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SPECIAL

JUNE 19/20 2021

FT Weekend Magazine



*Greetings from America's
energy revolution*

BY DEREK BROWER



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‘Despite us looking like armour-plated traffic wardens, we guards are here to look after students’

Security during Covid, p22

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-
- 5 Simon Kuper**
Why awe of Russian spycraft is misplaced
 - 6 Inventory**
Jamie Chadwick, racing driver
 - 8 Robert Shrimsley**
The new I do's and I don'ts
 - 8 Letters**
 - 10 Tech World**
Tap, eat, repeat. But is Japan ready to order in?
 - 12 Undercover Economist**
It's never been so easy to spend, spend, spend
-
- 14 Postcards from the revolution**
Joe Biden was elected last year promising to remake US energy. *Derek Brower* reports from the communities living high on the profits of fossil-fuel extraction
-
- 22 Observations**
Being a campus security guard in these times offers fear and grace in equal measure, finds *George Bass*
-
- Wellness special**
Crowds and Covid anxiety, the communities of tomorrow, children's mental health and the future of fatherhood
-
- 45 Spice of life**
Anjli Raval explores the culture of masala chai and recreates a lost family recipe
 - 48 Rowley Leigh**
Broad bean and tuna salad
 - 51 Jancis Robinson**
The rise of English sparkling wine
 - 52 Classic cocktail**
Brian Silva of Rules makes The Globetrotter
-
- 53 Games**
 - 54 Gillian Tett**
The joy of being back in the real world



‘Broad beans are a holy grail to both gardener and cook’

Rowley Leigh, p48




‘A crowd is too much humanity. We are ambivalent about the great press of others’

Wellness special

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SIMON KUPER

OPENING SHOT

Why the west's awe of Russian spycraft is misplaced



Eighty years ago this week, Germany's imminent invasion of the Soviet Union was an open secret around the world. The British Foreign Office's Weekly Political Intelligence Summary had been talking about it for two months. Soviet spies kept warning the Kremlin, too. Unfortunately, Joseph Stalin didn't believe them, recounts Owen Matthews in his gripping biography of Soviet agent Richard Sorge, *An Impeccable Spy*.

The head of the USSR's military intelligence, Filipp Golikov, was enabling Stalin: knowing that his five predecessors had been shot, Golikov tried to show the boss only pleasing information. When a report nonetheless reached Stalin on June 17 1941 saying that "all preparations by Germany for an armed attack on the Soviet Union have been completed", the dictator scrawled on it in blue wax pencil: "You can send your 'source' from the headquarters of German aviation to his fucking mother." Five days later, Germany invaded.

Russian spies and saboteurs remain hyperactive today, whether it's attacking defectors abroad, offering the Taliban bounties to kill US personnel, interfering in western elections or even hacking sport's World Anti-Doping Agency. Yet now, as then, the benefits are dubious. Russian spies seem to blunder even more than their western counterparts. In fact, they provide a case study of the inefficiency of authoritarian regimes. Especially in knowledge sectors, the authoritarians aren't half as good as democracies sometimes imagine.

Dictatorships overspend on paranoia. If you pour money into espionage and recruit foreign agents motivated either by communism or venality, you will discover some secrets. Soviet spies in 1941 knew about Hitler's plans and the western allies' project to build the atom bomb.

Stalin used the atomic intelligence, but only because he wanted to believe it. As the British KGB double agent George Blake, subject of my recent biography *The Happy Traitor*, discovered after fleeing to Moscow in 1966, "if the intelligence service gave information that didn't match the boss's view, then either that information wasn't passed on, or it was changed so that it did match the boss's view. So he was never correctly informed." The whole Soviet system worked that way, said Blake.

Then there is the tendency of spy agencies to go off the rails, especially in countries without democratic checks. Russian spy services possess money, information and licence to kill. They are also competing with other Russian spy services. The GRU, Russia's military intelligence agency, probably suspected that poisoning the defector Sergei Skripal in an English cathedral town would enrage western countries but may have cared more about outdoing rivals.

In any case, authoritarian spies are rarely subtle analysts of democratic countries. In 2014, the GRU seems to have swallowed the ludicrous proposition that Nato would accept Ukraine as a

member and use the Ukrainian port of Sevastopol as a naval base, says Matthews. These beliefs may have encouraged Russia's invasion of the Crimea.

Even when Russian spies seemed to hit the bullseye, helping Donald Trump get elected US president in 2016, there was probably an element of fluke. Interviewing people close to the Kremlin in Moscow two years later, I was told that the GRU's involvement in election-meddling was run by underlings, who merely hoped to weaken the inevitable next president, Hillary Clinton. Trump's victory stunned the GRU.

'Even when Russian spies seemed to hit the bullseye, helping Trump get elected US president, there was probably an element of fluke'

In Europe, nuisance-making by Russian spies often subverts Russia's own interests. A canny Russia would lean on historically friendly EU member states, such as Greece or the Czech Republic, to push its agenda in Brussels. Instead, Russian spies excel at alienating allies. Most spectacularly, in 2014, GRU agents blew up a Czech arms dump, killing two people, in the hope of stopping weapons reaching Russia's enemies.

Angry European and North American countries have expelled 309 Russian diplomats and other officials in just over four years, calculates *Le Monde* newspaper. Matthews says the spying activities "have horrifically damaged Russia's strategic position in the world". The regime in Russia may understand this. In a possible echo of Stalin's purges, Igor Korobov, the GRU's chief when Skripal was attacked, died eight months later, aged 62.

Yet even now, reports the *New Yorker* magazine, senior people in both the Trump and Biden administrations suspect GRU agents of "aiming microwave-radiation devices at US officials to collect intelligence from their computers and cell phones". Officials have fallen ill, and Washington is angry. As the US national-security official John Demers noted last year, Russia keeps "wantonly causing unprecedented damage to pursue small tactical advantages and to satisfy fits of spite".

The west's inferiority complex vis-à-vis authoritarian regimes probably peaked in 2020. While Trump was mishandling the pandemic, China kept deaths down and Russia pretended to. Today things look different: democracies have outdone their rivals in producing and administering vaccines; there are plausible suggestions that Covid-19 leaked from a Wuhan lab; and Russia's own continued mishandling of the virus has become clear - its excess death rate during this pandemic is about 50 per cent higher than the US's. Our awe of these poor, corrupt dictatorships is misplaced. **FT**

.....
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INVENTORY JAMIE CHADWICK,
RACING DRIVER

'I'm motivated by success, by the feeling of winning. For me, nothing compares'

Jamie Chadwick, 23, is the youngest driver and first woman to win a British GT championship, the first female driver to win a BRDC British Formula 3 Championship race and the first woman to win the MRF Challenge championship. She won the inaugural all-female single-seater racing W Series championship in 2019.

What was your childhood or earliest ambition?

From seven or eight, I wanted to be a professional athlete.

Private school or state school?

University or straight into work?
Private school: Cheltenham College on a sports scholarship for hockey, so I was able to play a lot of sport.

Most sportspeople leave school as soon as they can to pursue the commitment. I stayed until I was 18, I then went into professional sport.

Who was or still is your mentor?

I'm fortunate to have a lot of people I can rely on. If I have to name a single person, Rupert Svendsen-Cook, my manager, who's looked after me for the past four or five years and helped me with the upward trajectory.

How physically fit are you?

The biggest misconception with motorsports is that it's not a physical sport, but we have to train really hard. There are muscles that need to be strong but the training is varied and I enjoy cycling, gym work, everything.

Ambition or talent: which matters more to success?

Both are very important but without ambition, talent is wasted.

How politically committed are you?

I'm not, really. There's things I care about: gender equality, climate change. For those, I will use my platform in a positive way. But ultimately I'm a racing driver and there are better-placed people to discuss the issues.

What would you like to own that you don't currently possess?

A puppy. I grew up with dogs and I've not been in a position to own one because of my lifestyle.

What's your biggest extravagance?

A coffee machine I bought a year or so ago. Honestly, it was an extravagance! But it changed the game for me massively. You can grind your own beans, make your own espresso. Having spent time in Italy, I appreciate good coffee.

In what place are you happiest?

My home in London. I spend a lot of time in hotels and there's nothing like being in your own bed, with your own stuff, home-cooked food, everything.

What ambitions do you still have?

To be a world champion. I want to race at the highest level.

What drives you on?

I'm motivated by success, by the feeling of winning. For me, nothing compares to that feeling.

What is the greatest achievement of your life so far?

Winning the W Series championship in 2019. It's the championship that's given me the most opportunity and propelled my career the most.

What do you find most irritating in other people?

This could be a very long list. The main one is being late, when it happens regularly.

If your 20-year-old self could see you now, what would she think?

It's only a couple of years ago, but two years in motorsport feels a lot longer, more like 10. I never expected my career to get to this point; now there's an opportunity to work harder than ever.

Which object that you've lost do you wish you still had?

To be honest, I lose a lot of stuff, including every pair of sunglasses I've ever owned!

What is the greatest challenge of our time?

Climate change. I realised that as a result of taking part in the Extreme E championship [the off-road electric racing series that aims to highlight the climate crisis]. It taught me about how we have so many consumables and how we're so ready to destroy our planet. It's a challenge to make sure we moderate and manage the consumables we have.

Do you believe in an afterlife?

I believe that there is something, but it's not something I've thought a lot about. I don't like the idea that everything just ends.

If you had to rate your satisfaction with your life so far, out of 10, what would you score?

Ten. There's so much I still want to achieve, but if everything had to stop now, I'd still be pretty happy. **71**

Interview by Hester Lacey.

Jamie Chadwick competes in the 2021 W Series from June 26, wseries.com

At Facebook, we're collaborating with UK partners to reduce COVID-19 misinformation.

The pandemic has reinforced the importance of collaboration. We're continuing our work with governments, not-for-profit organisations, and researchers globally to support the pandemic response and reduce the spread of COVID-19 misinformation, including:

- Partnering with 35 fact-checking organisations covering 26 languages, such as Full Fact in the UK
- Displaying warning screens to highlight possibly incorrect COVID-19 content

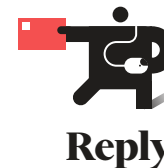
Learn more about our global partnerships and find helpful resources at about.fb.com/actions/uk

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ROBERT SHRIMSLEY THE NATIONAL CONVERSATION



The new I do's and I don'ts

Just for a moment, the happy couples will have been dancing with joy as the tender-hearted prime minister announced that he was, within the constraints of social distancing, scrapping the 30-guest limit on weddings and receptions. Until it emerged, alas, that jollity was subject to the few teensy restrictions still in place.

Perhaps the wedding planners can live with the insistence on face masks indoors. It does, after all, offer the opportunity for themed face coverings, perhaps with a picture of the happy couple.

But the restrictions on merriment are going to sting, especially for those who had delayed until after June 21 in the hope of rule-free nuptials. There is still to be no singing, no indoor dancing and table service only. Public venues must remove their dance floor, though the nightmare of every self-aware groom – the first dance – is apparently still permitted, on the understanding that it is also the last dance. This exception, also known as the Christina Perri “A Thousand Years” exemption, will allow for a special moment, though the recommended track remains “I Just Zoomed to Say I Love You”.

Where the party is being held on private land, the regulations are a little more vague. Dancing outdoors is not banned but it is “not recommended”. Well quite, but did we need the government to tell us this? I’ve been to a number of weddings where that would have been true. We often talk about the life skills not taught at school; surely how not to make a total pillock of yourself to the sound of Spandau Ballet’s “Gold” ought to be mandatory for all over-16s. You may not think you need it now, kids, but one day you’ll thank me.

The dancing ban is also especially welcome at any wedding where at least one of the newlyweds comes from a particularly large clan. Aside



ILLUSTRATION BY LUCAS VARELA

from standing between a hippo and its watering hole, there can be few more dangerous places to find yourself at such an event than between the guests and the dance floor when “We Are Family” hits the turntable.

The no-singing rule also seems especially defensible once you’ve stood in front of someone tunelessly bellowing out “Jerusalem” with an enthusiasm they did not bring to the search for a bottle of Listerine. Bands must be no more than six strong inside and 30 outdoors – a relief for those planning to hire Duke Ellington’s orchestra.

Bands clearly will have to be issued with a playlist of Covid-compliant songs, guaranteed not to induce singalongs. Anything by Leonard Cohen is likely to make the green playlist.

Clearly this is going to create a fresh challenge for law enforcement. Perhaps we can expect a new squad of nuptial cops. “Hello sir, Constable Williams. Wedding squad. We’ve had reports of people singing ‘Uptown Funk’ and clear evidence of some ‘too-ra-loo-ra-rye’-ing to ‘Come On Eileen’. I must warn you we have powers of annulment for continued non-compliance.”

For some, these rules are a sensible compromise. For others,

it might make for a meagre event. Surely the most intriguing question is what further gradual relaxation might come in the promised, but almost certainly token, two-week review of the continuing restrictions.

Among the ideas undoubtedly being examined are restrictions around the best man’s speech, which under existing rules had to be stripped of any jokes likely to generate dangerous droplets of laughter. In truth, this was always more of a theoretical than actual risk since there have been no reports of a genuinely funny best man’s speech since 1992. Research from Sage suggests they have an R rate well below one.

A relaxation of the dancing regulations might permit couples in a recognised bubble to slow dance and a socially distanced “YMCA” may be allowed, though ministers say it will be some time until it is again compulsory.

Tragically, recreations of the YouTube smash “wedding dance” remain banned and may in fact be so for some years after the pandemic has ended. Just to be on the safe side. **FT**

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A fantastic article (“Obedience and fear: the brutal working conditions behind China’s tech boom”, June 12/13). Amid all the east vs west high-level rhetoric, it’s interesting to read a piece that peels back the layers and presents a layman’s perspective on the working struggles of the average young professional. Just goes to show that there might be more similarities within this generation than you might think – regardless of geography.

HK Abroad via *FT.com*

@LaurieChenWords June 10
Fascinating deep dive into the dysfunctional working practices of China’s tech industry, where white-collar coders identify more with sweatshop workers

Re “How American streaming giants learnt to love Euro programming” (June 12/13). I tremendously enjoy the variety available on these streaming services. Friends and colleagues exchange tips on the latest Korean, Russian, Italian or other series and movies. Watching them not only makes for great entertainment but it’s a cultural experience every time, as you experience the aesthetics, language, mentality or sense of humour of another corner of the world. I will say a very hippie thing here but I do believe this helps to build international understanding.

