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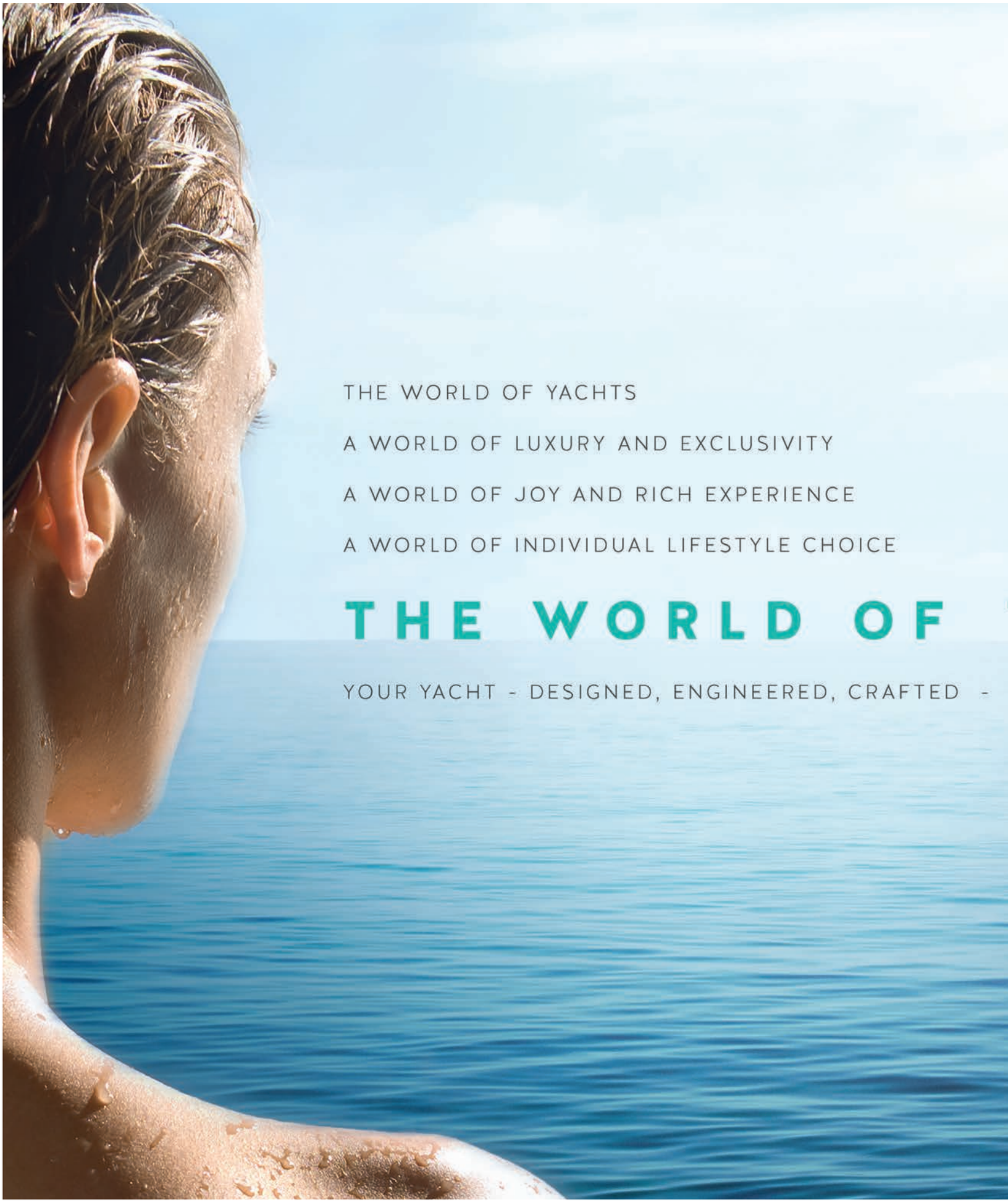
THE MAGAZINE
AUTUMN 2015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IN THIS ISSUE

PHOTO © FLASH PARKER

Jeremy Thomas in the cockpit of a Boulthee Academy Spitfire trainer, page 50

Steve McQueen on a Solex bike, page 66

Cover: *raised terraces in northern Congo. Image © Michael Nichols/National Geographic Creative*

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Contributors
(and their most recent trips)

JEREMY TAYLOR

Spitfire passenger (*p50*) Jeremy recently visited Helsett Farm near Tintagel, in Cornwall. 'I'm passionate about ice cream and owner Sarah Talbot-Ponsonby hand-crafts delicious organic flavours including a toe-curlingly good rose, cardamon and almond.'

LAURA LATHAM

Since Dubai (*p30*), Laura has made back-to-back trips visiting historic plantation houses in Barbados, haciendas in Mexico and marinas in Montenegro. 'Even on holiday I spend more time looking at property than on the beach. I can't resist a pretty façade.'

JAMES PARRY

Our art columnist James (*p27*) was just in Dubai to sell a painting. 'I had to take it as hand luggage and spent the entire flight manically guarding the overhead locker I'd stashed it in. Then I had to queue for a taxi in 45ºC heat. I thought the painting would melt.'

FLASH PARKER

US-based journalist Flash is just home (the state of Wyoming) from Papua New Guinea where he rubbed shoulders with tribal highlanders and dived some of the most spectacular sites in the South Pacific. He did not eat lobster (*p74*).

ANDREW HUMPHREYS

Editor Andrew swapped Cornwall's Atlantic coast (*p58*) for the warmer waters of the Italian Riviera, where he visited a collector of all things related to the Wagons-Lits train services – you will be able to read about that in a future issue of this magazine.

KATHRYN TOMASETTI

Kathryn lives in sun-baked Nice, so doesn't feel the need to travel far (just up the road for us: *p19*). She did recently visit her sister at her *rustica* in the Italian outback of Abruzzo. It has no electricity or running water. But it did have the one essential: wi-fi.

PrivatAir
AUTUMN 2015

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Indian treasure hunt

Exhibition In October 2009, His Highness Sheikh Hamad bin Abdullah Al Thani of the Qatari royal family visited an exhibition called Maharaja: The Splendour of India's Royal Courts at London's Victoria and Albert Museum. He was entranced by the artistry and opulence of the pieces displayed and decided he would start a collection of his own. It is fitting then that, six years on, the results of that urge to acquire similar 'splendours' for himself should go on display, where else, but back at the Victoria & Albert.

Starting on 21 November, Bejewelled Treasures: The Al Thani Collection is a testament to the singlemindedness of a determined collector. It mixes the traditional and the modern in Indian jewellery from Mughal jades and a rare jewelled gold finial from the throne of Tipu Sultan to post-Mughal treasures, such as a gold and diamond hair orament from western India from around 1900 (*above*), and examples of the influence that India had on avant-garde European jewellery made by Cartier and other leading houses. Dazzling stuff. It runs until March 2016.

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Sumptuous on the sly

Watches

The first watch ever created was a simple device, developed around 1500 in Italy and draped around the neck or fastened around the wrist. Less than a century later, two different types of watches were well established in western Europe: a more sophisticated version that could tell the hour, the day and even the phase of the moon, and a watch that was primarily a gorgeous piece of jewellery, disguised as a watch. In France during the religious wars of the 16th century, wearing extravagant jewellery was virtually banned by theologian John Calvin. But by effectively creating pieces of jewellery that looked like watches, these clever craftsmen were able to bend the rules. This led *cabinotiers* (craftsman) in Geneva to enlist the finest jewellers and enamellers around to create bespoke, technical and treasured pieces. Haute horologists Vacheron Constantin, founded 260 years ago, led the charge, elevating simple timepieces into works of art.

Some of the finest examples of Vacheron Constantin's intricate enamelling and complex gem-setting are on display at the Heritage Room of Vacheron Constantin's new ION Orchard boutique in Singapore. The exhibition showcases four different worlds: the East, Greece, Europe and the spectacular open-worked architecture of the 19th century, with 14 pieces dating from 1824 to 1929. The intricate and ornate brooch watch *(left)* was crafted in 1925 in a yellow-gold case with Japanese-inspired decoration, richly adorned with diamonds, rubies, coral, mother of pearl and black enamel.

Voyage & Ornaments, until 30 September 2015; vacheron-constantin.com

A different Taj for Dubai

Hotels

Three years ago Dubai unveiled one of its most ostentatious design projects to date: a €945m reproduction of the Taj Mahal, four times larger than the 17th-century original. It was to be a hotel with 300 sumptuous rooms and a luxurious shopping mall. Emperor Shah Jahan (who built the marble wonder to honour his third wife, Mumtaz Mahal) must have been weeping in his mausoleum. The economic downturn put the scheme on hold but the developers were certainly on to something: capitalising on the strengthening bond between India and Dubai. Trade between the two nations is worth €63 billion; moreover, two million Indians live and work in the UAE and, subsequently, Indian culture is in great demand there, from Bollywood films to five-star Indian cuisine and Ayurvedic yoga. Which is why the Taj Group, India's oldest hotel operator, decided it was high time to open their first property, the Taj Dubai. Taj Hotels have 93 properties in exotic locations around the world. This newest offering, which opened earlier this year, fits in beautifully with its modern, urban surroundings: a contemporary, elegant glass-and-steel tower with sensational views of the Burj Khalifa and nearby Downtown Dubai. The interior design is as cool as the exterior, with floor-to-ceiling windows, neutral colour palettes with flashes of rich colour, handmade Indian furniture and timber four-poster beds fit for a maharajah. *tajhotels.com*

The MOKE the merrier

Motoring Car lovers from Perth to Cairns shook their petrol heads this year at the announcement that the last remaining car manufacturer in Australia, Toyota, will shut its doors in 2017. It's a sad end to an industry that began in 1896 with a car that used boiling water to generate mechanical power, in a country that has the fifth largest number of cars per capita. But despite the big manufacturing collapse, Australia still harbours an ambitious, entrepreneurial spirit in motoring – as evinced by this summer's Aussie relaunch of the Mini Moke.

Originally designed by the British Army in 1959, this roofless, doorless jeep was hot property in the 60s and 70s – more likely to turn heads than a scarlet Ferrari. Its popularity was all down to the Aussies, who helped the Moke reach cult status when in 1966 they began making their own version, the Leyland Moke. They created an aspirational lifestyle vehicle, perfect for sunset drives along the beach. Their Moke Californian was created in 1972 and became a huge hit on the Flower Power scene. But as the purple haze cleared, the Moke went slowly out of style, with worldwide production ending in 1993. Then a few years ago, Queensland-based Moke International approached designer and Moke enthusiast Mike Young to come up with a version that appealed to the dynamic needs of the 21st-century. The new beach buggy version is longer, wider, more elegant and reaches a top speed of 110kmph. Currently the new Moke is only available in the Seychelles, Bahamas, Mauritius, UAE, Egypt, Maldives, Sri Lanka and, of course, Australia. To date only 1,000 have been made and prices start at €20,500. *mokeinternational.com*

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Well-appointed

A privileged peak inside the world's best-known residential address

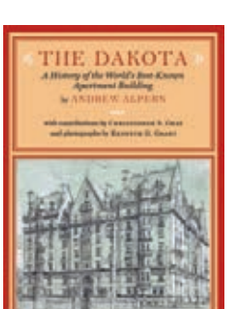
Property — There's currently a listing on CityRealty, a New York property site, for a three-bed apartment with an asking price of $23.5m. According to the write-up it boasts high ceilings, sensational views of Central Park, several fireplaces and impressive wainscoting, while the building has a large central courtyard and a white-gloved doorman. Downsides – or those the realtors admit to – include no nearby cross-town buses or supermarkets, and the side entrance is a shrine for John Lennon fans.

The apartment in question is the Dakota at 1 West 72nd Street. It is the city's most legendary residential block, a fortress-like edifice lording it over Central Park West. From the moment it was completed in 1884, it was notable, initially for its vast scale and unlikely setting – it was nine storeys high and sat surrounded by what was then mostly farmland. That developed into the tony Upper West Side and aided by its extravagant architecture – all gables, turrets, arches and balconies – and generous proportions, the Dakota flourished.

Over time, what it became best known for, though, was its celebrity residents. At one time or another these have included Lauren Bacall, Boris Karloff, Judy Garland and Leonard Bernstein. It is almost as infamous for the names that its cooperative board of residents have declined to allow to buy there, a list that includes Billy Joel, Carly Simon, and, Melanie Griffiths and Antonio Banderas. It's also where the Dakota's most famous resident, John Lennon, was gunned down under its arched entrance on 8 December 1980. Yoko still lives in the building.

A new book, *The Dakota: A History of the World's Best-Known Apartment Building* by Andrew Halpern, is published this November by Princeton Architectural Press. Crammed with historical photographs, it also republishes several photo-led magazine articles of recent times that offer a rare glimpse inside private homes; if you've ever wondered what Nuryev's bedroom looks like… (fruity).

Andrew Humphreys



Top: *John Lennon in his apartment at the Dakota, where he lived from 1973 until his death.* Above: *the Dakota from the north-east*

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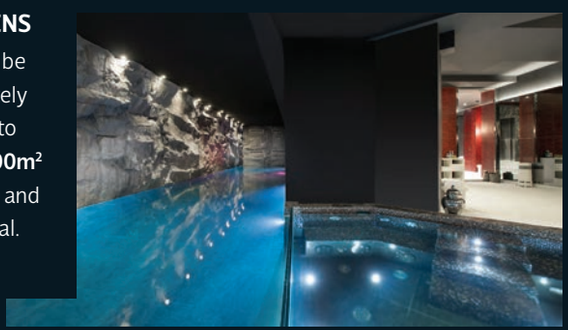

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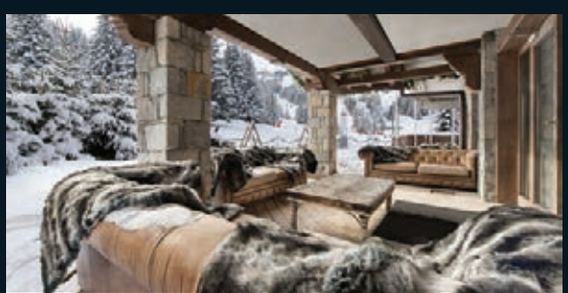

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THE MODERNE HOLIDAY

How the 20th century's most influential architect got away from it all

Architecture

Charles-Édouard Jeanneret-Gris, better known as Le Corbusier, redefined architecture for the 20th century. His Villa Savoye, built between 1928 and 1931 on the outskirts of Paris, was the functional, whitewashed concrete realisation of his influential 'five points of architecture' and the blueprint for generations of architects to follow. His Unité d'Habitation (1947–52) tower block in Marseilles was a radical 'machine for living in'. His chapel of Notre Dame du Haut (1950–55) in Ronchamp, eastern France, with its billowing concrete roof, is simply one of the most spiritually uplifting structures ever built. From summer 2015 it is now also possible to see how the most influential architect of modern times thought we should holiday.

