

JUNE 6/7 2020

16-PAGE  
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FT Weekend Magazine

# HOW GERMANY GOT CORONAVIRUS RIGHT

By Guy Chazan







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- 5 Simon Kuper**  
Will the US take the path to radical change post-pandemic?
- 6 Inventory**  
Robin Wall Kimmerer, botanist
- 8 Tech World**  
Why Hong Kong is worried about digital freedom
- 10 Robert Shrimsley**  
It's the one that you want: drive-in cinemas
- 10 Letters**

---

- 12 How Germany got coronavirus right**  
The country has been praised for the speed with which it brought Covid-19 under control. *Guy Chazan* reports from a former disease hotspot on how they tackled the crisis

---

- 21 Design special**  
A 16-page guide to the latest trends in the world of design, from virtual exhibitions to the products we're buying under lockdown

---

- 37 How to be funny online**  
*Sam Leith* speaks to the internet comics who excel at blurring the line between the silly and the serious

---

- 40 'I feel a responsibility to document our fight'**  
As protests erupt across the US following the killing of George Floyd by a white police officer, six photographers write about their experiences of recording a nation in turmoil

---

- 46 Honey & Co**  
Fried halloumi with avocado and cucumber salad
- 49 Jancis Robinson**  
Wines from Savoie: the new Jura?
- 51 Tim Hayward**  
The writer on his favourite local restaurant – and how much he misses it
- 52 Fantasy dinner parties**  
*Jan Dalley* devises her perfect meal

---

- 53 Games**
- 54 Gillian Tett**  
When tear gas comes to TikTok



DEE DWYER

### 'This has been an awakening moment for everyone'

The protests in pictures, p40



### Designs of the times

A special supplement on the shape of things to come, p21



### 'Late to the halloumi party, we're now fully converted'

Honey & Co, p46

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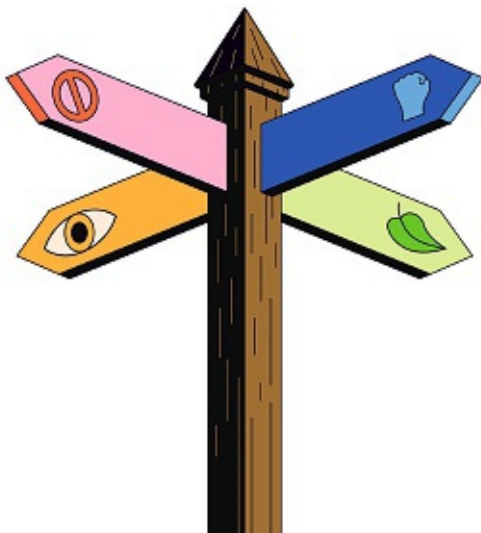




# SIMON KUPER

OPENING SHOT

## Will the US take the path to radical change post-pandemic?



In March 1917, Vladimir Lenin was living in Zurich, in smelly rooms rented from a shoemaker, spending his days in the library. When a neighbour told him there had been a revolution in Russia, he could hardly believe it.

The Germans put the obscure troublemaker on a train to St Petersburg in the hope of disrupting Russia, their enemy in the Great War. Lenin arrived in Petrograd with that rare asset at a time of flux: a plan. He promised to make peace with Germany, give land to the peasants and hand “all power to the Soviets”, the newly formed councils of workers, soldiers and peasants. In October, the Bolsheviks seized the Winter Palace.

Nothing about their triumph was historically inevitable. Alexander Kerensky, head of the provisional liberal government, who would die almost forgotten in New York in 1970, might have prevailed. Lenin won because he was lucky, but also because he had a story of hope, a sense that the moment had come to bet his life’s work without compromise, and a project – communism – that he had elaborated in the library. It was a disastrous project, but then it’s not the best ideas that win in times of flux. It’s the ones that are ready.

There are lessons here for today’s moment of flux. People are speculating about how the pandemic might change the world. In fact, as in Russia in 1917, everything is up for grabs. Each country will take its own path, largely because, as in 1917, there is almost no international co-ordination. This isn’t like the period of flux after the second world war, which produced multinational bodies such as the UN, the IMF and the EEC. Rather, there are four main scenarios that will play out differently in different countries:

**1. The status quo prevails.** That’s most likely if the pandemic proves brief. In that case, governments will turn the carbon tap back on, and preserve the existing economy, like after the financial crisis of 2008. This is their easiest option, because few governments have big ideas. To expect a career politician to have a project for societal change is like expecting a stand-up comedian to build a moon rocket.

Yet, saving the status quo would not assuage the anti-system anger on right and left that was deafening even before the pandemic/depression. And with so many people now broke or house-bound, there’s still very little demand for carbon.

**2. Nativist change.** In this scenario, governments curtail immigration, trade and global supply chains. Italy and perhaps others leave the EU. Donald Trump might have chosen this route had he still had Steve Bannon feeding him ideas. But without a plan, and obsessed with the stock market, he is pushing the economic status quo.

**3. A crackdown on democracy.** Hungary’s Viktor Orbán is currently ruling by decree, though the government now says those powers will lapse on June 20. Meanwhile, China is tightening the leash on Hong Kong.

**4. Progressive change.** This would take the form of “green new deals”, higher government spending, and redistribution, partly through wealth taxes and crackdowns on tax dodging. It wouldn’t only be implemented by leftwing governments. Britain’s Tories have passed the country’s biggest fiscal stimulus since 1992.

Most governments still deny that they can print money with impunity, as advocated by modern monetary theory, but what matters is that they are doing it. Moreover, so many trillions have been spent that the thought of spending more on, say, a universal basic income, now seems conceivable. An economist who is advising a major western government on its response says that all the usual fiscal constraints have suddenly become flexible.

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‘So many trillions have already been spent that the thought of spending more now seems conceivable’

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**T**he one option that seems almost inconceivable is revolution. No major democracy today would offer revolutionaries worthwhile help (even the EU is pretending not to notice Orbán’s power grab), and digital surveillance would catch plotters before they got anywhere near the palace. The decline of terrorism in the west since about 2017 and the decline of revolutions since 2011 are two sides of the same coin – the end of privacy.

Which democracy seems ripest for change? The country with a killer combination of strong pre-existing discontent (as we’re seeing now), a bad case of Covid-19 and a looming election is the US. Moreover, the Democrats will enter the election with their most radical programme since Lyndon Johnson’s Great Society. Joe Biden, long derided as a no-change centrist, said in May: “From this crisis, we have an opportunity not just to rebuild the economy but to transform it.” With a proposed federal minimum wage of \$15 an hour, big green ambitions, write-offs of student debt and expanded Medicare, he aims to combine Ronald Reagan’s persona with Bernie Sanders’ programme.

Nobody would call Biden an ideas person steeped in libraries, but his campaign is listening to people who are, such as the progressive economist Jared Bernstein, Elizabeth Warren and several Sanders advisers including Stephanie Kelton, mother of modern monetary theory.

Radical change in the US has never seemed less improbable. **FT**

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simon.kuper@ft.com @KuperSimon





**INVENTORY**  
ROBIN WALL KIMMERER, BOTANIST

**‘I’m happiest paddling on a lake in the Adirondacks. That is the home of my heart’**

**Robin Wall Kimmerer, 66, an enrolled member of the Citizen Potawatomi nation, is the founder and director of the Center for Native Peoples and the Environment at the State University of New York. She won the John Burroughs medal for her book *Gathering Moss*.**

**What was your childhood or earliest ambition?**

To be a forest ranger - the sort that gets to sit in the fire tower on top of the mountain, look out at the land, live in a little cabin.

**Private school or state school? University or straight into work?**

Public [state] school my whole life. My undergraduate degree is from the College of Environmental Science and Forestry, the same place I teach now. Both my master’s and PhD are from the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

**Who was or still is your mentor?**

The most influential is the late Stewart King, a Potawatomi elder and spiritual teacher who helped guide my being in the world. He was a wonderful gift in my life. I miss him very much.

**How physically fit are you?**

I think of myself as functionally fit. I can move a pile of firewood, haul a cart of compost, get my kayak on my car and go paddling. Other than a daily swim, I don’t go to the gym. I just want to be out doing.

**Ambition or talent: which matters more to success?**

Ambition, hard work and dedication matter most - the effort, motivation and commitment. I would rephrase ambition as passion.

**How politically committed are you?**

I am deeply committed to social movements for justice. In terms of influencing governmental policies and actions, I don’t feel I have any particular agency - I feel a bit powerless. Any commitment I have is at the level of trying to contribute a reimagining of what our societies might look like, as a writer.

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

A little shack on a wild lake where I could write and be engaged with the natural world.

**What’s your biggest extravagance?**

Magnificent, special daffodil bulbs. I adore all the colours and shapes that daffodils come in. I order 100 every fall.

**In what place are you happiest?**

Paddling on a lake in the Adirondack mountains. That is the home of my heart.

**What ambitions do you still have?**

A long list, all quite closely related. The one I am working on now is a land conservation programme that focuses on the protection of traditional indigenous plants, which are treasured by native people, and the knowledge of those plants.

**What drives you on?**

Channelling my love of the living world, with grief for the living world, into action to care for the land.

**What is the greatest achievement of your life so far?**

My two daughters: strong women, joyful people doing good work in the world. And my grandchildren. Passing on that gift of loving the world is very important to me.

**What do you find most irritating in other people?**

Self-aggrandisement. I just want to put my fingers in my ears.

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

She wouldn’t be surprised that she was a botanist and a writer, but she never would have imagined herself as a college professor.

**Which object that you’ve lost do you wish you still had?**

A wonderful pair of handmade snowshoes. Someone stole them out of my car in Kentucky. I still marvel at why someone from the south would steal snowshoes. Maybe they mistook them for tennis rackets.

**What is the greatest challenge of our time?**

As humans in this industrial age, we fail to see our fundamental kinship with the rest of the world. We view ourselves as outside of nature, as masters of the universe, instead of a member of the family. Changing that mindset is the biggest challenge.

**Do you believe in an afterlife?**

I know I have an afterlife as soil - a happy member of the carbon cycle! I also believe and hope that our Potawatomi understanding - that we might join our ancestors in the spirit world - comes to pass.

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

Nine. I’m a happy, joyful person. But there’s always more to do. **FT**

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*Interview by Hester Lacey. “Braiding Sweetgrass” by Robin Wall Kimmerer is published by Penguin*

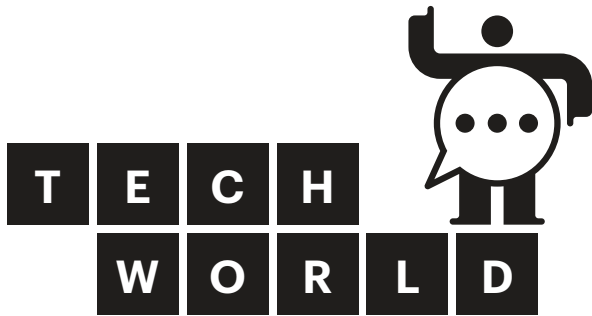


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BY YUAN YANG IN BEIJING

## Why Hong Kong is worried about digital freedom

For years, this Beijing correspondent has looked forward to Hong Kong trips, not only for the chance to see beloved friends and colleagues, but also to enjoy the uncensored internet. Emails get sent. WhatsApp calls connect. I don't have to hold a mental list of things I want to google for the next time I can access Google.

Since China erected its "Great Firewall" system of internet controls, Hong Kong has been the bridge between the mainland and the global internet, just as it is a financial and economic bridge into China. It has been a convenient and safe place to park servers for VPNs (virtual private networks) in order to prevent snooping and circumvent censorship. VPN servers function as portals for your internet data: journalists, academics and others on the mainland can transport their data via a VPN server in Hong Kong, and surf the web as if they were there.

Now China plans to implement a national security law extending its control over Hong Kong, and many residents fear their digital freedoms will be taken away. On the day of the announcement, Hong Kongers' interest in commercial VPN subscriptions surged, according to several providers. They were looking for a way to encrypt and thus protect their internet traffic from government surveillance, as well as to get it out of Hong Kong in case the Great Firewall is extended.

In recent months, Hong Kong police have learnt from their mainland peers and shut down protesters' chat groups on Telegram,

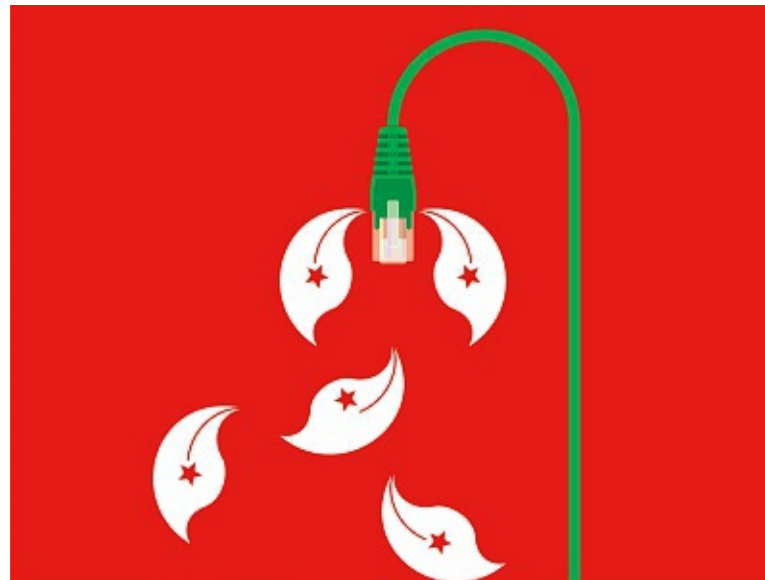


ILLUSTRATION BY PÂTÉ

the messaging app, as well as arresting group admins. The threat of even more China-style censorship is already forcing residents on to VPNs, and on to the streets. Some Hong Kong students who otherwise pay little attention to politics said that fear of the Great Firewall motivated them to join the protests. Only a minority may be interested in the security law itself or the legal somersaults required to pass it. But the idea of having access to one's favourite apps vanish overnight is a much more immediate and practical problem for a populace that relies on WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.

Imposing the Great Firewall on Hong Kong would not be technically difficult, says Andy Yen, chief executive of encryption software company ProtonMail, which fights for internet freedoms.


**'In turbulent times, some people hoard dried food or stash bullets. I collect VPN servers'**

"Hong Kong is small compared to the rest of China, so it'd be like implementing the Firewall in a mid-sized Chinese city." In regulatory terms, Beijing could argue that online communications can be used to organise threats to national security, and it therefore needs to be involved in issuing licences to internet service providers and telecoms operators in Hong Kong. A condition of its licensing would, of course, be applying censorship.

If Hong Kong's internet starts being censored, this will affect not only residents and businesses but also those on the mainland who have relied on it as a safe haven for their data traffic. This goes beyond the use of commercial VPN services, which Beijing has cracked down on in recent years. Hong Kong's telecoms carriers offer Sim card deals for travellers hopping to the mainland, which allows them several gigabytes of uncensored data by routing their data through Hong Kong. That's enough to last this journalist a month or two.

Many of China's multinationals are also tied to Hong Kong, where they have erected internal VPN servers. Even worse, after the shuttering of many commercial VPNs, some multinationals have been cornered by Beijing into buying costly government-approved "direct line" services. These are similar to VPNs, except in some cases they're not really private. And again, the data ends up passing through Hong Kong.

In turbulent times, some people hoard dried food or stash bullets. I collect VPN servers. It's difficult to convey to those outside China how much we rely on these annoying yet vital apps. They are as much a part of my daily routine as putting on my shoes, and if they don't work, then I can't leave my digital house.

Some behavioural psychologists say the best way to break an addictive habit such as social media is to build in a delay of even a few seconds before opening up any particularly tempting app. The thinking is that your body's short-term hunger for gratification will be outweighed by the boredom of waiting. I experience a delay of up to a minute every time I wait for my VPN to connect before doing almost anything online. Unfortunately, my addictive behaviour is being a journalist in China, and I'm not going to quit. I'll just keep hoping that my VPN will hold out. 

*Yuan Yang is the FT's deputy Beijing bureau chief*



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# ROBERT SHRIMSLEY THE NATIONAL CONVERSATION

## It's the one that you want: drive-in cinemas

Drive-in movies. How cool is that? After decades of gazing wistfully at the phenomenon that seemed to define American teenage existence, we may now, thanks to coronavirus, finally be about to get our own outdoor automotive cinematic experience. There were the odd temporary drive-ins in the UK before the crisis, but the chancellor Rishi Sunak is apparently especially keen to see scores more opening up as Britons find new forms of fun in the teeth of the pandemic.