Swiss no longer in London
via *FT.com*

Re Jonathan Derbyshire’s column (“Lurching towards a new era in freedom of movement”, June 12/13). It’s very tough not being able to see family, I sympathise. However, when Covid restrictions have lifted, climate change and the carbon emissions from flying will (quite rightly) continue to exert a long-term downward pressure on flight numbers. I think anyone with family/friends spread over long distances needs to consider this for the medium to long term.

853121 via *FT.com*

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FT Globetrotter has launched a brand-new guide to Singapore, celebrating the joys of the Garden City with expert advice on eating and drinking, exercise, cultural activities and much more. We’re looking for your best Singapore tips too. Submit them at ft.com/globetrotter/singapore

Quiz answers The link was the surnames of famous boxers 1. Ali G 2. Joshua 3. Bruno Tonioli 4. Duran Duran 5. Frank Tyson 6. Leonard Nimoy 7. Foreman of the jury 8. The Sound and the Fury 9. John Lewis 10. Robinson Crusoe **Picture quiz** Lily James + Allen Ginsberg = Lily Allen



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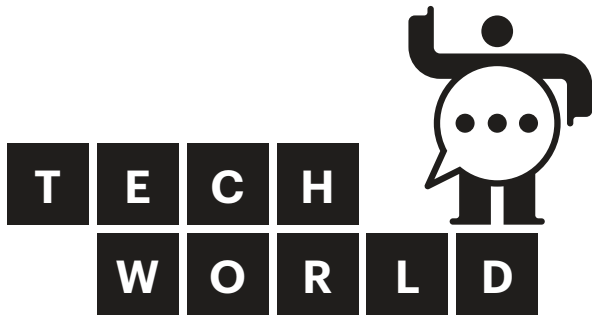
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BY LEO LEWIS IN TOKYO

Tap, eat, repeat – is Japan finally ready to order in?

This time last year, I had a revealing chat with Ryo Miyake, the Japanese fencer who won a medal at the 2012 London Olympics and was now pedalling an Uber Eats beat in Tokyo. Mostly, we discussed the zeitgeisty weirdness of his new job: if it had not been for the pandemic, Miyake would have been busy preparing to carry a nation’s sporting hopes before a home crowd. Instead, with no training camp to live in, he suddenly needed cash for rent and figured the cycling and food-haulage would keep him in shape until the Games were back on.

The solution, he said, felt natural. Times had been changed both by plague and by tech. The booming business of Uber Eats – and food delivery in general – was being propelled by Covid-19 and the closure of offices and restaurants, its ascendancy accelerating the rise of a tech-enabled gig economy it might otherwise have taken Japan much longer to embrace.

Miyake revealed that his Ubering had upturned his assumptions about how Japanese people eat. The nicest houses in the poshest areas, he noted, always seemed to place the minimum orders for the cheapest grub. The bountiful trays of high-end sushi and tempura went to the shabbier apartment blocks.

Miyake’s observations seemed all the more relevant last week when DoorDash, the US leader in home food delivery, announced that it was launching in Japan and targeting a market where this business is still in its infancy. DoorDash has chosen to compete not only with the relatively established likes of Uber

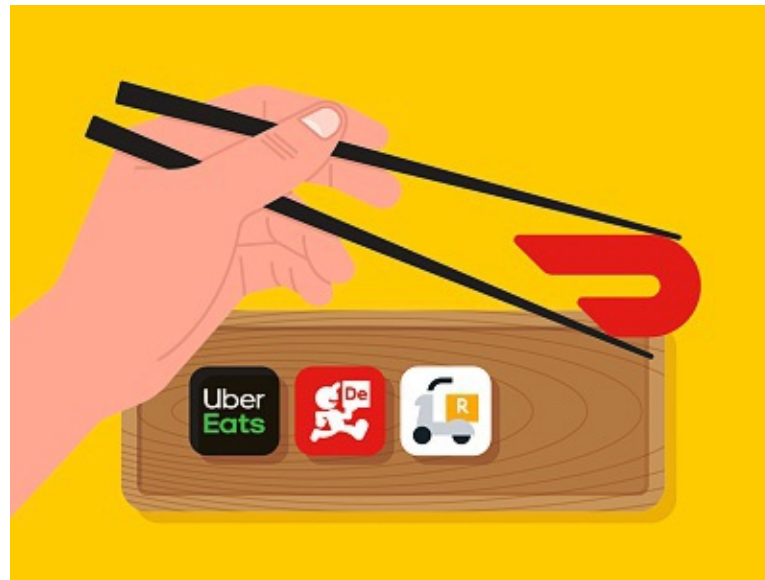


ILLUSTRATION BY PÂTÉ

Eats and domestic specialists such as Demae-can and Rakuten, but also with others that have turned up recently with plans to conquer the world’s third biggest economy. (In September, Germany’s Delivery Hero began operations in six Japanese cities under its Asian brand Foodpanda.) As DoorDash acknowledges, the food fight will only intensify as it is joined by Japanese logistics heavyweights such as the convenience stores and parcel delivery operators.

When the FT spoke to DoorDash’s chief executive, Tony Xu, about the venture, he used the now familiar phrases of foreign companies that enter the Japanese stage: accentuation of the country’s large economy, the delicate dance around why this goldmine is still untapped, the humble refusal to dictate, at this respectful learning

‘The nicest houses in the poshest areas, he noted, always seemed to place the minimum orders for the cheapest grub’

point, what might be the “right” answer for this market.

Indeed, many others, in different industries, have used versions of this on their way into Japan, from retailers such as Walmart and Tesco to banks and telcos that have ultimately retreated. There have, of course, been success stories of foreign companies here – Apple and McDonald’s stand out – but recent years have posed a broad question of whether foreign tech companies can achieve regular success in Japan where their bricks and mortar counterparts have struggled.

In DoorDash’s case, much will hinge on whether it has entered Japan at a time of anomaly, or of an incipient shift in behaviour – will food delivery, for example, emerge from the pandemic as a long-term preference of the elderly, or the offspring of the elderly ensuring their parents eat well? For now, the situation does seem enticing: after more than a year of drastically diminished sales, an increasing number of food vendors are looking to delivery apps to revive their dangerously diminished fortunes.

Working-age customers, meanwhile, are using this tech to overcome disruptions to a fragmented dining ecosystem that offered massive choice and centred on the provision of food (eat-in restaurants, supermarkets and convenience stores geared to ready-meals) either near their place of work or near the other end of a commute. The resumption of office work may not break the general appeal of food delivery, but it may herald a practical cliff edge.

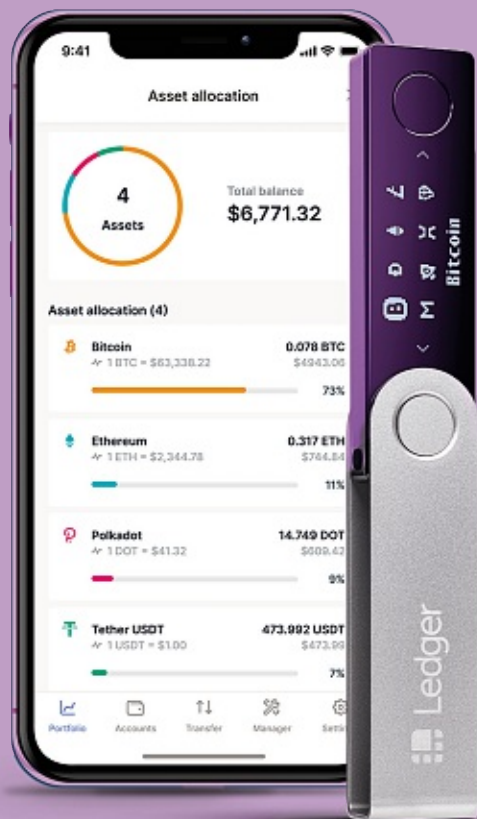
The biggest issue that tech, in Japan’s case, has not yet proven it can overcome is one of capacity. Restaurants supplying Uber, DoorDash and others with the food are doing so because the professional kitchens of Japan, which are generally small, have been forced by Covid-19 into an unprecedented phase of excess capacity. The moment those restaurants start filling again – no matter how significant the demand from apps – many kitchens could find themselves quickly unable to meet orders.

As for Miyake, he wondered whether the relief of a return to normal commuting life would eventually highlight the oddity of the role he had found himself doing. “I’m sure that a lot of the things I deliver, it would be quicker for people to get it themselves.” **FT**

Leo Lewis is the FT’s Asia business editor

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What looks like fraud, feels like fraud but isn't fraud? What about a company website that pops up when you search for the government agency that issues driving licences, and charges a handsome fee for forwarding your details to the real website?

Personal finance campaigners have been complaining about such sites for years, but I think there is a broader lesson to be drawn about the way we spend our money these days. Between outright fraud and honest commerce there may be a sharp legal line - but economically and psychologically the distinction is a gradual blur.

I worry that we now live in that blur, spending cash without clearly perceiving what happened. The pandemic, with its shift to contactless or online spending, has served to catalyse the process further.

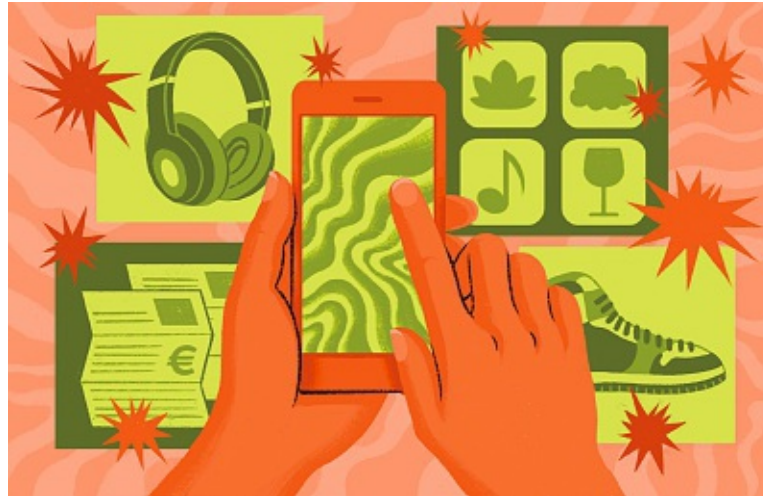
Consider the scam-adjacent website: the principal service it provides is to solve a problem it has paid to create - namely that the official website isn't as prominent in web searches as it might be.

The near-valueless service, however, is described unambiguously and the website states plainly that it is not an official site. So who would knowingly use such a service? My wife recently did. And it is self-evident that my wife is a person of the most refined wisdom and discernment. So how did this calamity occur?

My wife handed over about £100 for nothing of value because her technology made it so easy. She didn't notice the disclaimer because she was distracted and multi-tasking. She applied via a mobile phone, her browser preloaded with credit card details. On such a tiny screen, hints of trouble pass unseen. We're warned to be careful of the small print, but on a mobile phone, all the print is small print.

This is why I argue such websites exist on a continuum. There's the outright fraudster who tries to panic you into sending thousands of pounds to avoid ruin or prison. Then there's a blue-chip website such as Amazon, which undoubtedly provides a real service, but would be delighted to make it easier for customers to spend impulsively.

Amazon famously secured an absurd patent on "one-click" online retail ordering in 1999. (Steve Jobs, with typical foresight, immediately licensed it for Apple for a miserly million dollars.) That patent has now expired, but Amazon is still



TIM HARFORD

THE UNDERCOVER ECONOMIST



It's never been so easy to spend, spend, spend

keen to make spending effortless. Every time I use my phone to check the sales rank of my book on the Amazon website - roughly every 27 minutes - Amazon urges me to download its app. I don't doubt that the app would work better, which is why I don't want it.

In their book *Nudge*, Richard Thaler and Cass Sunstein urge regulators and companies to "make it easy" for people to do the right thing - such as pay taxes, sign up as an organ donor or save for a pension. As Thaler and Sunstein well know, nudges can also be used to "make it easy" to do other things, too - such as send money to a near-valueless licence-application service.

The logical extreme is the endlessly renewable subscription. Alongside the familiar bills for utilities, internet, mobile phone and mortgage, our household subscriptions include services as varied as an online yoga resource, access to all the *Star Wars* and *Marvel* movies, a Patreon campaign, wine, Amazon Prime, Microsoft Office, Adobe Photoshop, apps for mindfulness, language learning and productivity, two cloud storage services, unfettered access to BoardgameArena and a music bot on Discord.

Some of that will be incomprehensible, I'm sure; 15 years ago it would have been not just incomprehensible, but unimaginable. Yet not only are we paying for all this, we're paying without a clear idea of when or how much the payments are, or even the method of payment we are using.

In a classic article from 2006, "Paying Not To Go To The Gym", economists Stefano DellaVigna and Ulrike Malmendier compared consumers paying for health club membership in three different ways: with a 10-visit pass, on an annual membership and with an auto-renewing monthly subscription.

The monthly consumers had more flexibility - and paid for the privilege - but they did not use it. Instead, they stayed subscribed for longer, paid nearly twice as much per gym visit and typically took more than two months to cancel after their final gym appearance. All these online subscriptions are plugging into something that health-club owners have known all along.

So what should we do? On the FT Money Clinic podcast, I recently advised a listener who felt guilty

'We're warned to be careful of the small print, but on a mobile phone, all the print is small print'

that she was spending impulsively online, and often regretted and returned the purchases. One suggestion I had for her was that instead of buying immediately, she should instead write down each item on a spreadsheet, to revisit at the end of the month. She would have time to reflect, and she would also see the cumulative price tag for all her temptations.

My thinking was that by making the spending harder, slower and more conspicuous, she might gain some degree of control. It was only afterwards that I realised how directly this advice was swimming against the commercial tide. Harder, slower, more conspicuous? Companies have long wanted spending to be fast, easy and barely worth a thought. Thanks to the miracles of modern technology, they are closer than ever to realising their desires. **FT**

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Tim Harford's new book is "How to Make the World Add Up"

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OLD SCHOOL

President Joe Biden was elected last year promising to vastly remake – and decarbonise – American energy. *Derek Brower* reports from the communities that have been living high on the profits of fossil fuel extraction

Photography by Brandon Thibodeaux



NEW SCHOOL

ENERGY!

T

o write a story about the political, cultural and economic upheavals that might result from America's quest to burn less fossil fuel, I had to burn a lot of it myself.

In April, I flew to Bismarck, North Dakota, and found a shiny

white Audi Q3 waiting for me in the rental parking lot. I was there to find out how Americans living in communities that depend on the extraction and sale of fossil fuels are faring after last year's brutal crash in oil prices. And to find out how they feel about their new president's far-reaching, clean-energy revolution.