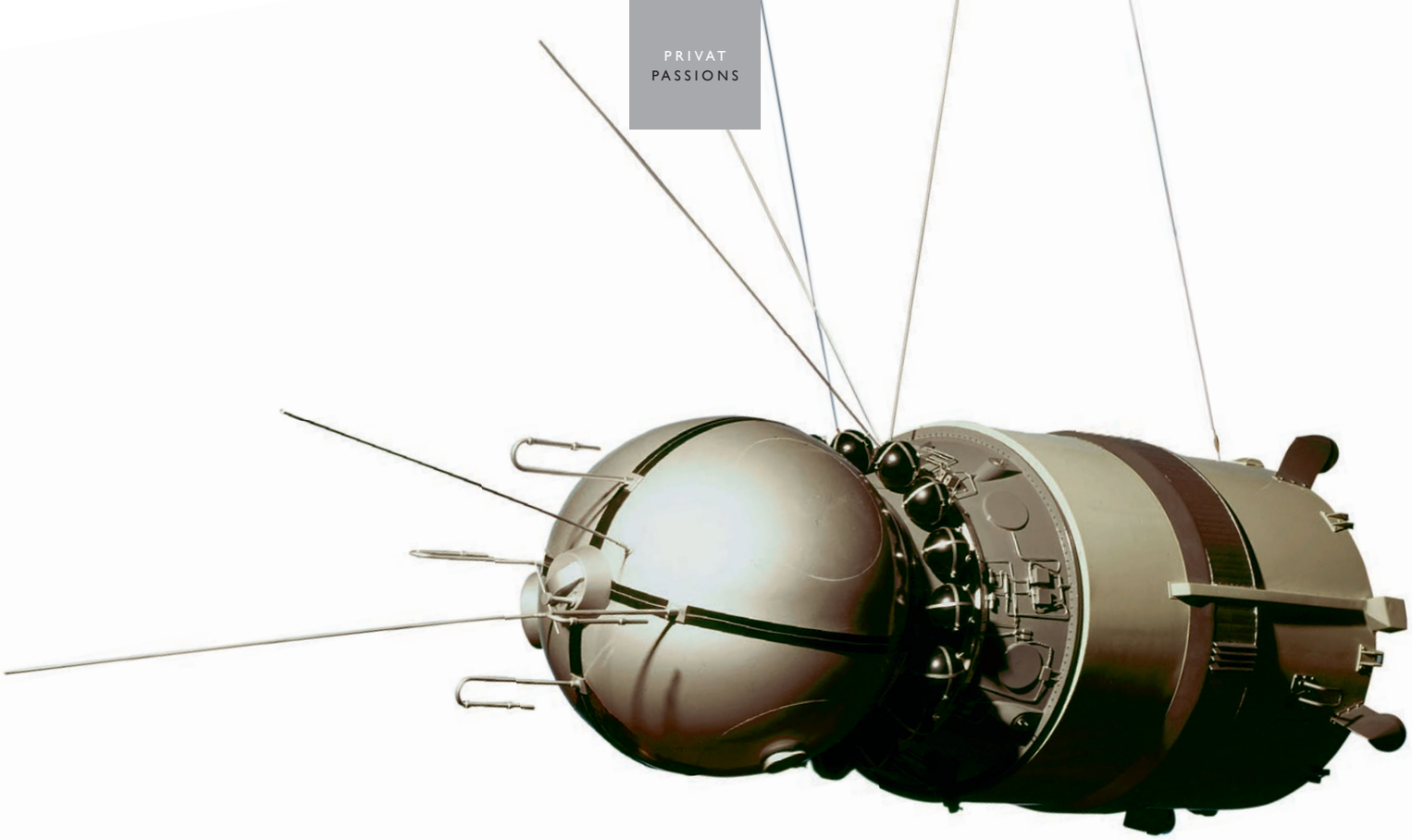
Cap Martin is a rocky headland about a mile from Monte Carlo and a 10-minute stroll from Gare de Roquebrune-Cap Martin train station. Set on a steep slope in the shadow of a carob tree, is Le Cabanon ('Little Cabin'), a rustic shack where from 1951 the Swiss architect spent almost every August. It is a mere 3.66m square in plan by 2.26m high, but although it looks simple it's designed according to Le Corbusier's modular principles – 2.26m is the height of a six-foot person with one arm above their head; 3.66m is twice the length of a six-foot person. The interior is divided into living, sleeping and washing areas based on the same system (*pictured above*). This, the architect, claimed in 1952, was all anybody needed.

It was another architect who led Le Corbusier to this spot: Eileen Gray's modernist

masterpiece, Villa E1027, stands just downhill of Le Cabanon. The two were good friends until Le Corbusier decorated the villa with eight massive murals, an unsolicited act that Gray considered vandalism. The two fell out, which led to Le Corbusier building his own neighbouring retreat on land belonging to a local restaurant. In part payment, he had five rentable holiday homes built for the family of the restaurateur. Known as Les Unités de Camping, each unit is eight square metres in size with minimalist wooden interiors in primary colours, and pop-out seating, shelves and sinks. They are like something from Ikea, 60 years ahead of their time.

All three buildings, collectively known as Cap Moderne, are open to the public by guided tour only. Interested parties can also take the opportunity to visit Le Corbusier's grave (*headstone, left*), a 10-minute drive up the hill. He died in 1965, when during one of his daily swims in the sea below Le Cabanon, he drowned. *Kathryn Tomasetti*

INSET PHOTO © REBECCA MARSHALL



THE OBJECT OF MY DESIRE:

Vostok 1

Tom Wolfe, food artist and celebrity chef

THE DEPARTURE LOUNGE OF HEYDAR Aliyev Airport in Baku is just the kind of place where you might bump into the food artist and celebrity chef Tom Wolfe. He has spent the last 10 years working in countries like Ukraine, Kazakhstan and Russia, and when we catch up he has just finished a photo shoot in the Caucasus Mountains.

Combining his love of food and art, Wolfe studied art foundation at Parsons School of Design and graduated from the French Culinary Institute NYC and Paris's Ferrandi school. His highly creative style means that he has an all-A list client list, including Madonna and Jennifer Lopez, and fashion designer Roberto Cavalli, who commission him for private parties.

His interest in Russia came from one particular London event: in 2011 he was commissioned by the British Council to cater for the unveiling of a statue of cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin to mark the 50th Anniversary of the

first manned space flight. Wolfe created a spread of Russian *zakuski* (hors d'oeuvres) and space food – a 'cosmousse,' for example, served in toothpaste-like tubes but which was chocolate mousse rather than the more authentic pâté.

As well as being influenced by Russian culture, he tells me, the Russian people have consistently supported his work. 'LVMH hired me to work as a celebrity chef at launch parties in Russia, and the encouragement shown by Russians I worked with really pushed me to new levels.'

Even so, the object he would most like to own is a little eccentric. 'I would choose Vostok 1, the first capsule to go into space. I'm in love with the Russian space programme because they did it so well. It was an art movement,' Wolfe says.

The spherical shape of Vostok 1 also appeals. His company, Tom Wolfe Produktions, often constructs curvy, theatrical and fantastical edible creations as well as wavy 'wearable trays' crafted by milliners and designers. These trays are loaded with small and perfectly formed culinary creations and are usually carried by specially trained models and ex-dancers. Wolfe's creations have something extraordinary, space-age and ultramodern about them. Not unlike Vostok 1.

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As told to Caroline Eden

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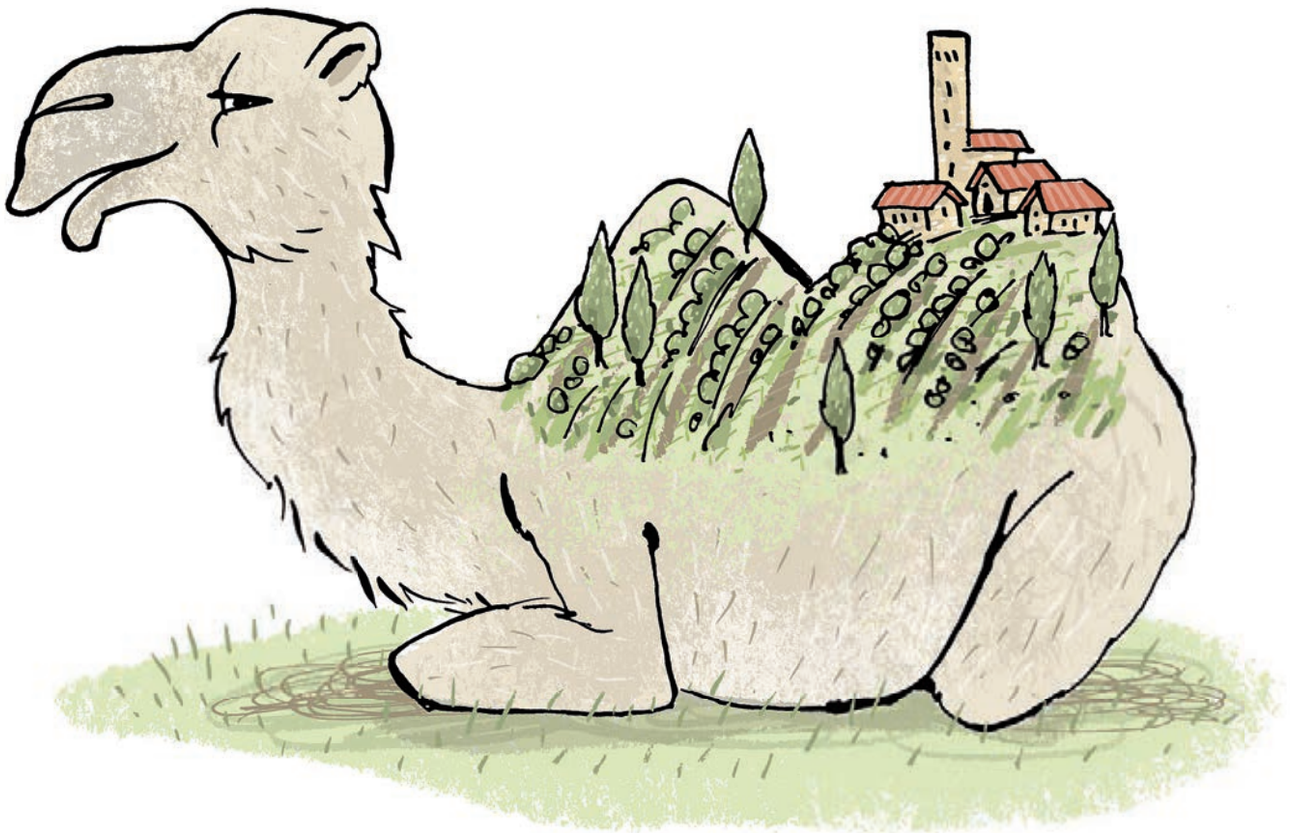

FIVE-YEAR HIGH

2010 was a good vintage in much of Italy, and a great vintage in Montalcino, writes Nina Caplan

Nina Caplan is the Fortnum & Mason Drink Writer of the Year 2014

'EVERY YEAR, THE GRAPE SHE GIVE different wine,' says Gualtiero Ghezzi of the Camigliano winery, named, oddly enough, for the camels that have surely never stalked these sunburned, picturesque Italian hills.

The grape in question is Brunello, better known as Sangiovese. Like Nebbiolo in northern Italy and Pinot Noir in Burgundy, Sangiovese is famous for being a lone ranger, a red grape so excellent at channelling its chosen terroir that it requires no blending with other grapes to make exceptional wine (although it is the main grape in Chianti). It thrives in the chunk of central Italy surrounding the hill town of Montalcino, just over 100km south of Florence, and has done for well over a century, although the wine world has only really taken notice in the last 20 years. The popularity of Brunello di Montalcino has grown extraordinarily in that time. An area that was once the poorest part of Tuscany now has property prices and fancy wheels that would not embarrass Milan. There are still areas that haven't quite caught up: Camigliano, for instance, a pretty, thousand-year-old village that is home to the winery of the same name and has a population of 32 – 20 of them regular churchgoers – with an average age of 85. But this is likely to change, and soon. The renown of Brunello di Montalcino can only grow as those capricious grapes help things along with a vintage of extraordinary grace and vigour: 2010.

Why is a five-year-old wine news? Because the rules dictate that Brunello di Montalcino must be aged for four years (five for Riserva) before release, so this is, in fact, the current vintage. It is superb, inspiring Sangiovese-fanciers to lap up every bottle they can access. Which isn't so many: the area in which Brunello can be made is not very big and yields are small.

Montalcino, most arid of Tuscan fine wine regions, has waited a long time for its moment in the sun. Sharecropping, the semi-feudal system of working others' land that kept the Tuscan peasantry in its place for centuries, collapsed in the 1960s, at which point winemakers like Giacomo Bartolommei of Caprilio scraped together the cash to buy a little of the land they had previously tilled for others.

Today, the Bartolommei family has 21 hectares and a shiny new winery, and its gentle

BELOW: *the vineyards at the hill town of Montalcino, Tuscany*

'Soon, even forgotten villages like Camigliano may thrill to the sound of Ferrari engines'

perfumed 2010 Brunello is sold out. The family works hard for its largesse, though. 'Sangiovese is picky and doesn't like every soil,' explains Gaia Gaja of the famous Piedmont family – they make superb Brunello at Pieve Santa Restituta, too. 'It overreacts to everything. If it doesn't rain right the tannins are harsh and angry; if it rains too much you have double the grapes and half the flavour. That's why it's called a noble variety,' she adds, wearily.