Of course, it has all come far too late for me. In the place of the cool kid that I never actually was, there is now a portly parent. This sense of self is going to take some of the sheen off the experience, but better late than never. I will be breaking out my relaxed-fit letterman jacket and having “fun, fun, fun till my daddy takes the T-bird away”.

Except, well, here's the first point: it isn't a T-bird. It is a badly dented and rather old family saloon. Music aficionados may have noticed that there are no great rock songs featuring the Volkswagen Passat. The Beach Boys did not sing about having fun, fun, fun till the digital display goes dark at times of high humidity.

A drive-in movie really demands a large car with a convertible roof, again not something that seemed essential for a family motor in the British climate. So my own drive-in experience will see the two of us cooped up in the VW while trying to eat burgers or popcorn without getting food all over the interior and trying to watch the movie through a grubby and too-small windscreen optimised only for a screening of *The Birds*. Very romantic. Were we younger, our minds might have been on something other than the movie, but nowadays, when we go to the



ILLUSTRATION BY LUCAS VARELA

cinema we want to watch the film, damn it. French kissing is all very well but it can play havoc with a complicated plot line.

Worse still for my wife, the movies on offer at our nearest venue are mainly musicals like *Grease*, *Rocky Horror* and *The Blues Brothers*. In other words, my wife's night out is sitting in a confined space with a tone-deaf husband bellowing out “You're the One That I Want” with all the intensity and tunelessness of one of those early *X Factor* rejects. You know the ones. They'd been singing in the shower for 40 years and had no idea that their voice was, in fact, the sound of migraine. Sartre may have thought hell was other people, but he'd have narrowed the definition if he had sat with me through a sing-along musical.

So to sum up: I have the wrong car, I am too old, the food will be rubbish and, if it is hot, we will swelter. There is likely to be a long queue to leave and don't even get me started on the toilets. The choice of films is likely to be inferior; the drive-in does not lend itself to high-end special effects and Dolby surround sound.

But this is the key point: you don't go to drive-ins to watch movies. They are designed for atmosphere and experience.

They are where you go to feel young again or because you actually are still young. If you are there to see the latest *Marvel Avengers* movie, you have messed up. The undoubted splendours of Blenheim Palace in the half twilight are really not the place. The drive-in is where you go when you don't really give a hoot about the film.

And yet, for all that, I am absurdly delighted by the idea. My poor wife and many of the adjacent cars are about to rock to the sound of my voice. I will eat bad food, roll down the windows. Maybe we'll sit on the bonnet if we're allowed and soak up the atmosphere. Another dent can't make much difference. Perhaps if this catches on, I will finally have an excuse for the male menopause sports car purchase I have thus far managed to avoid. I wonder if it comes in an estate.

This could be one of the few good things to come out of this wretched year and who knows, perhaps afterwards, in true *Grease* style, we will drive to the Aldenham Reservoir and go for a burn-up with someone in a Honda Accord. Oh, those “Su-hummer Ni-ights”. **FT**

robert.shrimsley@ft.com

@robertshrimsley



Reply

I do miss restaurants (“How to reinvent the restaurant”, May 30/31). Their buzz, their sense of urban adventure, the bonding over a bowl of ramen or a pizza – incidentally, both dishes that don't travel very well, even in those Deliveroo boxes, and are inconvenient to make at home. Really looking forward to those reopenings. My list of places to try is carefully maintained and grows every day.

JavaAndHorses via FT.com



@markcribb May 29

Excellent article from

@timhayward (“What is the future of restaurants?”). Agree we were on the brink already as a sector, but this is beyond the reset the industry deserves

“Bunker food: how to handle live lobsters delivered to your door” (May 30/31) was a great piece. As a kid, my family and I used to go on holiday every year to the north-west of Scotland. The cottage had a small inflatable boat and a few lobster pots. The combined fascination/terror of hauling up the pots and removing the crazy flapping dark blue creatures was only matched by watching them crawl around on the kitchen table before my mum attempted to navigate them into the boiling pot. Always a tinge of sadness, but the taste of native UK lobster flesh is one that cannot be beaten!

DrBiotech via FT.com

Simon Kuper's “Welcome to the age of insult, you snowflake” (May 30/31) was an excellent article. The trend over the last 10-15 years of (un?)social media has been towards ad hominem attacks rather than rational debate, which harks back to email flaming – it is far easier to hurl a remote insult as a keyboard warrior than to engage in actual human discussion.

Disgusted of Singapore via FT.com

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# HOW GERMANY GOT CORONAVIRUS RIGHT

From extensive testing to an early track and trace system, Germany has been praised for the speed with which it brought the pandemic under control. *Guy Chazan* heads to one of its former disease hotspots in Bavaria to report on how the country tackled the crisis. Photographs by *Manuel Nieberle*





his April, Walther Leonhard got an unusual call from the authorities in Rosenheim, his hometown in southern Germany. He was being given a new job, in a new field, with a title that had just been invented, “containment scout”. Leonhard, 33, who had been working as a court officer in Munich, was soon back home and hitting the phones. He was the latest recruit into Germany’s army of *Kontaktmanagers* (tracers) – the foot soldiers of its strategy for containing coronavirus.

Leonhard’s job is to call people who have tested positive – and all those they have recently come into contact with – to tell them to self-isolate for a fortnight. It’s not much fun. A lot of people are scared and confused when he breaks the news. “They ask how they’ll be able to feed themselves, what they should tell their boss, whether they can go for a walk – and you tell them, ‘No, you have to stay inside your four walls,’” he says. “And you say, ‘This isn’t some mean, vile thing the government is doing to you – it’s for your own protection, and to protect those around you.’”

Combined with its six-week shutdown, Germany’s “track and trace” system has been instrumental in stalling the spread of Covid-19 and preventing it from overwhelming the health system. It has also helped that the country has a well-oiled government, led by Angela Merkel, a physicist, that has avoided the screeching policy zigzags seen elsewhere. On April 17, authorities announced that the pandemic was under control – less than six weeks after Germany’s first deaths from Covid-19.

The country saw its first outbreak in January at the headquarters of Webasto, an automotive supplier near Munich. The source was quickly identified as a Chinese employee who had been

attending in-house workshops there. Some 10 employees ended up getting infected – one after using a salt shaker handed to him by a colleague with the virus. After extensive detective work, those with coronavirus were swiftly isolated, their friends and relatives found and alerted.

“Contact tracing has been important ever since Webasto,” Jens Spahn, Germany’s health minister, tells the FT. “With Webasto, we managed to quickly recognise all the chains of infection and interrupt them. And that meant we were able to stop it spreading all over the country.”

Some experts think it’s not entirely fair to hold Germany up as an exemplar of crisis management. “There are other model countries that have received much less attention, such as Vietnam, which has seen no deaths at all from Covid-19,” says Hendrik Streeck, professor of virology at Bonn University. A lot of Germany’s relatively good performance was down to luck. “[We] had the advantage that we had more time to prepare,” he says. “We saw the images from China and Italy before the wave hit us too.” But it also reacted more quickly to those images than other countries, he says, with “consistent testing and track and trace”.

The figures bear that out. By June 1, Germany had 183,508 confirmed Covid-19 cases, according to data from Johns Hopkins University, making it the world’s ninth-worst-hit country. But the number of infected people who have died is remarkably low – just 8,546, or about 4.7 per cent of the total. That works out at roughly 103 deaths per million inhabitants, compared with 430 for France, 554 for Italy and 579 for the UK.

This occurred despite one of Europe’s least draconian shutdowns. Though schools, non-essential shops and restaurants were closed for weeks, a large proportion of businesses and factories continued to operate as normal. Germany also left lockdown more quickly than many of its neighbours.

More importantly, the health system never came under too much pressure. “We never reached the point where we had too many people in intensive care,” says Streeck. “That meant we were never faced with the need for triage – when you only treat those patients with a greater chance of survival. For us, triage was only ever a theoretical possibility, never a real one.”

#### **In Rosenheim, it could have been very different.**

A short drive from the Austrian border, this bustling, affluent town, with its medieval centre and grand 19th-century facades, was one of the hardest hit parts of the country. Locals returning from Shrovetide skiing holidays in nearby South Tyrol brought coronavirus home with them, while a three-day “strong beer” festival that started on March 6 acted as a “super-spreader”. By late May, Rosenheim district had suffered 183 deaths from Covid-19 and 864 corona infections per 100,000 people – one of the highest ratios in Germany.

Katharina Lenherr is senior physician at Rosenheim hospital’s internal intensive care department, a heavily fortified space packed full of ventilators and monitors and stacks of protective gloves and gowns. During a break from her shift, she recalls the sense of dread that staff experienced in late March when their first patient, a man in his fifties, died of the disease. “It was one of my most emotional moments, because it was so unexpected and happened so quickly,” she says. “We did everything we could for him. We spent an ▶



Previous page: workers wearing protective equipment at a test centre in Rosenheim

Above: senior physician Katharina Lenherr (right) and a colleague treat a Covid-19 patient in an intensive care unit at Rosenheim hospital

**‘When the first patient died, it was one of my most emotional moments... We stood there and said, “OK, coronavirus has arrived here now, with full force”**

**Katharina Lenherr, senior physician at Rosenheim hospital**



◀ hour trying to revive him. And it didn't help." She recalls the feeling of bewilderment that settled on the ward. "We stood there and said, 'OK, coronavirus has arrived here now, with full force,'" she recalls. By mid-April, 64 of Rosenheim's Covid-19 patients had died of the disease.

But the hospital was well-prepared for the coming storm. It increased the number of intensive care beds for coronavirus patients, from seven to 63, commandeering ventilators from elsewhere, merging wards, rebuilding whole clinics and constructing make-shift isolation areas. "Within a week, we had the first additional intensive care wing, and within the second week another," Lenherr says.

The office of Jens Deerberg-Wittram, managing director of RoMed Kliniken, a not-for-profit group that runs Rosenheim's hospital, resembles a war room. Behind his desk hangs a detailed map of the region and a complex, colour-coded chart showing where the town's various ICU beds – blue for high care, green for medium and red for low – are distributed.

Just as in a war, he oversaw a mass mobilisation of personnel. "We employed 150 more people, medical students, retired doctors," who were put through a crash course in intensive care medicine and the use of ventilators, he says. Meanwhile, locals rallied round. The head of a children's orthopaedic clinic, closed during the shutdown, sent respirators and staff to operate them. A local plastics manufacturer donated a 300m roll of sheeting, used to create protective shields around infectious patients.

Still, the scale of the onslaught was scary. At its April peak, Rosenheim had an alarming 200 cases – a lot for a town of 63,000. One Friday that month, seven patients were put into intensive care in the space of just nine hours.

Worried by the rising toll of infections, Deerberg-Wittram had called Markus Söder, Bavaria's prime minister, in early April and pleaded for help. "I told him, 'If it gets bad, we won't just need beds with respirators – we'll need helicopters to take patients to other hospitals,'" he says. Söder said he'd do what he could.

In the end, though, it never came to that: Rosenheim always had enough ICU capacity. That was partly due to a grim truth about Covid-19: at least half the patients artificially ventilated died within four to five days, some of multiple organ failure – a phenomenon that has been seen in many other hotspots. This meant beds were freeing up more quickly than expected.

Rosenheim was also able to transfer patients whose conditions had stabilised to smaller clinics, where they were weaned off their ventilators and brought out of artificial comas. "Because of that we could withstand the pressure of patients, prevent a catastrophe and avoid the situation you saw in Italy," says Lenherr.

**This pattern was being replicated across Germany.** A key role in ramping up preparations was played by the country's health ministry, led by Spahn, a 40-year-old politician who has long been seen as a potential chancellor. His department intervened early, telling hospitals to postpone all elective procedures. "That freed up a lot of intensive care capacity, which gave us an important buffer at the peak of the crisis," says Spahn. The call was backed by financial incentives: the ministry promised hospitals €560 a day for every bed they kept vacant for a potential Covid patient and



Above: the RoMed Kliniken, a not-for-profit group that runs Rosenheim's hospital  
Facing page (from left): Walther Leonhard, part of Rosenheim's group of tracers; nurse Ivana Zuljevic has been through a crash course in ICU training; Jens Deerberg-Wittram, RoMed's managing director, says key decisions were made locally rather than in Berlin

# 34

Intensive care beds per 100,000 people – many more than other big European countries



€50,000 for each additional intensive care bed they created. Even before those measures were introduced, Germany had many more intensive care beds than other big European countries – 34 per 100,000 people, compared with 9.7 in Spain and 8.6 in Italy. This ratio increased in the pandemic, with the number of ICU beds rising from 28,000 to 40,000. There were so many that, in the end, a large number stood empty.

More broadly, the pandemic hit at a time when Germany's healthcare system was in an excellent state. "There have been no austerity policies in our health service," Spahn says. "Apart from a small dip in 2008-09, spending has been rising steadily every year for 15 years."

Indeed, while the financial crisis forced its neighbours to tighten their belts, Germany lavished money on healthcare. Between 1993 and 2017, state spending on health rose 130 per cent to €230bn a year. A big reason is demographics: social care of Germany's ageing population claims ever greater sums. Outside of the US and Switzerland, Germany now spends more than any other country on health – equivalent to 12 per cent of its economic output.

Part of the German system's strength is how uniform it is in terms of financial resources and the quality of care – a factor that contributed to combating corona. "Our hospital landscape is extremely homogeneous," says Deerberg-Wittram, who has worked across the UK and knows about regional disparities in the NHS. "There are no real weak spots – the standard of care is the same everywhere."

Germany's system also benefits from being much more decentralised than, say, the NHS. Town hospitals are often controlled by elected local mayors, rather than by regional or central government. "The mayor of Rosenheim needs great schools, swimming pools and a great hospital, and that's the same for the mayors of Hamelin and Münster too," says Deerberg-Wittram.

Spahn sees the decentralised nature of health provision as an asset. The hundreds of mayors "don't just get orders from above... A lot more people have to take on responsibility and make independent decisions," he says. "And if they didn't, they'd have to answer to their voters."

Rosenheim provides a perfect example. As the crisis worsened, a "civil protection management

team" was formed, made up of local officials and senior doctors from all the regional hospitals. It decided which patients were sent where, how to share out scarce protective equipment and where to create additional capacity. "There were really no instructions from Berlin," says Deerberg-Wittram. "Decisions were made locally, on the spot."

The dispersed nature of decision-making also played a big role in the rapid expansion of testing – a key feature of Germany's pandemic response. The UK abandoned mass testing in March, concentrating limited testing resources on hospitals instead. That same month, Germany conducted about 160,000 tests every week, based on a diagnostic test pioneered by the Charité hospital in Berlin. By mid-May, that figure had risen to more than 360,000 tests carried out by 128 private and public labs.

Testing was widespread in Rosenheim. In early March, Fritz Ihler, a local GP, helped set up a drive-in centre, manned by people in white and orange protective suits, in a central car park. It was soon inundated. "At its peak, we were doing 100 tests a day here," he says. Later, he adds, local GP practices got together, rented premises and set up their own diagnostic centres. This relieved local hospitals, "which in any case didn't have the capacity to do so many tests themselves".

The prevalence of testing meant cases were identified at a much earlier stage, and people could be admitted to hospital before their condition worsened – one of the reasons why Germany's death rate has been relatively low. "In Italy, people waited far too long and by the time they got to hospital they were seriously ill," says Deerberg-Wittram. "That just overwhelmed the health service there. In Germany it was the opposite."

Meanwhile, the authorities were gradually ratcheting up restrictions on public life. On March 8, they recommended the cancellation of all big public events. Five days later, most of Germany's 16 states closed their schools and kindergartens. Then, on March 22, the government closed shops ▶

## 'There was a kind of "no bullshit" attitude that dominated all decision-making'

**Jens Deerberg-Wittram, hospital administrator**





◀ and restaurants and banned meetings of more than two people.

At the same time, Berlin launched a massive economic aid package that, according to the Bruegel think-tank, is equivalent to 10.1 per cent of the nation's gross domestic product - larger than that of any other western country. It included a €100bn fund to buy stakes in affected companies, €50bn in direct grants to distressed small businesses and €10bn for an expanded furloughed worker scheme. The aid came in very useful - according to government forecasts, Germany will this year face the worst recession in its postwar history.