I wandered from shale oilfields in the Dakotas to Wyoming wind farms, from patches of desert earmarked for green mega-projects to skyscrapers in Houston, a city pumped through and through with oil profits. Two weeks of road from chilled northern prairies to the steamy Gulf Coast. Miles driven: 3,112. CO2 equivalent burnt: 1.24 tonnes.

Joe Biden won the US presidency after months of vowing to render the world's largest economy emissions-free by 2050, to crack down on fossil fuel pollution, to eliminate carbon from the power sector in 15 years and to electrify the automotive fleet of the country that perfected the V8 engine and proselytised the SUV. Democrats say Biden's plan can fight climate change and create a bounty of new jobs at the same time.

The plan also puts the US in the vanguard of a global energy transition many hope will sunset the petroleum era. From Wall Street to Frankfurt, investors are shunning oil and gas and favouring renewables. Goldman Sachs says spending on clean energy could amount to \$16tn in the next 10 years, as much as the rising economies of Brazil, Russia, India and China together spent on infrastructure in the century's first two decades. Forecasters, including the International Energy Agency, now say new fossil-fuel projects aren't necessary to meet the world's energy needs.

All of which is a head-spinning reversal for anybody working in Odessa, Texas, Williston, North Dakota, or many of the other places I visited on a road trip across seven states dotted with decades of accumulated energy infrastructure. Former president Donald Trump's proclaimed era of American "energy dominance" has given way to emboldened activists, investors, regulators and politicians. Perhaps that's why my voyage through these fossil fuel-dependent communities often felt like tracing a front. I met Americans fighting to hold back an energy transition, some fearing its impact, and others battling to speed its progress. Sometimes, all in the same place.

NORTH DAKOTA

Not all who wander are lost

The Fort Berthold Indian Reservation is no stranger to upheaval. Between 1947 and 1953, the US Army Corps of Engineers dammed the Missouri River that bisects this part of North Dakota, creating Lake Sakakawea and a hydropower plant and displacing some 90 per cent of the Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara (MHA) Nation, the native Americans who live here.

Today, another form of energy dominates Fort Berthold's rolling prairie. The reservation sits atop the Bakken shale rock unit, one of the world's most prolific oil-producing geological formations. It was here that drillers launched the American shale oil revolution just over a decade ago, making the US the world's biggest crude producer and upending geopolitics. Before last year's oil price crash, North Dakota was producing almost 1.5m barrels a day, more daily oil than the whole of the UK.

Mark Fox is the leader of the MHA Nation. The walls of his office in New Town, Fort Berthold's administrative centre, are adorned by a framed bow and quiver, as well as memorabilia from Fox's time in the US Marine Corps. We talk about the flood in 1953, the new US secretary of interior Deb Haaland - the first Native American appointed to a federal cabinet post - and oil, which has restored some of what was lost by the three tribes on Fort Berthold 70 years ago.

Before the drilling boom a decade ago, the reservation's main source of income was its casino and federal payments. Annual oil revenue in the past few years has provided as much as 85 per cent of the tribal budget. "It's buildings, schools... medical health insurance for the first time for our people," says Fox. Oil money also helped when the coronavirus hit the 7,000-person reservation last year. Whatever their initial concerns, Fox says his people want shale development to continue. "My hope is that one day we no longer depend on the federal government ever again."

For Fox, the challenge of a shifting national energy agenda has already arrived. In April the MHA Nation sided with an oil company in a thorny dispute with the Standing Rock tribe, which has been seeking to shut down a Bakken oil pipeline. The Standing Rock say the pipeline, which ships most of the MHA Nation's oil, endangers its water. "We respect Standing Rock's rights to say 'we don't want an oil pipeline...'. That's their right," says Fox. "But we also have a right."

The dispute echoes the broader debate over America's energy sector. Fossil fuels cause harm, but also pay for medical facilities in indigenous communities. North Dakota's oil advocates make

the argument for the rest of their state too. "The Bakken brought almost a rebirth," says Ron Ness, head of the North Dakota Petroleum Council in Bismarck, the state capital. "We were closing schools. And for the last decade we've been building schools. We went from an ageing state to one of the youngest ones."

The pandemic has complicated matters further. In 2019 the state's oil revenue hit almost \$4bn. Now, Ness reckons as many as a quarter of the 60,000 or so people working directly or indirectly in the shale patch have left following last year's crash. Some analysts believe the Bakken is in terminal decline since it is cheaper to produce oil elsewhere and because of the reticence among investors to pay for new drilling.

In Bismarck, Ness blames Washington. Pictures of Donald Trump hang in his office as he tells me that Biden and his clean energy agenda have put a chill on his state's oil business. "When you wake up every morning and you feel like the federal government is out to get you, there's a significant impact," he says. "Every conversation I have is 'climate this, climate that'."

WYOMING

Down in the canyons

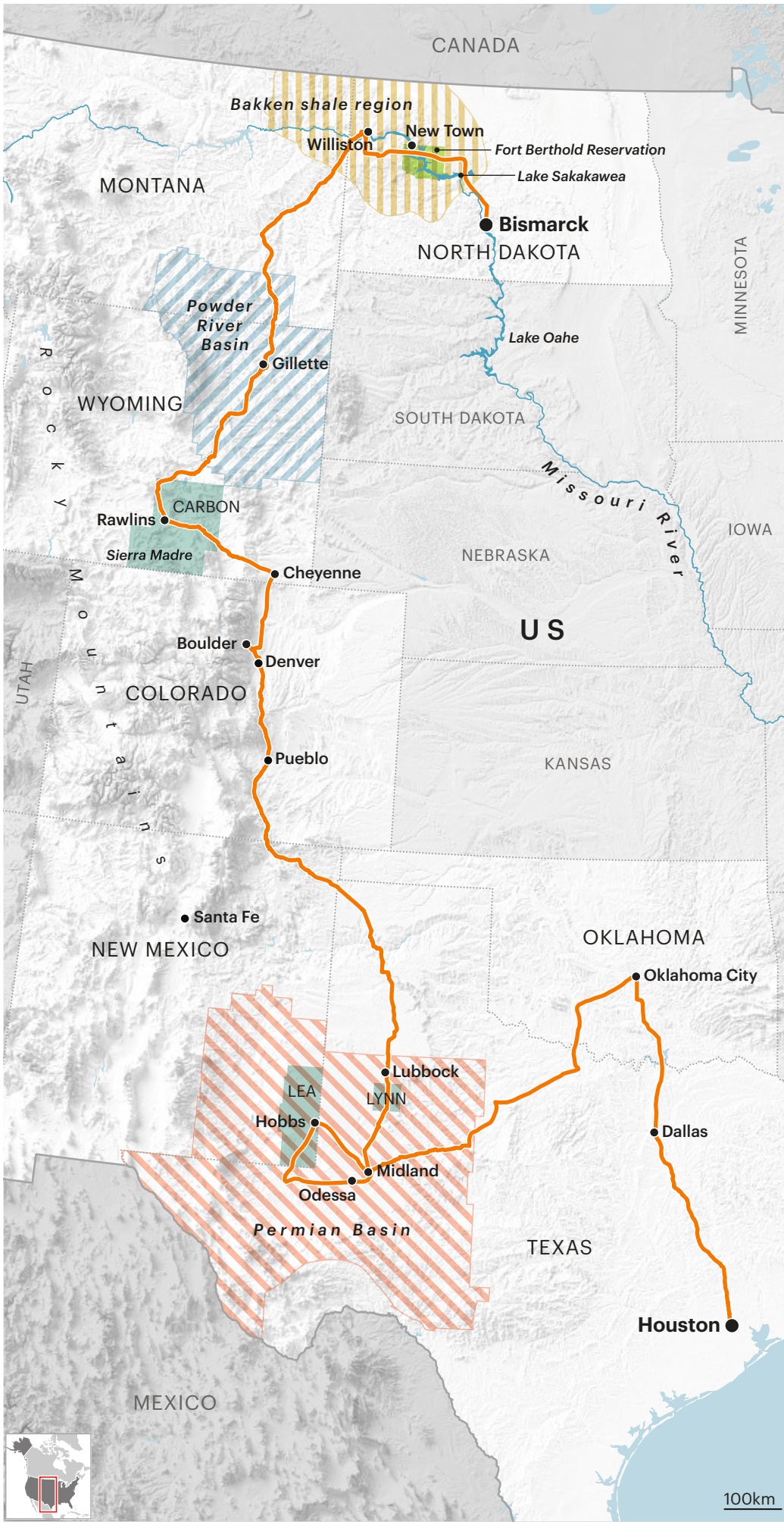
From the heart of the Bakken in Williston, I head through Montana and into Wyoming, another emerging front in America's energy transition. The state is famous for its huge skies, snow-capped peaks, deeply conservative politics and hydrocarbons, especially coal. But the Cheney dynasty's adopted state also has wind - powerful, persistent and, for the right investors, profitable.

Standing on a ridge in the Sierra Madre range in Carbon County, I look out. In the valley to our north is Rawlins, a prison town, and just east of there is the hamlet of Sinclair, renamed after its almost 100-year-old refinery. I'm on ranchland belonging to the Colorado billionaire Philip Anschutz, an investor in energy projects, newspapers and entertainment, including the Coachella festival. Sometime in the middle of this decade, this land will host a thicket of wind turbines, as many as 900 in total, with enough capacity to power one million homes. Eventually, a planned high-voltage, direct-current transmission line will stretch to Nevada, California and Arizona. Including \$3bn for the power lines, it will all cost \$8bn.

Bill Miller, who runs the Anschutz Corporation's Power Company of Wyoming, is an oilman and rancher and Anschutz, his deep-pocketed boss, is no tree-hugger. But both are on board with Biden's climate plan. "Society has spoken," Miller tells me.

'MY HOPE IS THAT ONE DAY WE NO LONGER DEPEND ON THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT EVER AGAIN'

MARK FOX, LEADER OF THE MHA NATION, NORTH DAKOTA



CARTOGRAPHY: STEVE BERNARD; SOURCES: USGS; EIA; OPENSTREETMAP

“Society has said, ‘I want to stick with renewable energy.’ You may not agree with everything that society is saying but they’ve spoken in a big way.”

Wyoming, which provides two-fifths of the coal mined in American power plants, is uniquely exposed to the federal government’s plan to eliminate carbon from the electricity sector. Coal is the dirtiest fossil fuel, emitting twice as much CO₂ when burnt as natural gas and enormously more than renewable sources of electricity. The state’s bounty, mostly found in the prolific mines of the Powder River Basin, is in peril.

The decline has been under way for a while, another outcome of the shale revolution that unleashed a surge of cheap natural gas production that has steadily eaten into coal’s share of power generation in the US. Wyoming’s coal output last year was just 218m short tons, about half the level of a decade ago. Employment in the sector has fallen by about 30 per cent in the past five years.

But taxes on coal, oil and gas still supply about half Wyoming’s general spending fund and entire communities rely on coal income. It’s hard to imagine Gillette’s well-appointed town centre, with its chic pizzeria and hipster brewery, without considering the money indirectly poured into the local economy by mining a few miles down the road.

Coal also has a cultural grip on Wyoming. “Coal is as much an identity for a community as it is an economy,” says Shannon Anderson, a staff attorney at the Powder River Basin Resource Council, a pressure group that has advocated for responsible mining for about as long as Wyoming has been plundering its coal seams. “But the past is not our future,” she says. “We have a carbon problem. We have to get on it. If we don’t, we’re going to be in big trouble.”

In Wyoming’s capital Cheyenne, authorities are trying to prop up the sector. Governor Mark Gordon has created a fund to fight lawsuits against other states seen as standing in the way of Wyoming’s attempts to export the fuel. The state also funds research into other uses for coal, from carbon-fibre to graphene.

“We’re in for a bumpy ride,” Gordon tells me. “This [presidential] administration really is dedicated to trying to figure out ways to limit the production everywhere of fossil fuels.” But wind power isn’t the answer, he says. “I think most people look at wind as if it’s benign.” But it can destroy pristine landscapes and the process to make the turbines is itself energy intensive, he argues. “None of this is fuzzy, warm butterflies stuff.”

Along with coal, Wyoming is blessed with some of the best wind potential in the US. Developers have already pounced. West of Cheyenne, a thicket of turbines has sprouted on the high plains. The Biden administration argues that a renewable electricity revolution is not just necessary to avert global warming, but good for the economy. ▶

‘I DON’T KNOW ANYBODY WHO CAN QUIT EATING TODAY AND START 10 YEARS FROM NOW WHEN THAT JOB’S AVAILABLE’

TERRY WEICKUM, MAYOR OF RAWLINS, WYOMING

◀ “When I hear the words ‘climate change’ I hear the word jobs,” the president is fond of saying.

But in rural Wyoming, some people I speak to are not worried about climate change and are downright sceptical of the jobs claims. A comment made by John Kerry, Biden’s climate envoy, crops up in conversation repeatedly during my trip. Trying to assuage fossil fuel workers’ fears earlier this year, Kerry suggested that those losing jobs in coal and oil “can be the people who go to work to make the solar panels”. Terry Weickum, mayor of Rawlins, backs the big new wind project nearby in the Sierra Madre range, but sums up the views of many when he tells me, “I don’t know anybody who can quit eating today and start 10 years from now when that job’s available.”

COLORADO

Skis and Subarus and skis on Subarus

The border between Wyoming and Colorado is a political divide as well as a geographical one. By the time I reach Boulder, the Rockies’ quintessential liberal redoubt, the helmetless Harley riders of Cheyenne have been replaced with middle-aged men in Lycra cruising along leafy lanes on \$10,000 bicycles.

Colorado is my halfway point en route to New Mexico and Texas. In its own way, it too is grappling with a transition. The state wants to slash emissions by 80 per cent by 2030, among other targets, eliminating coal-fired power generation to do so. It won’t be easy, but Colorado’s economy has other strings to its bow, including the array of research institutes, tech companies and corporations that cluster in the greater Denver area. Not to mention the skiing.

In North Dakota and Wyoming, I was struck by the anxieties this transition was causing. But in Denver, even a local oil and gas executive I meet for iced coffee on a warm Saturday morning seems keen on Colorado’s approach. The state’s oil companies are ready to embrace the shift, he says, even getting involved in community solar and other decarbonisation efforts.

A few hours later, I reach Pueblo, a city in southern Colorado’s high desert, where steel manufacturing and coal generation were once economic mainstays. Now, a quarter of the people live below the poverty line.

Morgan Bazilian, head of the Colorado School of Mines’ Payne Institute, had told me about Pueblo’s emergence as an energy transition paragon.