There have been man-made problems, too, including a scandal a few years back when unscrupulous winemakers were found to be blending international varieties into their Brunello. The locals know, though, that unreliability will ruin them: people do not pay high prices for a wine that's the pure Sangiovese expression of these hills in the hope that they'll find Cabernet Sauvignon or Merlot in the bottle. And if Brunello can't provide the goods there's always Chianti, or the Nebbiolos of Barbaresco or Barolo, which had a great 2010, too. But the best Brunellos – intense, dreamily aromatic wines full of sweet fruit and spice, made by the winemakers above, or the likes of Poggio di Sotto, Pian dell'Orino, Altesino or Biondi Santi – do not require any sly help. If the denizens of the Montalcino region can just use this year's stunning success to keep improving their wines, then Brunello's reputation can only grow, with benefits for wine lovers and locals alike. Soon, even forgotten villages like Camigliano may thrill to the sound of Ferrari engines and the incoming cash of second homers. The church elders would regret this, but they may be the only ones who do.

Drinking with Hemingway

The Ritz, Paris

When 22-year-old Ernest Hemingway and his new wife Hadley first arrived in Paris, in 1921, they were so poor he killed pigeons in the Jardin du Luxembourg for food. When the now world-famous novelist raced back into the city ahead of the advancing US Army in August 1944, it was to take up rooms at the Ritz. He swaggered in to liberate the hotel in the company of a band of dusty soldiers. They swept the building in search of lingering Germans, although management did not believe the sweep of the cellars was entirely a military operation when Hemingway reappeared slugging a bottle of vintage Bordeaux. They then marched into the bar where Hemingway ordered a round of 73 dry martinis.

He took up residence in room 31 where he camped out on a big brass bed and began each day as he meant to go on, with a bottle of Perrier Jouët Grand Brut. The party lasted several months, fuelled by a steady stream of visitors, including Marlene Dietrich, who'd sit on the tub in Hemingway's bathroom and sing while he shaved.

One person who wasn't welcome was Hemingway's then wife Martha Gelhorn (No 3, if we're keeping count). Her appearance would have made things tricky as the writer was then sharing his bed at the Ritz with another reporter, Mary Welsh, who would eventually become wife No 4. Grateful of the association – however boorish the behaviour – the Ritz later named its rue Cambon bar after the writer. It is customary to raise a toast to him there on the date of the Liberation (25 August), however since the hotel closed for renovations in 2012, the dry martinis are currently on hold.

FOR SALE - COLOGNY

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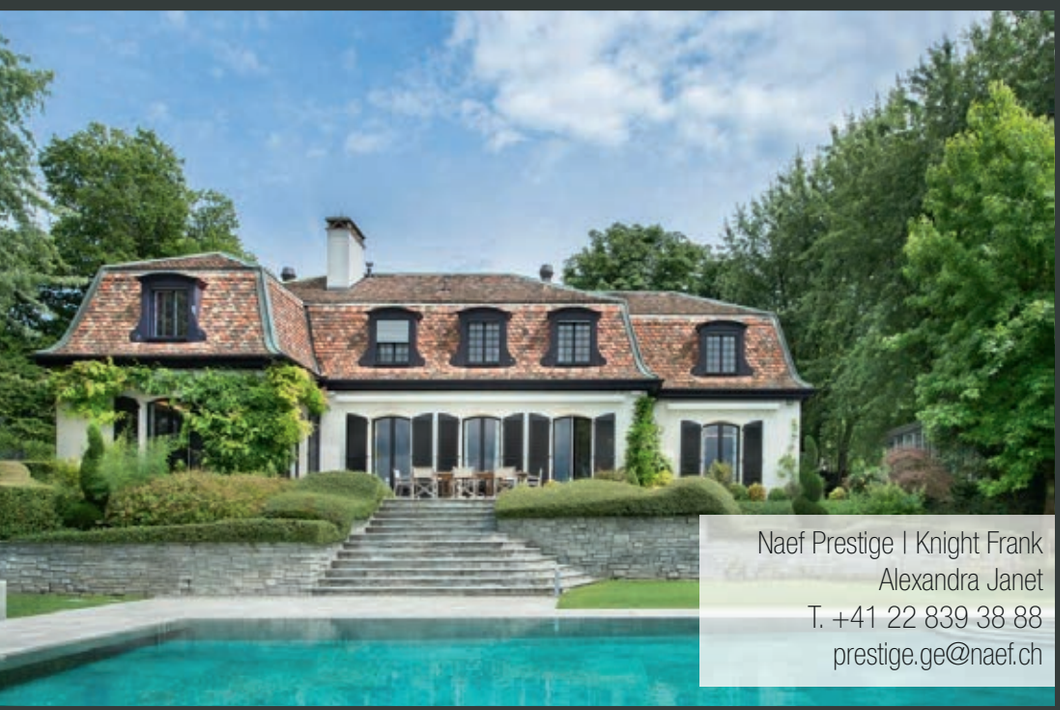

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BEAUTIFUL PROPERTY «ÎLE DE FRANCE-STYLE»

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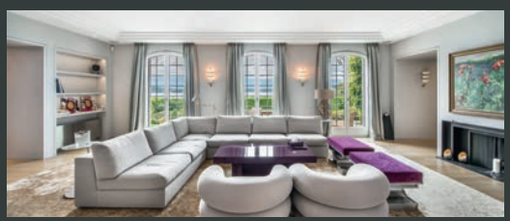

FOR SALE - VILLARS-SUR-OLLON

A PEARL OF THE SWISS ALPS

Located in one of the most beautiful parts of the bespoke ski resort Villars-sur-Ollon, this magnificent chalet was built with outstanding specifications. The property offers six bedrooms with en suite bathrooms, three living rooms, a dining room, a semi-professional kitchen, a gym and a spa. This secluded location will charm you with its amazing view of the Alps and the summit of Mont-Blanc that you may enjoy from its vast and sunny terrace.

Price on request réf. 25588

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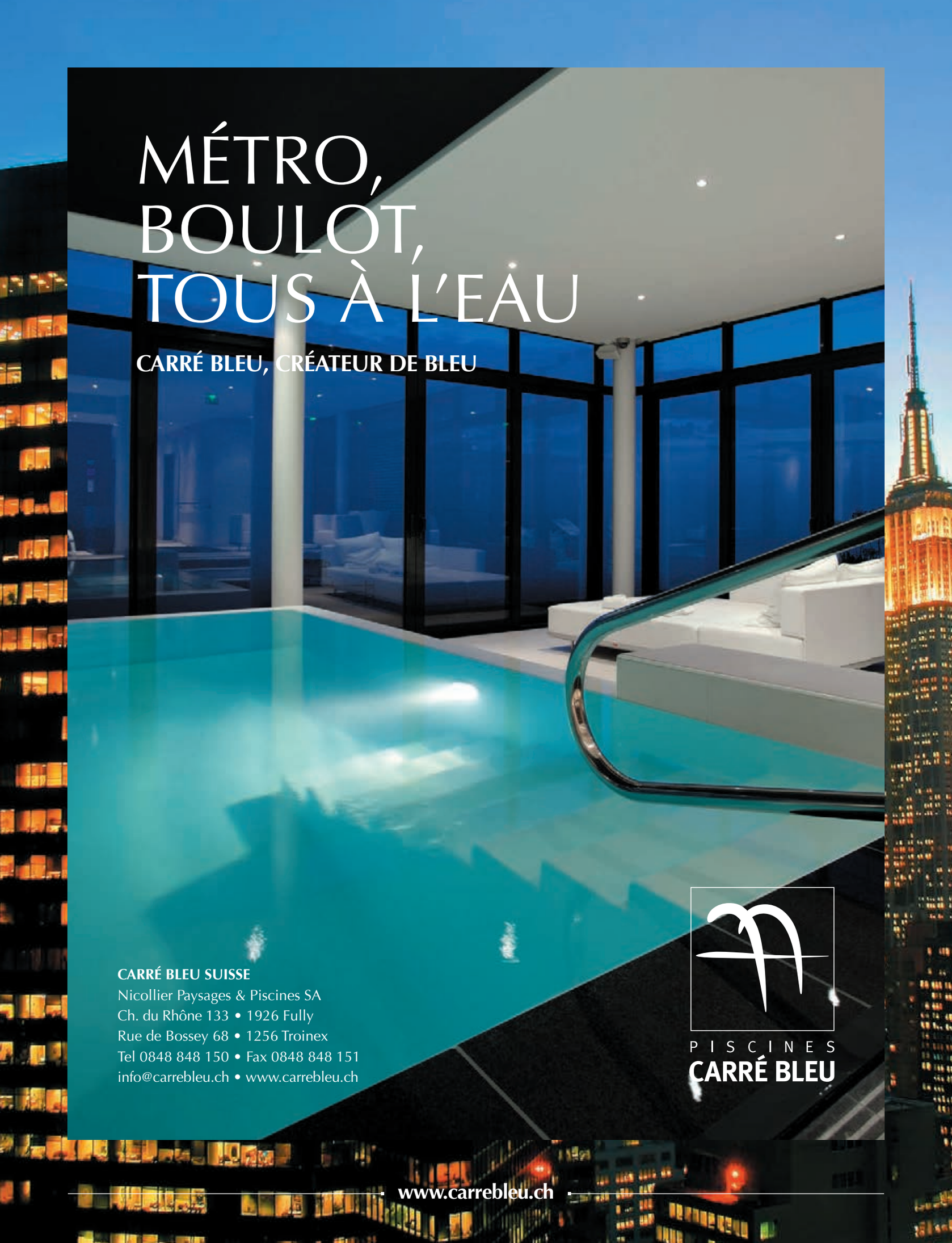
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SOMBRE IN LA SERENISSIMA

This year's dark and brooding Venice Biennale has drawn more than its fair share of scorn, yet James Parry is looking forward to a return visit

James Parry is consultant editor of Canvas *magazine*

BRUTAL, BLEAK AND DEPRESSING. SO chorused the critics when the 56th Venice Biennale opened in May this year. With its first African-born curator at the helm, the greatest contemporary art show on Earth was deemed by many to have hit the buffers before it had even left the station. Okwui Enwezor, of Nigerian descent but educated in the United States, has an impressive pedigree – curator of a raft of celebrated exhibitions worldwide and currently director of Munich's voguish Haus der Kunst – and his chosen theme for the Biennale, All the World's Futures, was suitably accommodating.

Aficionados were therefore prepared for the usual Biennale mix of party-going, fluff and celebrity, buoyed by the glamour and beauty of the city that never disappoints. What they got from Enwezor instead came as something of a shock, for here is art red in tooth and claw – a deeply political show encapsulated in Algerian artist Adel Abdessemed's *Nympheas*, blooms of water-lilies made from knives and machetes. Yet, as the months have gone by, this provocative Biennale has mellowed and, with several weeks left to go (the gates close on 22 November), its offerings have taken on the burnished glow of the late Italian summer.

Take, for example, Fabio Mauri's Babelesque tower of luggage in the atrium of the Central Pavilion. Enwezor has made no bones about his Biennale being 'a project devoted to a fresh appraisal of the relationship of art and the current state of things', and so where else to start that process than by contemplating the baggage of the past. While some of the more general political gesturing is annoying, like the

Previous page: *Ivan Grubanov's* United Dead Nations *in the Serbian Pavilion.* Right: *Adel Abdessemed's* Nympheas *in the Algerian Pavilion*

'Here is art red in tooth and claw – a deeply political show encapsulated in Algerian artist Adel Abdessemed's Nympheas, *blooms of water lilies made from knives and machetes'*

public reading of all four volumes of Karl Marx's *Das Kapital*, such stunts should not be allowed to obscure more valid expressions. One of these proved to be the most controversial episode yet at this year's Biennale, the closure – only weeks after it opened – of The Mosque, the official Iceland Pavilion. This project by Swiss artist Christoph Büchel saw a redundant church converted into a temporary, albeit fully functioning, mosque with prayer niche, ablution area and even a *madrasa*, or Islamic classroom. Büchel's aim was to comment on Venice's long historic links with the Islamic world, but instead his installation prompted city officials to close the building on the grounds that it was a 'threat to public safety'.

Much debate hinged on whether *The Mosque* is art or simply political posturing. 'Just like everything else in the global conversation these days,' says New York-based critic Julie Baumgardner, 'the artistic relationship with politics is muddled and confused.' Yes indeed, but so is the public's attitude to politics and government. Nowhere is this more honestly revealed than in the Serbian Pavilion, with Ivan Grubanov's thought-provoking *United Dead Nations*. Grubanov's fascination with collective memory led him to create a poignant installation based on the flags of 'dead' countries such as the German Democratic Republic. When I visited, a group of elderly Croat tourists, who had grown up as part of a united (but now dead) Yugoslavia, were moved to tears by seeing a flag they had once saluted laying torn and tarnished on the ground.

So yes, the Biennale can be dark and morose, but the issues are big enough to merit a sombre mood when called for. As for there being no beauty, try out Chiharu Shiota's evocative *The Key in the Hand* in the Japanese Pavilion, with its hundreds of suspended keys above two old wooden boats symbolising 'hands catching memories'. While for spiritual renewal, look no further than the United States Pavilion, a pantheon to the erudite talents of Joan Jonas. At an age (78) when most artists might reasonably be hanging up their gloves, Jonas has gone into artistic battle with renewed zeal and produced *They Come to Us without a Word,* a captivating series of spaces that explore man's relationship with nature. Her lightness of touch and sense of poetry are such that if you only have time to visit one venue at the Biennale, make it this one. That's where I shall be heading soon on a last sweep through Enwezor's heavy-duty but quietly mercurial show.

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On the rebound

Dubai has weathered the financial storm and has bounced back with more signature superlative-laden projects, writes Laura Latham

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'SEVEN YEARS AGO THEY SAID I was a fool, now they say I'm a visionary.' PNC Menon, chairman of Dubai-based development firm Sobha Group, has never regretted his decision to keep faith with the city. His is one of the key companies developing high-profile residential and commercial projects in Dubai, including at the Yacht Club at Dubai Marina and in the new Mohammed Bin Rashid City. 'I kept investing when no one would,' he says. 'No-one expected the market to return, but Dubai went through a cycle and has come back stronger.'