While the emergency fiscal response was spearheaded by the federal government in Berlin, shutdown measures were co-ordinated in a series of teleconferences between Merkel and the governors of the federal states, in which the chancellor, whose approval ratings soared during the crisis, deployed her powers of persuasion to reach a national consensus.

"This isn't in our constitution - it was newly invented for corona," says Reinhard Busse, head of the department of healthcare management at Berlin's Technical University. "It became the central organ of crisis management, and ensured that at least at the height of the pandemic, the response was highly uniform." Though there were occasional tensions, vicious bust-ups of the kind seen between US president Donald Trump and state governors are unheard-of in Germany.

Much policy was overseen by Helge Braun, head of the chancellor's office. A trained anaesthesiologist, he worked for years in an intensive care and pain management clinic. "It makes a difference that the chancellor is a scientist and her chief of staff a doctor," says Busse. "That has shaped our response to this pandemic."

Jens Deerberg-Wittram says Merkel's heavy reliance on experts was a critical factor in the crisis. "She said, 'Before I do anything, I have to understand what's going on here,'" he says. This meant Germany's leading virologists played an outsized role in shaping policy. "There was a kind of 'no bullshit' attitude that dominated all decision-making," he says.

**Merkel also had a secret weapon - Germany's** network of 400 local health authorities, the so-called *Gesundheitsämter*, which have been doing contact-tracing for years. Underfunded and understaffed, they long led something of a shadow existence. Few people had much of an idea what they were there for, apart from measuring drinking water quality and tackling measles outbreaks.

Ministers admit they were under-appreciated. "Over the years they have not received the attention they needed," says Spahn. "A lot of savings were made and staffing levels reduced." But when the pandemic hit, they were beefed up with money and manpower, becoming one of the central pillars of Germany's crisis response.

When coronavirus came to Rosenheim, it was the local *Gesundheitsamt* that felt the full brunt. "We were seeing 130 to 150 new cases a day," says Wolfgang Hierl, its head, a tall, rangy man who works out of a spartan office festooned with charts of Covid cases. "It was like an avalanche."

The authority immediately embarked on the task of tracing and quarantining cases, as well as all their contacts. Staff were seconded from other parts of County Hall to help. "We got a forestry official,

someone from the water authority, and even an employee of the state-run casino," Hierl says. But it soon became clear that more were needed.

On March 19, the Robert Koch Institute, Germany's main public health body, advertised for 525 "containment scouts" to help. It received more than 11,000 applications. Spahn's ministry earmarked €11.25m to finance the programme, and pledged that each district in Germany would ultimately have five scouts per 20,000 people. Rosenheim automatically received back-up, including new recruits such as Walther Leonhard. "We got all kinds - from management students to future tax inspectors," says Hierl. Germany's record contrasts with the UK's sluggish response, with NHS Test and Trace launched only last week.

Leonhard admits the work was stressful to begin with. "The time factor was really important - the sooner you find the contacts, the more effectively you slow the infection," he says. "And there was a lot of pressure because each infected person had up to 10 contact people you had to reach."

Much of the job entails explaining the rules of self-isolation, and then checking up on people

during their quarantine, asking if they have any symptoms, and if they have, whether they're getting worse. "I've had people who have stinging eyes or facial paralysis and [they] think it means they've got Covid-19," he says. "They need a lot of reassurance - they're very fearful."

Leonhard has less to do these days. But the authorities are keeping him on anyway. "Now with the numbers of new cases falling, contact tracing will become even more important," says Spahn. "It will allow us to identify every small outbreak and put out every little fire."

While Rosenheim's scouts were getting to work, the town's hospital was adapting to a new grim reality. ICU staff were enduring seven-hour shifts in full protective gear - respirator masks, plastic caps, face guards, surgical gowns and two pairs of gloves. Some suffered skin irritation and eczema. Lenherr admits that at the start she "nearly passed out" from having to wear so much PPE. "It's very, very exhausting," she says.

But a much bigger burden was the ban on visitors to Covid wards. "That really weighed on us," she says. She recalls the wrenching phone calls with

## 'It makes a difference that the chancellor is a scientist and her chief of staff a doctor. That has shaped our response to this pandemic'

**Reinhard Busse, physician and health economist**







Above: Katharina Lenherr with some of the PPE at the ICU at Rosenheim hospital  
 From far left: GP Fritz Ihler helped set up a drive-in test centre in Rosenheim; Wolfgang Hierl, chief of the local health authority that rapidly embarked on the task of tracing and quarantining cases in Rosenheim

relatives: “You tell them your loved one is about to pass away, but for your own protection you can’t come to say goodbye.” Staff tried to compensate as best they could. In a patient’s last moments, the medics who treated them would gather at their bedside. “In our ICU, no one died alone,” she says.

**G**ermany may have been more effective than other countries in containing the coronavirus pandemic. But the crisis also shone a spotlight on some deep deficiencies in the system.

One major issue: the acute shortage of PPE, especially masks – at least at the start of the onslaught. Like other countries, Germany found itself having to scour the world for increasingly scarce supplies just as its hospitals needed them most.

“We discovered how dependent we are on China for the supply of masks,” says Hendrik Streeck. “It might have made sense to have a central distribution centre, with centralised purchasing of PPE.”

Lenherr recalls scrambling to buy diving goggles and welders’ masks. She and her colleagues now carefully store masks they would once have thrown away after use. “FFP masks cost €13 each now when they used to go for a couple of cents,” she says.

Spahn recognises the flaws. “Should we have had more protective masks in Germany? In retrospect, yes,” he says. He has sought to rectify the situation: in April, about 50 companies won a government-run tender to produce 50 million masks a week from August.

Germany has also proved slow off the mark when it comes to producing a tracking app, which is supposed to alert users if they have come into contact with anyone infected. One will be ready at some point in June – about two months later than planned. Even when it’s up and running, there is no certainty that Germans – who, with their memories of the Gestapo and the Stasi, are more concerned about data privacy than many of their neighbours – will embrace it. Old-fashioned contact tracers with pen and phone in hand will probably remain the mainstay of the system for some time to come.

Meanwhile, infection rates have slowed: Germany is now reporting a few hundred cases a day, compared with 6,000 a day in early April. As the crisis eases, the unity of purpose that defined the country’s initial approach has broken down. In April, Merkel expressed frustration at the “unthinking” way some states were rushing to ease the shutdown. These differences broke out into the open late last month when the chancellery sought to extend Germany’s restrictions on social contact till July 5. The states rebelled, insisting they be scrapped by June 29. Some states are now increasingly ignoring Berlin and setting their own rules.

In Rosenheim, tough curbs remain in place: only people from two households can meet at a time, either in public or private. But other restrictions have been relaxed. Late last month, the streets were filling again with families and shops reopened.

“People are experiencing a second spring,” says Hierl. “They’re going out again, they’re shopping, they’re sitting in the beer gardens. That’s all great.” But he worries that they will forget about social distancing – and then the pandemic may flare up again. “I don’t want to go back to having 150 cases a day,” he says. “That was a truly terrible time.” **FT**

*Guy Chazan is the FT’s Berlin bureau chief*

# 103

**Covid deaths per million inhabitants in Germany compared with 579 in the UK**





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FINANCIAL  
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# STUCK INDOORS?

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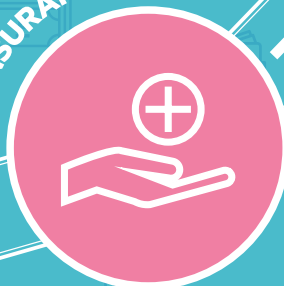
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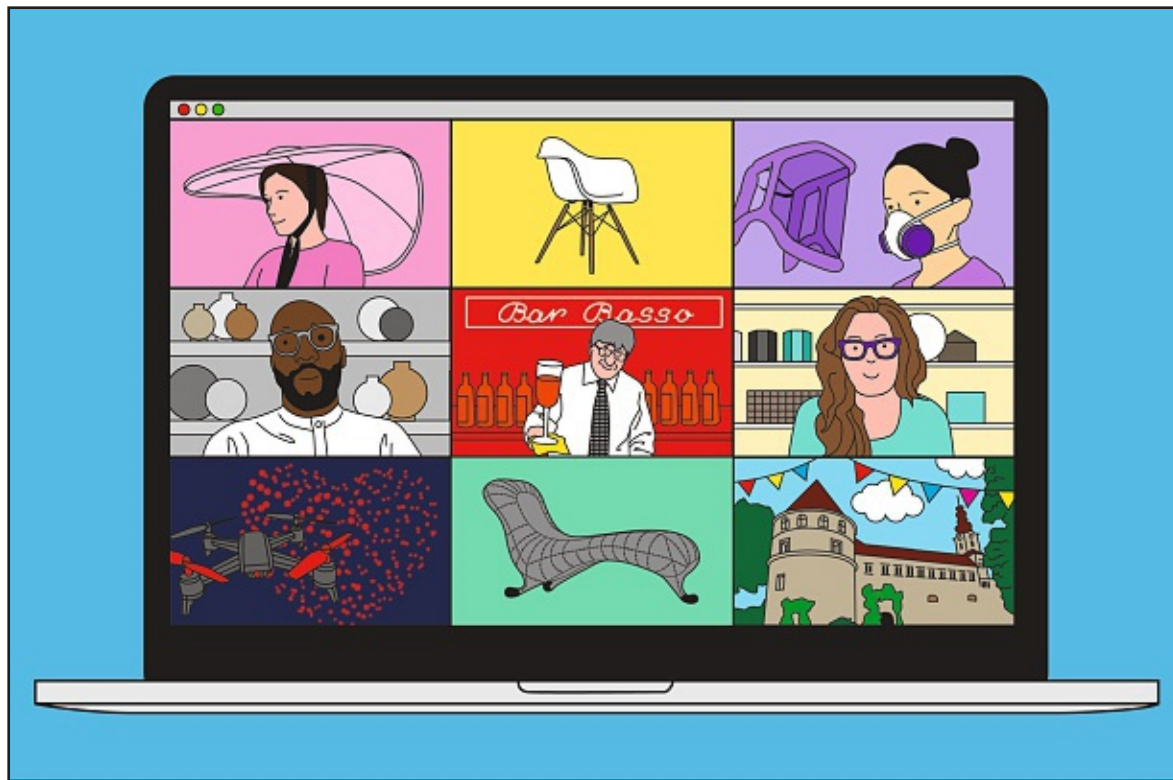
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# VIRTUAL REALITY

JACKIE DALY



**T**he new normal.” The UK foreign secretary Dominic Raab’s byword for long-term social distancing has its haters. The British interiors brand House of Hackney is one such detractor, declaring “the new temporary” to be a better fit for the state of limbo we find ourselves in. But are the changes we’re witnessing really temporary? Will the ways in which our homes, schools and offices are conceived – and the ways we view new designs – change for ever once the crisis is over?

Many of this year’s design gatherings have been moved to 2021 but not abandoned altogether, as virtual festivals and forums take hold. Design in Quarantine, a project founded in April by Anna Talley and Fleur Elkerton, postgraduate design historians based in London, documents the design world’s response to the crisis as it happens.

The online archive – a selection of graphics, architectural concepts and products – is a joyous peek inside the weird and wonderful mind of the inventor. Personal favourites include a social-distancing “cage” worn over the body (not sure it will catch on), an inflatable face mask (ditto), hands-free devices for opening doors (a huge thumbs up) and beach pods to keep sun worshippers a safe distance

apart (send me the brochure). On a serious note, Design in Quarantine is a piece of history in the making, intended as a resource for future design historians.

April also saw the postponement of the design world’s most high-profile annual get-together, Milan Design Week, which revolves around the Salone del Mobile furniture fair (it is now cancelled for 2020 and will return next April). The online magazine Dezeen promptly proposed a Virtual Milan platform, but just as quickly made a U-turn, apologising when it was accused of a “competitive move”. Its revised Virtual Design Festival – a mix of streamed interviews, virtual shows and product launches – went live on April 15 and runs until the end of June.

Halfway through Dezeen’s digital showcase, it claimed to have clocked up more than half-a-million video plays. Why? Because it’s an *Alice in Wonderland*-style rabbit warren for design enthusiasts – start clicking and you’ll emerge hours later. Highlights include Studio Drift’s drone performance over Rotterdam, a tour of Schloss Hollenegg hosted by a princess and cocktail-making classes at Milan’s Bar Basso (anyone who has visited the Salone has partied here, although most don’t recall the details).

**‘New designs include a social-distancing “cage”, an inflatable face mask, hands-free devices for opening doors and beach pods for sun worshippers’**

**The concept has caught on.** In May, New York’s annual NYCxDesign festival (now planned for October) was replaced by a “Virtual Experience” of films, webinars and online galleries. The first episode of its *Roundup* series spotlighting New York designers attracted 50,000 impressions on Facebook Live when it aired on the channel DesignTV by Sandow – another initiative developed in response to the lockdown.

Meanwhile, Offsite, an annual show organised by the online magazine Sight Unseen at Manhattan’s Skylight Modern, has been renamed Offsite Online – a virtual exhibition of works from some 100 designers and brands, many shown as 3D renders. The pieces can be viewed “indefinitely” and purchased

thanks to a collaboration with the online marketplace 1stdibs.

Once you start hunting for virtual events, the list goes on... from a “meet the brands”-style showcase on Grant Pierrus’s lifestyle blog Interior Style Hunter to *Knit!*, a forthcoming exhibition in Copenhagen organised by the fabric specialist Kvadrat, which will feature knitted textiles by 28 designers and will also be shown online from September 3.

Of course, there are negatives to such online “events”. Be prepared for guerrilla-style film-making and panel discussions punctured by nervous pauses as technical difficulties intervene. For me, conducting a serious conversation from one’s kitchen can also distract from the issues (though it’s admittedly gratifying to get a glimpse into the interior choices of others). And there is no substitute for the sensory encounter of a real-life show: the feel of a new material, the confirmation of quality as a drawer glides open and a certain atmosphere that comes from the meeting of creative minds.

Hence, the future of these events is shaping up to be both physical and virtual. London design fair Decorex plans to open at Olympia in October but has also conducted research into the audience for a virtual exhibition – and says the response is positive. “We see it offering content from the show and an opportunity for networking for those that can’t attend,” says the event’s director Sam Fisher.

For those who miss perusing art and design galleries, the crisis has also fast-tracked the realisation of ideas long in the making. Carpenters Workshop recently launched its first virtual exhibition, *Riverbed*, showing work by the designer Vincenzo De Cotiis. The gallery already hosts weekly conversations with artists from their studios on Instagram Live, and will present new online exhibitions every three weeks. It is also planning to digitise its future physical shows with video walkthroughs for those who are unable to visit in person.

