

MARCH 20/21 2021

FT Weekend Magazine

Spring

A food & drink special



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FT Weekend Magazine

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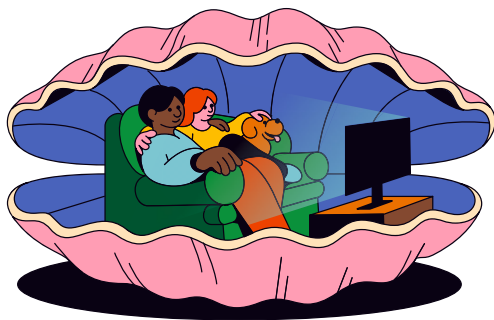




SIMON KUPER

OPENING SHOT

Truth is, many of us have had a good pandemic



Last Saturday, I got coffee outside with a friend whom I'd barely seen all pandemic. Straight after bumping elbows, he proudly took out his phone to show me his latest medical tests: his bad cholesterol had plummeted because he had stopped eating out. He was happy not socialising. Invited to two illegal dinner parties the previous night, he had told each host that he couldn't come because he was going to the other gathering. He then sat at home and watched Netflix. We enjoyed seeing each other, but in less than an hour we were both done, made our excuses and each retreated home to blessed solitude.

The focus during the pandemic has rightly been on people who have suffered: the dead, the bereaved, the lonely, the depressed, the newly unemployed, the impoverished, women beaten by partners, parents stuck in endless home-school and the young watching their youth tick away unused. But there's a guilty truth that rarely dares speak its name: many of us became happier during the pandemic. Now, as vaccines promise an eventual return to normal life, we aren't sure we want it.

Ipsos's annual Global Happiness survey, which polled 20,000 adults in 27 countries last July and August, came up with an intriguing finding: 63 per cent said they were happy, just one percentage point down on 2019. This was around the usual yearly decline: the percentage claiming to be happy fell 14 points globally between 2011 and 2020, with particularly steep drops in Mexico, Turkey, South Africa, Argentina, Spain and India. Last year's loss of the public sphere didn't seem crucial, because the most-cited sources of happiness were private ones: "my health/physical wellbeing", "my relationship with my partner/spouse" and "my children".

Similarly, Meike Bartels, professor of genetics and wellbeing at VU Amsterdam, compared survey data of 5,000 people pre-pandemic with about 18,000 afterwards and found a sizeable minority, about one person in five, reporting "increased levels of happiness, optimism and meaning in life". The pandemic had simplified many "busy, complicated" lives, Bartels told *Horizon*, the EU research and innovation magazine: "Some people realised they probably didn't live the life they liked, [and then] spent more time at home with their families - so there was some stress relief." The happy contingent may be even bigger than these figures suggest, given that admitting to contentment during a pandemic is socially inappropriate.

It's easy to dismiss the happy as "privileged" (in contemporary leftwing language) or "elites" (the rightwing translation). However, that's a dubious argument. Think of all the humble workers liberated from hated jobs and bosses and - especially in Europe - now paid to sit at home. In Gallup's State of the Global Workplace survey in 2017, only

15 per cent of employees in 155 countries reported feeling engaged in their jobs. Two-thirds weren't engaged, and 18 per cent were actively disengaged, "resentful that their needs aren't being met and acting out their unhappiness", according to Gallup.

The year's break will have come as a relief to many furloughed waiters, receptionists and also those doing what the anthropologist David Graeber called "bullshit jobs" that contribute nothing meaningful to society: "flunkies" whose task is to make others feel important, or "goons" who aggressively sell people useless products, often from call centres.

They have been freed from living to somebody else's schedule. So have the victims of an underrated source of mass misery: the commute. "Holding all else equal, commuters have lower life satisfaction, a lower sense that their daily activities are worthwhile, lower levels of happiness and

'Those who aren't homeschooling or working in intensive care have received the gift of time'

higher anxiety on average than non-commuters," reported Britain's Office for National Statistics in a survey of 60,000 people in 2014. "Route talk" ("The feeder road was closed, so I...") isn't always the mark of a banal mind. Sometimes it's a cry of pain. Those who continue to commute during the pandemic are enjoying emptier roads and trains.

Most people in developed countries are also richer than before because they have cut down on meals out and holidays. The personal savings rate in the US hit a record 32.2 per cent last April, and thereafter remained considerably higher than pre-pandemic. Above all, those of us who aren't homeschooling or working in intensive care have received the gift of time. This year, I've occasionally experienced an unfamiliar sensation: I had nothing urgent to do.

Life in society is unnatural, complicated and overstimulating. For the first time, an almost fully virtual alternative is on offer: virtual work, socialising, entertainment, shopping, food deliveries and sex. Some people will never want to go back.

The other evening, I had to cross Paris after curfew for a work event. Resentful at having my soothing evening routine disrupted, I realised I'd become a creature of habit. Forced to share space with strangers on the metro again, I self-diagnosed mild agoraphobia and what psychologists are calling "re-entry anxiety".

I'd like to retain some of my pandemic habits, such as spending one day each weekend entirely at home. But I suspect I'll fall back into the unwanted pre-Covid whirl. **FT**

.....
simon.kuper@ft.com @KuperSimon



YASMIN KHAN

COOK, TRAVEL WRITER AND BROADCASTER

‘Time in the kitchen is about playfulness, not performance’

Yasmin Khan, 39, is the author of cookbooks *The Saffron Tales* and *Zaitoun*, which chronicle her travels through Iran and Palestine. Before working in food, she was a human rights campaigner. She is also a media commentator and broadcaster

What was your childhood or earliest ambition?

I watched *In the Name of the Father*, the film about the Guildford Four, and decided I wanted to be a human rights lawyer.

Where did you go to school?

Where did you train?

King Edward VI grammar school in Birmingham. I did law at Sheffield, and got a scholarship to LSE for my master's. I then worked in the NGO sector until my early thirties. I'm a proud self-taught home cook. I've learnt everything I know about food from my travels and being in people's kitchens.

What was the first dish you learnt to cook?

Something like spag bol. I was really interested in learning how to cook things we never ate at home.

Who was or still is your mentor?

Certain people in my life have completely enabled me. I put a lot of emphasis on the wisdom others have. In terms of activism, Asad Rehman changed my life. On political communications, John Hilary, an old boss of mine. [Life] coach Yinka Latevi Tuakli helped me with my transition from an NGO worker to a food writer. My editor at WW Norton, Melanie Tortoroli, has really helped me grow as a writer.

How physically fit are you?

Quite, I think! I do yoga every day, I cycle everywhere, I dance a lot.

Breakfast or dinner: which?

Depends which country I'm in. In Turkey, breakfast - the most exquisite meal you can have. In Iran, lunch - that's the main time the family gathers. In the UK, dinner, with wine flowing and good conversation.

Which technique did you struggle to perfect?

Baking bread is still an area where I could improve.

Which flavour always pleases you?

Pomegranates and pomegranate molasses. I just adore sour, sharp, tangy, astringent flavours.

Which flavour can't you abide?

I can't think of a flavour. Sometimes there's a texture. Tripe, I can't do it.

What equipment could you not do without?

My food processor. For grinding walnuts into nut butter or chopping several kilos of herbs, it's my go-to.

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

Nothing. I've always had very little interest in material possessions.

What's your biggest extravagance?

Taxis and Ubers.

Do you consider food waste?

I was brought up with a family and a food culture where waste wasn't tolerated. You read all those stats about how much people throw away - I just don't do that.

What is your guilty food pleasure?

Out-of-season or tropical fruits. Yesterday I bought this incredible mango: wrong season, wrong country, but I just can't resist.

In what place are you happiest?

Swimming in the Gulf of Thailand.

Who or what makes you laugh?

My friends. I feel very lucky to have such wonderful, varied, vibrant friends in all corners of the world.

What ambitions do you still have?

I would love to be a biological mother. I've struggled with some fertility issues, so I don't know if it's going to be possible. I'd also love to host a TV series exploring political issues through a culinary lens.

What is the luckiest aspect of your life so far?

Having a family that I can rely on.

What has been your greatest kitchen disaster?

If cooking doesn't work out quite how you wanted, you can always salvage something. Time in the kitchen is about playfulness, not performance.

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

She'd be very proud that I'd dedicated my life to speaking out against militarism, human rights abuses, injustice and racism. She'd also be really glad that I'd had a hell of a lot of fun along the way.

Do you see yourself as an artist?

Definitely. I've always had an artistic spirit.

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

A solid eight. I'm really excited to see what comes next. **TV**

.....
Interview by Hester Lacey.

“Ripe Figs: Recipes and Stories from the Eastern Mediterranean” by Yasmin Khan is published by Bloomsbury on April 1 (£26 hardback)

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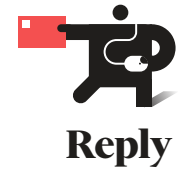
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ROBERT SHRIMSLEY THE NATIONAL CONVERSATION



Tory-approved sitcoms? You're having a laugh!

In a week of more important news, it was easy to miss the tragic end of BBC comedy *The Mash Report*, the first casualty of the concerted Conservative campaign against what the party's MPs call the Beeb's "lefty bias".

On this, they had a teensy point. On the day the cancellation was announced, its presenter Nish Kumar tweeted that the prime minister was "a liar and a racist", which does suggest a fractional divergence from impartiality.

Even so, after all the complaints about freedom of speech and cancel culture, it was striking to see the rejoicing in conservative circles. But then, on this side of the culture wars, revenge is a Nish best served cold. The thought now occurs that there is a serious business opportunity here, producing Tory-approved comedies for the BBC. These BBC execs are desperate, an easy target.

Even so, this is not 1970. Balance cannot just be bringing back the show but with Jim Davidson as the presenter. So my new company, QuidsIn Productions, is working on some ideas.

We are very excited about *The Remainiacs*, a sitcom about a family that spends their whole time blaming Brexit for every problem in their life. By mocking liberal remainers, this comedy reflects the broader society outside of London, Manchester, Liverpool, Newcastle, Leeds, Scotland and all those other unrepresentative parts of the UK. We are still working on the catchphrase but it might be "You can put that on the side of a bus".

The Remainiacs, obviously, are stuck-up, archetypal metropolitan elitists always complaining about the queues at the Waitrose sushi counter or how "there's a lot of langoustine curry on discount again". Each week, one of them loses out in a family dispute



ILLUSTRATION BY LUCAS VARELA

and spends the rest of the show demanding a confirmatory vote.

BBC execs are very excited about *Yes, Yes, Prime Minister*, a comedy about a chaotic but charismatic prime minister, Horace Ronson, who is loved by the nation but who cannot find two socks that match and whose personal life is a source of constant chaos. Each episode sees him saving the country from some crisis generated by the liberal media, the liberal civil service or the liberal elite, even as he struggles to prevent his numerous girlfriends from finding out about each other. Viewers love his catchphrase "excrementum ist icturum fan", but he always confounds his enemies by being more in tune with ordinary people. A running gag is that every week the Downing Street press officer acquires a new press aide who looks suspiciously like a younger version of himself. One of the big jokes is that Horace has a pet dog he pretends to hate but which in fact is his chief political strategist.

Blue Wall is a comedy about a go-getting Tory mayor in a northern region who buys an airport just before the pandemic hits and spends the rest of his term trying to persuade the government to fill it with civil service jobs that are moving north. Each week our

lovable mayor finds new ways to put one over the posho, out-of-touch southern liberal elite, so that by the end of series one, over 20,000 civil servants have been relocated to the baggage hall.

Jabs is set on the Irish border and follows a Northern Irish family smuggling Covid-19 vaccines into the Republic, which is unable to get out of lockdown because of the incompetence of the EU. The villain is an EU commissioner who is constantly trying to stop the Irish getting out of lockdown in the name of European solidarity.

We have others in the pipeline including *Hearts of Woke*, a comedy mocking the politically correct; *Dacre's Wild*, the hilarious story of a heroic, down-to-earth reactionary tabloid newspaper editor and ferocious opponent of press regulation who gets made the new broadcasting regulator; and *Judge John Deed*, an absurdist fantasy about a ludicrously liberal judge and enemy of the people, who goes to bizarre lengths to frustrate the elected government.

Anyway, as I said to the new DG: "You may not love them but they are worth the licence fee alone." **FT**

robert.shrimsley@ft.com
@robertshrimsley

Further to "Inside the university recruitment machine" (March 13/14): nobody wants to talk about the elephant in the room - immigration. I have no moral position on it, but mid-level or lower-rung universities have realised that a good way to generate funds is to target international students, who are willing to pay the full fees and are non-discriminating as to their products. Why? Because the product they are selling, in the US at least, is the visa - and \$30,000 is a reasonable price to pay.

Kz via FT.com

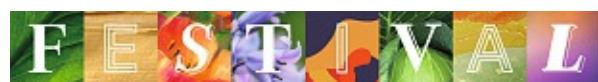
@mjluxmoore Mar 11 ["The brutal third act of Putin"] by @HenryJFoy offers a good perspective on the mind-boggling flurry of repressive laws passed in Russia over the past year, narrowing space for dissent to essentially nil. It's hard to keep up, really

Thank you, Elaine Moore: I have been wondering about this too ("If Big Tech has our data, why are targeted ads so rubbish?", March 13/14). What is the rationale behind showing the same content over and over again? Ads for the espresso maker I already bought long ago? What about good organic coffee instead of dumb repetition of past searches seems to be beyond the reach of modern AI.