In 2008, in the wake of the global financial crisis, construction in Dubai halted, its property market stalled and everyone said the good times were over. Gloating headlines reported on the phenomenon of expats locking up their villas and filling Dubai airport's car park with abandoned supercars. From being an international financial hotspot, Dubai had become positively Arctic.

What many observers failed to understand was that the city had defied logic to exist at all. Thirty years ago the government of the United Arab Emirates took an expanse of empty desert and successfully turned it into a metropolis so extravagant it earned the nicknamed 'Las Vegas on steroids'. That it should now defy the odds – and its critics – and spend its way back into splendour should really not surprise anyone.

'A lot of money is coming back into the market and so are buyers, because of all Dubai has to offer,' according to Gregory Lewis, senior negotiator at the local office of property agency Knight Frank. 'The lack of taxation is a key attraction, as is the lack of red tape on property purchases compared to other countries.'

Dubai's property prices dropped by as much as 65% in 2008 but the early shoots of recovery began to show within just a couple of years. Then, in 2013, the government introduced a series of regulations protecting investors against fraud or mis-management by development firms, restoring confidence and nurturing growth. The same year it was announced that the city would host Expo 2020. This showcase for international culture, business and development is the first to be held in the Middle East and is expected to draw over 25 million visitors, 70% of whom will be from overseas.

Prices have since soared by 33% and currently average US$500 per square foot ($5,385 per square metre), although Lewis claims that in super-prime areas this can go as high as $2,100 per square foot ($22,604 per square metre). Even so, values remain at 20% below those of seven years ago, which indicates that there is plenty more growth to come, something that is encouraging many buyers back into the market.

Fear of another bubble burst has led to the government implementing measures to slow things down, including restrictions on property flipping and mortgage caps. 'It's had a big effect,' says Lewis. 'The place now attracts proper investment rather than just speculation.'

In a move to find alternative sources of income, as oil reserves run low, Dubai is also embarking on a series of major infrastructure reforms to encourage tourism and business. These include $7.8 billion of upgrades to Al Maktoum International Airport, expansion of Dubai's port facilities and the creation of Meydan One, a project that will include the world's highest residential tower.

According to PNC Menon of the Sobha Group, one of the keys to the region's success is its location, halfway between Europe and Asia, with two-thirds of the world within an eight-hour flight. 'Dubai is a connecting hub for

PREVIOUS SPREAD: *the artifical lagoon at the new District One development with views of Downtown Dubai.*
ABOVE: *the current big growth in the Dubai property market is in villas, such as the contemporary offerings at District One*

'As Dubai continues to invest in its long-term future, so non-nationals are swapping rent payments for mortgages'

East and West,' he says, 'and the only cosmopolitan city in the Middle East.'

The majority of investors are currently from India and Pakistan, followed by Middle Easterners, northern Europeans and then Russians, Chinese and eastern Europeans. Qualification for visas for international buyers varies depending on nationality but a six-month or two-year residency permit is typically available with the purchase of a home valued at over Dh1 million ($272,000). Freehold ownership by non-nationals is legal in designated zones, including the Palm Jumeirah, Emirates Hills, Dubai Marina and Arabian Ranches, and Downtown, the location of the Burj Khalifa, currently the world's tallest building.

Lewis says well-priced property in all market sectors is finding buyers, though the highest level of activity is at the top end, where demand and sales in the $5m-and-up bracket is steadily increasing. Ultra-prime property, close to Downtown, generally comprises large plots with palatial villas, often on golf-course or beachfront sites. In the Palm Jumeirah and Emirates Hills, such properties average between $8m and $16m, but can cost in excess of $30m for a modern villa of 3,000m^2, with six to eight bedrooms, five-car garage, indoor pool and water or golf course views. At the Arabian Ranches golf resort, 25km from Downtown, high-spec villas of 2,000-plus square metres, overlooking the on-site polo field, cost between $4m and $8m.

Luxury apartments in sought-after central locations, including the Palm Jumeirah's Crescent, Dubai Marina and the Burj Khalifa are valued from around $1.2m for two bedrooms, although the best apartments in signature buildings, such as the Palazzo Versace or Emirates Crown at Dubai Marina, can command more than $10m.

If further evidence were needed of Dubai's regained rude health, then it comes in the form of Mohammed Bin Rashid City, also known as MBR City. This is a mega-development just under 3km south-east of Downtown Dubai and the Business Bay district. When complete, as well as residential areas it will include theme parks, cultural and leisure facilities, and the longest artificial ski slope in the world.

One of the highest-profile residential projects in MBR City is the recently released District One, which is being created through a partnership between Sobha Group and the government-owned Meydan Group. The million-acre development will comprise 1,500 luxury villas and is designed around a 7km, environmentally sustainable man-made lake with beachfront. The first phase of 262 residences, priced from $3.9m, sold out on release. The second phase of 30 properties with seven or more bedrooms, measuring from 1,672m^2, recently hit the market priced from $13.9m to $26.6m.

In the past its tax-free status and party atmosphere has meant that Dubai has always attracted young foreign workers on temporary contracts, driving a strong apartment-favouring rental market. That demographic appears to be changing. As Dubai stabilises and continues to invest heavily in its long-term future, so non-nationals are increasingly becoming long-term residents, swapping rental contracts for mortgages and installing their children at Dubai's international schools.

'Buyers are generally aged between 35 and 60, and the majority buying in District One want primary homes,' says Joseph Al-Sharif, Meydan Sobha's vice president of sales and marketing. 'Young professionals are upgrading from apartments to villas, international businesspeople are basing themselves here and UAE ex-pats are returning. The mindset towards Dubai has changed.'

ABOVE: *examples of villa properties currently being offered by Knight Frank at the Palm Jumeirah (left) and Emirates Hills (right)*

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HERE: *chef Niklas Ekstedt photographed at his innovative fire-pit restaurant, Ekstedt, in Stockholm*

CHEF ON FIRE

Stockholm-based chef Niklas Ekstedt decided to switch off the electricity and cook only over open flame with astonishing results, says Jenni Muir

Photography by Joachim Lundgrun

NIKLAS EKSTEDT IS HOLDING UP A Swedish magazine that's just published a feature on him and laughing with embarrassment. Not because of the cheesy picture of him taken 10 or so years ago, short haired and posing in chef whites for his hit TV cookery programme. Rather it's the frankness of what's been written. He paraphrases: 'It says the public don't think I'm a dork any more.'

Incredible as this may seem to anyone outside Scandinavia, it has taken years for this intelligent, charismatic and undeniably good-looking man to acquire street cred in his home country. That is what being a familiar face on television can do to a person, and Ekstedt, now 37, had one of the biggest shows in Sweden by the time he was 25. The thing that has turned his image around and bought him to international attention, is his Stockholm restaurant Ekstedt – notably not his first place, not even the first one named after himself, but undoubtedly the most innovative.

Whereas others in the New Nordic culinary movement put the emphasis on local and traditional ingredients, Ekstedt goes a step further by reverting to traditional techniques as well. Or, to put it another way, it's the fire-pit restaurant where flames, smoke and hot coals combine to make one super-cool place to dine. It's not just the memorable concept that's clever, it's the thinking behind it. His way of looking at the business of serving food is perhaps the most important thing Ekstedt learned while training in the kitchens of culinary masters such as Charlie Trotter, Alain Ducasse and Ferran Adrià.

'What I really picked up from them was essential ideas about restaurants rather than cuisine,' he says. 'A lot of chefs focus on what's on the plate and miss the broader idea of what a restaurant is. I'd talked to a lot of friends about how New Nordic food is struggling because it's about the product, and thought it would be great to open a place based more on technique. I also knew I wanted a restaurant that was considered a good culinary destination, not one to go to just because I was a celebrity.'

Ekstedt was 18 when he decided to go to Charlie Trotter's in Chicago, then the

'I've never met Yoko Ono but when I arrived at the restaurant everyone thought I was her friend'

most highly regarded restaurant in the world. He'd been to culinary school in his hometown (the same school attended by Magnus Nilsson of Fäviken) but that taught Scandinavian cooking rather than French or haute cuisine. 'My teachers didn't even know what Charlie Trotter's was,' he recollects. 'As a teenager I'd sit in my room reading Marco Pierre White's *White Heat* and think, yeah man! I just wanted to go to the best restaurants in the world and knew that going abroad was a big opportunity.'

His uncle, sculptor Peter Tillberg, had a friend who knew Yoko Ono and she called Trotter's to ask if they could take him. 'I've never met Yoko Ono but when I arrived at the restaurant everyone thought I was her friend.' That was awkward but not as unnerving as the night Charlie Trotter came into the kitchen and said the Swedish president was out front. 'I said, "We don't have a president." Charlie Trotter said, "I mean the king. You can serve him the next course." Boy, was I shaking.'

At 21 he opened Restaurang Niklas, a fine-dining establishment in Helsingborg in the south of Sweden. René Redzepi (now of Noma), whom Ekstedt has known since he was 17, came and worked in the kitchen for six months to help his friend get started. It was an immediate hit, critically and commercially. But Ekstedt felt things had moved too fast for him. He eventually realised he wanted to relocate to Stockholm and open a casual eaterie for a younger crowd. He did so in 2005 and, although the name has changed, that place is still going. Prudently he's shifted its offering to be more welcoming to the general audience that knows him from TV.

'Originally it was a high-volume place for the backpack generation but now it is like two restaurants – a broad crowd for lunch and early evenings, and a young crowd who come late night for the speakeasy-style bar,' he explains.

Ekstedt's more upscale fire-pit restaurant, opened in November 2011, attracts plenty of locals too – unlike many of the world's gastronomic temples, he points out. 'It's a really nice customer mix,' he says. 'Sometimes in famous restaurants in Spain and Italy you hear no one speaking Spanish or Italian. And in a lot

ABOVE: *diners at Ekstedt can watch the chefs cooking over the open fire.*
BELOW: *zander or pike-perch await the flame*

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BELOW: *sampling sulphur-free wines to match with the dishes.*
RIGHT: *chimney-baked king crab, avocado and almonds*

'I love that my restaurant's in Stockholm and the whole staff speaks Swedish'

of those kitchens everyone speaks English. I love that my restaurant's in Stockholm and the whole staff speaks Swedish.'

Nearly four years on, he feels as though he's now entered a fun stage with Ekstedt, but there were a lot of challenges to overcome, not least how to build and operate a fire-pit restaurant in the middle of the city. The idea first came to him when he bought a house on the Stockholm Archipelago and spent a whole summer with no electricity. 'Cooking with open flames is different in the country,' he says. 'In the city we have to get the wood in, chop it up, have space to store it, get the smoke out of the building…'

A few weeks after opening he realised serving an à la carte menu was logistically impossible and switched to a choice of set menus. Then, after a good winter, spring produce arrived and the young vegetables all frizzled up in the fire. 'But there's been less trial-and-error than I thought there would be,' he says. 'It is a delicate way of cooking, despite the heat and robustness, so it takes a lot of skill and careful selection of ingredients.'

The Ekstedt team have worked with a blacksmith to devise new equipment such as a glass-walled 'stone age microwave' that they use for cold-smoking foie gras, fish and shellfish – langoustines with asparagus and scallop roe, for example. Hay is used for baking the likes of beef and sweetbreads, and juniper for hot-smoking. But most ingredients are cooked on cast iron in the wood fire. 'We go to the hardware store a lot,' he smiles. 'Cast iron has changed my life, my cooking, my way of doing things.'

Staff recruitment is more difficult. 'Labour-wise this type of cooking is not tougher, but it is more demanding because you can't rely on modern technology. You need to be more focused. A chef used to a normal restaurant kitchen takes at least two months to get used to it. But so far no-one's quit.'

Also on the plus side, health inspectors love the place because almost everything is cooked through at high temperatures – the very opposite of the *sous-vide* and light curing techniques used in many modern restaurant kitchens.

A new Stockholm venue is being planned, but meanwhile Ekstedt is still committed to cooking by fire and is currently developing longer-term projects for the existing restaurant and creating new dishes. There was a time when he thought a Michelin star impossible but that was achieved in 2013; now he's aiming for a second. 'I'm not afraid any more, and I'm not hunting for success or recognition. We want to compete with the best in the world.' The dork, it seems, has disappeared in the fire.

