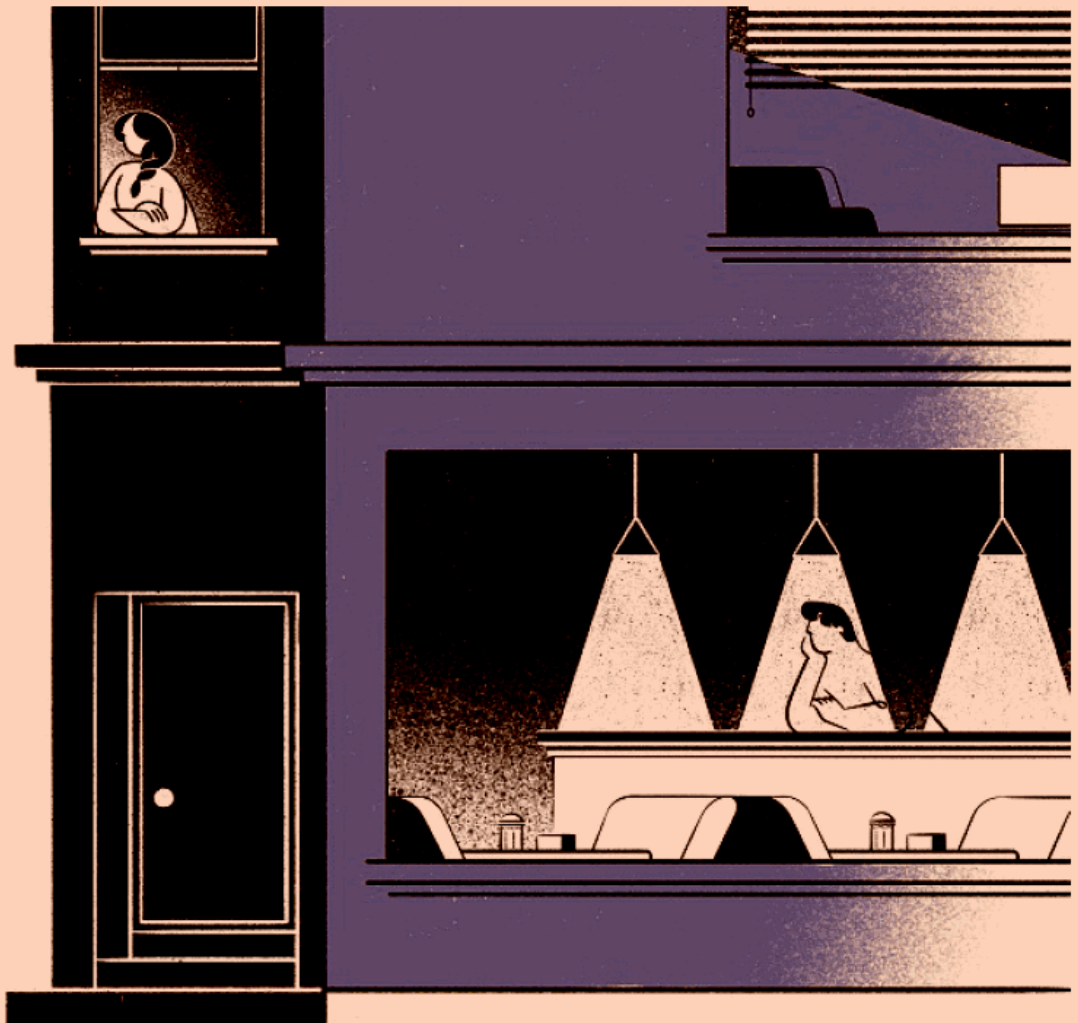
This is being replicated elsewhere, with action groups such as the 50-odd "band of brothers and sisters" convened by Lorenzo Lisi, proprietor of Hotel De' Ricci and its sibling Ristorante Pierluigi in Rome, to help keep Italian hospitality alive; and Relief Opportunity for All Restaurants

"WE HAVE STARTED TO PULL TOGETHER AGAINST WHAT IS AN EXISTENTIAL THREAT"

(ROAR), backed by Momofuku Group, Jean-Georges Restaurants, Eataly and other major players in Manhattan to help New York traders secure rent- and tax-relief and insurance guarantees.