“This is just the beginning of a big turning point for the gallery,” says co-founder Loïc Le Gaillard. “We are questioning everything – from our production practices to the way we host exhibitions.” **FT**

Jackie Daly is an assistant editor at *How To Spend It* magazine



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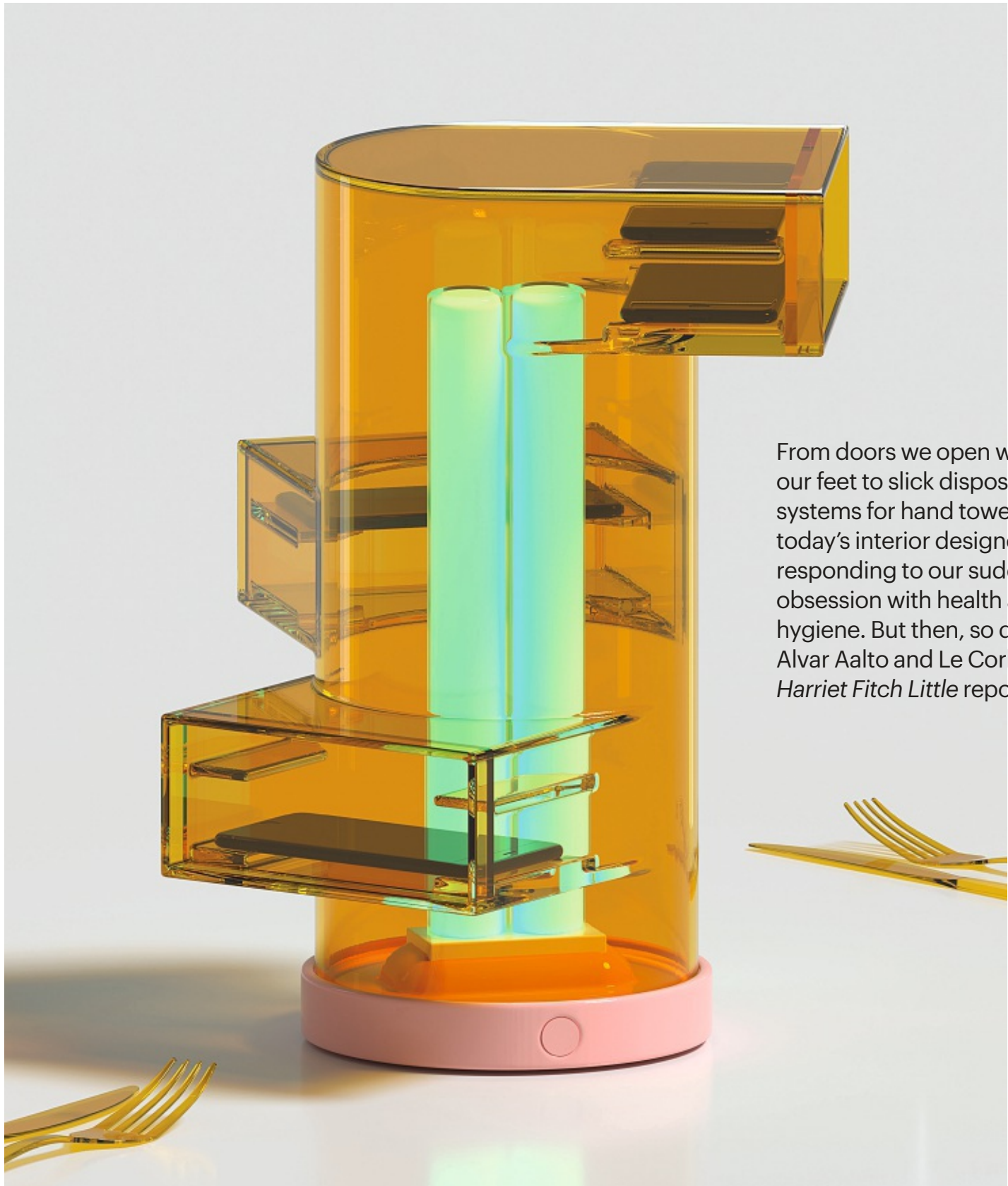
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# BACK

# TO



From doors we open with our feet to slick disposal systems for hand towels, today's interior designers are responding to our sudden obsession with health and hygiene. But then, so did Alvar Aalto and Le Corbusier. *Harriet Fitch Little reports*

# CLEAN

# LINES



Contemporary notions of “healthy homes” centre on wellness rather than hygiene. A healthy home is one that runs on juice cleanses, “clean” sleep and lots of natural light. It’s not that our homes are *dirty* as such, although would it be the end of the world if they occasionally were? A little dirt never hurt anyone – in fact, early exposure to germs is good for kids.

But, say interior designers, coronavirus is rapidly changing these perceptions. And whereas design modifications to offices and public buildings are being mapped out while those premises remain mostly shut, home designers are faced with something more immediate: responding to the changing needs of a clientele who have spent the past two months pacing their living rooms and thinking about little other than germs.

“Changes are already being made – and I one hundred per cent believe they will be long-term ones,” reports Kelly Hoppen, the British designer and ex-*Dragon’s Den* panellist known for her monochromatic interiors. Over email, she tells me that she’s seen new demand, particularly from clients in Asia, for wash basins near entrances and vestibules where shoes and outdoor clothing can be removed. She is also introducing doors you can open with your feet. “The days of physically pushing doors are behind us,” she predicts, although the “us” she refers to is presumably not all-encompassing.

Other designers write to say how features associated with public hygiene are being incorporated into high-end homes. Merlin Wright, design director of the kitchen company Plain English, says he’s seen an increase in inquiries about the kind of multiple sinks more common in commercial kitchens. Lucy Barlow, of Barlow & Barlow, says that clients are requesting hotel-style washcloth disposal systems in guest bathrooms, where towels are dropped immediately into hidden laundry baskets. Hoppen also points to the need to source “stylish bins” and “luxurious sanitiser containers”.

Naturally, product designers are working quickly to provide attractive solutions. Last month, the design studio Bompas & Parr held a competition asking entrants to dream up aesthetically appealing hygiene objects. Winners included a stylish table-top device that puffs out bubbles of hand sanitiser, and a gadget that disinfects phones using UV light.

This is unfamiliar and, for many people, unwelcome territory. We are used to thinking about our home as sanctuary, not sanitary. Even a juice cleanse sounds more appealing than a doorstep disinfection zone. But unlike many facets of the current pandemic, the concern over domestic hygiene is entirely with precedent.

“Historically, our homes have always been at the forefront in the fight against poor health and disease,” says Danielle Patten, curator at the Museum of the Home, formerly the Geffrye Museum, in east London. A few generations of affluence, antibiotics and the ability to pack the truly sick off to hospital have allowed us to forget this. In modern times, she explains, “the top line [has been] comfort and how you’re spending your time in the home, where previously it definitely seemed much more focused on being able to keep it as a safe, clean space”. Over the past few

months, however, we have reverted to more fundamental concerns: “[the home is] actually a battleground for our health,” she says.

As part of the Museum of the Home’s recent renovation, Patten worked on redesigning its Victorian room, based on an 1870s interior. This was an era scarred by the experience of regular epidemics. Infectious diseases such as cholera and typhoid were still not fully understood but were clearly linked to unsanitary living conditions – so much so that developers of the west London suburb of Bedford Park put the neighbourhood’s low annual death rates at the top of advertisements.

According to Annmarie Adams, a McGill professor who works across the faculties of architecture and medicine, Victorian doctors frequently came up with model-home suggestions, pitching themselves as “ideal designers of domestic environments”. “It’s pretty crazy to think about,” she says, speaking over Zoom in front of a green-screen image of her own kitchen. “I mean, imagine if architects said they were suddenly the best surgeons.”

Trends are an amalgam of influences, and pinpointing a single origin can feel like trying to identify the first lick of paint on a dry wall. Still, the impact of disease on the Victorian interior is not in doubt. The dark, heavily patterned aesthetic of early Victorian design was in part a way to disguise the urban grime that clung to everything.

Louis Pasteur’s 1861 finding that bacteria were responsible for infectious diseases contributed to a chain of events that resulted in a gradual winnowing away of fuss and ornamentation. The decades-worth of dust gathered on heavy fabrics and busy furniture was now known to harbour dangerous germs. Mouldings, deep-set engravings, free-standing wardrobes and canopied beds fell out of fashion in favour of simpler alternatives. In many working-class neighbourhoods, easy-to-clean interiors were dictated from the off. According to Patten, new houses were designed with painted walls or cheap “sanitary paper” so they could be washed easily.

**Today, as we reckon once more with a poorly understood virus that can survive on surfaces, some designers predict a similar shift towards simpler interiors. “Any designs that have a great deal of detail, with cut-out grooves or areas that are difficult to clean, will be a problem,” says Hoppen. Antimicrobial materials such as copper,**



Above: Alvar Aalto's 1931-32 Paimio chair for people with breathing difficulties

## ‘SUDDENLY, WE’RE RIGHT BACK TO 1918, TO THE PROBLEMS OF TUBERCULOSIS, WHERE YOU DON’T WANT TO TOUCH ANYTHING’

LLOYD ALTER,  
DESIGN LECTURER

which has been shown to kill the coronavirus faster than all other common surfaces, are mooted for a comeback.

For the past 20-odd years, “mid-century modern” has been seen as a stylish neutral, found equally in Ikea-kitted first flats and luxury townhouses. It is perhaps surprising to learn that our current design default has roots in century-old health concerns. The airy, white interiors and clean-lined furnishings of early 20th-century architect-designers such as Le Corbusier, Mies van der Rohe and Alvar Aalto were created with sanitation in mind – and often directly inspired by medical environments.

“[The modernists] were obsessed about the degree of cleanliness that really had to exceed hospital cleanliness,” says Lloyd Alter, who teaches interior design at Ryerson University in Toronto.

Tuberculosis was their main preoccupation. Prior to the discovery of streptomycin in 1943, the treatment for this deadly disease was environmental, with patients prescribed a “lying cure”, surrounded by clean air and views of nature. Early sanatoriums inspired the modernists with their white walls, lack of ornamentation and indoor-outdoor design. Aalto even designed his own sanatorium in Paimio, Finland, completed in 1933, in which he advanced these principles further.

Some of the designs from Aalto’s celebrated sanatorium are now considered “timeless” classics. This is amusing, given their hyper-local origins: his Paimio chair – a scroll-shaped seat that now sits in MoMA’s collection – was designed as a “cure chair” to open up the chests of patients who had trouble breathing. Aalto’s innovative tubular steel furniture was designed to be easily cleaned and moved about the building.

Alter tells me that these forgotten health concerns are the key to understanding modernism. “As soon as you start looking at things through that lens, it all changes,” he says. He bemoans the fact that contemporary designers often forget about the hygienic intent behind the modernist designs they’re aping. For example, cushions that should detach for easy cleaning are now built in. “People like the ▶





Above: an example of 'sanitary' wipe-clean Victorian wallpaper

Previous page: Centrepeace, which disinfects your phone with UV light, was one of the winners in the Bompas & Parr sanitiser design competition

◀ style, but they don't understand the roots of it. They don't make the health connection," he says.

However, he predicts that this will change. "Suddenly, we're right back to 1918, to the problems of tuberculosis, where you don't want to touch anything... Everything's got to be clean, clean, clean," he says. "I bet by next year you'll see all of Ikea's stuff changing in a way where they'll now be saying, 'This is washable, this is cleanable... We're not using this material any more because it can harbour bacteria.'"

Alter believes that the experience of a pandemic will prompt a renewed appreciation for early modernist design and for the fibreglass and moulded furniture that followed it, from designers such as Charles and Ray Eames and Joe Colombo. This may well prove true among collectors but Covid-19 is a new disease and these are new circumstances. It seems unlikely that the design concerns that flow from it will be a copy and paste of a previous generation's.

This year, our homes have absorbed the functions of half a dozen other spaces - office, school and gym among them. This will have its own impact on design and perhaps hasten an end to the infatuation with open-plan living. Lockdown has also renewed our appreciation for outdoor space and increased (if such a thing is possible) the mania for houseplants. "Green walls" will probably become popular in smaller homes and, where space allows, balconies and gardens.

Over email, designers give these concerns equal weighting with hygiene, and suggest other positive consequences that reflect their own interests: an increase in upcycling, more local supply lines and the return of the well-stocked pantry. "There's a lot of room to ensure these new sanitising and hygienic needs are met without going all glossy, sterile and cold," writes Lisa White, director of lifestyle and interiors at the trend forecaster WGSN. "On the contrary, interior design - commercial and residential alike - will look at trying to convey as warm, reassuring and welcoming a feeling as possible."

Interior designers are often bellwethers of wider trends, but their focus groups are self-selecting and disproportionately wealthy. The future look and feel of our homes will be shaped by the needs and adaptations of people who don't have Kelly Hoppen on speed dial.

The Museum of the Home is currently collecting testimonies from the public about how they're living under lockdown. When it reopens, hopefully later this year, these personal narratives will become part of the tapestry of historic concerns that have shaped the domestic interior.

"It's these really small, everyday stories that are actually headline [stories] now and historically important," says Patten. Perhaps visitors will find some comfort in seeing not only that we're all in this together, but that we've been here before. **FT**

# WHAT WE'RE BUYING NOW

DEBORAH BANJO

As the UK enters its third month in lockdown, people are adapting to new ways of life. After an initial scramble to bulk-buy toilet roll, consumers turned their attention to products that reflect their new homebound lifestyles. Unsurprisingly, recent sales data show that spending on home goods is higher than last year - more than 3,000 times higher in some cases. So which items have made it to the top of our shopping lists?



## DRINKWARE

Since pubs and bars have closed their doors, cocktail hour has been taking place at home. Waitrose has reported that a quarter of

those who drink have been drinking more since lockdown began, and a fifth have taken part in virtual drinks with friends: nowadays, it's all about the "quarantini". As people seek to create their own bar experience, cocktail glasses, shakers and other drinks accessories have been selling

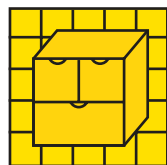
fast. Amara, an online retailer that specialises in luxury interior goods, reports that barware sales from January to May have increased 3,430 per cent on the same period last year.



## PLANTS

Indoor plants, which were already subject to an Instagram-fuelled surge in popularity, now have added appeal for locked-down

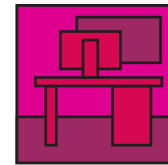
consumers looking to bring the outside in. Sales of indoor planters at Amara were up 79 per cent from January to May this year, compared with the same period in 2019. Cultivating house plants is not the same as being able to roam the great outdoors but, especially for city dwellers with no outdoor space, creating an indoor garden may be the next best thing.



## STORAGE SOLUTIONS

Lockdown has provided the perfect opportunity to declutter and reorganise. Perhaps in an attempt to restore order to our lives, or

simply to house the items we have bought in bulk, many of us have invested in home storage. A spokesperson for The Conran Shop comments that: "Home organisation has been greatly outperforming our pre-lockdown trends." And John Lewis has seen a 74 per cent increase in storage sales over the lockdown period.



## OFFICE FURNITURE

With working from home at an all-time high, demand is up for desks and office accessories. During one week in May, John Lewis reported

a 44 per cent increase in sales of desks and a 91 per cent increase in office chairs, compared to the same week last year. Elena Paparozzi, a buyer at Heal's, says people are keen to make home working as comfortable as possible. The furniture retailer sold 429 per cent more of its Ercol Treviso desks between April and May compared with last year. Paparozzi adds that consumers are "investing in quality, design-led pieces that will stand the test of time... With changes in the way we work and live looking set to continue, we believe that these trends will remain for the foreseeable [future]".



## CANDLES AND HOME FRAGRANCES

More of us have been buying candles during lockdown - perhaps to aid relaxation and create a sanctuary in the

home. Amara sold 127 per cent more scented candles between January and May this year than last year, while at John Lewis, sales of candle holders were up 43 per cent over the same period. Meanwhile, Heal's reports a 220 per cent increase in sales of home fragrances in April and May compared with last year. **FT**



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# MILAN: WHAT HAPPENED NEXT?

SILVIA SCIORILLI BORRELLI



I attended Milan design week for the first time in 2009, as a law school student in the city. I remember skipping classes after staying up late to attend parties on Via Tortona, in the heart of the design district, lounging on Cassina sofas, then hopping from one event to the next on the Via Durini and marvelling at the contemporary art installations at Statale university.

The 2008 financial crisis hadn't managed to scuff the world's most important design event, centred around the Salone del Mobile furniture fair, and over the next 10 years, the buzz only grew louder. April became the time of year when the city's best exhibitions, cultural events and parties took place. The Salone itself attracted an increasingly international crowd, with prices for Airbnb flats and hotels skyrocketing and restaurant walk-ins impossible, even on otherwise quiet Monday nights.

Not this year. Italy's largest Covid-19 hospital, a 500-bed temporary facility, is currently located on the Fiera Milano in the suburb of Rho, where the Salone usually takes place. Having initially been postponed from April until June, the design fair was cancelled at the end of March at the height of Italy's coronavirus outbreak.

"Having to cancel the event was extremely sad and all the participants realised how important the Salone actually is to their business," says Claudio Luti, president of the fair and chief executive of the Milan-based furniture company Kartell.

Milan's reach is huge. The fair attracts 450,000 professionals, collectors, students and critics from more than 180 countries. In previous years, photographs from the Salone and the many events that accompany it around the city, collectively known as the Fuorisalone, have taken over my social media feeds. As a Milanese friend put it, it's a "whirlwind of innovation, design and emotion", not just in the worlds of furniture and accessories but also in food, fashion and art.