Caveman via FT.com

Re Simon Kuper's "Lessons from the Netherlands on staying in power" (March 13/14): the reasons that Mark Rutte is still in power after his mismanagement of the vaccination campaign and many scandals in his governments include his Teflon management style and the stalemate between the parties that would not support a coalition without his VVD. I am happy to be Dutch and live in this wealthy, boring but wonderfully pragmatic country, but I hope for Rutte not to be prime minister. **The daring Dutchman** via FT.com

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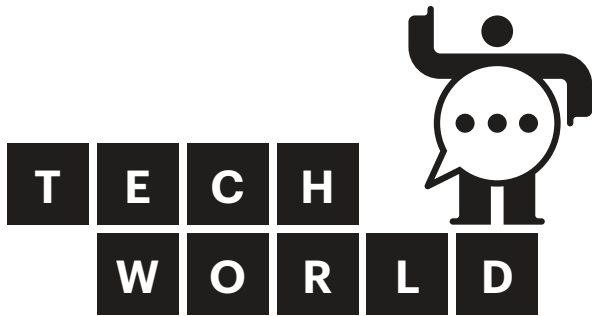
The FT Weekend Festival is back this weekend. Join Dr Ozlem Tureci and Dr Ugur Sahin, the scientists behind the BioNTech/Pfizer vaccine, and many others as we take on the big ideas of 2021. Plus a wine tasting, cocktails and cooking demos. For passes and programme: ftweekendfestival.com

Quiz answers The link was positive emotions 1. The House of Mirth 2. Angel Delight 3. Felicity Kendal 4. Courtney Love 5. Glee 6. Comfort 7. A stately pleasure-dome 8. Hope 9. The rapture 10. Beethoven's "Ode to Joy" Picture quiz RuPaul + Cathy Newman = Paul Newman



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BY DAVE LEE IN SAN FRANCISCO

How a football video game became a hard habit to kick

As lockdown set in, I decided to wade into the world of competitive *Fifa* - a mode of the bestselling football video game that I had long avoided. I knew it was delicately engineered to sap both my time and my money.

Fifa Ultimate Team involves building a squad, mostly by opening randomised packs - sometimes called "loot boxes" - containing upgrades. You can speed up progress by paying real money for more packs: a deposit of \$99.99 is declared "great value" in the game's menu.

What surprised me, though, as I interacted with fellow *Fifa* players in online forums, was the alarming number who seemed to utterly despise the game and how it made them feel - when they were supposedly engaging in it as a relaxing hobby.

On Reddit, there are frequent discussions about "Fifa-onset" depression, anxiety and anger. Most players appear well aware that they are being drawn in by algorithms designed to provide carefully choreographed bursts of satisfaction, but that doesn't help.

"I spent a few hundred bucks on *Fifa* points yesterday," read one recent post. "After a few hours I looked back at myself in disgust."

If you don't pay with money, you'll need to pay with time instead. Completing the Weekend League - the *Fifa Ultimate Team* weekly ranking event that offers the best prizes, such as packs with rare players - requires playing 30 matches, adding up to about 10 hours.

When *Fifa* fans talk about reaching an emotional breaking



ILLUSTRATION BY PÂTÉ

point, it's often during these mammoth sessions.

Experts are concerned, drawing comparisons with the kinds of behavioural patterns observed in alcoholics and drug addicts. Declaring "it's just a game" is insufficient, says Douglas Gentile, professor of psychology at Iowa State University and a leading authority on mental health and gaming. "When people tell you that they need help, the compassionate thing is not to say, 'Oh, that's not a real thing.' The compassionate thing is to say, 'OK, what do you need?'"

Transparency might be a good place to start. Lately, we're starting to demand more insight into the algorithms that power everyday technologies, from how Amazon ranks products to why extremist videos spread on

'Players appear well aware they are being drawn in by algorithms designed to provide carefully choreographed bursts of satisfaction, but that doesn't help'

YouTube. Prising open these "black boxes" is a way to prevent harm.

Video games are no different, and none warrants more scrutiny than the highly lucrative *Fifa Ultimate Team*, which in December attracted an average of six million players every day. In its fiscal year 2020, game developer Electronic Arts (EA) said it made \$1.5bn from loot boxes in *Ultimate Team* alone. (The figure includes the equivalent modes in the company's American football and ice hockey games, but it's mostly *Fifa*.)

Regulators around the world are calling into question the morality of the loot-box system, saying it should be considered gambling, given players' lack of insight and control over the likely outcome. Probability breakdowns of the "packs" people buy show that the chance of getting the most coveted players is often less than 1 per cent (sometimes it's a little better than that).

Such is the hostility towards EA, and the distrust of its motives, that a trio of fans recently sued the company, alleging "scripting". The theory, prevalent among the *Fifa* community, claims that the game at times artificially stacks the odds against you - pushing you into a run of bad results, for example, or making it more likely that you concede a heartbreaking last-minute goal. (EA has denied using scripting and the case was withdrawn after the company gave the plaintiffs access to its engineers, who provided confidential details of how its games worked.)

The broad suspicion fans have of EA is a symptom, perhaps, of a business model that now treats the act of buying a game as a mere signing-on fee ahead of much larger investments later. As a result, young people are being subjected to "engagement at all costs" algorithms, the psychological effects of which can remain long after the game has ended, says Gentile. "The emotions are real," he says. "There is no separation between the real life and the game life."

Now and again, someone who has managed to go cold turkey will step back into the forums, as though home from rehab, urging others to follow in their footsteps. "My head feels clearer," said one post this week. "My house is spotless and [I] actually have the motivation and drive to do something with my life." 

Dave Lee is the FT's San Francisco correspondent

ELIZABETH HARROD. SOLOIST. THE ROYAL BALLET



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EXTRAORDINARY BEDS

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We are now about a year into the ohmygosh-this-is-for-real stage of the pandemic. A time, perhaps, for taking stock of the big decisions – and whether they were wise.

To my mind, there were two big calls to be made. The first: was this virus a deadly enough threat to merit extraordinary changes to life as we know it? The second: should those changes be voluntary or a matter for parliament, the courts and the police?

The UK wavered over the first decision – long enough to ensure that the country suffered one of the deadliest first-wave outbreaks in the world. But in the end, the decision was made: this wasn't just like a bad flu, which we should take on the chin. It was simply too dangerous to keep calm and carry on.

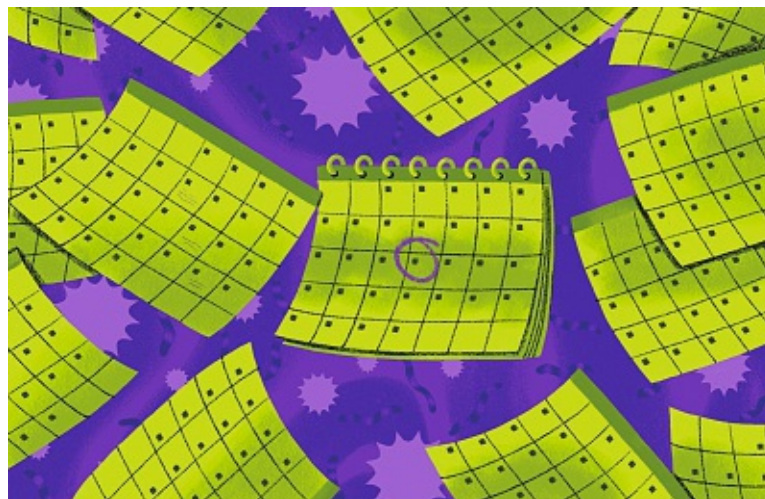
I have always suspected that this realisation was sparked by the terrifying footage from overwhelmed Italian hospitals, but modelling also played a part. An infamous working paper, "Report 9", published just over a year ago by the Covid-19 Response Team at Imperial College, predicted: "In the (unlikely) absence of any control measures or spontaneous changes in individual behaviour... 81% of the GB and US populations would be infected." If so, more than 500,000 people would die in the UK alone.

I have read several explanations of why this report was so badly mistaken. That is odd – I re-read it this week and it doesn't seem mistaken at all. The researchers got the big picture right: Covid-19 was highly infectious, killed about 1 per cent of the people infected in the UK and thus could kill a huge number of people if not stopped. Most of those who died would be elderly.

We have not, thank goodness, seen 500,000 deaths. But we might well reach 150,000. Most of those deaths were caused by two terrifyingly rapid waves of infection. Had we shrugged our collective shoulders and done nothing but make more coffins, 500,000 deaths would surely have been the result.

The Imperial report also correctly suggested that lockdowns might have to be repeated almost indefinitely until a vaccine became available. I didn't want to believe it at the time, but it gave us a glimpse of the future: rolling lockdowns for more than a year.

The report's mention of "control measures or spontaneous changes



TIM HARFORD

THE UNDERCOVER ECONOMIST



What have we learnt from a year of Covid?

in individual behaviour" raises the second big choice we collectively made – with the media, politicians, public health officials and police all playing a role. The question was how much to trust ordinary citizens to make sensible decisions. Our answer: not much.

Read the newspaper headlines and you'd conclude that we were all panicky, selfish fools: too scared of a virus in a faraway country (those "don't overreact" articles from early 2020 have not aged well); hoarding all the masks and loo paper; and performing acts of outrageous selfishness such as going to the beach or the park.

This narrative was unhelpful in several ways. First, people are influenced by each other – an idea sometimes termed "social proof". If you show us images of selfish covidiot, we are more likely to be selfish; show us noble altruists and we aspire to be like them. Second, because the shaming focused on publicly visible behaviour, people were blamed for doing something quite safe – going outside. Third, if we believe people are foolish and selfish, we have to rely on writing and then enforcing strict rules about what is and is not allowed.

Such rules are inevitably blunt. They implicitly endorse much that

they should not (such as sitting 2.1 metres apart from someone in a poorly ventilated office or pub), while banning all sorts of things that should be permitted. Last spring, I saw the police admonishing a lady sitting alone in the middle of a meadow. Had she been doing sit-ups, her behaviour would have been allowable as daily exercise – but she was reading a book and was thus a lawbreaker. Absurd.

I suspect – but cannot prove – that a lighter touch would have prevented more Covid with less collateral damage. Pure voluntarism might not have been enough, but you can get a long way with altruism, social pressure and clear guidance. Japan's advice – to avoid the "Three Cs" of closed spaces, crowded places and close contact – is far more memorable to me than whatever strange combination of households, settings and exemptions the authorities in my own country are currently allowing. (Let's not even start on the excuses made for the behaviour of Dominic Cummings.)

Nowhere was this clearer than in the government's catastrophic handling of Christmas. It issued an incomprehensible tangle of

If you show us images of selfish covidiot, we are more likely to be selfish. Show us noble altruists and we aspire to be like them'

rules allowing a three-household "Christmas bubble", basked in headlines such as "Boris Johnson battles experts to save Christmas" and finally back-pedalled at the last moment. The result was that many families made dangerous plans to spend Christmas with elderly relatives on the assumption that they must be safe because they were legal, then felt resentment at the change. Much of the damage was already done; most days in January had more than 1,000 deaths.

There is every reason to believe that vaccination is making short work of the pandemic in the UK, but it is always worth learning lessons. I'll remember to trust the competence of the government a little less, to trust mathematical models a little more and to have some respect for the common sense of ordinary people. **FT**

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

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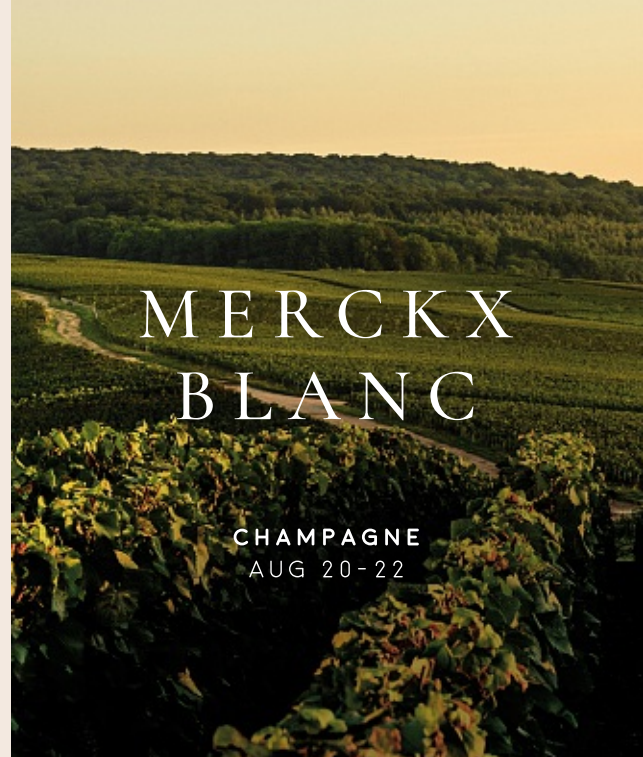
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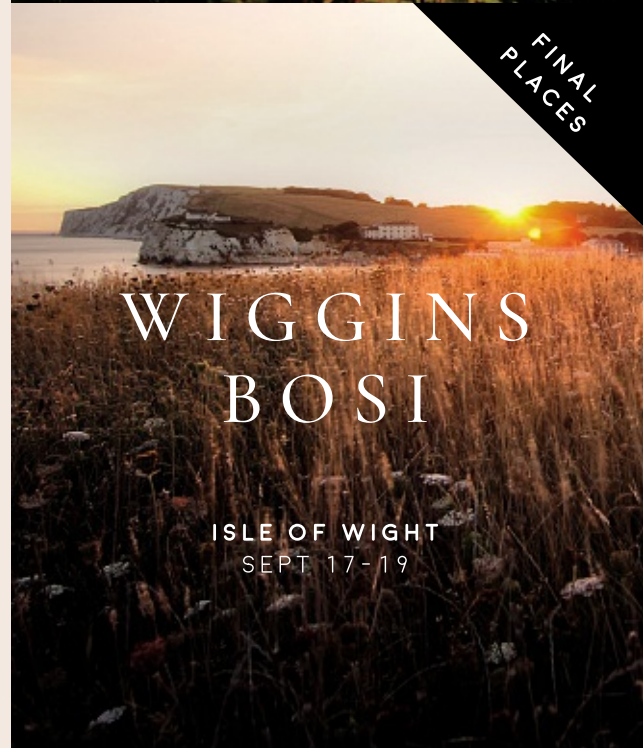
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COMING SOON

Cracked it

Eggs are both the simplest of comfort foods and ingredients of great sophistication, says *Tim Hayward*. Now lockdown has given him the chance to devise the perfect combination of egg, butter, salt and bread. Photographs by *Rick Pushinsky*

Lockdown has got us all bored. Events we might ordinarily look forward to - meals out or holidays - are either forbidden or seem to move ever further into the future and instead we are forced to focus on the quotidian delights of our own cooking. For me, lockdown has also meant time to eat and appreciate a decent breakfast... which in turn has made me dangerously contemplative.