For student chefs graduating this summer, there may be a silver lining. "If we start to see any kind of return to people gathering, there will be work," says Camilla Schneideman, managing director of Leiths School of Food, which will complete this year's diplomas with online tutorials, if necessary. "There's always a need for highly skilled people. Also, this industry has proved endlessly resilient. The whole rise of street food and supper clubs came out of the last recession, when there was a shift away from white-tablecloth dining to a more informal style. That did huge amounts for the food industry in this country."

Tom Brown describes the day when, "a dribbling mess", he prepared to let go of his staff and was met by their response. "Chef, we all know you would do anything for us," one lad told him. "You've normally got us and now we've got you." "I will never forget that," Brown says. "That to me signifies hospitality – that caring for people, that warmth and generosity. And that from a 19-year-old kid who's got nothing – and is about to have less." ■HTSI @ajesh34





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HOW I SPEND IT



JASPER CONRAN ON EMBROIDERY

ILLUSTRATION BY KLAUS KREMMERZ

Sewing has been woven into the fabric of my life for as long as I can remember. Certainly, as a six-year-old, when I read Beatrix Potter's *The Tailor of Gloucester*, I was smitten by the descriptions of "cherry-coloured twist" and "button-holes so small that they looked like they had been made by little mice". Later, when my aunt took me to Dickins & Jones' haberdashery department, I had a joy meltdown. I knew that I had arrived in paradise. To me, this place was infinitely more spellbinding than Hamleys down the road. From then on, the annual Christmas pilgrimage to see the lights of Regent Street was always polished off with a couple of hours spent weighing up the comparative merits of one shiny braid against another.

On a school trip to the Victoria and Albert Museum, I then discovered the ravishingly beautiful 18th-century clothes in the costume court. Here were mesmerising outfits made of stuffs of wool, silk and linen, woven or embroidered extravagantly with colour mixes of cerise and chocolate, pale blue and snuff, or elephant's breath and moss. Best of all, however, were the diamond buttons.

Aged 15, I left my Dorset boarding school and went to art school in New York to study fashion and the craft of

making clothes. I, like Beatrix Potter's little mice, learnt to sew tiny stitches and to pull cross-threads on calico, to drape on the stand, and cut and snip until the shape was right. Unlike them, I did not sing charming little songs. I found that learning to design and make clothes was complex and arduous. When I started my business, it wasn't unusual to sit up sewing all night for days on end while preparing a collection or filling in orders. As soon as I could afford to hand over the sewing machine and needles to someone else better qualified, I did.

MY FIRST ATTEMPT LOOKED LIKE THE WORK OF A DRUNKEN GORILLA

Last October, I went to Charleston in Sussex where the artists Duncan Grant and Vanessa Bell lived and worked, covering every available surface of their home with their own paintings, fabrics, prints and ceramics. Practically nothing was unadorned. What really caught my eye, however, were the beautiful cross-stitch needleworks. These were to be found on everything, from cushions to chairs to day beds and even mirror frames. Duncan and Vanessa would design the pieces and then Duncan's mother, Ethel (and sometimes his aunt), would beaver away turning them into embroideries.

Inspired, I thought that I would give needlework a stab, and so I went back to my studio and got some rudimentary lessons in cross-stitching. I found out you can send via the internet any image that you fancy, which can then be printed on canvas and sent back, ready to embroider.

Here in my hand once again was the needle, discarded so long ago. I'm afraid that the absence showed, and from the outset things did not go according to plan. My wools got tangled in monstrous cat's cradles and would twist and knot as if to spite me. My girlfriends sucked their teeth in disapproval at my tension. I also felt hampered by having to lug around a cumbersome wooden frame (which eventually got discarded on a bonfire on the banks of the river Nile). Predictably my first attempt at needle-working (one of Duncan Grant's designs) ended up looking like the handiwork of a furious, drunken gorilla.

It is generally acknowledged that embroidery is not a particularly butch pursuit and I found initially (as a *man*) that I was very shy of pulling my piece (of needlework) out in public. In the end I just became oblivious to stares. In fact, I've found that most people don't care a fig as long as you don't poke them repeatedly in the eye with your needle.

My hope is that, with time and some much-needed lessons, my technique will improve and I will be able to hold my head up in the company of the Ethel Grants of this world. But in the meantime I have found a hobby that gives me peace, pleasure and satisfaction.