Just west of Interstate 25 outside the city, you get a glimpse of why: huge white wind tower parts are stacked outside one of the world’s largest wind power manufacturing sites. It’s now one of Pueblo’s major employers. As local coal plants are being decommissioned, the city is plotting a future as a solar and renewable energy hub. “In Pueblo, the energy transition is creating jobs and boosting the local economy,” Bazilian wrote in a recent study of the city.

NEW MEXICO

At the sharp end of the drilling ban

The lunar landscape of New Mexico is unique, even in the US. The high-altitude desert inspired Georgia O’Keeffe’s paintings, but most non-Americans probably came to know it as the backdrop for *Breaking Bad*.

Raul Alvarado carries a Springfield XD-M 40 handgun in his truck. He drives 300 miles a day around oilfields checking on pump jacks and other facilities belonging to his employer, Texland Petroleum. “There’s a bunch of crackheads around here,” says Alvarado, explaining his firearm. “They steal our copper.”

We are in Hobbs, in Lea County, standing on top of some of the most productive oil-bearing rocks on the planet. This is the west end of the Permian Basin, an area spanning almost 90,000 square miles from Lubbock, Texas, in the north to the Rio Grande in the south. I have come to meet a local politician, Alexis Martinez Johnson, a conservative Republican running for mayor of Santa Fe, capital of the Democrat state. As she and I chat beside a nodding pump jack, Alvarado checks the machinery.

This kind of activity – oilfield work in general – is about to cease in New Mexico thanks to the Biden administration’s moratorium on federal drilling, according to Johnson. She says that will have severe consequences for her state. The pause was a signature early policy of the administration, showing that the Trump-era oil and gas free-for-all was over. “But the cost is significant,” says Jeff Wilhelm, who runs a company handling Permian drillers’ waste water. “The moment I saw the legislation around federal property I remember having a conversation with my partner saying, ‘What are we going to do?’” he tells me in Midland. “No one will ever appreciate [the impact] of the regulation until you have to lay off someone you worked with for 10 or 15 years.” ▶



SHIFTING HORIZONS

FT Weekend Magazine sent Brandon Thibodeaux to capture the Texas and New Mexico legs of Derek Brower’s road trip. Clockwise from top left: a pump jack produces oil beneath power lines near Midland, west Texas; a mural in downtown Midland; Alexis Martinez Johnson in Hobbs, New Mexico; wind turbines near Midland, Texas; a solar farm in Marlin, Texas; and Wes Burnett in his office in Odessa, Texas

Opening spread, from left: oil pump jacks dot the landscape across west Texas near Midland, as do wind turbines



RENEWABLES MIGHT HAVE A BAD NAME IN GILLETTE, WYOMING, OR HOBBS, NEW MEXICO. BUT IN UPWARDLY MOBILE CIRCLES IN HOUSTON, CLEAN ENERGY IS JUST ENERGY

◀ This week, a Louisiana court approved an injunction against the moratorium, although analysts say the federal government has other methods to continue the pause. Even some of Biden's fellow Democrats now doubt the efficacy of the strategy. In New Mexico, federal lands account for more than half the state's oil output and fund about 20 per cent of the state's spending. New Mexico's Democratic governor, Michelle Lujan Grisham, has pleaded for the policy to be reversed. Not surprisingly, Johnson isn't buying it. Alvarado paints the picture in more sombre tones. "You think that storm in the White House was bad," he says, referring to the Capitol riots in January. "If they shut down the oil here in New Mexico... whoa, you can see a lot of angry New Mexicans."

TEXAS

Not granddaddy's Lone Star

As I enter the Permian Basin from the north near Lubbock, the first signs of energy production are wind turbines towering over cotton and wheat fields. Texas, for all its reputation, is a clean-energy superpower. A fifth of the state's electricity was supplied by renewables last year, and Texas leads the nation in wind power generation.

But further south, around Midland and Odessa, you can almost smell the crude. The desert here has been ravaged by American oil. Industrial detritus - flares, pumpjacks, silos, tanks, petrochemical plants, man-camps, rigs - spills for miles into the mesquite- and shinnery oak-covered scrubland.

While North Dakota's Bakken is entering a twilight, the Permian is showing signs of recovery after 2020's price crash. Every oil and gas producer worth its salt, from BP to ConocoPhillips, has a piece of the Permian pie. The region produced 4.5m barrels a day in May. If it were a country, the Permian would be the world's fourth biggest oil producer.

And yet, anxiety about the future is widespread here. The price debacle showed that even the mighty Permian could be brought low by the whims of the Saudis. And, in November, a French buyer of American natural gas cancelled its long-term contract to ship supplies from the Gulf Coast to Europe because of concerns that fracking was too damaging to the climate.

It was another sign of the times and a warning for the future. If shale operators want a market for

their oil and gas, they will need to clean up their act. Wall Street is demanding the same. So the Permian's deepest-pocketed producers are trying to overturn widespread scepticism about their attempts to become a little greener.

Bruce Johnson, who runs EnXL, an oilfield services provider in Midland, says environmentalists have taken against the oil sector and refuse to listen. "We're the demon and the left doesn't like us." Already, February's devastating electricity crisis in the state - when plunging temperatures and a rare snowstorm froze up some power providers, leading to the deaths of more than 150 people - has taken root in the popular imagination in west Texas as the fault of wind turbines that failed at the crucial moment. In fact, it was natural gas supplies that failed, leaving the state's highly deregulated electricity network woefully short.

Yet despite these tensions, larger solar and other green projects are now becoming as much a feature in west Texas as gas flares. Last year, Oberon, a 180-megawatt-capacity array built just south-west of Odessa, came online. Just up the road from it is the most ambitious of these clean energy projects, a \$7bn plan from Houston-based Nacero to make gasoline from natural gas that would otherwise be flared in the Permian.

Driving me out to see the patch of hardscrabble desert just north of the highway where the plant will be built, Wes Burnett, director of economic development for the Odessa chamber of commerce, can't hide his enthusiasm. "We couldn't be happier. The investment, the company, what it's going to do for everybody," he says. "It's the biggest project we've ever had."

TEXAS

Another Houston landing

President Biden's decarbonisation plan promises to do something else: dot the nation with charging points so America's drivers can permanently switch to electric vehicles. But I didn't see many on my trip. In fact, I saw more peeling Trump-Pence signs than Teslas. Until I reached the oil capital of the world.

Houston must be home to more fossil-fuel millionaires than any city on earth. But if the first few days of my road trip, up in the Bakken, showed me how distant the discourse in Washington about a clean-energy transition felt from the people who

actually produced the energy, the final leg showed the opposite. Renewables might have a bad name in Gillette, Wyoming, or Hobbs, New Mexico. But in upwardly mobile circles in Houston, clean energy is just energy. And if there is money to be made in solar or wind, investment will follow.

A few days later, in a former Fiesta food hall in the city's Midtown area, Juliana Garaizar shows me around Greentown Labs. This is North America's largest clean energy incubator, headquartered in Boston. This particular facility rents out space - and laboratories - to cleantech start-ups, everything from desalination to "virtual solar" distributors. Garaizar just opened its Houston branch.

A group of young entrepreneurs sips hard seltzer and craft beer and talks about ideas with older executives from companies such as Baker Hughes, an established oilfield services company currently grappling with its future in the energy transition. "If we want to solve climate change, we need to be in the energy capital of the world," says Garaizar. "There's no way we could solve that from the east coast and west coast only." Among Greentown Labs' partners for this launch are established clean-energy providers as well as companies whose names adorn fences next to pumpjacks and flares, including BP, Shell and Chevron.

Houston is a city built on oil money, and its white-collar professionals are not resisting the energy transition. Kay McCall, a former private equity energy investor who now heads the non-profit Renewable Energy Alliance, told me much of her work is now advising oil and gas professionals about how to find employment in clean energy. "People want out," she says. "They don't like having to explain to their kids what they do. It's a real thing. It's a tsunami and it's largely driven by millennials and those younger than them."

One of those millennials is Dakota Stormer, an ex-Shell employee who left this year after creating carbon-tracking app Footprint. He believes the climate strikes movement led by Swedish teen Greta Thunberg has reached - and converted - corporate boardrooms atop Houston's skyscrapers. He doesn't mention Biden or new federal rules. "Even conservative groups are starting to see it as an opportunity instead of something to fear," says Stormer.

His optimism was something I hadn't much encountered on the road. It all felt a long way from Fort Berthold, North Dakota. And I still didn't know if America was ready to embrace a global energy transition, or fight it. **FT**

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Derek Brower is the FT's US energy editor

JOHN MITCHELL

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University challenge

Being a campus security guard in these times offers fear and grace in equal measure, finds *George Bass*

“You’re gonna die,” one of my mates texted, followed by the Edvard Munch scream emoji. When I clicked on the link, I saw what she meant: according to the Office for National Statistics, male security guards were the professional group most at risk of dying from Covid-19.

I forwarded the link to the other blokes on my shift, then went back to opening doors with my elbows and checking hallways for the nearest wall-mounted sanitiser. It was June 2020. After three months of being on duty in a pandemic, my palms were already so dry that I could have sanded down decking barehanded.

I’d never even heard the words “key worker” until the first lockdown last year, let alone understood that I could be one. Nurses and supermarket workers, sure. But security staff?

In lockdown, key workers have had privileges and faced dangers. During the first wave, my daughter could still go to school because I was a key worker, while most of her friends suffered weeks of amateur tutoring by distracted parents. On the other hand, I had to do a job where physical contact with strangers was a daily inevitability.

Like other employees who can’t clock in from the sofa, the virus has never been far from my mind. Early on, when we thought transmission by objects was a high risk, I worried because I touched a thousand door handles each shift and signed out so many keys to cleaners and contractors that my hands smelled metallic, like I’d emptied a fruit machine.

I’ve worked as a security guard on a university campus in the south of England for 14 years and I’ve been a licensed bouncer for seven. We work 24/7, getting involved in everything from first aid to fights to blocked drains to nocturnal essay advice to pulling drunk students out of hedges. Since Covid struck, the role has been even more varied than normal. Almost as soon as the pubs were forced to close, we were on the lookout for ninja booze dealers trying to sell alcohol

to the students still on campus. At the same time we were having to argue with lecturers claiming “emergency access” to collect their ergonomic keyboards.

A few night guards on our campus were shot at with fireworks launched by bored local teens on e-scooters. “It’s worse than Basra,” one ex-squaddie half-joked, especially with the added risk of infection as you chased the kids away from the halls of residence.

Universities fully reopened on May 17 this year, but by then it was almost the end of term for most students, so it has stayed fairly quiet. Now guards like me are wondering how many outbreaks we’ll get come September when the new wave of freshers arrives or whether life will go back to a semblance of how it was pre-Covid.

In many ways, being a security guard and bouncer is the role I was destined for. As a teen, I realised one day during a physics lesson that I didn’t have the focus for my dream job (astronaut). My back-up dream job - lighthouse keeper - got phased out the year I left school. Security guard/bouncer seemed a pretty good match. I could shed some light on a rough landscape, see the ships in safely.

My mate’s text briefly made me wonder if I’d made a mistake. But I couldn’t wrap my head around the science. Why was our Covid death rate - 74 per 100,000 men in England and Wales at the start of the pandemic - higher than that for workers we assumed were most exposed to the risk of infection, such as frontline NHS staff? Female nurses were 15 per 100,000, male ones 50. Perhaps they were the ones getting the best protective equipment, fastest.

One important factor may be the high number of security guards from black, Asian and other minority ethnic (BAME) groups: 26 per cent, versus 12 per cent of all workers, according to the Trades Union Congress. Research has shown that BAME groups are up to twice as likely to die from Covid than white people like myself. ▶



Illustrations by Leonard Beard



'A few students hosted some very raucous "study bubbles". Others saw their mental health suffer for following the rules and going without company'

◀ "The ONS themselves made clear that there were a range of factors that might make a person particularly vulnerable to the virus, such as age, underlying health conditions and ethnicity," says Michelle Russell, acting chief of the Security Industry Authority, which regulates the UK's private security industry.

Russell highlights how security officers have been "on the front line in the battle against the Covid crisis" in hospitals, in vaccine and testing centres, keeping food chains going, in warehouses and premises. "I recall last year walking through a very empty Covent Garden on the way to a meeting - the only people I met on the way were security officers," she says. The figures for dead male security guards from March to December were even worse: 101 per 100,000 men, against 31 deaths per 100,000 for the general population.

One of the risks we've encountered on campus is navigating the boundaries around providing welfare. Previously, on getting a lecturer's late-night email asking if we can unlock a music room so that a stressed-out student can relax with some drum practice, we'd have been happy to help. Now this means co-ordinating with the housekeeping rapid-response team to see if they're able to sanitise the block before and after use.

Right now, every morning after picking up my radio, master keys, bodycam and face mask, I check the database of quarantines in halls of residence. We need to know which level of personal protective equipment to wear should we be called to an argument or a lockout in university accommodation. Even those basic things have become complicated.

One day last year an aggravated mum gatecrashed the campus, desperate to collect belongings from her daughter's room. The girl had returned home just before the first lockdown and had been living out of a rucksack for months. The visitor ban at the time meant that the mum should have been asked to leave the grounds. But seeing how lockdown was impacting both

her and her daughter's welfare, we broke out the wipes and visors and gave them passage.

Outside of nine-to-five, it's security staff who deliver food parcels to anyone on the student residents list who is isolating (even if we couldn't get an online shopping slot ourselves). We don our grocery delivery outfit - visor, sanitiser, plastic apron, gloves - then grab essentials from the refectory freezers.

Gallows humour has always been one of the most important ingredients of my job. You can't talk a stoned student off a scaffold tower and have him insist he's doing an astronomy practical without seeing the funny side.

But sometimes the humour won't shut off. When I was reading the death-stat text to my girlfriend, our six-year-old daughter overheard me joking about my cremation arrangements (specifically, at which point I wanted "Movies" by Alien Ant Farm to play) and asked me if I was really going to die. "Well, everyone dies sometime," I replied. "Being alive forever would be boring." I was stalling for a more comforting answer.

"But will you die of Covid?" she asked.

I showed her how good I was at washing my hands.

"So why will guards die?" she said.

I had to think before I answered that one. Even with scientists and the ONS on the case, I still couldn't give a clear answer. Industry publication *This Week in Facilities Management* speculated that our deaths could be in part due to "encountering conflict when trying to enforce Covid-19 guidelines".

The main conflict we've encountered so far is parties. Students taking health, social care or teaching degrees were allowed to remain on campus during lockdowns. Most of them behaved themselves - you can't get out of bed for a dawn placement if you've been up until 4am crushing empty beer cans against your forehead. But a few hosted some very raucous "study bubbles". Others, more worryingly, saw

'Our six-year-old overheard me joking about my cremation arrangements and asked me if I was really going to die'



their mental health suffer for following the rules and going without company.

