

PLUS: **WHAT** (Beef, Manila clams, oyster frittatas) **and WHERE** (Midtown?) **to EAT in 2018** By Adam Platt

Also: **The Great AWOKENING:** When All CULTURE Is POLITICAL Culture / **AVON** for MILLENNIALS By AMY LARocca p.32
By MOLLY FISCHER, p.68



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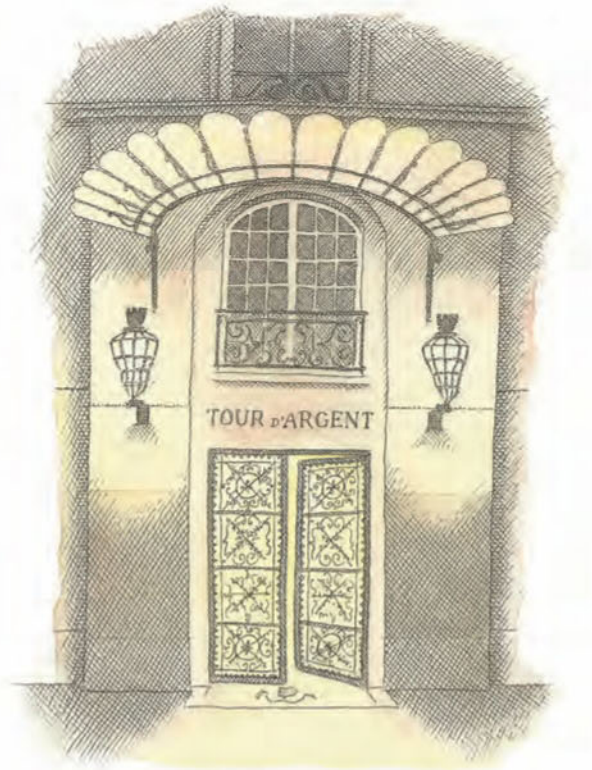
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HAIR; NAILS BY NAOMI YASUDA AT STREETERS; STYLING BY ANNA TREVELYAN. ON WEISS, SILVER EARRING BY DAVID YURMAN.

*Emily Weiss,
founder of Glossier.*

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Illustration by Jeffrey Smith for New York Magazine.
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THIS PAGE: HAIR BY TAKASHI YUSA USING L'ORÉAL AT MAM-NYC; MAKEUP BY YUKI HAYASHI AT STREETERS; SET DESIGN BY ANDREA HUELSE; COTTON SHIRT WITH ATTACHED LEATHER BUSTIER, \$1,020, AND MOIRÉ TROUSERS, \$770, AT DOVER STREET MARKET.

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Comments



1 For *New York*, writer Mattathias Schwartz and photographer Matt Black spent weeks in Puerto Rico this fall documenting the devastation wrought by Hurricane Maria (“**100 Days of Darkness,**” December 25, 2017–January 7, 2018). BuzzFeed’s Matt Ortile wrote that “**this week’s cover from *New York* is putting me through the wringer—heartbreaking photography with a quote up top that makes me want to vomit.**” And Tallahassee mayor Andrew Gillum responded, “We need this administration to finally show some compassion.” Thomas J. Field, a spokesperson for the Army’s power-restoration task force in Puerto Rico—who was quoted in the story saying, “Just because you ask for something doesn’t mean you’re going to get it. FEMA has a responsibility to the taxpayer,” in response to an unfulfilled request to have a new generator delivered to Centro Médico—wrote to clarify the context of his comments: “The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers assessed the temporary power needs for Centro Médico on September 24, noting two of three generators were operational—while also receiving intermittent power from the existing grid providing sufficient power for critical infrastructure. **The assessors determined generator requests would be better served in other facilities in need of emergency power, as there were limited generation resources on the island at the time. This prioritization was for life-saving, critical infrastructure with no power.**” Lars Anderson, deputy chief of staff at FEMA for President Obama, added: “In Mattathias Schwartz’s article he is right to point out that the initial response by the Trump administration to assist Puerto Rico after Hurricane Maria was too slow. But as we’ve seen in various types of disasters, communities, first responders, and local organizations are