And while locals say they barely noticed the absence of design week this year - by April 21, the fair's intended start date, they had already been in lockdown for seven weeks - many design companies have felt its loss keenly. "We are forced to shut down production but we all kept planning and coming up with ways to interact with our clients remotely, to avoid losing international orders, which the Salone largely facilitates," says Luti. While it's too early for detailed forecasts, he expects the sector's revenue to

**'Italy's largest Covid-19 hospital, a temporary facility, is currently located on the Fiera Milano, where the Salone del Mobile usually takes place'**

drop by 20 to 40 per cent this year. Altgamma, an association of high-end Italian brands from the fashion, design, hospitality and food industries, is predicting a 20 per cent drop for the luxury sector as a whole.

In 2017, Italy's design sector was worth almost €22bn, according to Mediobanca, with sofa, kitchen and wood-furniture companies exporting most of their products. "The issue now is quickly getting back on our feet, supporting the supply chain and focusing on exports, which make up a big part of design companies' revenues," says Luti.

The fair's cancellation has been especially detrimental to independent designers and newcomers, which don't have the marketing firepower of the big brands. For them, face-to-face contact with dealers and collectors

at the Salone is vital and can't be replicated online. "A picture on social media doesn't allow you to tell the difference between a piece handmade in Italy and a Chinese imitation," says Guglielmo Poletti, one of Italy's top emerging designers. "I'm working with [the design brand] Desalto to improve the video presentation of the products we would have launched at the Salone, and some magazines have launched virtual design weeks, but it's not the same."

Poletti believes, however, that this crisis will help quality design brands to stand out, notwithstanding their revenues and marketing budgets. "Smaller names that come up with innovative and valuable ideas will survive regardless, others won't - but it's not necessarily a bad thing."

Some of the larger brands, such as Arclinea, a Veneto-based luxury kitchen manufacturer, have yet to feel the squeeze. Its northern European stores continued operating while most of the continent was in lockdown, "plus we work with developers for large supply contracts and the existing ones haven't been affected by the coronavirus outbreak", says Federico Fortuna, a member of Arclinea's founding Fortuna family. "But this year would have been our biggest at the fair yet... it would have been very important from a media and branding standpoint," he adds.

Back in Milan, while lockdown measures have begun to ease, the city is a long way from recovery. With no tourists in sight, the stores empty and residents encouraged to work from home and stay indoors at night (with the sale of alcoholic drinks banned after 7pm), the new vibe feels very different from the one I knew before. And not in a good way.

Yet some on the Italian design scene see the crisis as a catalyst for change. Carlotta de Bevilacqua, chief executive of the lighting company Artemide, is taking a philosophical approach. "Beauty and science will save us if we respect our world and nature," she says. "We will overcome this horrible crisis. After all, the Middle Ages were followed by the Renaissance." **FT**

Silvia Sciorilli Borrelli is the FT's Milan correspondent



# SHELF-IMPROVEMENT

The coronavirus pandemic has prompted a surge in sales of DIY products as many of us finally get around to doing all those jobs we didn't have time for before lockdown. Self-confessed procrastinator *Neville Hawcock* celebrates the new-found urge to repair – but will he ever get around to fixing his own shed?



A man assembles a 'Do-it-Yourself' shed designed by architect Robert Anshen c1950

Every man thinks meanly of himself for not having been a soldier," said Samuel Johnson, but he was barely scratching the surface. There's so much more I could reproach myself with when it comes to manliness. I'm a cravenly reluctant driver, who will do anything to wheedle his wife into the hateful task. I have zero interest in sport. And I'm terrible at fixing things. It's lucky for me that I live in an age when the concept of "manly" accomplishments comes with scare quotes as a default.

In truth, I'm relaxed about all but one of these deficiencies. Consider a world without soldiers: that would mean no war, or – if that's too naive – at least make it harder for blowhard politicians to reach for. No amateur drivers would mean fewer deaths on the road. No sport – well, that's what lockdown's given us, and we seem to be getting by.

But when it comes to fixing things, I'm less sanguine. A world where things get mended is better than one where they don't. Better, too, than one where broken things go to landfill: as questions of sustainability become more pressing, there's an ecological imperative to consider. A lot of people concur. Projects such as Repair Café and Men's Sheds, combining social purpose with workshop facilities, have proliferated in the past few years. More recently, coronavirus seems to have released a long-suppressed urge to repair: in the UK, online sales of DIY products jumped as lockdown hit.

I'm absolutely with the programme. We don't have finite resources: let's make what we've got go further. The trouble is that, when theory comes to practice, I founder. Procrastination is always more appealing. My last significant repair was the latch on my bedroom door – a simple old-fashioned one with a spring that had worked loose, and which I'd fixed before. Yet it still took about a month of futzing around with makeshift remedies – a door wedge, a kettle bell – before I got round to dealing with it. In a spasm of good intentions, I'd brought the toolbox up the day the latch broke; in the time it took me to open it, the box had *gathered dust*.

And that was during lockdown, when we're supposed to have time to spare. (Though I suspect that for every person who's diligently mastering Arabic or learning how to knit, there's another toiling to keep the kids fed or the business afloat.) In pre-coronavirus times, repairs took even longer. When a careless



teenager broke the front gate by swinging on it, over a year went by before I reached for the screwdriver. Until then, ours was the only house on the street that proposed a gatepost swathed in gaffer tape as a decorative element, as an impudent neighbour cheerfully pointed out.

My most shameful failure is the shed on my allotment. I proudly acquired it secondhand about a decade ago, and with a friend spent a morning lugging the panels into place. I levelled the ground, I put it all together, I moved my tools in. And then other priorities intervened. When the roof needed refelting, I couldn't find the time. When thieves broke in to steal the tools, I never rehung the door - it was always quicker to buttress it in place with an old plank. Eventually rain got in, rot got a foothold... there's no happy ending. Whenever I go to tend my vegetables, it's a constant rebuke, like the black cat in the Edgar Allan Poe story, though a shed can't quite muster the same pitch of gothic anguish.

But let's not be too judgmental. Whereas Poe's narrator is driven in a drunken fit of malice to mutilate his pet, my neglectfulness rests on more rational foundations. There's only so much time in the day, there's only so much energy one has. Zero-sum considerations come into play. In the case of the luckless shed, it became clear that I could either look after it or look after my vegetables. Since it's the latter that's the purpose of an allotment, the shed lost.

Or is that just an excuse for a deficiency of temperament? There are people for whom repairs are a form of relaxation, a thing that comes naturally. My father is one such. Lawnmowers, clocks, boilers - all submit readily to his ministrations. But it is not a gene that I have inherited. When I deal with them, objects turn recalcitrant, sometimes even bloody-minded; attempts at repair skitter off in unforeseen directions. Swearing is inevitable. No wonder the cost-benefit calculation tends to end up at the kludge.

Some objects seem designed to resist repair, or at least repair by the people who have paid for them. Apple has drawn fire for design features that deter consumers from using any but authorised menders. I can't be the only person without a pentalobe screwdriver. Too often, sleekness trumps accessibility, a point made by the American writer and mechanic Matthew Crawford in his 2009 book *The Case for Working*



A woman repairs furniture c1950

**'Some objects seem designed to resist repair, or at least repair by the people who have paid for them. Too often, sleekness trumps accessibility'**



Neville Hawcock: 'My most shameful failure is the shed on my allotment'

*with Your Hands*. His thesis was that this discourages us from engaging with the physical world, with dire moral consequences: a reduction in our individual agency, a drift towards mere acquiescence in the channels that corporations define for us.

A decade on, some of this seems unduly pessimistic. Even before the book came out, a pro-repair movement was mobilising. Website iFixit, for example, which campaigns for "the right to repair", was founded in 2003; last year US senator Elizabeth Warren mooted legislation to enforce such a right (for farm machinery) during her presidential nomination campaign. YouTube is full of videos detailing repairs on everything from jeans to jet engines, while British TV viewers can thrill to the varieties of dexterity on display in *The Repair Shop* and *The Great British Sewing Bee*, both on their sixth series. Manual skill is a thing to be celebrated.

Yet in other ways, Crawford's warning rings louder than ever. It's possible that all-conquering smartphones and social media help liberate our potential; it's also possible that they frame the world in ways that diminish us. For those already worried about the ways these devices spy on us, matter-of-fact discussions about contact-tracing apps, in the wake of coronavirus, may add to a nagging sense of constraint carelessly embraced. Meanwhile, AI not only muscles in on the distinctively human capacity for cognition, it also represents the emergence of machines whose makers cannot fully understand them.

Fixing things feels like a natural response to this techno-acceleration. Like the various manifestations of the "slow" movement, it requires time, deliberation and sustained attention to what's beneath the surface. It also means, as Crawford observed, switching from a passive mode to an active. You're no longer just a consumer, taking what's given to you: you're a craftsman, leaving things better than you found them, fighting the good fight against encroaching entropy.

Whether I'll get round to doing my bit is a different matter. There's certainly no hope for the shed: under my management, entropy has triumphed. The last time I stepped inside, the floor gave way. But I'm not a hopeless case. At least I still have the decency to think meanly of myself. **FT**

Neville Hawcock is an FT commissioning editor



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# THE SHAPE OF THINGS TO COME

Priorities across the world have reordered over the past few months, focusing attention on climate change, community, adaptation... How will the design world respond? *Baya Simons* asks leading industry figures for their predictions



Research for American-Israeli artist Neri Oxman's 2019 Totems project, in which she used melanin to make a sculptural installation

COURTESY OF NERI OXMAN AND THE MEDIATED MATTER GROUP

In January, an answer to the question “What will design look like in the 2020s?” might have included buzzwords such as “sustainability”, “restoration” or “augmented reality”. Back then, the design critic Aaron Betsky predicted that this decade would see “the return of the real” after 10 years of an industrial minimalist style – symbolised by the Edison bulb – that was designed for ease, speed and social media.

But with a pandemic comes a reordering of priorities. The rocket-shaped skyscrapers and “retro-futuristic” interiors in pastel colours that characterised the past decade don’t sit quite right any more. The severity of the current situation has given new urgency to the climate crisis. Today, modesty feels more appropriate. Many in the design world have commented that we now have an opportunity to rethink not only what we buy, but how we live, work and travel. A new set of buzzwords might include “community”, “distancing”, “hygiene” and “adaptation”.

London’s Design Museum chose the theme for its 2020 Designers in Residence programme, for which it selects four “designers to watch”, before the spread of the pandemic in the UK. Fittingly, the theme is “care”, a word that connects our priorities before and after the outbreak: care both for the planet and the people on it.

Which creative minds will be at the forefront of this new era? Here, we ask experts and designers who they think will give shape to the changed design world of the 2020s. **FT**



**ES DEVLIN**  
ARTIST, DESIGNER AND  
ARTISTIC DIRECTOR  
FOR LONDON DESIGN  
BIENNALE 2021

“The shift will be towards cultivating ‘antifragility’ – in design, culture, cities, people,” says Devlin, who has designed sets for productions from *Hamlet* at the Barbican starring Benedict Cumberbatch to Kanye West’s Yeezus tour. She is referring to the Lebanese-American scholar Nassim Nicholas Taleb’s concept of the “antifragile” to describe systems that “adapt and evolve in response to shock and disorder”, as opposed to those that are “resilient” and “robust”, designed to “return to the status quo”.

Devlin says we should look to people such as Neri Oxman, an American-Israeli designer and MIT professor who uses natural geometric patterns to create structures that are “grown” rather than “assembled”, including a pavilion woven by silkworms, and to Sulaiman Khan, founder of the consultancy ThisAbility, which helps disabled creatives into work. “The lockdown has turned our attention to the experience of those who are always working within limited physical parameters,” she says. “We should turn to and value their expertise in practising infinite imagination within physical limitations.”

In theatre and live music, she suggests that the need for new “audience geometries” will lead to more collaborative approaches. “Participating in the ritual of mass gatherings will be more like being part of a choreographed Olympic ceremony,” she says. “As an audience member, ▶



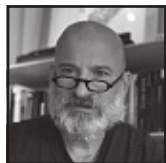
◀ you will have your role, your position, your responsibilities towards those around you, the way the performers do.” She names Billie Eilish’s stylist Samantha Burkhart as a designer who’s approaching face masks with imagination, putting lace and crystal-studded mesh designs on her clients.



**JUSTIN MCGUIRK**  
CHIEF CURATOR,  
DESIGN MUSEUM  
LONDON

Over the past few years, design has been reinventing itself as “a process and an ethic”, with the sole focus no longer on the end product, says McGuirk. “Given our precarious ecological situation, designers today are concerned with the full life cycle of a product – they want to understand each one as a process that starts with raw material and ends in some form of waste. Ideally they want to cut out harmful extraction at one end and refuse at the other.”

Among the emerging designers engaging with these issues, McGuirk highlights the Amsterdam-based Italian duo Formafantasma (“ghost form”). The pair has experimented with various unusual materials, making tiles from volcanic ash and vessels from a biomaterial containing flour, agricultural waste and limestone. He also picks out the Dutch artist Christien Meindertsma, who, in an effort to understand where everyday things come from, chronicled all the different products that originate from pigs – including china figurines made from crushed bones in Stoke-on-Trent, and acrylic paint made from their fat.



**BENJAMIN PARDO**  
DIRECTOR,  
KNOLL DESIGN

Hands-free door-knob attachments and proposals for office cubicles with extra-high walls are among what Pardo, of the US design firm Knoll, dismisses as “knee-jerk reactions” to the pandemic. “It’s not just a question of an interior change or the need to put up a piece of Perspex to separate people,” he says. “We’re going to make a lot of mistakes... we need to learn step by step. Design, for me, is about understanding the problem that you need to solve – and the knowledge of what the specific problems are is not mature yet.”

Pardo believes that architects such as Sharon Johnston and Mark Lee, of the Los Angeles firm Johnston Marklee, are well-suited to designing for the decade ahead due to their flexible approach – as showcased in their design for the UCLA Graduate Studies building, adapted from a warehouse to suit its new function. “These are big questions that we’re facing,” he says. “Sharon [Johnston] always says you should design everything from the city to the spoon. There should be a whole totality, including the question of urban planning.”



A cabinet by Italian duo Formafantasma made of clear glass, digital print on aluminum computer cases



**LUKE EDWARD HALL**  
INTERIOR DESIGNER,  
ARTIST AND  
FT COLUMNIST

“People have had enough of boring spaces,” says Hall, echoing Betsky’s prediction that the 2020s will be the decade that moves away from pre-packaged minimalism and towards “the real”. In recent years, he says, “It feels as if there’s been a lot of interest in reusing, recalibrating and repurposing.” He points to the fashion designer Emily Bode and her furniture-designer partners Aaron Aujla and Ben Bloomstein, who operate under the name Green River Project. Their earth-toned, craft-influenced collection features pieces made from coffee-stained Douglas fir and upholstered in Bode’s hand-painted corduroy.

“I hope that the enjoyment of antiques and vintage will continue,” Hall says. “If we need new things for our homes, surely it makes sense to buy pieces that already exist and have stories attached to them, not to mention great age and patina.”



**EDWIN HEATHCOTE**  
FT ARCHITECTURE  
AND DESIGN CRITIC

“The pandemic is inevitably going to shape the environment for years to come, but many of the stop-gap devices designers are working on address only the symptoms – not the cause,” says Heathcote. “Space, cities, schools and theatres will need to be radically redesigned and reconceived.”

He believes that architects will have to take innovative approaches to natural materials. He looks, for example, to the Italian architect Francesca Torzo, whose elegant tower-like library in Yangshuo, China, is made entirely from bamboo, and to Gloria Cabral, of the Paraguayan practice Gabinete de Arquitectura, who designed a “brickless” brick wall made with raw mud that washes away to leave a dry cement “negative” cast. Her innovation allows structures to be built quickly by unskilled labourers using minimal materials, in an attempt to address the rapid growth of many cities.

Designers “have a responsibility, like doctors, to do no harm”, Heathcote adds. “They need to think about social issues, about the environment, about waste, about the conditions of employment and precarity. They need to question their clients all the time.”



**CAMPBELL THOMPSON**  
HEAD OF FURNITURE  
& LIGHTING,  
THE CONRAN SHOP

For Thompson, “The 2020s will be a decade of rebalancing and reassessing what is important. It is hard not to imagine a sustained period of modesty in everything we do – which I think will be reflected in the products we create and buy.”

