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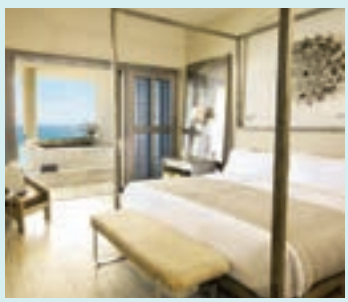

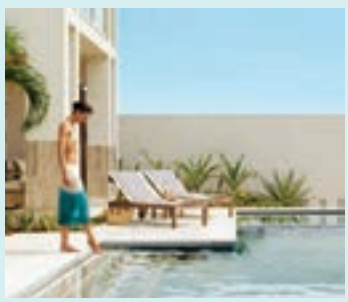

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Welcome

PHOTO: BERNHARD WINKLEMANN

There are currently some 120 three-Michelin-starred restaurants in the world, and I've been lucky enough to dine in 10 of them. This autumn I ate at Le Cinq in Paris, relatively newly adorned with Michelin's highest accolade thanks to the arrival of Breton-born Christian Le Squer 18 months ago. Le Squer knew that the pinnacle of fine dining these days isn't simply about ingredients, aesthetics and perfect execution (although, of course, these are prerequisites), it's about emotion and storytelling. And although the food here is undeniably Parisian *(see image above)*, the dishes that truly shone for me were those with a nod to Le Squer's Breton heritage.

One Michelin-starred eatery I am yet to visit (it's at the top of my list), is Virgílio Martínez's Central in Lima, the fourth-best restaurant in the world. Like Le Squer's creations, every plate tells a different story, and at Central each dish is a celebration of a particular area of Peru, from the uneven topography of the Andes to the twisting riverbed of the Amazon, and the barren monochrome desert of Ica. 'At Central we cook ecosystems,' he told me. 'The plate has to communicate what we experience in nature.'

Experiencing nature at its very extremes is a theme in this very wintery issue. On page 58 we have a story about ski touring in Norway – a trend among experienced skiers now, but a sport they've been practising in Sunnmøre for a century. For our gorgeous cover story (p40) we travelled to the desolate beauty of the North Pole. And if that sounds inspiring to you, how about chartering your own superyacht to either the North or South Pole? We profile the top cutting-edge luxury superyachts capable of sailing on the world's most challenging seas on page 16.

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

Claire

CLAIRE BENNIE
EDITOR

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Usually postcards aren't cherished for their literary merit, but in this issue we have some missives worth keeping: covertly filming rebels in Papua New Guinea; swimming alongside icebergs and penguins in Antarctica; sailing solo around the world aged just 16; and spending six months trekking the Great Wall of China.

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Four reasons to pack your bags and set off on an adventure: the journey of a lifetime to the North Pole via Russian nuclear-powered icebreaker; the chef championing Peru's biodiversity in modern cuisine; ski touring in the Norwegian mountains; and behind the scenes with Venice's mask makers.

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PrivatAir News

In this issue we take a look at PrivatAir's PrivatTraining division, a service launched in 2009. PrivatAir strives to help other private jet operators manage their training requirements and meet the levels of excellence in service that have played a key part in PrivatAir's success.

PHOTO: CHRISTOPHER MICHEL

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Behind the scenes

Artist **Calvin Nicholls** tells us how he created the wintry polar bear on the cover of this issue of *PrivatAir* magazine, using just paper and glue

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

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

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

'Considering pattern and flow was as important as the space between the hair,' says Nicholls, about creating our polar bear sculpture. 'Paying attention to the areas where the hair opens up adds important dimension and life. This was foremost in my mind as I reviewed my photos and completed layout and pattern drawings. Thick paper was used to establish the general form to which all of the small bits were attached.'

'Smooth, flowing form in the ice offered a wonderful contrast to the fuzzy main focus,' he continues. 'An attempt to soften the ice was helped along a little by scoring the paper with rounded burnishing tools and keeping the pieces quite flat.'

Nicholls says that the polar bear sculpture is a fair description of his craft and career. 'I recall the day I decided to dip my toe into the world of paper,' he says. 'The decision to test my limits by cutting pieces so small that tweezers were required to pick them up and glue them in position wasn't taken lightly. Exploring a wide array of metal working tools, knives and archival papers from around the world continues to be an epic art adventure with new discoveries at every turn.' ◆

calvinnicholls.com

ABOVE: Nicholls cuts out countless leaves to achieve a high level of detail

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PHOTO: OFIS ARCHITECTURE

THIS PAGE, TOP TO BOTTOM: the Hayes Residence in Berkeley Springs, West Virginia; the Bjellandsbu Hunting Lodge in Etne, Norway; Frank Lloyd Wright's Fallingwater. OPPOSITE PAGE: Douglas House in Harbor Springs, Lake Michigan

Country living

Steve Handley finds a new book on wilderness houses to be a compendium of buildings in tune with nature

The great country homes of European aristocrats were built in those long pre-industrial salad days when land meant wealth: ornate piles standing in manicured parks surrounded by farmland and hunting grounds. Then came the machine and the factory, and money was something to be made in town. But while today we may earn our living, find our partners and get our education and entertainment in the city, we still go to the wild as a way of shucking off the stresses and strains of urban life. It's a place to find a happier, healthier, more carefree us. A place to be with family and friends, enjoying simple pleasures and great views.

The historical statement of wealth and taste that went with the country house has not gone away, however. Today's rural homes may be smaller and leaner but they are just as eye-catching. But whereas the grand houses of yore served to advertise the refinement of people who had enough cash to distance themselves from the rough agricultural life, many of their descendents broadcast the message that their owners actively embrace nature.

Elemental Living is a coffee-table picture book that takes a look at modern country homes, divided into three sections: houses to view nature from, houses built *in* nature and houses built *with* nature. The houses to view nature from largely follow the modernist style, all clean lines, wood floors and high ceilings. Plenty of mirror-like glass reflects the surrounding trees and maximises the amazing views – though on the downside, you're on view to any passing canoeist or hiker.

Richard Meier's Douglas House, completed in Harbor Springs, Michigan in 1973, is a four-story residence on a steep wooded slope. Built of steel and wood, painted a stark white, and with large windows giving panoramic views of Lake Michigan, the house is conspicuous against the surrounding forest. As the architect of this geometric confection of decks, window frames and crisp white handrails remarks, his vision is 'a machine-crafted object that appears to have landed in a natural world'.

The 50s prototype of this now-generic minimalist style, Mies van der Rohe's classic 1951 Farnsworth House in Plano, Illinois, also appears in the book. Future generations took its clean lines and open spaces and built them bigger and bolder. Farnsworth House looks simple compared to big-budget descendents such as Douglas House – a little like old Minis and Beetles versus their swollen modern versions. Another familiar building is Frank Lloyd Wright's famous Fallingwater

PHOTOS: KEN WYNER, JAMES SILVERMAN, IAN G DAGNALL / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO, SCOTT FRANCES / OTTO

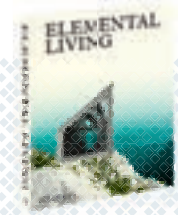
from 1939. Balconies and roofs jut out on all sides from stone uprights over a waterfall. It looks like an untidy pile of oddly shaped books, yet these oblongs frame the waterfall below and flatter the trees around.

Elemental Living places Fallingwater in its built with nature section, alongside the Bjellandsbu Hunting Lodge in Norway, a lop-sided curl of wooden planking wrapped over a glass frontage. Above it, a grassed roof rises from a stone wall at one end dropping down to the grass of the surrounding hills at the other. It's where a hobbit with a double PhD in semiotics and ecology might live. Said hobbit would probably visit friends at the bonkers Dragspel House in Sweden, a horned, undulating slug of red cedar shingles sliding triumphantly through the forest.

But it's not just organic shapes that capture this rightness with nature. The 1942 Casa Malaparte on Capri, the setting of Godard's endless marital argument of a film *Le Mépris*, is as inorganic as you like. A brick-pink oblong with steps leads up to a terraced roof with a curved white balcony like a Nike tick set. It's fabulously contrived, yet somehow perfectly sympathetic to the spur of rocky coastline it sits on.

There are some splendid successes that work simply because they are bold statements. Australia's Stamp House is a Bond villain's lair of giant concrete cantilevers protruding over a lake, with balconies at their mouths. Cape Town's Middle Garden Pavilion is a cheerfully Brutalist concrete affair, all roof and no walls, that somehow manages to look like an oriental temple crossed with the canteen at London's Southbank Centre. It glowers back at the surrounding veldt in the most satisfying way. It's not a home, it's for parties.

And yet some of the most charming buildings here are glorified cabins. PK Arkitektar's 2015 rural cottages at Brekkuskógur in south-west Iceland aren't trying to have a dialogue with nature. Pressed into the earth, with grassed roofs and bunkers, they are homes in which to huddle and keep warm. 'Want to see nature?' they seem to be saying. 'Go stand outside.' ◆



THE ART OF GOOD LIVING

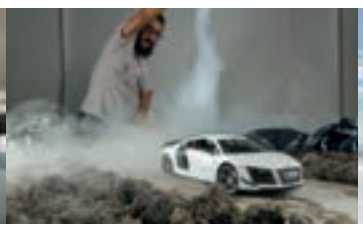
Pick up one of these excellent new architectural tomes

Elemental Living
There are 60 glorious modern buildings celebrating the natural world in this extraordinary book by Phaidon. £29.95

The New Pavilions
Author Philip Jodidio explores how pavilions (tents, bandstands and places for sitting, seeing and being seen) offer a chance to experiment with form. Thames and Hudson, £24.95

Hoffmann
A look at how Austrian architect Josef Hoffmann (1870-1956) revolutionised Western aesthetics with a brave new minimalism – and how he's still relevant today. Taschen, £8.99

It takes 5,000 different parts and 70 hours to build an Audi R8. Only 20 R8s roll out of the factory a day. The workers who build this model are the best of the best, and have been with Audi for decades



R8 V10
Stats about Audi's lastest version of its supercar

5.2-litre V10 engine

533bhp (602bhp for the Plus model)

Top speed of 205mph

0-62mph in 3.2 seconds

Seven-speed S tronic dual-clutch automatic transmission, quattro all-wheel drive

Aluminium and carbon fibre build weighs in at just over 3,400 pounds

Small car, high drama

Photographer **Félix Hernández** creates bold and striking car photography using just shaving cream, flour and a bit of ingenuity

As anticipated, the release of 2017's Audi R8 supercar has caused a real buzz with automotive fans. The pinnacle of Audi's range, this luxury sports two-seater challenges rivals such as the Porsche 911 Turbo, the McLaren 570S and the Ferrari 488GTB with its speed, style and sharpness – and this year's offering is faster and more powerful than ever before. And although it retails from $162,900, you might be surprised to hear that the photographer Félix Hernández got the R8 in these stunning images for as little as $50. How? Well, the car Hernández shot was a fraction of the size – it's actually a toy model.

As a child, Hernández had a huge imagination, locking himself in his room for hours to play with his toys. Now the Mexican-based photographer gets to do this for a living, creating incredibly realistic photography using scale models and ingenious camera angles. 'Doing photography with smaller models isn't that different to shooting in a studio or on location,' says Hernández. 'I shoot them in my studio with studio lights. It's similar to shooting a product – but then, if you want to give a heightened sense of realism, you have to think in scale. I take lighting principles and apply them to a smaller scale.'

With an ingenious imagination and some advanced planning, Hernández achieves big results, but what's surprising about these images is how little is achieved using digital manipulation. 'I love photo manipulation and digital art,' he says, 'but what's really cool is doing as much as you can in-camera. For snow scenes, I use wheat flour. For desert scenes, I use corn flour. For atmosphere, I add smoke. For rain, I spray water. For droplets, I add corn syrup.' ◆

hernandezdreamphography.com

PHOTOS: FELIX HERNANDEZ

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Boats that break the ice

For a new type of superyacht owner, glory lies in sailing to destinations that nobody has reached before and returning with stories to last a lifetime, writes Dominique Afacan

A LEGEND IN THE MAKING

Powerful ice-breaking superyacht Legend *was delivered to her owner in October 2016, refitted especially for charter guests looking for Antarctic and Arctic adventures in comfort. After a day spent ice diving, glacier hiking or polar bear spotting, guests can retreat to the on-board Balinese spa, relax in the cinema or take a well-earned nap in one of the luxurious suites. Bliss.*

26 *guests*

77 *metres long*

1 *three-person submarine*

4 *waverunners*

2 *snow scooters*

1 *helicopter*

€455,000 *a week (plus expenses)*

As far as travel tales go, Kelvin Murray, a director at Eyos Expeditions, doesn't have to struggle for good material. As if living in Antarctica weren't cool enough, he has also led exploratory diving expeditions through the world's largest fjord system in Svalbard, hiked with reindeers and lectured on the secret life of walruses. Murray's fascination with and knowledge of the polar regions make him the ideal person to take on a trip there. And these days, the number of superyacht owners who want to go is steadily growing. But with all the associated difficulties and dangers, why on earth would you want to?

'Think about the epic journeys of Scott and Shackleton – names synonymous with exploration and human endeavour,' says Murray. 'That inspires and provokes us. Until recently, it wasn't possible for non-explorers to do those things, but modern technology means these places are more accessible. Now superyacht owners and charter guests who have covered a lot of destinations ask me, "Where else can we go?" The poles have that mystique – and are enough of a challenge to satisfy those needs.'

Should you also want to visit, Murray and Eyos Expeditions are the ones to call. Not only do they ensure your chartered boat is up to the job and accompany you to the frozen wilderness, they act as 'ice pilots', (translation: 'You can hit that piece of ice, but not that piece'), help seek out wildlife and solicit the endless permissions required to visit the Antarctic.

Eyos has also created a superyacht of its own. The *SeaXplorer 100*, currently in build, is a collaboration with Dutch shipyard Damen. Equipped for 40 days of autonomy, the 100m-long boat has an ice-breaking steel hull (which can thrust through ice up to a metre thick), a fully enclosed helicopter hangar (suitable for two helicopters), a luxury tender, a dive support boat and expedition RIB, an ice radar, and – somewhat less crucially – a special mud room where the 30 guests can shed the penguin guano from their boots.