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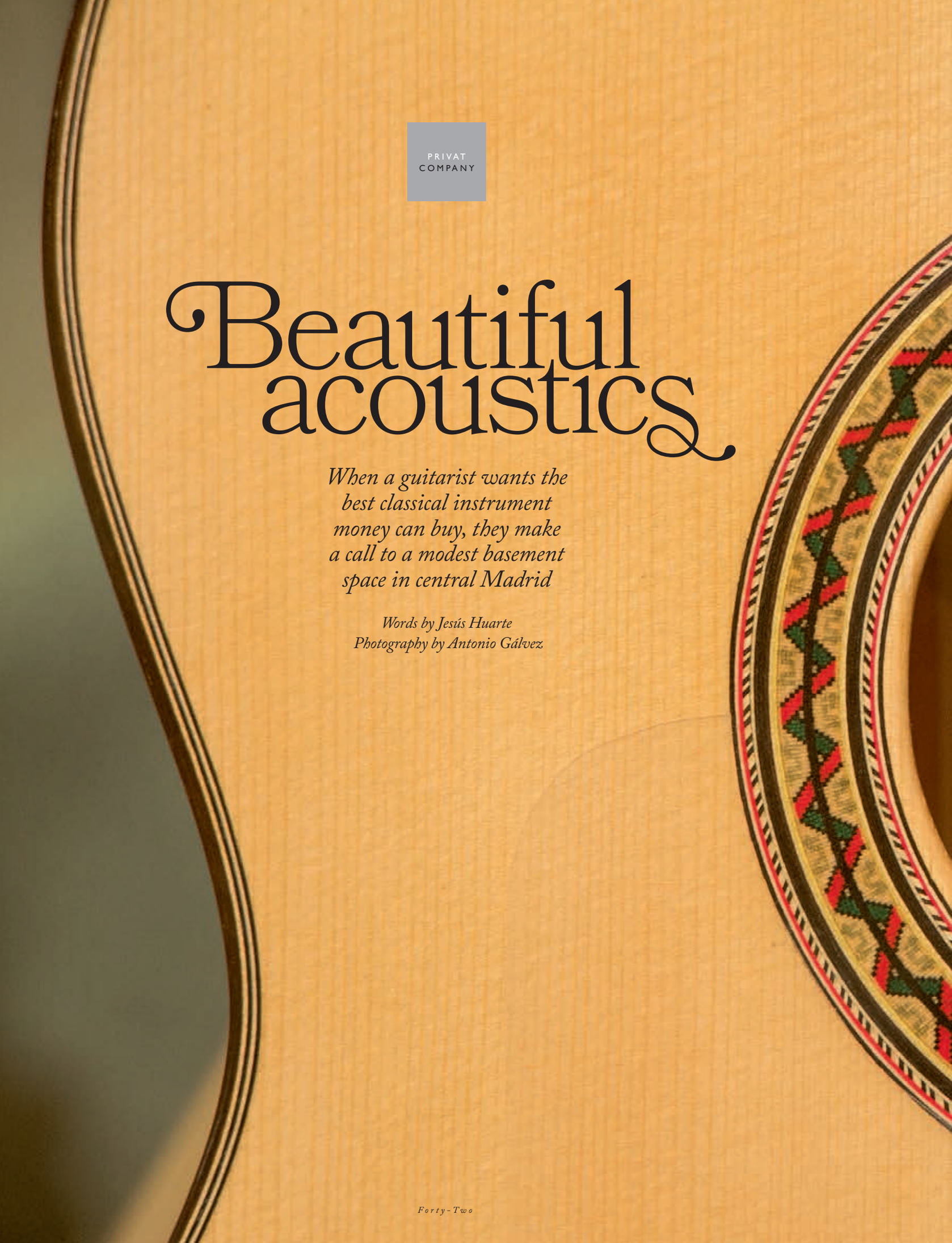
When a guitarist wants the best classical instrument money can buy, they make a call to a modest basement space in central Madrid

Words by Jesús Huarte
Photography by Antonio Gálvez



FELIPE CONDE HASN'T EVEN FINISHED his first cup of coffee, but his daughter María already has her apron on so she can start sanding one of the guitars she's making. It's just nine in the morning and her father smiles to see her already at work as he enters the workshop on calle Arrieta in central Madrid. He is a guitar-maker, or luthier, and the tradition to which he has dedicated four decades of his life will continue on with Maria and Felipe Jr, who also makes his own guitars. Felipe Sr, now 58, was also young when he started out; just 14, when he apprenticed with his father and his uncle, who had inherited the trade from their uncle, Domingo Esteso. This legendary creator of flamenco-style guitars would be filled with pride to know that the guitar-making dynasty he founded in 1915 is celebrating the company's centenary by reissuing one of his guitars.

In that time, the company's renown has spread far beyond the narrow streets of the Opera neighbourhood. In 2011, octogenarian Canadian singer-songwriter Leonard Cohen was the recipient of the Prince of Asturias Award in Letters, one of Spain's most prestigious cultural accolades. He began his televised acceptance speech by relating how back home in Los Angeles, while preparing for his flight, he had begun wondering what he might say: 'I was compelled in the midst of that ordeal of packing to go and open my guitar. I have a Conde guitar, which was made in Spain… an instrument I acquired over 40 years ago…'

'We've never had such wide publicity before,' says Felipe Conde. 'For me, Cohen has my maximum gratitude and, together with Paco de Lucía, he is my greatest ambassador.' Which is itself something of a tribute to Cohen, to be mentioned in the same sentence as the late flamenco genius, a man considered one of the greatest guitarists ever.

Felipe's father, Mariano Conde Sr, crafted de Lucía's concert guitar, the musician and craftsman working together to push the boundaries of what was possible in attaining the perfect, resonant flamenco sound. When his father retired, Felipe took over the relationship, making guitars for de

HERE: *Felipe Conde (far left) presides over a family business of guitar-makers, begun precisely 100 years ago, which operates out of a small basement in the Opera district of Madrid*

Lucía until his death in 2014. The musician's family has the very first guitar Felipe ever made.

De Lucía understood better than anyone the talents of the Conde family, to which he paid tribute in a letter now treasured by Felipe. 'Flamenco is a wrenching of the soul,' wrote de Lucía, 'and I've experienced that sensation with the guitars made by my artists and friends the Hermanos Conde. And I say "artists" and I say "friends" because they are both. And the truth is that to wrench sound from a guitar, you must give it soul, magic or art.'

Others who are beneficiaries of the Conde magic include top flamenco artists and international stars such as Bob Dylan, Lenny Kravitz and Al Di Meola, as well as collectors and public figures such as Felipe VI of Spain, who once presented a Conde guitar to the man who is now emperor of Japan.

Today, with a two-year waiting list, Felipe works only on commission. In the company's modest basement workshop, it takes two months to give life to two guitars. Two, because guitars are made in pairs: while one is drying, the other is being worked on. His materials are hardwoods like rosewood from India or Madagascar and cocobolo, a wood from Central America prized for its strength and lustrous colour. Some of the wood he uses belonged to his father and has been drying for three or four decades. Drying is essential so that the guitar is louder, raising volume from the instrument being one of the maker's biggest challenges. 'Its acoustic capacity is less than that of other orchestral instruments,' explains Felipe. 'It is doomed to loneliness. That's why, when it starts to sound in the *Concierto de Aranjuez* [the 1939 composition for classical guitar and orchestra by Spanish composer Joaquín Rodrigo], the rest fall silent.'

Everyone in the family plays well enough that they – as Felipe puts it – 'know how to uncork the bottle'. During the building process, a process that is part patience, part intuition, the ties to the instrument become so intense that Felipe swears that it is like falling in love. 'The guitar player needs a instrument to which he can surrender himself, so he can

'This is a very traditional business and it may surprise some that a 100-year-old company would have a woman making guitars,' says her father. 'But I am proud of her drive'

HERE: *Felipe Sr's two children, Felipe Jr, 23, and María, 25, have both embraced the family business and craft their own guitars*

express what he is holding inside. And that passion begins in the workshop.' This emotional bond, he explains, can make it difficult to let some of the guitars go but, fortunately, he adds, 'Sometimes they come back to us for repair.' A few months ago the shop had one come in that was made in 1921: 'It was made by my grandfather,' says María, 'who I never met. I held it in my arms and was swept away by emotion.'

At 25, María is the company's latest revolution: not because she is the youngest – her guitar-making brother Felipe Jr is 23 – but because she is a woman. 'This is a very traditional business and it may surprise some that a 100-year-old company would have a woman making guitars,' says her father. 'But I am proud of her drive.'

In this family, each guitar bears the name of its creator, even though they all exit the door of the same workshop. What's more, there are three workbenches and the tools are not shared. Felipe Jr explains that the chisels are sharpened to suit each luthier. He has already sold two of his guitars. Now he is experimenting with a different kind of internal

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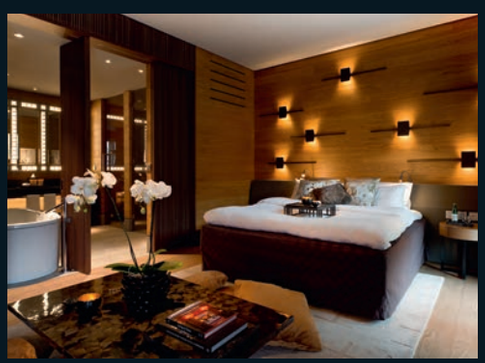

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'The guitar player needs an instrument to which he can surrender himself, so he can express what he is holding inside. And that passion begins in the workshop'

bracing to enhance his guitars' strength. 'It's not enough for me to work with what I've been given, I want to evolve,' he explains. His father says that he is amazed by his children's guitars: 'Their eagerness is what moves us. I pull them forward, and they pull me.'

While the family is busy in the workshop, the rapid trills of Riqueni's *Fandangos al Niño Miguel* emanate from the next room. In what is part living room (it has two sofas and a coffee table), part show space (Conde guitars are displayed in cabinets), flamenco guitarist Miguel Rivera is testing one of Felipe Sr's guitars. As he caresses the instrument, coaxing sounds from it as if hearing it for the first time, more lines from Cohen's speech come to mind. Still talking about his Conde guitar, Cohen said, 'I took it out of the case, I lifted it, and it seemed to be filled with helium it was so light. And I brought it to my face and I put my face close to the beautifully designed rosette, and I inhaled the fragrance of the living wood. You know that wood never dies.' Particularly not the wood used in a Conde guitar.

Top: *the rosette pattern around the sound hole indicates which family member made the guitar.* Above: *the centennial guitar, a replica of one of company founder Domingo Esteso's models*

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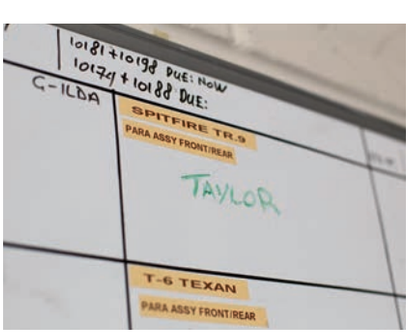
Photography by Nicole Hains and John M Dibbs

SCYTHING THROUGH CLOUD AT 600m the Spitfire makes a barrel roll and levels out over the English Channel. The cockpit is a heady mix of engine oil, aviation fuel and leather – it is the raw smell of nostalgia.

Few aeroplanes provoke as much passion and emotion – at least in an Englishman, such as myself – as the Vickers Supermarine Spitfire. Created by aeronautical engineer Reginald Joseph Mitchell, the single-seater was designed as a high-performance, short-range fighter in the run-up to World War II. Britain's Royal Air Force was delighted with the prototypes of the new, as-yet-unnamed aircraft and placed a large order; Mitchell was less happy with the name they gave his design: 'Spitfire was just the sort of bloody silly name they would choose,' he is reported to have said.

Some 22,500 were built, but after the war, propeller aircraft were phased out in favour of new jet-engined machines and the surviving Spitfires were scrapped or sold off around the world, where they ended their days. Several Spitfires that were sent to Hong Kong, for example, were bulldozed into the sea as part of the process to reclaim land to lengthen a runway. Only around 50 are believed to remain in existence today. One beautifully restored example sold for €4.4m at Christie's in July this year. Another is owned by the Boultbee Flight Academy, based at Goodwood in south-west England, and I'm lucky enough to be in it. The flying school operates a Mark IX model, one of many Spitfires that were modified into a training aircraft. Just six of these two-seaters remain operational, offering would-be pilots like me the chance of lifetime.

It was only in September 2014 that the UK's Civil Aviation Authority changed the law and allowed paying passengers into the cockpit. Boultbee now has a six-month waiting list of would be-flyers eager to get airborne, but earlier this summer I was invited to pull on a flying suit and clamber into the cockpit.



HERE: *pre-flight suiting up and briefing take place in the Boultbee hanger at Goodwood airfield, on the edge of the South Downs in southern England*

'Many people say that you don't sit in a Spitfire, you strap it onto your back and go flying'

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'Many people say that you don't sit in a Spitfire, you strap it onto your back and go flying,' says Commander Dave Mackay, one of the training pilots at Boultbee. 'The aircraft is so responsive that man and machine become one.'

Mackay should know. He learnt to fly as an 18-year-old and went on to join the Royal Navy, flying missions over Bosnia and Iraq. At 54 he's still a Royal Navy reserve and has flown everything from a Sea Harrier to a Tiger Moth. As we taxi up the grass runway, he explains over the intercom why the Spitfire is so special.

'It's true the Hurricane entered service a year earlier and shot down more enemy aircraft, but the Spitfire gave RAF pilots a distinct advantage. The Luftwaffe knew the Spitfire was more than equal to their Messerschmitt, and psychologically that was a disaster. When you are engaged in an aerial dogfight it is obviously better to have the superior fighting machine. However, enemy pilots had a genuine fear of the Spitfire and what it could do if they met in the skies.'

While the Spitfire is a beautiful flying machine, it is less than graceful on the ground. Its nose-up-tail-down configuration means the pilot can't actually see what's in front. This forces Mackay to weave an undignified course to the runway, looking left and right through the canopy to check the way ahead is clear. The Spitfire's 27-litre Merlin engine is also prone to overheating at a standstill, so with clearance rapidly granted from the control tower, Mackay eases the throttle lever forward and we surge up the runway. I watch flames spit from the exhaust pipes just below and in front of the cockpit, then the tail lifts and suddenly we're airborne.

World War II pilots wore flimsy leather helmets, but even with modern noise-cancelling headgear there's no mistaking the roar of that Rolls-Royce engine. As we climb over the Sussex countryside and head south towards the coast, I can feel every vibration through the seat. Momentarily lost for

HERE: *writer Jeremy Taylor takes the rear cockpit seat in the Boultbee Academy's reconditioned Mark IX Spitfire trainer*

words, I'm watching a rash of old-fashioned black dials on the dashboard that tell me we are cruising at 260 knots, at a height of 550m. Through each side of the glass canopy I can see Mitchell's famous elliptical wing design at work – tapered to avoid drag, its underside housing the carriage and Browning machine guns.

'The Merlin is a beast of an engine. Very loud and instantly recognisable,' says Mackay. Moments later he invites me to take the controls. It is a truly magical moment and I can feel the adrenaline pumping around my body. I can't see the horizon from my back seat, so I'm relying on instrumentation as I concentrate on trying to keep us level and straight. All I can think is, what would it have been like to go into battle in one of these?

Then Mackay takes control again and as we head back towards Goodwood aerodrome, he pushes the stick forward, returns to level flight and executes a perfect victory roll over the watching crowds below. Seventy-five years ago that would have got him a reprimand from a commanding officer but today it seems very fitting.