I began with the middle-class staple of yoghurt and fruit. It's healthy enough in principle, though it only seems to work with the kind of fruits that need shipping halfway round the world, and you have to eat an awful lot of them to feel satiated. Then, one morning, staring at a bucket of creamy Greek yoghurt and a mound of blueberries and raspberries that had definitely flown further than me in the past six months, I had a sudden urge for eggs, the most elemental and unfussy of comfort foods.

I started with the very simplest - the boiled-egg-and-soldiers of childhood. It's something we adults don't do enough (*pace* Prince Charles, apparently). I love food that needs you to interact with it, from artichoke leaves dipped in ►





◀ hollandaise to a full-height *plateau de fruits de mer*. Boiled egg and soldiers requires as much knowledge and dexterity as getting the good stuff out of a lobster, yet it's one of the first foods we wean our children on.

The key is getting the egg consistency right. The yolk must be as liquid as possible without any of the white remaining "snotty". It's a fine art. In recent years, cooks have expended huge effort creating the perfect Japanese *onsen* egg, steamed or boiled so it splits appealingly on top of an Instagrammable bowl of ramen. There are thousands of web pages dedicated to the process and yet astonishingly few for getting your egg suitable for dipping shards of toast. I'm not ashamed to admit I have an app on my phone that allows me to select the level of "doneness" I desire, helps me measure the diameter of my egg, asks for the ambient temperature of the kitchen and then sets an alarm for the very second it should be lifted from the boiling water and plunged into cold to stop it cooking.

I'd used this for several years before I finally realised that, for my favourite eggs, the time always turned out to be a few seconds either side of seven minutes and now, endowed with this knowledge, I just use the regular kitchen clock.

It should take a matter of seconds to get your egg into its receptacle - I use napkin rings, I've got bugger all else to do with them - and neatly decapitated.

Few cultures are as invested in the idea of the egg in the shell as the Brits. Many cook their eggs hard and "peel" them. Wilhelm

Wagenfeld, the Bauhaus-trained German industrial designer who went on to work at the Jenaer glassworks, created a perfect, egg-sized receptacle in heat-conducting glass, into which the insides of an egg can be sealed before boiling. It's the only bit of breakfast kit that's found its way into the design museums of the world, though it's roundly shunned in this country, where we just use the shell.

Nobody seems to know why we call toast, buttered and cut into strips, "soldiers" but it's good that we do. The world is full of writers making them "healthy" by replacing them with vegetable batons, or "indulgent" by using brioche. But these are soldiers. They're not having any of that nonsense. A nice bit of sourdough and a smear of salty butter are standard issue and any attempt to mess with it is prejudicial to discipline.

Once your mind drifts down the rabbit hole, it's amazing how many ways we've found to combine eggs and bread. In Japanese cuisine or high-end Nordic restaurants you might expect to see dishes that focus on the perfection of a single ingredient. Handcrafted udon in a simple dashi. A mushroom, lightly fermented. Poached egg on toast approaches this degree of gastronomic monomania.

Egg yolk, a pointy-headed chef will tell you, sets at 64C, while the white begins to gel at about 80C. In an egg boiled in the shell, the variation between yolk and white is pronounced. Poaching reduces the difference. When you crack the egg

into hot water you can watch and control every second of its coagulation. If your egg is stale you'll have a sort of wet-lace mess, but with a fresh one and a suitably monastic focus, you'll be delivered of a perfectly set, unseasoned egg, ready to ladle on to toast.

But there's a lot more to the supposedly artless combination of eggs and bread. Even as infants we understand the importance of salty butter on our soldiers and, should you experiment, you'll find that any combination of egg and bread that isn't leavened with lots of butterfat and salt turns to ashes in the mouth. The very austerity of the poached egg throws the focus on to its juxtaposition with the bread and the essential addition of butter, salt and a heavy grind of black pepper.

Of course, the voluptuary could not survive long on the austere pleasures of the poached egg and soon slides down the slippery slope to scrambling. The basics are this: good eggs should be broken up in a pan with a little butter and carefully managed heat. They should be seasoned with pepper and salt. As they curdle to the ideal point, more butter is beaten in to stop further cooking and then the whole can be ladled over toast.

In real life, of course, the variations are pleasingly endless. Some pour eggs into a non-stick frying pan, leave them to set, then break them up by vigorous stirring. Others lovingly pour the sieved eggs into a double boiler, stir obsessively for up to half an hour like a French sauce and serve them like a lumpy custard.

COLOUR GRADING BY JAMES MIDWINTER. EGG CUPS AND SPOONS COURTESY OF DAVID MELLOR. EGGS COURTESY OF PENNIBURY FARM, LEICESTERSHIRE



'I'M NOT ASHAMED TO ADMIT THAT I HAVE AN APP FOR BOILING EGGS ON MY PHONE'

For me, scrambled eggs approach the ideal, partly because getting the eggs and toast to the table *au point* requires two people. There is a quasi-erotic buzz in preparing something that personal to share with someone else, and in the act itself - the attentiveness, the delicacy, the collaborative effort and the ever-present possibility of humiliating failure.

We could keep this up all day. There are fried eggs on toast, egg bread, pain perdu, the fried-egg bap with brown sauce, Yea, even unto the princely eggs Benedict, which, apart from a single slice of ham, is surely nothing but titivated eggs on disciplined bread. After years of obsessive research, though, I have found my own egg-and-bread soulmate.

I will not call it an omelette sandwich, though many would. For me, the omelette means Elizabeth David droning on about La Mère Poulard on Mont Saint-Michel or a gastronomic peeing contest between TV chefs. Breakfast is too important and thus requires a more honest fried egg.

Cut two slices of fresh, white, crusty bread, preferably sourdough. You should ideally have this still with traces of warmth from the oven, so I suggest you do as I did and buy a bakery. Spread thickly with salted butter and place on a plate.

Melt a lump of the butter in a frying pan and, as soon as it foams up, crack in three large eggs, add big pinches of salt and pepper, then use a silicone spatula to roughly scramble the eggs into moist homogeneity. Let them spread back to cover the base of the pan and then allow the underside to set firm. You should be able to lift up the edge and see the underside with the merest hint of a tan. Fold the whole thing in half, lift it directly on to the buttered bread and top with the second slice. Now turn your back on it, cross your arms and ignore it pointedly.

After 45 seconds, relent, rotate to face the sandwich and lift the lid. It should be conspicuously anointed with melted butter on to which you should drizzle a little balsamic vinegar, creating a kind of bastard vinaigrette. Draw the lid back over the sandwich like a veil, bisect it, then take it somewhere quiet where you can eat it with your eyes closed lest, like Tiresias gazing upon Athena, you are struck blind by its effulgent beauty. **FT**

tim.hayward@ft.com;
@TimHayward



WHAT IS AVAXHOME?

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How the
KitKat
went
global

The story of a humble British snack that became a gigantic hit in Japan, with flavours ranging from matcha to soy sauce, is a lesson in how foods can cross borders, overturning cultural expectations at the same time. *Gillian Tett* reports. Photographs by *Faris Mustafa*

In December last year, Nestlé, the Swiss chocolate company based on the scenic shores of Lake Geneva, launched an online advertising campaign in Japan for a “whisky barrel aged” KitKat. Its three layers of wafers were coated with chocolate made from “rare cacao nibs” aged for 180 days in whisky barrels from the island of Islay - “sacred ground” in Scotland for the drink, or so the Japanese marketing literature says. This apparently gave the bar “a refined whisky aroma... and evokes a calm and relaxed feeling”.

Does this sound weird or wonderful? Is it a display of culinary creativity by Japanese pâtissier Yasumasa Takagi, who developed the recipe? Or is it just a sign of the gimmicks that consumer goods companies will use to chase margins? Possibly all of the above.

But here is another way to interpret that Scottish-Swiss-Japanese innovation: as a symbol of the paradoxical nature of globalisation today - one that might point to how we consider cultural identities, labels and diversity. We live in an era marked by once-unimaginable levels of global interconnection, ushered in partly by digitisation. That, after all, is the reason chocolate made from cacao aged in Scottish whisky barrels can be advertised so easily to Japanese consumers - and also discovered by me, an English journalist living in New York.

Yet as digital platforms, cargo ships and planes create connections (and contagions), we are also living through an anti-globalisation backlash, fuelled by economic pain, geopolitical tensions, populism and insecurity in the face of rapid technological change. Many communities are trying to define their differences - or tribal allegiances - by embracing distinctive cultural signifiers, whether a flag, a language, national dress or a passport.

Food can reflect this: hot dogs, say, seem “American”; sushi, “Japanese”. But the beauty of what we eat and drink is that it signals an oft-overlooked truth: while national labels can be powerful, they

are rarely as fixed as people think. On the contrary, what we feed ourselves with reveals that we live in a world where identities can be wonderfully fluid and ambiguous.

In the 20th century, some social scientists fretted that the world was heading for “Cocolonisation”: in which brands such as Coke dominated, crushing local competitors, in an expression of western corporate and political power.

But what observers realised subsequently was that this stereotype does not begin to capture what globalisation really does. Yes, cultural memes and objects spread: Coke bottles are found everywhere. But meanings change when they jump borders. “Coke is often attributed meanings and uses within particular cultures that are very different from those imagined by its manufacturer,” David Howes, an anthropologist, has written. These include smoothing wrinkles in Russia, turning copper into silver in Barbados, and reviving someone from the dead in Haiti, he notes.

Moreover, cultural trends do not move in one direction: as Birmingham’s balti curries and California’s avocado-laden “sushi” rolls show, they ebb back and forth between countries and cultures, creating new fusions all the time. When you look at a whisky barrel aged KitKat, in other words, you are not just seeing a chocolate snack.

KitKat’s past offers clues to its globalised present. In 1862, a Quaker patriarch called Henry Rowntree bought a cocoa works in York, in the north of England. He soon moved it to an unlikely location - a former industrial iron foundry - and built a family sweet-making business with his brother Joseph. They later hired a French confectioner to develop recipes.

In the 1930s, the company launched the milk chocolate-covered wafer we now know as the KitKat after an employee suggested Rowntree’s develop a treat “a man could take to work in his

pack”. Wartime austerity forced a change in recipe and branding, but when life returned to normal KitKat’s popularity boomed, under the tag “The biggest little meal in Britain”. Rowntree’s started exporting it to former British colonies. Its slogan, invented in the late 1950s, endures today: “Have a break, have a KitKat.”

When KitKat arrived in Japan in the 1970s, it was sold as an exotic “British” treat to consumers who were developing a taste for foreign travel. Adverts in Japan showed “British people in distinctly British environments enjoying a KitKat break between action-packed activities,” explained Philip Sugai, a business school professor in Japan, in a case study. “The message revolved around how Japanese people could enjoy life within the British context.”

Yet despite being backed by the marketing muscle of multinational Nestlé, which acquired Rowntree’s in 1988, KitKat struggled to compete with confectionery from local producers such as Glico. “KitKat was seen as a foreign sweet and didn’t look like it would ever be that popular,” says Ross Rowbury, former president of public relations agency Edelman Japan.

Indeed, by the turn of the millennium, executives at Nestlé’s regional office in Kobe, Japan, were asking themselves whether the KitKat brand had a future in the country. Nestlé thought the best way to boost sales was to target students. But the company’s ethnographic “fly-on-the-wall” research revealed Japanese teenagers did not like the “Have a break” tag. These students were so stressed by *juken* - the high-pressure exams that have such a bearing on their future - that the only “good break” they wanted was a long rest, not mere chocolate.

But then came a twist that no western corporate planner could have foreseen - or at least not with top-down economic models and consumer polls. In the early 2000s, Masafumi Ishibashi, a local Nestlé manager and his boss, Kohzoh Takaoka, heard that sales of KitKats on the southern Japanese ►

WHAT WE EAT AND DRINK
REVEALS THAT WE LIVE IN A
WORLD WHERE IDENTITIES
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FLUID AND AMBIGUOUS





BLOSSOMING MARKET

The Japanese KitKat has been produced in more than 300 local flavours, including wasabi, soy sauce, sake and, in 2017, a throat-lozenge variety targeted at football fans



◀ island of Kyushu were surging between December and February. A trend had erupted among teenagers: students had noticed that the word “KitKat” sounded like the Japanese phrase “*kitto katsu*” (“you will overcome”), so they were giving each other the bar as a good-luck token to get through the ordeal of *juken*.

Initially, this seemed nothing more than a piece of teen trivia. The Kobe team did not dare replace the “Have a break” tag with “*Kitto katsu*” since they knew their bosses in Switzerland wanted to maintain consistency among global brands.

But Takaoka, Ishibashi and the rest of the team decided to try some subtler tactics to capitalise on the student craze and spread it beyond Kyushu. They put the phrase “*Kitto sakura saku yo!*” (“wishes come true!”) in their Japanese adverts and asked hotels next door to exam centres to distribute KitKats to students with this slogan on a postcard.

The wording was astute: literally, it means “the cherry blossoms will bloom”. “Because of the revered position that the cherry blossom season [holds] in Japan, blooming cherry trees [are] equated with abundance and success,” Sugai wrote in his case study.

Ishibashi adds: “We didn’t exactly tell Vevey [Nestlé headquarters] what we were doing, because we knew that it would sound so strange [to non-Japanese people]. We wanted to start quietly and see if it would work.”

It did: sales of KitKats exploded among students across Japan. Teenagers redefined the bar as an *omamori*, the good-luck token sold at Shinto shrines and Buddhist temples. In January 2003, 34 per cent of Japanese teenagers told pollsters that a KitKat was their favourite good-luck charm, second only to an *omamori* blessed by a genuine Shinto priest. “It was amazing,” recalls Ishibashi. “[Chocolate] became an *omamori*.”