As interest in expeditions to these desolate regions increases, so does the choice for intrepid superyacht owners. Some of the best options on the market include: 71m-long *Enigma XK (left)*, converted from a fisheries patrol vessel; Icon Yachts' newly refitted *Legend*, a 77m beauty built specifically for adventurous charter; and *Ulysses*, currently on the market while her owner builds something bigger (bigger than the 107m original, just to be clear). Alev Karagulle, part of the team at Burgess, the brokerage tasked with selling *Ulysses*, is confident of the demand for such giants. 'At the larger end of the size spectrum, yachts have facilities such as gyms, spa areas, cinemas and, of course, an incredible inventory of toys for both land, sea and ice,' he says. It's hardly roughing it like Shackleton and Co. But then, maybe if he had the chance to travel to Antarctica now, Shackleton might also opt for sitting on a private tender with humpbacks swimming around him with the promise of a hot shower and gourmet dinner just a short journey away. ◆

eyos-expeditions.com

DEEPER ON DOWN

As the thirst for adventure gathers force, the demand for reaching new depths increases. This year's Monaco Yacht Show confirmed the latest trend in superyacht toys: luxurious personal submarines. One of the most popular was the Aurora-6 by California-based manufacturer SEAmagine. This spacious $5m sub is capable of carrying six people down to 1,000m with the pilot at the front, two passengers in the 'owner's lounge' right behind and three in the 'guests' lounge' at the rear. Rotating chairs mean passengers can take in the action from every direction through the clear acrylic hemispheres that have replaced metal spheres in modern mini-subs: guests have the sensation of total immersion in the underwater world. Should all that water make them thirsty, there's a minibar in the front – and an emergency bathroom at the back. ◆

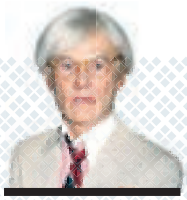
Nine out of every 10 superyachts stick to the turquoise waters of the Caribbean and the Mediterranean, but these coastlines only make up 6% of the world's coast and 1.5% of the ocean's total surface area

90%

ABOVE: Inside *Legend*, the spectacular superyacht that caters for up to 26 guests. **LEFT:** *Legend* is 77m long and built for adventure. **OPPOSITE, INSET:** *Enigma XK* used to patrol Scottish waters looking for illegal fishing boats

PHOTOS: QUIN BISSET

New oversized Hockney retrospective *A Bigger Book* gives his work a vast canvas to work its magic. Out now, £1,750, *taschen.com*



ARTISTS ON ART
Hockney loves to talk and write. Here are four more artists who gave us books

Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp
The creator of the notorious 1917 Fountain *– a urinal with the artist's signature on its rim – holds forth.*

The Philosophy of Andy Warhol: From A to B and Back Again
Vapidly obsessed by wealth, celebrity and consumption, Warhol's deadpan fascination with glossy items has become our modern culture.

Dear Theo: The Autobiography of Vincent Van Gogh
The original unstable artist unburdens himself in letters to his brother.

My Art, My Life
Mexico's Diego Rivera reveals he lost his virginity at nine, was framed by Leon Trotsky for attempted murder and was a cannibal by 18. Course you were, Diego.

O you pretty things

David Hockney champions the pleasure of seeing in a world where art has to be ugly to be relevant. Steve Handley enjoys a new oversized book celebrating his work

Art stopped being pretty in 1907, the year of Picasso's *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*. Prior to this, art was easy to spot and easy to like. Craftsmanship and beauty had reached a gold standard, refined over hundreds if not thousands of years to delight the senses. Now here was a picture of wonky, flat prostitutes with faces like African masks. This new art was deliberately displeasing. There was a message, sure, but ugly always has a problem no matter how clever it is: it's hard to like. It's also hard to identify fine art when craftsmanship and beauty have been tossed out the window. You have to be a sophisticate – or know one – to tell ugly from plain bad, which is what gives modern art its cultural cachet.

No one has to learn to like David Hockney. Indeed it's hard to find a more likeable artist. The bluff Yorkshire smoker has been producing crowd-pleasing art since the 70s when his scrawled polemics of the 60s gave way to lissom youths in showers and Los Angeles swimming pools. Hockney paints the landscape of pleasure. And indeed the pleasure of landscape. Flowers, pools, people, streets, trees, dogs – his art is always accessible. It's 'proper art': skilful and tasteful in the pre-Picasso way and clever without being difficult.

Can such pleasing art ever sit with the cool kids? Only if you discard 'relevance' and 'modernity' and look to other qualities. The French artist and judo fan Yves Klein had only one requirement of art: that it be marvellous. And Hockney is marvellous. His paintings with their heightened light and colour tell us not about all the wrong there is in the world but its charm and beauty. This is a man who likes to like, and what he likes most is seeing. 'I get great pleasure from my eyes,' the old man said at a 2012 opening in London.

The latest Hockney retrospective, *A Bigger Book*, is mercifully free from words, save a single page from Hockney himself. (Hockney is a great student of art history, but it's technique that interests him: the medium not the message.) The standout feature of this book of 450 pictures over 498 pages is its size: 50cm x 70cm – open it up and a double page spread is four-and-a-half feet across. Weighing 35kg, it needs heavy-duty support so comes with its own bookstand featuring legs in Hockney-esque bright primaries. More like an exhibition than a book, at $2,500 it's the cheapest way of owning all the key Hockney paintings without robbing several national galleries. How clever, how modern is that? ◆

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THE MICHELIN MAN: CHEF LE SQUER'S CV

1962: *Born in Plouhinec, Brittany.*

1976: *Wanted to become a sailor aged 14. Embarked on a two-week fishing expedition, where his uncle taught him to cook.*

1986: *Graduated with a* certificat d'aptitude professionnelle *and* a brevet d'études professionnelles *from hotel school.*

1996: *Obtained his first Michelin star at Café de la Paix restaurant.*

1998: *Was awarded a second Michelin star at Café de la Paix.*

1999: *Succeeded Ghislaine Arabian at the prestigious Restaurant Ledoyen on the Champs-Élysées.*

2002: *After gaining two Michelin stars for Restaurant Ledoyen in 2000, he got the third in 2002.*

2008: *Founded a new restaurant Etc (for 'epicure traditional cuisine') and received a Michelin star.*

2013: *Was awarded five toques by* Gault et Millau *for his excellent cuisine at Restaurant Ledoyen.*

2014: *Moved to Le Cinq in October.*

2016: *Obtained Le Cinq's much-desired third Michelin star.*

High five

Le Cinq has the most dynamic menu in Paris. Chef Christian Le Squer says it's all down to playfulness, precision and storytelling, reports Claire Bennie

When Franck Painchaud, restaurant manager of Le Cinq, comes to our table at course four of nine of the Epicurian Escape *dégustation*, I ask him what is so special about chef Christian Le Squer's food. He blinks in confusion. 'This plate,' he says. 'Does it look like onion soup to you?' The dish is adorned with perfect caramel-hued globes, topped with paper-thin shavings of truffle and delicate, crisp croutons, a sprinkling of emerald dust and a moss-coloured gel. The menu calls it 'Parisian style' gratinated onions, but it doesn't look much like that either. I pop one of the onion spheres onto my tongue. It bursts immediately, and my mouth is filled with an unctuous, sweet and syrupy liquid, and the unmistakable flavour of rich onion soup. Painchaud gives a little nod. 'Such a surprise, *non?*'

In early 2016, Le Cinq joined the hallowed ranks of the world's most elite restaurants: it was awarded its third Michelin star. The Four Seasons George V, whose restaurant Le Cinq is, made no bones about their desire for that final star. Le Cinq used to have all three when esteemed chef Philippe Legendre was in charge, but when he left in 2007, so did Michelin's highest award. Hiring Le Squer 18 months ago was a statement of Four Seasons' commitment – this is the man you call when you want to be the very best. You could call him the Michelin Man – although I certainly don't (at least not to his face) when I meet him in his office, a glass cube in the corner of his state-of-the-art kitchen, the morning after our meal.

Despite lunch service being in full swing, Christian Le Squer is generous with his time. He is delighted when I tell him how much I enjoyed the onion dish and the course that preceded it: a butterflied king prawn served with a hot mayonnaise so light and foamy that it felt like a eating cloud of Béarnaise with all the calories taken out (although I sincerely doubt that they were). It was served with a beautifully intricate buckwheat galette that looked like Le Squer had spent hours weaving it by hand, like a piece of Lesage embroidery. Apparently that's not that far off the mark. 'I'm like a performer and, yes, a couturier,' he says. 'I like to think I'm making food like Chanel. It takes a lot of time, creativity, passion and hard work.'

PHOTOS: BERNHARD WINKELMANN, GUILLERMO ANIEL-QUIROGA, STEPHANE DE BOURGIES

Ever wondered why it's called the *Michelin Guide*? In 1900, the tyre maker created a food and drink guide as a marketing tool to highlight the best places to eat and sleep on the road

Le Squer says his goal is to create truly Parisian food, but that galette suggests otherwise. Le Squer is from Brittany – a fact I gleaned from Painchaud when I was presented with a plate of four *kouign-amann* (a flaky, caramelised-butter pastry from the region) with our coffee. He smiles. 'I want every plate to tell a story,' he says. 'There's love and emotion in every dish. I like to play with ingredients and textures, but not purity of the food or dishes. I don't like fusion food.'

Although Le Squer cannot define his cuisine as solely Parisian, any external influences (the galette; a touch of ginger with the sea bream; the sparkling granita served with strawberries, Chantilly cream and white chocolate) only add to the playfulness and don't detract from the quality or considered-ness of this distinctly French menu. Le Squer is incredibly well travelled; he tells me about his upcoming trip to Istanbul and his love of Japan. Rather oddly, he's just been made a green tea ambassador. 'I love it! It cleanses the palette. I have it with my breakfast and at 11am every day,' he says, gesturing to a large tea pot by his computer.

But the most innovative part of Le Squer's food philosophy is, well, his dedication to innovation. At 11.55am on the dot, he taps on the glass wall, gesturing to a chef in immaculate whites. At noon he wants to judge whatever this young cook has just created. 'Every day in my kitchen, I have a team of two chefs who spend four hours on research,' he says. Le Squer's protégé has constructed an exquisite starter with an array of mushrooms, subtle slicks of jus and a garnish of herbs. Le Squer takes a bite and gives the young chef a nod of approval.

So what's next? 'I don't like to look too far ahead,' says Le Squer. 'I like to live in the present. I have the three stars now but I want to take my time to perfect my food further.' And what would have happened if he hadn't got that third star? He laughs off my question. As if it was ever in doubt. ◆

GORGEOUS GEORGE

A rock 'n' roll stay? Forget it. Paris's Four Seasons George V is all couture and class

Apparently whenever the Rolling Stones arrive in town, their first stop is the Four Seasons George V. They call it the G5 – presumably to try to give the hotel a bit of a rock 'n' roll edge, but frankly, it's hard to think of many hotels *less* suited to a rock band. Then again, Mick, Keith and Co are pretty soft these days. Art Deco George V is the most sumptuous hotel in Paris, a point that is hammered home the moment you enter the lobby, which you might mistake for Paris's submission for the Chelsea Flower Show, with countless vases filled with elaborate arrangements of red roses, violet hydrangeas and amethyst lilacs.

The opulence and floral displays (12,000 fresh flowers every week) continues throughout the hotel, with 17th-century tapestries from Flanders and intricate wooden panelling. The 244 rooms are impeccably styled, with shimmering Florentine chandeliers, grand Napoleonic furniture and rich fabrics. The only vaguely rock 'n' roll touch? The red velvet sofas in Le Bar. Well, who wants to throw TVs out of their window these days? ◆

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A gem of an idea

Are man-made diamonds better than natural ones? **Josh Sims** investigates

PHOTO: GETTY

'There are not many people with a 2ct diamond on their finger,' says Clive Hill, carefully studying a brilliant stone almost as large his thumbnail. 'This a good size.' His voice swells with pride – but not at his spending power. Hill's delight is not that he can afford such a virtually flawless white diamond (he can't); it's that, as founder of WD Lab Grown Diamonds, he created it.

Synthetic diamonds aren't as crackpot as they sound. All you have to do is take tiny sliver of carbon material and put it into a special chamber. Add in varying amounts of gases and then heat to a very high temperature, which will produce a plasma – the gases break down into their constituent parts. Carbon molecules then attach themselves to the carbon particle, causing it to grow. Wait for perhaps a few weeks. Remove the gases, then take the piece of carbon from the chamber. Crack it open and if it's been done just right, inside you'll find what takes Mother Nature billions of years to make.

'A lot of people in the diamond industry have been keen to view such lab-grown diamonds as marginal,' says Hill. 'But this stone' – he gestures at the sizeable gem – 'is unknockable, unignorable. Quality lab-grown diamonds have arrived.'

So much romance is tied to the rarity of a diamond, that the idea of being able to grow one in a lab at will seems the stuff of science-fiction. But the advent of what has mistakenly (and somewhat sniffily) been dismissed as 'synthetic' diamonds – when, in fact, they are chemically identical to those dug from the ground – is now the stuff of reality.

The idea is not new, but has certainly advanced rapidly in recent years. Industry pioneers Gemesis's early process, for example, used gases with a high nitrogen content, which that meant it could produce only coloured diamonds (actually far rarer in nature than white ones). That problem overcome, now white diamonds of great clarity and 'colour' are being produced in the lab. And every one of them has a characteristic much sought after in mined diamonds: each is utterly flawless.

But it's not their perfection that is likely, in time, to shake the diamond market – effectively a cartel that tightly controls diamond supply to pump demand and play masterstrokes in marketing. Each lab-grown diamond is around a quarter the cost of its mined equivalent; furthermore, it has little of the environmental impact of natural diamonds, nor is it associated with African wars. Larger lab-grown >

Natural diamonds are formed over one to three billion years, slowly forming at high pressure and temperature at depths of up to 118 miles inside our planet

3 billion

SOLD!
The world's most expensive gemstone

It might sound like a garish Pantone shade, but Vivid Blue made headlines this year not because it became 2016's most fashionable colour, but because of a rare blue diamond, the Oppenheimer Blue, that was auctioned by Christie's for $57.5m – the most expensive gemstone ever. Although its exact origin is unknown, this 14.62-ct gem most likely came from the Premier Mine, 25 miles east of Pretoria in South Africa.

LEFT: Clive Hill checks the clarity of one of his lab-grown diamonds

diamonds will surely come in time. Unsurprisingly, the handful of companies that make their money from mined diamonds are less than thrilled at the prospect.

Resistance may be futile. To draw a parallel, cultured pearls were similarly dismissed when they were first created, and now they, not deep-dive pearls, account for the vast majority of all pearls sold. Perhaps only the story of a stone produced by natural forces over aeons will keep the mined diamond in demand, especially since it is, by some accounts, only set to become even rarer, as no major new sites for exploration have been uncovered and the expense of mining becomes prohibitive.

