PrivatAir

SUMMER 2016

FLIGHT OF FANCY
How feathers evolved into one of nature's greatest marvels

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LOST VOICES
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Welcome

Last month I went on safari in Kruger National Park in South Africa. It was my first time in the bush and, like so many other travellers, I was desperate to try and spot the Big Five (lion, buffalo, rhino, elephant and the elusive leopard). I expected these five creatures to be the highlight of my trip, and indeed, little beat the experience of sitting in the middle of a herd of 32 lions, devouring and fighting over a just-killed buffalo, or stalking a female leopard as she sniffed out the tracks of a lone impala. But something I hadn't given any consideration to beforehand was the birds. Kruger is one of the world's best birdwatching destinations, and the beauty and variety of birds flitting from tree to tree, circling day-old carcasses and dipping their beaks into watering holes is truly something to behold. My favourite was the male lilac-breasted roller – a magnificent specimen with a green head, a lilac breast and bright-blue belly with wings so vibrant they almost seem fluorescent. But it's not just its Technicolor coat that makes this bird so special. To attract a mate, the male swoops (or 'rolls') through the air, ducking low and performing an exuberant belly dance. Although the national bird of both Kenya and Botswana, sadly the lilac-breasted roller is now under threat, due to a tradition in which local men present one of the bird's magnificent blue feathers to a woman they want to marry. You can see more magnificent plumes in our spectacular piece on how feathers have evolved, shot by *National Geographic* photographer Robert Clark.

Feathers aren't the only extravagant displays we have in this issue. Writer Jeremy Taylor travelled to Muscat to meet the Royal Cavalry of Oman, some of the world's most brilliant horseriders, and photographer Charles Fréger's pictures of monsters from Japanese folklore also make for an interesting, if scary, sight.

Whatever adventure, big or small, you're en route to, I hope you enjoy this issue.

CLAIRE BENNIE
EDITOR

Contents

Inside the summer 2016 issue of PrivatAir magazine

PHOTO: KHALIL AL ZADJALI

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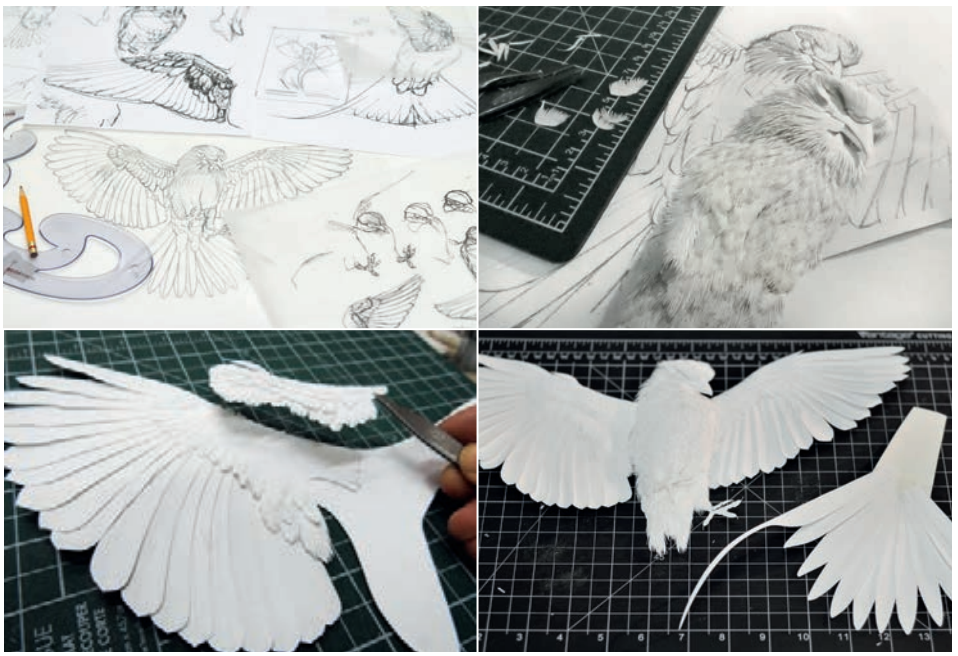
Behind the scenes

Artist **Calvin Nicholls** tells us how he created the lilac-breasted roller on the cover of this issue of *PrivatAir* magazine, using just paper and glue



In 1983, Canadian artist Calvin Nicholls was a young graphic artist who had just struck out on his own when he happened across a beautiful paper sculpture by artist Jonathan Milne in Toronto. 'I felt like I was seeing highlight and shadow for the first time,' Nicholls recalls. 'I've always been fascinated with the power of light in photography, sculpture and drawing. I loved what I saw so much that I decided to do a few pieces of my own.'

It was an art form Nicholls had dabbled in at art college, but not something many other artists were doing at the time. 'It was fun but I thought, this is silly, I'll never use this again,' he says. How things change. Since Nicholls started making a name for himself in the mid-80s, there are now quite a few paper artists out there, but few with his skill, patience and level of intricacy. As soon the *PrivatAir* magazine team saw his work, we knew he was the natural choice to create a bespoke piece of artwork for the cover of our summer issue.

Nicholls worked for over 60 hours to create the piece. He sketched out a lilac-breasted roller before going on to select the right paper. 'I often use some handmade Japanese paper, which is archival quality and made by the same families through generations,' he says. Nicholls always uses paper which is either 100% cotton or alkaline buffered, so it doesn't decay. This means his pieces can last for more than 100 years. For this sculpture he used two different weights of 100% cotton paper.

'I couldn't have created this lilac-breasted roller without the expertise of photographers who live and work in its habitat,' says Nicholls. 'The observations of photographers Stu Porter (*wild4photographicsafaris.com*) and Clement Francis (*clementfrancis.com*) not only filled in gaps on details of gesture and habit but helped greatly in establishing a moment.

'I'm astonished at the ability of birds to land while being buffeted by swirling breezes, yet do it with such ease. To capture this, I spent more than half of the process considering various flight positions.

'Maintaining the flow and layering of feathers is critical,' continues Nicholls. 'I constantly refer to my detailed sketches for the size and texture while cutting each feather. Translating these from two-dimensional drawings to low-relief three-dimensional work requires careful selection of paper weight and tools.

'I lay the feathers in a way that allows for the detailed parts to cover the glue. An articulated diffused lamp directs light so I can monitor light across the bird as I work. This assures effective studio lighting for photography of the art and ease of display of the framed sculpture upon completion.'

calvinnicholls.com ◆

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Nicholls sketches out the cover; carefully scoring the feathered body; placing the components together working from the outside in; putting on the finishing touches

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Portfolio

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PHOTO: CHARLES FRÉGER

STRANGER THAN FICTION
Japan's 'island of monsters' might not be real, but these odd islands are

The cat islands
There are actually two cat islands in Japan: Aoshima and Tashirojima. On the latter, cats outnumber humans six-to-one; there are 51 stone cat-shaped monuments; and dogs, of course, are not allowed ashore. Locals believe feeding the cats brings luck.

Island of gas masks
It sounds like a modern-day horror story, but residents of Miyake-jima, in the Izu islands, are required to carry gas masks at all times. It's all thanks to active volcano Mount Oyama, which regularly belches out poisonous sulphurous gas.

The ghost island
Gunkanjima (meaning Battleship Island) was the site of a coal mine until 1974, when petrol replaced coal and it was abandoned. Gunkanjima played the hideout of villain Raoul Silva in the Bond movie Skyfall.

Queer as folklore

Photographer Charles Fréger doesn't believe in monsters, but he's fascinated by those who do. He speaks to **Matt Glasby** about chasing ghosts and ghouls in Japan

French photographer Charles Fréger is too rational to believe in monsters, demons or spirits, he says in gently accented English from his home in Rouen. Or rather, 'It's not that I don't believe,' he clarifies, 'I believe in the people believing in them.' Sceptic or no, Fréger has spent the past few years touring rural Japan photographing such believers. His latest book, *Yokainoshima* ('Island of Monsters'), depicts villagers dressed in extraordinary home-made costumes representing various *yokai* (Japanese for 'ghosts, phantoms or strange apparitions'): figures of folklore connected to archaic agricultural festivals. If it all sounds a little *Wicker Man*, well, that's no coincidence.

Fréger's 2012 book *Wilder Mann* explored the weird and wonderful creatures of pagan Europe. When he heard of the mythical *namahage* (ogres) of Japan's Akita Prefecture, the similarities were striking. But where the Western beasties are often based on everyday animals, the yokai are altogether more exotic, from cuddly thrift-store Gruffalo to terrifying fright-masked goblin. Fréger is particularly fond of the *toshidon*, visiting deities who come down from the mountains on 31 December. 'Often they go into the houses to scare the kids, and that's very similar to December traditions such as Saint Nicholas, the Wren Boys of Ireland, or the Krampus in Austria.'

Though scaring children seems unseasonably high on the average yokai's to-do list, Fréger points to the *paantu* of Okinawa Prefecture for more benevolence. A god covered in mud and leaves, the paantu smears dirt on people to bring them health, happiness and fertility.

Fréger's interest in portraiture was piqued in 1999 after he photographed the sailors on a French navy ship. Since then, his muse has encompassed everything from sumo wrestlers (*See Rikishi*, 2005) to Breton lace (*Bretonnes*, 2015). 'I like people wearing costumes for a certain reason, where the clothes are symbolic of a connection with their identity,' he explains. 'So I'm doing a series of portraits of people dressed in uniform or costumes – where it's not just streetwear, it has a meaning.' But this doesn't make him a traditionalist. 'I like the vitality of tradition where there's revolution, where people readapt it to their own tastes,' he says. 'I don't like when it becomes very strict, so you can't move, you can't change. I like its evolution.' Perhaps Fréger has more in common with his subjects than he lets on. After all, if dressing up as yokai is an attempt to capture the vagaries of nature, so, too, is taking photographs. ◆

Yokainoshima (£24.95, Thames and Hudson) is out on 27 June.

PHOTOS: CHARLES FRÉGER

Number of locations photographer Charles Fréger visited in Japan for *Yokainoshima*

60

THE BIRTH OF FRANKENSTEIN

Two hundred years ago this summer, Mary Shelley thought up the world's most gruesome monster

Don't you hate it when bad weather ruins your holiday? In 1816, taking your mind off the rain wasn't as easy as switching on the TV. On a particularly soggy 16 June 200 years ago, a group of writers, holed up inside while on vacation on the shores of Lake Geneva in Switzerland, decided to play a game to beat the boredom – and challenged one another to come up with the best tale of terror. The writers? Lord Byron, John Polidori, Percy Shelley and his soon-to-be-wife Mary. The winning story? Mary's chilling fable about Dr Victor Frankenstein, a scientist high on possibility who created a grotesque creature from the sewn-together parts of the recently dead.

Frankenstein was first published anonymously in 1818 (Shelley's name appeared on the second print-run in 1823), and has since become one of the most enduring tales of all time, re-interpretated by each new generation. Another fiendish fiction classic born during that trip? John Polidori's *The Vampyre*. Although tales of blood-sucking creatures have been recorded in most cultures for centuries, it wasn't until Polidori's short story that the vampire became mainstream. These days most people remember Bram Stoker's chilling version, *Dracula*, which came a few years later, but it was Polidori who started the trend. ◆

A celebration of one of the world's greatest ever fashion icons, *Frida Kahlo: Fashion as the Art of Being* is published by Assouline, $195, assouline.com

The art of being Frida

Sixty years after her death, the Mexican artist Frida Kahlo is more relevant that ever. One new book delves into the reason why, says **Claire Bennie**

A FIGURE OF SPEECH
Three of our favourite Frida Kahlo quotes

'There have been two great accidents in my life. One was the trolley [the bus crash that disabled her], and the other was Diego. Diego was by far the worst'

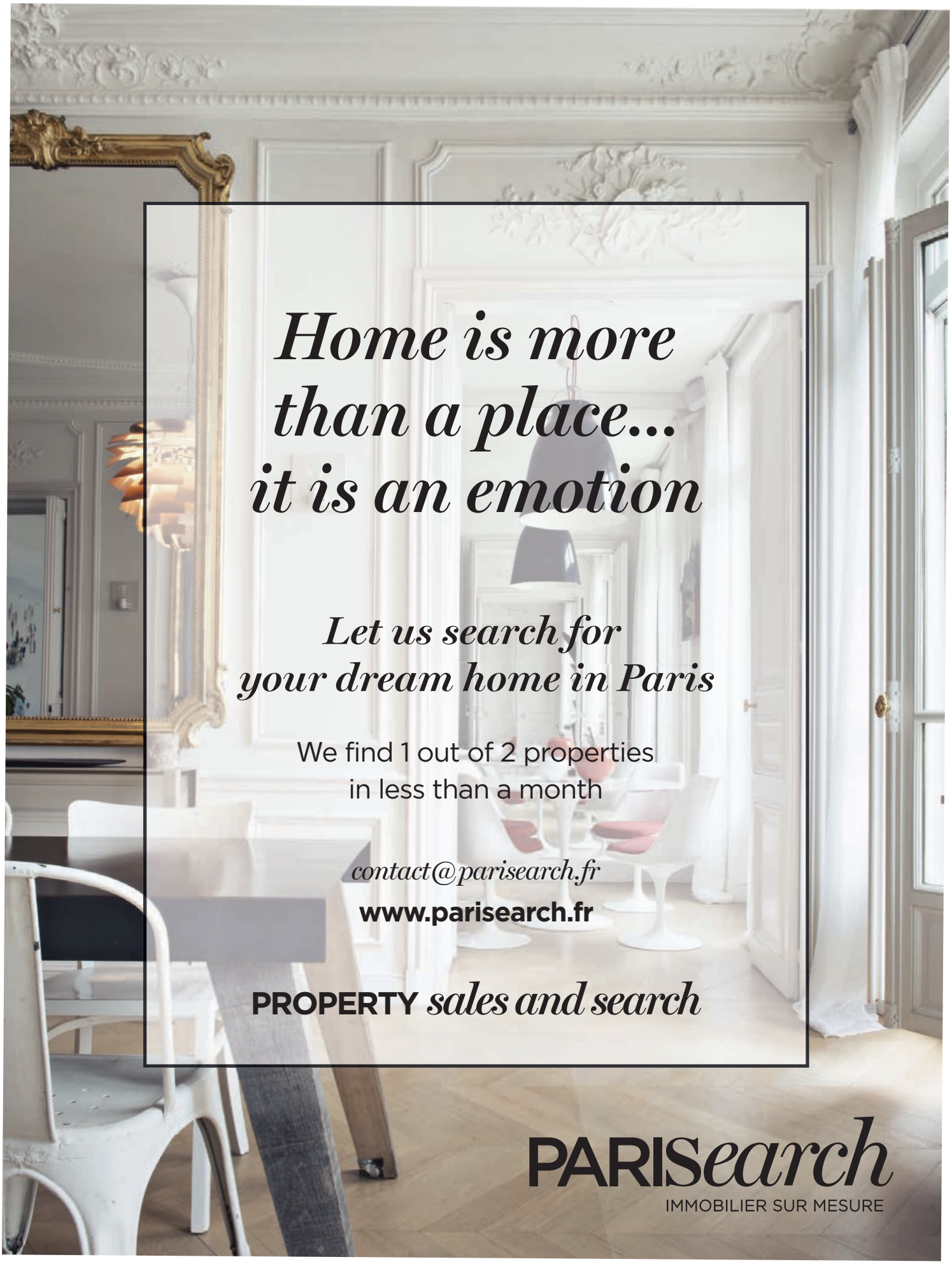
'I paint self-portraits because I am so often alone, because I am the person I know best'

'They thought I was a Surrealist, but I wasn't. I never painted dreams. I paint my own reality'

She might have passed away in 1954, but right now Frida Kahlo is having a moment. Since she first graced the pages of American *Vogue* in 1937, Kahlo has been recognised the world over as a style icon, a revolutionary. In 2010 she provided inspiration for *Vogue* once again when Karl Lagerfeld photographed Claudia Schiffer as the Mexican artist; in 2012 Mario Testino shot Karlie Kloss as a floral-headdressed Kahlo. Last year saw an exhibition of 300 of her belongings, from richly embroidered blouses and floor-grazing skirts to oversized jewellery, at London's Hoppen Gallery – pieces that her artist husband Diego Rivera had locked away and weren't discovered until 2004. Earlier this year, Russia held its first-ever Frida Kahlo retrospective, with 35 paintings, drawings and lithographs, as well as 100 photographs of her life on loan from the Museo Dolores Olmedo Patino in Mexico City. Later this summer the Mernier Gallery in London will host an exhibition inspired by Kahlo, just after the launch of a new book, *Frida Kahlo: Fashion as the Art of Being* by fashion journalist Susana Martinez Vidal.