It's a good job I come from a household that's well trained to spot danger signs. My girlfriend is a key worker in a school for kids with special educational needs; some of them have been dealt a grim hand. She often comes home with deeper bruises than me because social distancing goes out the window when you're trying to stop an unsettled child from attacking his classmates. Luckily, we've developed a couple's coping strategy. When you get in from work, you've got 10 minutes to get it off your chest. Whoever's less bruised makes the tea.

If a year on the frontline of a pandemic has taught me anything, it's about the importance of setting examples - specifically, who we let set examples. I was as browned off as the rest of the country when Dominic Cummings, then chief adviser to prime minister Boris Johnson, refused to apologise in May 2020 for having broken lockdown with a jaunt in his car. Lockdown seemed to fall apart after that. Within days, we were seeing more people on the campus CCTV.

I'm supposed to set an example in my job. In future, I'll make sure I take my cues less from people who've got the power to dodge accountability and more from my fellow suckers left to clean up the mess. Covid has made my responsibilities as a guard even clearer.

Maybe our increased duties over the pandemic will make others see us differently. This March, there were ugly scenes when security at Chelmsford Tesco were overwhelmed by a maskless shopping spree. I hope regard for key workers improves, especially as lockdown restrictions are lifted, but also that frontline staff go back to being less visible, rather than punchbags for people's frustrations.

It's summer now, but I can feel September approaching: virtual open days are taking place and our estates team is carrying out repairs ahead of student arrivals. If I'm on duty come moving-in day, I'd love to chat with the freshers and tell

them that, despite us looking like armour-plated traffic wardens, we are here to look after them.

One lesson we can all take from a year of stop-start lockdowns is that humans are fast adaptors. If someone had told me two years ago that I couldn't get my shopping without a bikini on my face, I'd have assumed it was a student union SHAG Week party gone wrong. (That's Sexual Health Awareness and Guidance.) But as I escort another technician into our medical training block, or carry a box of visors for lecturers, I'm confident we can get through Covid. It's not like we haven't faced deadly viruses before.

"On average, there have been three pandemics per century for the last five hundred years," says Laura Spinney, author of *Pale Rider: The Spanish Flu of 1918 and How it Changed the World*. "The 1918 flu killed many more people than the first world war, but that wasn't really known at the time. Most of the pandemics through history have been utterly forgettable; Covid-19 is the first to happen after the internet revolution.

"There won't be one morning when we wake up and think, 'Hooray! It's over!'" says Spinney. "But life will gradually shuffle back to something approaching normality."

I'm not sure what normality might look like, but there's a mantra I've been using whenever I wake up low on energy: glass half full. Despite the apparent death risk and the students who set off fire alarms and having to wear a mask for 13 hours a day, I really enjoy my job.

I get to help people. I get a selection of torches to play with. And I'm not back on a building site trying to share a portaloos with three hungover Scousers. In those days, I'd curse the fact my brain couldn't handle Nasa's entry requirements and I couldn't escape into deep space.

Now when I'm surrounded by a hundred hangovers after shots-for-a-pound night, space is just a memory. Covid has taught me what I've long suspected: we're all here to look out for each other and the human touch goes a long way. Just don't forget to pick up your mask first and keep the windows open. **FT**



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FT Weekend Magazine

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Mental health has rarely been as high on the collective agenda as it is today. That is why our State of Mind special looks at novel approaches to therapy, education and community



4

Too close for comfort

As gigs, sporting events and festivals return, how will we handle the throng? *Helen Barrett* on crowds and Covid anxiety



GETTY IMAGES

9

Daddy's home

Spending more time with his kids in lockdown, *Joshua Chaffin* turns in his best fathering performance in years

10

Are the kids all right?

Emma Jacobs hears from the schools and psychologists finding creative ways to help children cope with the pressures of the pandemic



14

All together now

Communal living provides the connection that many of us have been missing over the past months. *Claire Bushey* looks at the case for co-housing



Cover illustration by Luke Best

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Too close for comfort

Helen Barrett on the anxiety of crowds

Crowds were a paradox of the pandemic. Although ordered to stay at home, human beings were still drawn together in tension, outrage and anguish: by Trump in US arenas; by racial injustice for Black Lives Matter; as anti-maskers; as women manhandled by police; as Glaswegians against deportations; as rioters at the Capitol building.

For 15 months we were reminded of the crowd's great strengths – its unity of spirit, its force in numbers – but also its unpredictability, its risk to our health, its threat to our individuality. A crowd is too much humanity. Now, as restrictions slowly lift, we are ambivalent about the great press of others.

“I will be reluctant to join crowds again, at least until the majority of people are vaccinated,” says Brendan McGraw, a chief finance officer whose job meant that he continued to travel throughout the pandemic, spending week after week alone in hotel-room quarantine. “It’s like rationing after the second world war, and how your parents never forgot about it.”

The pandemic has altered our behaviour and may continue to do so long after the immediate viral danger has passed, according to new research. In a survey carried out in February this year, Professor Marcantonio Spada of London South Bank University and Professor Ana Nikcevic of Kingston University found that more than a third of participants “strongly endorsed avoiding going out to public places”, while 54 per cent wanted to stay off public transport.

The researchers have identified what they call “Covid-19 anxiety syndrome” – a fear of the virus that they believe may stop people from returning to crowds when restrictions lift. Spada says the syndrome is “a constellation of forms of coping that could keep people stuck in the fear/anxiety response”, such as avoiding public places and constantly checking news updates, and “may precipitate the development of other mental-health difficulties in the long run, such as clinical health anxiety and agoraphobia”. One in five people they surveyed scored highly on a scale identifying the syndrome.

“This group find it harder to disengage from these threats, which may make a return to normal daily living harder,” says Spada. “Some will get better. But what about the people left behind? What about the young and impressionable?”

As lockdowns lift, it’s rational to feel some anxiety, says Tine Van Bortel, professor of global health at De Montfort University and principal investigator in public health at the University of Cambridge. “But it is a problem when you catastrophise or magnify the threat of the crowd in a way that stops you living your life.”

Some people have no plans to return to the crowd. Van Bortel is among the authors of studies tracking mental health in the pandemic. While ►



The Hajj, the annual Islamic pilgrimage to Mecca in Saudi Arabia, draws as many as three million people

‘All event crowds see themselves as one. They are together for the same purpose’

John Drury, Sussex university

◀ the crisis has been traumatic for many, she says, “a good cross-section of society in the right living conditions have found it beneficial. We see clear groups, people who had social anxiety before the pandemic, who have been validated to stay at home. They have found a much better way to work and live – and they want to keep it.”

Van Bortel describes how, during her research, she interviewed people who were determined never to return to the crowd: “Expensive commutes, packed into trains, body-to-body on hot summer days, are extremely unpleasant.” Some women mentioned problems with groping on busy trains. “They absolutely do not want to go back to that.”

Annabel Standen is one of those people for whom crowdless Covid has been a relief: “I know others have found it difficult. And it can be lonely. But it has taken away so much anxiety.”

The 21-year-old has a form of social anxiety disorder. She describes a phobia about the outside world so overwhelming that she avoids cinemas and theatres – the gatherings that make life pleasurable for most. And she chose her far-flung university because “I like the mountains and the sea. It’s not crowded here.” Standen says she will venture out again, but she will have someone with her, and will use “gradual exposure” therapy as restrictions lift.

Standen’s dread of hordes is extreme (she is receiving therapy). But her words amplify what many of us find uncomfortable about crowds.

Dealing with anxiety

Tine Van Bortel of the University of Cambridge says that we should not “over-medicalise” anxiety about returning to the busy world: “It is a very normal, healthy response to change, especially after a long period. Initial stress can even be a motivating force,” she says. “It is only a

problem when it becomes a cognitive distortion.”

“Brain soothing” can help with less serious, low-level anxiety. “These [techniques] are scientifically proven to reduce stress,” Van Bortel adds. “Nothing complex, just focus on your breathing and slowing it down, anywhere at any time.” Notice if

you start to personalise your anxiety, she says, with thoughts such as “it is only me this is happening to”. That may be a signal to seek help from a GP.

Mind, the UK mental health charity, says anxiety symptoms may include a sense of dread, a faster heartbeat, feeling dizzy or

having panic attacks: “If you notice changes to your thoughts, feelings and behaviours that last longer than two weeks, keep returning and are affecting your daily life, speak to someone you trust. Your GP should be able to talk you through support,” the charity says.

Think of Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar*, and how easily Mark Antony turns a crowd into a mob with his rhetoric. In King Vidor’s 1928 silent film *The Crowd*, New York’s throng becomes a horrifying metaphor for the forces of capitalism.

But not all crowds are the same. “There is an important distinction between a crowd at a railway station compared with a crowd at a gig or a football match,” says John Drury, a professor of social psychology at the University of Sussex specialising in collective behaviour. “We enjoy being in one type, and we don’t enjoy the other.”

The crowd we tend to like, of course, is the psychological kind – full of people like us, such as the demonstrations that have punctuated the pandemic. “All event crowds see themselves as one. They are together for the same purpose,” says Drury. Sometimes they take part in what Barbara Ehrenreich, in her 2006 book *Dancing in the Streets*, calls “ecstatic rituals”. But in doing so, they can be complacent: fine in normal circumstances, less so when a virus is still circulating.

The crowd we tend not to like, the “physical” kind, is made up of people indifferent to our intentions, as in the morning commute. But while we may think of public transport crowds as a viral risk, from a behavioural science point of view, a festival or street protest may be just as risky, if not riskier. “People tend to do things like sharing drinks, they are not so bothered about personal space and they move together,” says Drury. “In psychological crowds, you see others as an extended self. Per-

sonal space only counts for other people, those who you do not see as an extended self.”

It may be helpful, he says, to think about the function of crowds. Some are literal manifestations of institutions – cultural, religious, even a nation. Others make history as the nucleus of social change. Others still are for pure enjoyment, such as crowds at concerts.

Crowd safety is the science that seeks to protect us, though even the most tightly managed crowds can get out of control. One of the largest psychological crowds is the Hajj, the annual pilgrimage by up to three million Muslims to Mecca in Saudi Arabia (cancelled for foreign pilgrims in 2020 but scheduled for July 17-22 this year). The throng is spectacular, but it has a long history of fatal crushes, most recently in 2015, when according to Associated Press nearly 2,500 people were killed, though that figure is disputed.

Paul Townsend today advises Mecca’s authorities. He is director of Crowd Dynamics, a consultancy based in the UK that models how mass gatherings at music festivals, sport stadiums and street events may behave. The Hajj is the most intricate project he works on. He describes it as “the most complicated crowd in the world, in terms of the largest number of people in one place trying to do the same thing at the same time”.

Religious crowds are in unison, which means individuals are less guarded, he says. “That means there’s no natural stopping, and areas can get overwhelmed very quickly. So it needs management to prevent that.”

During the pandemic, Townsend worked for UK venues such as concert halls and stadiums on plans for reopening. Some are thinking about offering what he calls a “mixed-crowd experience”, where people pay extra for private visits, or visits where they are kept away from the hordes. In other words, VIP access – but more of it, and for more of us.

When the virus passes, the psychological crowd will return. But we may choose to stay away from the physical version. Could the era’s legacy be the ultimate luxury: the chance to go our own way? **FT**

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Helen Barrett is deputy editor of FT Wealth magazine

Advertisement Feature



COMMITTED TO YOUR
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WEEKEND WELLNESS

Maximising the benefits of downtime
for the whole family's mental health

Being busy can feel like a badge of honour. So many of us define ourselves by our work lives that we fall victim to overdoing, overworking and overproducing. But there are plenty of good reasons to give your brain a break. We know that rest and relaxation can improve your mood and increase your ability to concentrate. And when you don't give your mind a chance to pause and recuperate, you may also experience the mental and physical health problems that go hand-in-hand with fatigue, stress or even burnout.

It's not just for us that downtime is important, however – but our families too. The pandemic has been tough on us all – research from premium health insurer Bupa Global shows that two in three board-level executives (68%) identified symptoms of mental ill-health in their partner or children in 2020ⁱ. Positively though, many are now more aware of their family's emotional needs and are taking steps to combat signs of ill health.

This means protecting non-work time and ensuring the whole family has time to relax, recharge and refresh at the weekend. So here are our top tips to protect family time and make the most of it.

Make more of family time

While taking time to plan your weekend may not be everyone's inclination, according to Dr Pablo Vandenabeele, Clinical Director for Mental Health at Bupa Global, it's a good way to bond and make sure everything gets done – including the all-important downtime. "Creating a to-do list helps families decide together what needs to get done and how best to use the time they have left", he explains.

Get lost in the moment

It can be difficult to switch off from work stress, deadlines and chores at the weekend, but that doesn't mean you can't enjoy the time you are spending together. Dr Vandenabeele suggests creating small but meaningful routines and making a conscious



effort to really enjoy being in the moment together: "pay attention to those smaller moments, like cooking together, or a movie night and catching up on the children's latest news".

Have fun getting creative

Time spent on something creative has been linked with an increase in positive emotions and a decrease in negative emotionsⁱⁱ. So Dr Vandenabeele recommends trying something that all the family can enjoy, such as baking or painting, for example.

Great adventures in the great outdoors

Fresh air and physical activity are great ways to boost the mental health of the whole family. And with longer days and warmer weather, now is the ideal time to find an activity that suits everyone, whether it's a dog walk, a picnic or a game of tennis.

Accept the things you can't control

We all have high hopes for our weekend time and the time we spend with our families, but if your expectations are too high, you might be creating unnecessary stress. Instead of focusing on what you didn't manage to do, be aware of the positives, like getting enough sleep and eating well.

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i. According to Bupa Global's Executive Wellbeing Index, conducted by Opinium Research in July and August 2020 among 100 high net worth individuals from the UK defined as those with over £1 million (or market currency equivalent) in annual salary and investable assets. ii. <https://www.bupa.co.uk/newsroom/ourviews/burnout>

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Daddy's home

The pandemic gave many fathers more time with their children. *Joshua Chaffin* has – mostly – relished the change. Illustration by *Luke Best*



have felt closer to their children since lockdown. Many reported more meaningful conversations with their kids, who had taken a greater interest in their lives in turn.

As the pandemic eases and companies begin to usher staff back to work, I wonder whether this will have been but a brief golden period before we revert to past routines or whether some of the changes in how families work and live will last.