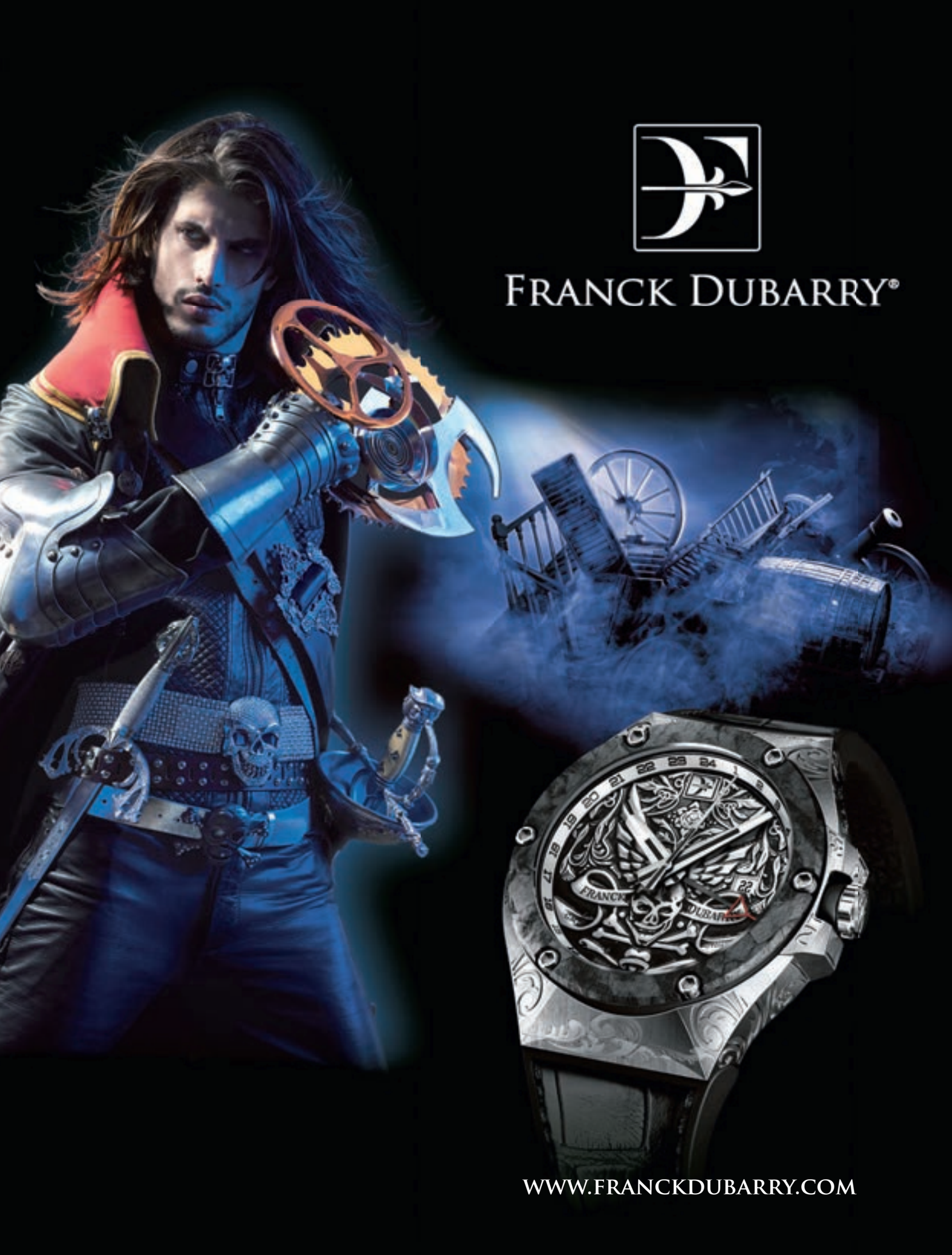
'The whole market is touchy about lab-made diamonds now – even some of our oldest customers, who are OK with buying our [lab-grown] emeralds, rubies and sapphires don't want the diamonds,' says Tom Chatham of Chatham gemstones, whose father, Carroll, perfected one of the first processes for creating lab-made emeralds in 1938. 'They don't buy lab-made ones because they don't have to yet. But the supply of mined diamonds isn't endless. The problem for lab-made diamonds at the moment is that the industry can't produce enough stones at the right price to take full advantage of the growing awareness of them. But we're on the verge of cracking that.'

The real upshot of lab-grown diamonds may be less what's on your finger, more what's in your computer. They could be used more readily in semi-conductors, optical devices, water purification systems, high-powered lasers and other electronics of tomorrow.

'In fact, one reason I got into this business was that I have a touch of geek about me,' says Hill. 'And the potential for lab-made diamonds in applications are extremely exciting – it gives me goose bumps. They could really change the world.' ◆
wdlabgrowndiamonds.com, chatham.com

A DIAMOND STAY AT THE COTSWOLDS' WHATLEY MANOR

Marilyn claimed they were a girl's best friend, Sean Connery's Bond marvelled at their longevity, even Rihanna told us to shine bright like the precious gem. Diamonds have become shorthand for the very finest, and that's exactly what guests can expect from the Diamond Ritual at the Aquarias Spa at Whatley Manor, a five-star Cotswolds hideaway that combines all the charm of the English countryside with pioneering beauty treatments. The 'ritual' is performed in a brand new Natura Bissé Bubble Suite, an isolated chamber where the air you breathe is 99.995% pure, offering unrivalled detoxification. Beginning with a soothing 30-minute back massage, the treatment then involves an indulgent 60-minute bespoke Diamond Energy facial that helps to restore elasticity and improve skin tone and texture via a series of natural peels, exfoliations and marine mineral masks. After the diamond hour is up, Whatley Manor continues the theme of total decadence – from a private cinema available for hire to The Dining Room, the restaurant headed up by award-winning chef Martin Burge. While there are no diamonds involved in the cuisine, it is equally as precious: two hard-won Michelin stars ensure that Whatley Manor's uncompromising standard is deliciously upheld. ◆ *whatleymanor.com* *Imogen Rowland*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PHOTOS: LOLA HAKIMIAN

The first Orient Express train had enough beds for 58 passengers. Each sleeping car had up to 10 compartments with a wash basin that served as living rooms by day and bedrooms by night

58

On the right track

Louisa Johnson looks at the story of the legendary Orient Express

On 4 October 1883, a curious crowd gathered at the Gare de l'Est in Paris. The object of their fascination? The Orient Express, a luxurious train service that was set to revolutionise travel. Another more fortunate group were standing just to the side of the train, a mix of gentlemen in top hats and frock coats with leather bags that they handed to the porters. These politicians, journalists and novelists from across Europe were about to embark on the train's inaugural journey. Their destination? The exotic eastern city of Constantinople, some 1,500km away. The journey would be incredibly fast by 19th-century standards: travelling by Orient Express, it would take them just under two weeks, crossing 10 different countries. As Georges Boyer, a writer from *Le Figaro*, said of the return leg of the journey, 'In 76 hours, instead of 111 as before, we have made the journey from Constantinople to Paris, and did so without the slightest fatigue, in complete comfort.'

'Complete comfort' was an understatement. The Orient Express was ground-breaking not only for its pace and ability to traverse the breadth of Europe; it was also the first and last word in opulent travel. Belgian entrepreneur Georges Nagelmackers wanted to create a 'lovely, rolling hotel' – an unprecedented level of luxury that would astound his guests. And astound them he did, with compartments crafted out of mahogany and teak; red velvet armchairs that gave way to generously upholstered beds with fresh silk sheets changed daily; and a lavishly decorated gas-lit dining car that served multiple-course meals – with wine pairings chosen according to what you could see out of your window at that moment. Every detail was impeccably considered.

As writer Edmond About, who was also on that first journey, put it: 'From Pontoise to Istanbul… three houses on wheels, seventeen-and-a-half metres long, built of teak wood and crystal, steam-heated, brightly lit by gas lights, amply spacious and just as comfortable as an expensive Paris apartment.'

Writers and artists were quickly seduced by the romance and glamour of travelling on the Orient Express. 'Who knows who will be on board?' journalist Morley Safer famously asked. 'A couple of spies, for sure. At least one grand duke; a few beautiful women, no doubt very rich and very troubled. Anything can happen and usually does on the Orient Express.' Joseph Kessel and Agatha Christie were just two of the writers to popularise this sleeper train, Christie most famously in her 1934 best-selling novel *Murder on the Orient Express*, which if it didn't immortalise the service in book form, certainly managed the trick in 1974 when the Oscar-winning film adaptation came out. A remake, directed by Kenneth Branagh and starring Johnny Depp and Michelle Pfeiffer, will appear some time in 2017 – apparently we still enjoy watching posh people getting offed in luxurious and exotic locales.

The Paris to Istanbul trains ran until 1977. Affordable air travel and high-speed trains meant that it was no longer a practical form of transport – and in any case, by this point the Orient Express had become a shadow of Nagelmackers' vision. The final train didn't even have a dining car – passengers had to bring enough food to last them several days. The Orient Express continued in number of guises until 2009, when it finally disappeared completely from European timetables.

Confusingly, from 1982 to 2009, there were two Orient Express train companies running; the original, and Venice Simplon-Orient-Express. The latter was created when American businessman James Sherwood bought two of the train's original cars and, on discovering that the name Orient Express had never been trademarked, launched his own version.

Then in 2014, French national rail operator SNCF decided to purchase the original Orient Express. 'We want to develop a brand that has luxury travel and French lifestyle at its centre,' said SNCF development director and new Orient Express CEO Frank Bernard. SNCF has set up partnerships with luxury brands such as furniture maker Cauval, putting luxury mattresses that retail for up to €40,000 in each of the cabins, and hopes to relaunch that famous Paris to Istanbul route within the next two years. But should you be impatient, Venice Simplon-Orient-Express runs a single service between the two cities (and stopping at Budapest, Sinaia, Bucharest and Varna) just once every year in August. ◆

Read more about the story of the Orient Express in a new book Orient Express: The Legend of Travel *by Assouline, $85, or take the annual Paris-Istanbul trip with Venice Simplon-Orient-Express, belmond.com*

RIDE THE RAIL
Three glorious modern-day train journeys

Tren a las Nubes
The 'Train to the Clouds' travels along the old line from Salta in Argentina to the Chilean border. It ascends to 4,220m during its seven-hour journey through the Andean mountains, making this the highest train journey in the world not using a rack and pinion system.

The Rocky Mountaineer
Take this dramatic two-day journey along the Canadian Pacific line, from Banff to Vancouver, and you'll be rewarded with glacial lakes, lush green forests and fast-paced rivers. See them all with uninterrupted views in the glass-domed GoldLeaf carriages.

Palace on Wheels
The Palace on Wheels combines sophisticated travel that only maharajas could previously dream of, with mod cons such as flatscreen TV, wi-fi and showers in each cabin. The train takes a circular route from Delhi, stopping at Jaipur, Chittorgarh, Udaipur, Jaisalmer, Jodhpur and Agra.

Edwina Dunn
Data Scientist and CEO of Starcount

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Postcards

Tales of intrigue and adventure from across the globe

ILLUSTRATION BY DAVID MAHONEY

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A GRUELLING SIX-MONTH TREK ALONG THE GREAT WALL OF CHINA

‘I secretly filmed a rebel commander in Papua New Guinea’

PATRICK HUTTON

Globe-trotting Patrick Hutton, 28, is a camera operator who mixes his paid work with personal adventures. His first big trip – crossing Mongolia on camels – was followed by a gruelling three-month adventure trundling through Papua New Guinea, where he was ‘invited’ into a rebel military camp. Patrick kept his camera quietly rolling…

INTERVIEW BY MIKE PEAKE. ILLUSTRATION BY DAVID MAHONEY

Papua New Guinea is huge, densely forested and extremely hard to cross when you’re under your own steam, which is what my friend Richard Johnson and I set out to do in 2014. After months of walking we were chronically exhausted, and when it came to the last stage, paddling down the Fly River, we would drift in our raft by night and paddle by day.

About two-thirds of the way through this part of the trip, we passed what looked like a small village one afternoon and started to paddle towards it, hoping to get some drinking water and supplies. Suddenly, a group of guys came running out at us with guns, demanding to know who we were and what we were doing. We asked if they were the army and they said no, they were the rebels, which obviously made us rather tense.

But they were actually quite friendly and wanted to know everything about us, and seemed under the impression that we might be able to get weapons for them. They said that if we could bring guns in they would give us access to West Papua’s resources when they had liberated it from Indonesia. It was all pretty surreal.

Just before nightfall we wanted to get on our way, but they told us we needed to go and see their commander. They explained it was about a five-hour paddle away, which was the last thing we wanted, but they then became insistent. They gave us an escort in another boat, and off we went, paddling into the darkness.

We arrived at midnight. The mood at the rebel HQ was much less friendly, but I sensed an opportunity. I had my DSLR round my neck, which many people think is just a stills camera, but it records video too. I turned on the camera, kept it tucked towards my chest and tried to be discreet.

The whole village came out to see us and I got some great footage of them silhouetted by the moonlight, some of them carrying guns. When they asked what we were doing, saying we were just there for tourism seemed slightly bizarre, given the circumstances.

The commander himself was quite unimposing. Unlike the soldiers we’d seen earlier in the day, who’d been in camouflage, he was just in a football T-shirt. I asked if we could take photos and we were told no, so I knew I had to keep what I was doing hidden or we’d be in trouble. Some of the best shots I got were in one of the huts: there was a board on the wall with photos pinned to it, although I’ll never know if they were people to capture or pictures of other commanders.

The whole thing was very scary, because we were in such a remote location. We had no powered transport to get away, they had guns and we were in their territory. As night wore on we got more and more tense and when they said yes when I asked if we should leave, we got into the boat and paddled off as quickly as we could.

I’ve turned the footage into a documentary which I’ll put online shortly. As for more adventures, I’m hanging up my boots for a while because I’ve just become a dad. Having a baby is an adventure in itself, although I’m pretty sure I’ll be back on a plane to somewhere before too long… ◆

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'I swam the teeth-shatteringly cold seas of Antarctica in my Speedos'

All the oceans of the world have been so badly over-fished that the fishing fleets are now heading to Antarctica for the last big catches. If this continues, then some of the most pristine wilderness areas on earth will be destroyed. As the United Nations Patron of the Oceans, I set about trying to gain global support for the Ross Sea to become a Marine Protected Area.

The Ross Sea is such an important place for scientists because they can understand what an intact marine system looks like. The rest of the world has been so badly damaged by man.

The waters around Antarctica are not owned by anyone – they're part of what's known as the 'high seas' – waters that are beyond national jurisdiction – and they represent 45% of the world. They are largely unprotected, and I thought if we could get one sea protected, the rest could follow.

I've done lots of cold water swims now. It takes months of training, and unfortunately that means lots of swimming in cold water, which is bloody unpleasant. The media sometimes think that I just jump in and that I'm different to everyone else and that cold water swimming is no big deal for me, but anyone who thinks I enjoy it is very wrong. There's no insulated wetsuit or anything like that: it's just me in my Speedos.

While I have about 50 people who help me with things like getting fit, handling the media and a dozen other things, for the trip to Antarctica there were six of us. As well as me there were two doctors, a cameraman, a photographer and the driver of the boat.