Eventually, the Japanese team told their bosses in Vevey what was going on. Wisely, executives

in Switzerland allowed the team to continue with their cultural experiments. In Kobe, the KitKat packaging was redesigned to enable students to write good-luck messages on it, then Japan’s postal service was persuaded to accept them as prepaid envelopes. “Nobody had ever done that before with the postal system,” observed Sugai. When Fukushima in eastern Japan was hit by a tsunami in 2011, people sent KitKat boxes to the workers tasked with reconstruction as a form of encouragement. Later, special boxes even became valid as train tickets under a scheme to boost tourism to Fukushima.

Nestlé’s Kobe team broadened their experimentation beyond marketing. To UK consumers, a KitKat was a brown chocolate snack bar, but in 2003, the Kobe team created a pink KitKat by adding strawberry powder. They then made one with matcha (green tea) powder. To date, they have created more than 300 local flavours, including wasabi, soy sauce, sake and even, in 2017, a limited-edition throat-lozenge flavour to soothe hoarse Japanese football fans cheering on the national team in the World Cup qualifying campaign.

A few of these innovations embraced non-Japanese flavours as novelties. However, most expressed a sense of Japanese identity through food. Over time, flavours became embedded in Japan’s regional identities too, such as purple sweet potato from Okinawa or cheese from Hokkaido. These are now sold as tourist souvenirs (*omiyage*) at Japanese railway stations.

To British or Swiss tastes, such flavours can seem strange. Indeed, foreign tourists often buy them as souvenirs of Japanese, as opposed to British, culture. But strange or not, the craze had turned the bar into one of the top-selling chocolate brands in Japan. The KitKat’s rise there was so dramatic that Ryoji Maki, one of the Kobe executives who had introduced the wild new flavours, was promoted to KitKat’s global brand manager in Vevey.

Then came the final twist: Nestlé launched the matcha KitKat in the UK, where it sold fairly well.

Strictly speaking, this was not a made-in-Japan import: the bars are manufactured in Germany. But green-tea chocolate (the KitKat bars themselves are green) was not something British consumers could have imagined 50 years ago.

“What this story shows is that you have to think outside the mainstream,” Maki told his baffled non-Japanese colleagues at a presentation – showing pictures of Japanese students clutching KitKat bars as *omamori* during exams. “You have to listen to consumers.” Or, more accurately, recognise that consumer tastes are more creative than executives might understand.

Would the Rowntrees have approved of all this? I like to think so. Victorian England, after all, was another period of globalisation, when trends collided across borders, albeit often under unequal circumstances. As entrepreneurs, the Rowntrees knew that commercial success relies on having a flexible mind and being willing to pinch good ideas from any source.

Therein lies the biggest point of all – not so much about our taste buds but about how we imagine identity today. The 21st century is a fractured time when politicians promote narrow nationalisms, draw boundaries between “us” and “them” and express antagonistic cultural allegiances. But what the journey of KitKat, like so many other foods, shows is that labels can also be malleable, in a good way.

Whatever you think of whisky barrel aged KitKats, we can all celebrate the fact that a brown chocolate bar has turned green, and become Anglo-Swiss-Scottish-Japanese along the way. Let us hope it can be a metaphor for politics as well. **FT**

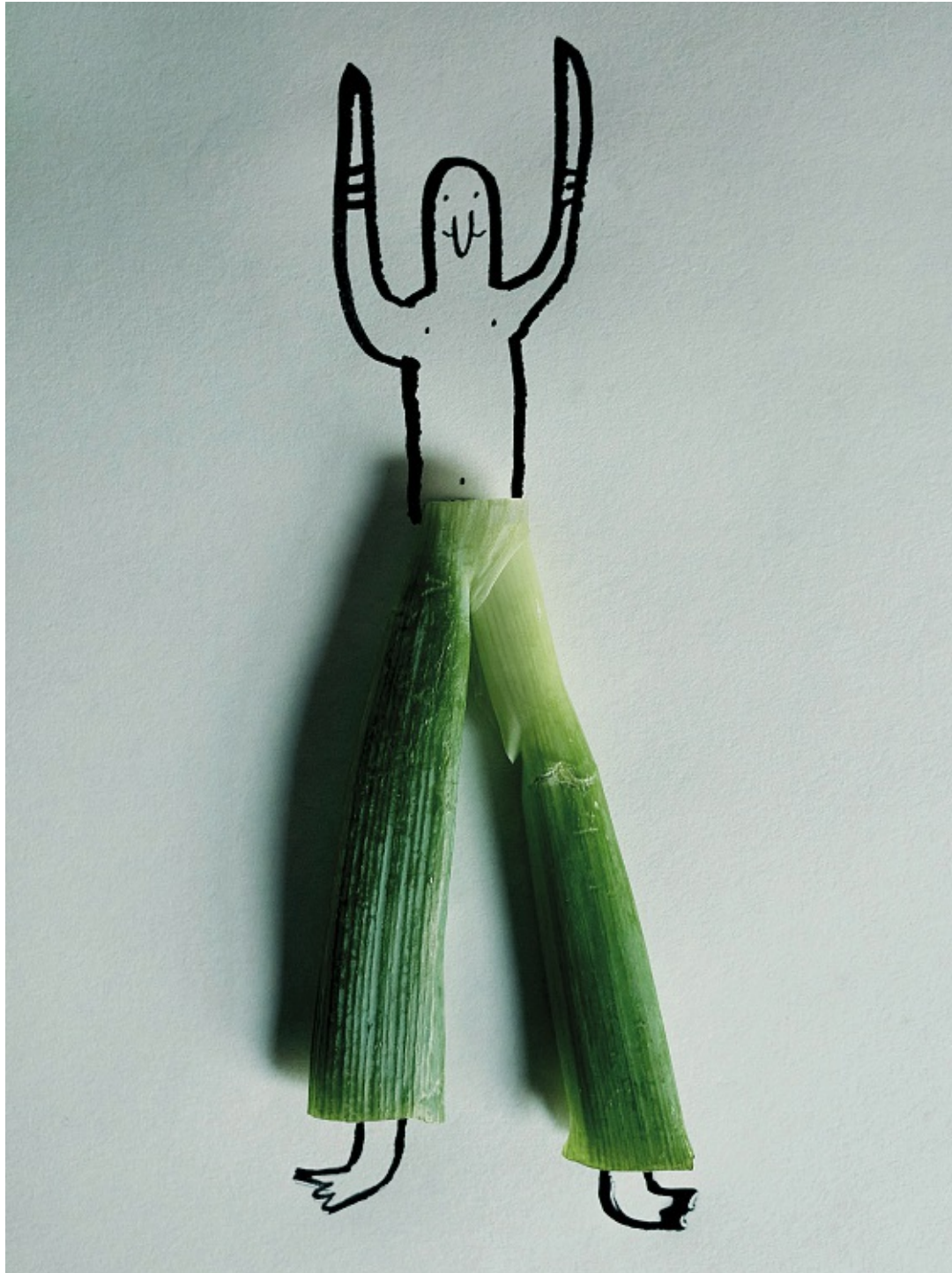
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Gillian Tett is the FT’s US editor-at-large. Parts of this article are based on Gillian’s book “*Anthro-Vision: How Anthropology Can Explain Business and Life*”, to be published in June

FLAVOURS BECAME EMBEDDED
IN JAPAN’S REGIONAL
IDENTITIES - PURPLE SWEET
POTATO FROM OKINAWA OR
CHEESE FROM HOKKAIDO



Green shoots

Spring onions may be readily available throughout the year, but they couldn't be more deserving of their name. *Bee Wilson* on why the underrated vegetable adds a bit of a bounce to the plate. Photographs by *Jack Davison* and *CW Smallbones*



Edna Lewis recalled that the first salad of spring during her Virginia childhood “consisted of scallions or young onion plants, before they had reached the bulb stage, and Simpson, a tender kind of lettuce”. Lewis - author of *The Taste of Country Cooking*, one of the great American cookbooks - was born in 1916, the grandchild of an emancipated slave, in a small farming settlement called Freetown where everything her family ate was freshly made and linked to the seasons. She later said that her life’s mission was “to try to recapture those good flavours of the past”.

Her spring salad was one of those forgotten flavours: the freshest of spring onions and lettuce, simply washed and dressed with sugar, vinegar and salt, but no oil. Lewis recalled that she and her seven siblings loved this dish so much that they would save it to eat last “so that we could spoon lots of dressing onto our plates”. While the young green onions were

available, her family ate it every day until sometime in late April or early May when they became “too tough to use”.

Spring onions - or scallions, to give them their American name - really were a spring vegetable once. These days, it can seem like a misnomer. There isn’t a month of the year when spring onions are not in the shops. Whatever the season, they are always nestling unobtrusively in the salad aisle, near the radishes and celery. Sometimes, they are boringly labelled “salad onions”, as if there were no other use for them. Unlike asparagus, which gains prestige through the shortness of its season, no one heralds the spring onion. But to me, they are still deserving of their name because no other vegetable tastes quite so much like green shoots of hope. Whether you eat them in April or December, they add something springlike to the plate. They are also good for impatient cooks because they soften more quickly than regular onions in stews or risottos. ►

◀ Spring onions might be the most underrated of all vegetables, at least in the west. Most of the time, we hardly even consider them in their own right, rather than as a mere garnish. Yet for the price, I feel that no other vegetable can delight in quite so many ways. Served chopped and raw, spring onions are like an onion in soft focus, with some of the pungent edges blurred away. But if you keep them whole and cook them, their character transforms. They go as silky and sugary-sweet as leeks.

Mark Diacono - the author of *Herb: A Cook's Companion* - tells me that he enjoys the fresh, bright flavour of spring onions because they are "less harsh than a regular onion" but have "more oomph than a chive". He likes to add them to chopped eggs with a mix of green herbs, or to season a very green Greek herb pie made with filo pastry. Diacono points out that unlike many other vegetables such as green beans, spring onions can be homegrown in the UK for most of the year. They are harvested in Worcestershire, one of the main growing areas, from March to November.

But what exactly is a spring onion? For years, I had been confused about the difference between green onions, spring onions and scallions. The confusing part is, first, there is no difference and, second, that a "spring onion" can actually refer to a whole family of different green onions, all in the allium family. According to Alan Davidson in *The Oxford Companion to Food*: "Most of the spring onions grown in the West are simply immature plants which, if left in the ground... would develop into full-sized onions." The majority sold in Britain are - like the ones Edna Lewis relished during her childhood - just white onions that haven't yet turned into bulbs. But "spring onion" also sometimes refers to the long green bunching onions of Asia - *allium fistulosum* - which grow in clusters and never form a bulb, no matter how long they stay in the ground. Sometimes these are called Welsh onions - this actually has nothing to do with Wales and comes from the Anglo-Saxon word "welise", meaning "foreign".

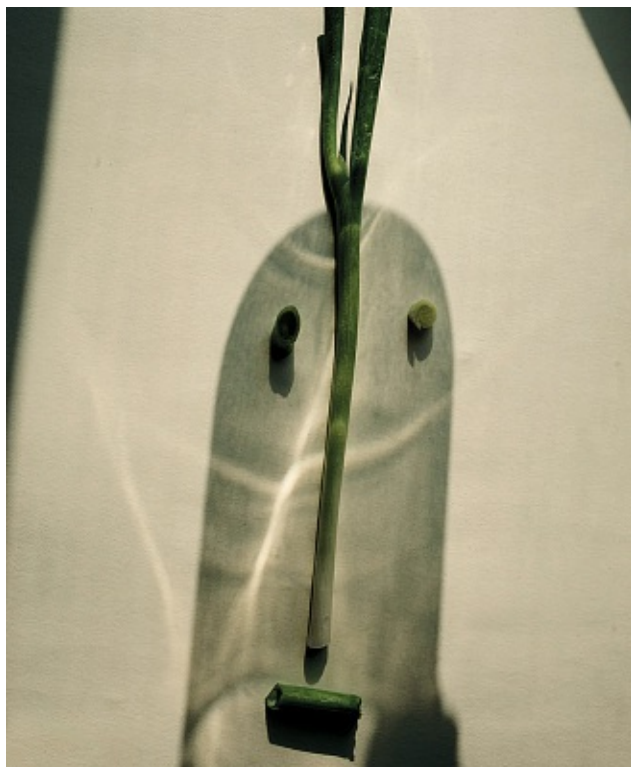
Whichever kind you buy, spring onions will have hollow tubular green leaves and a white bulb (unless you have managed to find a bunch of red scallions with a purple root, in which case, lucky you). You can tell whether your spring onion is an immature bulb onion (*allium cepa*) or a mature bunching one (*allium fistulosum*) by looking more closely at the leaves. Cut a leaf open in cross section. If the layers look circular, then it is a bunching onion. If the layers look flattened inside, then it is a young version of a regular onion.

To see these little spring onions in a new light, try barbecuing them whole or charring them in a hot cast-iron skillet. It is a revelation to see how quickly their flavour evolves from strong to sweet. In Catalonia, a kind of spring onion called *calçots* are barbecued and eaten with a heady romesco sauce made from hazelnuts, almonds, smoky dried peppers and tomatoes. When eating these *calçots*, you slip off the charred outer layer "like pulling off an evening glove", as restaurateur Gabrielle Hamilton memorably observed, and dip each one in the romesco sauce. Pre-pandemic, Catalans would meet for sociable *calçotadas* in early spring - parties revolving around cooking *calçots* over an open fire.

But you can still have an onion party by yourself. A single bunch is the perfect portion for one. Heat a griddle pan over a high heat on the hob and cook the onions for about 10 minutes, turning with tongs until evenly charred. When they are soft, wrap them in newspaper for another 10 minutes to allow them to rest before devouring with toast and romesco (there's a good recipe from Jenny Chandler on the Borough Market website). This charring technique works best with spring onions that are not too big.