In his view, creatives who are working with sustainable materials will lead the way. The French industrial designer Samy Rio, for instance, explores the industrialisation of bamboo through products such as hair dryers and lanterns made from the versatile grass, while the Welsh furniture designer Huw Evans is interested in how natural materials can be used to create modern designs – such as the fan-like chairs and lights made from English ash and American black cherry wood in his Concertina collection. “Planet-centric design” – as Thompson calls it – “may not be a trend, but more of a new requirement.” **FT**



Green River Project’s Black Hyedua Chair, 2019  
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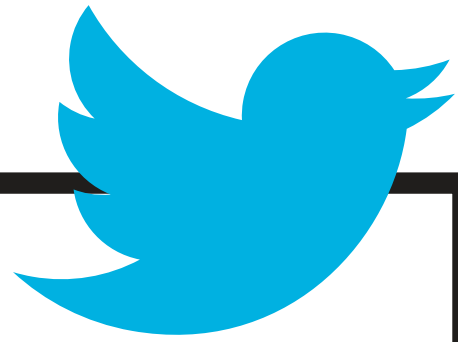
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**Sam Leith** • 1m

Here's a little something I wrote...

# HOW TO BE FUNNY ONLINE

As we navigate bad news on social media, those with the ability to make us laugh provide a much-needed release valve. *Sam Leith* speaks to the internet comics who excel at blurring the line between the silly and the serious. Illustrations by *Brian Saffer*

In the very early stages of the Covid-19 panic, an audio clip started circulating virally online.

“My sister... her boyfriend’s brother works for the Ministry of Defence,” a male speaker said in a sober tone. “One of the things that they’re doing to prepare... is making a massive lasagne. At the moment, as we speak, they’re building the massive lasagne sheets... They’re putting the underground heating at Wembley on, that’s going to bake the lasagne, and then they’re putting the roof across and that’s going to recreate an oven, and then what they’re going to do is lift it up with drones and cut off little portions and drop them into people’s houses.”

The message, originally recorded by 29-year-old software salesman Billy McLean for a friends WhatsApp group, spilled on to multiple social media platforms and was reportedly heard by millions within hours. Its success speaks – most obviously – to the way anxious times call for a laugh. But it also hit a nerve: at a time of sketchy information and deep uncertainty,

misinformation and conspiracy theories – very often sourced to a friend of a friend who works high up in government, and very often little less absurd than this one – circulate in exactly the same way. Will there have been some people sharing that clip who, for a bit, believed it?

One of the effects of social media, even before the crisis, has been a flattening out of distinctions of tone. Your Twitter, Facebook or Instagram feeds haphazardly juxtapose rage and laughter, serious news and parody. Online comedy is woven into the public conversation. It’s not always easy – particularly when things are being shared on the basis of a headline or a snatch of audio – to pick out the wacky parody from the wacky theory, the spoof from the real.

Indeed, you could say that humour isn’t just an add-on to the digital media environment, but its structural model. The most obvious analogue precursor of the way anything travels in social media is the circulation of jokes. They come to us through networks of friends, authorless or apocryphally attributed, and they prosper or founder according to the emotional ►



◀ response of their listeners. Do they get a laugh? Do they snag the attention?

We now live in an age when news and opinion have the same circulatory system as jokes. One of the most notable responses to Dominic Cummings's Downing Street press conference was an instant flood of Specsavers memes mocking the UK prime minister's adviser's claim that he made an hour-long round trip in his car as a means of testing his eyesight.

Humour – in the form of lampoons or political satire – has of course been part of our public discourse since Aristophanes and Juvenal. Juvenal's satires sent up the weaknesses and hypocrisies of the ruling

classes; Aristophanes set about everything from demagogues to the follies of philosophers and jurors. But in our own times, humour sometimes seems to be a major, if not the main, part of the public conversation. President Trump attacks his opponents with funny nicknames and retweets jokey/threatening memes. Conversely, an online humourist attacks Trump by *not* making jokes: “Presidential Trump” (under the handle @MatureTrumpTwts) specialises in quote-tweeting Potus. When Trump tweeted: “So now it is reported that, after destroying his life & the life of his wonderful family (and many others also), the FBI, working in conjunction with the Justice Department, has ‘lost’ the records of General Michael Flynn. How convenient. I am strongly considering a Full Pardon!”, the account “translated” it to: “My tweets for the foreseeable future will solely focus on #COVID19 pertinent information and/or links to accurate and updated information to keep you safe. This is by far our collective top priority, so please join me in treating it that way.”

Another comedian, @meganamram, has been tweeting “Today was the day Donald trump finally became president” once a day for months. And this stuff gets under the skin. Trump cares deeply about being spoofed: he railed continually against his portrayal by Alec Baldwin on *Saturday Night Live*. Meanwhile, still more bathetically, the Republican congressman Devin Nunes tried to sue over a parody Twitter account (@devincow) pretending to be a cow living on his farm in Iowa, which went exactly as well as you might expect.

The boundaries between the joke and the serious are blurred: the former can be a delivery mechanism for the latter, and vice versa. For example, there was something of the prank in the way in which 17-year-old Feroza Aziz got around moderators in a viral TikTok late last year. The American teen calmly delivered a make-up tutorial... in the course of which she started to talk about the Chinese government's persecution of Uighur Muslims: “Then you're going to put [the eyelash curler] down and use your phone... to search up what's happening in China, how they're getting concentration camps, throwing innocent Muslims in there, separating families from each other, kidnapping them, murdering them, raping them, forcing them to eat pork, forcing them to drink, forcing them to convert.”

TikTok is coming into its own as a forum for edgy humour, especially among young people. The 30-year-old American writer Eva Victor has accrued more than 300,000 Twitter followers

with her spoofy TikTok riffs – such as the one in which she played an archetypal “Karen” trying to get her reluctant boyfriend to come to “Straight Pride”: “I don't understand what's not computing. We have 364 days a year where we have unbelievable unspoken privilege, and then we have one day a year – one day! – where we get to celebrate having that privilege all year round. What doesn't make sense to you?”

Also on TikTok, the comedian Sarah Cooper is credited with inventing a “new genre of comedy” with the videos in which she lip-syncs to particularly absurd passages of President Trump's speeches. Her breakout video, “How To Medical”, showed her mugging and frowning over a soundtrack of Trump suggesting that people fight Covid-19 by injecting disinfectant. The Canadian critic Jeet Heer has written in *The Nation*: “The brilliance of Sarah Cooper's comedy is that it gives us Trump's words raw, along with a pantomimic commentary. If Trump has turned subtext into text, Cooper has added a layer of surtitles on top of the text.” It's also funny as hell.

That said, as much as social media's comic instincts address themselves to real-world concerns, they also lead away from them. There is a case to be made that being funny online can diffuse rather than sharpen political arguments. Why be seriously angry and ask difficult questions when there's a hit-and-run joke to be made (or copied)? A quick laugh can be a get-out-of-jail-free card, and the joke travels in a way that the detailed analysis will struggle to. Memes and catchphrases – “gammons”, “cockwomble” – may annoy their victims but they seldom shame them. As the late newspaperman John Junor said, “No one ever destroyed a man by sneering.” And for the canny politician, making a self-deprecating joke out of an embarrassment, as Boris Johnson often expertly does, can change the tenor of a public conversation.

Perhaps in reaction to all that boundary-blurring, social media has also seen a strand of very pure and innocent humour, whimsy and silliness emerge – a tonic in this age of anxiety. Moose Allain (@mooseallain) is an illustrator who routinely posts puns and wordplay for his 125,000 Twitter followers. “I gave up



**THE FUNNIEST TWEETS WORK EXACTLY BECAUSE THEY HIT YOU OUT OF THE BLUE, AS IF YOU'D OVERHEARD SOMETHING RIDICULOUS DURING A DULL CONVERSATION**

commenting on politics a few years ago because I couldn't be doing with the arguments,” he says. “People say it's great because you're a bit of light relief.” He describes his online career as “a byproduct” of his work: “While I was drawing, my mind would be free to wander around and think up bits of wordplay and jokes and things. I've always done it, but once I had a medium to put them out on, it just seemed the perfect match. People seem to like silly puns and things – the weaker the better.”

A typical Allain tweet might, say, be a picture of a glum-looking man checking his watch in front of an empty plate with the caption: “Bañana – the banana that never comes.” Or a man holding open a door as a depressed-looking owl waddles through it saying: “What's the point?” Above it the caption reads: “I let out an owl of despair.”

One of the pleasures of online wit is that the stars of it are seldom professional or seeking to make money. “I'm not necessarily doing it because I want to have a lot of retweets or likes,” says Allain. “A lot of my stuff, if it reaches one or two people, and they come back and say I loved that, that's enough for me.” For most of the internet humour microcelebrities, it's a pastime rather than a job – more than one told me that they don't think the skillset particularly overlaps with that of the professional comic. The funny tweet is what an earlier generation of theorists might have called an *acte gratuit*. *Acte gratweet*, perhaps.

Another Twitter comedian, “Mutable Joe” (@mutablejoe), who has built up a following of nearly 50,000 since May 2009, describes

himself as “a respectable member of society with a moderately successful career in IT and a wife and three children”. He says his tweets are “just something to make the day a bit brighter or vent”. Joe specialises not so much in gags as in tone of voice. “There should be a millennial edition of Monopoly where you just walk round the board paying rent, never able to buy anything” is one example; or “to make videoconferencing at work less dull, construct an elaborate family life that all occurs just off screen”.

“On Twitter at least,” he says, “I think the resource constraints dictate the kind of things that work. There's very little space for any build-up to a punchline. I'm not sure it was ever intended this way but Twitter is this bizarre Philip K Dick machine that plugs you into a howling stream of non sequiturs and reading a timeline is an incredible feat of rapid context switching from one voice to another... Many of the funniest tweets... work exactly because they hit you out of the blue in a sea of other tweets, as if you'd overheard something ridiculous during a regular dull conversation.”

I asked him if being funny is platform-specific. “Facebook generally has people you know so you have to be wary, Instagram is all imagery and looking good, TikTok involves showing your real face and LinkedIn is, well, shit. Twitter is, I think, where people feel most free to express themselves in a fairly brutally honest – and therefore funnier – way because of the relative anonymity.” He adds: “I think the more time they spend online, the more people develop a persona and this becomes a way to circumvent the lack of context. Having established this ‘character’, you

can say things that aren't that funny in isolation but funny because you said them.”

Sir Michael (@michael1979) is a good example of this sort of character comedy. His posts are often picture- or screenshot-led, showing conversations in which the author's persona innocently flummoxes and enrages his interlocutors on social media message groups. “He's a very disagreeable, sanctimonious and hapless man from a tiny village in rural Ireland who falls out with everyone and who doesn't possess the self-awareness to realise how lonely he is,” says his creator.

One prank, for instance, involved him putting out fliers with his phone number inviting people to text for a free haircut. Once he had a victim hooked in, he would explain, over a lengthy series of text messages, his demented scheme for tricking a barber (Michael gets haircut; victim gets haircut and, as Michael leaves, promises to pay for them both when his own haircut is finished; Michael returns in wig and false beard, asks for a haircut and promises to pay for all three haircuts once his cut is finished; victim goes out and returns in disguise etc. “Hopefully, if we do this for long enough, the barber will lose track and forget to charge us for our original haircuts.”) The result – a series of baffled, exasperated and finally hostile messages from the victim – is triumphantly posted as screenshots on Twitter. Grim silence, a block or ejection from a chat room is the end result of most of his sallies.

It is a character that he has been writing for many years, which means, “I know how he talks and thinks and I could drop him into any scenario and know how he'd react... In that respect, it's like any writing [of a character] – if you know what his/her motivations are, telling stories you want to tell becomes a lot easier.”

In Moose's view: “For most people at least, I don't think this developing a voice is something deliberate or conscious, it just sort of happens the more you type in the box.”

Bob Mortimer's “Train Guy” video skits (Mortimer is one of relatively few professional comics who have translated directly to social media) fall squarely into that category. The premise is simple and relatable: an obnoxious commuter brays implausible management buzzwords into his phone at top volume. It's something like *The Office* delivered in TikTok-length bursts. And appropriately for its subject, Train Guy crosses platforms; someone even made a soundboard where contextless snatches of the audio could be played ad lib. Train Guy gives us the simple pleasure of Mortimer's lavishly charming silliness – and is, perhaps in a pure form, an example of the way in which comedy on social media, much as it can be a delivery mechanism for satire, a sly form of commentary or a structuring principle for political communication, can also just be there to give us all a big, hooting and much-needed laugh.

That's no small thing. As Sir Michael's creator puts it: “Twitter seems an unserious place. And yet, it's where we all go to discuss and learn about the most serious issues in the world. So we end up with unserious people (and I very much include myself in that) finding ways to cope with living through an unbelievably horrible and terrifying time.” **FT**



# 'I FEEL A RESPONSIBILITY TO DOCUMENT OUR FIGHT'

As protests erupt across the US following the killing of George Floyd by a white police officer, six photographers write about their experiences of recording a nation in turmoil



## **LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA** Alexis Hunley

I am not OK. The cruelty I witnessed by the police on Fairfax Avenue will stay with me for ever. I watched non-black individuals vandalise and loot with zero police presence stopping them. Meanwhile it seemed as though every law-enforcement official in the city was in riot gear, shooting at unarmed, peaceful protesters two blocks away.

It is the unwavering love I have for every black person who has marched, protested and organised – both in the past and the present – that keeps me together. And to every non-black ally that has used their power and privilege to support, protect and uplift their black peers, you have my love as well – keep going, please.

Left: Los Angeles, May 27. Police officers in riot gear line up. Right: Fairfax, Los Angeles, May 30. A protester's sweater reads 'I'm Just Armed with Love'









‘Though it is hard to be in the midst of the movement, it is needed. I am here to visually show the world that we are fighting for our freedom’



**WASHINGTON, DC**  
Dee Dwyer

As a black photographer documenting the protests in Washington, DC, after the murder of George Floyd and many others by the police, this has been an awakening moment for everyone. To see the world come together in solidarity for my people on racial issues shows how black lives truly matter.

Though it is hard to be in the midst of the movement, it is needed. I am here to visually show the world that we are fighting for our freedom, our reparations and all injustices placed upon us because of the colour of our skin. As Malcolm X stated: “Concerning non-violence, it is criminal to teach a man not to defend himself when he is the constant victim of brutal attacks.” Black people are standing up and fighting back because we are tired of constantly being bullied.

**MINNEAPOLIS, MINNESOTA**  
Joshua Rashaad McFadden

Blacks across the US are fighting this perpetual battle for equality and, frankly, life at its most basic level. Unfortunately, this is nothing new. The death of George Floyd has spurred another wave of rage, sorrow and hopelessness in the city of Minneapolis and across the country. I began documenting protests in 2013 and started a photographic series *After Selma* in 2015. Like much of my work with present-day demonstrations, I feel a responsibility to continue documenting our fight against injustice.



Right: protesters march in Minneapolis as smoke rises behind them

**BROOKLYN, NEW YORK**  
Anthony Geathers

Solidarity has been the overall message here in Flatbush, Bed-Stuy and many other black neighbourhoods in Brooklyn. During these times and being on the ground, I’m seeing more black people stand together, support one another and hold conversations. From making sure outside agitators don’t destroy black businesses to directing traffic and supplying the protesters with water, there have been displays of strong unity.

Even on social media, black people are linking up and figuring out ways to help each other, not

just through the fire, but for the sake of the future. I see black scholars and leaders, that many in the media criticise, continue to be of service with their knowledge about how to move as a people. I see black teachers and mentors out there, including my brother, continue to educate and encourage the youth to talk about these times – even though they’re having to do so remotely.

Above: Brooklyn, May 30. A father and his daughter attend a protest at the Barclays Center



**'I immediately felt the energy of people wanting, praying for change – praying that this is the last life taken'**

**ATLANTA, GEORGIA**

**Lynsey Weatherspoon**

I didn't think twice when a protest was scheduled in Atlanta after George Floyd was killed. Hearing of his death, along with that of Ahmaud Arbery and Breonna Taylor, and now Tony McDade, caused a bit of rage combined with sadness inside my body, and I wanted to bear those emotions with everyone else.

I'd never been to a protest, nor photographed one, so my act of solidarity came out of

necessity and curiosity. Everyone was there with one accord, and it was palpable. Various signs held by protesters were very unapologetic about their messages. The more we tear down the inequities that the United States has inherited, the more we can be honest about the systemic racism present in our country.