The first swim was en route to Antarctica to acclimatise, but it was a disaster because an enormous great sea lion surged down on top of me. I'd only gone about 200m when I heard the crew screaming at me to get out – they hauled me in just in the nick of time.

The second swim was when we arrived at Cape Adare in the Ross Sea. The word 'cold' has no meaning when you start talking about these temperatures, and on top of it all I was worried about killer whales and leopard seals, which were likely to be in the area as they eat the Adélie penguins that we kept seeing. A trick I'd learned was to throw in a piece of ice that would replicate the sound of a penguin jumping in; I figured that if no predators emerged within a few minutes the area was as safe as it was going to be. I managed 540m, swimming though a gap in the sea ice. When they hauled me in I couldn't feel the side of my face.

Three days later I had planned to be in the water again at Cape Evans but the wind was gusting at more than 70 knots and we had to abandon it, but I did a 330m swim a few days later at the Bay of Whales, where the water was -1.7°C and the wind chill was -37°C.

Because the air was so much colder than the sea, every time I lifted my arm out of the water the pain was excruciating – I could see my body freezing, first the fingertips, then I couldn't feel my hands. If I'd attempted more I don't think I'd have survived.

The longest swim lasted 11 minutes and that was off the coast of Peter Island a few days later – a place so remote that fewer than 1,000 people have ever set foot on it. It was beautiful with crystal-clear waters and I swam 560m.

The big work started once I'd got back, when I went to Russia who, alongside China, had been blocking the creation of this Marine Protected Area for five years. I had no idea how they would welcome me, but they did so with open arms. You won't find one Russian who has not, as a young boy or girl, been taken down to a cold lake, cut a hole in the ice and then jumped in; it's a rite of passage. When I met Slava Fetisov, a very influential Russian former ice hockey captain, he told me the Russian media liked me because Russians like people who put their body where their mouth is.

When Russia and China announced they were to join the other countries in the Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR) and agree to the Ross Sea being made into a Marine Protected Area, I did press interviews for three whole days and nights. I wanted to celebrate, but all I could do was go back to my hotel and fall asleep in my clothes.

This is just the beginning for me. There will be more freezing swims, and I won't be happy until all the seas around the continent are protected. *lewispugh.com* ◆

IN DEEP WATER
Three of the world's most extreme swims

1. In 2007, Slovenian Martin Strel embarked on a 5,268km swim through the piranha-infested waters of the Amazon river, from the Peruvian Andes to the shores of Brazil. It took 66 days.

2. Danish freediver Stig Avall Severinsen holds the record for the longest swim under ice, 152.4m, when he spent two minutes, 11 seconds underwater near Annasslik Island in East Greenland.

3. Strong currents and tides mean fewer people have swum the English Channel than have climbed Everest. But Brit Alison Streeter is unfazed, having completed the swim 43 times.

INTERVIEW BY MIKE PEAKE. ILLUSTRATION BY DAVID MAHONEY

LEWIS PUGH

Lewis Pugh, 46, is a former maritime lawyer who decided to give up the day job and start campaigning for the protection of the oceans. A lifelong swimmer, he wondered if extreme swimming might just be the way to draw people's attention to the cause. After swimming across the North Pole and a glacial lake halfway up Everest, Lewis realised that he would have to go to one of the coldest places on Earth if he wanted to make the ultimate splash

‘I sailed solo around the world when I was 16’

When I started sailing I was really scared of everything, including water. It was a book by Jesse Martin that changed everything – his story really struck me because he was just a regular guy and yet he’d been the youngest person ever (aged 18) to sail around the world on his own. I hit on the idea of doing what he’d done when I was 11, and over the next few years it became an obsession.

For two years before, I gained experience on long sailing journeys, learned about sea survival, figured out how to fix engines and also found out about celestial navigation. The most incredible thing was the support I got from experienced sailors – volunteers who had responded to an ad I’d put in a boat magazine.

But critics thought I was too young and that I had little chance of success. I proved them all right on the first night of my boat’s sea trials when I hit a 63,000-ton cargo ship head-on while I was asleep.

Up until then I had doubts about what I would do if things got scary: would I fall apart? But when I collided with the tanker, I went into autopilot and did exactly what I needed to do. It also enabled me to fix the systems that should have told me a ship was nearby.

Setting off from Sydney was emotional. Mum and Dad were amazingly supportive and had always said I could achieve whatever I wanted to. I felt a real sense of pride as I said goodbye.

The days were always different, depending on the weather, but one thing I had to do was learn how to catnap for pretty short periods of time. A lot of my best sleep was had as the sun was coming up, and followed the relief of getting through the night. The scariest was when I hit a storm in the South Atlantic. A huge wave turned the boat upside down in the water for a few minutes. I was down below – the boat’s pretty much watertight – and up until then the storm had been exhilarating because as well as being terrifying, the waves are like huge, beautiful mountains. But when the wave that turned everything upside down hit I couldn’t comprehend how the boat could still be structurally sound after such an impact. You start playing through your head what might happen next when the back-up plan is basically a glorified pool raft. I’d wrestled it below because it had come loose, so I wasn’t going to be able to launch it in such terrible conditions. Eventually the boat righted itself and I got through the night.

Most of the time things were less dramatic. I read books, listened to music, wrote a blog and I could keep in touch with people back home via satellite phone.

Apart from the phone, I was totally alone out there. People often think there must have been a rescue boat trailing me, but there wasn’t. When I eventually got back 210 days later on May 15 – three days before my 17th birthday – I hadn’t seen land in months and hadn’t seen a living person since I left.

My arrival was overwhelming. The sights, sounds and smells were a sensory overload, as was the crowd of people, including our then Prime Minister. I just went onto autopilot, but I do remember that my first hug from Mum and Dad was a bit special.

People always want to know what I’m doing next. For a girl who effectively ran away from school I’ve come to really love studying; I got my degree and am now doing an MBA. I work with a marine start-up and also the United Nations World Food Programme. And I’m still sailing. One day I’ll sail around the world again – only I’ll be stopping and enjoying some of the places next time. ◆

jessicawatson.com.au

INTERVIEW BY MIKE PEAKE. ILLUSTRATION BY DAVID MAHONEY

JESSICA WATSON

Encouraged by her parents – who perhaps didn’t take her too seriously at first – Jessica Watson become an accomplished junior sailor and amassed hundreds of thousands of dollars in sponsorship to kit out a 34-ft ocean-going sailboat named Ella’s Pink Lady *so she could sail around the world. On October 18, 2009, she set off from Sydney, waved an emotional goodbye to her parents and set sail for… Sydney, more than 20,000 miles away across some of the world’s most challenging waters*

OFF THE WALL
Three of the world's greatest wall walks

KUMBHALGARH WALL
At just over 36km, the wall that surrounds the splendid Kumbhalgarh Fort in India might pale in comparison to China's Great Wall, but this structure is the second-longest continuous wall on the planet – and like the Great Wall, it's also reportedly visible from space. At its widest the wall is 15m thick.

HADRIAN'S WALL
Begun in 122AD, the wall that separates Scotland and England was built to defend the northernmost part of Emperor Hadrian's kingdom. Today a hike along the remnants of the 117km Roman wall takes about seven days.

WALL OF BABYLON
Dating back to 575BC, this structure 85km south of Baghdad protected one of the original Wonders of the World: the city of Babylon. Its creator King Nebuchadnezzar double- and even triple-fortified the wall, and at some points it was 30m high. The ruined Ishtar Gate, formerly one of the wall's most spectacular features, has been reconstructed in the Pergamon Museum, Berlin.

'It took me six months to walk the Great Wall of China'

When Tarka L'Herpiniere asked me to walk to the North Pole with him three days after we'd met, I only agreed if we could do something easier first. On my list of places I wanted to see was the Great Wall of China, so I suggested that – though I probably just had a few days of walking and taking some pictures in mind.

Tarka, however, found out that no one had ever walked the full length of it before, and thus began seven months of training. I had to put on three stones in bodyweight because I was going to lose so much once we started. You can put it down to pure vanity, but having to gain weight was the hardest part of the preparation for me because for five or six years as a model I'd made a living by being super-slim.

When I planned the trip – as I have done for all our subsequent adventures – I did it as if I were doing it for someone else. Complete naivety is bliss, because it means that in the run-up I can be excited instead of worried. The worry only came on the flight to China, especially the last leg flying over the Gobi Desert and seeing the route we'd be spending the next six months walking back across. There wasn't a whole lot there, and I had no comprehension of how I could do it. I cried the whole flight.

When the taxi driver dropped us off at the wall's most westerly point we couldn't convince him to leave us. Another driver turned up and they were arguing about these two westerners who were trying to convince them that we'd be fine.

We headed out with as much water as we could carry and after a few days bumped into a shepherd who showed us how to get water from a plant. I don't know if that was what did it, but two days later I was very ill with gastroenteritis and dehydration and kept passing out. We were miles from anywhere, so Tarka made me a makeshift camp, left me the phone and set off in search of a road. Eventually he found one, flagged down a bus and rather forcefully coerced them into driving across the desert for me, all using hand gestures because we didn't know the language.

It was a five-hour drive to the hospital, where I spent two days on a drip. Then Tarka said, 'Right, let's carry on', so we took a taxi to where the bus had picked me up

The Great Wall was constructed in the third century BC as a means to prevent barbarian nomads entering the Chinese Empire. It never effectively stopped them, but became a pyschological barrier between China and the world

and had the whole saga of trying to get the driver to leave us again.

We were averaging about 20 miles per day, and for the first month we would often walk at night because it was so hot during the day. We'd camp on or next to the wall. There is no actual wall about half the time; you're just following a map. Even most of the better-preserved bits are little more than a mound or a hedgerow – the wall that people know from those majestic photos accounts for just a tiny percentage of it.

As we headed east we started to see more people, and they would do anything for us. For most of the journey they would feed us and insist on us sleeping in their homes – two or three generations would typically share a one-room house with a large concrete bed that we'd all line up on like sardines. They'd never seen a westerner before and they didn't want us to leave.

I think my favourite moment was the day we'd been scrabbling through undergrowth just trying to find a way up yet another mountain and then, when we got to the top, finally seeing that view that everyone's seen photos of – the wall snaking off over mountain after mountain into the distance. It came about four months in and it was a real 'wow' moment. When I look back now the whole trip is full of amazing memories, but if you read my diaries from the time I'm crying every day. I was like a walking zombie half the time.

About 1km from the end I got really emotional, as I knew my mum and dad would be there. And so I finished as I started – in tears – as I embraced them, only to see them shrink back because of the stench. We'd had one set of clothes and literally two or three showers in six months, so the smell was pretty horrific.

I've come to realise that what I most love about adventuring is the memories you get afterwards; no one can take them from you. Whenever I set a new goal and people say, 'Isn't that going to be miserable?' I know the finished feeling, and that's what drives me. It's that warm feeling that you just wouldn't get without the hardship.

You also learn so much more about yourself on every trip, and how incredible the human body is. Every time I think my body's about to break, I've now learned I'm nowhere near its limit.

When it comes to adventures, I'm a see-what-comes-next kind of person, so if someone says, 'Do you want to join this ocean rowing team?' it gives me the freedom to say yes or no, whereas if I had more of a well-defined goal I might be blinkered to other opportunities. Although that could just be my excuse for not having a plan. ◆

INTERVIEW BY MIKE PEAKE. ILLUSTRATION BY DAVID MAHONEY

KATIE-JANE COOPER

In late 2006, this horse-loving fashion model was inspired to walk the Great Wall of China with a dashing young explorer she'd just met. Despite – or possibly because of – their gruelling six months together, they went on to get married. Today, Katie is an accomplished explorer, but it is that trek across the Far East's most mystical of structures that still brings a tear to her eye…

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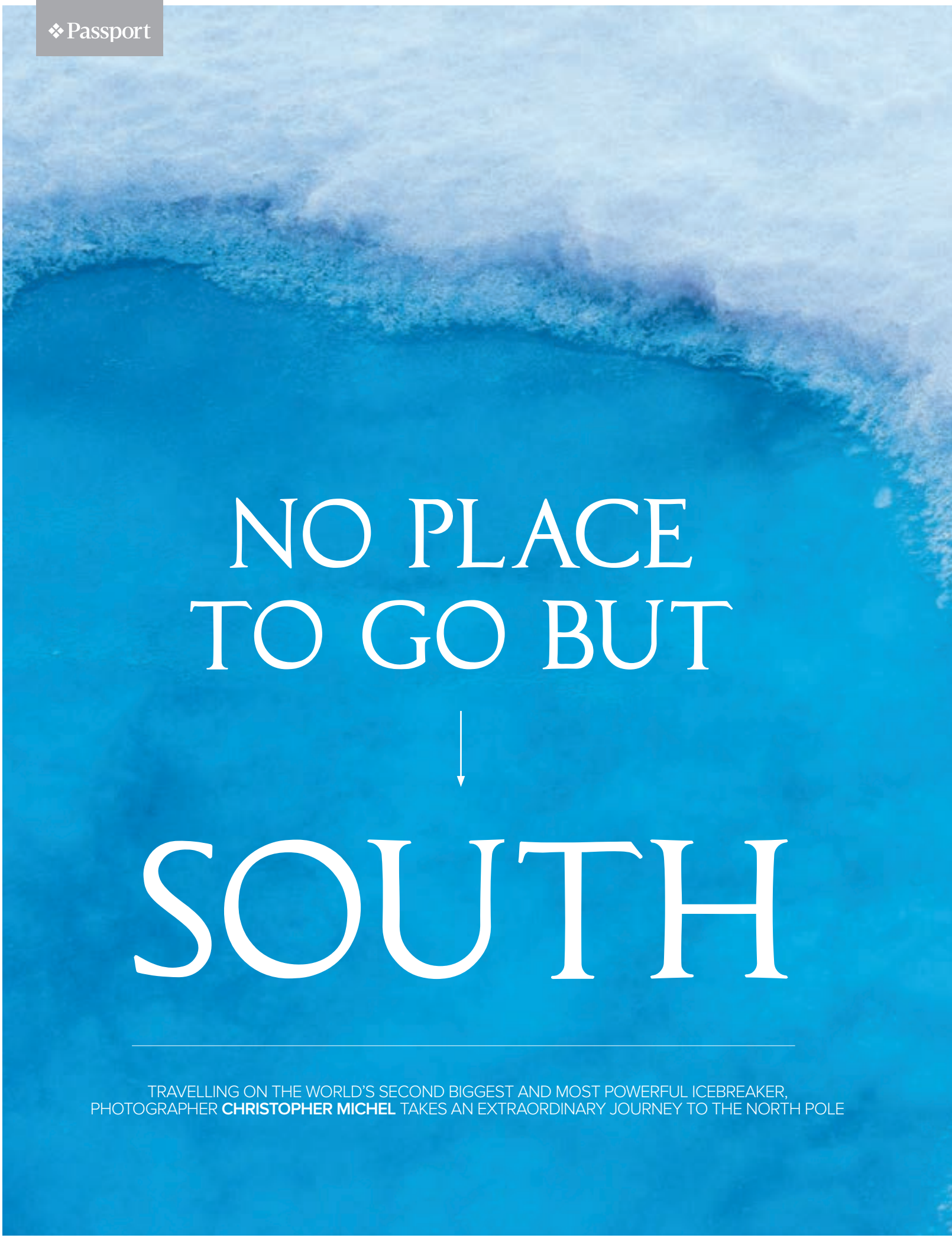
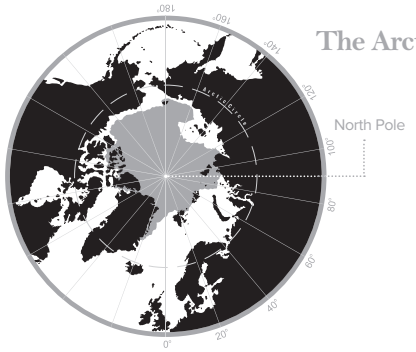
PHOTO: CHRISTOPHER MICHEL



NO PLACE TO GO BUT SOUTH

TRAVELLING ON THE WORLD'S SECOND BIGGEST AND MOST POWERFUL ICEBREAKER, PHOTOGRAPHER **CHRISTOPHER MICHEL** TAKES AN EXTRAORDINARY JOURNEY TO THE NORTH POLE



The sun hasn't set here in months. I'm sitting in absolute silence on a bright white plain of gritty ice crystals on a melting ice floe 14,000 feet above the sea floor. In the distance, I can see the ship that brought me here and my Russian guide with a gun, here to protect me from hungry polar bears. I'm at the North Pole – a place so far away in distance and experience from the modern world it's hard to know what to expect. A terra incognita of fantasy and saga, the North Pole is home to the narwhal, the aforementioned polar bears, and maybe the odd elf and his boss. But until relatively recently, this desolate, unfathomable cold land was virtually unknown to man.