But how and why is Kahlo still relevant today? 'Perhaps it is her fierce individualism, her insistence on "being herself," before those words were on everyone's lips, that makes her an apt symbol for our own age,' says *Vogue* contributing editor Lynn Yaeger in the foreword to the book. 'Kahlo was not only an iconic artist, she was a bold beauty and an avant-garde fashionista whose timeless sense of style makes her relevant. She knew that life was a theatre and fashion her costume. She understood the importance of image and attitude. The canvas was Kahlo's mirror; she was the painter, the model and the painting – the author, subject, medium and object. She was her own best work of art.'

But the road to international style icon was hardly smooth. Kahlo contracted polio as a child and was further disabled by a horrific bus accident in her teens. At the Casa Azul, her home from when she was born until her death, you will find a showcase of medical paraphernalia: braces, medical corsets and artificial limbs. And her relationship with Rivera was tumultuous, to say the least. They divorced and remarried, and both were frequently unfaithful. But Kahlo remained a fearless character, prioritising her art above all else. Says Martinez Vidal, 'Frida was not just another woman with unmistakable style – she was also an avant-gardist and visionary in creating her identity and cultivating her uniqueness.' At a time where women were expected to be demure and soft, Kahlo was brash, bold, forthright and passionate – something that allowed her to take on the taboos of her day. ◆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IMMOBILIER SUR MESURE

Arthur Conan Doyle – one of the world's greatest mystery writers – joined the hunt for Paititi a century ago. The tropical jungle was the inspiration for his novel *The Lost World*

'The biggest mystery in South America'

For the past 18 years, Thierry Jamin has been searching for Paititi – a city of gold lost in Peru's jungles for centuries – and 2016 is the year he thinks he'll find it, he tells **Amy Dennis**

'The Spanish called it, Paititi el Dorado (Golden Paititi), but more than piles of gold, I'm excited about the ancient scriptures and the stories they'll tell when we unearth its ruins,' says French explorer Thierry Jamin. This summer will mark his 21st expedition into the Peruvian jungle on a quest to find Paititi, a lost Inca city that has captured his imagination since he was a child. He'll be searching through forest so dense and dangerous that in 1971 and 1997, when teams of experienced explorers set off for of Paititi, they never returned. But Jamin isn't particularly worried. 'The worst thing about the jungle, without a doubt, is the snakes,' he says. 'There are deadly snakes but luckily we've never had real problems – although we've come very close.' The snakes are less of a concern because this time he'll be armed with professional radar equipment and a helicopter – meaning fewer hours hacking through tangled undergrowth swarming with vipers, anacondas, tarantulas and hungry jaguars.

Jamin calls Paititi, 'the biggest mystery in South America'. Its legend started in the 1600s when Italian missionary Andrés López was told tales of a city, rich in gold, silver and jewels, deep in the tropical jungle near Cusco. Lopez wrote to the Vatican about Paititi, and allegedly revealed its location. When part of his report was found in the Jesuit archives in Rome in 2001, it inspired a flurry of new expeditions.

Although Jamin is still yet to find Paititi, his team has uncovered a number of impressive sites. 'So far we've found small citadels with a few buildings, passageways and tombs,' he says. 'Some of the structures we've found predate the Incans.' Uncovering these magnificent ruins was thanks to local tribes. 'It's the greatest privilege to work with them, they know everything,' says Jamin. 'The Machiguenga tribe told us about the ruins we went on to discover. According to their legend, the lost city of Paititi – which they refer to as enchanted place with strange lights, unnatural noises, a mythical mountain and twin lakes – might well have been the political capital of the Amazon Empire, before the Incas and, in that case, before Machu Picchu.' Jamin is right to put his trust in the Machiguenga: it was they who led American archaeologist Hiram Bingham to Machu Picchu a century ago.

This year the search will focus on the jungle of Megantoni, north of Cusco. 'Thanks to satellite images of this region we believe we've found the twin lakes – and these lakes are at the heart of their legend. Right next to the lakes, there's a strange, green-covered square mountain.' The team will start off exploring the lakes with a deep-water robot. 'If we're going to find anything, the lakes are where to start,' says Jamin.

'Perhaps Paititi has already been discovered by cowboys or treasure hunters, and there won't be anything left,' he continues. 'But it's such a difficult area to reach that it's impossible that the Spanish reached Paititi in the 16th century. Since then, no discoveries have been recorded, so I hope that we find something near complete.' ◆ *granpaititi.com*

JAMIN'S QUEST IN NUMBERS

18
years of exploring

21
expeditions

27
people in his team

500kg
of equipment

244km
from Cusco is where Jamin believes Paititi is

16
days at a time in the jungle

1438
the year the Inca Empire started

SEARCHING FOR ATLANTIS

Are we on the verge of discovering the greatest lost city of all time?

PHOTO: GETTY

Almost 2,500 years ago, the philosopher Plato wrote a captivating tale of an advanced island city that dreamed of taking over the world – but sank to the depths of the Atlantic Ocean. Whether or not his story was fabrication or historical record is up for debate, but today there are countless theories on where Atlantis could be, from Ireland to Tibet. The most persuasive is that it's somewhere in the Mediterranean, an idea last year given more clout when author Mark Adams released his book *Meet Me in Atlantis*. Adams set off on a tour of possible locations before settling on four plausible options: marshy Doñana National Park in southern Spain; Malta; the Greek island of Santorini; and on the Souss-Massa Plain in south-west Morocco. The latter is a suggestion put forward by German computer expert Michael Hübner, and the one that Adams calls 'the most convincing on paper. No archaeological searches have taken place here before; who knows, maybe it's been hiding in plain sight all along.' ◆

A single page from a book owned by Shah Tahmasp, who reigned over 16th-century Iran, was sold in 2011 for £7.4m, smashing all other previous Islamic art records

£7.4m

HADID'S GREATEST HITS

Maxxi National Museum of 21st Century Arts, Rome
A series of LEGO-block buildings imposed on one another, this contemporary gallery was once described by Hadid as being more like an 'urban field'.

Heydar Aliyev Center, Baku
Resembling a gigantic ribbon, this cultural superstructure broke with convention, ditching Soviet-era rigidity for playful curves and freeform waves.

Aquatics Centre, London
For the 2012 Olympics, Hadid reimagined the swimming pool. Her inspiration? The fluidity of water in motion. The result? The showpiece stadium of the modern Olympic era.

Arabian art goes east

It's the most important award for Islamic-influenced artists – and now the Jameel Prize is leaving London's V&A for Istanbul. But why? asks Mike MacEacheran

Among the many uplifting stories tied to Middle Eastern art today (the Louvre Abu Dhabi opening this December; London's Islamic Art Week auction hitting £25m; Art Dubai now in its 10th year), perhaps none is more cheery than the recent success of the Jameel Prize.

The brainchild of the V&A Museum in London, the biannual £25,000 award for contemporary Islamic-inspired art and design has become a mainstay, endearing itself to critics, art lovers and its late patron, architect Dame Zaha Hadid, ever since its inception in 2009. In the Iraqi architect's words, its arrival was a zeitgeist moment, 'pushing new boundaries' and bridging the cultural divide between East and West. Following the Iraqi architect's death in March, this year's prize may well take on even greater significance.

For starters, it's on the move from Kensington in west London to Beyoglu in west Istanbul, a showcase of 11 artists and designers whittled down from more than 280 nominees. The idea, according to co-curator Tim Stanley, is to advertise and celebrate the fact that boundaries and borders don't matter. Artists from Afghanistan, Mali, Puerto Rico or Thailand, he says, all draw inspiration for their work from Islamic traditions. And that has lead the V&A straight to Istanbul, the home of previous winner Dice Kayek.

'We didn't invent the idea that practitioners are regularly inspired by Islamic tradition; that was going on already,' says Stanley, a senior curator for the V&A's Middle Eastern collection. 'But we have alerted many more people to the fact that this interaction exists, and it is helping build a broader and better-informed consensus of what is going on in the world, and how fascinating it can be.'

Such principles are also at the forefront of Egyptian street artist and nominee Bahia Shehab's work. Lauded for her visual history of the word 'no' in Arabic over the past 1,400 years, Shehab believes the most important thing is getting the message out.

'Art can change lives and we need that kind of change in the Arab world,' she says. 'When I see Arab schoolchildren and their parents standing in line outside museums to see artwork, that is when art becomes valid.' Now surely that would be the most uplifting story of them all. ◆

This year's Jameel Prize exhibition runs from 8 June to 14 August at the Pera Museum, Istanbul; vam.ac.uk/content/exhibitions/exhibition-jameel-prize

PHOTOS: JUSTIN PATRICK, GETTY IMAGES

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YANNICK ALLÉNO
The visionary French chef's recipe for success

Born in 1968 to brasserie-manager parents, Alléno's first taste of life in the kitchen was at 15, when his father sent him to Winchester in England. 'I hated it, but it worked out,' he says. From there he worked in numerous restaurants in Paris, including Relais Louis XIII. In 1999 he earned his first Michelin star at Hotel Scribe, and in 2008 was awarded the Gault Millau Chef of the Year and launched Groupe Yannick Alléno. After his shock departure from Le Meurice in 2013, Alléno took over Pavillon Ledoyen.

The man reinventing French cuisine

It produces the finest food in the world, but recently the likes of Noma and El Bulli have pushed France out of the culinary limelight. Yannick Alléno talks to Josh Sims about changing that...

When Yannick Alléno departed Le Meurice in 2013, opting to go on a sabbatical from high-profile cooking, the decision seemed like career suicide. After all, climbing the buttery pole of haute cuisine typically requires punishing hours and constant forward momentum. And the job at Le Meurice, now occupied by Alain Ducasse, was as big as it got. But here was a Michelin-starred Gault Millau Chef of the Year taking time off. How very French.

'I had other work to do,' says Alléno, 'but after 10 years at Le Meurice I was really tired and needed to take some time out to reflect. Le Meurice was this big company and it was hard to be creative in that environment. I wanted to completely redesign my cuisine. I travelled a lot, looked at other cuisines, but decided my truth, so to speak, was in France.'

And in a big way. When he resurfaced at the Champs Élysées's Pavillon Ledoyen – one of the capital's oldest restaurants, dating back to 1791 – a year later, within seven months he had picked up three Michelin stars. That made him then one of just 111 chefs worldwide, and 26 in France, with maximum star power. He came back with a thump too – the sound of his 1,200-page, 17kg cookery book *Ma Cuisine Française* landing on the dining table. It was a statement of intent. 'I wanted to make a big comeback,' he says, 'and I think I did that.'

What makes Alléno's cuisine well worth shouting about? His reinvention of cooking with sauces, arguably the foundation of French cuisine. Typically, he notes, a sauce is classically made with all the ingredients in one pot, which are then boiled, filtrated, reduced. Yet this ignores the impact of temperature on taste. 'It's strange,' says Alléno. 'We know how to cook a piece of meat perfectly, and then we cover it with a sauce that's been sat there boiling for hours.'

It is more complex, but Alléno has taken to cooking each ingredient in his sauces separately and at the ideal temperature before blending them together just before serving, as one might a cocktail; reduction is done not by heat, but by freezing, which preserves the minerality and salinity of the ingredients. His sauces are divested of the butter and flour that typically made them heavy, and revived with an aromatic element. Result? Much lighter, fresher, punchier and healthier.

'Food always follows human evolution,' he says. 'We suddenly decide we all want to look fit and sexy, and heavy sauces drop out of favour even more. French cuisine has never really looked for new ways of making them, and in recent years there have rightly been criticisms made of it for not moving forward. But that's changing. French cuisine is back, and it's great, because we still have the produce and the wines to make

complex dishes. Finding a new way of working with sauces, really, it's changed my life.'

Work is still tough, even at Alléno's level. Getting Ledoyen (since renamed Alléno Paris, and which next year will undergo a complete renovation) back on its feet has not been easy. 'It was losing a lot of money and had nothing in the cellar,' he notes. 'Sometimes work feels like being in the army. You're on duty every day, every night. It's exciting, but stressful,' he says.

This year Alléno plans to open a French brasserie in Seoul, a country whose cuisine is something of a mystery to him, but which he is looking forward to trawling for inspiration too. Although, whatever he finds, rest assured that what he does with it will ultimately only further his regard for the cooking of his native land.