The vegetable varies hugely in size, which reflects not just the variety but the stage at which they are harvested. The long bouquets of green onions sold in Chinese and Korean food shops tend to be larger and more bulbous than the little finger-width ones that are standard in British supermarkets. These fatter, juicier spring onions with their slippery layers lend

IT IS A REVELATION TO SEE HOW QUICKLY THEIR
FLAVOUR EVOLVES FROM STRONG TO SWEET



themselves to being cut lengthwise into fine julienne strips and dropped into cold water, where they will not only lose some of their pungency but curl up delightfully. Spring onion curls are an excellent thing to add at the last minute to a salad or any number of stir-fry dishes.

Without spring onions – ginger’s essential companion – Chinese cuisine is unimaginable. Food writer Ching-He Huang tells me that they give not just a “sweet oniony bite” but the crucial element of balance to a dish. She asks me to imagine eating Peking duck without the finely sliced cucumbers and spring onions cutting through the delicious fattiness. Huang points out that spring onions have been used in China since the Han dynasty of 202BC-AD220. Back then, they were used to prepare meaty stews or “geng”. They are still used, Huang says, as a kind of culinary disinfectant to dispel “xing wei”, meaning “the raw-meaty flavours in meat, fish and seafood”.

Huang’s latest book, *Asian Green: Everyday plant-based recipes inspired by the East*, is teeming with spring onions in one form or another: she makes savoury pancakes studded with them and sautés them sweetly with carrots and spinach to serve with noodles. One of my favourite recipes in the book is a ginger and spring onion-infused oil: a paste of ginger, red chilli and spring onion mixed with sesame oil and soy sauce. Huang describes this as a Chinese answer to salsa verde – a verdant seasoning to make almost any dish taste springlike.

Spring onions are considered so special in China that there was once a tradition of sending a child for their first day of school with a bunch of them to bring good luck (a bit like the American tradition of an apple for the teacher). I was told this by Georgine Leung, a nutritionist who grew up in Hong Kong. Leung explains that in mainland China, spring onions are associated with intelligence, partly because the word for spring onion – transliterated as “cong” or “ts’ung” – sounds like one of the Chinese words for “clever”. As well as being a food, they

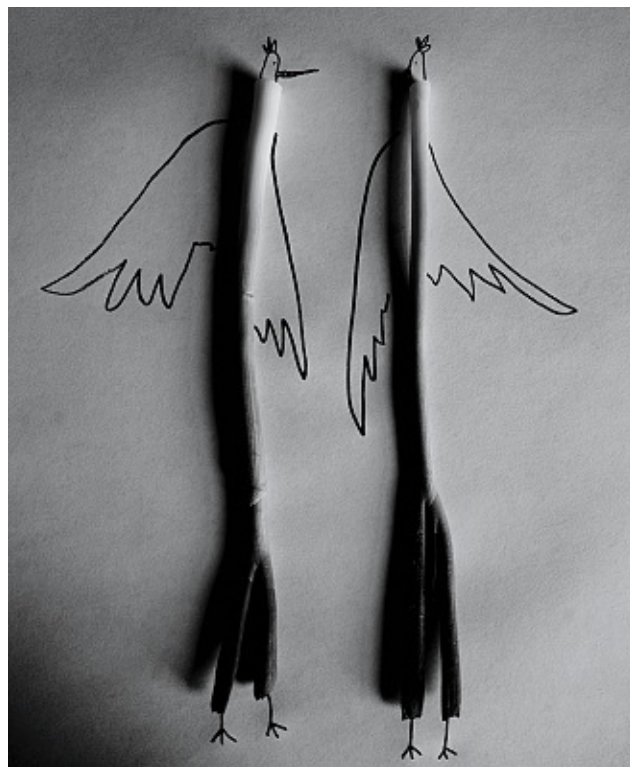
have also long been seen as a medicine. Leung notes that in ancient Chinese medical texts, they were touted as a treatment for a range of conditions, from fevers to digestive issues. Interestingly, Leung says that the different parts of the onion are seen in Chinese medicine to have different properties – the root being “spicy” and “moderate” and the green parts “warm”. Huang confirms this, saying that the white part is considered more potent and “yang” and this carries over into the way that the different parts are used in cooking. “We tend to use white in cooking, then green in garnish.”

One of the saddest instructions you will ever see in a cookbook is the advice to discard all the green part of a spring onion and use only the white. This is completely missing the point. To borrow from Booker T and the MGS, these are green onions. If you throw away the top parts, how can you make an Irish champ, in which mashed potatoes are enhanced with flecks of green onions and lots of butter? Except for the root and the very tips of the green, which may be tough, the whole thing is good to use. Even the trimmings can enhance a stock.

My very favourite spring onion recipe is also one of the simplest I have come across. Like the spring salad, it comes from Edna Lewis, who calls it “Skillet Scallions” and recommends serving it with veal kidneys or steak. For four people, you take four bunches of spring onions, trim the roots and tops to fit a medium-sized frying pan and wash them, leaving any clinging water as it helps them to steam. You heat three tablespoons of butter in the pan and, as soon as it foams, add the onions in a single layer. Cover with a lid for three minutes before turning them. After a minute or so more, they will be done. Lewis comments that “the white part should be a bit crisp, the tops tender, shiny, and green”. She insists that no salt is needed. I was sceptical on this last point but she is right, as usual. They are like an oniony bouquet of spring and nothing you could add would improve them. **FT**

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Bee Wilson is a food writer and author of “The Way We Eat Now”

I FEEL THAT NO OTHER VEGETABLE CAN DELIGHT
IN QUITE SO MANY DIFFERENT WAYS



Let us eat cake

Baking through the five stages of grief helped *Itamar Srulovich* and *Sarit Packer* cope during this pandemic. Here they share their most comforting recipe. Photographs by *Patricia Niven*

For us, this week represents Covid-19's first - and hopefully last - birthday.

It crashed into our home like grief - and 12 months later we can trace how we baked our way through all five stages of it.

We first baked this cake this time last year, when we thought it would all be over soon and that, while we had missed Mother's Day, we would still be with our families for Passover and would need a flourless cake. That would be denial.

We baked it again to assuage anger - at the government, at bats and pangolins, at satanic landlords and curfew-breakers, at the person standing too close in the queue at the local market and the one barking at us for standing too close.

Then we baked it as a bargaining chip - if we bake for key workers and clap on Thursdays, if we bake to raise money for Beirut and Captain Tom, if we bake for our neighbours, customers, anyone who needs sweet comfort, then maybe we'll be spared, maybe it will all be over soon...

And needless to say, we baked it in periods of sadness and depression.

They say the last stage is acceptance. We get that in glimmers. We are still waiting for it to settle but we'll have a slice of cake while we wait, thank you very much.

And what a cake. It is pure, wholesome tenderness, a cake that gives much and wants nothing in return. It quivers but does not collapse. It needs very little to enhance its clean beauty, though it might be grateful for some cold cream and a scatter of fruit.

What's it for exactly? Not for a virus, but for the new us. For better or worse, we are different now. While we're still not sure what the new us will grow into, we have come through a year of plague (knock on wood) and we are excited by what the future might hold. So, we mark this milestone with a little celebration and a very good cake. Maybe this is acceptance. 🍰

By *Itamar Srulovich*. Recipe by *Sarit Packer*. Their new book *"Chasing Smoke: Cooking over Fire Around the Levant"* is published by *Pavilion*, May 13



Coronaversary flourless, dairy-free delicious chocolate cake

- 60g coconut oil
- 100g 70 per cent dark chocolate
- 70g almond butter (or you can use peanut butter or tahini)
- 3 eggs (at room temperature)
- 100g caster sugar
- 2 tbs cocoa powder
- 1 tbs desiccated coconut
- 2 tbs ground almonds

For serving (optional)

- 80g crème fraîche
- 1 punnet of raspberries

1 — Heat your oven to 160C (fan assist).

2 — Melt the coconut oil in a small pan and add the chocolate and the nut butter. Melt and mix to combine everything, then set aside.

3 — Place the eggs and the sugar in a bowl or beaker. Using an electric whisk (it would be very hard to achieve the correct fluffy consistency without one), whip until they puff up, lighten in colour and become very foamy. (This is known as the ribbon stage, meaning that when you remove the whisk it should leave a ribbon-like mark in the mix, which slowly disappears. It should take about five minutes on a high speed.)

4 — Fold the chocolate mix by hand into the egg mix. Sprinkle in the cocoa, coconut and ground almonds. Continue folding until the mix is homogenous. Transfer to a lightly buttered 7in baking tin (ideally a loose-bottom one for ease of removing later).

5 — Place in the centre of the oven for 10 minutes. Rotate the cake for an even bake and add another eight minutes to your timer. Remove from the oven and leave the cake to cool down in the tin for at least two hours somewhere chilly, but not the fridge.

6 — Remove the cake carefully from the tin. Serve at room temperature for the best result. (If you have kept it in the fridge, make sure to bring it up to room temperature before serving.) Top with crème fraîche and raspberries just before serving, if you like.

Party like it's 2021

Corks popping, the clink of ice, a crowd of friends... Soon we will be able to meet and mingle, but our get-togethers may be a little different.

Alice Lascelles looks forward to post-pandemic parties with recipes from six top chefs and mixologists.

Illustrations by Natsko Seki

Not long ago, I received an invitation to a party at a friend's cottage in the Cotswolds. "Summer Evening Garden Party, 7th August 2021," it announced, optimistically. "Dress code: Silk Road."

For a moment I stared at the invitation, unable to compute. Summer. Evening. Garden. Party. Each rose-gold syllable seemed almost impossibly exotic - like a dream. Did we really used to do such things, I wondered, scrabbling around in the attic of my mind.

And then, gradually, like sunbeams piercing the gloom, the memories started to return: strings of lights, people laughing, music. The smell of night-scented stock and cigarette smoke on a warm evening. A cork popping, the clink of ice. The feel of grass under bare feet. I sat at my desk, looking at the invitation, and felt a little stab in my heart.

In the early days of the pandemic, I said "When this is all over..." an awful lot. It would just be a matter of weeks, or maybe months, I thought, before we could all celebrate with a great big jamboree. I had visions of VE Day-style street parties with bunting and sausage rolls and sponge cake. We'd sing Dame Vera Lynn songs and hug all those neighbours we'd glimpsed during the weekly NHS clap.

It didn't quite pan out like that, of course. One year in, Covid-19 is still clinging on like the guest who doesn't know when it's time to go home. And I still haven't learnt the name of my neighbour across the street.

Yet life goes on and it must be celebrated. If there's one thing we've learnt over the past 12 months, it's how to eke a celebration out of almost nothing - a muddy walk, a doorstep coffee, a socially distanced "cheers" over the garden fence.

So what will parties look like, as restrictions ease? A bit awkward to begin with, I imagine. But maybe not all bad.

The days when everyone crowded into the kitchen may be behind us. But on the upside, we are now all masters of the al fresco party. Even the most miserable British summer will hold no fear for hosts armed with patio heaters, thermoses and 3-tog puffer jackets. The garden will become the new epicentre of socialising - where else, after all, are we supposed to put all those poorly trained lockdown dogs?

Sharing plates will be passé, along with dips, fondues, bowls of nuts and anything requiring a good rortle. In their place, the bite-sized canapé will have a renaissance: devils on horseback, blinis and the mushroom vol-au-vent. ▶



◀ Snacks that boast their own biodegradable packaging will also be in hot demand. Expect to see quails' eggs all over Instagram in 2021. Maybe it will become *de rigueur* for hosts to provide guests with individual packets of nuts - a good way of repurposing all those airline snacks currently going to waste.

The quality of drinks will improve enormously as people compete to show off their new-found mixology skills. Everyone will be able to jump behind the bar.

Cross-contamination will be a concern, of course, and hosts will live in terror of the wine-glass mix-up. As a consequence, sales of the glass marker will surge in a manner not seen since the 1920s. No party look will be complete without a little gem dangling from one's coupe.

Glass-clinking will be a no-no - so we'll all have to get good at The Toast. "May the roof above us never fall in, and may the friends gathered below it never fall out" is one I resorted to many times in pre-Covid days. It seems more pertinent now than ever.

Thanks to Zoom and WFH, everyone will have seen inside your home already, so there will be no point in tidying up. And intrusions - by flatmates, pets or feral children - will be tolerated much more readily.

Everyone will have forgotten how to get dressed from the waist down, so expect some funny outfits. Most of us will look fatter, hairier and older. But a handful will emerge, like butterflies, appearing suspiciously youthful - could that be a lockdown nose job?

By the old standards, precious few will have interesting stories to tell - hardly anyone has been anywhere or seen anyone. But there won't be any lack of things to talk about. People will tread more lightly with news of personal triumphs - dream house purchases, promotions and holidays. Instead, parties will hum with the question: how was it for you?

There will be laughter, a bit too much drinking and probably a few tears. It will be overwhelming to see so many people all at once. But, my God, I'll be happy to see them - even the ones I never liked that much.

I don't know if my friend's Silk Road party will happen. I'm no longer holding out for that VE Day jamboree. But that's OK, because the more I think about it, the parties that lie ahead might actually be rather nice. **FT**

Alice Lascelles is an FT contributing editor and drinks columnist for *How To Spend It*. Instagram @alicelascelles

Cocktails

RUBY BRONX

By Nick Strangeway, bartender, drinks consultant and co-founder of Hepple Gin

I really love the Bronx. This springtime twist uses the more intense flavours of blood orange juice in place of traditional orange juice.

- 50ml gin
- 10ml Campari
- 10ml fino sherry
- 40ml freshly squeezed blood orange juice (fine-strained through a tea strainer)

GARNISH

- Small wedge of blood orange

METHOD

Stir with ice, strain into a chilled coupe and garnish.



BERMUDA DAISY

By Mia Johansson, bartender and co-owner, Bar Swift

Fresh, light and a little bit exotic, this Rum Daisy is super-easy to make. If you can't get Galia melon juice, it's great with watermelon juice too.

- 25ml white rum
- 50ml Galia melon juice
- 15ml elderflower cordial
- 15ml lemon juice
- Chilled sparkling water

GARNISH

- Ribbon of cucumber

METHOD

Mix the first four ingredients in an ice-filled highball, top up with the sparkling water, stir gently and garnish.