In 1968, just one year before Neil Armstrong walked on the surface of the Moon, the first confirmed surface conquest of the North Pole was made by Ralph Plaisted. He arrived over the ice by snowmobile. It had already been 50-odd years since Roald Amundsen walked upon the land-locked South Pole. The North Pole is on water, requiring expeditions to traverse both ice and ocean, making it more challenging to get to. Today, the North Pole has been visited by thousands of people – researchers, military personnel, explorers and a few brave tourists. They arrive by submarine, aircraft and icebreaker. It's estimated that there have only been just over 100 visits to the North Pole by a surface vessel. I'm on the 115th.

If you want to take a surface ship to the North Pole, you'll need the biggest, baddest, most powerful icebreaker in the world. Fortunately, the Russians have this covered. I'm travelling on the *50 Let Pobedy* ('Fifty Years of Victory'), one of six Arktika-Class nuclear-powered icebreakers operated by Rosatomflot (the Russian State Atomic Energy Corporation's fleet). With two nuclear reactors, she generates 75,000 horsepower (that's equivalent to over 200 Chevy Suburbans) and is capable of breaking ice ridges almost 30 feet thick. During the summer, Rosatomflot partners with polar experts Quark Expeditions to bring a small number of tourists, explorers and scientists to the North Pole. The rest of the year, *Fifty Years of Victory* clears ice in the increasingly accessible and valuable waters above the Arctic Circle.

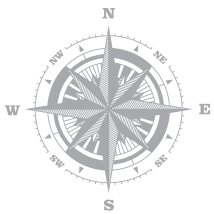
We sail from a closed nuclear facility in Murmansk, through the Kola Bay and onto the Barents Sea. The Kola Peninsula is brimming with Russian warships, shipwrecks, and curious communications facilities. As the Earth warms, Arctic ice is melting at an alarming rate, making the once inaccessible Arctic the next major battleground for natural resources and national security. Russia has recently filed a petition with the United Nations claiming exclusive economic access to 463,000 square miles of Arctic territory, including the North Pole. Natural gas reserves in this area have been valued in excess of $25 trillion. It's a new Cold War.

Two days out from Murmansk we start to encounter sea ice. Each degree of latitude brings more ice and more mystery. As the ice thickens, we enter the dominion of *Ursus maritimus*, better known to you and me as the polar bear. They may look sweet and cuddly but don't be fooled – polar bears are the apex predators of the Arctic. Humans are food, just like every other living creature on the ice. Unfortunately, these magnificent lone wanderers are suffering the effects of Arctic warming. Climate change is the single most significant threat to their survival; it's estimated that by 2050, 30% of the world's 26,000 polar bears will be gone. As the planet warms and sea ice disappears, it takes away the drifting platforms they need to hunt seals. Worryingly, recent projections even indicate that the Arctic could be ice-free for five months of the year (in the summer when polar bears need to hunt after their winter fast) by the middle of this century.

Evolution at the extremes has led to some of the most incredible creatures on Earth. Along with the occasional seal and polar bear, small herds of walruses with their >

There have been only just over 100 journeys by surface vessel to the North Pole. I'm on number 115

PREVIOUS SPREAD: a lone female polar bear circles the boat. TOP RIGHT: captain of *50 Let Pobedy* Dmitry Lobusov. RIGHT: the powerful icebreaking vessel



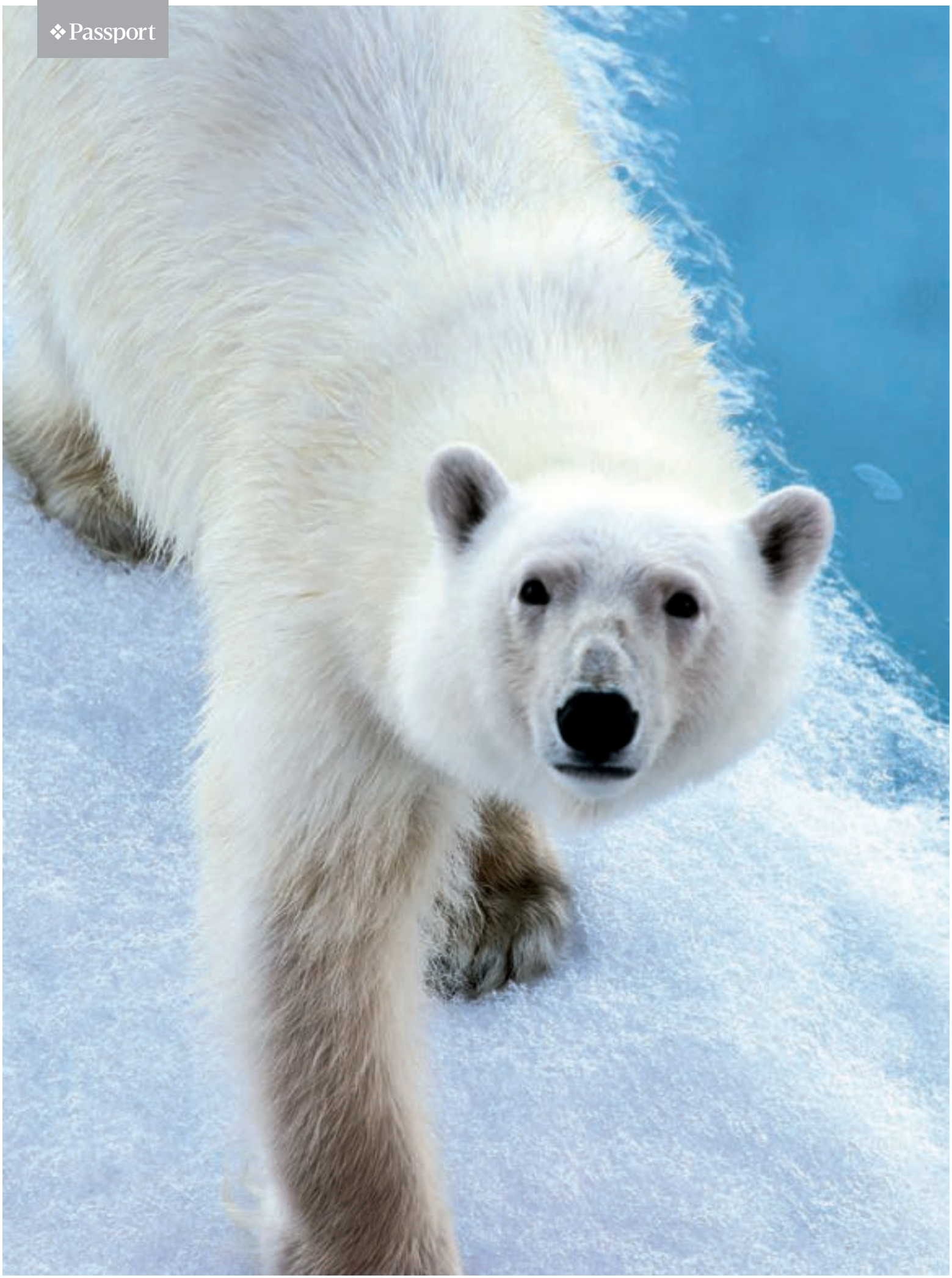
LOOKING FOR THE NORTH POLE?
Head north, yes? Well, sort of. The Earth's poles tend to wander by a few centimetres each year. For most of the 20th century, the North Pole drifted west by 10cm a year, but since 2000 it's been heading east at a rapid clip of 17cm. This tilting of our planetary axis is due to redistribution of water with the melting of the Greenland Ice Sheet, a result of climate change.

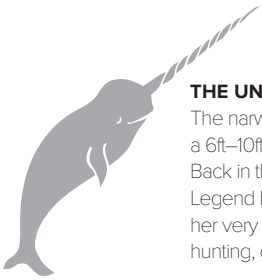
LEFT: Bob Headland, Senior Associate of the Scott Research Institute at the University of Cambridge. RIGHT: walruses relax on the ice when not diving for molluscs

gnarly, foot-long tusks can be seen along the seemingly endless ice floes. These tusks are used to help them climb out of the water onto the ice and, in males, to maintain territory and protect their harem of females.

If you don't have a drone to explore the islands, a 70s-era Russian MI-2 helicopter will do just fine. Stepping aboard this vintage helicopter requires the suspension of one's normal life-preservation instincts – pay no attention to the duct tape! It's totally worth it. These shipboard helicopter pilots are some of the best in the world – and the scenery is out of this world.

As we approach the pole, the ice thickens dramatically. Almost every other ship in the world would be stuck (or sink) in this kind of ice. The *Fifty Years of Victory* is so powerful, she barely shudders as she smashes through the floes and pressure ridges. After five days at sea, we arrive at 90° north on an absolutely perfect, crystal-clear morning. Reaching the North Pole has a peculiar quality as it's more of an idea than an actual, recognisable place. There is no research base, historical marker or any other indication that you've arrived anywhere special, other than your GPS saying 90.00°N. So, once we found thick enough ice to disembark, the first order of business was to plant a big, red 'North Pole' sign at the spot. >





THE UNICORN OF THE SEA

The narwhal, a small whale that lives in the chilly waters of the Arctic Circle, has a 6ft–10ft long tusk, a trait that earned it the nickname 'the unicorn of the sea'. Back in the 16th century, they were often believed to possess magical powers. Legend has it that Queen Elizabeth I shelled out £10,000 to get her hands on her very own narwhal tusk. Sadly today narwhal numbers are in decline, due to hunting, climate change and overfishing of halibut, their main source of food.

The poles attract some of the most interesting characters in the world, such as legendary polar historian and explorer Bob Headland. Senior Associate of the Scott Polar Research Institute at the University of Cambridge, primarily his work focuses on the human effects of the polar regions. He also works with Quark Expeditions, educating intrepid travellers about the history of polar exploration. Headland isn't the only character I meet on this trip. Forget Captain Ramius and *The Hunt for Red October*, the captain of *Fifty Years of Victory*, Dmitry Lobusov, is the real deal – extremely competent, extremely serious and the unequivocal boss. I decided not to wait for a smile before I snapped his picture.

'No place to go but south' is a standard-issue joke at the North Pole, and after just a day of exploring the *Fifty Years of Victory* had no option but to do just that, heading south for the 1,500-mile journey home to Murmansk.

There are few things more beautiful than ice. With 24 hours of daylight, the view from the ship was an ever-changing kaleidoscope of geometric shapes and blue-green colours. It was hard to sleep with the idea that you'd miss even a single second of the drama unfolding outside in the midnight sun.

Along our route home, we stopped to explore Franz Josef Land, one of the most remote and mysterious archipelagos in the world. These Russian islands tell a magnificent story of flora, fauna, military bases, polar history and abandoned research stations. Shore landings at Franz Josef Land are conducted by Zodiac or helicopter. The islands were used extensively by the Soviets for military and research purposes; entire bases lie abandoned and virtually untouched from the days of the Cold War. As we turned south again for the last time, Franz Josef Land gave us a glimpse of her best – a glassy sea mirroring the hauntingly beautiful Arctic sky.