Fatherhood has never been a static role. My own was of the *Mad Men* era. As a child, I understood his duty as going away – for work, for meetings, for squash, for business trips or to chop wood. He would come home to be swarmed by hugs. Later, when my mother went back to work, he would take us to a local tavern for dinner, still wearing his suit and tie. It is to him I owe my enduring love of eating at a bar.

Times have changed. By 2016, fathers were performing three times as much childcare as their 1965 counterparts, according to the Pew Research Center, and were as likely as mothers to describe parenting as central to their identity.

Looking back on my pre-Covid parenting, I would describe myself as a showboat dad: the smug variety who seeks adoration for turning up at public events such as sports day or taking the kids for an ice cream on Saturday. What an amazing dad! Behind the scenes, my wife handled much of the parental dirty work.

That has shifted, somewhat, these past months. As a psychologist, her schedule is less flexible than mine. Now, when the kids intrude in the middle of the workday due to an emergency – like wanting a snack – it usually falls on me to react.

Other dads I've polled have suggested it would be best for them and their kids to have some separation. But I'm (mostly) grateful for the extra time. One of my favourite memories of this anxious year will have been lunch, when, like a ship's crew, we each abandon the discrete compartments we've been working or studying (or online shopping) in and congregate in the galley for a shared meal. (There were also days when I felt trapped with my family in a submarine stranded at the bottom of the ocean.)

I think the kids have enjoyed the extra fathering and the opportunity to know their dad better. My daughter punches me in the groin when I least expect it, which is her way of expressing love. Her older brother, meanwhile, recently volunteered that he did not feel he really knew me before the pandemic, when I was frequently running to and from the train in a suit.

"I thought you were some kind of corrupt business guy," he told me. I'm not sure what would have given him that impression. But, after a year of high-level fathering, he now knows better. I think. **FT**

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Joshua Chaffin is the FT's New York correspondent

don't know why but I once told my young son that I had won the Father of the Year award for the London neighbourhood where we were then living. He actually believed me and so was disappointed years later when he brought it up and I was obliged to correct the record.

If there were such an award, this year I would surely be in contention. Over the past 12 months or so I have turned in the best fathering performance of my 11-year career. I have been present for virtually every meal, many of which I have cooked. I have run baths, effected tuck-ins and shuttled our two kids to their bevy of after-school enrichments, including chess, fencing, basketball, taekwondo and skateboarding lessons. I have even managed my son's travel soccer team, causing us to forfeit only one match due to my administrative shortcomings.

I am fathering so well I am nearly mothering. That is, I am now approaching the contributions my wife has made over the years without hope of any sort of a medal.

All this is due to the pandemic, of course. It has magically restored hours to my day that were once devoted to a desultory commute. Some of that recovered time has been squandered on the rescue dog we adopted. (He requires about 14 hours of walks each day.) Still, there is plenty left over for the kids.

It is not just time. The pandemic has also provided a window into my kids' previously opaque lives. In the Before Times, I would inquire about

'I am fathering so well I am nearly mothering. That is, I am now approaching the contributions my wife has made over the years'

their school day, often just as I was kissing them good night. "Fine," they would report. Now, in real time, I overhear my eight-year-old daughter singing with her classmates over Zoom and repeating Mandarin phrases. The house rumbles when my son has a remote gym class.

Fathers of my acquaintance are spending more time than ever with their children, though still not shouldering as much of the household burden as women, according to the UK's Office for National Statistics. Harvard's Graduate School of Education found that 68 per cent of the fathers it surveyed



Are the kids all right?

Emma Jacobs hears from the schools and psychologists finding creative ways to help children cope with the pressures of the pandemic. Illustrations by Luke Best

When Leah* heard that the UK would lock down, shutting her south London school indefinitely, she spun through a range of emotions. The 15-year-old thought at first that she'd be happy to stay home, she says, but instead "I felt kind of sick. I just had weird feelings."

Leah's home life was stable: both parents were employed and no one close to her fell ill. "I didn't feel anxious about the pandemic," she says. But she did at times feel sad, suffer mood swings and ruminate over circular thoughts in her bedroom.

Without school to structure her time, she kept strange hours, spreading her work from morning until midnight. It could be stressful trying to catch the nuances of lessons over Zoom and she worried about falling behind. "January was the worst lockdown," she says on a video call. "You forget what normal life is actually like."

Instagram messaging was her main method of communication with friends. But if they didn't respond right away she would start to feel paranoid. "You can see when people are active. It got to me.

I kept checking, expecting [friends] to answer." In June last year, she emailed her form teacher to say that she was finding things hard. In co-ordination with one of her parents, the school set up frequent calls with staff to advise her on boundaries and coping with lockdown, as well as on exercise, diet and sleep. Leah now winces with embarrassment as she recounts fretting over Instagram likes.

Educators and researchers say this kind of intervention is the best way to keep children and teenagers from spiralling. It is too early to tell what the long-term impact of the pandemic on mental health will be, but there are fears that, without help, for the young in particular it will be profound.

A study by the Royal College of Psychiatrists found that 28 per cent more children and young people were referred to mental-health services in England between April and December 2020 than in the same period in 2019. Eighteen per cent more needed urgent care, which includes assessments about whether they need to be "sectioned" under the 1983 Mental Health Act.

But many schools and charities are implementing creative, evidence-based methods that aim to

shield children from the worst effects of the past year. Young people are resilient and most will "bounce back with a good routine with school and family support", says Lesley French, a psychologist who works at the Anna Freud Centre, a mental-health charity for children based in north London.

For many children and young people, their mood worsened as the pandemic went on. The London-based YoungMinds charity surveyed people aged 13-25 who had a history of mental-health needs; 75 per cent of them found the most recent lockdown harder to cope with than previous ones. Children in families going through financial hardship suffered especially. And for children experiencing abuse and domestic violence, there was no escape.

Among younger children, teachers have observed delayed language development. Some pupils find it difficult to adjust to seeing so many people at school after a long time at home. Michela Biseo, deputy head of the early years programme at the Anna Freud Centre, says babies she has encountered at her sessions "react quite warily" to strangers. ▶

'January was the worst lockdown. You forget what normal life is actually like'

Leah, age 15

'They have been through an incredibly difficult time. We shouldn't assume they will simply bounce back'

Wendy Robinson, Childline

◀ The pandemic may have also exacerbated existing mental-health problems, says Bernadka Dubicka, outgoing chair of the child and adolescent faculty at the Royal College of Psychiatrists. Lockdown and the NHS's switch to emergency Covid mode often meant delays in screenings and treatment. "The general rule is that the sooner you can provide help, the less likely it is to be chronic and [the] quicker the recovery," she says. Lockdowns meant that children were coming in when they were already in crisis.

It would be misleading, though, to label an entire generation as scarred. The range of experiences has been vast and diverse. Some children who usually find school stressful thrived, while others relished the chance to spend time with their families and the freedom to explore their own interests. That children's mental health and minds are still developing is both an opportunity and a risk, says French.

It helps that many schools in the UK have reacted dynamically and creatively to the crisis. A number have launched initiatives including counselling and peer support, increased play time and, in some cases, shorter lessons.

In the depths of lockdown it was difficult to identify children who were struggling without seeing them in person, says Nicola Noble, co-head teacher at Surrey Square Primary School in south London. But the school had a solution: tracking kids' anxiety and wellbeing levels through online surveys and phone calls. "We were able to [find out] whether they were worried about mummy being upset, or daddy's lost his job. You had children who presented as being fine... It was through the data collection that we could [see] they weren't fine." In one case, staff members helped move a single mother and her family out of their rat-infested flat.

The King's Cross Academy, a primary school in north London, increased the hours of Dafina Hadri-Ljusta, its part-time emotional literacy support assistant, to five days a week. If a child is struggling, they are referred for six to eight sessions or can drop in. Speaking from a small, toy-strewn room, Hadri-Ljusta demonstrates how she uses a mood lamp to help young children express feelings. They press red for anger, yellow or green for happiness and blue for sadness: "Sometimes when they feel a bit confused, or mixed-up emotions, they press the flash button, and then they have all the colours."

Meanwhile, the Anna Freud Centre itself is piloting TriSpace, a programme that offers counselling sessions not only to children but also to parents and teachers - both for their own mental health and to talk through worries they have about children. Young people are offered cognitive behavioural therapy to deal with anxiety and low mood, and there is peer support training for older children as well, so the whole community is better equipped.

One of the places where TriSpace is being tested is Keyham Lodge in Leicester, a small state school that caters to children between 11 and 16 with emotional and social needs. Rahi Popat, a pastoral care

officer at the school, says he is impressed with the programme's focus on wellbeing. "It's so easy to say, 'Get English and maths done.' Yes, but our children are coming to terms with a different life."

Yet such initiatives are far from uniform, and not all schools have been sympathetic. Mind, the charity, has heard from young people who were struggling with their mental health and felt pressured by school to focus on academic work, which exacerbated their problems and triggered bad behaviour. Teachers reacted punitively: one pupil spoke of being put into isolation for a week after stealing a scalpel so they could self-harm. Another was sent into isolation for a panic attack.

This spring, the government pledged to boost funding for children's mental health. The Department of Health and Social Care has earmarked £79m to expand the number of mental-health support teams in schools and colleges in England from 59 in March 2020 to 400 by 2023, as well as community services such as therapy. The education department recently announced £17m to help train senior staff at 7,800 schools in mental health.

While the extra money is welcomed by mental-health providers and educators, the Children's Commissioner for England reported that these services had been historically underfunded. Only one in four children and young people needing help could access it, they found, with lengthy waiting lists and uneven services across the country. Geoff Barton, general secretary of the Association of School and College Leaders, has said the money comes after "years of government underfunding of schools and colleges, which has taken its toll on their capacity to provide pastoral support". Noble agrees, saying the money is not "a substantial investment considering the number of school pupils".

Getting this right is key to children's futures, says Carrie Senior, the principal of Harris Girls' Academy East Dulwich in south London. During the pandemic, she contacted 300 children who were living in difficult family circumstances or who had previous mental-health concerns. "It's so important that schools [attend to] mental health. It's difficult for a child to get a good education if they're not in a good place to learn."

For parents concerned about their children, Wendy Robinson, service head of Childline, the counselling service run by charity NSPCC, advises patience and support. "Young people are resilient but they have also been through an incredibly difficult time. We shouldn't assume they will simply bounce back."

Leah is now preparing to finish Year 10. With a bit of help from school and her parents, she says that over the past 12 months she has developed some useful life skills that help her to manage her worries. "[I've] learnt to be a bit more independent," she says shyly. **FT**

* Not her real name.

Emma Jacobs is the FT's work and careers writer



Jean Dubuffet

Brutal Beauty

17 May – 22 Aug

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Jean Dubuffet, *The Extravagant One* (Enfance), July 1954, Private Collection, © ADAGP, Paris and DACS, London 2021. Photograph by Joseph Coscia Jr. courtesy Pace Gallery



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54

All together now

Americans have long been intrigued by alternative communities, from hippie utopias to seniors' co-ops. *Claire Bushey* investigates the future of an ideal



Above: residents at Twin Oaks Community, an ecovillage in Virginia that is home to about 100 people

When Alice Alexander describes how she feels to have weathered the pandemic in communal housing, the gratitude rings out in her voice: she feels lucky, she says.

Covid-19 left many Americans feeling isolated and anxious about their health, but Alexander, 63, had her community to rely on - Durham Central Park Cohousing, a development in North Carolina that is home to 36 people in 24 condominiums. Co-housing is a type of "intentional community", where residents live in private homes but choose to share public spaces and activities, such as meals.

"As you get older, you realise more and more how you need community," says Alexander, who co-founded the development in 2014. "We are not meant to be isolated beings. We are meant to be in social groups. Covid has underscored that we cannot survive alone."

When the pandemic hit, Durham Central Park's care team, usually tasked with looking after older residents post-surgery, asked the doctors and nurse already living in the community to map out safety protocols for mask-wearing and handwashing. If someone fell ill with Covid-19, the others checked on them until they recovered. And, after a short hiatus, residents resumed a socially distant version of their daily happy hour on the rooftop terrace.

The isolation imposed by the coronavirus pandemic has unleashed another pandemic, more insidious - one of loneliness, mental illness and eroded wellbeing. Between August 2020 and February 2021, the number of Americans saying they had experienced symptoms of anxiety or depression in the previous week increased from 36 per cent to 42 per cent, according to the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

While many people have coped by leaning heavily on family in the past year, some - through choice or circumstance - have turned in other directions, finding solace in relationships outside the ties of blood and marriage. Alternative community, broadly defined, has sustained them: from housemates, co-housing and people living in cooperatives to religious congregations and singles who formed Covid bubbles.

Communal living has a long history in the US. In 1663, Mennonites fleeing religious persecution in Europe founded in Delaware what was probably the country's first non-indigenous intentional community. In the 19th century, reformers seeking to counter the social ills of industrialisation started utopian communities. Hippies in the 1960s and 1970s established communes partly as a reaction to the atomisation represented by single-family homes in far-flung suburbs.

The end of the Vietnam war and economic shocks of the 1970s, among other things, led to the decline of many communes, though not all. (Twin

Oaks in Virginia celebrated its 50th anniversary in 2017.) Communal living became a talking point again in the late 1980s, when architects Kathryn McCamant and Charles Durrett wrote a book popularising the concept of co-housing after seeing it modelled in Denmark.

Today, intentional communities take many forms. There is co-housing, such as the Durham development, and cooperatives and communes, which typically have higher degrees of shared work, space and resources than co-housing. A 2010 survey found that co-housing residents in the US were usually aged over 40, more likely to be female and skewed whiter, wealthier and better educated than the population on average. Co-living, meanwhile, refers to businesses that operate dorm-like buildings marketed to young professionals in trendy neighbourhoods, while ecovillages are usually located in rural areas and stress sustainability.

Statistics on communal living in the US are spotty. But Heidi Berggren, a professor at the University of Massachusetts-Dartmouth who is affiliated with the Cohousing Research Network, says there were about 3,000 designated co-housing communities across the country in 2018.

Research shows that social isolation and loneliness are devastating for physical and mental health, says Elizabeth Markle, a professor of community mental health at California Institute of Integral Studies. Moreover, the pressures of contemporary life, including high housing and childcare costs, make it challenging for many nuclear families to meet social, financial and logistical needs. "We are such social creatures," she says. "Literally, our neurobiology is regulated by attachment relationships... Community, done well, has the power to create some of the village or tribe experience that I think potentiates human wellbeing more effectively."

Grace Kim, an architect whose 2017 TED talk advocating co-housing as an antidote to loneliness has had more than 2.5 million views, says the American mythology of rugged individualism has impeded the country's wider embrace of communal living. However, she says that she has seen an increased interest in co-housing as the pandemic has prompted a re-evaluation of connection.