'The fact is that French cuisine is unique in the world,' he asserts. 'Taking inspiration is one thing, but the danger for it would be to follow movements, like the style of cooking at El Bulli [Ferran Adrià's ground-breaking restaurant in Spain] or Nordic cuisine. They're great, but the fact is that Nordic cuisine is primitive. All that going out looking for berries, the foraging. The French were doing that kind of thing back in the 15th century, before it had its culinary revolution. So it will be interesting to see where those other cuisines go…' ◆ *yannick-alleno.com*

CAMBODIA'S IN HIGH SPIRITS

Daniel Bruce meets the team behind Samai, a distillery producing world-class rum in the most unlikely of places: Phnom Penh

Usually when someone talks about Cambodian spirits, chances are they're referring to the local *ah'ret* – mystical beings that oversee and meddle in everyday life – not liquor. To say Cambodia has no reputation for quality alcohol is an understatement, but these days things are changing. On a narrow street off Phnom Penh's main boulevard you'll find Samai, Cambodia's first ever rum distillery. It was the brainchild of Daniel Pacheco, a 31-year-old engineer from Venezuela. 'After a few years of working here, I realised I missed Venezuelan rum,' he says. 'When my friend Antonio Lopez came to visit, we were drinking cheap rum in a Phnom Penh bar and we decided we could create our own.'

Cambodia is home to an abundance of sugar cane, the primary ingredient for rum. Although it's been used to sweeten hooch for years, never had local farmers considered creating their own rum. Two years ago, Pacheco and Lopez secured a sugar cane supply and set up the Samai distillery. Built on an old parking lot, behind austere brick walls, fermented sugar evaporates through a beautiful old-fashioned copper still and fills jar after jar with their smooth, caramel-tasting spirit. Samai's flagship product, a premium dark rum, is aged for one year in different kinds of sherry butts, imported from Spain. As the average temperature in Cambodia is 28°C, rum ages fast – not necessarily a good thing. Nevertheless, with its quickly growing production, Samai hopes to export to Singapore and Spain this year.

Samai's master distiller, Moang Champichi, is most excited about Samai's soon-to-be-released Kampot pepper rum. 'This rum is distilled through a tray of fresh pepper,' she says. 'Others have made infused pepper rum before, but we are the first ones in the world to distil it.' ◆ *samaidistillery.com*

FROM LEFT TO RIGHT: avocado mille-feuille; Wagyu beef; coconut meringue; Charlotte norvegienne with apple; chicken and grapefruit brulée; Iberian ham mousse with Kalamata olives

PHOTOS: EDMOND HO

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The number of bridges in Hamburg. Germany's second city has more bridges than anywhere else in the world – and more than Venice and Amsterdam combined

Hamburg's high note

The city's newest architectural icon takes living the high life to the next level, says **Laura Latham**

Possibly better known for international business than tourism or culture, Hamburg is about to become an important European centre for music. Germany's second city is a jumble of ornate neo-Renaissance buildings, 19th-century warehouses and post-war office blocks, alongside contemporary signature architecture, such as the Dancing Towers in the famous Reeperbahn district. It is also one of Europe's most important ports – the industrial zone, on either side of the River Elbe, comprises miles of dockyards, factories and smoking chimneys.

Hamburg's authorities have been working to regenerate part of this riverside industrial area with a scheme known as The HafenCity. The creation of a hip neighbourhood of residential and commercial premises mirrors the redevelopment of London's Docklands. And at the heart of the site is the Elbphilharmonie, a spectacular new building that will combine high culture with top-drawer living.

'The Elbphilharmonie is unique,' says Frank Schmidt, director of Quantum Immobilien, which is developing the site. 'It's probably the most interesting project in Hamburg and an opportunity for the city to become better known abroad.'

The eye-catching, 26-storey development fuses Hamburg's industrial heritage with contemporary and cutting-edge design. The brick-built lower part of the building is actually Kaispeicher A, a protected, historically important warehouse that had become a ruin. The city authorities wanted to preserve and redevelop the remaining structure and commissioned Swiss firm Herzog and de Meuron to create an architectural and cultural showpiece.

Eighteen new floors were added to the original eight-storey building, with the resulting structure comprising an impressive exterior of steel and glass, and a roof designed to resemble waves. Interspersed along the façade, which has 1,000 curved panels that reflect the surrounding river and industrial landscape, are a series of 'loggias' with glass fronts that mimic the shape of tuning forks, a nod to the building's new role as a centre for music.

The Elbphilharmonie will house a 2,650-seat, state-of-the-art concert venue, a hotel and spa, several restaurants and public spaces with panoramic views. In addition, there will be 45 sleek apartments on floors 11 to 26, making them the highest residential units in the city. The properties measure from 120m² to 400m² and cost from €6.5m to €11m, considerably more than other top-end property in Hamburg.

Despite this, 40% of the Elbphilharmonie's apartments have already sold, predominantly to German investors, many of whom have strong business or family connections with the city. 'The Elbphilharmonie currently represents the top of the market in Hamburg,' says Philip Bonhoeffer of local estate agency Engel and Völkers. 'It is a landmark, the most outstanding project in Hamburg; there is nothing comparable in Europe.' >

THE BEST MUSIC VENUE IN THE WORLD?

Designed to be as acoustically perfect as possible, the Elbphilharmonie comprises two performance spaces: the Grand Hall and the Recital Hall, with 2,100 and 550 seats respectively. The interior of the Grand Hall has a flowing shape with terraced seating and a stage at the heart of the hall, giving the audience optimum views and sound. But what makes the space truly special is a 'white skin' of 10,000 individually crafted gypsum-fibre panels covering the ceiling and walls, which reflects and distributes sound. This innovative concept is the work of Yasuhisa Toyota, one of the world's best-known acoustic engineers.

The setting is certainly unlike most other luxury residential developments. Properties offer uninterrupted views of the Elbe but also of the ever-changing industrial landscape. Such a visually striking exterior requires interiors that are equally as beautiful, and Italian firm Citterio and Partners has created a sleek and understated design concept that draws on clean urban lines contrasted with natural materials of wood and stone.

In addition, Quantum asked British designer Kate Hume to curate a beautiful scheme for the showcase apartment that is stylish and edgy, yet easy to live with. Colour palettes reflect the tones of the city, and range from soft greys and aquas, to charcoals, cobalt blues and purple. The bespoke furnishings, designer light fittings, retro finds and art add texture and glamour to the overall look. 'It's a big view. I didn't want the interiors to feel beige or to fade against that view,' says Hume. 'HafenCity is a part of Hamburg that has its own vibe, a place to experience metropolitan life.' ◆

For further details on residential properties at Elbphilharmonie, visit quantum.ag

GOING WITH THE GRAIN

Is timber the new building block of the 21st century? Top architects seem to think so, says Laura Latham

It may sound strange to say that wood is the hot new building material, but for centuries it has been largely ignored. Recently, however, there have been big advances in the design and quality of wood engineering. Known as cross-laminating, it means timber can now be used to build structures on a far taller and grander scale than before.

International architects are excited about proposals for high-rise and multi-use projects across the world. Timber housing and mixed-use developments are already under way in London and Stockholm, Portland (Maine) and Bordeaux. 'We see timber not as a trend but as a way of dealing with sustainability issues,' says Martin Videgård of Swedish Tham and Videgård. 'It makes sense in Scandinavia, where timber grows fast and is an endless natural resource.'

Kevin Flanagan, of London-based PLP Architecture, says timber is less energy intensive to produce than concrete and has a higher aesthetic appeal. 'Wood brings an association with nature, people love its feel and look.' Earlier this year, PLP presented ideas for Oakwood House, an elegantly tapered, 80-storey timber high-rise with 1,000 residential units, to former London Mayor Boris Johnson. The design was submitted as part of a project by Cambridge University to examine the role of wood in large-scale urban design. 'Timber could mean we reimagine cities for the next generation,' says Flanagan. ◆

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COILED LIKE A COBRA
Shelby's classic car in numbers

$5.5 MILLION
A 1966 Shelby Cobra 427 made history when it was sold for $5.5m in 2007 – a world-record price for an American car

48 HOURS
There were 50 50th anniversary Shelby Cobra Street Cars made in 2011, and they all sold out in just two days

800 horsepower
In 1965, Carroll Shelby designed the Supersnake, with two superchargers and a whopping 800hp, as the ultimate Cobra for his personal enjoyment

16
The number of people who bought a Cobra with automatic gears (which completely defeats the purpose of buying a performance car like a Cobra…)

262 kmph
The Shelby Cobra reached an incredible top speed of 262kmph when it was first launched in 1964

A brand new classic

Josh Sims meets Neil Cummings, the man who has just won a battle to replicate performance cars made by Carroll Shelby, an icon of American automotive history

It may be a footnote to the new $305 billion highway bill – a piece of legislation the size of a telephone directory – but Neil Cummings is very happy with his couple of lines. After all, Cummings, a lawyer turned CEO of carmaker Shelby, has been fighting for it for over a decade. Why? Because the new legislation means that it will be a lot easier for manufacturers to build replicas of vintage cars. Specifically for Cummings, he can now create a limited number of Shelby cars as they were originally constructed through the early 1960s, before safety regulations eventually put paid to these classics in all but kit car form. Shelby may not be a household name, but Carroll Shelby – a former racing-car driver – was the man who could coax the fast out of any car. He is the legendary maker of the Cobra, the car that he developed in 1962 by putting a Ford V8 racing engine in a modified body from British maker AC. Perhaps the American answer to the Jaguar E-Type in its recognisability, it was the car that allowed Shelby to take on Porsche and Ferrari at the race track and win. In recent years finding a 'real' Cobra has been impossible (unless you're happy to drop a few million dollars) and for decades petrol-heads paid to have their GT

The first driver to shake up a bottle of bubbly to celebrate a victory was Ford GT40 driver Dan Gurney in 1967. Guess who was right next to Gurney whispering in his ear and urging him on? Carroll Shelby

Mustangs 'Shelbyised' (essentially a complete rebuild of the car that will double the price). Until now.

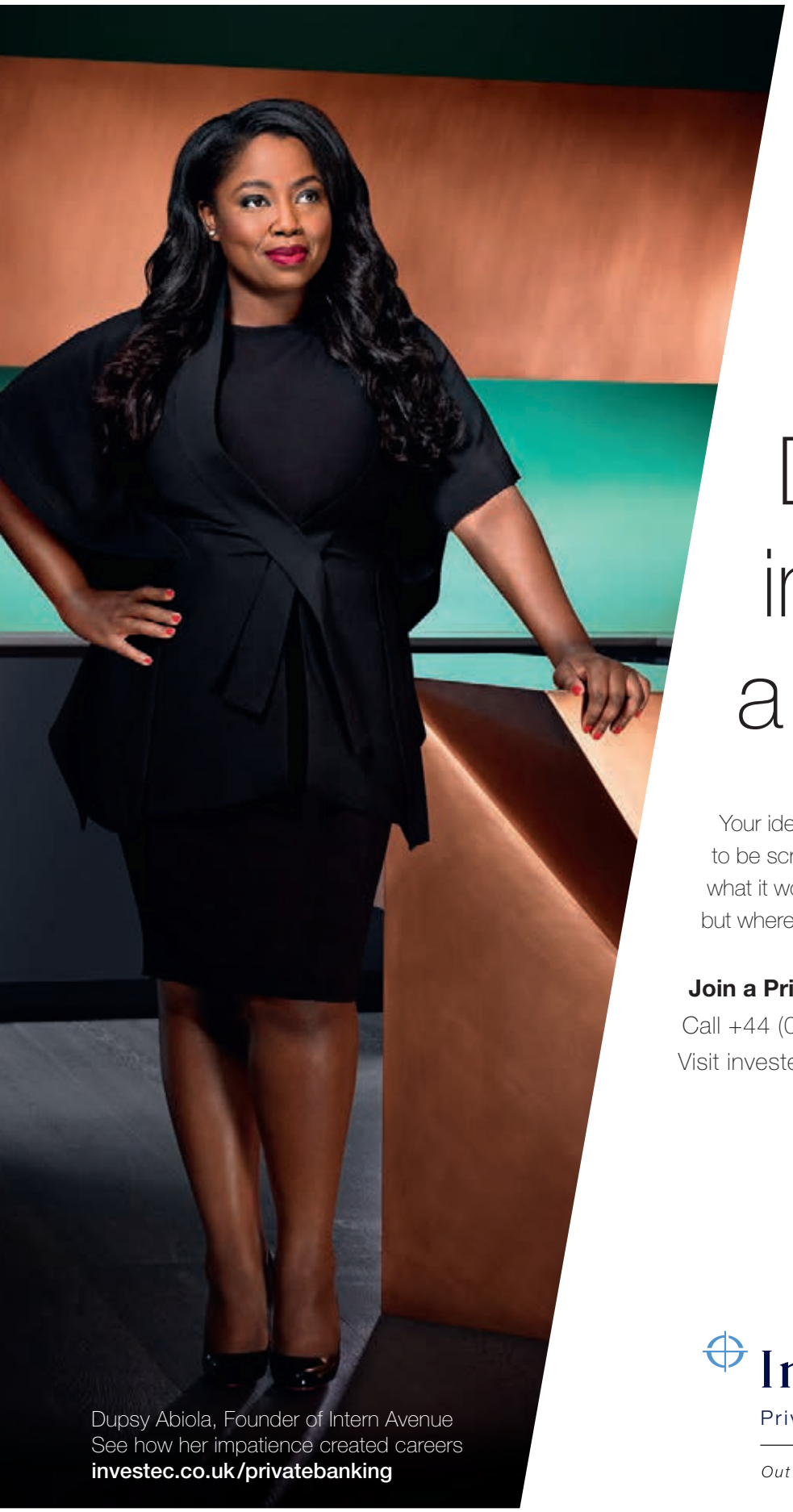
'The idea of the legislation first came about because it was proving such a huge effort to get the makers of Cobra replicas under control. Every time we turned around there was a "new" Shelby Cobra in front of you,' explains Cummings. 'We thought, if only we could at least make a few cars to the original specifications without the need for plastic fenders and airbags. Then our cars would be safer than kit cars. And it would work for other small carmakers getting ripped off too.'

Cummings thought it would never actually happen. 'Getting Congress to decide on anything at all is hard enough,' he says. 'Shelby may be a great part of American automotive history, but it's still a small speciality company.'

The legislation appeared at the end of a bill in late 2015, but it is not without its restrictions. It allows Shelby to make just 325 cars of each of its classic models – at least those 20 years or older – which for a market the size of the US alone is next to no supply at all. 'And that number had to be heavily negotiated,' says Cummings. But those few cars – each of which will meet current emissions standards – are set to prove some of the hottest tickets in the car world when production starts early next year. Prices have yet to be decided but inevitably will reflect the cars' rarity.