One of our last nights at sea was one of the most memorable – a close encounter with a female polar bear. She spied (or smelled) us from a mile out and came right toward us – probably looking for a midnight snack. Pretty gutsy to take on a nuclear icebreaker, but she approached unafraid, making eye contact with me and others on deck. After an hour or so of trying to get inside, she walked slowly away – occasionally glancing back at us. To me, the message was clear: this is her realm, not ours. ◆

christophermichel.com, *quarkexpeditions.com*

PREVIOUS SPREAD: a phone box at the North Pole?
TOP LEFT: the serene beauty of the Franz Josef Land archipelago

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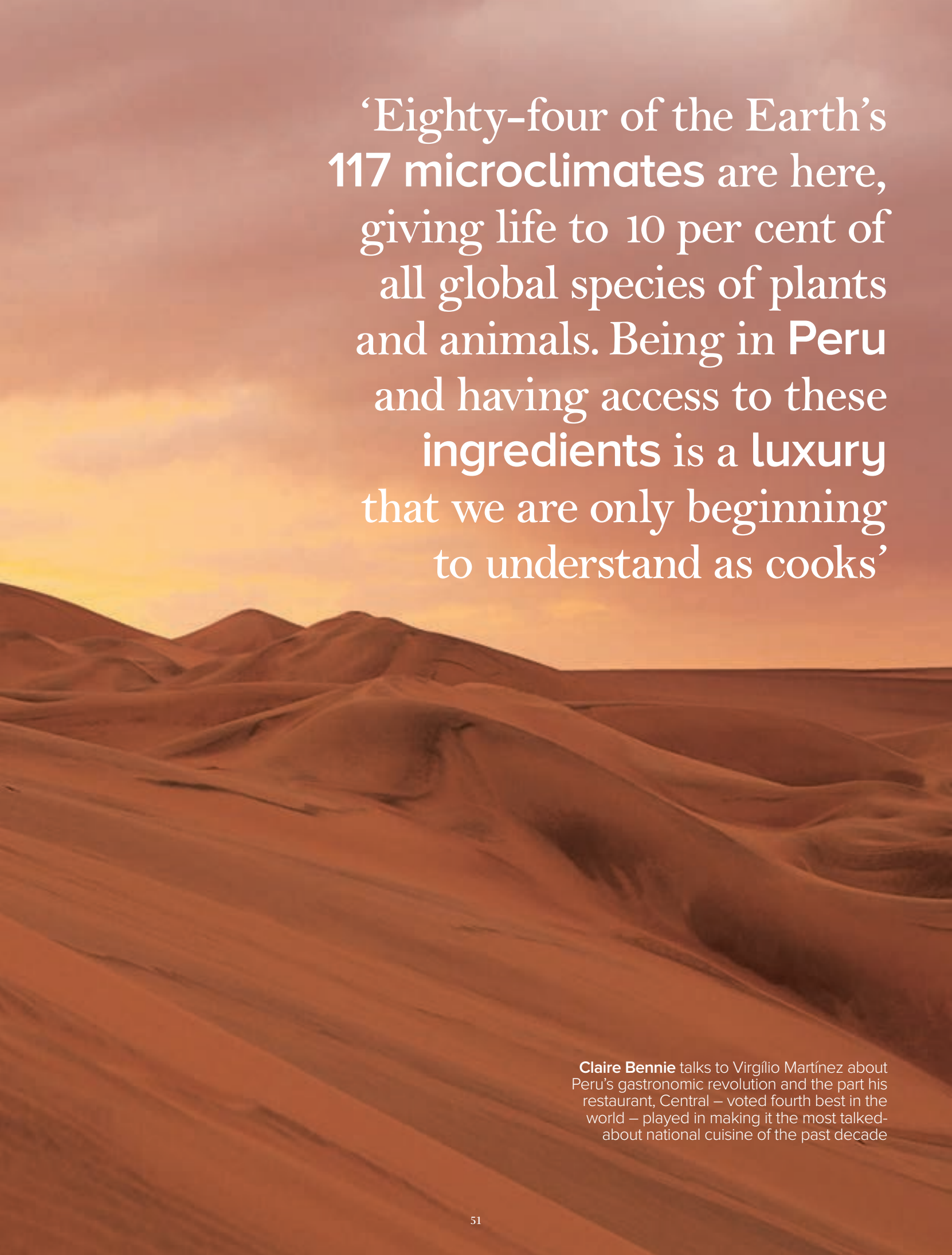
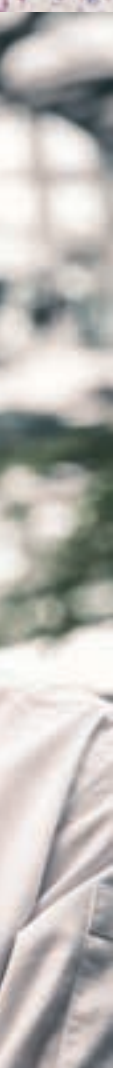


‘Eighty-four of the Earth’s **117 microclimates** are here, giving life to 10 per cent of all global species of plants and animals. Being in **Peru** and having access to these **ingredients** is a **luxury** that we are only beginning to understand as cooks’

Claire Bennie talks to Virgílio Martínez about Peru’s gastronomic revolution and the part his restaurant, Central – voted fourth best in the world – played in making it the most talked-about national cuisine of the past decade



'I hate it when people say, "Oh, Peruvian food, it's the new trend right now",' says chef Virgílio Martínez. 'Everyone's been talking about it for about 10 years – it's just that they didn't really know what was happening in South America until recently, and the world is always looking for something new. I think Peruvian cooking is – and has always been – very honest. We just explore our biodiversity, and we're lucky that we always find really special ingredients. It's not a trendy thing.'

Martínez might dislike the term 'trend', but there's no denying that Peruvian cuisine has become exceptionally popular over the past few years. Head to any major city – London, Paris, New York, Singapore – today and you'll have your pick of Peruvian restaurants. Which is quite some feat considering as recently as 20 years ago visitors to the most biodiverse country on Earth were few and far between. A dangerous place that struggled with terrorism – the Shining Path guerrillas waged a bloody insurgency in the country during the 1980s and 1990s – meant people weren't even coming here for Peru's magnificent landscape or the mystical Inca ruins, let alone for the country's rich cuisine. But over the past decade, political stability, growing infrastructure and a blossoming economy have encouraged more tourists to visit. Even so, in the beginning locals were more likely to take them to French or Italian restaurants – Peruvian restaurants were seen as too basic and unrefined for the new arrivals.

'Peruvian cooking is very honest. We explore our diversity and we're lucky we always find really special ingredients'

Change came thanks to a chef called Gastón Acurio, the man who mentored Peru's chef-of-the-moment Virgílio Martínez. After training at some of the top restaurants in France (including three-Michelin starred Tour d'Argent), Acurio returned to Lima in 1994 to open his own restaurant – but serving fine French classics, not Peruvian food. It wasn't until 2000 that he dabbled in his native cuisine, at Astrid y Gastón, whose success in Lima spawned a sister restaurant in Bogota, Colombia. This was headed up by Acurio's protégé, Martínez. This was the first time that Martínez had a chance to cook Peruvian professionally, but alas it wasn't in his home country. 'It was difficult to cook Peruvian food outside of Peru,' he says. 'We lacked the produce to make Bogota work. Even though the restaurant was packed every night, I felt like I was cheating.' Which is why Martínez knew he had to return to Lima and pursue his own project. In 2008 he opened Central (now the fourth best restaurant in the world in the 50 Best Restaurants in the World list). It was perfectly timed. That year also saw the arrival of the country's first food festival, Mistura (co-organised by Acurio), a celebration of the diversity of Peruvian food where flavours, textures and dishes from all across the country were served up in food trucks and glitzy restaurants. The Peruvian dining revolution was starting to come together.

But we're getting ahead of ourselves. How did a promising young skateboarding star become one of the greatest chefs of a generation – and introduce Peruvian food to a world of curious foodies? 'Skateboarding became my life and helped give me a sense of creativity,' says Martínez of his younger self. 'When you're skateboarding you're always performing. You need to be imaginative to find spots to skate, you have to work hard and commit, and you have to work in teams with different types of people. Looking back, I can see the foundation of how I work in the kitchen now forming then.' But at 17, in front of potential sponsors at a skate park in California, Virgílio Martínez fell in the middle of a 360° spin on a half-pipe. He broke his shoulder. Two weeks later, he broke the other one. 'It was time to rethink my options,' he says.

But that didn't include cooking – at least not yet. His father and brother, both lawyers, were keen that the youngest Martínez follow in their footsteps. He enjoyed studying, but knew that law meant and a future of sitting in an office.

'When I was younger, whenever I could, I used to surf in San Bartolo, a beach town south of Lima,' he says. 'I would >

PREVIOUS PAGES, LEFT TO RIGHT: Miel en la Jungle with honey and cocona fruit; the red desert of Orilla. THIS PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: terraced farming on the Andean foothills; Papa Voladora, named after the main ingredient, a potato that grows like a fruit, hanging from the branch; chef Virgílio Martínez; Recolección de Cushuro – cushuro is an edible Andean bacterium

PHOTOS: ERNESTO BENAVIDES, JIMENA AGOIS, HELGE KIRCHBERGER

CENTRAL
Explore the exquisite cuisine of highly acclaimed Peruvian chef Virgílio Martínez in this beautiful new book (£39.95, Phaidon)

paddle my board up to a boat where the fishermen were eating ceviche with fish they had just caught. Those were the first ceviches I'd ever tried. In small shacks on the shore I would have *arroz con mariscos* (seafood rice), or be shucking oysters, sea urchins and clams, and eat them raw. I appreciated the freedom I had then. Cooking in Peru then was not like it is now. There were no famous chefs or culinary figures to look up to. I wasn't even particularly passionate about cooking, I just wanted to get away. I read gastronomy books all the time and I wanted to learn more and get to know the world. Studying law prevented that, so I dropped out. With no options in Lima, I enrolled in culinary school in Ottawa, Canada.'

After a year in Ottawa, 19-year-old Martínez transferred to another cooking school in London. He learned the secrets of sophisticated French cuisine at the Ritz ('My eyes began to open to the possibilities of what cooking could accomplish') but when his visa was up, he didn't feel he had achieved everything he'd set out to do. So, when his flight from London to Lima stopped over in New York, Martínez found he couldn't get on that second flight. He took a job at Lutèce, one of the best restaurants in the city at the time. 'I worked hard to stay organised and to understand the balance of flavours. I made countless lobster risottos, tuna mille-feuilles, and consommés. I worked with precious ingredients I was not used to, like cheeses and wines from France, the best black truffles from the Dordogne, tuna from Japan and porcini from Italy. And I was grateful for all of it.'

After New York, Virgílio Martínez returned to Peru and started working with Gastón Acurio. 'From Monday to Friday I worked at the first Astrid y Gastón, which at the time was still leaning towards French cooking,' he says. 'Gradually, Acurio introduced Peruvian dishes like *lomo saltado* [beef stir fry] to the menu and started to Peruvianise everything, such as replacing mayonnaise with huancaina, a spicy, creamy sauce from the Andes. I didn't understand it at the time – I still had this illusion of French superiority and I wasn't quite ready to part with it. Yet at the same time I could appreciate that Gastón was building something different. I'm very grateful to this day to have witnessed that process from the beginning and to have been able to watch an empire being built as he rallied the whole country around our food.' It was then that Martínez went to Bogota to work at the new Astrid y Gastón, and subsequently to open a branch in Madrid. 'Why was I cooking Peruvian food in Spain when the availability of the ingredients was so limited?' he says. 'I knew I had to go the source.' >

RIGHT: a colourful collection of corn.
FAR RIGHT: Amazonía Roja, made with paiche, an enormous fish from the Amazon

A GUIDE TO PERU'S THREE KEY INGREDIENTS

Potatoes

There are said to be more than 4,000 varieties of potato growing in Peru. Martínez says he's worked with 400 kinds, and his team employ 50 different techniques to prepare the spuds.

Corn

First farmed here in 1200, there are more varieties of corn (55) than anywhere else in the world. They come in a rainbow burst of colours: white, yellow, purple, red and black.

Quinoa

These edible seeds have become so popular in recent years that the UN called 2013 'the year of quinoa'. First domesticated 4,000 years ago, it's been a staple of Peru's diet ever since.

Virgílio Martínez opened Central to little fanfare in an old house with trees growing in one corner, a spacious outdoor area and the sweet, salty scent of the nearby sea. It was just right – although it took a little while for the food to reach similar levels of perfection. 'Our food was confused,' he admits. 'I kept bringing in European ingredients and mixed in Thai flavours and things from my experiences abroad.'

Although Central's unveiling coincided with those first few exciting years in Peru's culinary transformation, shortly after it opened, permit issues meant that the restaurant had to close for five months. The enforced break gave Martínez and head chef Pía Léon (now his wife) a chance to re-evaluate what they wanted to achieve.

'Before I started the restaurant, I travelled to lots of different parts of Peru. This inspired us to take a different approach,' says Martínez. 'I began to think about a research arm of the restaurant that could explore Peru's biodiversity. But as a cook I didn't know where to start.' This was the beginnings of Mater Iniciativa, Martínez's transformative quest to find ingredients in their native habitat. Again he took time away from the kitchen to cross Peru, looking for culinary inspiration. 'Seeing wild cacao beans or Amazonian fish eating fruit that had fallen into the water was unbelievable,' he says. 'We found more people who appreciated what we were doing. But we had to create a structure where I could leave the restaurant to travel around Peru on research trips. We had to separate Mater from the restaurant and put together the right team – an interdisciplinary group of specialists, ranging from forest engineers to anthropologists. The kitchen needed to wait until all of the research was ready before trying to pull it into the menu.'

The result cultivated a totally different approach to the menu. At Central there are 16 different courses, and each course comes from a different Peruvian ecosystem. 'Altitude kept appearing over and over again,' says Martínez. 'Peru's topography is uneven, which may sound chaotic or unwelcoming, and yet it is anything but.'

'Not a single ingredient is more prized than another. Respecting the harmony of the dish is stronger than the flavours'

Once Martínez and his team decided to organise the menu according to altitude, he says it wrote itself. 'Not a single ingredient is more prized than another,' says Martínez. 'When we discover these groups of ingredients together and bring them back into the kitchen to find a way to harmonise on the plate, it doesn't always happen instantly. We could swap one ingredient for another – something from outside their realm of origin – and the entire dish would taste better. Yet respecting this harmony is stronger than the flavours.'

In 2012 Central was named the best restaurant in Peru. In 2013 it just squeaked into The World's 50 Best Restaurants at number 50. By 2015, it was named the best restaurant in Latin America, and fourth best in the world. How can Martínez top all of this in the coming year? First things first, he's investing further in Mater Iniciativa (which is currently run from the corner of Central's dining room) by relocating it to Cuzco, to be closer to the plentiful fauna and foliage of the interior. Central is also relocating to a larger space. And this winter – Peru's summer – Martínez releases *Central*, a book that pays homage to the tales that have made his career possible. 'I think this is the perfect time to speak about what's happening in Peru,' he says. 'Most visitors go to Lima, Cuzco and Machu Picchu, but they don't get to see anywhere else or enjoy our culinary diversity. We're at the beginning of something big. It's a celebration of our natural ecosystems.' Strictly speaking, it is a cookbook, with more than a hundred recipes. But who exactly is the book for? Most of the ingredients Martínez uses in his dishes are impossible to pronounce, let alone find in your local shop. 'The stories are more important than the recipes in the book – even for us in Peru,' he says. 'It's difficult because not all the ingredients come to our kitchens. I think the book is about these ideas, the ecosystems, the biodiversity and how you can be inspired by your own surroundings. The whole philosophy of what we're trying to do is very natural, very honest. It's a book for everybody, not just chefs or experts.' ◆

centralrestaurante.com.pe

RIGHT: Diversidad de Quinuas, a dish featuring four different types of quinoa

A tour de FORCE

The latest snowsports trend? Ski touring, an exciting mix of cross-country and downhill. For the real deal, Norway's Sunnmøre Alps are the place to try it – after all, they've been doing it here for over a century, writes **Toby Skinner**

PHOTOGRAPHY **RIVER THOMPSON**

'The wildest Alpine valley I ever saw was not in the Alps, it was in Norangsdalen at Sunnmøre'

SIR WILLIAM CECIL SLINGSBY

When Sir William Cecil Slingsby first climbed Slogen mountain in central Norway in 1870, he declared the view – a spectacular straight line down the iconic Hjørundfjord – 'one of the proudest in Europe'. He also said, 'The wildest alpine valley I ever saw was not in the Alps, it was the valley Norangsdalen at Sunnmøre.'