Below: Atlanta, May 29



**DALLAS, TEXAS**

**Zerb Mellish**

When I got to the protest, there were so many people of different ethnicities, religions and beliefs. The crowd was huge, so much bigger than I could have imagined. I immediately felt the energy of people wanting, praying for change – praying that this is the last life taken.

I began to gravitate towards groups where the emotions were spilling over – hearing their stories, capturing their images, making sure I caught them in the best light possible. There was a story that really broke me down the most – a mother who had lost a son to police brutality, with a child in a carriage. The younger son was reaching for one of their protest signs, not quite understanding what he was grasping for as the mother pulled the sign back. The sign said "Not my sons". In that moment, I realised that everything is at stake right now. The very fabric of what makes us human.



Left: Dallas, May 29





# Honey & Co Recipes



## Squeaky blindners

Like every household, ours has its likes and dislikes. I'm not sure exactly when we went off halloumi cheese but at some point we decided that its bouncy bite, its squeak and that milky blandness were all just a placeholder for meat. For us, it was a low-effort, protein-rich substance used by chain restaurants and recipe writers to provide an alternative for vegetarians in anything from shawarma to pad thai. It was welcome in every fridge in the land - except ours.

So how did a piece of halloumi end up in our house? We presume it came as a sample or was a substitute in an online shopping delivery. We only reached for it because it was a rainy evening, there was nothing else to eat and no way either of us was going to the shops. We placed a pan on the stove and reached for the white blob in the fridge.

That night's dinner was an unexpected delight: a crisp salad with creamy bites of avocado and the occasional hit of chilli. The cheese on top, with its bronzed, garlicky crust and melted, stringy centre, was like everything a crouton wishes it could be. This dish was one of those happy accidents we now recreate with great joy. It has served us well as a midweek supper for two or as a starter when guests can come over again. Halloumi cheese is now a fixture on our shopping list.

It feels silly to apologise to a cheese but, after bad mouthing it for so many years, we feel that we must. We were late to the party but are now firmly converted. **31**

*By Itamar Srulovich. Recipe by Sarit Packer*

## Fried halloumi with avocado and cucumber salad

To make a light lunch for four

- 1 pack of halloumi (250g)
- 5 tbs olive oil
- 2 cloves of garlic, peeled and minced or grated
- Freshly ground black pepper
- 6 sprigs of parsley, leaves picked and roughly chopped
- 6 sprigs of mint, leaves picked and roughly chopped
- 4 small Lebanese cucumbers or one large one (about 300g)
- 2 kohlrabi or a small celeriac, peeled (about 300g)
- Bunch of salad radishes, 2 large red radishes or half a mooli (about 250g)
- 1 large soft avocado
- Juice of two lemons
- 1 green chilli, deseeded and thinly sliced
- 4-5 spring onions, thinly sliced
- Flaky sea salt

**1** — Dice the halloumi into 1cm-2cm cubes and place on a sheet of kitchen paper to dry. Heat two tablespoons of oil in a frying pan. Add the halloumi cubes and toss until they are nice and golden all over (about three to four minutes). Remove from the heat, add the minced garlic and toss again to coat. Sprinkle with some freshly ground black pepper and half of the chopped parsley and mint.

**2** — Quarter the cucumbers and cut into small dice (if you are using a large cucumber, scoop out the seeds before dicing). Dice the kohlrabi (or celeriac) and radishes similarly and place them all in a large bowl. Dice the avocado into larger cubes and add to the other vegetables. Drizzle the lemon juice all over and add a sprinkle of flaky sea salt. Add the sliced chilli, spring onions and remaining herbs and mix well.

**3** — Pour over the remaining olive oil, transfer to a large serving plate, top with the fried halloumi cubes and serve while the cheese is still warm.







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# Jancis Robinson Wine

## Savoie faire

Is Savoie the new Jura? Among many fashion-conscious wine drinkers, particularly sommeliers, this is a relevant question. These two French wine regions pushed up against central France's eastern border tend to be lumped together in books (guilty, m'lud) but have very little in common except a vague proximity to the Alps.

In terms of global impact, the Jura is a good decade ahead of Savoie, whose wines outsiders are likely to have encountered only on a skiing holiday. Compare and contrast with Jura wines, which so successfully rode the wave of an early 21st-century backlash among younger drinkers against blockbuster wines blessed with high scores. This had little to do with clever marketing on the part of producers and a great deal to do with influential sommeliers' use of social media in setting wine trends.

New York wine professional Anna-Lisa Campos recalls: "When I started at Tom Colicchio's Craftbar in 2007, people were just starting to talk about Jura wines in a geeky, insider, under-the-radar way, and I feel like the obscurity really started to shed around 2009. Young, upstart sommeliers and retail clerks like myself couldn't necessarily afford Burgundy regularly, but we could afford wines from Jura (and cru Beaujolais). It was fun for us to know about a 'cool' thing - and fun for our curious customers who we recommended them to."

British Master of Wine Mark Andrew of Noble Rot observed the Jura wine craze in Paris, when he and his business partner Daniel Keeling toured the more au courant wine bars of the city before opening their own in London in 2015. "The buzz about Jura was palpable in places like Vivant, Le Verre Volé and Septime," he remembers in an email, where "local, indigenous, authentic, small-batch, handmade" wines were embraced.

It was not until 2013 that Jura producers held a tasting in London.



As imagined by Leon Edler



The following year, the British wine writer Wink Lorch self-published *Jura Wine*, the first book in English devoted to the subject. (She had already been billed as "The Real Queen of Jura Wine" at events for influential wine stores in Manhattan, eager to deepen their customers' acquaintance with *vin jaune* and the Savagnin, Ploussard and Trousseau grapes that characterise fashionable Jura.)

Lorch's second book *Wines of the French Alps - Savoie, Bugey and Beyond*, published at the end of last year (available from [winetravelmedia.com/shop](http://winetravelmedia.com/shop)), is likely to encourage Jura fans to discover the wines made in the more mountainous regions to the

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### 'White wines dominate the vineyards of Savoie and they share purity, refinement and notable persistence'

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south, even if they are trickier to find outside France. While Jura wines answered a call for fresher, lighter wines than those feted in the 1990s, Savoie wines are even more so.

This is not because the vineyards are so high up in the scenic Alps that overlook them - average elevations are only just higher than those in Alsace, for example - but it has been at least partly because yields have been relatively high until this century. To make a living from steep, difficult-to-work vineyards, it was believed that you had to squeeze as much wine as possible out of every vine. But this approach is changing and there is a new generation of wine producers who recognise that the future of the region lies in quality over quantity.

White wines dominate the vineyards of Savoie and they share purity, refinement and notable persistence, often preceded ►



## Recommended Savoie wines

Wines are listed with their cru, with the grape variety in brackets

- Alpine Wines offers a six-bottle Taste of Savoie Explorer case, including a copy of Wink Lorch's book, for £144.

### SPARKLING

- Dom Belluard, Les Perles de Mont Blanc NV Savoie, Ayze (Gringet)  
\$27 Gordon's Fine Wines & Liquors, Waltham, MA

### WHITES

- Dom Belluard, Les Alpes 2018 Savoie, Ayze (Gringet)  
£27.78 Les Caves de Pyrène, £31.99 AG Wines, £33 Buon Vino
- Philippe Grisard Mondeuse Blanche 2015 Savoie, Cruet (Mondeuse Blanche, a parent of Syrah)  
Alpine Wines sell the 2013 and 2019 for £24.88
- Dom Jean Perrier et Fils, Ch de Monterminod 2017 Roussette de Savoie, Monterminod (Altesse)  
Imported into the UK by Alliance Wine
- Gilles Berlioz, Les Filles 2015 Chignin-Bergeron (Roussanne)  
£36.50 Vine Trail

### RED

- Dom des Côtes Rousses, Les Montagnes Rousses 2017 Savoie, St-Jean-de-la-Porte (Mondeuse Noire)  
£28.50 Vine Trail



Tasting notes on Purple Pages of JancisRobinson.com.  
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◀ by floral or herbal aromas that really do seem to taste alpine. But it's silly to generalise because the vineyards are so widely dispersed and, with so many of them on hillsides, they lie at different altitudes and face in all sorts of different directions. Glaciers, the river Rhône and Mont Granier, which collapsed in 1248 and 2016, have all played a part in creating wildly varying geologies.

The region's 2,100ha of vines are divided into 23 subregions, or crus, generally named on the label, a situation Lorch described in an online presentation last month as "madness". But then few wine lovers object to the division of Barolo - with a roughly similar area of vines - into more than 180 crus. We just have to apply ourselves, presumably, and do our best to distinguish between, for example, the eight different wine producers called Quenard, some with and some without an acute accent.

Summer days can be very hot indeed, but nights can be quite cool in the highest vineyards and frost and hail are increasingly common. The narrow valleys have provided crucibles for intensely local grape varieties that, with a few exceptions, have not travelled far. Jacquère is the most planted and needs encouragement to yield real character, but the likes of Domaine des Ardoisières and Domaine des 13 Lunes are managing it - even if some of the wines are grown outside the area demarcated for Vins de

Savoie and have to be sold as Vins des Albrogues, the name coined for local, not-quite-appellation wines that recalls the name of the Gallic tribe that originally lived in this part of the world. Jacquère is also a fine base for the sparkling Crémants de Savoie produced today.

The delicate Altesse, also called Roussette, is a particularly fine local white wine speciality, as is the richer, aromatic, often herbal Roussanne that is now planted

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**'Narrow valleys provide crucibles for intensely local grape varieties that have not travelled far'**

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all over the world alongside other Rhône valley grapes. Just to keep us on our toes, in Savoie, Roussanne is commonly known as Bergeron and is most often encountered in the cru of Chignin, just south of Chambéry. A particular favourite of mine is the floral Gringet grape, currently being revived by the innovative Domaine Belluard in the Ayze cru in the hills east of Geneva.

Savoie's reds used to be easy to overlook but the most famous red wine grape Mondeuse, recently shown to be a close relative of the noble Syrah, can make thrillingly peppery wines, though all are pretty light - very 21st-century in fact. **FT**

More columns at [ft.com/jancis-robinson](http://ft.com/jancis-robinson)

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**FT Weekend**



# Restaurants

## Tim Hayward



ILLUSTRATION BY ANNABEL WRIGHT

### My local favourite

I won't review restaurants in Cambridge - it feels like a conflict of interest when I, too, own a restaurant in my hometown. But lockdown has given me the chance, at least, to tell you about my local favourite (which I won't name) - not as a review, but as a profound appreciation.

Away from the tourist-trampled centre, in a rank of undistinguished modern shops, it would be hard to think of a place more architecturally or atmospherically neutral. The walls are painted white, the lighting is neon and the tables are long, refectory style. The only decoration is a collection of Rothko posters.

Mark Rothko painted the Seagram Murals in about 1958 for the walls of the Four Seasons restaurant. So thrilling was Abstract Expressionism in New York at the time that nobody questioned the wisdom of filling the walls of a dining room with such monumentally bleak works. Nobody, except perhaps Rothko who said his paintings were intended to make diners "feel that they are trapped in a room where all the doors and windows are bricked up, so that all they can do

is butt their heads forever against the wall" and that they would "ruin the appetite of every son-of-a-bitch who ever eats in that room".

This amuses me immensely, but even in a place as rarefied as Cambridge I don't think the art-history reference is intentional. In fact, I mention it because it's become symbolic to me of absolute and perfect artlessness.

The menu is a mash-up that a place with a more considered marketing strategy would call "pan-Asian". There are Chinese, Japanese, Singaporean, Thai and Vietnamese-inspired dishes, but the selection is more about what's possible in a wok and grill-equipped kitchen than any particular tradition, and about the things that regular customers have loved over the past 20 years. It can't be easily characterised as authentic any more than a local Italian in a small town is representative of the peasant tradition of Italy or an "Indian" represents the massively diverse food of the subcontinent.

There isn't a "concept", just a very fundamental idea about food-as-a-business. Places like this aren't there to "showcase" the talents of an individual chef, bringing us their "twist" on a personal tradition. They are about pleasing the customer with the kit and skills available. This



**'God, I miss it. I used to go regularly, when I wanted to get away from work and just sit somewhere, alone with my thoughts'**

is the basis on which the American diner sprang into being, as well as the kebab shop, the chippy, the original Italian coffee and sandwich shops. It's no coincidence that, in big cities and small towns all over the world, it is immigrant families who have started up places like this. Unpretentious "joints" serving good food at low prices to a democratically mixed audience.

The food is good. Made daily with fresh ingredients. The soup stock is always excellent but it's better on some days than others - which delights me because the variation is proof of human intervention. Simple food, interpreted well for its market and then served perfectly cooked on scrubbed tables in a white-painted canteen setting - a description that could equally fit St John or the River Café and, in its unique way, I love it as much as either.

God, I miss it. I used to go regularly, when I wanted to get away from work and just sit somewhere, alone with my thoughts. I don't have dining rights at any of the colleges, so it's as close as I'm going to get to their calm, monastic refectories and, to be fair, I probably end up sitting among just as many random Nobelists anyway.

In the last weeks before lockdown it was nearly always empty - racism I really didn't expect in such an ostensibly educated and liberal city - and I have no idea if it will survive long weeks of closure. If it does, it will manage well with social distancing. Protocol was always to arrive alone and seat yourself as far away from everyone else as possible. If it dies, I shall miss it horribly.

Mostly, as I sat there, I would think about restaurants and what they say about us as a society. I thought about the vital importance of cafés to so many immigrant communities and families, the importance of honest cooking with fresh ingredients, the fatuity of our concern with "authenticity" and the universal human drive to hospitality. I thought about overt and covert racism, about the joy of eating alone and the soul-deep nourishment to be found in a big bowl of mapo tofu.

It's not just my personal work canteen, but a touchstone. When work was filled with launches, star chefs and starred restaurants, it was a constant three-dimensional reminder of what's really important in our business. God willing, I'll be back. 

[tim.hayward@ft.com](mailto:tim.hayward@ft.com);

[@TimHayward](https://twitter.com/TimHayward)





## FANTASY DINNER PARTY

JAN DALLEY

The FT's arts editor picks the guests, venue, chef, dishes, wines and cocktail for her dream supper

**M**y ideal dinner has to be outside and by the sea. Proper, warm, blue sea, with waves and a beach.

So I've chosen San Fruttuoso, on Italy's Ligurian coast. There is no road to this small crescent bay, with its arched medieval abbey crouched on the sand, but after the last boat has taken away the day's visitors there is still a restaurant open, Da Giorgio. I will borrow its stupendous terrace, perched high on the rocks over the silent and silvery sea: the owners will forgive me if all the rest is invention.

The first guest to arrive down the rocky path is the Russian poet **Alexander Pushkin**. He is in a petulant mood: his delicate, 18th-century dandy's shoes are scuffed. I've been in love with him since I was 14 - for his heady and timeless invention, for his hatred of authoritarianism, for the passion of his poetry that effectively reinvented the Russian language, for his bouts of deep seriousness and of wild hilarity.

Doesn't he know I chose him for this dinner over Shakespeare? He'd better behave.

And is he going to like the writer **Dorothy Parker**, now tripping down the steep path in her equally silly shoes? Brilliant, restless, unhappy, a fierce campaigner for social justice, a feminist who lived it rather than using the term - frankly, I've asked her to see whether this famous New York wit really is as funny as she's said to be. These two will be fine together once they get on to their favourite subject - suicide.

**Picasso** arrives next and causes a stir. I'm nervous about him as a guest: is he the kind of man who sulks unless you're talking about him? Of course he is. But I couldn't resist meeting him, for a breadth of vision that is unrivalled, inexhaustible, endlessly inspiring: rare and true genius. He and Parker hate each other on sight, predictably, but I know they'll soon bond over dachshunds.

Then, **James Baldwin**, writer, thinker, pioneering campaigner. I'm nervous about meeting him. I've read him obsessively: I want to climb into his wide, generous mind and wander around in it, as through the rooms of a rambling house, some dark and narrow, others lit by shards of sparkling light.

My fifth guest is late, but I must give the others a drink. Not champagne - that's all wrong by the sea. And Parker will leave if I don't

give her a cocktail. So I produce a delicate, ice-cold Lemon Balm Gin Collins, devised specially for tonight by Panu Long, one of London's most inventive mixologists. And, as an amuse-bouche, succulent local figs wrapped in prosciutto - smoky-sweet and salty, to balance the light, tart, herby gin.