'The legal battle has been worth it,' says Cummings. 'To date you had to have something that looked like a Cobra on the outside with who knows what on the inside. I mean, it could have a Toyota engine in it. Not that Toyota make a bad car…' ◆ *shelby.com*

PHOTO: GETTY



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‘I spent a week with India’s richest man’

I got into photography when I was about 18. I figured that if I could travel the world, make people laugh and maybe make them think, then that wouldn’t be a bad way to live. I’d also realised that I wasn’t very good at being told what to do by people in authority, and while photographers are usually following a brief, there’s still a certain freedom.

I remember the photo editor of the *Daily Telegraph*’s Saturday magazine telling me that this was the best assignment she’d ever handed out when she asked me to spend a week with billionaire Vijay Mallya, the man behind Kingfisher beer and Kingfisher airlines.

My first encounter with him was at Stansted airport. He arrived in a red Bentley and we boarded his new private jet, an Airbus corporate A319 with an office at the back and a bedroom. I remember standing up at the bar on the plane and looking out the window and thinking, ‘Hmm, we’re about to take off, perhaps I should sit down?’ There had been no instruction to do so as you’d get on a commercial flight, and that was the start of what was to be a very different kind of week for me.

I was there because Mallya was trying to buy the Whyte & Mackay whisky group for United Breweries. I know if you read the news today he seems to owe a lot of money, but at the time he was one of the richest men in India.

We went to Parliament with him in New Delhi because he was an MP there, we went to the horse races with him in Mumbai and we went to a business conference and dinner in Bangalore, all the time flying on other private jets that he owned. We ate at his New Delhi premises as well – what I remember most vividly is eating off a silver platter. The food came in on a silver tray and I thought it would then be spooned onto a plate but no, that was what we ate from. The building wasn’t too dissimilar to an English country house, with paintings on the wall and deep colours.

Towards the end of the trip we were invited to join Mallya for his 51st birthday celebrations aboard his yacht, *The Indian Empress*, which was one of the biggest and most expensive yachts in the world. There were about 30 of us there and apparently it was a low-key affair compared to his 50th when he’d flown in Lionel Richie to sing.

I remember when Mallya unwrapped his presents there was a gold and bejewelled knuckleduster, which I took to be a bit of a joke present because he clearly had a few enemies. He had a very authoritative presence but without being bullish, dispatching instructions in a very calm way. I have this great picture of us coming back into the harbour at Mumbai with Mallya behind the wheel with his hair flowing in the wind.

It was an unforgettable trip, and it felt like a real privilege to be able to document the billionaire lifestyle and to show that India isn’t only about children sleeping under bridges and people living by the railways. It was an uncomfortable experience in some ways, but one I managed to leverage some enjoyment from.

I have since been back to India quite a few times and have often thought I could live there. I’d feel very comfortable calling it home because I’m so taken with the people, the food and the colour. I tend to feel nervous in the countryside or somewhere I can see the horizon, so the bustle and noise of India would be perfect for me. ◆

the-curators.co.uk

INTERVIEW BY MIKE PEAKE. ILLUSTRATION BY DAVID MAHONEY

PETER DENCH

When not travelling the world on assignment, photographer Peter Dench is a director at The Curators, a company that sources, curates and installs exhibitions and events in public, corporate and private spaces worldwide. He’s hung out with the Queen and Ruud Gullit, but an opulent week with one of India’s richest men was something he’ll never forget

‘I rowed across the Atlantic – twice’

When I was a child in Ghana, where my father helped build a harbour, warships would turn up and put on pirate parties for the local children. I thought the sea was great, so when I was old enough I signed up to the Royal Navy. I also signed up because I had two big ambitions: to sail around the world and to row the Atlantic.

The latter was never really possible when I was in the navy as you never get more than three weeks off. But after I retired and the chance to row the Atlantic came up in 2009, I went for it.

There were 12 of us on board and while they said it was going to be a world record-breaking crew, we missed out on the record by a few days. Taking everything I learned on that attempt – basically what not to do – I formed a crew and set about leading a second attempt in 2011, with just six of us.

Rowing the ocean and breaking the record are not the same. If you want to break the record it’s extremely painful because the blades must never stop moving: for 24 hours a day you have to push yourself and everybody on board. You need people who are both mentally and physically strong and who have the same aim as you.

It takes about two years of planning, and I remember feeling a great sense of relief as we set off from Tenerife. What’s great is that once you’ve begun, all you’ve got to do is eat, row and sleep.

It takes between three and five days to get into a routine – day one is easy because you’re working on adrenaline, but days two and three are harder as your body gets more tired after repeated sessions of two hours on/two hours off – and lots of bad sleep. By the fifth day your body’s in shock but your mind’s telling you to live with it.

There’s definitely more pressure being the skipper – the main concern is to keep morale up and keep the crew motivated. As skipper you also have to lead from the front and show the others what you’re made of. I might have been the oldest, but my watch often managed to put in the most miles.

When you finish your watch the first thing you try and do is rub the salt off you – there’s one baby wipe per person per watch – and then you drink and eat, because if you don’t eat you’ll be pathetic the next time it’s your turn to row. We had 6,000 calories per person per day, which is the most we could carry, but it’s not enough. By the end you look like sticks insects and your performance becomes pretty poor.

The worst time to be out was in the tropics between 11am and 4pm when the weather was unbearably hot and your eyes stung from the glare of the sun and the sea; the best time was at night, especially when it was completely cloudless and the stars were just stupendous.

The sea can be very cruel and can change extremely quickly, and the biggest worry for me was that someone would fall overboard. Around a third of the time the sea was too rough, the wind too strong or the boat moving so fast that we wouldn’t have been able to stop the boat, turn it around and row upstream to pick someone up. People knew that if they fell in, they might not get back out. It certainly focused the mind.

I think the hairiest moment came about three days in when we were nearly run over by a big Russian freighter which had come over to see what we were up to. I was shouting on the radio telling them that we were OK but they didn’t speak English. In the end we had to stop rowing, which went against everything we had set out to do, and back-paddle so that the ship could pass ahead of us. Eventually the captain came on and he spoke English; he apologised and then circled us from about two miles away taking photographs.

We landed in Barbados in under 32 days, having done the 3,000-mile route quicker than anyone else. Several teams have tried to beat us since – two of them sunk and one lost a crew member overboard.

A few years after the Transatlantic row I tried a row around Britain, but we got into a gale and the rudder broke. I recently got back from sailing the Atlantic, and compared to rowing across it, it was so much easier. I think the toughest thing that happened was the freezer stopping working. It was a nightmare. We had to drink warm beer for a while... ◆

David’s rowing efforts are in support of Combat Stress: justgiving.com/fundraising/teamtriton

DAVID HOSKING

Former Naval Commander David Hosking, whose daughter Sophie won an Olympic rowing gold medal for Great Britain in 2012, has had his heart set on rowing the Atlantic since his 20s. Within the last decade he has had the chance to fulfil his dream not just once but twice, the second time setting off as skipper with his own crew

INTERVIEW BY MIKE PEAKE. ILLUSTRATION BY DAVID MAHONEY

PUSH THE BOAT OUT
Rowing adventures around the world

THE RIVER THAMES
Lonely Planet calls rowing along the river that hosts the world’s most prestigious regattas like ‘sitting on a conveyor belt watching living history pass you by’.

THE GRAND CANYON
Hold on tight: an 18-day journey winding through the Grand Canyon along the Colorado River and tumbling waterfalls is a truly exhilarating experience.

THE MALDIVES
Rowing the Maldives took off a few years ago after British silver medallist Guin Batten travelled 60km from Fulmulah Island to Vaadhoo Atoll.

Adventurer Olly Hicks - the only person to successfully row across the Atlantic Ocean solo – will attempt to row around the world in January 2017. He expects it will take 18 months

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‘Civil war couldn’t stop me coming face to face with mountain gorillas’

After finishing a degree in art history in Canada, I thought I would be unemployable. It was the early 1990s and while we hear a lot about the contemporary art market today, back then there was much less of a sense that you could make a career in that field. Luckily, I managed to get a placement at the Victoria and Albert in London, and while working there, I convinced some friends to fly to Rwanda, where I was born, for Easter. The plan was for me to meet them there and go on a trek into the jungle to see the mountain gorillas.

I flew out from London to Kampala, Uganda. In those days Rwanda and Uganda were experiencing border conflicts, so you couldn’t travel directly between the two. You had to fly through a third country, and the third country on my trip was Burundi. I went to the Air Burundi desk in Kampala and bought a ticket to Rwanda via Burundi. After landing in Bujumbura, I went to the transit desk and said I was connecting to Kigali. ‘We haven’t flown that route for years,’ I was told.

I said, ‘What do you mean? I bought the ticket in Kampala,’ and they said the person who’d sold me the ticket must have pocketed the money. There were no flights to Kigali, full stop. When I asked why, the man replied that the border between Burundi and Rwanda was closed. I decided to go to the Sofitel until I sorted something out.

There was a very strange atmosphere at the Sofitel. I started talking to people in the lobby and it quickly transpired that Burundi was in the middle of what was basically a civil war. These were pre-internet days and I had had absolutely no idea. It was very scary – that night the hotel lights started flickering as the power went out, there were noises of shouting, alarm bells, screeching of cars and gunshots out in the street. There was a curfew on and there had been a lot of violence the day before. All the guests were huddled together in the hotel lobby, and it was extremely frightening. For 24 hours I really had no idea if I was going to get out of it.

Luckily I met a man who was booked on an Ethiopian Airlines flight out the next day. It was going exactly where I wanted to go – Kigali – and then on to Addis Ababa. I decided to join him.

En route to the airport it was like something out of a film: we were stopped every 100m and machine guns were shoved in through the window by policemen. When we finally made it to the airport the man I was with asked me if I had any money. I had $200. He said I should put it in my passport and give my passport to him. I did. He took it and he went to the check-in desk where they swallowed the $200 and he came back with an extra ticket.

When I finally met up with my friends in Rwanda we still carried on with the original plan to see the gorillas. What is especially exciting is that when you get to the mountain gorilla community you realise how like humans they are, or how like gorillas we are, because you see them in a family setting. The females are holding babies and you’re instructed to crouch down and be very unassuming, and the gorillas then start to notice you and observe you. It’s fascinating.

While I’ve visited some incredible places, the one I still long to visit is Tehran, where the Iranian Crown Jewels are housed in the State Bank of Iran. Hopefully, with the recent improved relations with the West, it will be easier for me to visit some time soon. ◆

christies.com

INTERVIEW BY MIKE PEAKE. ILLUSTRATION BY DAVID MAHONEY

DR AMIN JAFFER

Dr Amin Jaffer is International Director of Asian Art at Christie’s – it’s a job that takes him all around the world, appraising valuable collections and setting up sales. While nothing fazes him today, an encounter early on in his career had the potential to put him off travel for good – but steady nerves and a little bit of luck saw him through

‘I led a team of 12 people across the blazing-hot Gobi Desert’

RIPLEY DAVENPORT

Ripley Davenport, 46, was an outdoors-loving youngster growing up in Norfolk. His aversion to the mundane lead him to a military career with spells in both the Royal Navy and the RAF. A solo trek across Mongolia in 2010 gave him an appetite for the extreme, but a year later he became hooked as he led a group of strangers across this gloriously barren landscape

INTERVIEW BY MIKE PEAKE. ILLUSTRATION BY DAVID MAHONEY

In 2007 I decided to be the first person to cross Mongolia alone. After three years of planning I was there, ready to set off with my wheeled trailer on which I carried all my supplies. Unfortunately, it broke down just three days in, and I had to head back to the UK with my tail between my legs. I tried again a month later, continued where I left off and managed to complete a journey of just over 1,000 miles.

That trip was horrendous but I was deeply affected by the place – it’s so vast, rich in culture and with incredibly warm people. It was like a magnet and I found myself wanting to cross the Gobi Desert again, only this time with camels.

I toyed with the notion of doing it alone, but a few people said they’d be interested and I decided to lead a team. I settled on the idea of using Bactrian camels to carry our gear across roughly the same route I took the year before, but going west to east this time. I felt a bit wiser, I knew the terrain, but the logistics were even worse this time around because there were 12 of us. After eight months of planning and endless conversations with Russian and Mongolian authorities, we finally got out to Ulan Bator.

The people with me were from all over the world – Canada, Singapore, India, America – and they all wanted to challenge themselves. Their ages ranged from 19 to 56 and they all had an adventurous outlook. Some had prior experience, but what quickly became evident was that some thought the journey would be more like a package tour than the long slog it was going to be. I quickly realised it wouldn’t be easy trying to manage such varied personalities and mindsets.

From Ulan Bator, we flew west to Khovd, where we were taken to our first camp in ancient Russian vans. When we arrived we were like kids, excited by the tents and the camels, and eager to get going.

The routine developed over the next few weeks: sleep, wake, walk, camp, day in, day out. It was pretty monotonous – though that’s not to say it was unpleasant. But as people began to take on board what they’d signed up for – exhaustion, blisters, fatigue – they started to show their true colours. As leader, I became the target. A lot of people seemed annoyed by how difficult it all was.

We experienced some pretty bad weather: sand storms and a terrifying electrical storm with a heavy downpour. There were injuries and illnesses too: one of the women got kicked by a camel and we thought for a while her leg might be broken. I also became worryingly ill with severe stomach pains and doctors told me, via satellite phone, to abandon the

'The harder the life, the finer the person. In the desert I found a freedom unattainable in civilisation; a life unhampered by possessions'

SIR WILFRED THESIGER, THE BRITISH EXPLORER WHO REJECTED THE MODERN WORLD FOR THE ARABIAN DESERT

journey, but I just couldn't bring myself to pull out. I was elated when I got better after a few days.

One of the biggest problems was the camels. We had 15 at the start, all with their own personalities, and trying to get them to sit or stand, stop them running off, throwing tantrums or spitting at us was a daily chore. We tied a blue ribbon around the neck of the worst one, which refused to do anything, and after three or four weeks we set it free to graze because it was just so awkward. The complete opposite was a very gentle camel we named Snowball, which was pure white and very loving. It was affectionate and liked being stroked – it was really strange to see a camel showing traits like a dog's.

While the going was tough, there were lots of good moments, too. One of the best days was the time we drank ice-cold fresh water from a well. Most of the stuff we'd been drinking was lukewarm and a little rancid, so to find some fresh water drawn from a deep crack in the earth was just unbelievable.

The end was all a bit of an anti-climax. I'd managed to navigate us from A to B using some old Russian maps, but we'd overshot the finish by a few miles. It was midday, we were on a small hill, I stopped and looked at the maps, and went, 'Hang on. We're here.' There was no parade, no drums, no overhead helicopter, but there was also a feeling of, 'Wow. Did we really just cross 1,000 miles of desert?' We all congratulated each other and shook hands, but everyone's big moment came when they went back home and rejoined friends and family and celebrated what they'd done. For me the fanfare was arriving home after two months away and seeing my kids with 'Welcome home, Daddy' banners at the airport.