The great Victorian mountaineer knew what he was talking about. Barely known in his native England, Slingsby is a mountaineering legend in Norway, having logged at least a dozen first ascents of mountains 2,000m or higher, all of them in central Norway – an area he had fallen in love with in his own stiff-upper-lip way. Norwegians know him as the godfather of Norwegian mountaineering. He's also regarded as one of Europe's ski-touring pioneers, having crossed the 1,550m Keiser Pass on skis in 1880.

I'm being versed on the legend of Slingsby by Brendan Slater, another English convert to Norway who knows a bit about ski touring and the unadulterated beauty of central Norway's mountains and fjords. We're sitting in the restaurant of the Hotel Union Øye, which was founded in 1891 in the small fjord-side village of Øye. The family-run hotel still has a dimly lit air of Victorian splendour, from the suit of armour in the lobby to the historical photos, the rumours of a ghost and the charming manager who looks like she's just stepped out of a Nordic-Bavarian costume drama.

Along with his wife Sissel Tangen, Slater is the co-founder of Headnorth, a new company specialising in ski-touring trips around central Norway, from the Sunnmøre Alps to Sognefjord to the south and Romsdalen to the north. We're here for a three-night taster tour around Hjørundfjord, Sunnmøre and Stranda, all of it a few hours inland from the pretty Art Nouveau town of Ålesund on the coast.

'I've travelled all my life but I've never found a part of the world as stunning as this,' says Slater. 'The Lyngen Alps and Lofoten are better known in Norway as ski-touring areas, but for me it's more spectacular here because you're looking at fjords rather than ocean, and there's more contrast. At the summit of most of the mountains here you get these classic mountain-fjord vistas, and you can ski right down to the water. There's also this great mix of old Norwegian culture and cutting-edge Scandi design. As an adventure destination, it has it all.'

If Slater has a Slingsby-esque love of the mountains and fjords, and a desire to share that with the world, he admits he's not quite got the same mountain chops. Having moved to Oslo in 2006, it wasn't until he met Tangen in 2008 that he was encouraged to try ski touring.

'I'd never skied at all, not even on a piste, and I was pretty ropey,' he says. 'I probably still am. But, you know, I still have the same wonder, because I see this place just like a traveller, and I still have that sense of awe every time I go up these mountains on skis. I just want to share this area and introduce more people to ski touring here, whether they're beginners like I was or experts. I also want to help to sell the area – I feel like some locals don't quite grasp just how special it is.'

Special it certainly is. On our first day, after a night at the Hotel Union Øye, we put skins on our skis, switch the bindings to cross-country mode and head up from the car park of the Villa Norangdal guest house to the Blæja peak at 1,142m. I'm a ski-touring novice, but it's a simple and curiously relaxing activity. We head slowly, rhythmically uphill, all the while looking at the sun glinting on the virgin marshmallow snow that we're going to ski down.

Two-and-a-half hours and 1,000m worth of suspended gravity later, we reach the summit. On the far side of the peak, the Hjørundfjord reveals itself far below, glistening among the reflected mountains. Ski touring has all the satisfaction of hiking up a mountain – except that, after that smug sense of conquering a piece of nature, you get to put on a pair of skis and point them downhill. Descending is a glorious grin-and-whoop experience, and after every section of mountain you can look up and see your tracks, including >

PREVIOUS SPREAD, LEFT TO RIGHT: Sagafjord Hotel in Sæbø; ascending the 1,142m Blaeja peak. THIS PAGE, FAR LEFT: Brendan Slater and Sissel Tangen, the married couple behind Headnorth

the odd powdery stack. That night we stay at the smart fjord-side Sagafjord Hotel in Sæbø, finishing our sauna session with a run into the Hjørundfjord in our underwear. It's not a pretty sight, but it helps contribute to a night of deep sleep.

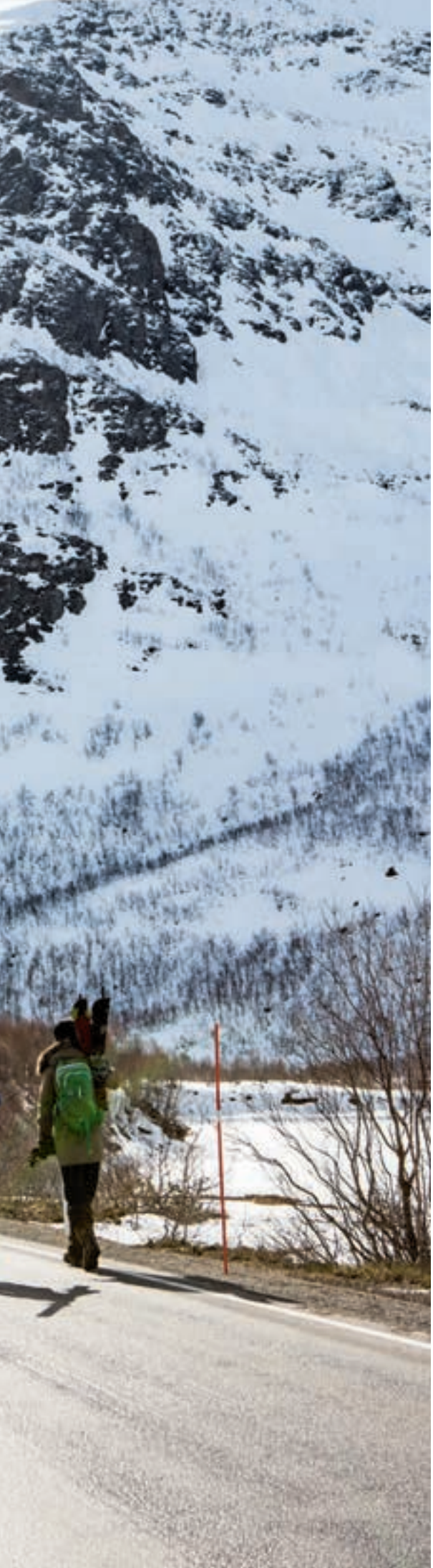
It's little wonder that people are starting to really catch on to this part of the world, which has always been best known for the Geirangerfjord, a World Heritage site and probably the most famous fjord on the planet. Åndalsnes, to the north via the serpentine Trollstigen road, is attempting to rebrand itself as "the Chamonix of the north". Sports like riverboarding (a kind of white-water bodyboarding) and caving are joining the more traditional adventures like ski touring, hiking and mountain biking. The Romsdalen area has seen an influx of cool accommodation options, such as the smart Romsdal Adventure guest house, which runs mountain bike trips and hiking tours.

Around Hjørundfjord, Slater is helping to map out the Hjørundfjord Haute Route, an epic 33km ski tour to rival the famous Haute Route in the French Alps, albeit with swankier accommodation along the way (Headnorth like to mix adventure with comfort). The timing is good. Ski touring is booming in Norway, and new ski technology means there's ever less compromise on quality of enjoyment between going up and coming down.

But it's not just adventure tourists who have been discovering this part of the world. The drive to Hotel Union Øye on the first day takes us along bleakly beautiful roads used in Norwegian dark fantasy *Trollhunter*. Matt Damon was recently in the area filming for *Downsizing*, which will be released late in 2017. The most famous use of the area by Hollywood came in last year's spooky robot thriller *Ex Machina*. When director Alex Garland wanted a gorgeous home for the movie's billionaire CEO, his production team embarked on a year-long worldwide search which ended when they found the Juvet Landscape Hotel, a stunning series of modern eco-pods at Gudbrandsjuvet in the Valldal valley. 'We knew that if we found a spectacular landscape it would provide a lot of the power of the guy,' wrote Garland in the film's production notes. 'If he owns this landscape, he must be spectacular, too.'

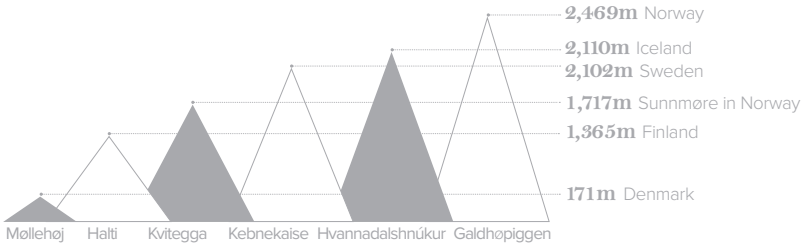
Juvet is where we stay on our final night, after an another epic day of ski touring at Ystevasshornet. We're welcomed by Knut Slinning, Juvet's owner, who has virtually nothing in common with Nathan, the manipulative billionaire CEO >

CLOCKWISE FROM RIGHT: Walking to the Ystevasshornet ski touring route; on the ferry from Sæbø; Johan Arnemo, from the Uteguiden guide company, descending at Blæja



PEAK PERFECTION

The 10 highest peaks in the Nordic region are all in south-central Norway, but that's not to say there aren't some mighty mountains out there. Here are the tallest in each country compared to Kvitegga, Sunnmøre's highest summit



in *Ex Machina*. Slinning is self-effacing and outdoorsy, with a gentle, wry smile. He's not quite part of the *Wallpaper** set who coo over his hotel in magazine spreads, and says his favourite part of welcoming people to Juvet is 'seeing their shoulders drop; just seeing that peace that comes with being here'. He insists that everyone eats together in the elegantly rustic farmhouse, whether that means former Norwegian PM Jens Stoltenberg, Scottish band Travis or Pippa Middleton.

Juvet was the result of a series of coincidences, and Slinning is at pains to play down his role in putting this part of Norway on the international design map. He worked in property in Ålesund and had a cabin nearby. By chance, in 2005 he met modish Norwegian architects Jensen & Skodvin, who were in the Valldal valley as part of Norway's National Tourist Routes project, which involved architects and designers installing architecturally striking viewing areas along the routes.

'They'd mentioned to me that they wanted to design a different hotel around the area,' recalls Slinning. 'I hadn't thought too much about it, but not long after I was on the old farm here at Burtigarden, which is on a stretch of land I've always loved. The farmer came out and just said to me, "Since you're so fond of this place, would you like to buy it?"'

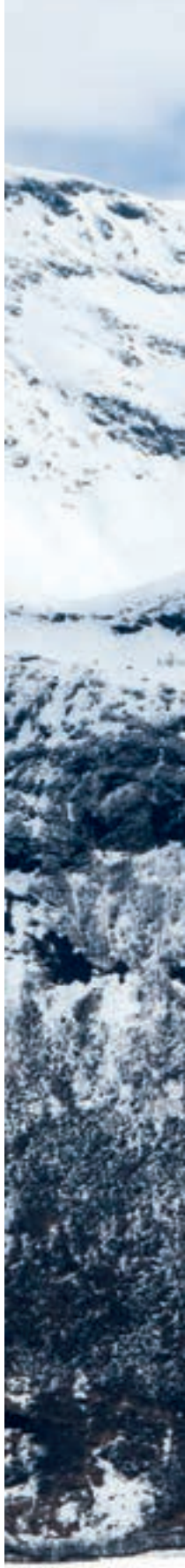
The rest is history and, with the help of funding for the tourist routes, Slinning and the architects set about designing and building the hotel, which opened in 2010. 'It was important to us that we didn't blast any rocks or alter the terrain in any way,' he says. 'The nature should be the star, and all the rooms have their own little view. When you're inside you can't see other rooms, and there are no curtains, so it feels like you're part of the landscape.'

Another aspect was respecting both the heritage of the farm and the local area. All the old farm buildings were restored, so you get a striking contrast of old and new, and the hotel tries to use local suppliers wherever possible. For example, the traditional crisp wafers served at Juvet are made 10 minutes down the road by the wonderful Nikka Myren Grønning, a 99-year-old with a glint in her eye, who has lived and baked at the same old house since the War, when she would sneak supplies out to Russian soldiers fleeing the Nazis. In her kitchen she shows us a local newspaper article about her and three contemporaries about to turn 100, and she bids us farewell with a huge hug and her only words of English: 'I love you.'

On our last night, after a gorgeous meal of smoked whale carpaccio and *bacalao* (salted and dried cod), we drink Mack beers in the outdoor hot tub at Juvet, by the glass-walled sauna and spa around which many of the scenes in *Ex Machina* were filmed. All is still, except for the semi-rhythmic rumbling of both the hot tub and the river below.

I can understand how Slingsby fell for this part of Norway, and why people like Brendan Slater are falling for it all over again. He and his wife are fantastic hosts, not least because they do still seem to take a very pure joy in it all. It's not at all hard to see why. ◆

headnorth.no



INSET, LEFT TO RIGHT: the home of Nikka Myren Grønning; the Juvet Landscape Hotel, where most of the scenes in *Ex Machina* were filmed. RIGHT: going up to the 1,142m Blæja peak in Møre og Romsdal county

Behind the mask

Venetian masks have been a big part of its festivities since the 12th century. **Mandi Keighran** meets the artisans bringing back a lost craft, and the woman who created the world's most exclusive masked ball

PHOTOGRAPHY **CLAUDIA CORRENT**

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It is an annual fantasy of masks, elaborate costumes, Prosecco and fireworks, a fairy-tale world in which imagination wraps itself seductively around reality. For two weeks every February, the annual Carnevale di Venezia (Venice Carnival) transforms the city with extravagant, nightly balls, and a sense of hedonistic luxury fills the streets.

Among Carnevale's myriad masquerade balls, there is one that is more exclusive and extravagant than any other: Il Ballo del Doge (The Duke's Ball). Created by Venetian costumier and *mascherara* (mask-maker) Antonia Sautter in 1994, it has been held every year since in Palazzo Pisani Moretta, a 15th-century Venetian palace on the Grand Canal whose rooms are decorated by Baroque artists, including Tiepolo. 'There are few occasions to live a dream with open eyes,' Sautter says. 'Il Ballo del Doge is one of those rare opportunities, and the carnival is a world of extraordinary play.'

While the Queen of the Adriatic is now indelibly associated with its carnival costumes and masks – such as the *bautta*, used by the nobility to disguise their identities and mingle with the lower classes – that rich history fell into decline and owes its revival in part to mundane economics.

It is generally accepted that Carnevale began in 1162, when Venetians celebrated a victory over the city of Aquileia in Piazza San Marco. By the 13th century, it had become tradition for the citizens of Venice to hold decadent festivities for as long as two months up to Lent. Along with Ascension in May and another celebration held in the three months to Christmas, it meant Venetians spent much of the year clad in evocative disguises created by the city's talented costumiers and mascherari. >

'There are few occasions to live a dream with open eyes. Il Ballo del Doge is one of those rare opportunities, and the carnival is a world of extraordinary play'

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THIS SPREAD: inside the queen of Il Ballo de Doge, Antonia Sautter's glorious boutique in San Marco, Venice

By the end of the 18th century, however, under the rule of the King of Austria, Carnevale had fallen into decline. By 1797, the use of masks was forbidden and the city's mascherari had disappeared. The masks and the costumes remained forgotten for nearly two centuries until the late 1970s, when Venice found itself in economic crisis. Local industry was in decline, and a push to increase tourism during the low, winter season was seen as the answer. So, the Italian government decided to revive Venice's traditions, restoring the city's architecture and, in 1979, reinstating Carnevale. Suddenly, there was a new market for masks.