Landing in a Spitfire can also be a handful. With such a long nose cone over that enormous Merlin engine, visibility is severely restricted. We bunny hop down the runway and then start our left–right wiggle back to the hanger. It takes me a moment to gather myself before awkwardly climbing out of the cockpit. The Spitfire no longer goes to war but it's still an assault on the senses. Mackay tells me many passengers are reduced to tears and often can't speak afterwards.

I ask him what is it about this aircraft that makes grown men cry? Not being the crying type, he can't exactly say, but he acknowledges there is something that sets it apart from all the other aircraft he's flown. 'It has a heart and soul,' he says, 'and it just captivates anyone who goes near it.'

'As we climb over the Sussex countryside and head south towards the coast, I can feel every vibration through the seat'

TOP: *the Boulthee Academy actually operates two tandem-seater Spitfires.* ABOVE: *Jeremy Taylor after experiencing the assault on the senses that is a Spitfire flight*

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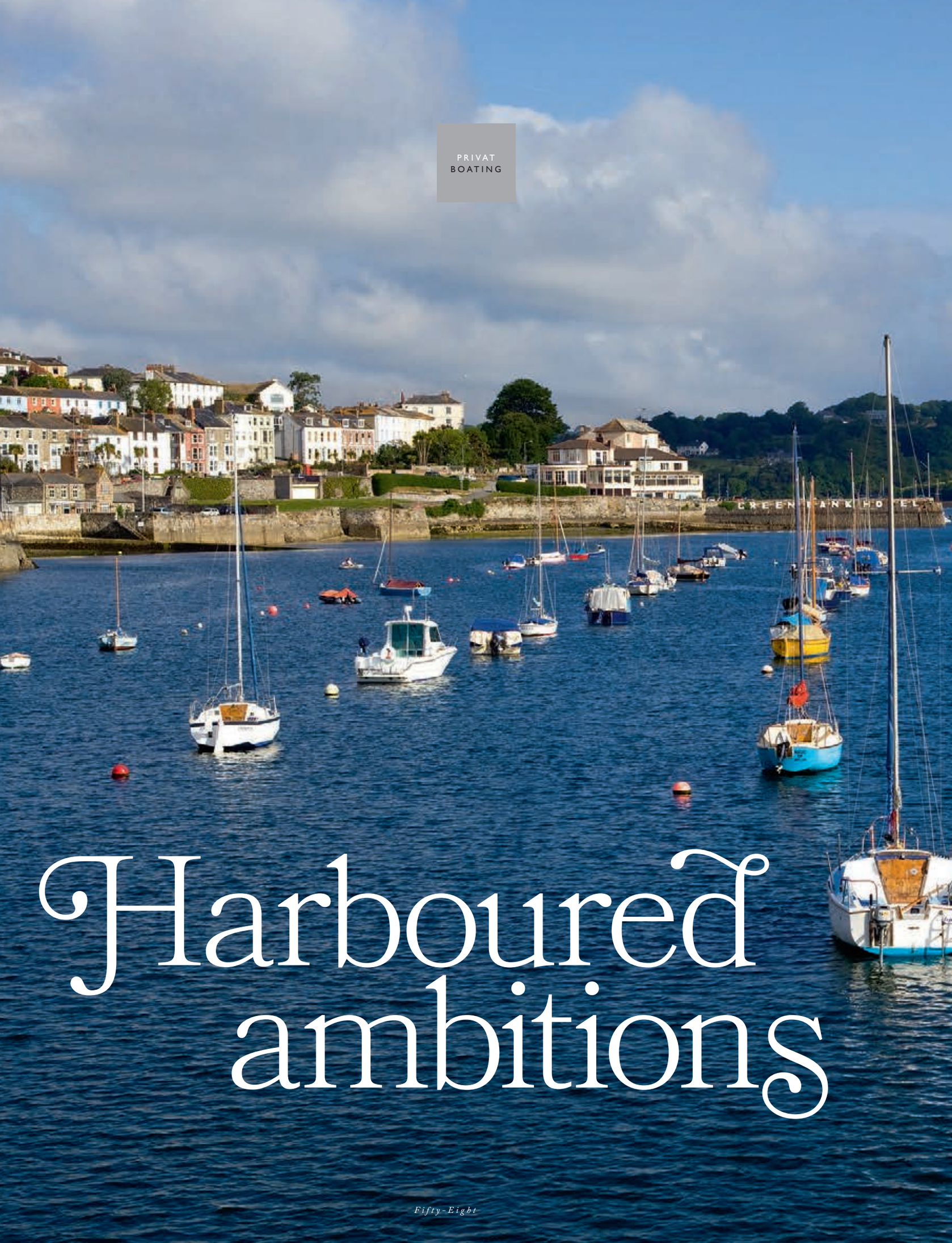

Harboured ambitions

Andrew Humphreys visits south-west England, where the sleepy town of Falmouth has become a major player in the global superyacht business

Photography by Andrew Montgomery

PHOTO © GETTY IMAGES

Previous spread:
Falmouth Harbour, with the Greenbank Hotel in the background
Here: *father-and-son team Keith and Ryan Barnicoat work on the Exterior Outfit team. Keith has been with Pendennis nearly 26 years; Ryan drives the monstrous hoist behind them*

IT IS THE WORLD'S OLDEST sporting rivalry: the America's Cup. In 1851, the New York Yacht Club took its schooner *America*, after which the trophy would be named, to race in the Royal Yacht Squadron's annual regatta around the Isle of Wight, off the south coast of England. *America* crossed the finishing line a full eight minutes ahead of the chasing pack. With no other boats in sight, Queen Victoria, who had a summer home on the island, supposedly asked, 'Who is second?' only to be told, 'Your Majesty, there is no second.'

So began 132 years of American dominance, the longest undefeated run in sporting history, until in 1983 the Royal Perth Yacht Club challenged and won with *Australia II*. Jubilant Australian prime minister Bob Hawke greeted the victory by saying, 'Any boss who sacks anyone for not turning up today is a bum.' That year Great Britain also mounted a serious challenge with the patriotically named *Victory*, but they were beaten in the race for a place in the final by the Australians. Heading the British challenge was entrepreneurial property developer and keen sailor Peter de Savary. A tenacious man, he immediately ploughed money into the Blue Arrow project to develop a new yacht for a 1988 America's Cup challenge, establishing a development base at Falmouth in Cornwall. The Blue Arrow yacht never got to race but the shipyard de Savary established – named Pendennis after the neighbouring headland and castle – flourished and in 1994 was bought out by its management.

Falmouth has serious seafaring pedigree. Since the 17th century, as the most south-westerly deepwater harbour in England it was the first port of call for ships heading for Britain and northern Europe from the Atlantic. It was where seafarers made repairs, took on supplies and received orders for onward destinations. It flourished as the country's principal packet port, that is the place where all international mail was received and went out from, carried by a fleet of speedy, lightly armed ships.

One of two wharves the Blue Arrows used was Greenbank; the old quay there is now a car park for a hotel called the Greenbank. It's made up of an amalgamation of historic buildings, with bits dating back to 1640; Florence Nightingale visited in 1907, the same year Kenneth Grahame stayed and wrote parts of *Wind in the Willows* (lots of hotels claim famous writers penned landmark books while in residence but the Greenbank displays yellowed letters to prove it). The dining area looks over a harbour filled with small boats and a skyline of gently swaying masts. It is where I meet Mike Carr, joint managing director of Pendennis, and wife Jill over a dinner of dressed crab, monkfish tails and grilled hake.

Carr was brought up in nearby Southampton, working as a naval architect for ship-building giant Vosper Thornycroft before accepting an invitation to join Pendennis in 1989. In the 26 years since, the shipyard has created 30 custom-built boats and undertaken more than 200 refits. One of the first was the classic sailing yacht *Adela*, originally built in 1903 and

'All the boats we've done are bespoke. It's not like turning your trousers up to get the right length'

'There can be no imperfections in the paint finish. I don't know why it should matter so much but it does'

rebuilt by Pendennis in 1995 (she was brought back in 2000 to be cut in half and extended by five metres). More recently there was a refit of the world's largest single-masted sailing yacht, the *M5*, which needed the stern to be reconfigured so the owner could install his seaplane on the boat, and 2015 saw the completion of a two-and-a-half year makeover of the classic *Malahne* (owned for 23 years by film producer Sam Spiegel, who used her as his production office and private quarters during the making of *Lawrence of Arabia* in Jordan), which involved dismantling an unflattering 1980s modernisation and returning the boat to her original sleek 1937 shape. 'If you look at all the boats we've done,' says Carr, 'they are bespoke. It's not like turning your trousers up to get the right length.'

Pendennis doesn't just do boats. When architectural practice Future Systems designed a spacecraft-like media centre for Lord's Cricket Ground in London, the company called on the aluminium-welding expertise of Pendennis to build it – 'It's basically a boat on its side,' says Carr. And when Future Systems imagined an aluminium tunnel connecting the street with the interior of New York's flagship Comme des Garçons fashion store, again, they asked Pendennis to handle the construction.

At one time, there were several yards in Britain doing custom builds and refits but now Pendennis's competition is solely overseas, in Italy, Holland and, increasingly, Turkey. 'We're rowing our own boat here,' says Carr. He would, he says, love to see more boatyards flourishing in England, but competition for building contracts and refit work is fierce, and the economic reality is that shipyards in southern Europe can do things cheaper. They are also closer to where superyacht owners gather, which is why in 2011 Pendennis opened an outpost in Palma, Spain, to be on hand to service craft sailing the Mediterranean.

Over dessert, Jill Carr points out the Pendennis works visible beyond the masts on the far side of the harbour. Silhouetted against a deep blue night sky we can make out the bulk of the two new 90m construction halls. What we can't see is the new non-tidal wet basin, completed in May 2015, which allows the shipyard to do on-water work.

The investment in infrastructure is matched by an investment in people. Despite its natural beauty, Cornwall is one of England's poorest areas, having lost the industries that once sustained it – notably fishing and tin mining. With around 360 staff, Pendennis is one of the region's major employers, with an award-winning apprenticeship scheme, introduced by Jill, which to date has supplied a fifth of the workforce. The only problem, she explains, is keeping hold of them. 'They do their four years training,' she says, 'then they'll get whisked off to the Caribbean on some boat where they'll earn a fortune.'

Next morning I'm collected from the Greenbank by a local taxi. At this early hour progress along the pretty but narrow high street is slowed by delivery vans, but also because my driver idles to say hello to several people passed on the street. When we arrive at the Pendennis yard she tells me she knows half the employees working here. Falmouth is a small town in which the shipyard is a big presence. Reception directs me to a granite cottage in the shadow of hulking grey four-storey work sheds. It's a former yacht club headquarters, now the centre of the Pendennis operations. Upstairs are the offices of Mike Carr and co-managing director Henk Wiekens, downstairs is the conference room with a table of old ship boards and cabinets of nautical models and trophies. The superyacht world can be bafflingly shadowy and the company's client base is a closely guarded secret, but the identity of at least one customer is given away by a signed Fender Stratocaster hung on the wall, presented to the company by Eric Clapton after his 47.8m motor yacht *Va Bene* had been in for a major refit. (Fellow musicians Pete Townshend and Queen's Roger Taylor are said to also be Pendennis clients.)

I tour the shipyard in the company of refit sales manager and Falmouth native Tristan Rowe. I'm asked not to identify the boats I see but that surely does not apply to the behemoth occupying the new wet dock in plain view of the whole harbour, the 85.6m *Aquila*, one of the world's largest superyachts. As we walk, hard-hatted and clad in high-viz vests, through carpentry shops, paint-spray booths and on dry-dock gantries, I'm frequently introduced to fathers working beside sons, co-workers who are brothers and all manner of other familial combinations. Pendennis may only be 27 years old but it feels as rooted in Falmouth as the barnacles on the wharves. Among all the giant cranes, the hulls suspended above

HERE: *joiner Rob, cleaner Dawn and yard worker Nick Holdroff pose with nephew/ cousin Kyle Head, also a yard worker, in the dry dock*

us like science museum exhibits, and the general din and cacophony, the key to everything, says Rowe, is 'paint, paint, paint'. By which he means the ability to deliver a satin-smooth, absolutely flawless, high-sheen finish. To this end Pendennis has paint booths – one of which is 80m long to accommodate masts – that are fully ventilated, temperature-controlled, with sticky walls to catch dust. 'There can be no imperfections,' says Rowe. 'I don't know why it should matter so much but it does.'

Then we go to sea. With some of the best sailing waters around the UK, Falmouth puts on several regattas throughout the year. Pendennis sponsors its own Pendennis Cup every two years, with the next event in 2016. My visit fell during the five days of the J-Class Regatta. These are the legendary yachts conceived in the 1920s to race in the America's Cup. True thoroughbreds, they were sleek and beautiful, but also vastly expensive and required extravagantly large crews. Between the arrival of the Great Depression in the early 30s and looming global war in the second half of the decade, they were too much of a luxury and most were scrapped. Now they are back. Three originals survived, which were independently rescued and rebuilt, and then raced in 1998. It was a sight that stirred the imaginations of several deep-pocketed sailing fans; since then five new J-Class yachts have been built to original designs and the fleet travels the world attending regattas.

Present in Falmouth are new-builds *Ranger* (2004) and *Lionheart* (2010), and an original 1933 boat *Velsheda* (the name is composed of the first letters of the names of original owner William Lawrence Stephenson's daughters, Velma, Sheila and Daphne. The last letters of the daughters' names went to another of his boats, the *Malahne*). We are part of a flotilla of small pursuit craft buzzing around the three J-Class yachts like flies around a resting cheetah. But once the sails go up and snap into the wind, the yachts power forward, scything through the water and we are all left in their wake. For four hours we chase the racers from harbour mouth to buoys set one mile out and back again, four times over.

The racing carries on for two more days after I leave. Pleasingly, victory goes to *Lionheart*, which has just completed an extensive refit with Pendennis. It suggests that the shipyard improves performance not just looks. She carried several Pendennis staffers and ex-staffers as part of her crew. It is possible some of them may be with her in 18 months time when she and the other seven J-Class yachts take up an invitation to participate in a regatta in Bermuda as part of the 2017 America's Cup (where Britain's team will be captained by four-time Olympic gold medal-winner Ben Ainslie, who learned to sail around Falmouth). If they do, as per Jill Carr's fears, they may become lost to Pendennis, but then their participation in international competition is the best kind of word-of-mouth boosterism for the company. Not to mention maintaining the America's Cup link with a boatyard in a sleepy corner of south-west England.