most often the first to help those in need, not the federal government. The harrowing story of survival by the residents of Villa Calma that Schwartz describes epitomizes the idea of neighbor helping neighbor. But the goodwill shown in moments of crisis is not enough to make a community whole. The local organizations that bear the brunt of rebuilding need resources, and the meager pittance that has been provided thus far by the administration simply won’t get the job done. **Communities themselves are the ones that will be there for the long haul, and we need to give them what they need to rebuild, not simply throw them a few paper towels.**” This is the first feature story the magazine has also published fully in Spanish (online at nymag.com/huracan-maria), and Representative Nydia Velázquez wrote, “**Every American should read this article on what is happening to our fellow citizens in Puerto Rico—in both English and Spanish.**”

2 Kerry Howley profiled Reality Winner, an intelligence leaker unlike any we’ve seen before (“**The World’s Biggest Terrorist Has a Pikachu Bedspread,**” December 25, 2017–January 7, 2018). Edward Snowden tweeted, “If you’ve never heard the name Reality Winner, read this. If you already know who she is, reading this is even more important.” Peter Sunde, a co-founder of file-sharing website the Pirate Bay, wrote, “**The story of Reality Winner makes me think of the Stasi. After the fall of the US surveillance state, we will look back at people like her, Snowden and Manning, asking ourselves how we let a state treat them this badly. And us as detainees and property.**”

➔ Send correspondence to comments@nymag.com. Or go to nymag.com to respond to individual stories.

IN MEMORIAM



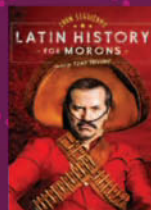
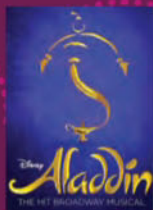
Maura B. Jacobson, constructor of *New York*’s crossword puzzle from 1980 to 2011, died on Christmas Day at the age of 91. During her 1,400-puzzle tenure, she presided over one of the most well-loved and popular features in the magazine. In those three decades (until she dropped back to alternating weeks in her final year as our constructor), she never skipped an issue, not once. **Her long-time friend Will Shortz, the *New York Times*’ puzzle editor, called her “a national treasure”—**a distinction owed mostly to her knack for creating crossword grids that were unusually dense with theme clues, shot through with a distinctive and sometimes antic whimsy. Often, she’d build the grid around a funny rhymed verse that revealed itself as the puzzle was filled in. We have a memorial essay about Maura up now at nymag.com, but for the print edition of *New York*, we decided that the best possible tribute was to allow her fans one more dose of her addictive voice. **So on page 90, we have republished the first crossword Maura created for us, which appeared in the issue of May 19, 1980.** It’s one of her rhyming-verse puzzles, and the title is “Shape-Up,” with a theme perfectly suited to the first issue of January. Our condolences and affection go out to Maura’s husband, Jerry, and her extended family.