It was the city's students who resurrected the craft traditions of the mascherari, and among the first to do so were two architecture students. Carlos Brassesco and Mario Belloni had met at the Lido, the city's long, sandy beach, where they were selling handmade puppets and mechanical birds to tourists. Neither was native to Venice – Brassesco had fled political repression in Argentina and Belloni had moved from Genoa after finishing his studies – but they soon found a shared passion for the city's craft traditions, and founded in 1986 one of its first ateliers, Ca'Macana, with their wives, Carolina Brassesco and Antonella Belloni.

'I fell in love with Venice straight away,' says Mario Belloni. 'There is an intangible mystery about this place, which sometimes seems to be about to reveal itself, but never allows us to grasp it. I believe that the ancient Venetians adopted the use of masks to be in harmony with the subtle game of revelation and concealment, with the adventure of discovery which one breathes in the very air of the city.'

The quartet taught themselves the old art, learning from historical paintings and drawings, and a growing body of research work driven by renewed interest in Venice's traditions. 'My father taught himself everything he knows,' says Filippo Brassesco, Carlos's son, who also studied architecture and now works with his father. 'He studied the history and learned to work with the traditional materials, papier mâché and leather.' >

THIS PAGE: Antonia Sautter creating beautiful printed silk by hand. OPPOSITE: Davide Belloni preparing a mask

He also invented new ways to create the traditional masks. The comedia dell'arte masks first worn by actors in the 16th century, for example, are traditionally made from a single piece of leather, dampened and worked over a positive form with a small hammer, a laborious practice that takes weeks of work. Wanting to shorten the time needed to create these masks to make them more affordable, Brassesco invented a way of layering small pieces of leather with glue.

He still sells masks made in the traditional way – with their grotesque features and sweeping eyebrows made of horse hair – but says the more affordable ones are much more popular. 'These days, the expensive masks are generally used only by professional actors,' he says. 'My new technique is a contemporary interpretation of the tradition to keep it alive.'

Together, the four artisans became some of the most sought-after mascherari in Venice, even creating masks for Stanley Kubrick's 1999 film *Eyes Wide Shut*. In 2006, however, the two couples went their separate ways. The Bellonis wanted to focus on making and decorating papier mâché masks – including contemporary twists on tradition, like the popular steampunk masks created by their son, Davide – and running workshops for visitors. The Brassescos, meanwhile, wanted to pursue their passion for building props, and creating sets and masks for some of the dozens of balls that take place during Carnevale.

Antonia Sautter, the queen of Il Ballo del Doge, chose the same path. Born during the month of Carnevale, costumes and masks have always been a part of her life. 'When I was a little girl, I would help my mother make the costumes for the carnival for me and my friends,' she says. 'Through the costumes, I entered many magical worlds – some historical, some fantasy. It was pure joy and happiness.'

When Sautter grew up, she refused to leave the fantastical world of costumes and masks behind. At the age of 30, she left a job in foreign sales for a Venetian glass company to open a small shop selling her costume jewellery, hats, masks and costumes. 'When something is inside of your heart, it has to come out,' she says, explaining her decision to follow her dream.

Thirty years on, her original store has grown into three boutiques in San Marco, and workshops and ateliers that employ dozens of seamstresses and artisans making masks, costumes and more. While she's protective of her practice – 'The glass-makers on Murano have their secrets and I have mine,' she says – she's proud to show the 1,500-plus costumes >

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VENICE FACE-OFF

Which mask will you choose for February's Carnevale?

Bautta

The most traditional mask, the bautta features a hood that covers the head to the shoulders with a mask over the face.

Jester

Associated with the Middle Ages, the jester or joker mask is accompanied by a garish costume and incessant laughter.

Il Dottore della Peste

The plague doctor mask dates back to the 1600s and was invented in Paris before spreading throughout Europe.

Moretta

An 18th-century oval mask worn as a form of seduction by women, it was held in place by a button gripped between the teeth.

she's designed and created over the decades, many of which are on display in her atelier and available to hire.

It's impossible, Sautter says, to determine how many hours of work go into each mask or costume. 'The ideas don't come easily,' she says. 'It is like a happiness and suffering at the same time. When you want perfection, you have to put all your energy into it. Then, hopefully, a result comes out, like an illumination.'

Yet, each year, she continues to create elaborate costumes and masks for more than 400 performers and dozens of guests (other guests choose to hire existing costumes).

It might seem like the mascherari have returned to Venice for good, and with tourism increasing every year, the market for their work has never been larger. Sadly, however, the growth of tourism in Venice – and the associated demand for cheaper masks – is threatening the craft this time round.

'Mass production has killed our art,' says Sautter, referring to the ubiquitous cheap plastic masks that have overwhelmed the city in recent years. 'It's sad to see these masks – they have no personality. I believe that the art of mask-making in Venice is in danger, but my hope is that there are still some young people who want to use their hands to create these beautiful objects.' ◆

antoniasautter.it, camacana.com, facebook.com/camacanaatelier

'The ideas don't come easily. It is like a happiness and suffering at the same time. When you want perfection, you have to put all your energy into it'

TOP LEFT: Antonia Sautter. LEFT: inside the Bellonis' mask atelier, Ca'Macana

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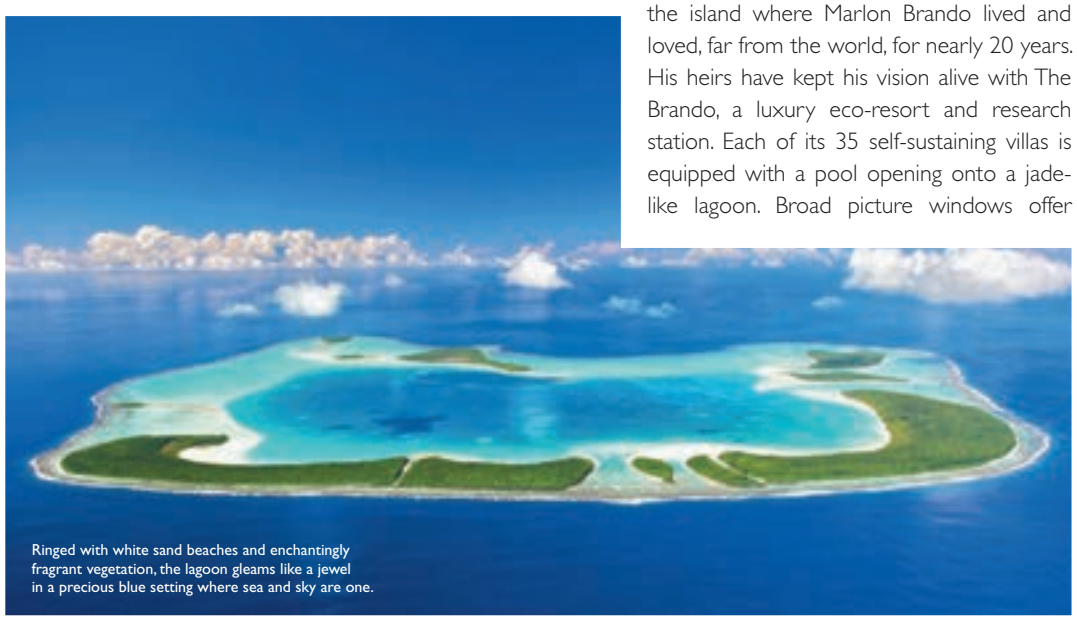
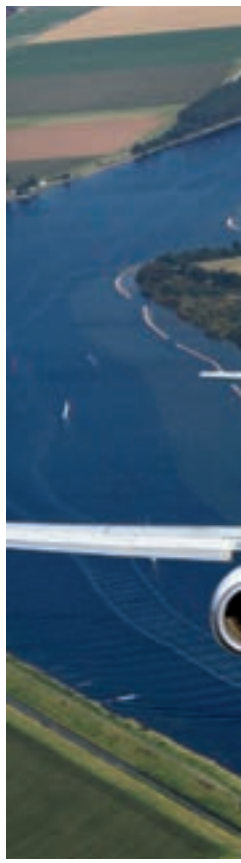


Ringed with white sand beaches and enchantingly fragrant vegetation, the lagoon gleams like a jewel in a precious blue setting where sea and sky are one.



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In May 2009, PrivatAir launched its PrivatTraining division, a service aimed at helping private jet operators manage their training requirements. As each organisation has a unique client base, PrivatAir knows how vital it is to tailor programmes to suit both the customer's needs as well as the individual company's. PrivatAir also creates bespoke programmes to help private jet operators fulfil their full legal obligations.

'We practise the skill of effective learning with customers both internally and externally, on a daily basis,' says Victor Grove, PrivatAir's Senior Vice President Training, Selection and Customer Service. 'We believe the key to effective training is to make sure that we deliver relevant content and consistent messages throughout the courses we provide. We believe we bring value to our clients by providing them with high-level, well-structured programmes delivered by a team of skilled and highly motivated individuals who make our customers feel valued and moreover empowered.'

In a fine-tuned business, every member of staff carries the company's reputation, and subsequently, that company's success. Over time, PrivatAir has distinguished itself not only for its exceptional service, but also for its high safety standards. This is why PrivatAir places the utmost importance on extensive and high-quality training of its own cockpit staff and cabin crews.

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In June 2016, PrivatAir signed a coaching contract with Air Côte d'Ivoire – the national carrier of Côte d'Ivoire, based in the economic capital, Abidjan – to train its existing crew management team as well as cabin crew members. The middle management training programme for all base managers and inflight directors aims at developing a strategy to enhance the communication between the inflight product and the different partners in the 'service excellence' chain.

For PrivatAir, training for excellence is an ongoing process, which is why they provide not only the initial training, but also refresher and recurrent training in different areas of operation, including safety training, first aid and medical, dangerous goods, and safety and security training, crew resource management, senior management, and most importantly of all, customer service. 'As Maya Angelou once wrote: "I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel",' says Grove. ◆

For more information, see privatair.com

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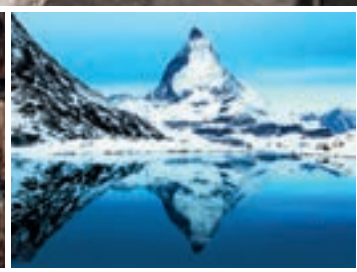

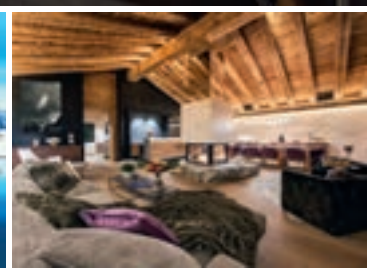

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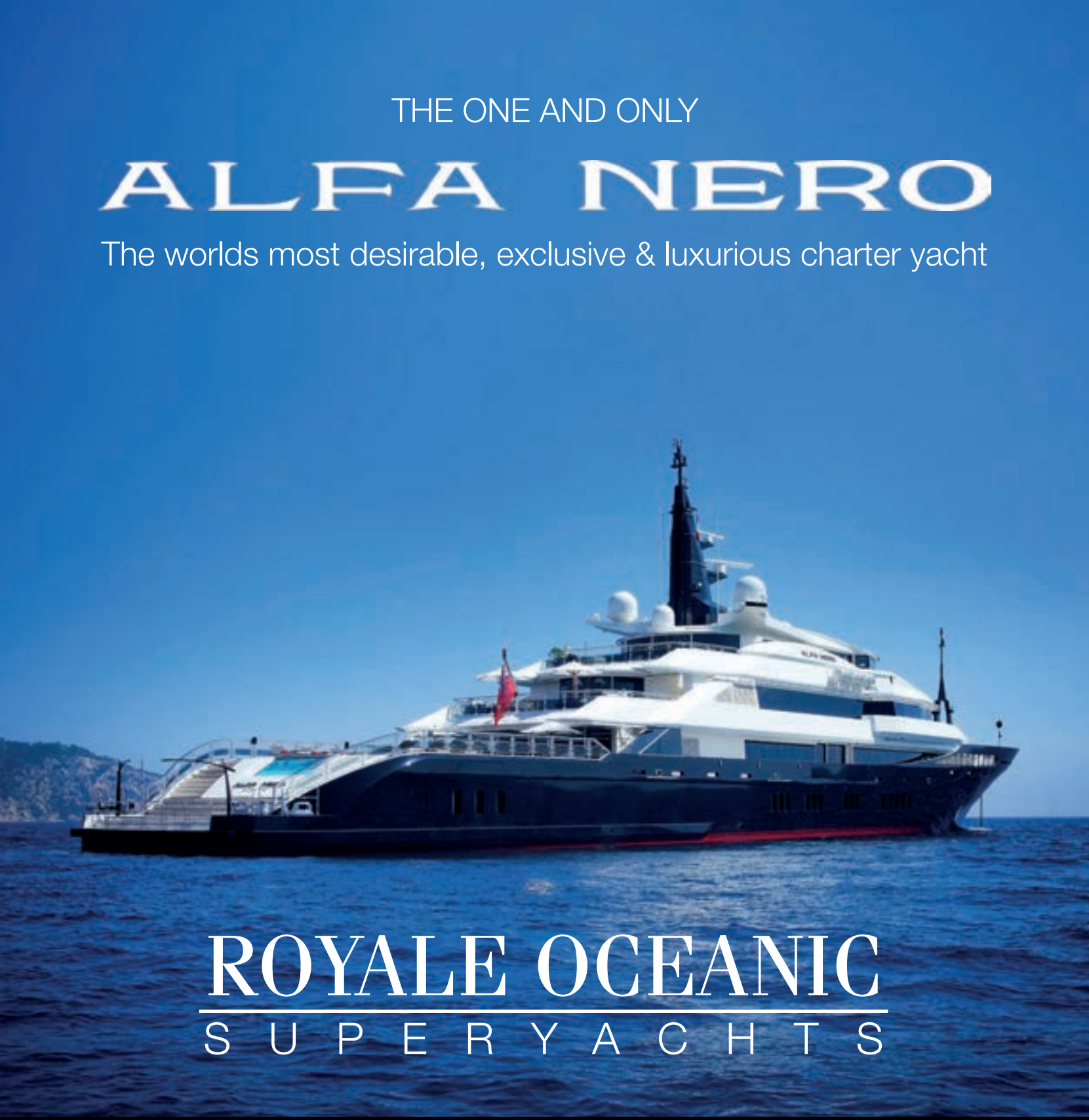

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