Next, it has to be fish, straight from the sea swooshing the rocks below us. Brochettes of prawns and a ragbag of the day's catch - a chunk of mullet, perhaps, next to a squiggle of tentacle - seared fast on a brazier, oily with garlic and the

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**'Is Picasso the kind of man who sulks unless you're talking about him? Of course he is'**

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herbs of the hills around. With that, we'll drink a Bourgogne Aligoté, Domaine Dubois, introduced to me by Robert Slotover on his delightful, quirky Slotovino wine blog.

Now, traditionally, we need a meat course. I imagine Picasso is longing to sink his teeth into the flank of a bull. But this meal is my fantasy and he'll have to put up with a fantastical dish. It's a tribute to my father. A clever, ironic man, who somehow landed up with a houseful of brats and a decade or so of basic family suppers, he'd eye the Monday-night mince and

cabbage and say, expansively: "Ah, wonderful - *Poulet crème flambé à l'Armagnac!*" We four kids had no idea what this meant, but we would all chant it anyway: a magic charm from another world.

It took me years to realise the dish probably didn't exist (you can't *flamber* something with cream in it). But we're having it anyway. Pushkin will like the idea: his taste for French food led him to stuff his hero Eugene Onegin, on the razz in St Petersburg, with Strasbourg pie (foie gras, truffles, grouse and pork, wrapped in pastry) while knocking back an 1811 vintage champagne. *Gourmandise* in iambic tetrameter.

And although Baldwin's tastes might be simpler, he too embraced the French life, in St-Paul-de-Vence, after a wandering existence. With the impossible *poulet*, he'd like a light red wine from the Jura Arbois, Domaine Tissot Poulssard.

Nobody ever needs a cheese course, but it is a happy excuse to drink a stonking red. So I'm going to indulge my love of Catalan grub and serve a cheese called Ombra, described by one food writer as the love child of Manchego and Parmesan. This makes it sound harder and brier than the smooth, almost butterscotchy sheep's cheese I know, so perfect with *membrillo* and a few leaves. Controversially perhaps, I'm going to pair it with one of my favourite reds, the gorgeously deep Château Musar from Lebanon.

Now, as my guests warm to their discussions of human rights, the state of society, art, suicide and dachshunds, there's the whole dessert question. Me, I can't be bothered with puds. But I know this: if you want your guests to love you, give them chocolate. So we'll have some salted caramel chocolate fondants, little tumps of feathery, very dark chocolate sponge that disgorge the gooey caramel as you dive in. With some vin santo, an ambrosial Fêlsina - so that I can just dunk some cantucci into it.

All this is created out of the air by our chef tonight, Babette Hersant. She, if you remember, is the servant who blew her lottery win on a single resplendent feast for the two women who took her in as a refugee, years before, in the 1987 film *Babette's Feast*. She's played by the wonderful **Stéphane Audran** - and that's who has been my far-from-silent fifth guest tonight. The late Audran's style, courage and intelligence were a guiding light for so many women of her era. She knew about making a fantasy come to life. **FT**



# 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.** Which annual festival was celebrated in 2020 on January 25, and will be celebrated in 2021 on February 12?

**2.** By what name is Mendelssohn's fourth symphony known?

**3.** The ex-convict Shadow Moon is the main character in which novel by Neil Gaiman?

**4.** Which landmark feature of Rome is overlooked by the Santissima Trinità dei Monti church?

**5.** Which film of 2002, which went on to become the highest ever grossing romcom up to that point, was written by and starred Nia Vardalos?

**6.** Which song by the Bangles was included in the BBC's "list of records to be avoided" during the first Gulf war?

**7.** Bourbon Street (above) is a historic

thoroughfare in which area of New Orleans?

**8.** Which reference work, begun in 1857, was finally published in full in 1928?

**9.** What's the name of the Vatican soldiers (below) who protect the Pope?

**10.** What did Cricket Australia ban crowds from doing in 2007 (with limited success)?



## The Picture Round

by James Walton

Who or what do these pictures add up to?



+

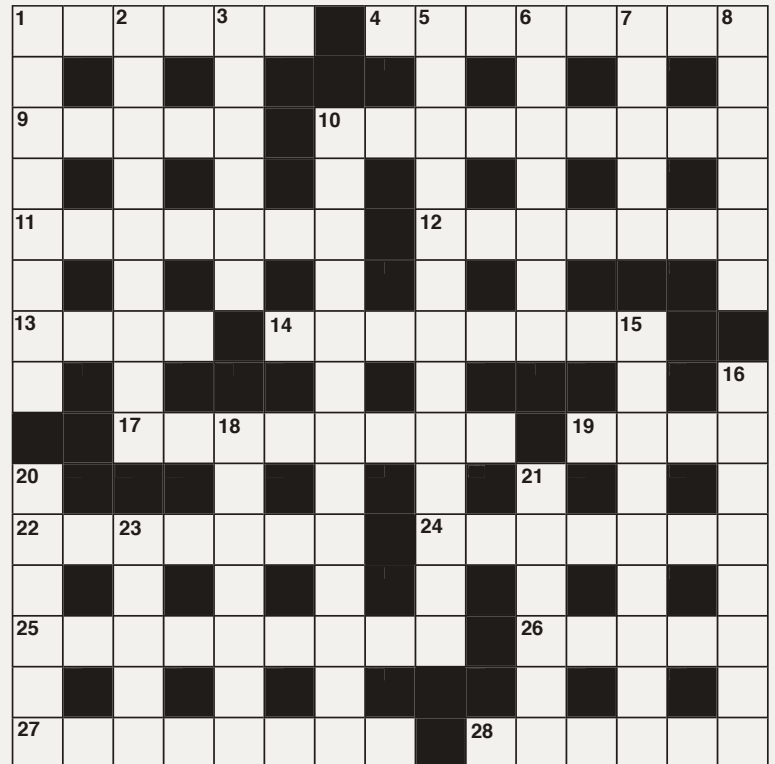


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Answers page 10

## The Crossword

No 491. Set by Aldhelm



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

### ACROSS

**1** Two-note bird (6)

**4** Sparkling (of wine) (8)

**9** Overturn (5)

**10** Us (9)

**11** Worship (7)

**12** Perform better than (7)

**13** Kitchen item (4)

**14** Liberal, benevolent (8)

**17** Prohibited zone (2-2, 4)

**19** Loosen (4)

**22** Type of pear (7)

**24** School bag (7)

**25** Usual (9)

**26** Ancient fabulist (5)

**27** Heading for the goal (2, 6)

**28** Aromatic plant with blue flowers (6)

### DOWN

**1** Careful to decrease personal debts

**2** One who looks after a discount that's been arranged (9)

**3** Clothes business (6)

**5** Do business incorporating pure losses being transferred without reason (13)

**6** Line up to get right in with musical leader (7)

**7** Book start of vacation during Christmas (5)

**8** Graduates, say, send enclosed dissertations (6)

**10** Speak about love and bear with difficulty what's too complicated (13)

**15** Compound terrible shyness with it (9)

**16** Sweet sum of money wrapping tablet up (8)

**18** Attractiveness, a touch of grace and love in France (7)

**20** Cowboy at rodeo, finally, after endlessly awkward start (6)

**21** With farmstead you're including stable (6)

**23** Start where the film crew are (5)

Solution to Crossword No 490







# GILLIAN TETT

PARTING SHOT

## When tear gas comes to TikTok



Last weekend, one of my teenage daughters showed me a TikTok post from a young white male “influencer” she adores called Hiram.

Normally, his videos tell his millions of followers how to handle skincare issues, such as choosing a cleanser or fighting acne.

Not now. This week, his top tips were focused on tear gas – and how American teens should deal with the likelihood that it will be fired at them during a protest of the kind that have erupted all over the US after a white police officer killed George Floyd, a black man, in Minneapolis.

“Make sure you prepare beforehand,” Hiram told his fans, instructing them not to wear the make-up he usually champions in his videos, since “the oils present in make-up will cling to the tear gas or the Mace and make it even worse for your eyes, your mouth or anywhere else on your face”.

If they were tear-gassed, he added, his fans should use chilled milk to ease the pain, followed by a weak mix of soapy water. “Whatever you do, do not rub [or] touch any part of your face,” he explained in the soothing tones he normally deploys to discuss facial serums.

It’s a surreal moment in teenage cyberspace. Like many parents, until quite recently I tended to yell at my daughters if they watched too many TikTok videos. The platform seemed like junk food for the brain – a stream of silly dances, celebrity posts, teenage gossip and displays of flashy consumerism.

Now, though, TikTok, Snapchat and Instagram are turning into forums for civic activism – even for privileged, middle-class children like my own. There are posts telling teenagers to put their mobile phones into airplane mode if they go near a demonstration to avoid being tracked. My daughter’s feed has been overwhelmed with videos showing both distressing images of police assaulting peaceful demonstrators – and of police officers kneeling in protest against racism. Acquaintances of hers have posted videos of police attacks they have filmed on their own phones in New York.

There are impassioned calls from black teenagers for racial justice – and calls for white teens to demonstrate their cyber solidarity as well. “Don’t wait for your black friends to chime in or to get called out on Twitter,” says one typical post. “It isn’t on them, it’s on you... don’t back away from conflict just because it makes you uncomfortable.” Indeed, as protests escalate, many teenagers have deliberately stopped talking about the topics they often obsess about on TikTok. “Read the room!” messaged Collin Brientnall, another influencer, this week.

What will future historians make of this? One obvious point is that America’s youth is becoming increasingly politicised, even in its more pampered corners. Another lesson is that the internet is changing the dynamics of protest. In the 1960s,

news about police brutality against anti-Vietnam war protesters and civil rights groups disseminated quite slowly, and mostly through television, radio or newspapers. Protests were inspired by leaders who galvanised their followers on the street, such as Martin Luther King Jr.

Today, these leaders are increasingly found online, where their words reach people much faster than before. So does information about events, since protesters are disintermediating traditional forms of media (my daughter saw the horrific eight-minute-and-46-second video of

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**‘The internet is changing the dynamics of protest. Today, leaders are increasingly found online’**

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the killing of George Floyd long before me, as it arrived in her social media feed before the mainstream news had reported it).

There is another important point about the polarised nature of cyber echo chambers. The reason my daughter’s friends are receiving pro-#BlackLivesMatter content about the protests is because algorithms have profiled them: they live in a liberal city (New York) and love watching Trevor Noah, the South African comedian and anti-racist campaigner. My children also happen to be biracial.

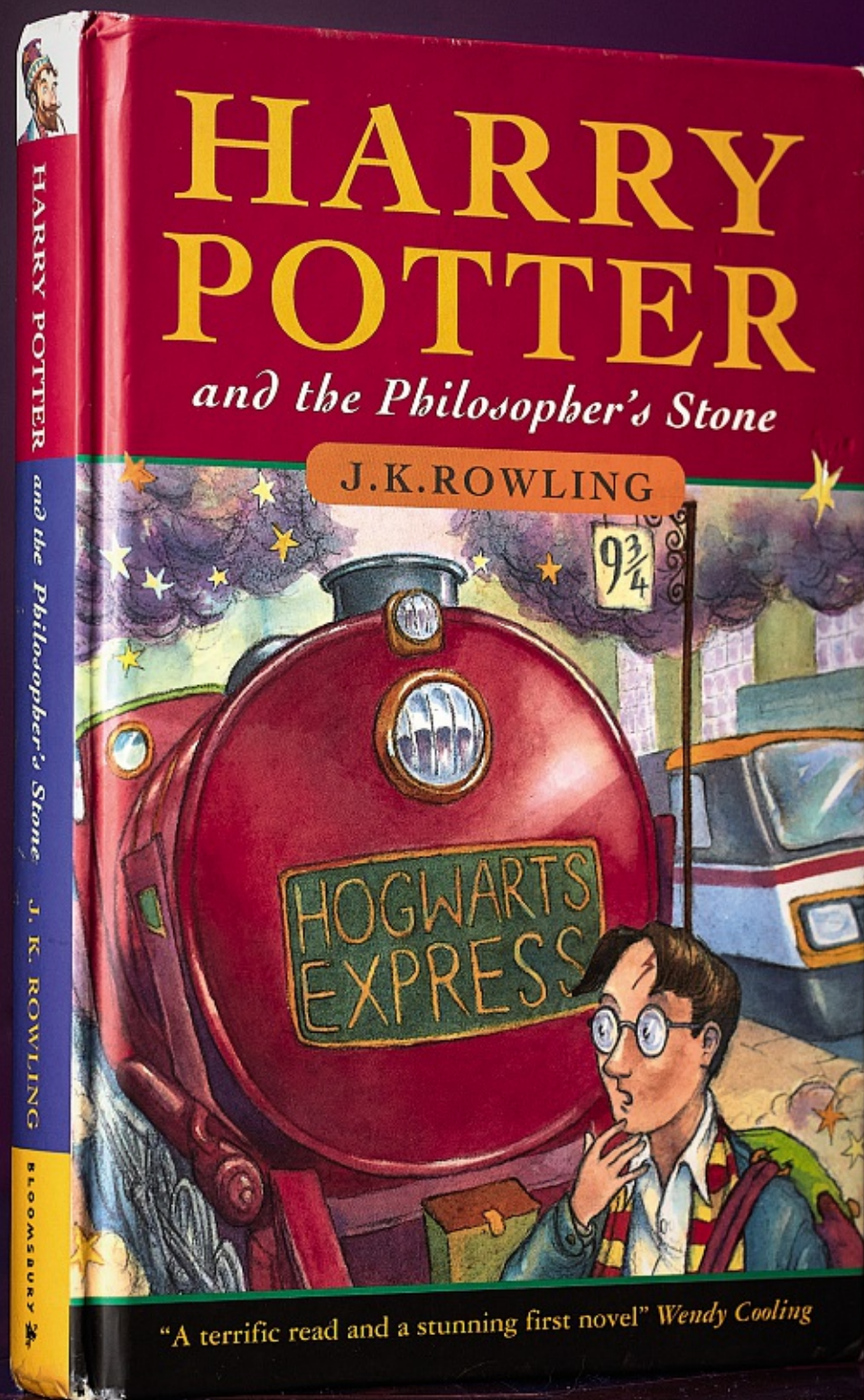
But there are numerous other voices on social media that my daughter is not hearing right now, since they never appear anywhere in the online universe she inhabits (unless it is to be parodied by Noah). I make a point of following diverse political views on Twitter, so I have seen tweets this week from outlets such as Breitbart, with headlines that blame violence at the protests on leftwing provocateurs (typical quote: “Black Lives Matter is a joke! You are the racists!”). This is something I personally disagree with. I am furious about endemic racism and the entrenched inequities that Covid-19 is now so cruelly exposing. But I want to listen to different views. And I think teenagers should too.

A world full of echo chambers is a place where it is difficult to create sensible policy solutions. It is also a place that is easy for provocateurs to manipulate. (There is speculation that Russian or Chinese outlets may be using social media to spark more unrest in an effort to influence American institutions, echoing what was seen in 2016, while domestic political groups may also be seeking to inflame tensions in order to influence the November election.) And that is before you throw in the additional ingredients of tear gas, rubber bullets and youthful emotion.

I fear a long, dangerously hot summer, both on the streets and in cyberspace.

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*gillian.tett@ft.com; @gilliantett*





## RARE BOOKS, MANUSCRIPTS, MAPS & PHOTOGRAPHS

**AUCTION 17 JUNE**  
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**ROWLING, J.K.**  
**HARRY POTTER AND  
THE PHILOSOPHER'S STONE**

London: Bloomsbury, 1997. First edition, hardback, first impression, inscribed and signed by J.K. Rowling on the front free-endpaper  
£80,000-120,000 + fees

*J.K. Rowling's Harry Potter books have become a modern classic of children's literature, with first edition, first impression copies of Rowling's first book being truly rare: 500 hardback copies were produced, with around 300 of these being given to libraries and schools. This would leave a maximum of 200 copies of the book in possible circulation in fine, non ex-library condition. The actual number is likely to be far lower.*

*Only a handful of first edition, first impression books were then inscribed by J.K. Rowling for friends, acquaintances and family members. This copy is one such work.*

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