ALMOND & ROSEMARY MARGARITA

By Deano Moncrieffe, agave spirits consultant and owner, Hacha bar

The slightly peppery, lemon-pine notes of the rosemary balance the sweet, almondy nuttiness of the orgeat in this cocktail, while also bringing out the herbaceous notes of the tequila/mezcal.

- 50ml blanco tequila or joven mezcal
- 25ml Grand Marnier or Cointreau
- 15ml lime juice
- 15ml orgeat syrup
- Small sprig of rosemary

GARNISH

- Sprig of rosemary

METHOD

Muddle the rosemary sprig in the bottom of a shaker. Add all the other ingredients, shake with ice and strain into a chilled coupe.



Food

SCRUMPY

FRIED OYSTERS

By Mark Hix, The Fox Inn, Corscombe

These deep-fried beauties will entice even those who think they don't like oysters. Don't be tempted to use native oysters, as it's a complete waste of good shellfish. Small to medium rock oysters are perfect.

SERVES 4

- 120g gluten-free self-raising flour (it gives a lighter batter), plus extra for dusting
- 200ml cold cider
- Oil for deep frying
- 12 rock oysters, shucked, plus their half-shells
- Salt and black pepper

FOR THE MAYONNAISE

- ½-1 tbs chilli sauce
- 1 tbs good-quality mayonnaise

To make the batter, put the flour in a bowl and slowly whisk in the cider until you have a smooth consistency, then season. Meanwhile, heat some vegetable oil to 160C-180C in a deep-fat fryer or heavy-based saucepan (no more than half full). Dry the oysters on kitchen paper. Test the oil by dropping in a little batter: if it browns after a minute or so, it's ready.



Dip the oysters into the dusting flour and shake off the excess before dipping into the batter. Cook them six at a time for a minute or so until they are crisp and light golden. Remove from the oil with a slotted spoon and place them on a plate with kitchen paper on it. Lightly season with salt.

In a small bowl, whisk the chilli sauce and mayonnaise together. To serve, spoon a little sauce into each half-shell and place an oyster on top.

MEDJOOL DATE,

ALMOND AND SMOKED PANCETTA BONBONS

By Nieves Barragán Mohacho, Sabor (from her book *Sabor: Flavours from a Spanish Kitchen*)

These "bonbons" are a wow in one bite - sweetness, texture, saltiness. The perfect accompaniment to a glass of vermouth.

MAKES 12

- 12 whole Medjool dates
- 24 Marcona almonds
- 24 rashers of smoked pancetta, thinly sliced
- Rapeseed or sunflower oil for shallow frying
- Toothpicks, to serve



Pre-pitted dates can be dry, so choose ones with the stones still in. It's important that the pancetta is very thinly sliced, or it will unfurl when you fry it.

Pit your dates, then put a couple of almonds in the centre of each one and close it. Wrap a couple of slices of pancetta around each date and secure with a toothpick. Heat some oil in a pan and shallow-fry the wrapped dates until the pancetta is golden and crispy. Remove from the pan and drain on kitchen paper before serving.

CHEESE STRAWS

By Skye Gyngell, Spring

These flaky, brittle pastry straws are simple to make and very addictive. We serve them with drinks in the evening as a light snack. We make the pastry ourselves but you can happily substitute a good-quality shop-bought pastry.

- 50g Lincolnshire Poacher
- 50g Red Leicester
- 50g Parmesan
- Cayenne pepper
- 250g puff or flaky pastry
- 1 egg yolk



Grate all the cheeses together and mix with a small pinch of cayenne pepper. Roll out the pastry on a clean, well-floured surface until it is 3mm thick. Sprinkle half of the grated cheese on the middle third of your pastry sheet. Fold up the bottom third and cover with the remaining cheese. Now fold down the final third and press gently with the rolling pin. Cover and refrigerate for 30 minutes.

Remove from the fridge and roll into a 3mm-thick sheet again. Using a small sharp knife, slice into long strips 2.5cm thick. Twist each strip and lay on a baking tray lined with parchment. Rest in the fridge for a final 30 minutes.

While your pastry is resting, preheat the oven to 200C. Gently brush the cheese straws with egg wash and bake for 20 minutes. Remove from the oven and allow them to cool before serving. They are best eaten on the day of baking but will keep well in an airtight container for a couple more days.





In search of Jar Jow

On the trail of an old London-Chinese dish, the legacy of dockworkers from China who had settled in Limehouse in the late-18th century, *Fuchsia Dunlop* discovers a takeaway that delivers the perfect balance of Anglo-Canto fare. Photographs by *Benjamin McMahon*



In the New World Chinese takeaway in Plaistow, east London, Julie Tang was gossiping with her customers in a broad Cockney accent. A woman leant on the counter, discussing her various marriages. An elderly man came in, beaming, for some food and a chat. The telephone rang constantly and a stream of people popped by to pick up orders in hot foil containers stacked in brown paper bags. "Hello, Barbara, yes, you'll pick up in 20 mins?" said Tang on the phone. A few Chinese lanterns hung from the ceiling of the otherwise spartan room. Everyone seemed to be on first-name terms with Tang, who filled the space with the warm glow of kindness and welcome, like the beloved landlady of a neighbourhood pub.

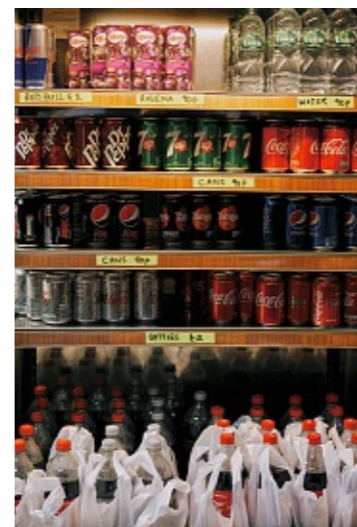
If 2020 was the year of the pandemic, it was also the year of takeaway food, and 2021 may be the same. With restaurants either closed or constrained by the rules of social distancing, home cooking and meal deliveries came into their own. Takeaways no longer just meant pizza or cheap food in plastic boxes, but anything you could imagine, from Malaysian *laksa* to English pies, from meals to meal kits, from the affordable to the astronomical, delivered to every sofa in the land. Hunkered down in Dalston, I enjoyed everything from Turkish kebabs and fish and chips to a white-truffle tasting menu that arrived in a multitude of boxes with two pages of instructions.

Amid this wild kaleidoscope of culinary choices, it's easy to forget that the takeaway was once almost synonymous with Chinese food. In the 1970s, when I was growing up in Oxford, the only takeaways available, aside from fish and chips, were Chinese and Indian. On rare occasions, to the delight of my sister and me, our parents would pick up a Chinese meal: spring rolls, sweet-and-sour pork balls with a polystyrene cupful of bright red sauce and a stack of foil boxes filled with fried rice and chop suey. We would grapple with the unfamiliar chopsticks and eagerly devour the food.

According to accounts cited by author Barclay Price, the Chinese takeaway was born in the postwar years, when customers asked to take food home from the popular Lotus House in Bayswater; others believe that it was invented at a Limehouse restaurant, Local Friends. In any case, the idea took off with the arrival of a wave of immigrants from Hong Kong's New Territories. Most takeaways were Chinese outposts in largely white communities, offering mildly exotic food to Brits more accustomed to eating shepherd's pie, and many appeared when Chinese families took over former fish-and-chip shops, which may be why chips - often with curry sauce - became a fixture on their menus.

According to Gregor Benton and Edmund Terence Gomez in their book *The Chinese in Britain, 1800-Present*, at the start of the 1950s, there were just 36 Chinese restaurants in the UK but, in competition with the new fast-food chains, Chinese takeaways

BY 1971, CHINESE TAKEAWAYS WERE OPENING AT THE RATE OF THREE A WEEK; BY THE LATE 1990S, THEY NUMBERED ABOUT 5,000 NATIONALLY



Clockwise from top left: cooking *Jar Jow*; a selection of cold drinks; old-school favourites, including chop suey,

chow mein, pork balls, crispy pancake rolls, chips and curry sauce; signage; New World owner Julie Tang

"I'VE KNOWN KIDS WHO HAVE NOW GOT KIDS OF THEIR OWN AND THEY STILL COME. AND EVEN PEOPLE WHO MOVED OUT TO ESSEX 15 YEARS AGO STILL COME BACK, ONCE OR TWICE A WEEK"

JULIE TANG, OWNER, NEW WORLD

sprung up all over the country in the 1970s and 1980s. By 1971, they were opening at the rate of three a week; by the late 1990s, they numbered about 5,000 nationally. In just two decades, the Chinese takeaway had become a British institution.

The food on offer was far removed from what Chinese people ate themselves: there were no broths, bones or shells, few vegetables and far too much deep-frying. With no access to fresh Chinese produce, takeaways relied on tinned bamboo shoots and water chestnuts, as well as beansprouts grown from dried mung beans. Fresh peppers and onions offered the requisite crunch; flavours were childishly appealing. The formula, loosely based on Cantonese cooking but simplified for western tastes and modest budgets, had been pioneered by Chinese immigrants in America. It was the only Chinese food most British people ever ate. Despite its almost total lack of authenticity, it was a wild success. By 2001, according to a report by Market Intelligence, Chinese was the British people's favourite foreign food.

Half a century after it first conquered British palates, the "traditional" British Chinese takeaway has been drowned out by the clamour of other cuisines and a new wave of more authentic Chinese specialities. Most of the elder generation of Cantonese chefs have retired, their locally born children leaving behind the rattle of ladles in woks and the hiss of steam. Supermarket Chinese ready meals, often featuring favourite dishes, have encroached on the old takeaway market. Anyway, why eat chop suey, an ersatz dish invented for Americans, when you can enjoy biang biang noodles made by a native of Xi'an or real Sichuanese mapo tofu?

After my childhood delight in sweet-and-sour pork balls, I largely forgot about the old-school Chinese takeaway. I went to live in China and became accustomed to eating real Chinese food. Only once, for journalistic reasons, did I order a meal from a random north London takeaway and I must have picked badly because it was so poor it destroyed all my childhood memories: rancid oil, leathery meat. It wasn't an experience I wanted to repeat. But that was until I stumbled across Julie Tang's New World on the Barking Road.

I was on the trail of an old London Chinese dish, *Jar Jow*, a speciality of the city's original Chinatown near the Limehouse Docks. I remembered it from my early days as a restaurant reviewer in the 1990s, when a couple of faded restaurants in Limehouse still served it: a mixture of chopped pork and vegetables in a dark, sweet sauce. Rumour had it that it was the legacy of Cantonese or Shanghaiese dockworkers who had settled in Limehouse in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. I was curious about the dish and hoped that, if I could discover its Chinese name, I could work out its origins in some Chinese regional cuisine.

But Limehouse is no longer a Chinese neighbourhood. During the second world war, the district was devastated by German

◀ bombing; afterwards, Hong Kong immigrants started laying the foundations of a new Chinatown in Soho. By the late 1990s, all that remained of Chinese Limehouse was a commemorative dragon sculpture and a couple of Chinese restaurants. Now even those establishments have been swept away by a tide of artisan pizzerias, trendy coffee shops and craft breweries.

Internet digging suggested that the only place in London where *Jar Jow* was still available was the New World, a few miles from Limehouse. And so I ended up driving out to Plaistow for a Chinese takeaway. It was a nondescript-looking place, but as soon as I entered it was clear it was special. The menu was a throwback to the 1970s (with *Jar Jow* as a bonus), the place was filled with enticing smells, the customers all clearly loved it and then there was the amiable Julie Tang, with whom I quickly fell into conversation.

Tang is a born-and-bred Londoner, the daughter of Hong Kong immigrants who ran a Chinese takeaway during her teenage years. She married into another Chinese takeaway family, and she and her husband took over this business, then known as Lam's House, in 1996. The menu has barely changed since. "We've added a few dishes, like crispy duck," she says, "But the main items on the menu remain the same, because it works." The repertoire is a roll-call of classic Anglo-Canto fare: chop sueys, chow meins, fried rices, curries, sweet-and-sours, prawn crackers and "English dishes" that include roast chicken and various omelettes with chips.

"Probably 60 per cent of our customers are white British and among the rest there are now a lot of eastern Europeans," says Tang. "The white British love their chicken chow mein, special fried rice, sweet and sour chicken balls, chips in curry sauce and chicken curry. We do have a few Chinese customers, but they order what, for me, are more traditional dishes, like boiled rice, Hong Kong-style sweet-and-sour pork and Singapore noodles; they never order chop suey." Many of her customers have been coming here not only for years, but for generations. "I've known kids who have now got kids of their own and they still come. And even people who moved out to Essex 15 years ago still come back, once or twice a week," she says.

In the back kitchen, the Fujianese head chef, Xue Jingong, who has been working for the business for 28 years, showed me how to make *Jar Jow*. In a small wok, he stir-fried slices of char siu pork and a few pork scratchings in oil, then tipped in sliced bamboo shoot, onion and green pepper. A brief sizzle, then he added water, chilli powder, tomato paste, seasonings. Finally, he thickened the sauce with starch and turned everything into a foil container. With its dark soy-sauce sheen and sliced bamboo shoot, the dish looked Chinese-ish, if not Chinese. It had a definite chilli kick. Tang and Xue told me its Chinese name, which didn't

"WE DO HAVE A FEW CHINESE CUSTOMERS, BUT THEY ORDER MORE TRADITIONAL DISHES, LIKE BOILED RICE, HONG KONG-STYLE SWEET-AND-SOUR PORK AND SINGAPORE NOODLES – THEY NEVER ORDER CHOP SUEY"

JULIE TANG, OWNER, NEW WORLD



Clockwise from far left: the New World kitchen; bags for food; the team of cooks; food waits to be given to a customer; *Jar Jow*



THE PANCAKE ROLLS WERE JUST AS I REMEMBERED THEM: GREAT FLOPPY THINGS PACKED WITH JUICY BEANSPROUTS, SHOT THROUGH WITH MORSELS OF CHAR SIU PORK

help me deduce its origins. Xue admitted he didn't eat *Jar Jow* himself. According to Tang, however, the dish still has a loyal following in east London: "Lots of people order it, young and old, we have several orders every night." Outside east London, no one's heard of it.