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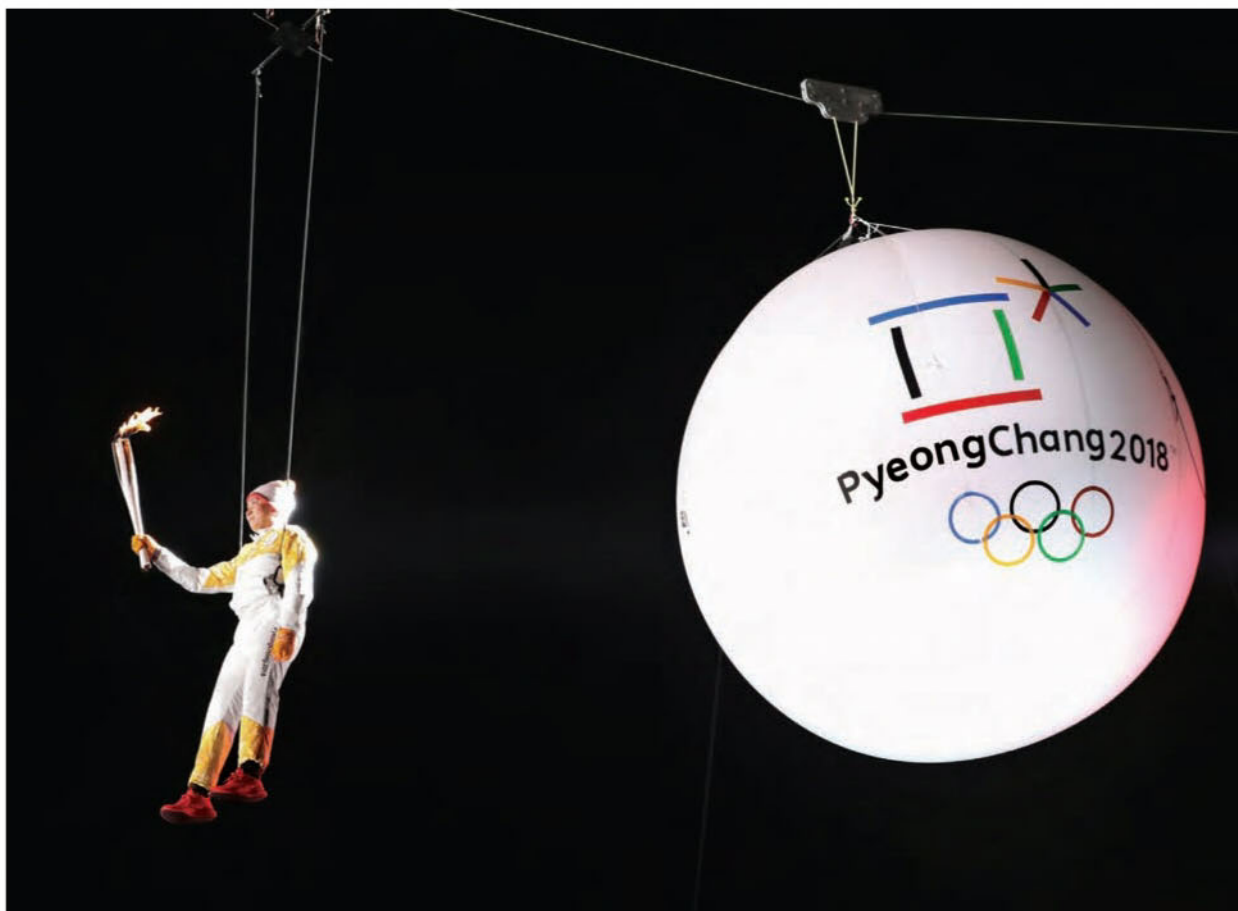
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INSIDE: The "Quiz Daddy" of HQ / A year of Trumpian inanity



Games: Will Leitch

The Dr. Strangelove Olympics

How do you watch luge in the shadow of nuclear apocalypse?

FOUR YEARS AGO, my then-five-months-pregnant wife, in the family room of the new home we had just poured much of our life savings into buying, changed the diaper of a screaming toddler and watched a man on television tell her that her husband, half the planet away, was probably about to get blown up.

The Texas Republican House representative Michael McCaul, merely the Homeland Security Committee chairman, was talking about Sochi, Russia, where I, along with thousands of other journalists, was covering the 2014 Winter Olympics. "I've never seen a greater threat, certainly in my lifetime," he said on *Fox News Sunday*. "I think there's a high degree of probability that something will detonate, something will go off, but I do think it's probably most likely to happen outside of the ring of steel"—the protective perimeter Putin had promised to thwart any terrorism. I remember getting a text from my wife as I was taking a bus home from a ski-jumping event. "Are you in the ring of steel

right now?" it said. "Just left!" I texted. She fired back: "Well get back in! You're gonna blow up!"