I have just finished my second piece of needlework. It is from a painting by my husband, Oisín Byrne, of a bunch of flowers. These were tulips that I had planted, then picked and stuck in a pot. He took them to his studio and drew them. I photographed the painting and made a needlework of it. ■HTSI



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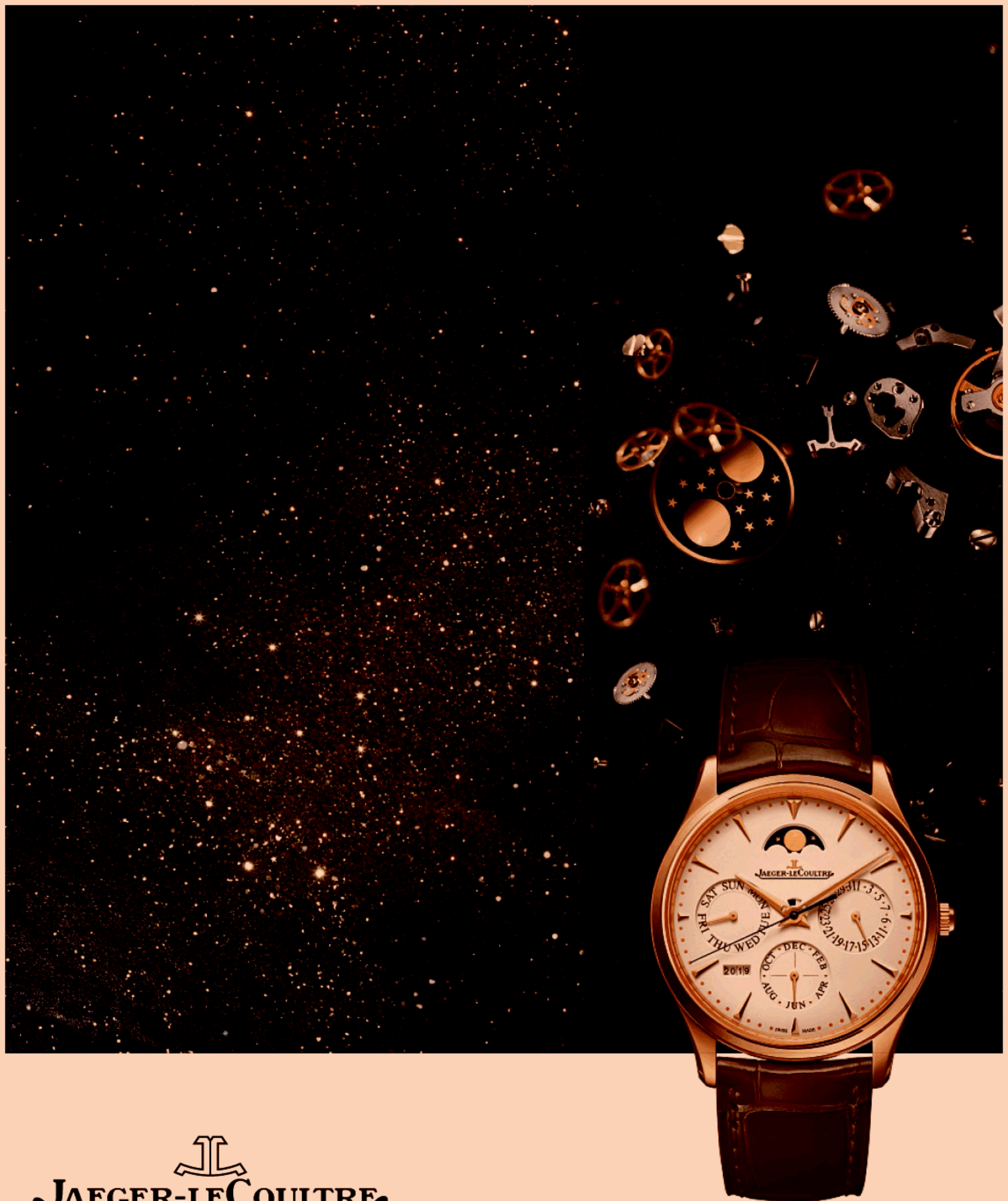
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