The journey had taken 51 days and validated my belief that with enough grit and perseverance, you can end up pushing through your limits and enter into the unknown.

I've done other expeditions since then, and most recently they've involved adventure swimming. Last year I swam up the Kenmare river in Ireland: I really enjoyed it and it opened up a new world for me. My next challenge is to swim from Sicily to Gozo in Malta this year – it's 52 miles across the Malta Channel, where the dangers include everything from jellyfish, boat traffic, hypothermia and possibly even sharks – but my ultimate goal, I think, is to swim around Ireland. I'd also like to go back to the Gobi alone, with just one or two camels, and see if I can be self-dependent. I'd take a few supplies with me; I'd love to see how long I could last. ◆

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JUST DESERTS

Five magnificent experiences in the driest places on Earth

THE KALAHARI

Stretching for 360,000 square miles across Botswana, Namibia and South Africa, the Kalahari Desert is green after spring rains and home to an abundance of flora and wildlife.

WHITE DESERT

Trekking through this barren Egyptian land you'll be forgiven for thinking you're stomping past ice floes in the Arctic. Here, spectacular chalk formations have been created by centuries of sandstorms.

THE SAHARA

Stay on track – but off the beaten track – with a train journey through Morocco's desert. The Oriental Desert Express route, from Oujda to Bouarfa, stops off at nomadic camps and desert villages.

THE ATACAMA DESERT

Become a *huaso* (Chilean cowboy) for a day and follow the trail from the heart of the the Atacama (the driest desert on earth) to the oasis town of San Pedro de Atacama on horseback.

ANTARCTICA

It might not be what you think of when you hear 'desert', but in the teeth-shattering climes of this bone-dry land you can play with penguins and take an eight-day trek to the Pole.

Top to bottom: Lord J. Rothschild summer pavilion, Corfu, Greece; Residential Compound in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia; Dunmow House, Athens, Greece; Stag's Leap Winery, Napa Valley, USA

A PASSION FOR ARCHITECTURE

Meet a studio that creates architecture based on function, emotion and a respect for nature

Headquartered in Barcelona, BC Estudio Architects operates all over the world, including the United States, India, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Australia and several European countries. The company's list of architectural projects includes boutique hotels, luxury homes, wineries and golf clubs.

Company director Javier Barba has put together a team of professionals of varying nationalities who all share the belief that architecture is a tool which can change and improve society, a sentiment that is echoed in the studio's motto: pleasant and comfortable environments which are respectful of nature and its resources.

The company's architects work with a global view, with the aim that each project is unique and special.

Projects are designed with the vision of blending the architecture, interior and landscape design disciplines, and each project looks to create an impact not just because of its beauty, but also due to its functionality, proving the two can exist in harmony. BC Estudio achieves this using renewable resources and elements such as recycling water, in order to reduce energy consumption and harmonize the building with its surroundings, in a process known as Green Architecture.

The firm accepts and thrives on the responsibility to provide the best answer to the client's needs, offering different solutions tailored to each individual commission.

Projects are born from a series of primary sketches and drawings as well as scale models, and are developed using the most advanced Building information modeling (BIM) technology. Physical and digital models are used, as well as renderings of images and videos, leading to the creations of unique high-quality architectural projects, with timeless designs that embrace local tradition and necessity, not just fashion.

bcarquitectos.com

JAVIER BARBA Estudio Architects greenarchitecture

ALTERNATIVE LUXURY

Prestigious provides the ultimate combination of exclusive accommodation and luxury service

Over the past few years there has been a move away from the traditional hotel towards alternative accommodation such as short-term rental apartments and stays on luxury boats – people are starting to prioritise privacy and personalisation. What's lost, however, is the everything's-taken-care-of service you'd get from a hotel.

For those who want the solace of alternative accommodation but all-inclusive assistance, French company Prestigious may hold the key. It offers a range of 370 luxury rental apartments, villas and yachts across the world, combined with an extensive concierge service.

Founded in Paris in 2013 by Suomi Park-Fujiwara, Prestigious now has properties in Europe, the US, the Caribbean and St Barths. The company offers both short-term holiday lets and long-term accommodation. It is discerning in its choice of property, ensuring its clients will experience nothing less than a perfect stay.

The interior of one of Prestigious's Miami properties, 'Shore Drive' (from €1455 per night)

The Prestigious concierge is available daily between 7am and 10pm. It caters to your every whim, so you can switch off completely. If you need a baby-sitter, an in-house chef or someone to organise queue-jump tickets for a local museum, all you have to do is ask.

Setting itself apart from its competitors, Prestigious aims to take care of every guest, and make each stay the experience of a lifetime.

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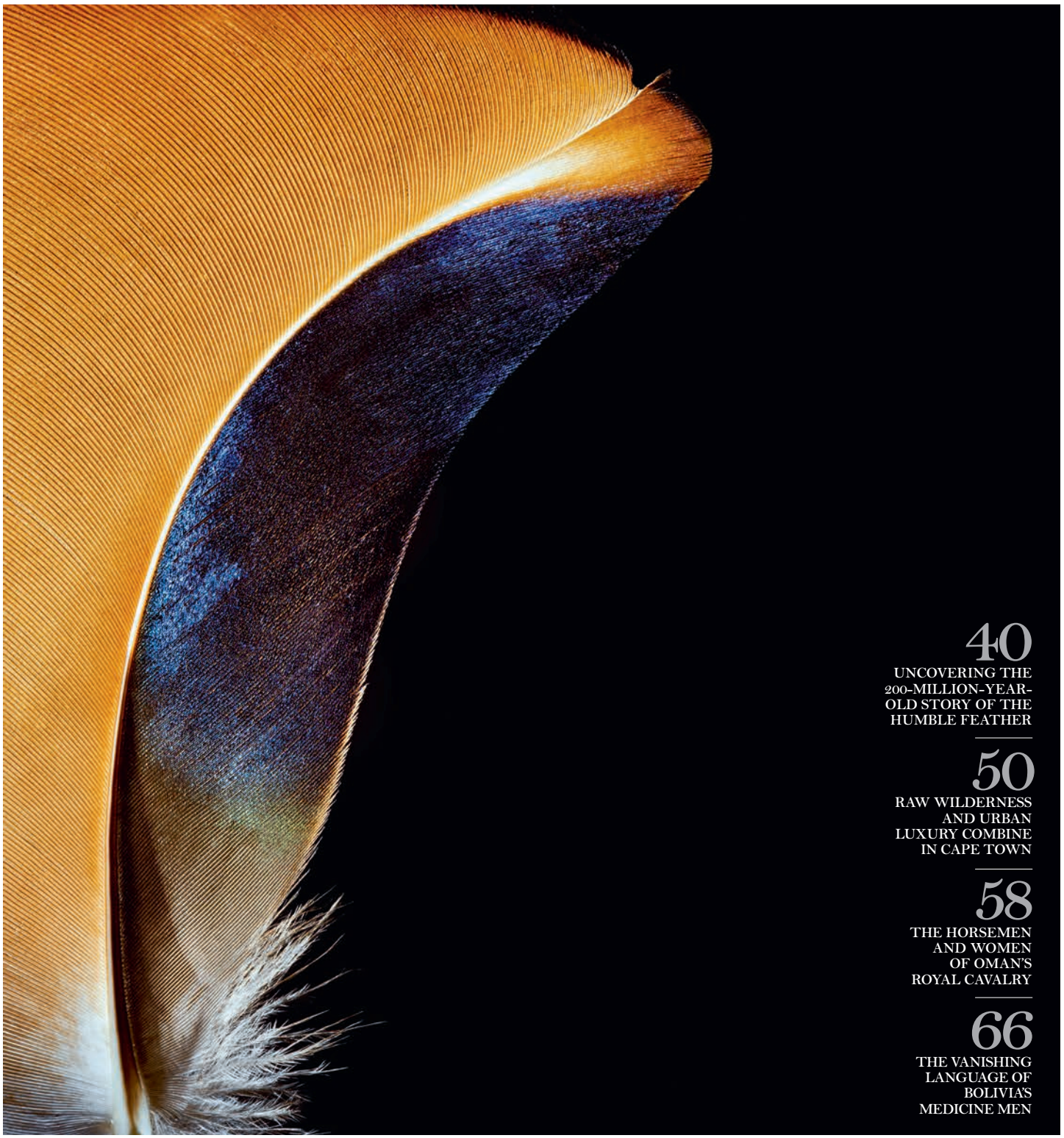
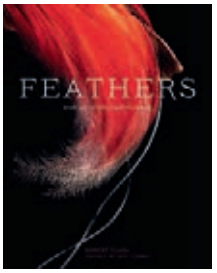


PHOTO ROBERT CLARK

‘Form follows function, as the saying goes, but when it comes to feathers I would say, if form follows function then beauty follows form’

Employed in flight, warmth and sexual attraction, feathers are one of evolution’s most useful and enchanting creations. **Claire Bennie** spoke to Robert Clark, the photographer behind a new book telling their 200-million-year-old story

FEATHERS: DISPLAYS OF BRILLIANT PLUMAGE
With gorgeous images from award-winning *National Geographic* photographer Robert Clark, this beautiful book offers a captivating perspective of a seemingly simple, everyday object: a bird feather (£19.99, Chronicle Books)



Hay in western Kansas might not strike you as a top twitching destination, but with 467 different species on the state list, it offers some of the most diverse bird-watching in the world. It was here, in this quiet town, that photographer Robert Clark grew up. 'My fascination with birds stretches back to my youth when I would gather feathers of meadowlarks, crows and quails,' he says. 'As a child, I started observing the doves and red-tailed hawks endemic to the area.' The autumn migration is one of the most spectacular times to visit this small corner of the USA, as thousands of neo-tropical birds – hummingbirds, shorebirds, waterfowl, warblers and orioles – fly south for the winter. 'Every year I'd watch the sandhill cranes flying along their migratory path at the Cheyenne Bottoms Wildlife Area close to my home,' says Clark. 'It was very rural – Kansas City, the biggest city by far, was a long way away.'

Little did Clark know that his boyhood curiosity with birds would lead him to a rewarding career at *National Geographic*, and to the publication of his own book, *Feathers: Brilliant Displays of Plumage*, an exquisite photographic study of more than 60 different birds' feathers. But it wasn't birds that drew him into a career in photography. After being given a camera by his big brother in his teens, Clark first cut his teeth with an assignment documenting a high school basketball game for *The Hays Daily*. After graduating from Kansas State University he worked on a number of newspapers – *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, *The Cincinnati Post* and *The Ogden Standard Examiner*. In 1990, after moving to Philadelphia, he worked with reporter Buzz Bissinger photographing West Texas high school football culture in Odessa. The book, *Friday Night Lights*, was an international bestseller. 'Then, at 32, I left newspapers and moved to New York,' says Clark. 'The director of photography at *The Philadelphia Enquirer* introduced me to the photography director at *National Geographic*. I worked really hard to learn about different kinds of photography – in terms of lighting and technical aspects that would help differentiate me from other photographers – so it wasn't all just photojournalism. I was trying to build on the foundations of narrative photojournalism and still be able to tell a story – except in a more illustrative, controlled way.'

Clark's first assignment for the magazine was in 1995, photographing 17th-century French explorer Robert de La Salle's ship *La Belle*. It was discovered beneath 12 feet of water off the Texan coast that year. Clark shot a remarkable wide shot of *La Belle* exposed to the air and blue sky >

PREVIOUS SPREAD: a palm cockatoo. LEFT: the Indian roller dips through the air, displaying its brilliant blue feathers to attract a mate. RIGHT: a single feather from the Archaeopteryx fossil discovered in 1861. NEXT SPREAD: the flamingo's pink colouring is a result of a diet full of beta-carotene-rich algae

'My fascination with birds stretches back to my youth when I would gather feathers and observe the doves and red-tailed hawks endemic to the area'

CARE TO DANCE?
The red bird of paradise is a great example of extreme sexual dimorphism, with one of the most spectacular mating dances in the natural world. The male displays his extravagant plumage, prancing in front of potential mates, spreading his vibrant red tail feathers out in a grand fan and even hanging upside down

'The ways in which feathers have evolved is riveting to me. Over millions of years the scales ofa dinosaur began to grow upwards in spines that covered the body ofbirds'

for the first time in more than 300 years. 'Working for *National Geographic* wasn't necessarily the idea when I moved to New York,' he says. 'I wanted to be David Bailey and take portraits. But I've had the chance to look into topics that I'd never dreamed I could dabble in – things like Charles Darwin and Alfred Russel Wallace, for example. No one seems to know who Wallace was, but he was one of the main guys behind natural selection; his name was on the paper as well. He wrote Darwin a letter and said he had this idea. The rest, as they say, is history.'

And so it was in 2004, when Clark was given the chance to work on a story about Darwin, that he was able to re-explore his fascination with birds and their feathers – and immerse himself a new passion: investigating the constantly unfolding tale of human development. 'As I examined Darwin's life, it became clear to me that his interest in and understanding of the evolutionary processes grew encyclopaedic during his five-year voyage aboard HMS *Beagle*,' Clark says. 'During that time, while studying the varying sizes of finches' beaks in the Galapagos Islands, Darwin incepted the notion of island evolution: the isolation of a species plus time and adaptation to local conditions.

'After Darwin returned home to England, he began breeding pigeons. In his breeding he was trying to accelerate evolution, looking at the birds' skeletons to see if his selection had led to any morphological changes. The varieties of pigeons he raised were astounding. As I studied Darwin, the evolution of the feather began to occupy my mind, and throughout the next decade I continued to photograph birds as I did more work for *National Geographic*. Eventually this led to the opportunity to work on an article published in February 2011 called *Feather Evolution: The Long, Curious and Extravagant History of Feathers*. That story led me to these 200-million-year-old ubiquitous objects of nature.'

In this collaboration with acclaimed science writer and *New York Times* science columnist Carl Zimmer, the pair reminded us of how unlikely it is for us to see some of nature's greatest marvels in person ('We won't get to glimpse a colossal squid's eye, as big as a basketball. The closest we'll get to a narwhal's unicorn-like tusk is a photograph,' wrote Zimmer), but there is one natural wonder that we see almost every time we step outside – one that goes completely unnoticed, and certainly unappreciated, by most of us: feathers. 'Everyone connects with feathers,' says Clark. 'I live in Brooklyn – arguably the centre of hipsterism right now – and I see feather tattoos everywhere. Feather earrings, T-shirts too, and dreamcatchers on people's rear-view mirrors.'