"Friends are like, 'I totally get now why community is important,'" says Kim, who herself lives in Capitol Hill Urban Cohousing, a community she co-founded in Seattle. "It's easier for them to understand why these choices might make more sense for some folks."

Hardship tends to emphasise the importance of support structures outside intimate relationships and family. Alan O'Hashi, 68, board president of the Cohousing Association of the United States, lives in Silver Sage Village Cohousing in Boulder, Colorado. He says he was "dragged" into co-housing

'We are not meant to be isolated beings... Covid has underscored that we cannot survive alone'

Alice Alexander, Durham
Central Park Cohousing

by a partner who found it appealing. He was not converted until an illness hospitalised him for six weeks in 2013. "That's when I figured out what co-housing really was, which was the neighbourly support," he says. "All of a sudden, I came home from the hospital and people were bringing by casseroles and coming by and pounding on the door. I've been a big disciple of it ever since."

When the pandemic took hold, Silver Sage abandoned face-to-face meetings and its biweekly shared meals, but the community adjusted. They purchased patio heaters so they could gather outside to eat food that households had prepared individually. While many people saw their relationships with anyone other than family and close friends vanish during the past 15 months, O'Hashi says, "Here they were different, but they were never missing."

In addition to designed communities, communal housing can be informal - groups of people choosing to live together to share emotional, financial or logistical burdens. Vince Brackett, 35, and his wife Keziah are raising their three children in a home shared with two housemates. Brackett is the pastor of Brown Line Church, a non-denominational Christian church in Chicago with progressive values.

The family has lived with housemates for nearly a decade now, and Brackett says that having two other adults around during the pandemic "has been one of the things we've been most personally grateful for... The idea of more than one person saying, 'How was your day?' at the end of the day was really wonderful."

The benefits were ineffable but real. The group would play cards or watch television together in the evenings. It was a relief to have others around to process the waves of emotion generated by the crisis, says Angela Rak, 33, an actor and teaching artist who has lived with the family for six years. It was good too, she says, to live with children - to ignore the state of the world and sometimes just play Pokémon. This living arrangement was critical to her mental and emotional health, Rak says. "I've seen a lot more emotional exhaustion from my friends who are living by themselves in studio apartments." **FT**

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Claire Bushey is the FT's Chicago correspondent



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Spice of life

In India, masala chai welcomes guests, nurtures gossip and seals deals. *Anjali Raval* explores the elixir's history and recreates a forgotten family recipe.

Illustrations by *Priya Sundram*

In most Indian households, the day starts after bathing, praying and breakfast. But for me, even when I was younger and religious, chai has always come before God. It is not just a cup of tea or a caffeine hit. Each morning, the terracotta drink cures me of the previous day and sets me up for the next. It is a healing tonic that relieves and rejuvenates.

In its simplest form, masala chai is made with strong black tea leaves, milk and often water, simmered with sugar and spices such as ginger, cinnamon, cloves, nutmeg and black pepper. The aromas that fill the air within minutes of heating up the saucepan have an uplifting effect long before the sweet, spicy elixir touches the lips. These joyful sensations are compounded only when, after a sip or two, I take a bite of something savoury – hot buttered toast, a samosa or *fafda gathia*, a crispy chickpea-flour snack from Gujarat.

As with all staples of the Indian subcontinent, the spice mix (the chai masala) and the method of preparation vary according to region, family and the individual making the brew. Some boil ►



◀ water then add the tea leaves and spices before including the milk and sugar (as the restaurant Dishoom recommends), while others have it bubbling all in one go. Some favour using whole spices, while others - my family included - prefer a blend of toasted and then ground spices. "The key is to get the balance of flavours just right, so that one spice doesn't overpower the other," says tea historian Jane Pettigrew. "It all has to be in harmony."

Recipes for these blends are a source of pride and often closely guarded secrets. My friend Krish's 93-year-old grandmother, who dispatches her famed spice blend to friends and relatives across continents, won't disclose the formula even to her own children.

Legend has it that the origins of masala chai date back thousands of years to when an ancient king in what is now India sought out a medicinal beverage. The drink he created did not include tea, but it was full of spices, rich in antioxidants meant to aid digestion, calm the nerves and enhance circulation.

Today, the drink - laden with tea, milk and sugar - is omnipresent in India. Chai accompanies a neighbourly gossip or heady political discussion. It is how guests are welcomed into a home and how business deals are sealed. Roadside and train station chai wallahs have pots constantly bubbling away, serving espresso-style pick-me-up shots in glass tumblers or clay kulhars throughout the day.

Yet the modern history of India's favourite drink is a dark tale. The British developed a taste for Chinese tea from the 1650s onwards but became increasingly unwilling to pay for it. Then, in the early 1800s, a wandering Briton discovered tea growing wild in the north-eastern state of Assam. India's tea industry was born.

Chai wallahs have pots constantly bubbling away, serving espresso-style pick-me-up shots throughout the day

The local population laboured in appalling conditions to produce the tea but never drank it themselves or reaped the financial rewards, says Shashi Tharoor, author of *Inglorious Empire*, a book about the British in India. It was only when demand in England dropped during the Great Depression of the 1930s that the British encouraged Indians to drink tea. "Stuck with vast quantities of unsold tea, they had no choice but to target the Indian market, after ignoring the natives for a century," he says. "Economics drove tea consumption."

Local vendors went on to create their own takes on the British cup - which was a mix of tea, milk and of course sugar, itself a product of exploitation and the plantation economy. The addition of spices, including ginger, cardamom and nutmeg, soon became commonplace.

Subcultures have emerged, as have regional concoctions. In south India, a type of basil called tulsi is added; in Punjab, they favour green cardamom; in Kashmir, green tea is preferred as a base; and in Sikkim, they have a "butter" tea. Other variations include fennel, star anise, mint or saffron.

India consumed about 80 per cent of its 2019 tea production of 1.4 million tonnes. But the industry, which is the second largest in the world after China's by output, is under acute stress. Coronavirus-related lockdowns dramatically lowered production over the past year. Meanwhile, workers in Assam, which produces half the country's supply, have been on strike to protest poor conditions.

In other parts of the country, such as the south, estates have slashed their workforces over the years, paid higher wages and mechanised the production process. But in Assam they are still dealing with a legacy of indentured labour, often migrants who were brought over to work in the tea gardens and were compensated with housing but little else.



“For owners, margins are wafer-thin,” says Prabhat Bezboruah, chairman of the Tea Board of India. “In Assam we have a large workforce that we obviously can’t get rid of, despite 70 per cent of the people that are supported by the tea estates in terms of housing and things not actually working in the industry. So they are paid badly, their work is not valued adequately and it becomes a vicious cycle. This structure is unsustainable.”

Drought has compounded the region’s problems and India’s latest deadly coronavirus outbreak is threatening the tea harvest as infections surge among plantation workers. The sector also has an eye on the impact of climate change and unpredictable weather patterns.

Meanwhile, masala chai has gone global, from the launch of Oregon Chai products in 1994 in the US to the Starbucks chai latte, often laden with vanilla, cinnamon, sweeteners and syrups.

In London, Mayhul Gondhea, co-founder of Pamban Chai & Coffee House, says the company has sought to create an authentic masala chai culture. “The artisan coffee scene has been great, but it all looked the same. Good coffee, shit tea. We wanted it to be on an equal weighting.” To achieve this, the founders looked to their Indian and Sri Lankan origins.

“We use whole spices and staple ingredients to create a complex drink that is beautiful on the palate,” says Gondhea. “No one chai is the same. The main thing is, you have to stay true to the roots.”

As for my family, we went from preparing our own chai masala for decades under the instruction of my chai-loving late grandfather to buying a ready-made blend. So, in search of comfort - particularly after the past year - and a lost history, here is my attempt to recreate a forgotten recipe. **FT**

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Anjali Raval is the FT’s senior energy correspondent

The Raval family recipe

For the blend

You can use pre-prepared ground spices but I prefer to start from the whole spice.

- 7cm-8cm root ginger
- A few cinnamon sticks
- 2 tbs whole cloves
- 2 tbs cardamom seeds
- 2 tbs white peppercorns
- 2 tbs black peppercorns

1 — Take the root ginger and grate coarsely. Roast this in an oven for 15 minutes at 180C (160C fan assist), taking care that it does not burn. Meanwhile, toast the cinnamon sticks in a hot pan until they become fragrant. Repeat with the cloves, cardamom (keeping the husks as they have flavour and aroma), white peppercorns and black peppercorns, toasting each of them separately.

2 — Using a mortar and pestle, spice grinder or clean coffee grinder, turn each spice into a fine powder. Keep each spice separate until you are ready to make the blend.

3 — For the blend, take 1 tsp cinnamon powder, 1 tsp clove powder, 1 tsp nutmeg powder, 3 tsp cardamom powder, 4 tsp ginger powder, 1 tsp white peppercorn powder, ½ tsp black peppercorn powder and mix well. You can alter the quantities of each spice depending on your preferences. Those not partial to a fiery kick can leave out the black pepper. Store the blend in a cool dry place in a glass jar or another airtight container.

For the chai

- 3 tsp Assam tea leaves or 2 strong black tea bags
- ½ cup water
- ½ cup milk
- 1 tsp chai masala
- 2 tsp sugar
- A few slices of fresh root ginger

1 — To make a single cup of masala chai, place the tea leaves (or tea bags), water, milk, chai masala blend, sugar and a few slices of fresh root ginger in a saucepan. Heat it all up together and let it simmer until the colour darkens to a deep rusty brown. Be careful not to let the chai boil over as it foams and bubbles up.

2 — Pour the masala chai through a sieve into a cup, leaving behind the tea and spices, and enjoy.





Rowley Leigh Recipes



Keep 'em peeled

Photographs by Andy Sewell

A friend, more experienced in the vicissitudes of growing vegetables on the Devon and Somerset border than I, uttered the ultimate sacrilege last year. “I’m not sure it’s worth bothering with broad beans,” she declared. “Not really worth all the faff.”

Though shocked, I had an inkling of what she meant. My own crop last year - from 12 plants sown in spring and three months’ watering, weeding and tying them to an elaborate network of bamboo canes - amounted to precisely one and a half dinners’ worth of beans.

This year was going to be different. Another friend told me to plant them in the autumn. Obediently, I sowed 16 Aquadulce seeds and they all germinated perfectly. By December, I had 16 healthy plants about three inches high and I diligently covered them with a film of fleece to protect them from the cold. By January, the fleece had stunted their growth and many had fallen over. They were looking ill, some mortally so. “Take it off,” said the same adviser. “They’ll be fine.” The vicious frosts of February and May finished off the sickliest invalids, plus a few others. I now have seven bean plants, tall and ready to flower, and I can look forward to perhaps one and a half more bean feasts.

Notwithstanding my first sage’s opinion, I shall persevere because broad beans are a holy grail to both gardener and cook. Besides, most things taste better when harvested an hour before, and nothing makes the heart swell with pride quite so much as bringing in a crop of vegetables that you have practically begged to grow.

Some growers claim their broad beans are so tender that they need no peeling. Others even claim they can eat them in their pods. But broad beans should be as big as your thumbnail and in my kitchen peeling is the order of the day. Many young people in the household have learnt this to their cost. In fact, they have quickly become more skilled in the peeling than I am in the growing. But say not the struggle nought availeth. **FT**

More columns at ft.com/leigh

Broad bean and tuna salad

A fresh take on the trattoria classic of beans and tuna. Good quality tuna in olive oil is essential, the oil being used to dress the potatoes. Quartered hard-boiled eggs can be added and the tuna swapped with anchovies to give it a niçoise touch.

Serves 4-6

- 500g new potatoes
- 1 lemon
- 1kg broad beans
- 500g cherry tomatoes
- 6 spring onions
- 250g tinned tuna
- 1 red chilli
- A few sprigs of parsley

1 — Wash and scrub the potatoes and cover with cold water in a saucepan. Add plenty of salt and bring to a simmer. Cook until tender for about 30 minutes and leave to cool (drain and refresh in cold water if pushed for time).

2 — Bring a large pot of water to the boil. Peel the lemon and cut the peel into small dice. Place in a sieve and blanch in the water for 30 seconds, then refresh in cold water. Pod the broad beans and drop them in the boiling water for one minute. Drain and refresh in plenty of cold water. Using thumb and forefinger, pinch off the skins and collect the bright green beans in a bowl.

3 — Cut the cherry tomatoes in half and season the cut flesh with salt, ground black pepper and a drop of red wine vinegar. Slice the spring onions and chilli and pick the parsley leaves.

4 — Slice the potatoes and arrange on the bottom of a serving dish, dressing them with the oil from the can of tuna. Season with salt and pepper. Likewise season the broad beans and pile on top, along with the cherry tomatoes. Break up the tuna on top of the salad and sprinkle over the lemon zest, chilli and spring onions. Douse in plenty of olive oil and a good squeeze of lemon.

Wine

I rarely drink rosé but know how popular it is and even I might succumb on a summer’s day. Otherwise, a light red, slightly cooled, would suit.





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Jancis Robinson Wine

Hot fizz

English Wine Week begins on June 19. It has taken quite a while for the country to embrace its native ferments but English sparkling wine is now fully respectable.

The sommelier at The Dorchester, one of London's grandest hotels, recently chose Rathfinny's 2015 fizz, grown on the South Downs near Brighton, to precede a special dinner. Those attending a pre-season "friends and family" performance of *The Marriage of Figaro* at Opera Holland Park were treated to Gusbourne's 2016 sparkling wine before the overture. And last March, the FT's Rich People's Problems columnist James Max suggested it was time to ditch champagne for English fizz.

A recent blind tasting of far too many English sparkling wines – plus three champagnes, to see if we could distinguish them – proved just how competent those who make wine sparkle in England are. There was no aggressively frothy mousse. The balance of the elements was mostly superb. And yet the wines were also delightfully varied.

The teams responsible for Krug and Dom Pérignon tend to limit the number of champagnes they taste in a single session to 10 and 15 respectively, but my English tasting was organised by an obsessive. I knew that Nick Baker of online retailer The Finest Bubble has an inexhaustible thirst for champagne, but it seems that this applies to any good sparkling wine.

He invited me and fellow Master of Wine Richard Bampfield to help him assess about 90 English sparkling wines because he wants to expand his online range. They have been divided into three sessions and this first one, he assured us, was the most ambitious. We tasted 23 vintage-dated blanc de blancs, followed by 18 vintage-dated rosés, starting at noon, with only Carr's water biscuits and some



As imagined by Leon Edler

Recommended English blanc de blancs vintage fizz

Like champagne, these wines are around 12% or 12.5% alcohol. I scored all of them at least 17 out of 20. High praise.