Panic about violence at the 2014 Olympics may seem quaint heading into the 2018 version, which will be conducted under the specter of a genuine nuclear showdown—all of South Korea would be devastated, by any account, in the event of a military conflagration between the United States and North Korea. But four years ago, the threat, and the fear, were very real too. Three weeks before those Games, the State Department warned that they were an "attractive target for terrorists." Stories of "black widow" bombers, inspired by a Chechen-separatist group that promised a "present" for tourists, dominated the airwaves. Former deputy CIA director Mike Morell told *CBS This Morning* that the Games would be "the most dangerous Olympics" of his adult life, and Maine senator Angus King said, "It would be a stretch, I think, to say I'm going to send my family over."

As long as the Olympics have been presented as a sort-of-corny-but-also-sort-of-genuinely-heartwarming beacon of global cooperation and understanding—which is to say, since forever—they have also been a security concern, particularly for Americans traveling to parts of the world where they are not particularly beloved. (Though it is worth remembering that the only terrorist attack at an Olympics in the past 45 years happened in Atlanta.) In 2014, the worry was anti-Putin separatists coming from the nearby Caucasus Mountains. In 2004, it was a lack of security forces in Greece. In 2002, it was having the Olympics in America so soon after 9/11. But the Winter Olympics are a particular worry because, well, they're the Winter Olympics: Most people don't even realize they're happening until the year turns and hey, look, here they are. They are a high-profile global target that sneaks up on you in a way that the Summer Olympics don't. Which brings us to this year, when the world will be watching the spectacle unfold on the very peninsula over which the threat of a nuclear apocalypse looms. And the United States—usually the nominal hall monitor of these pageants of global peace and prosperity—will arrive looking to the rest of the world more like a threat itself. If you thought Putin's 2014 Games were scary, wait until you put an Olympic Games less than 50 miles from the Korean Demilitarized Zone and, to quote an orange bard of our time, a little man who has a little button at his desk that may or may not work.

HOW SCARED ANYONE heading to Pyeongchang, South Korea, next month should be depends on your perspective. If you're feeling positive—and everyone's feeling positive about everything these days, aren't they?—you may note that the North recently made a rare statement of potential cooperation with the South, saying it wished success for the Olympics and would even consider sending a delegation, though no athletes from North Korea have currently qualified for the Games. It was as wide as Kim Jong-un had opened his arms to the South in years, and a cheerful South Korean governor said his country would be delighted to send a cruise ship to pick up North Korean athletes.

Then again, within hours of Kim's peace offering, Senator Lindsey Graham tweeted that allowing the North to participate in the Olympics would "give legitimacy to the most illegitimate regime on the planet" and claimed that the U.S. would be forced to boycott the Games if North

Olympic Terror

1972

The Palestinian terrorist group Black September takes 11 members of the Israeli team hostage in Munich, eventually killing all of them and a German police officer.

1987

North Korean agents detonate an explosive aboard Korean Air Flight 858, killing all 115 people onboard, in an attempt to scare teams away from attending the 1988 Olympics in Seoul.

1996

Eric Rudolph plants a pipe bomb underneath a bench in Centennial Olympic Park in Atlanta, resulting in two fatalities and 120 injured.

Korea showed up. (For what it's worth, Graham does not in fact have the power to boycott the Olympics.) And just hours after that came, of course, the Presidential Tweet of Penis Supremacy: the already infamous "please inform him that I too have a Nuclear Button, but it is a much bigger & more powerful one than his, and my Button works!" It was the tweet that welcomed us all back from the holidays stricken with that familiar fear of nuclear annihilation. U.N. Ambassador Nikki Haley, who in December said U.S. Olympics attendance was an "open question," dismissed the North Korea–South Korea talks, something few other countries have done. Four years ago, the worry was that we were wading into a regional issue that we'd pay the price for. But this year, we're the ones stirring the pot.