ABOVE: *a guitar signed by Eric Clapton and one of the boats refitted in the yard celebrated in model form in the conference room.* OPPOSITE: *brothers Pete and Ant Coles, both paint supervisors, have been working for Pendennis for almost a quarter century between them*

PHOTO © GETTY IMAGES

HERE: *American actor Steve McQueen relaxes on a Solex during the shooting of* Le Mans *in the south of France in summer 1970*

Two wheels good

Beloved of Sixties style icons, the Solex motorised bike is making a comeback on the Cote d'Azur. Tristan Rutherford takes a ride

I HAVE DRIVEN PAST THE HOTEL DU Cap-Eden-Roc on the Cap d'Antibes at least a dozen times: once in a client's Ferrari; once in a friend's campervan; and once in a Soviet-era military jeep that my father mistakenly bought on eBay. But for raw exhilaration, none compare to my most recent ride: a classic Solex scooter. Its top speed is just 35kmph but that is the de facto limit on the St Tropez to San Remo coast road in summer. With no helmet required, it feels like a rocket-powered racing bike.

The Solex is the 2CV of two-wheeled transport. Like the Deux Chevaux, it was designed in post-war France using austerity-era materials. Lego looks notwithstanding, it proved so popular that eight million units were produced out of the factory at Courbevoie in Paris until production ceased in 1988. It may have been manufactured in the north but thanks to celebrity fans like Brigitte Bardot the brand was synonymous with the South of France and a freewheeling laissez-faire lifestyle. As a result, these vintage motos now have cult status across the 70 countries to which they were exported, with owners' clubs from Toronto to Saigon.

In spring 2015, almost 70 years after the bike's invention, the world's first vintage Solex hire shop – called So Solex – opened in Juan-les-Pins. Within just a couple of months it was followed by a second branch down the coast in Nice. The business is run by enthusiast Olivier Durin, a Solex owner since the 1990s, who lives, he tells me, 'for this sexy little bike'. Each of the two branches is stocked with ten classic models that Durin himself has lovingly restored by hand. They even have names: Suzette is a little apricot-coloured number, while Lucette is banana-yellow. For a breezy history of the Cote d'Azur's coolest wheels, Durin takes me on a coastal tour.

We begin with a few practise runs around La Pinède, the leafy piazza that fronts the Hôtel Belles Rives in Juan-les-Pins. In the summer of 1926, when this was the Villa Saint-Louis and the rented home of American writer F Scott Fitzgerald, the Solex was in its nascent design stage. Thanks to recession and a world war, gestation was slow but over two decades engineers Maurice Goudard and Marcel Mennesson conducted experiments by fitting a sewing machine-sized engine onto a push-bike. The top-heavy performance was too precarious to go into mass production but the idea of simply dropping a whirring engine cog onto a bicycle's front tire was mechanically ingenuous. The eventual solution was simply to go with a much smaller power unit. Olivier shows me how to pedal-start the motor before we belt along Juan-les-Pins' seafront up to the Cap d'Antibes.

The French public loved the invention. As we fly along the Riviera coast road in the afternoon sun, it's easy to see why. The Solex is reassuringly uncomplicated: to regulate the

'To regulate the speed you simply squeeze the brakes. It's like riding a runaway train'

ABOVE: *the bay at Nice, where you will find a branch of So Solex*

PHOTO © GETTY IMAGES

speed you simply squeeze the brakes. It's like riding a runaway train. Near the Plage des Ondes beach we come up upon a motorcade of Mercedes S-Class almost becalmed behind a gardening truck, and Durin and I blast past the lot of them in an impudent raspberry of engine noise.

When the first Solex model went on public sale in 1946, it cost 13,600 French francs, or a month's wages for an average working person. But the 45cc engine was extremely economic and once the initial investment of buying the bike had been made, its owner could commute to work and ride around for peanuts. In 1948, around 25,000 units were sold. The following year the company was selling one hundred a day. An engine upgrade in 1953 (the Solex 330 model boasted a mammoth 49cc) boosted sales up to 200,000 a year.

Durin and I park up by Roman Abramovich's Château de la Croë residence (previous owner: Aristotle Onassis). That's something you can only do on two wheels, not four, here. Parking is at a premium on the very tip of the Cap d'Antibes, where land prices are the third highest on the planet (only Monaco and Cap Ferrat are more expensive). Durin leads me to a path that runs behind the Hotel du Cap-Eden-Roc gardens. Thanks to France's socialist paradox, a public walking trail leads around this billionaires' paradise. Jasmine and pistachio mastic choke the trail. The glorious cove of Plage des Galets shimmers beyond. 'This is where locals from Antibes come to escape,' says Durin. Fish dart sideways as we paddle in crystal-clear seas. Perhaps our neighbours – Abramovich on one side, quite possibly Brad

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LEFT: *Olivier Durin and one of the Solex bikes he personally restored and now hires out from his two So Solex shops*

As I cruise past several Ferraris, it's my Solex that attracts the admiring glances and even one 'Oh là là'

and Angelina, frequenters of the Hotel du Cap-Eden-Roc, on the other – are doing the same.

We follow the Cap d'Antibes trail further on foot. Off to our left is the Villa Eilenroc, designed by Charles Garnier, architect of the Paris Opera – it is where Woody Allen filmed his roaring Twenties romp *Magic in the Moonlight* in 2013. There were no Solexes in that, but the bikes frequently popped up in French New Wave films, notably Jean-Luc Godard's *À bout de souffle*. Jacques Tati rode a Solex in *Mon Oncle*. Meanwhile, off-screen one of the biggest stars of all, Brigitte Bardot, was frequently photographed riding a Solex, becoming something of an unofficial brand ambassador. 'Movie actor endorsement for Solex really drove the brand,' says Durin.

The Solex were also getting better. The best-selling 3800, on which all later models were based, was launched in 1966. Period advertising posters played on the brand's youthful cool by showing a finely-coiffed French youth with one arm around a Bardot lookalike and the other resting on his Solex handlebars. Posters promised a hundred kilometres of action on one litre of fuel. It had a comfier seat and while previous models had only been available in black, buyers now had the choice of blue and red. By 1971 things were even groovier: that year's Solex 5000 came in 'Palma' yellow, 'Atoll' blue and 'Névé' white. Details like stainless steel mudguards and whitewall tires kept both the 1940s generation and their teenage kids happy. *'Pere et fils enfin d'accord'* ran the advertising slogan – 'Both father and son finally agree.'

Durin maintains his Cap d'Antibes historical commentary as we putter back to Juan-les-Pins in the evening sun. The glitz and glamour remained on the Côte d'Azur into the 1970s and 1980s but the rest of France wilted under oil shocks and strikes. Work was abandoned on the Channel Tunnel

PHOTO © LAURA STEVENS

and Bernard Hinault won his final Tour de France, the nation's last. The Solex story came to a similarly sad end. Sales had tailed off to around 7,000 per year by 1980. By the end of that decade only the Hungarians and Chinese were still producing Solex under licence, until they too realised that the capitalist dream doesn't start with 49cc engines.

The following morning Durin packs me off to discover the current, revived state of Solex. The new So Solex branch in Nice's hipster Garibaldi *quartier* is riding the current trend for all things vintage. So cult right now is the 1940s brand that one wag recently recreated François Hollande's sexy scooter call on lover Julie Gayet using a vintage Solex, then uploaded the video to YouTube. Commendably, he raced the route from the Elysée Palace to Gayet's rue du Cirque apartment in one minute 32 seconds flat. The Solex legend is also being reborn outside of France: Italian design firm Pininfarina (the guys that styled the Alfa Romeo Giulia and Ferrari Testarossa) recently launched the E Solex, an electric bike styled on the original.

I ride away from the So Solex showroom on a 1974 'Roland Garros' special edition in lawn green. It's called Raymond. As I cruise around the marina and off along the coast road passing several Ferraris, it is Raymond that attracts the admiring glances and even one 'Oh là là'. I climb upwards towards Elton John's mansion on top of Mont Boron to enjoy a panorama that pans west from Cannes, east to Menton and the border with Italy. Then I gun the Solex downhill to Villefranche – a route blazed by Robert De Niro in the film *Ronin* and Jason Statham in *The Transporter*. Raymond isn't fitted with a speedometer but I swear I push 40kmph.

It's in Villefranche, a fishing port beloved of Pablo Picasso and Jean Cocteau, that the Solex truly turns heads. Unfortunately, the heads belong not to Bardot-styled starlets but to elderly men. 'I kissed a girl on my Solex 1400 in Lyon,' one of them tells me. 'Then 20 minutes later I kissed another one two kilometres away.'

'Remember La Rochelle?' enquires another gent of his wife. He tells me how toegther they rode over to western France in 1965 with two cans of petrol strapped to their front wheel. At one point the crowd around me is a dozen strong, all firing questions at me about *essence, puissance* and *vitesse*. Later, Durin tells me how recently he took out two girls with their father to celebrate his 70th birthday; at the end of the jaunt they insisted on buying the bike and Durin gave in. It's a love affair that keeps running – just like the 49cc Solex.

ABOVE: *one of So Solex's bikes for hire. This one is called 'Suzette'*

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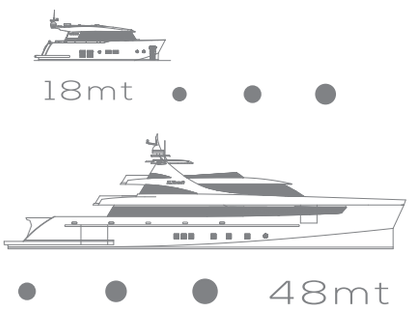

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ALL-YOU-CAN-EAT LOBSTER

One gourmet writer embarks on a nonstop, 72-hour North American coastal crustacean binge

Words and photography Flash Parker

HERE: *the Cape Neddick Lighthouse on Nubble Island, one of the state of Maine's best known landmarks*


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MY QUEST TO FIND NEW England's finest lobster dinners, rolls, bisques and boils doesn't begin in Portland, Kennebunk, or even Rockport, Maine. It begins, of all places, at a hotel in the Calchaquí Valley in the Andean foothills of Argentina. There, thousands of miles removed from the cool waters of the North Atlantic, I find the luxury hotel Grace Cafayate, where I spend a week feasting on braised rabbit and quinoa, wine ice cream and llama tenderloin prepared by chef Javier Robles. After one particularly extravagant banquet, Robles, with a bottle of crisp Torrontés in one hand, tells me about a recent trip to the United States. His travels to New England have included a 'Crustacean Crawl' organised by chef Jonathan Cartwright, which was a revelation. He encourages me to seek out Cartwright on my return to America. So I set my sights on the Atlantic Coast.

On the flight to Portland, Maine, I review my plans to devour oceanic delicacies in lobster shacks in Maine, hike along the seawall, check out country hamlets in Connecticut and posh colonial inns in Massachusetts. About 45 minutes after landing in Portland, I pull into the lane at the White Barn Inn, a 19th-century clapboard charmer in Kennebunkport celebrated for its lavish tasting menus and Who's Who dinner parties. This is where Cartwright is executive chef. After greeting me, the concierge slips into the bar and emerges moments later with a tumbler of Rusticator Rum from Bartlett Spirits of Maine Distillery in nearby Gouldsboro (neat, smoky nose; brown sugar and vanilla on the tongue) and the chef himself (sinewy, cheeky smile, dressed head to toe in cycling gear). 'I understand there's a lobster-mobile ready for you out front,' the chef says, with just a hint of mischief in his voice.

Cartwright began the Crustacean Crawl at the White Barn Inn as a way to showcase for guests two of his passions: cycling and lobster. The Crawl is billed as a hook-to-fork experience that takes guests out onto lobster boats, down to the docks and into the kitchen at some of the most revered shacks and restaurants in town, while showcasing Kennebunkport's unique charm along the way.

Cartwright is a fixture on the local cycling circuit and no slouch in the saddle; we pedal about town while he points out neighbourhood lobster shacks and family-run businesses. We pass the antique hawkers in pleasant Dock Square and peek in the windows at Alisson's Restaurant, where the mission is to 'get messy with a one-and-a-half-pound boiled lobster and finish with the blueberry pie'. We sail past brick boathouses on Ocean Avenue and Mable's Lobster Claw, which has a 'stuffed lobster packed with scallops and bread and bacon and butter – all the things that make a man feel good about himself'.

When we hit the Port Lobster Co restaurant, we stop to shake hands with local seafood magnate Sonny Hutchins, 62 years into the business of *Homarus americanus*. Hutchins' restaurant sells more than '1,000 pounds of lobster on a good

HERE: *not-quite-seaworthy skiffs are stacked in neat rows at the picturesque harbour at Porpoise Cove*

'Most importantly, he leaves me with the advice to just stop when I see a sign for lobster'

summer day, and a few lobster rolls on top of that,' he says. Hutchins lets us check out his lobsters, so Cartwright shows me how to tell a male from a female. I'll never look at a fuzzy pleopod the same way again.

From Port Lobster we continue on to picturesque Porpoise Cove, where lobster boats with noble names – *Amoret*, *Rhiannon*, *Two Keepahs*, *The Clam* – bob in the gentle tide. Down on the docks, we help a lobsterman's apprentice, John, haul a lobster cage off his boat while catching trade baiting secrets. 'You put your salted herring in the lobster pot, then drop the pot into the ocean.' Specialist stuff.

Along the way, I ask Cartwright about his favourite lobster haunts outside the city. 'I'm a chef, so I'm not good at giving recommendations. I'll try anything, anywhere,' he says. 'So long as the company is good, and the Champagne is cold, I'm happy to experience something new.' With that we stop in at Stripers Waterside Restaurant, where chef Gary Caron convinces me to try his lobster sausage and house sauerkraut. Sous-chef Leonora Palaima, a former Cartwright disciple, lets me count the ways she loves New England through her grilled lobster roll. Over dessert, Cartwright does eventually name a few places he loves along the open road, but most importantly, he leaves me with the advice to just stop when I see a sign for lobster.