Later, I drove home with my own stack of foil containers, brimming with delicious smells. It was my first Anglo-Chinese takeaway in decades, and I was filled with nostalgic glee. Here were the sweet-and-sour pork balls of my childhood, piping hot and quite irresistible, each golden globe stuffed with a nugget of tender meat and eaten with a trickle of clear, mandarin-coloured sauce. The pancake rolls were just as I remembered them: great floppy things packed with juicy beansprouts, shot through with morsels of char siu pork. And then there were chips with their home-made curry sauce, which Tang insisted I try, and special chop suey - as stubbornly unfashionable as you'd expect: neither western nor Chinese, but a mixture of chopped pork, chicken, shrimps, onions, beansprouts and peas in a sloppy tomato sauce, with a small omelette on top.

My visit to the New World brought me no closer to understanding the roots of *Jar Jow*, but it did offer me a joyful reunion with my childhood recollections. Banished were all thoughts of rancid oil and leathery meat. This was the easy, lovely, robustly inauthentic Chinese food I had adored as a child, deftly cooked and served with an endearing generosity of spirit. It was a reminder that British Chinese food, like London itself and all its polyglot cuisines, tells tales of people on the move, past and present. *Jar Jow*, that strange hybrid, had early on been eclipsed by chop sueys and chow meins. Now even these dishes had become endangered species, replaced in the nation's affections first by crispy duck with pancakes and now by a whole plethora of regional dishes.

The almost total disappearance of the Chinese and their old *Jar Jow* from Limehouse is also a reminder that the history of immigration is an evolving palimpsest of tastes and stories, layered one on top of another, each one erasing the one before it, reminding us all of our ephemerality. People and dishes come and go. Immigration, gentrification, white flight, hipsterfication, urban decay, war and urban renewal all redraw the maps of cities. It's a process that is fraught with emotion but usually futile to resist. Our claims on land, space and palates are fragile and fleeting. **FT**

Fuchsia Dunlop is the author, most recently, of "The Food of Sichuan", winner of the Fortnum & Mason 2020 cookbook award. New World (also known as Lam's House), 40 Barking Road, London E13 8HJ; +44 20 7476 6577

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Jancis Robinson Wine

Spring awakening

The annual cycle of vineyards has always seemed to be particularly miraculous. Throughout the winter, their matrix of savage, dark stumps looks especially unyielding. And yet every spring, without fail, tender green shoots emerge, heralding foliage so luxuriant it often has to be cut back to allow the grapes that result from its tiny flowers to stand a chance of ripening. At this time of year - and especially this year, marooned in a London flat - I envy all the vine growers I am in touch with.

Much is said and written about the consolations that nature can offer to the locked down. A window box, even a mere potted plant, is blissfully unaware of the pandemic. But we can all enjoy the miracle of spring and the renewal of vine growth in liquid form through wines that seem particularly springlike - as well as enjoy the first fruits of the 2020 vintage, already a year old in the case of some southern hemisphere wines.

WHITES

Dog Point Sauvignon Blanc 2020 Marlborough 13%

This comes from one of my favourite producers of one of the world's favourite wines. The NZ estate is run by members of the original Cloudy Bay set-up before its Sauvignon Blanc became ubiquitous. Fans of Coche Dury white burgundies might like to seek out the 2019, which has even more of the Coche struck-match character.
£14.95 The Wine Society

Herbert Zillinger, Horizont Grüner Veltliner 2019 Lower Austria 12.5%

Low in nothing but alcohol from a determinedly biodynamic producer. Chock full of extract and satisfying flavour with cinnamon and ginger notes and a dry, chalky, persistent finish.

£16 The Real Wine Company



As imagined by Leon Edler

BOB Short for Kate Sauvignon Blanc 2020 Marlborough 13%

From winemaker Ben Glover's label in memory of his late sister Kate, this is a more complex Marlborough Sauvignon than most, with notes of greenery. A superior version of a well-loved style of wine.
£16.49 Bancroft Wines

Rolly Gassmann, Réserve Millésime Sylvaner 2019 Alsace 12%

Very deep gold for such a young wine. Rich, pungent, open, broad nose. Lots of fun here, and more evidence that Alsace Sylvaner

'We can all enjoy the miracle of spring in liquid form through wines that seem particularly springlike'



can be a seriously interesting dry wine. To be enjoyed now, with or without food.

£18.99 The Old Bridge Wine Shop

Lismore, Barrel Fermented Sauvignon Blanc 2017 South Africa 13.5%

From one of the coolest vineyards on the south coast - 30 per cent fermented in a concrete egg, the rest in 500-litre oak barrels. Samantha O'Keefe has produced a serious, substantial wine with a lot more life than many a Pessac-Léognan. Bone-dry finish. Probably best drunk with food. Impressive persistence.

£18.99 Strictly Wine and other independents

Howard's Folly, Sonhador Branco 2018 Alentejo 13.3%

First vintage of a field blend of ancient vines of various Portuguese varieties grown on granite and made by Australian immigrant David Baverstock of Esporão. Just 15 per cent was aged in big oak barrels to produce a really distinctive dry white with a satin texture and layers of citrus flavour.

£19 Pull the Cork

Rafael Palacios, Louro Godello 2019 Valdeorras 14%

Blend of Godello grapes grown around O Bolo in several of Galicia's typically tiny plots at elevations above 600m. Intense, dry, concentrated, sophisticated. Just the job for those who seek a reliable, sensibly priced alternative to fine white burgundy.

About £19 from various independents

Dom Bachelet-Monnot 2017 Bourgogne Blanc 12.5%

Really rather ripe and gorgeous on the nose with a very light, smoky reductive note. Lovely white burgundy for drinking now and much better value than many New World Chardonnays from some of the more celebrated producers. ▶

◀ A light lemon-sherbet character, but not for the long term.
£19.18 Justerini & Brooks

**Daniel Chotard 2019
Sancerre 13.5%**

An interesting Sancerre from a ripe vintage. So much less austere and aromatic than many previous examples but with a richness and density that reminds me of some of the celebrated Cotat Sancerres which have such a long life.
£19.95 Berry Bros & Rudd

**Isabel Chardonnay 2016
Marlborough 13.5%**

By NZ standards this is an antique! Marlborough's characteristic acidity is fading and this is a fully mature, very agreeable alternative to a well-made Côte de Beaune white burgundy. Fresh and bright-fruited.

£21.49 Bancroft Wines

**Dominio do Bibei, Lapola 2018
Ribeira Sacra 13.5%**

Another Galician dry white based on the magical Godello grape. Fresh, marine, racy, citrusy and very distinctive. Hugely digestible and refreshing now, but don't hang on to it.

£22.50 Vin Neuf and other independents

**Benjamin Leroux 2018
Bourgogne Blanc 13%**

A blend of wines from the Hautes-Côtes de Beaune and outlying vineyards around Meursault put together with great skill by this new-generation negociant. Neat,

fresh and pure. Creamy texture with a slice of lemon. Just the ticket. The only disadvantage of the wine is that you know it would have cost half as much quite recently. It's also at its peak at the moment. Not for the cellar.

£25 Berry Bros & Rudd

**Pewsey Vale, The Contours
Museum Release Riesling 2013
Eden Valley 12.5%**

A label of the Hill-Smith family of Yalumba. Some of these vines were planted way back in 1965. There's a first release at five years old followed by this second release when they judge the wine can eloquently demonstrate the ageing ability of Riesling. How many German producers have a late-release programme, I wonder?
£26.49 Noel Young

**Mullineux & Leeu Family
Wines, Old Vines White 2019
Swartland 14%**

Andrea Mullineux's old-vine blend of seven different varieties has never disappointed. You would be well advised to grab the concentrated 2019 vintage now as the harvest was shrunk by drought. Intense honey and beeswax on the nose. An untutored palate might assume, wrongly, that this wine has some sweetness because it's so rich. Satin texture and waves of flavour including green leaves and Cape gooseberries. Long, subtle and thoroughly admirable.

*£25.99 Noel Young,
£26.99 The Wine Reserve,
£30.50 Philglas & Swiggot*

**ROSE
Waterkloof, Circumstance
Coral Mourvedre Rosé 2020
Stellenbosch 13%**

Spring in a bottle? But with so much more flavour than most very pale rosés. It's made from the same grape as the famous Domaine Tempier Bandol rosé. Smart silver screwcap. Broad and flattering with rather soft fruit but a very gentle, caressing impact on the palate. I wouldn't age this and it's a rosé that could happily be drunk in winter as well as summer, but it's beautifully made, with light smokiness.

£11.39-£13.99 various independents

**REDS
Bononia, Gomotartzi Gamza
2019 Bulgaria 12.7%**

Gamza is a Bulgarian grape that makes fruity, fairly soft wines that drink well young and without food. This one, grown close to the Danube river, is a lovely springlike red with a little note of tamarind. Unexpectedly persistent.

£10.50 The Old Cellar

**Dom de la Grosse Pierre 2019
Chiroubles 13%**

Pauline Passot makes translucent Beaujolais that is seriously underpriced. Fragrant, delicate, mouth-filling and very refined.

£11.68 from Howard Ripley soon

**Dom Jean-Marc Burgaud, Les
Charmes 2019 Morgon 13%**

This has the flirtatious - even slightly peppery - side that so

many wine lovers seek in a cru Beaujolais. Lovely, racy fruit and a juicy drink-me quality.

£22.99 The Old Bridge Wine Shop

**Dog Point Pinot Noir 2018
Marlborough 13%**

Very gentle, delicate and nuanced but not quite as compelling as the 2017 is now, which augurs well for the future of this 2018. It is savoury and dry - there's no distracting sweetness, no beetroot quality, no obvious oakiness. You could certainly enjoy it today but I suspect it might be even better next year. Amazing that one producer can be so good at both Sauvignon Blanc and Pinot Noir - and makes pretty smart Chardonnay too.

£25 The Wine Society

**Kusuda Pinot Noir 2017
Martinborough 12.9%**

Very rich nose suggests a wine with more alcohol than 13%. Made by a Japanese master of subtle red wines in the North Island's Pinot Noir capital. So clean and pure. Wonderful persistence with a fan of flavour that builds on the finish, like a fine burgundy. Real reverberation and depth.

A wine that sings!

£100 Woodwinters



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FT Weekend





FROM LEFT: SAMUEL BECKETT, THELONIUS MONK, ROWLEY LEIGH, JENNIFER PATERSON, BENJAMIN LOVE, SIGMUND FREUD

FANTASY DINNER PARTY

ROWLEY LEIGH

Among Monet's water lilies, the FT food writer tucks into snipe on toast with Thelonus Monk and Sigmund Freud

We are dining in the basement of the Musée de l'Orangerie, surrounded on all sides by Monet's water lilies. It has to be in Paris, as **Samuel Beckett** refuses to travel. Paris also suits the chef, Edouard Nignon, who hasn't lifted a saucepan in earnest since he sold Restaurant Larue in 1928. He cooked for Tsar Nicholas II and Franz Joseph of Austria, and I thought that might come in handy with two of my guests, **Sigmund Freud** and my great-grandfather **Benjamin Love**, both born in 1856. Benjamin was sent to Britain from what is now Belarus when he was 12 and I want to mine him for a bit of family history. I warn Nignon off the pork in deference to these two.

They are the first to arrive. Siggie is in a frightful bate. Some upstart at the door has just

snatched the cigar out of his mouth. I explain that even in my wildest dreams it isn't possible to smoke in the presence of the artwork. He looks around contemptuously and mutters something about "wish-fulfilment".

Beckett arrives. He stares through his pebble lenses at the pictures, walking up very close and then stepping back in confusion. I offer him a glass of the von Schubert Kabinett Riesling but he turns it down and demands a glass of beer. My son Sidney, acting as wine waiter, produces a bottle of Duvel and Sam nods approvingly. A pregnant pause ensues before Benjamin asks to look at Freud's pocket watch: he assays it with a professional air. He explains that he is a pawnbroker. Freud looks puzzled. "You know, Siggie, a pawnbroker, the man with the three balls," explains Sam. Siggie whips out a notebook and scribbles something.

Jennifer Paterson, cook, author and one of TV's *Two Fat Ladies*, is the next to arrive, with a loud cooe, wearing a crash helmet and a white plastic parka, removing them to reveal an elegant scarlet cashmere tunic, her immaculately coiffed hair and her usual array of rings and pendants. She also

declines the Riesling and demands whisky. "Grouse would do."

Nignon is impatient, so we sit down and set about the *blinis à la russe* with ice-cold shots of vodka. Benjamin is very happy, as is Jennifer, who tried to eat caviar on her deathbed but didn't manage it. Sam orders another Duvel.

The *consommé Francillon* (duck consommé with beetroot) arrives.

'Nignon hasn't lifted a saucepan in earnest since 1928, but he once cooked for Tsar Nicholas II and Franz Joseph of Austria'

It has, as Edouard promised, "*la nuance d'un rubis foncé et d'une merveilleuse saveur*". Benjaminsips each spoonful in ecstasy.

The last guest arrives in a state of some confusion. "Hey man, what's happening?" inquires jazz pianist **Thelonus Monk**, as he seats himself at the table between Freud and Paterson. "Something is taking its course," replies Beckett. We stare at the lilies.

Nignon pulls out all the stops with the *turbot soufflé nantaise*. The fillets of turbot are coated with

a soufflé mixture and garnished with *pommes dauphines* - stuffed with diced lobster - and a *sauce normande* with poached oysters. Raveneau's Chablis Forêt 2002 has sufficient freshness and puissance to cope with this exquisite creation.

After an initial, reverential silence, Beckett finds himself explaining cricket's leg-before-wicket rule to Freud. The notebook emerges again: "And you say one ball and three sticks?" Benjamin and Monk talk animatedly and at cross purposes about 12-tone music and 12-bar blues. Beckett has another beer.