When he started delving deeper into the story of the humble feather, Clark became engrossed in its origins. 'It's incredible that feathers actually pre-date birds; they go back more than 125 million years,' he says. 'As I became astounded by the extreme variation, formation and colouration of the feathers that covered each bird, the story took me to the Liaoning Province in China to shoot a collection of Confuciusornis bird fossils from the early Cretaceous Yixian and Jiufotang formations.'

This single distal secondary feather from a deposit of fossils discovered between Munich and Nuremberg in 1861 (on page 43) – a year after Darwin and Wallace announced their theory of evolution – opens Clark's book. It belonged to Archaeopteryx, a genus of bird-like dinosaurs that can be described as somewhere between the non-avian feathered dinosaur and the birds we know today. It also predates the Confuciusornis, which Clark shot in China, and is often referred to as 'the first bird'. Archaeopteryx lived during the Jurassic period, some 150 million years ago. When the fossil was found, it stirred up a lot of controversy – particularly because the finding came so soon after the theory of evolution; it was a chunk of evidence that thrilled Darwin. Incredibly, claims that it was a fake resurfaced as recently as 1985, when astronomer Fred Hoyle and physicist Lee Spetner argued it >

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: the golden pheasant's crest feather; the red bird of paradise's extravagant plumage; a lollipop-shaped tail feather belonging to the king bird of paradise; and a fan-like feather from ground-dwelling pigeons found in New Guinea

TOP FLIGHT: THE WORLD'S THREE BEST BIRD-WATCHING DESTINATIONS

1 Papua New Guinea is home to more than 700 types of bird, including 40 species of dazzling birds of paradise. Largely untouched by humans, it also has few predatory species, so local birds have been able to flourish. Go bird-watching at Varirata National Park

2 Forget the Big Five; in South Africa's Kruger National Park, twitchers should aim for the Big Six – a feathered version. They include the ground hornbill, the lappet-faced vulture, the saddle-billed stork, martial eagle, Pel's fishing owl and the kori bustard

3 The lush, wild rainforest of the Pantanal in Brazil is home to 650 different species of birds – that's more than in all of North America! Top spots include the country's biggest bird, the rhea, a close relation of the ostrich, and countless hummingbirds

ABOVE: the adult male mallard has green-blue head feathers separated from the rest of the body by a clean white ring about its neck

was likely that feather impressions were applied to a thin layer of concrete. Paleontologists worldwide immediately dismissed their claims. The Archaeopteryx is currently located at the Humboldt Museum für Naturkunde in Berlin.

'The ways in which feathers have evolved and manifested themselves over time is riveting to me; over millions of years the scales of a dinosaur deviated and began to grow upwards in spines that covered the body of birds,' says Clark. 'Through many generations, these spines spread, evolving specific purposes for the regions on the body on which they grew; eventually these structures were imbued with extravagant colours and features.' Since evolving from spines, feathers have evolved for all kinds of purposes: flight, insulation, sexual attraction, camouflage. One of the most spectacular sights in the natural world is a brilliant display of plumage in a mating dance, for example, the peacock's brilliant turquoise and emerald green fan or, Clark's favourite, the scarlet feathered dance of the bird of paradise. 'The males go through such an intense mating dance to attract females,' he says. 'And of course, they have such beautiful feathers. The example that we have on the book's cover [the bird of paradise, shown on the previous page] is hard to beat.

'I love things that are elegant and functional,' continues Clark. 'I love the old Nikon cameras, you know they just work well, and now things are just difficult and confusing with digital. You get immediate gratification these days – you know, let me fiddle with this and that. It was different with film. I love function and things that just work for a certain purpose, you know? Feathers – they all work, whether it's for sexual selection, for flight – there's a picture in the book of an owl's feather and it's curved at the top, slightly smaller at the top, and it allows the owl to fly more silently; to become a better hunter. I just think that's really, really interesting.' ◆

robertclark.com

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CAPE ESCAPE

With a burgeoning urban arts scene, a slew of exciting chefs and the raw beauty of South Africa's wilderness just two hours away, Cape Town has become the ideal luxury getaway, says Simon Kurs

The South Africans call it their soul space. The vast desert belt that runs across the country's midriff, separating the lush Cape from the High Veld and the Kalahari to the north, is an unforgiving and ancient landscape. But drive far enough to the Karoo's western extreme and it changes. As you reach the Cederberg mountains, the scenery becomes greener; scattered boulders appear on the roadside. The higher you climb, the more there are, until, suddenly, the valley basin opens dramatically to reveal a tapestry of deep ravines and canyons, waterfalls and sloping ridges.

If it weren't for the dirt track, you could well imagine being the first person here. You wouldn't be able to tell anyone, however, as there's no phone signal. In fact, there hasn't been any since Clanwilliam, the last town we passed, some 40 minutes back up the road.

'There are no masts anywhere. We did it deliberately,' laughs Herbert from behind the wheel of the car. 'It means people are forced to relax when they come to stay with us.'

And that's the point of Bushman's Kloof, a 7,500-hectare wilderness reserve, with a luxury retreat in the middle that has been designed to be entirely at one with its surroundings, combining the best elements of an experiential holiday with all the trappings of a top-notch wellness getaway. So, from the minute you arrive at the main lodge, you're free to do as little or as much as you like. The first thing that happens, however, is that you're introduced to your ranger who will take you out on nature walks or kayaking on the nearby reservoir, or give you a guided tour of the 130 rock art sites that are littered around the reserve.

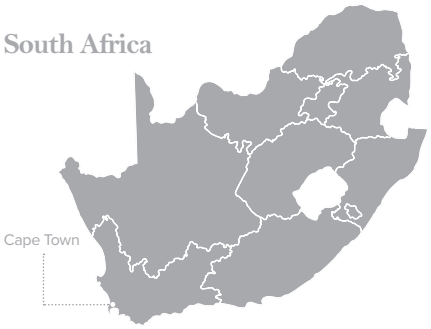
He's also on hand for more transcendent experiences. Indeed, it's with our ranger, Christaan, that we experience one of the main reasons why people come here at all. It's late on the second night and he's guiding us back to our room after dinner. Approaching the front porch of our cottage, one of 16 scattered around the garden grounds, we catch sight of movement up ahead. The night is dark and as we approach and catch the distinctive shape of a springbok munching away nonchalantly on the grass.

There's no denying that you're connected intimately to nature at Bushman's Kloof, but it's always in a way that feels expertly curated – largely because everything is so luxuriously appointed. This is quite unlike the vast majority of safari experiences, where part of the appeal is about leaving your comfort zone behind. In contrast, Bushman's Kloof is itself a comfort zone.

Take the dinner we've just come from before our animal encounter. With night just fallen, we arrived at a stone-built shepherd's cottage illuminated by candlelight blazing from its windows (I counted 63 candles). Inside, a burning hearth threw heat into the centre of the room where there stood a single table, decorously laid for two. A chef was on hand to cook one of the most fabulous meals we've ever had, grilled on a traditional barbeque or *braai*, before we were taken for a night drive and a spot of star gazing.

'We like to do these extraordinary dining experiences for all of our guests at least once,' says Ryan Weakley, when he and I catch up the following morning. Other guests apparently enjoy an outdoor meal in a natural sandstone amphitheatre just as impressive as the kitchen garden we were in. The resort's executive chef is plucking sprigs of parsley and basil for a salsa verde he is making later. Bushman's Kloof's kitchen gleans 70% of its fruit and vegetables from its vast allotment, plucking peppers, cucumbers, tomatoes, figs, mangos, grapefruit and persimmons, among others, to feature on the daily-changing >

LEFT: a romantic dinner at Bushman's Kloof wilderness reserve



menus. 'It means we can experiment and just cook what's good,' says Weakley. Of course, the proximity to nature does have its drawbacks. 'Every day we have to chase away the baboons,' he laughs.

I could go on and on, describing the staff, perhaps the greatest asset here, or the fabulous outdoor spa gazebo. But what's even more remarkable is the location. Bushman's Kloof is a mere two hours from Cape Town, which means it's able to scratch a very particular itch for a very particular type of modern traveller, allowing them to combine a high-end, but suitably bite-sized safari-style experience with an entirely different – urban – safari in a landscape that is changing before its inhabitants' eyes.

'There are cranes everywhere,' says Jess Latimer, pointing skywards from across the table. 'The building has been going crazy since 2010 when the World Cup was here. It just hasn't stopped.'

We're sat in Hemelhuijs, a vibrant cafe in a newly pedestrianised part of Cape Town that perfectly epitomises just what Latimer is talking about. After the absolute serenity of Bushman's Kloof, it's somewhat overwhelming to see so many people. The owner of Cape View Clifton, the city's most fashionable guesthouse, is perfectly at home here, of course. Indeed, her ultra-chic cliff-side escape, which she opened in 2012, is a major beneficiary of the new buzz here. Cape View Clifton, set in the hills overlooking Camps Bay, is itself a sure sign of the way things are changing. The place is somewhere between a Hamptons beach house and a Mykonos party pad, all clean white minimalism, wood, glass and slick Scandi furniture.

'We wanted to make somewhere that was like a home away from home,' says Latimer, 'one where you have everything you need without the formality of a hotel.' One great example is how she's replaced a real-life concierge with an app that you can download once you've checked in, directing you to the best places to eat, drink and shop in the city. It's a necessary tool in a place that is changing so quickly, with hot new spots popping up all the time.

Nowhere, right now, is hotter than Bree Street. By day, it's a hub of galleries, boutiques, coffee shops and interiors stores, but when night falls its Victorian facades buzz with energy. Walking its pavements, there's the same kind of vibe as London's Soho, trendy young things grabbing terrific modern tapas at La Parada or queueing for a table at Chefs Warehouse, the current place to be seen from Irish-born chef-owner Liam Tomlin. Later they might enjoy a cocktail in the canopied courtyard of Honest Chocolate, a hidden gin bar at the back of the confectionery store.

But ask any foodie and they'll tell you that the Old Biscuit Mill is the place to go. This former industrial yard in the city's increasingly trendy Woodstock neighbourhood, is the home of The Test Kitchen, where Luke Dale-Roberts plies his trade with experimental fusion cooking. In a tasting >

Cape View Clifton, set in the hills overlooking Camps Bay, is somewhere between a Hamptons beach house and a Mykonos party pad

ABOVE: Cape View Clifton's owner, Jess Latimer. **RIGHT:** the sweeping vistas of Camps Bay from luxurious Cape View

COOKING UP A STORM: LUKE DALE-ROBERTS' CV

1971 Born in Punnetts Town, Sussex, UK
1996 Moved to London, where he cut his teeth working under Roux brothers' protégé Kevin Hopgood
1998 Worked at London's number-one fusion restaurant, Bali Sugar, before working as executive sous chef at the capital's famous Soho House
2002 Spent four years in Asia launching restaurants from Seoul to Singapore, including The Square in Singapore and Spiral in Manila
2006 Moved to Cape Town, where his wife is from
2010 La Colombe at Constantia wine estate – where Dale-Roberts was executive chef – ranked 12th in the San Pellegrino World's 50 Best Restaurants
2010 Set up a food stall serving eclectic fusion food at trendy Neighbourgoods Market
2010 Opened The Test Kitchen in Cape Town to rave reviews
2011 Launched The Test Kitchen's sister restaurant, Pot Luck Kitchen

menu big on hits, the light curry glazed kingklip stands out: the local fish first arrives, steaming between two concrete flowers pots, sitting on charcoal, before it is plated and brought back, sitting on a carrot and cashew purée, finished with carrot beurre noisette. It's a true delight both for its execution and theatricality – no wonder Dale-Roberts is making such a splash.

That's not to say he's the only notable figure on the food scene here. You'll find authentic barbeque at the Hog House brewery and Peruvian small plates at Charango Grill and bar. Dale-Roberts' own second venture the Pot Luck Club, also in the Old Biscuit Mill, is also currently attracting a good deal of heat for its fusion tapas.

The reason for this boom? Dale Roberts is clear: 'Everyone has upped their game radically,' he says. 'From the suppliers and producers, all the way to the wine makers.'

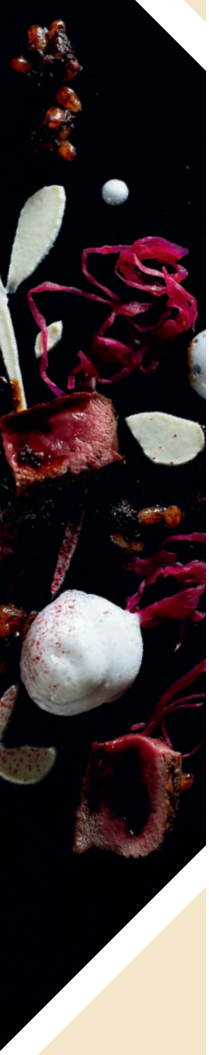
And so we find ourselves sitting in a cold, dark room, staring at a huge, spiralling art installation that appears to be somewhere between a corkscrew and a DNA helix, for the final leg of the visit. We're in the Wine Gallery at Ellerman House, a Cape Town hotel that's known for having South Africa's biggest private wine collection.

If Cape Town is now hot for food, then it is also making serious noise about its wine. Of course, this nation has long produced wine (the first South African wine was first made by European settlers in 1659) and the vineyards of the wine route are a long-established point in the tourist trail. However, in recent years, production has been taken to the next level, as we're learning during a tasting session with Manuel Cabello, the sommelier at this stunning hotel, sampling some of the 7,500-odd bottles in the cellar.

'There are so many different terroirs in the Western Cape,' he says. 'It used to be that the producers would just grow what they liked, but now they take a scientific approach, testing the soil and planting accordingly. The combination of knowledge, technology, passion and know-how makes this the best time for growers here.'

The results speak for themselves. Last July, South African wines won more trophies than did Spain at the Decanter Awards, picking up 15% of all international silverware. There has been a resulting explosion in places where you can indulge your oenophile tendencies – ranging from Publik, a relaxed and hipsterish wine bar just off Bree street where the daily-changing list is handpicked to focus on local producers using natural methods, all the way to the fine-dining experiences such as Jordan, restaurant of the Jordan Wine estate in the winelands of Stellenbosch, which is famed for its food and wine pairings.