Après lobster, we roll ourselves back to the White Barn Inn. All told, the Crustacean Crawl covered around 25km and showcased Kennebunkport from the perspective of a man

FROM TOP: *the atmospheric dining room at the White Barn Inn, Kennebunk's legendary gourmet hitching post; classic American advertisements line the New England lobster trail; the White Barn Inn's signature boiled lobster – served simply with drawn butter, corn on the cob and boiled potatoes*


AMORET
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who has cooked lobster for presidents and pop stars, dined with deckhands and doctors, and called New England home for more than 20 years.

Later, as the sun sets over the coast at the White Barn Inn, I indulge in the nine-course tasting menu, highlighted by a butter-poached smoked lobster with Russian River Chardonnay, a chicken-and-foie-gras terrine topped with honey popcorn, and a challenging free-range coddled egg. Working my way through one of the finest gastronomic experiences I can remember, I have no doubt that this is the meal that Chef Robles is still dreaming about from Argentina.

The next morning I bid adieu to the inn and hit the road with a notebook filled with Cartwright's endorsements in my pocket. I don't make it far. About 20km south I turn off for a jaunt along the Marginal Way and the town of Ogunquit, where I beach myself upon the rocks like a crab at low tide. After a spell wave-watching, I continue on to Nubble Point for a look at the Nubble Lighthouse at Cape Neddick Light Station, one of Maine's most beloved landmarks, before backtracking across the pebbly park to Fox's Lobster House. Here, simple wood panelling surrounds the bar and impossibly gigantic fish are tacked to the walls. I order the lobster tacos and a hearty lobster stew sweetened with sherry, accompanied by a pint of Stowaway IPA from the local Baxter Brewing Co.

Continuing along the coast, I eventually catch one of the tendrils of the Essex River and follow it to Woodman's of

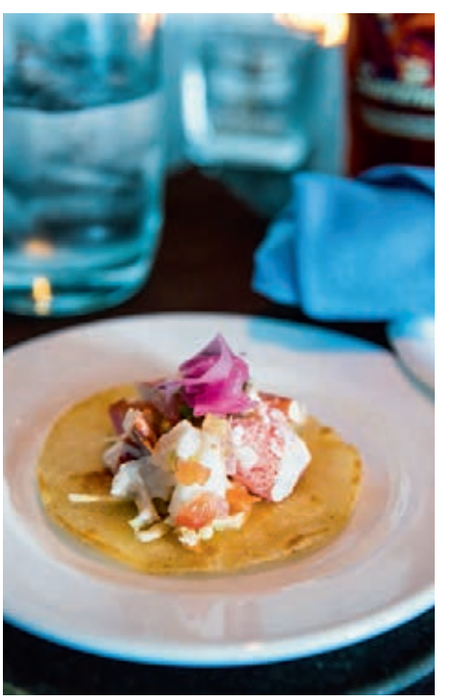
OPPOSITE: *fishing boats waiting patiently for their captains at Porpoise Cove.* THIS PAGE, FROM TOP: *double-dipping* Homarus americanus *at beloved Massachusetts seafood shack Woodman's of Essex; lobster bisque to go from Stowe's seafood shack in West Haven*

'If I had a dollar for every lobster my grandfather tossed back into the sea,' says one fellow calling himself Clammy Davis Jr, 'I'd have a bigger boat'

Essex, a seafood institution that has been in business since 1914 – one of Cartwright's feature recommendations. At the counter, I pick a lobster from the bottom of the tank, wrap a bib around my neck and embrace the tender, buttery moment. A meal at Woodman's is a wholly provincial experience; this is a neighborhood tavern where stewards sling fresh lobster instead of frosty suds, and everyone knows each other. My feast is a community experience, one shared at a long picnic table outside, sea breeze and lobster bits on my face.

In nearby Gloucester, a small artsy town on Cape Ann, I get out to stretch my legs and talk shop with some lobstermen at the harbour. Fishermen have been plying their trade here since the early 17th century, when Gloucester was emerging as America's first seaport. A few of the fishermen I meet can trace their roots back to those early days, a time when lobster was seen more as a nuisance or a pest than a symbol of haute cuisine. 'If I had a dollar for every lobster my grandfather tossed back into the sea,' says one fellow calling himself Clammy Davis Jr, 'well, I'd have a bigger boat.'

Crossing the line into Connecticut, Cartwright's list of recommendations includes a mix of lobster shacks, harbourside restaurants and fine-dining establishments. I stop at Lenny's Indian Head Inn, overlooking Branford's quiet Sybil Marsh. Soaking up the breezy ambience at the boat bar – constructed from coastal bric-a-brac and salvaged pirate booty – I order a lobster roll and a bowl of lobster mac-and-cheese.



FROM TOP: *lobster is ubiquitous in New England and coastal Massachusetts; chef Gary Caron's delightful lobster taco amuse-bouche*

BRIDGING THE GAP

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Only Bridging is one of only a few brokers to specialise entirely on bridging and short-term finance. The company has been totally committed to this sector for more than six years, and has been named 'Best Bridging Broker' at the Business Moneyfacts Awards and at the Bridging and Commercial Awards. As such, when it comes to funding your short-term finance requirements, Only Bridging not only demonstrates but proves that you should be dealing with the experts.

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As I drive west, I grab some lobster bisque to go at Stowe's Seafood and coast through some of Connecticut's prettiest covered bridges (Bull's Bridge in Kent, Cornwall Bridge in Cornwall), pick up an antique brass lobster at Kent's Foreign Cargo and dip my toes into the cool waters of Lake Waramaug. I pull up shortly at the Mayflower Grace in the small town of Washington, the sort of place I have always imagined myself holing up at to work on the next great American novel. The Mayflower is a colonial oasis, a collection of pretty cottages with five-star modern amenities. The perfectly manicured grounds are teeming with vibrant floral arrangements and the restaurant, Muse, is known for exceptional seafood. I pull up to the front of the house, ready for one last crustacean crusade.

It is barely noon when I dive into Muse's menu. I begin with the lobster rolls, served slider-style on crusty buns, and follow with a butter-poached Maine lobster swimming in a smoked-corn purée and paprika butter sauce. I finish with a duo of lobster wontons. I'm a sucker for a three-course lunch.

In a state of lobster nirvana, I retreat to the Mayflower Spa, where I opt for what's billed as a 'bionutritional balance session' in the vain hope of countering my trencherman eating habits. But as I am cocooned in seaweed, it just makes me think of lobster even more. I get back on the road for one last ride and consider Cartwright's advice as I pull up Hartford's Bradley Airport on the GPS. I may be heading home but there are sure to be some decent lobster spots hiding between here and there.

'I may be heading home, but there are sure to be some decent lobster spots hiding between here and there'

RIGHT: *the Mayflower Grace's elegant take on the humble breakfast omelette, stuffed with fresh lobster.*
BELOW: *Connecticut's beautiful Lake Waramaug offers rural bliss – and a short respite from gastro indulgence*

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CONGO HOOK-UP

Since 2011, an ECAir–PrivatAir partnership has brought new routes and higher frequencies to Brazzaville

Words by David Carter

EQUATORIAL CONGO AIRLINES, OR ECAir FOR short, has come a long way in the four years since it was founded as the national carrier of the Republic of the Congo. From its first delivery of a single Boeing 737-300 in September 2011, the airline has expanded significantly. It has achieved this with the assistance of PrivatAir. The ECAir-PrivatAir partnership now operates six aircraft at Brazzaville.

'We started with domestic services from Brazzaville to Pointe-Noire and Ollombo, and the following year launched international services,' says Dave Parkyn, chief operating officer at PrivatAir. 'Our alliance with ECAir has proved a success partly because we're flexible and quick to respond to new requirements. PrivatAir is used to flying VIP charter services at short notice, so flexibility really is engrained in our culture. We also see our long-term partnership as precisely that, rather than as a traditional client-supplier relationship.'

Using three Boeing 737s, two Boeing 757s and a Boeing 767 provided by PrivatAir, ECAir now connects Brazzaville with Pointe-Noire, Ollombo, Bamako (Mali), Dakar (Senegal), Douala (Cameroon), Beirut, Dubai and Paris Charles de Gaulle (CDG). It also links Pointe-Noire with Libreville (Gabon), Libreville with Cotonou (Benin), Douala with Cotonou and Bamako with Dakar.

Dave Parkyn

An ECAir 787-800

On ECAir's six times a week flagship service between Brazzaville and Paris CDG, the Boeing 767 offers three first-class lie-flat suites, 30 business-class lie-flat seats and 164 economy-class seats.

In the second quarter of 2016, the ECAir-PrivatAir partnership will add a new Boeing 787 Dreamliner to its fleet, primarily for Brazzaville-Paris CDG. The new aircraft will offer three first-class lie-flat suites, plus 18 business-class lie-flat and 183 economy-class seats.

To supplement its existing long-haul services, ECAir is considering launching new services to Houston and Beijing.

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On river trips, visitors can see hippopotamus and crocodile on the banks of the mighty Congo

airport, complete with a new terminal and runway. Some 20 airlines serve Brazzaville, the largest of which is ECAir.

Under the cooperation agreement with ECAir, PrivatAir provides the aircraft, cockpit crew, cabin crew and technical support. Many of the cabin crew and three pilots are from the Republic of the Congo, and there are plans to recruit some local technical personnel for ECAir's Brazzaville base. Staff are also from Switzerland and other countries.

In addition to its extensive operations for ECAir, PrivatAir operates scheduled services for two other airlines: Lufthansa (flying Frankfurt-Dammam and Frankfurt-Pune) and SAS (Stavanger-Houston). All its passenger operations are supported by revenue from carrying cargo.

'PrivatAir brings the highest standards of safety, security and personal service, together with huge experience and expertise,' says Dave Parkyn. 'As our expanding ECAir services clearly show, our airline partnerships are working well and we're currently negotiating new scheduled services contracts with more airlines.'

VISITING THE REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO

Brazzaville, the capital and largest city of the Republic of the Congo, lies in the heart of French-speaking Africa. Between 1940 and 1943 it was the capital of Free France and home to Charles de Gaulle. Today it is an easily walkable city with a wide choice of cafes and restaurants offering mainly African- and French-inspired cuisine. On river trips, visitors can see hippopotamus and crocodile along the banks of the mighty Congo. Just outside the city is Les Rapides, a wild stretch of the river and a great spot for a drink, lunch or evening meal.

Across the Congo – the planet's second-largest river by water flow – is the far larger city of Kinshasa, capital of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. This is the only place in the world where two national capitals lie on opposite banks of a river and within sight of each other.

On the country's Atlantic west coast is Pointe-Noire. This booming city features a European quarter, an African quarter, some fine beaches and attractions such as the Diosso Gorge. ECAir flies between Brazzaville and Pointe-Noire up to six times a day with a journey time of one hour.

Most tourists visit the Republic of the Congo for the wildlife, found across the country and particularly in forest reserves such as the Parc National Nouabalé-Ndoki and Parc National d'Odzala-Kokoua. The country is home to 400 mammal species, 1,000 bird species and nearly 10,000 plant species, of which some 3,000 are found nowhere else in the world.

In the vast tropical jungles are around half the world's lowland gorillas. Other memorable wildlife sights include forest elephants, antelopes and buffalo, and chimpanzees. If visitors are lucky, they might also see a mandrill, the most colourful primate of all, and Hartlaub's duck, the only forest-dwelling duck.

All these amazing wildlife sights are set against the dramatic, natural backdrops of verdant jungle, the Congo River, forest waterfalls and ancient volcanoes.

Together, PrivatAir and ECAir are opening up the Republic of the Congo to visitors, whether they are travelling for leisure, business or both.

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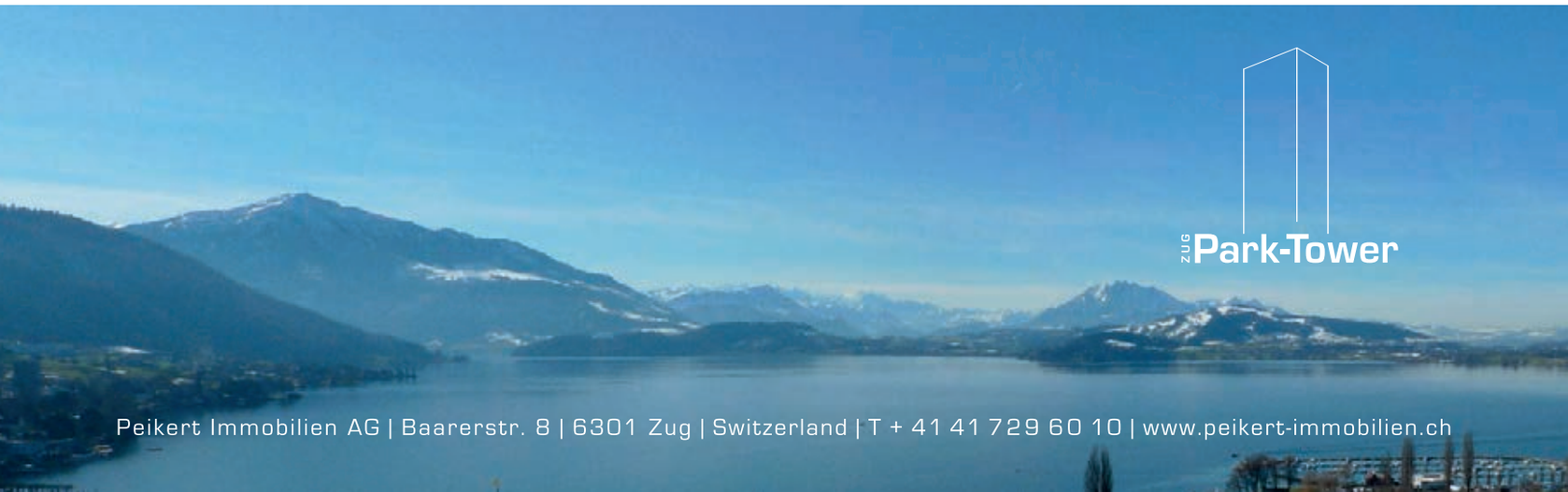

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