Nignon produces the *bécassines à l'eau de vie* promptly. Two snipe arrive, each on toast spread with foie gras. "Now I'm really in heaven," gasps Jennifer. We make no comment. Sidney serves the 1990 Jamet Côte-Rôtie. As Jennifer's highly varnished fingernails dismember the carcasses, the others follow suit. Even Beckett is inhaling the gloriously Burgundian Rhône wine with reverence. The lilies are beginning to make sense.

After a pause and a little "comfort break", *la rêve d'Edouard Nignon* arrives. But this glorious concoction of meringue, wild strawberries and almonds goes almost unnoticed. Monk, who had accompanied Freud to the loo, seems extremely agitated, and even Siggie has become more animated. I thought he'd given up the cocaine years ago. Sam is singing "Danny Boy" and only Benjamin maintains any reserve. We discuss my grandfather. "He was such a silly boy: wouldn't talk to us for 15 years, just because he married out, as though we cared."

Paterson cradles Monk in her arms, calming him with her inimitable rendition of "The Skye Boat Song". We all take up the chorus, even Siggie. She coaxes Monk over to the piano and starts growling out "Alexander's Ragtime Band", as he runs little arpeggios and harmonies in and out of the vocals. Sam taps his feet enthusiastically. Even Nignon emerges from the kitchen and I hear his light tenor in the choruses.

We decamp to some chaises longues in the Jardin des Tuileries. I offer Siggie a Ramón Allones Prominente cigar but he declines, saying his filthy rum-soaked Don Pedros are good for his throat. We drink ice-cold daiquiris and puff away contentedly to the sound of the lapping waters of the Seine. We have of course, ordered the suspension of all traffic for the occasion. **FT**

Restaurant Insider

Nicholas Lander



BAGELS MADE BY CHEF SAM KAMIENKO IN HIS HOME IN WEST LONDON. PHOTOGRAPHS BY AMELIA KING

Lockdown is the mother of invention

Chefs, in my experience, do not adapt to boredom easily. They tend to be young and in a hurry, and enthusiastic about feeding as many people as possible. For some, cut off from their colleagues and customers during lockdowns the world over, that has meant preparing food for the needy and supporting frontline workers.

Others have taken the time to develop businesses fit for the corona-era, following their noses and their stomachs.

Sam Kamienko is one such chef. Born in Australia to Polish parents, he had stints in New York and Paris before coming to London and joining Leroy in Shoreditch, which won a Michelin star in 2019. During lockdown in March 2020, he was living in Earl's Court. This area of west London reminded him of New York and his mind turned to bagels, that quintessential Jewish boiled-baked staple.

Throughout that first lockdown, Kamienko refined his bagels, a product that appears simple but is tricky to get right. He started selling them - plain, poppyseed and

more - three or four days a week: "I get up early, shape, boil and bake the bagels, which come with five different toppings. Then I pack and cycle them all over London."

When I ask how business is, he sends a breathless email, saying he's "inundated": "The combination of Instagram and lockdown, and that they are delivered by bicycle, has really spread the bagel love." He has been making about 300 a week and is now asking himself where his future lies - in a restaurant's kitchen or his own.

Hanzhou Piao has also got on his bike, but in his case, to deliver homemade dumplings around Paris.

Born in China, Piao worked in Japan and Canada before moving to Paris, where he has cooked at Ellsworth and Pierre Gagnaire's Gaya. Before lockdown, he had brought his Dongbei (north-eastern Chinese) dumplings to friends' dinner parties and "the notion of starting my own business had floated across my consciousness". But he had taken it no further.

During the first lockdown, he volunteered to cook in a collective that made meals for 800 hospital staff and he made, froze and gave away his dumplings at weekends.

When the city's new curfew was announced in late 2020, Piao



'Sam Kamienko has been making about 300 bagels a week and is now asking himself where his future lies - in a restaurant's kitchen or his own'

decided his moment had come. With Gaya restricted to takeaway only, Piao worked from 8am to 5pm in the restaurant before rushing out to buy supplies for his dumplings. A single Instagram post resulted in his first order of 27 boxes, each with 12 dumplings, and he now has a list of more than 200 customers for the 100 boxes he can make and deliver over a weekend.

As demand has grown, so has his repertoire: classic dumpling fillings such as pork and shiitake have been followed by more adventurous flavours such as veal, 'nduja spicy sausage and Raclette cheese. This has been matched by Piao's grasp of bicycle maintenance. "My first bike broke beyond repair after my first week's delivery," he says. Since then, he has learned how to fix every part.

When New York's two-Michelin-star restaurant The Modern closed in March 2020, Jiho Kim, its talented Korean-born pastry chef, felt "desperate". He still wanted to cook for his customer-friends but preparing multiple courses in his domestic kitchen was not easy.

Opening a pop-up was his solution but finding a space with the appropriate set-up seemed impossible. Finally he settled on Radio Star Karaoke bar on West 35th Street. The space wasn't ideal: it had just two burners and two small sinks in the corner. But after some thought, Kim decided that humility - rather than luxury - was the path to follow.

With help from other chefs at The Modern, Kim built a kitchen with portable butane burners and a \$30 toaster oven, borrowed tables and chairs from closed restaurants and constructed an outdoor eating space. The result was Joomak - Korean for tavern - where he cooked a \$65 tasting menu featuring dishes such as duck breast with *gochujang unagi* (sweet and spicy eel), roasted pear, almond and miso caramel. After moving on to other locations, his pop-up has closed and Kim is preparing to open a permanent Joomak restaurant this spring.

"As soon as we open, our guests know our heart - how much we want to cook food," says Kim. "We are just like actors and actresses on Broadway. It's not just for the money." **FT**

More columns at ft.com/lander

Games



A Round on the Links

by James Walton



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

1. Lily Bart is the main character in which Edith Wharton novel?

2. Which dessert product, launched in 1967, was advertised by Wallace and Gromit in the 1990s?

3. Which actress starred in the first productions of Tom Stoppard's

plays *The Real Thing*, *Happgood*, *Arcadia* and *Indian Ink*?

4. Who was the lead singer of the band Hole?

5. In which TV series did Jane Lynch play Sue Sylvester – a cheerleaders' coach who later became the school principal?

6. What was the first fabric conditioner launched in the UK?

7. In the opening lines of Coleridge's "Kubla Khan", what does Kubla Khan (right) decree in Xanadu?

8. In which Arkansas town (above) was Bill Clinton born?

9. According to some evangelical Christians, in which event will all believers – living and dead – ascend to heaven?

10. What was adopted as the anthem of the European Community in 1985?



The Picture Round

by James Walton

Who or what do these pictures add up to?



+

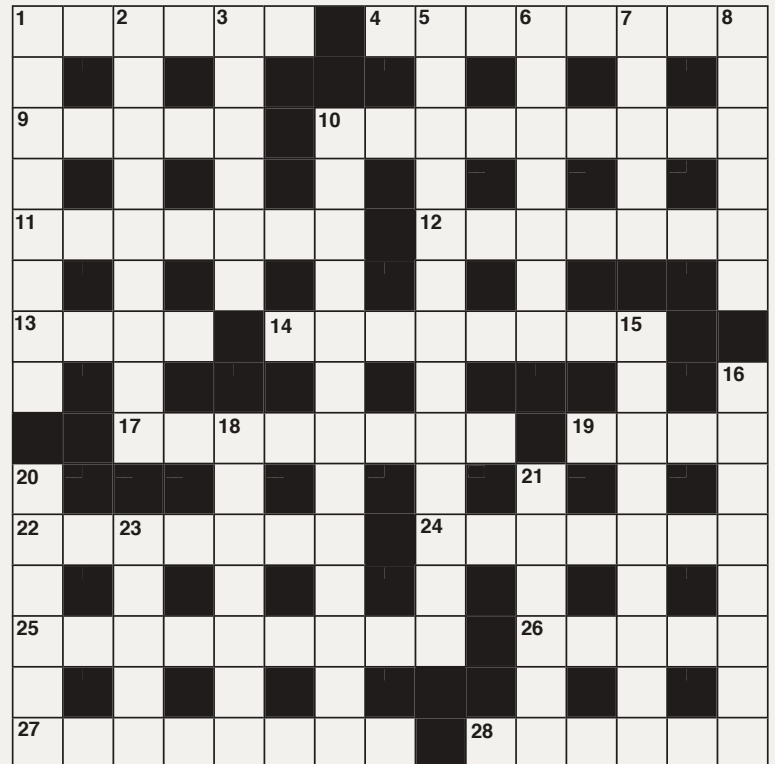


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Answers page 8

The Crossword

No 531. Set by Aldhelm



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

ACROSS

- 1** Shirt (6)
- 4** Dusk (8)
- 9** Forbidden behaviour (5)
- 10** Aide (9)
- 11** Small greyhound (7)
- 12** Italian woman's title (7)
- 13** Memo (4)
- 14** Slope (8)
- 17** Reality-avoiding fantasy (8)
- 19** Cry of pain (4)
- 22** Making a home (7)
- 24** Collated edition (7)
- 25** Small old coin (9)
- 26** Locomotive (5)
- 27** Non-elite (university) (8)
- 28** Small hole (6)

DOWN

- 1** State of a phoney person was somehow not applicable (8)
- 2** Secret cell's to lie, but is in trouble with head of espionage (9)
- 3** Digs out exclusives (6)
- 5** Beginning of score does set it out in witty musical (4, 4, 5)
- 6** Way to incorporate dip for pasta (7)
- 7** Work around university with an old source of fertiliser (5)
- 8** Giant takes over independent artist (6)
- 10** One terribly poor etching's created by us (13)
- 15** Little picture's digital element? (9)
- 16** It regularly leaves organised hunts etc (8)

- 18** Each fragment at first is lively (7)
- 20** Fix a large number's endless drudgery (6)
- 21** Irritated by fool in a disagreeable place (6)
- 23** Reliable cover's thus put on top (5)

Solution to Crossword No 530





GILLIAN TETT

PARTING SHOT

What is a fair deal for New York's cabbies?



Last week, as a combination of sunny weather and improving Covid-19 news warmed the spirits of many New Yorkers, I went walking in a park near the residence of mayor Bill de Blasio.

There I saw something to puncture the spring optimism: dozens of taxi drivers had parked their iconic cabs, the same colour as the daffodils, on the street by Gracie Mansion and were noisily protesting nearby.

The drivers were asking de Blasio to use the funds New York is receiving from America's \$1.9tn stimulus package to support debt relief for them. According to New York state senator Jessica Ramos, the drivers have an average of \$500,000 debt as a result of borrowing heavily to buy a medallion, the city's taxi-driving permit.

The drivers want lenders to reduce loan burdens to \$125,000 and then want de Blasio to "backstop" those debts, but the city has a different idea: last week de Blasio unveiled a \$65m package for drivers which offered a \$20,000 interest-free loan to help them pay off some of their debts.

The New York Taxi Workers Alliance, which represents 21,000 drivers, says the plan bails out the hedge funds that made the loans to drivers, rather than the drivers themselves. The union has called the medallion-debt situation an "economic crisis on the verge of becoming a humanitarian crisis".

Is this simply a New York fight? Some readers might be tempted to think so. After all, those bright yellow cabs are a symbol of the city, and its taxi services have long been run in an idiosyncratic manner, using rules first devised in the 1930s.

Yet what makes this local tussle so interesting is that the core issue extends well beyond the Big Apple, touching on policy questions that now confront many western governments. As Covid-19 shut down large parts of the economy worldwide, many places have (rightly) provided aid to support vulnerable people and ailing industries.

But now that a recovery is in sight, the challenge is determining who still deserves assistance. Should debt be written off if it was incurred pre-Covid but worsened by the pandemic? Should governments prop up industries that cannot thrive in a digitised, post-pandemic world? How much creative destruction should take place if it causes more human pain?

There are no easy answers, as the yellow cab saga shows. A few decades ago, driving a taxi in New York seemed a reliable way to get a foothold on the American dream. The overwhelming majority of drivers are immigrants, and many were so convinced the job was secure that they took out large loans for their medallions.

Since the city carefully controls the supply of medallions, their price used to be steady in secondary markets, trading at around \$250,000 between 1995 and 2002. However, after the financial crisis of 2008, lenders that were looking for new business niches started to offer medallion

credit to drivers, sparking price inflation, as I examined at the time.

Medallion prices rose to more than \$1m in 2014. But since ride-hailing apps such as Uber entered the market, they have plunged back to around \$200,000 today. While yellow cab drivers have seen their income collapse, their medallion-linked debt has not declined. Worse still, this debt was often extended on predatory terms, echoing the subprime mortgage scandals. The result has been a profound tragedy for many drivers, even before Covid-19, leading to some suicides.

Many New Yorkers consider it unfair to bail out one hard-working impoverished group without helping others

Hence the industry's demands for debt relief, which are backed by Letitia James, New York state attorney-general, who launched an investigation into allegedly predatory medallion lending practices in 2019 and even threatened to sue the city to provide debt relief (though ultimately did not).

On a human level, it is hard to avoid feeling sad about these tragedies – or to disagree that the taxi drivers deserve support, not least because some of them seem to have been ill-equipped to realise the predatory nature of the loans that were pushed on them. But the problem that confronts de Blasio is that New York has a serious budgetary crisis of its own, which is likely to get worse this year since some wealthy taxpayers have fled to places such as Florida. Many New Yorkers consider it unfair to bail out one hard-working impoverished group without helping others.

Then, of course, there are the bigger questions that any free-market economist might ask: does it make sense to rescue the yellow cab industry in a world where digital disruption is likely to only intensify? Is this medallion system (which is also used in places such as Boston and Chicago) even fit for the 21st century? Is it time to overhaul the entire taxi and ride-sharing system, to provide more protection to drivers of every sort?

My answer to the last question is a definite "yes". It would be nice to think the pandemic disruption and fight about taxi debt in New York could spark a bigger overhaul. But this will take a long time, so in the short term there will undoubtedly be more emotive negotiations between de Blasio and the taxi union. Economic stress will not simply melt away, even if there is a warm summer economic recovery, nor will the fights about what is "fair" policy in a post-pandemic world. **FT**

gillian.tett@ft.com @gilliantett



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