Much of this is down to a new generation of boundary-pushing growers, says Cabello. 'Young makers are coming through,' he says, 'and they're definitely being more adventurous. This is a great time to be in South Africa.' ◆



'Everyone in the region has upped their game radically – from the suppliers and producers all the way to wine makers'

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: ajoblanco with sherry and chicken sweetbreads, almond milk and celeriac crisps; springbok with fermented red cabbage, turnip milk and pine nut dressing; linefish with potato and snoek medley; foie gras with pine needles and chestnuts. RIGHT: inside The Test Kitchen

PHOTOS: JUSTIN PATRICK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Far and ride

In May, the eyes of the world were on the Royal Cavalry of Oman as they performed for the Queen's 90th birthday in Windsor. **Jeremy Taylor** journeys to Muscat to uncover the secrets of this extraordinary band of horsemen – and women

PHOTOGRAPHY **KHALIL AL ZADJALI**

'They make it look easy, but years of training have gone into this. The cavalry was formed by the Sultan himself, so it's a great honour to be selected to play'

A blood red sun is rising over the Indian Ocean, illuminating the al-Hajar mountains that pin Muscat to the coast of Oman. The jagged peaks look ominous against the sky but there's something even more frightening hurtling down the beach. A hundreds yards away a posse of 12 cavalry is stampeding across the sand towards me. Their Arabian horses are packed tightly together, hooves splashing through the waves as they bear down on my position at full gallop.

The dramatic scene could have come from the pages of a novel by TE Lawrence. Except there's something even more bizarre filling my ears – the sound of massed bagpipes drifting across the sand dunes. The situation would be far more terrifying too if the women riders weren't wearing brightly coloured costumes and smiling broadly. And there's not a single weapon between them because this is just a rehearsal – part of a daily routine for one of the world's greatest equestrian display teams.

The Royal Cavalry of Oman is a ceremonial squadron that also features a mounted female orchestra. Steering a pretty but recalcitrant Arabian horse with just your knees is one thing but delicately playing a flute or clarinet at the same time is quite another. Most of the strikingly attractive men and women of the cavalry squadron are under 30 years old and look resplendent in their traditional Omani outfits. The highlight of their year was performing at Queen Elizabeth's 90th birthday celebrations in England in May. They spent three weeks tented in the shadow of Windsor Castle – a long way from the unrelenting heat of the Omani desert.

But while the soldiers look breathtaking in their costumes, it's really the horses that steal the show. Decked out in tassels and brightly coloured saddle clothes, their necks jingle with braids of glittering silver that catch the morning sun. They've been brushed and pampered to perfection by another small army of grooms. Their broad saddles are made from a rainbow of coloured textiles instead of leather, with matching saddle and bridles too. It's a spectacular but unusual sight – so how did this flamboyant unit of men and woman appear in the normally reserved Middle East?

Oman has some of the most enlightened attitudes towards women in the region. The country's relaxed position has much to do with the Sultan Qaboos, who deposed his father in 1970 and then established the cavalry unit four years later. Qaboos is a dominant but benign figure who still runs the country today – the longest serving ruler in the Middle East.

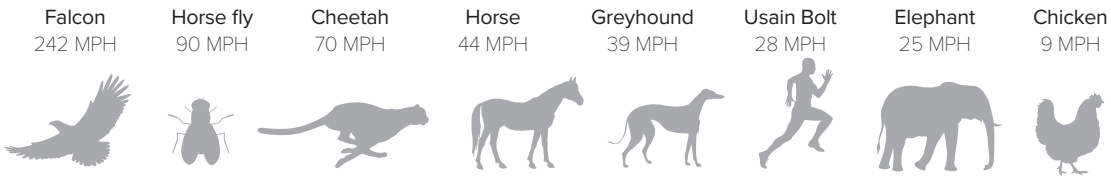
An Anglophile, Qaboos studied at Sandhurst and served with the now defunct Cameronian Regiment. Oman was never part of the Commonwealth but still has 'special ties' with Britain dating back to a treaty signed in 1800. So perhaps it's not surprising that the cavalry operates today like the British Jockey Club: it is also the organising body for events like show-jumping, racing and even polo. The cavalry today has grown to 140 horses and 200 riders, filling the vast Al Safinat stables, some 15 miles north of the Omani capital of Muscat. The Firqah ceremonial section of men and women was created in 1993 and is famous for brightly coloured displays of costumes and horsemanship.

Second Lieutenant Raidah Albahri, a member of the mounted orchestra, is one of the few who speaks >

LEFT: the Royal Cavalry of Oman galloping through the desert. RIGHT: Second Lieutenant Raidah Albahri

UP TO SPEED

Over the past 150 years, thoroughbreds have got faster. Just from 1997 to 2012, sprint horses improved race times by more than a second. Is it breeding, a healthier diet or better training? The jury is still out, but one thing's for sure, when it comes to the world's fastest, it's far from a one-horse race. Here are the fastest animals on the planet.



English. In the morning she rides out with the rest of the cavalry, then studies the flute in the afternoon. Sitting beneath a palm tree at the cavalry's headquarters, the 29-year-old talks about her lifelong love of horses and music.

'My father bought me my first flute when I was a little girl. Back then my fingers struggled to cover the keyholes. The instrument felt awkward in my hands and my lips were sore with practising. I think my parents were happy because it was a distraction from my favourite pony,' says Albahri. 'My father encouraged me to join the Sultan's cavalry but I wanted to be a policeman. He urged me on, so I joined the army when I was 19. I was very proud to be part of the women's orchestra, but my father died suddenly. He didn't live long enough to see me perform. That made me very sad.'

Her soft features and tiny stature make Albahri look half her age. Yet the traditional silk and cotton Bedouin costume worn by cavalry officers hides a thoroughly modern Omani woman. On her evenings off she drives a 6.2-litre American supercar and smokes a pipe.

British cavalry officers have recently been drafted in to help the Omanis improve their skills, adding precision and experience to the musical routine. Paul D'Arcy, a retired Corporal of Horse with the Household Cavalry, is a percussion specialist. During a long military career he played cello at countless state engagements, including the wedding of the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge in 2012.

'They make it look easy but years of training have gone into this,' says D'Arcy, tightening a saddle drum before the orchestra horses enter the arena. 'Fortunately, the Omanis are trim and adaptive, so they have a head start. The cavalry unit was formed by the Sultan himself, so they see it as a great honour to be selected to play.'

Walking through the cavalry's air-conditioned stables, it's clear these are some of the best-kept animals in the Middle East. The horses are beautifully turned out and start their day with a gentle canter along the beach. Each has a large loose box and is identified by a printed nametag slotted into the stable door. Bogama, Methaq and Maskirovka are among those enjoying a nosebag. >

LEFT: a female rider rehearsing on the beach. **RIGHT:** close-up of an Omani horse saddle. **FAR RIGHT:** a rider carrying the cavalry's flag

5000BC

Oman's rich culture of horses and horse breeding dates back more than 7,000 years. Archeologists have found a number of ancient carvings and copper models of horse heads, which you can see today in the Museum of Frankincense in Salalah. According to legend, the first horse thoroughbred in Arabia was called Zad al-Rakeb, given by the Prophet Solomon, Son of David, to an Omani Uzd tribe who wished him well on his wedding. It's said that Oman's finest horses still share his bloodline.

'Arabian horses are very slight compared to English breeds,' explains Samiya Alabri. The 26-year-old started riding when she was seven and joined the army six years ago. 'This makes them agile and fast – so they are very good at performing stunts in a small arena.'

Alabri plays cornet in the band but rides with Albahri and her male colleagues in some of the daredevil stunts. The women gallop barefoot in pairs, one standing upright on her saddle, holding onto her neighbour's hand for support. The men form pyramids of 10 by standing on their saddles. Others perform the *rakd al arda*, or close formation galloping in pairs. Their incredible riding skills are enhanced by mesmerising poems and chants, as well as the *hairoob* – the difficult task of trying to persuade a rebellious Arab horse to lie down and play dead.

'Some of the tricks are dangerous and it's hard work practising. But if you love something you work hard for it,' adds Alabri.

One of their most famous manoeuvres is the cavalry charge I experienced on the beach earlier. Before the days of tanks and guns, this is how war was waged between countries and tribes in the Middle East.

'These are all traditional skills which we can trace back many centuries,' explains General Abdulrazak Al Sharwazi. 'They were used to fight in the desert and now help to keep our culture alive. It is part of our heritage and we love to show off our riding to the world. Our soldiers ride with a smile on their face because they enjoy what they do.'

The general also believes his mounted female orchestra is the only unit of its kind in the world. The women come to Alsafinat to perfect their playing techniques after a year of military training. The state-of-the-art facility includes a soundproof recording studio and the very latest equipment. It's built well enough to smother the sound of the cavalry's secret weapon – a full complement of 14 bagpipers who also play on horseback. The men have been trained to play riding on camels too, while General Al Sharwazi is also keen to point out that the Sultan has racing ostrich in his private collection.

Retired British Major Douglas Robertson of the Scots Guards is the general's right hand man. Now grandly titled Band Expert at the Royal Cavalry of Oman, Robertson was another regular at royal events during 40 years of military service. He led the Massed Mounted Bands on four Queen's Birthday Parades, headed eight Beating of Retreats on Horse Guard Parade and has a personal letter of thanks from President Obama for his musical prowess.

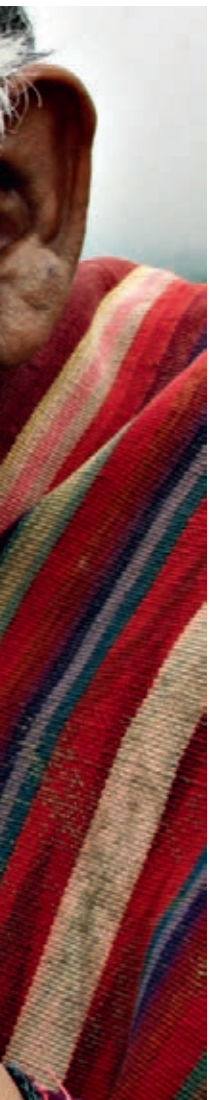
'It's demanding, but my military experience has helped me cope,' he says. 'They didn't know me from Adam when I arrived here in 2013 but we've moved forward on this journey together. There's no doubt that one day they will be up there with the best mounted bands in the world.' ◆

TOP LEFT: Queen Elizabeth and Sultan Qaboos during her state visit to Oman in 2010. **BOTTOM LEFT:** A female member of the cavalry plays the trumpet in the mounted band. **TOP RIGHT:** A horse running through the desert. **BOTTOM RIGHT:** the Royal Calvary of Oman in their ceremonial outfits

THE SECRET LANGUAGE OF THE KALLAWAYAS

In the heart of the Bolivian Altiplano, a group of medicine men fight to keep their customs alive. But both they and the special language they use in their rituals are in danger of extinction. **Álex Ayala Ugarte** travels into the jungle to meet them

PHOTOGRAPHY **PATRICIO CROOKER**



TOP: the misty mountains of Bolivia's Bautista Saavedra province. **LEFT AND RIGHT:** the pipe and shells used in the kallawayas' healing rituals

Miguel Tejerina, 54, uses a strange nomenclature for the herbs gathered near his home. His recipes are concentrated knowledge handed down from generation to generation, century after century. One says that *kunkuna* is used to relieve earaches, while *auja auja* is for the heart, *pampa muña* for post-partum complications and *llinta llanta* for women who want to conceive sons.

Tejerina is wearing an earth-coloured poncho and sports a stylish fedora; he keeps his remedies in plastic containers in his home in Curva, a Bolivian village of one- and two-storey adobe and stone houses 285km from La Paz. To get there, you must traverse incredibly narrow roads that snake their way round the hills and gorges, and sometimes disappear into a thick fog that covers most everything like a giant veil. Its inhabitants seem otherworldly. 'They condense their being, like stone does, into the hard concentration of their molecules,' said the writer Fernando Díez de Medina in *Nayjama*, his 1950 primer on Andean mysticism. Some of these inhabitants are kallawayas, itinerant physicians who specialise in the use of medicinal plants. 'We read the look and take the pulse of our patients,' Tejerina explains from behind a nearly empty desk containing a simple appointment book. 'We analyse the symptoms and then treat the disease.'

Tejerina usually talks with his older peers in Machaj Juyay, or 'family language'. The linguist and anthropologist Xavier Albó says this is a 'secret' language, used almost exclusively in ritual and medicine. The kallawayas see their mysterious language as essential for preventing the herbal lore of Bautista Saavedra Province – a 2,500km² area located in the heart of the Andean Altiplano plateau – from falling into the hands of 'outsiders'. Some – somewhat controversial – studies tie it to Puquina, a now-extinct pre-Hispanic language.

Whatever its origins, Machaj Juyay ended up adopting the grammar of Quechua – the predominant indigenous language of the Andean peoples – 'almost completely', according to the historian Carmen Beatriz Loza.

Herbal remedies these may be, but many people take them seriously, even today. Some researchers say that for years, >

These experts in natural medicine helped to control an outbreak of malaria in Panama and were at the Paris World Expo in 1889

80%

Bolivia is a nation of bush doctors. It's believed that at least 80% of its 10 million inhabitants have called on local healers to cure ailments

PREVIOUS SPREAD: Mariano Mendoza, one of the oldest kallawayas in the town of Curva, and a woman in the traditional dress of Andean Bautista Saavedra. **LEFT:** these offerings will be used as part of a healing ritual. **RIGHT:** a couple in Bautista Saavedra

the kallawayas oversaw the physical and spiritual health of much of the Inca Empire. In more modern times, from 1909 to 1912, some of them attended the Peruvian President Augusto Bernardino Leguía and his relatives. The kallawayas are famous for roaming far and wide, herbs in hand. Between 1881 and 1885, these experts in natural medicine helped to control an outbreak of malaria during the construction of the Panama Canal, and they were at the Paris World Expo in 1889.

In a small almanac-filled room accessed through a Lilliputian door, is Domingo Quispe – a short and almost toothless 51-year-old kallawaya from the local Lagunillas area, who says that he's been able to visit many interesting places thanks to his work. He doesn't think the local young people will take advantage of the opportunities for travel offered by the kallawaya lifestyle, however. 'They go off to the city in search of job opportunities and forget our customs,' he says. Of his six children – four girls and two boys – only one has decided to walk in his father's footsteps. He is thus the only one likely to pass on the dying language.