Perhaps predictably, tourists are not flocking to these Games. *USA Today* reported that ticket sales are 41 percent lower than organizers had expected and that demand has been lower than it was for the Sochi Winter Olympics. Would you want to go watch a sporting event 50 miles from Kim Jong-un right now? As an American?

It is worth noting that security probably won't be different at this Olympics than at any other—to a point. Vicki Michaelis, a journalism professor at the University of Georgia and a former Olympics correspondent for *USA Today* who covered nine different Games (and currently sponsors a fellowship program for college students to cover the Games for TeamUSA.org), says that there is "a knowledge that's passed from host to host that probably dictates the larger picture," but that every host country has a different culture of security. "Rio was a relaxed place," she says, "and so when you're there, you don't see the security as tight on that individual, gate-by-gate, entrance-by-entrance basis, because these are not people who are answering to Putin, or these are not people who grew up in China." In Russia, the security was so tight that some of the journalists I saw there joked that they'd always remember Sochi as the place they got groped every 15 to 20 steps in any direction.

Is that the culture of Pyeongchang? Putin rejected American assistance with security in 2014 because he wanted to show the might of his country, to prove that he could run a safe Games. But the world feels quite a bit different than it did four years ago—and not just because there won't be an official Russian delegation to play the role of global villain (because of a doping scandal, the country can only be represented by individuals who will be identified as "Olympic Athletes From Russia"). It's because the world feels like a powder keg waiting to go off at any moment. It is still likely that nothing will happen, just like nothing has happened for more than 20 years. It is still likely that this column will look ridiculous when the Games are over, like all the alarmist pieces about Sochi did. One certainly hopes so.

"I used to tell my family when I would go to an Olympics, whether it was Salt Lake City or Athens or wherever, and they were concerned: 'Look, I'm probably in the safest place on the planet for the next 17 days,'" Michaelis says. "Every country that's there has an interest in keeping it secure." But if you were asking whether or not the U.S. is currently working to make it easier for South Korea to keep the Games safer, the overwhelming perception is that it is hurting more than it is helping. Perhaps that is our new reality with everything. Why should the Olympics be any different? ■