- Balfour, Victoria Ash 2012-13 MV Kent
- Breaky Bottom, Cuvée Koizumi Yakumo Seyval Blanc 2010 Sussex
- Chapel Down, Kit's Coty 2014 Kent

- Fox & Fox, Inspiration 2014 Sussex
- Jenkyn Place 2015 Hampshire
- Nyetimber 2013 West Sussex and Hampshire
- Ridgeview, Limited Release 2009 Sussex (magnum)
- Squerries 2014 Kent
- Sugrue, Cuvée Boz 2015 Hampshire

The wines are generally sold directly by the wineries via their websites but Wine-searcher.com may list some retailers.

Tasting notes on JancisRobinson.com



oatcakes to blot them up. At the end, as I beat a hasty retreat, he suggested opening more bottles.

Because of the number of wines, I'll confine myself to describing the blanc de blancs from when my taste buds were at their sharpest. I find quite a lot of people are confused by the term blanc de blancs, which simply means a white wine made from pale-skinned grapes, so it could, strictly speaking, be applied to almost all white wines, sparkling or not. But in a sparkling context it is used to distinguish from blanc de noirs, or white wines made from dark-skinned grapes, where the grape skins are kept in contact with the juice for as short a time as possible.

'A recent tasting proved just how competent those who make wine sparkle in England are'

In practice, a blanc de blancs from Champagne or the UK is most likely to be made from Chardonnay, the dominant pale-skinned grape in both places. The biggest surprise of our tasting was how well one exception to this rule performed. Three of the wines were made by veteran English winemaker Peter Hall, who planted Seyval Blanc vines in his Breaky Bottom vineyard near Lewes in 1974. Back then, the imperative was to have grapes that would ripen in much cooler English summers. Seyval Blanc is a hybrid grape specifically bred to ripen early and was the most-planted grape variety in England until the craze for producing sparkling wines in the image of champagne meant Chardonnay and Pinot Noir overtook it.

Seyval table wine can be pretty neutral, but Hall conjures effervescent magic from his vines, perhaps helped by their great age. Each of his cuvées is named ►

◀ in memory of a friend or relative, and the star of our tasting was named after his great-great-uncle Koizumi Yakumo, better known as 19th-century travel writer Lafcadio Hearn, who gave the west early glimpses of Japan. “Definitely not trying to taste like champagne but like a superior English fizz,” I noted. “Lots of energy.”

The magnum of Ridgeview Limited Release 2009 was also excellent, even if it seemed absolutely ready to drink, whereas the Breaky Bottom Cuvée Koizumi Yakumo 2010 tasted as though it still had many years ahead of it. Equally good, and more delicate than the Ridgeview magnum, was Blanc de Blancs 2013 from the pioneer of English champagne taste-alikes, Nyetimber, whose very competent fizz I first had in the 1990s.

Since there have been so many new entrants in the sparkling wine business in the past few years, vintage-dated wines are most common. (Two of the blanc de blancs we tasted were as young as 2017.) The extensive Rathfinny estate was first planted in 2012, so the earliest crop will have been in 2015. Owners Sarah and Mark Driver have not had time to build up the stocks of reserve wines that are used by many champagne blenders to add depth to wines from the most recent vintage – a common problem among British wine producers.

It is notable, then, that the talented winemakers at Nyetimber were particularly keen to launch non-vintage blends once they had

built up reserves of older wines for blending purposes. The first release of their non-vintage Classic Cuvée, based on 2011 blended with ingredients from older vintages, was launched in 2016.

It will be interesting to compare the quality of the vintage-dated wines tasted in this first session with the 17 non-vintage blends lined up for our second session.

The lone blanc de blancs champagne in our blind tasting, a 2012 from grower Yann Alexandre, didn’t stand out from all the English wines and indeed seemed a bit tart and less persistent than many of them. As Bampfield reminded us, average crop levels are much lower in English vineyards than in Champagne, which may well result in more flavourful English wines capable of ageing longer. Certainly one feature of British sparkling wine is its longevity, perhaps boosted by relatively high levels of acidity.

The UK’s comparatively cool climate has traditionally resulted in such tart base wines that winemakers routinely encouraged the conversion of harsh malic acid into softer lactic acid. But in recent balmy years, this so-called malolactic conversion is often unnecessary and avoided.

What is abundantly clear from the collection of wines I tasted is that the UK’s sparkling winemakers have nothing whatsoever to be ashamed of. It doesn’t have to be champagne, folks! **FT**

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More columns at ft.com/jancis-robinson

MY CLASSIC COCKTAIL

BRIAN SILVA, RULES



The Globetrotter

- 60ml Michter’s US*1 Kentucky Straight bourbon
- 10ml Cocchi di Torino vermouth
- 10ml Amaro Averna
- 5ml Bénédictine
- 3 sprays (or drops) Islay malt whisky
- 1 blackberry

1 — Except the malt whisky and blackberry, place all of the ingredients in an iced mixing glass.

2 — Stir to dilute and chill for 20 seconds.

3 — Strain into a large iced rocks glass.

4 — Garnish with a blackberry, and spray (or drop) on the whisky.

Customers come from all over the world to Rules, our bar upstairs from the restaurant, and they often request a bespoke cocktail. This is one I have created especially for FT Globetrotter.

It’s a take on the Manhattan, pairing American bourbon with a couple of Italian aperitifs – perfect for a late-night cocktail after dinner or the theatre. It’s finished with a dash of Islay malt whisky, which gives it a slight smokiness. If you’re making this at home, add a few drops on top of the blackberry garnish. Or better yet, come and order one in person. **FT**

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Brian Silva is head of the bar team at Rules, 34-35 Maiden Lane, London WC2

In a new series from FT Globetrotter, the world’s top bartenders create cocktails that summon the spirit of their cities. See more at ft.com/globetrotter

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CULT WINES

Games



A Round on the Links

by James Walton



All the answers here are linked in some way. Once you've spotted the connection, any you didn't know the first time around should become easier.

1. Alistair Leslie Graham first appeared on television in 1998 – by what name is he better known?

2. In the Bible who succeeded Moses as the leader of the tribes of Israel?

3. Which future *Strictly Come Dancing* (above) judge appeared in the video

for Elton John's "I'm Still Standing"?

4. Which band, particularly big in the 1980s, had three members surnamed Taylor – none of them related?

5. Which English fast bowler of the 1950s was alliteratively nicknamed "Typhoon"?

6. Whose two autobiographies are *I Am Not Spock* (1975) and *I Am Spock* (1995)?

7. In an English Crown Court, who delivers the verdict?

8. The title of which William Faulkner novel is a phrase from *Macbeth* with two definite articles added?

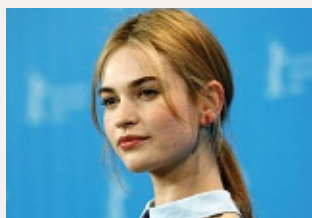
9. Monty the Penguin, Excitable Edgar and Moz the Monster have all appeared in Christmas adverts for which retailer?

10. In 1966, the Chilean government renamed the Pacific island Más a Tierra after which British fictional character?

The Picture Round

by James Walton

Who or what do these pictures add up to?



+

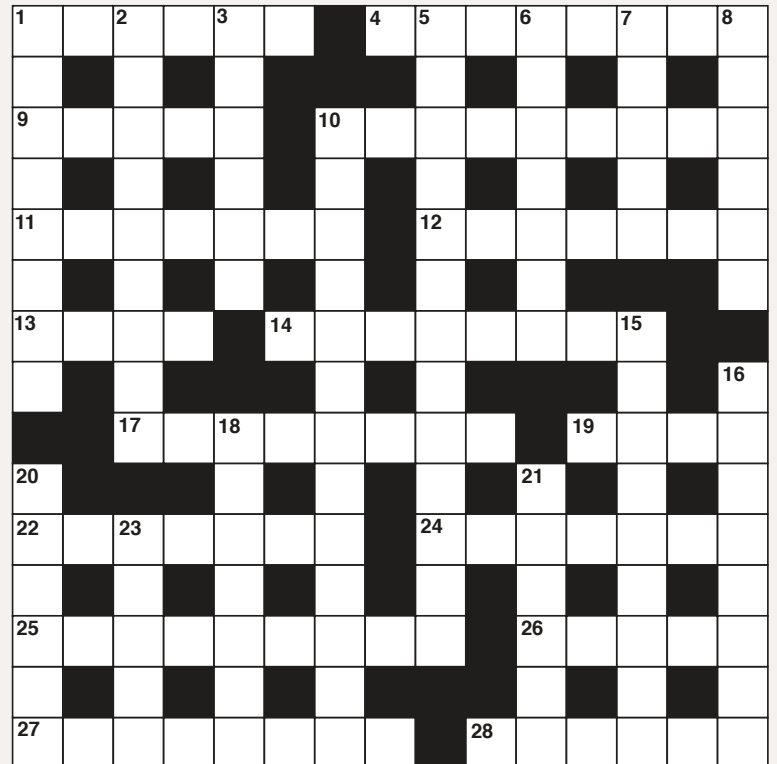


= ?

Answers page 8

The Crossword

No 544. Set by Aldhelm



The Across clues are straightforward, while the Down clues are cryptic.

ACROSS

- 1** Japanese horseradish (6)
- 4** Bog moss (8)
- 9** Tidy the plumage (5)
- 10** Inhale (7, 2)
- 11** Fictional vampire (7)
- 12** Gorge (7)
- 13** Loosen (4)
- 14** Area, surroundings (8)
- 17** Ultimate, final (8)
- 19** Latvian capital (4)
- 22** In theory, as planned (2, 5)
- 24** Dense bushes (7)
- 25** Regular times (9)
- 26** Of the town (5)
- 27** Playful talk (8)
- 28** Court sport (6)

DOWN

- 1** We do it up when renovated and liquidated (5, 3)
- 2** Move desk to go off and run away (9)
- 3** Bilge is sailor's sleeping place with some hesitation (6)
- 5** Mostly the same in print – namely different (13)
- 6** Old style's trad, perhaps, and green (3, 4)
- 7** It's fine embracing English relative (5)
- 8** Very small Greek character hugged by very small child (6)
- 10** Getting ideas for a morning – sit around next to brother (13)
- 15** Bakery treat for awkward 3 – not half (6, 3)

- 16** Sussex town has embraced pop star (8)
- 18** Set out axle pin that needs repairing (7)
- 20** Associate bishop taken in by honourable former pupil (6)
- 21** Appear to judge physique (6)
- 23** Standard editor made cuts (5)

Solution to Crossword No 543





GILLIAN TETT

PARTING SHOT

The joy of being back in the real world

Last week I participated in a ritual that used to feel commonplace but now presents a shock: entering a television studio to give a live interview. The prompt was the meeting of G7 leaders in Cornwall and the fact that I recently published a book, with its inevitable tour.

Pre-Covid, this type of promotion entailed a well-defined set of ceremonies: popping into TV studios, sipping warm wine at launch parties, putting in appearances at bookshops and pontificating on conference platforms. The process required a lot of all-too-physical travel. Now, however, a book tour is largely conducted from the safety – or hell – of a spare room via video platforms, after some hastily applied smudges of make-up. It starts with a few clicks of a mouse and can be accomplished minutes after rolling out of bed. (Depending on the time zone, this occasionally happens.)

Last weekend I was bracing myself for another Skype call, with a morning chat show on America’s MSNBC network. But then I learnt that the studio was opening for “real life”, since Covid-19 rates in Manhattan are now so low and the vaccination rates so high. (This week, New York state hit the 70 per cent vaccination rate and fireworks were set off to celebrate.) Cue a scramble to find vaguely smart trousers in my wardrobe, after a year of worrying only about the state of my shirts.

It was an instructive experience, not least because echoes of this adjustment are being felt by anyone now returning to the office. My first reaction, as I raced to the studio, was to feel startled and irritated by how time-consuming physical experiences can be compared with ones taking place in cyberspace. Going to a TV studio entails travel, navigating security at the entrance and hanging around for hours in a green room.

Worse, it is hard to predict how long such processes will last. A year of lockdown has caused many pieces of once everyday infrastructure to atrophy. Sometimes this makes it easy to breeze through bureaucratic systems. Sometimes capacity has been cut so drastically that there are bottlenecks when actual people start turning up, be that at car-rental services, airline check-ins, coffee shops or office security. (I have experienced terrible queues at all of these recently.)

My second thought, as I hung around the green room, was that time “wasted” in physical space is never entirely unused. Far from it. Just milling about in a social environment generates serendipitous encounters. It also lets us absorb non-verbal signals from others, and gain a sense of peripheral vision that widens our lens on the world.

The issue at stake revolves around customisation – and control. When we go online, we tend to choose our experiences and the boundaries of our vision. But in the real world we have less control over what we might bump into. Other people and other realities intrude.

This is immensely valuable after a year in which we have been cooped up, not just in a physical or social sense, in our homes and friendship groups, but also, all too often, in a mental sense, only watching the people and events on our screens.

At MSNBC, for example, I encountered someone I had never met before, rightwing political commentator Max Boot. Better still, in 2018 he wrote a book on a topic I knew nothing about (and did not even realise I knew nothing about): the life of Edward Lansdale, the 20th-century US military and intelligence leader. After spending time

‘In the real world we have less control over what we might bump into. Other people and other realities intrude’

in that green room, I am now a little less ignorant about this corner of American history.

That encounter has shown me what I am missing by not doing physical book tours: chance remarks in a crowd, people telling you why you are wrong (which they do not often do on Zoom) and an opportunity to observe the body language in an audience to see if people are bored by your ideas. Physical encounters are the necessary counterpoint to being trapped in a room with your thoughts – the normal state for authors, even without a lockdown.

Of course, I should have known all this before I ended up on that talk-show sofa, since my book explains what we need to know about being human in a digital age. It also lays out, with reference to Wall Street, how deeply modern work relies on the lateral vision we have been forced to abandon in the past year. The reason why offices are valuable is not because they uphold formal processes at work but what social scientists sometimes describe as “incidental information exchange” (swapping ideas between teams) and “sense-making” (navigating the world through shared knowledge and experience, including non-verbal cues).

But my brain, like everyone else’s, has a tremendous capacity to self-deceive and forget. The act of returning to the office – or TV studio – still creates a new set of surprises, irrespective of what my brain knows.

And that, perhaps, is the most important lesson of all: physical encounters enable us to collide with the unexpected. That might not be “efficient” compared with digital work. Nor is it probably what most office workers want to experience each day. But these collisions are part of the joy of life. **FT**

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