According to UNESCO, half of the 6,000 languages still spoken in the world today are in danger of disappearing; one dies out every two weeks. A project sponsored by the National Geographic Society and led by Professor David Harrison estimates that only one hundred people currently speak Machaj Juyay. 'And most of them are older,' says Fabián Llaves, another kallawaya with a piercing gaze and bright smile, born in Lagunillas. Llaves explains >

38

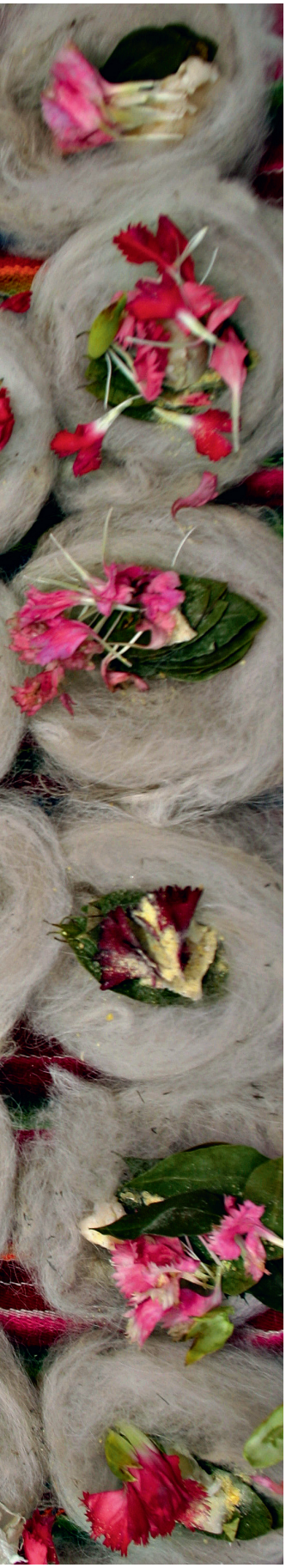
Bolivia is one of the most diverse language areas in the world, and although there are only three official languages (Spanish, Aymara and Quechua), there are 38 acknowledged in the constitution – and plenty that aren't. It's estimated 37% speak a language that pre-dates the arrival of the Spanish colonists in the 16th century

that the lore is usually passed from parents to children and from grandparents to grandchildren, but there are also those who are self-taught. Mariano Mendoza is such an exception. At 85, his fingers are crooked and he breathes as if he's just run a marathon. He learned to use coca leaves to cure various ailments by watching kallawayas. In Curva, Mendoza is famous for his ability to cure bizarre illnesses such as *susto* (fright). Lucha León, standing next to him, confirms this: 'Half of my body was paralysed by a lightning strike in my garden and he was able to heal me.' Mendoza, however, never learned any of the kallawaya vocabulary, and he'll probably die without understanding any of it.

Loza identifies two critical moments for Machaj Juyay in the more or less recent past. The first was the Chaco War between Paraguay and Bolivia, which lasted from 1932 to 1935. Back then, the kallawayas were mobilised to provide medical services to the indigenous contingent, and many lost their lives. And the second was the National Revolution of 1952, which pushed some to abandon their nomadic lifestyle and settle in local towns. Moreover, their practices were sometimes prohibited after the Spanish Conquest, and were not legalised until 1984. Today, its survival is in more trouble than ever. Despite this, tradition still rules in the Tejerina household. In one corner of the dining room, Miguel has on display some dolls with Western features who wear the traditional costumes of Curva. His daughters have inherited his skills and are already making their own medicinal teas with local flowers, roots and shrubs. These remedies – protected in the saddlebags of the few remaining kallawayas – are also steeped in the hope that their history and their knowledge will not fly away on the winds of the Bolivian Altiplano. ◆

The language is secret because it's only passed from parents to children, grandparents to grandchildren

RIGHT: an offering to Pachamama (Mother Earth), ready to be set alight. FAR RIGHT: a group of kallawayas perform a ritual in the mountains of Bautista Saavedra



LUXURY BY DESIGN

With a career built on designing the interiors of business jets and expensive yachts, Jacques Pierrejean is an expert in the finer things in life

CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: Jacques Pierrejean; the interior of a private Boeing 787; inside a plush private jet; the 141m YAS motor yacht

Jacques Pierrejean founded the Pierrejean Design Studio, based in Paris and Nice, 35 years ago. He has been fitting out luxury crafts since he began, with his first job as the interior design consultant for Dassault Falcon Aviation. He soon made the move to Airbus to develop the Airbus Corporate Jet Centre for VVIP customers and heads of state, and has recently delivered the new Boeing Business Jet 747-8 for His Highness the Emir of Qatar. If there's someone you want designing your vessel, it's probably the man who works for royalty.

If there's someone you want designing your vessel, it's probably the man who works for royalty

In his downtime, Pierrejean has also been involved in racing and sailing yacht design – naturally – and has worked on many Giga Yacht projects. YAS, a motor yacht of 141m, was his most recent project and certainly the most prestigious realisation.

Now he has turned his hand to creating his own private collection, which is inspired by nature and landscapes. This is a common theme in his work, owing to his Corsica-based office. 'When I'm there, I have the habit of unwinding by walking along the seashore,' he says. 'I get the impression of a seat designing itself around the rocks; a carpet appears to me through the seaweed in the depths of the water; and the vegetation creates a certain mood through the light and shadow it makes.'

And it's not just nature – physical activity and culture serve as sources of inspiration for Pierrejean. Jogging and bike rides allow him to relax and let go of his thoughts. Then, 'like a puzzle, ideas organise, assemble and structure themselves,' he says. 'A concept is born, imagined and developed, free from all constraints and spurred on by the physical effort.'

As for culture, for Pierrejean, it is the emotion of a performance that galvanises the senses and gives way to sensations that will later bring maturity to an idea.

Wherever he finds his vision, the result is always the same – a beautiful design that doesn't just look luxurious, but feels it too. It's little wonder that his services are sought after time and time again.

pierrejean-design.com

PHOTOS: GETTY IMAGES

The jewel of the east

Thanks to the successful partnership between PrivatAir and Lufthansa, international travellers can fly to the culturally rich city of Pune in style and comfort, says Rania Margari

If you're searching for a destination that showcases the colour, culture and community of New India, look no further than the thriving metropolis of Pune. This cosmopolitan city, 150km from Mumbai, has struck an ideal balance between tradition and modernity, earning the moniker 'the Oxford of the East' (due to its academic heritage) and position as the cultural capital of Maharashtra, thanks to its glorious palaces, graceful temples and art museums.

Pune is also an emerging business destination – one that was difficult for international travellers to reach before July 2008, when PrivatAir pioneered a new route, an all-business-class service between Frankfurt and Pune on behalf of Lufthansa, Germany's largest carrier. And over the past decade, Pune has blossomed into one of the most exciting destinations in India.

A WEALTH OF CULTURE

Nothing shows off Pune's rich heritage and sense of grandeur quite like the Aga Khan Palace, built by Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah Agakhan III in 1892. Set within a leafy, upmarket area north of the city, this majestic building is widely considered to be one of the greatest landmarks of India. It's also an iconic monument to the country's freedom movement; this is where Mahatma Gandhi, his wife Kasturba Gandhi and secretary Mahadev Desai were imprisoned from 1942–44. Today it is a national memorial to Gandhi and his life, and the palace houses paintings and exhibitions showing the significant moments of this extraordinary man's life.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Pune's 10-day Ganesh celebration; enjoy a fantastic foodie scene; shopping in Tulsi Baug; the Aga Khan Palace

Right in the heart of Pune, the beautiful Dagadusheth Halwai Ganapati Temple is not only one of the most distinguished places of worship in India, but also a social institution dedicated to the Hindu God Ganesh. The 2.3m statue of the elephant-headed deity at the entrance to the temple is adorned with an impressive eight kilos of gold. Not far from the temple you'll find Shaniwar Wada, an impressive fortification built in 1732. It was almost completely destroyed by a fire in 1828, but thankfully the walls, ramparts and a magnificent fortified gate still remain today. And for a chance to soak up Pune's famous spiritual side, visit the Osho Meditation Resort, an ashram founded by the late guru Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh. It offers an idyllic environment for meditation, and draws thousands of *sannyasins* (seekers) every year.

Locals and travellers all agree that the best time of the year to visit Pune is during August and September, when the 10-day Ganesh Chaturthi, a Hindu festival in honour of Ganesha, is in full swing. Celebrated by most of the Maharashtrians, this colourful festival culminates with a parade of Ganesh idols, carried to the local rivers to be immersed.

OLD TRADITIONS, NEW BEGINNINGS

Major thoroughfare Mahatma Gandhi Road is the destination for discerning shoppers. This is where big brand boutiques showcase their exclusive products alongside cheery street food stalls. For a more traditional Indian shopping experience, try Laxmi Road in the old part of the city, where you can haggle for almost anything, including brightly coloured clothing, glittering jewellery and leather shoes. For a slightly more chaotic but authentic experience, try Tulsi Baug, a bustling market right in front of the Vishrambaug Wada temple. Here you can find anything from cooking items and cosmetics to traditional Maharashtrian wares and sarees in every colour imaginable. And adajcent to Tulsi Buag you'll find foodie heaven: Phule market. This meeting place is one of the oldest markets in the city, with over 500 stalls selling fruit, vegetables, piles of herbs and spices, and trays of impossibly sugary sweets.

India's gastronomy is as diverse as the country itself, and Pune's restaurants are a great showcase of flavourful and colourful Indian meals, consisting of fragrant curries, grills >

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The key to success for this operation is PrivatAir's ability to meet the specific needs of the client

ABOVE: travel in luxury and style to Pune with PrivatAir and Lufthansa

and spices. For traditional food with an exciting, modern twist, try Great Kabab Factory at the Radisson Blu Hotel, or for the best, succulent meat in town, get down to Barbeque Nation, with its amazing rooftop location. Elegant Paasha, at the top of the JW Mariott, serves mostly north Indian dishes, or for something more informal, try the Irani cafe-restaurant inspired Café Goodluck.

WHY PRIVATAIR ARE THE LEADERS IN AVIATION EXCELLENCE

When PrivatAir launched its all-business class route between Frankfurt and Pune on behalf of Lufthansa in 2008, the service offered a non-stop connection to one of the key Indian cities for business and leisure travellers alike. The Frankfurt-Pune route was initially served by a 56-seat all-business-class Boeing Business Jet, although later, at Lufthansa's request, a two-class configuration was introduced.

The introduction of this long-haul, narrow-body aircraft didn't require any additional staff or associated management costs for Lufthansa, but allowed for sufficient flexibility to adapt to changes in market demand when necessary. Lufthansa was also spared the hassle of micro-management. This was the real key to success for a specialist operation of this type, where PrivatAir demonstrated its ability to meet the specific needs of the client. PrivatAir was also able to fully integrate product branding into the service.

PrivatAir pioneered the premium wet lease concept for narrow-body, long-range aircraft back in 2001, introducing its first all-business-class operation offering non-stop transatlantic flights in June 2002, between Dusseldorf and Newark on behalf of Lufthansa. It was a milestone for both companies. For PrivatAir, one of the main global players in business aviation, this was the first ACMI wet lease agreement (providing aircraft, crew, maintenance and insurance) and it subsequently opened up a whole new business model. At the same time for Lufthansa, this was an opportunity to provide an entirely new, unique experience to its business class customers.

PrivatAir subsequently entered into similar agreements with other major carriers, and since then has successfully operated scheduled services on their behalf. The company's strength lies in its ability to meet the specifications of individual airline partners, maintaining its flexible approach. PrivatAir manages the aircraft, crew, maintenance and insurance, enabling airlines to focus on the core elements of their business. ◆

For more information visit privatair.com

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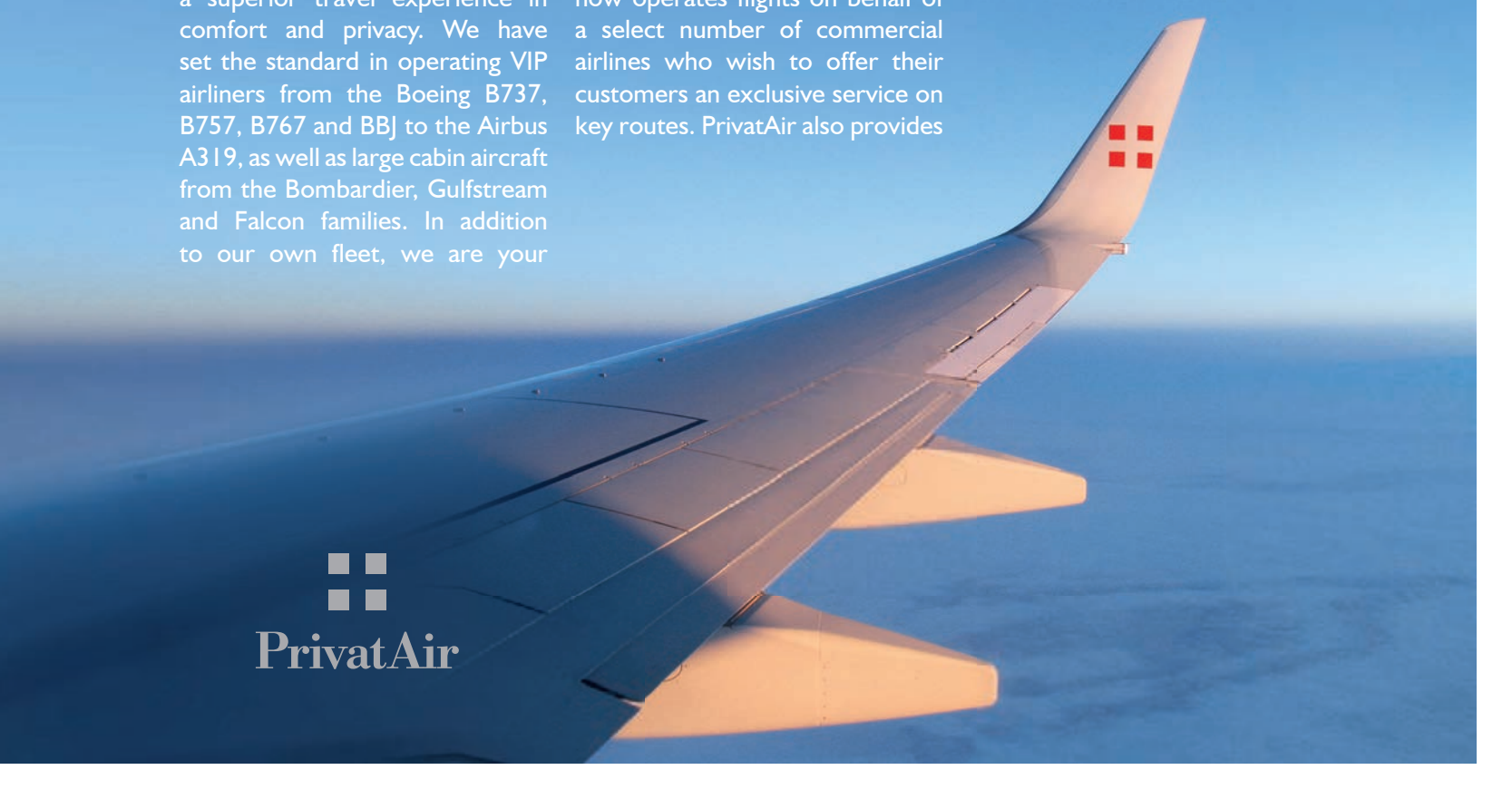

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