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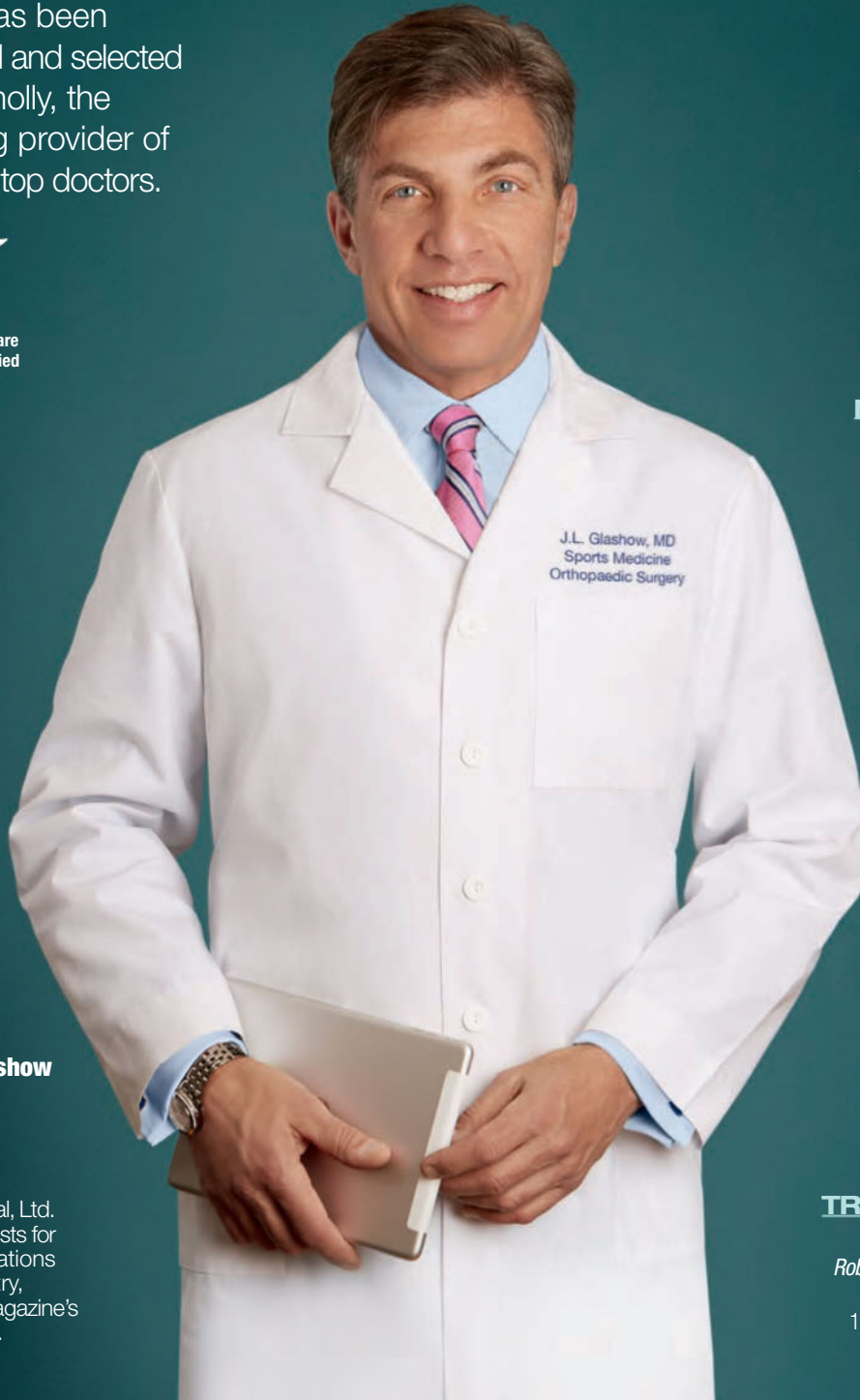


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Bloopers: Trump's Greatest Worst Hits

The number of gaffes, dubious choices, and falsehoods issuing from the president in 2017 was so high that you may have forgotten some of the less notorious ones.

By Eric Levitz

1. Where Does He Find These People?

The president's first national-security adviser was a paid agent of the Turkish government; his second communications director raised more awareness about auto-fellatio than about the Republican agenda. Trump's hires in lower-profile positions have been equally interesting:



David Friedman, *ambassador to Israel*: Trump's former bankruptcy lawyer, Friedman believes that Barack Obama is anti-Semitic; that

Israel has a legal right to annex the occupied West Bank; that liberal American Jews who disagree with him are "far worse than *kaapos*," i.e., Jews who carried out Nazi orders during the Holocaust.



The Reverend Jamie Johnson, *director of community outreach, Department of Homeland Security*: To work with skeptical

faith-based communities, Trump picked Johnson, a conservative talk-radio host who'd argued that "Islam is not our friend" and that "America's black community" had "turned America's major cities into slums because of laziness, drug use, and sexual promiscuity." (Johnson resigned in November.)



Michael Anton, *senior security adviser*: In an essay titled "The Flight 93 Election," Anton

compared conservatives in the 2016 race to the passengers of Flight 93 on 9/11: They could either "charge the cockpit"

or "die." His reasoning? "The ceaseless importation of Third World foreigners" crowding out Republicans.



Lynne Patton, *head of Housing and Urban Development for New York and New Jersey*: Patton had no

experience in government or public housing, but she'd been an event planner for the Trumps and apparently did a bang-up job on Eric's 2014 wedding.



Frank Wu, *senior Homeland Security adviser*: A former naval-intelligence officer turned right-wing radio host, Wuco has claimed

that ex-AG Eric Holder had been a Black Panther and ex-CIA director John Brennan is a secret Muslim.



Steve King, *ambassador to the Czech Republic*: As a security guard for Nixon's Committee to Re-Elect the President, King was accused of

keeping Martha Mitchell, wife of then-AG John Mitchell, in a hotel room—so she wouldn't talk to the press about Watergate—and holding her down while she was injected with a sedative.

2. The New Blacklist

There's scant evidence that the undocumented commit more crimes than any other group—don't tell Trump.

➔ ONE OF TRUMP'S early executive orders required the Department of Homeland Security to assemble a weekly list of crimes (allegedly) perpetrated by undocumented immigrants in sanctuary cities. DHS then opened the Victims of Immigration Crime Engagement Office—an entire bureau dedicated to the supposed scourge. (To quickly grasp these actions' discriminatory nature, imagine a weekly government list of "robberies committed by Jews" or, say, "sexual assaults by real-estate moguls.")



3.

Do As I Tweet, Not As I Do

Trump's views on proper presidential conduct have evolved since the Obama years.

ON GOLF

Before moving into the Oval Office, Trump tweeted his outrage about Barack Obama's "excessive" golfing (27 times).

As president, **Trump has visited a golf resort roughly one out of every four days.**

ON TRAVEL

Trump found it scandalous that taxpayers were forced to finance Obama's travels and pledged that as president he wouldn't take vacations "because there's so much work to be done." In his first 26 weeks in office, **Trump left the White House for the weekend 21 times.** His family's travel expenses are on pace to substantially exceed the Obamas' (and Trump pockets a chunk of that change by channeling it into his own properties).

ON SYRIA

In 2013, Trump tweeted that bombing the Assad regime for its apparent chemical-weapons attack would be "bad," but if Obama was set on it, it'd be a "big mistake" not to first get congressional approval. Obama didn't, in the end, order a strike. In April 2017, **Trump ordered a strike against Syria without congressional approval.**

ON EXECUTIVE ORDERS

In 2012, Trump castigated Obama's "major power grabs." In April 2017, the White House boasted to the AP that **Trump would sign 32 executive orders in his first 100 days**, "the most of any president ... since World War II."

4. Trump's Wildest Unvetted Policy Proposals

America should ...

- 1. Form a joint cybersecurity task force** with the nation (Russia) that had just used cyberattacks to influence the U.S. election.
- 2. Give the president power to "challenge" the broadcast license of any news network** that he deems irresponsible.
- 3. Make "the wall" see-through so immigration agents don't get crushed:** "When they throw the large sacks of drugs over ... you don't see them—they hit you on the head with 60 pounds of stuff? It's over." (Drugs really are, occasionally, catapulted into the U.S. But there have been no reports of agents getting beamed.)

- 4. Crush its own health-care system:** Trump repeatedly called on Republican lawmakers to spur a crisis in the individual insurance market—because, after all, the public would blame Democrats for it.
- 5. Forcibly expropriate Iraq's oil:** "If we kept the oil, you probably wouldn't have ISIS, because that's where they made their money in the first place," Trump remarked to a CIA audience. "So we should have kept the oil. But, okay, maybe we'll have another chance."

- 6. Ban transgender Americans from the military:** The glacial pace of the president's multipart policy tweets brought panic to the Pentagon last July: "After consultation with my Generals and military experts, please be advised that the United States Government will not accept or allow ...," Trump wrote. He did not complete his thought for nine minutes—and America's top military officials scrambled to ascertain whether the president was about to declare war on North Korea. To their relief, he was merely declaring thousands of U.S. troops unfit for service while falsely suggesting that "generals" told him to.

5. His Highness

Trump has called himself a "king," and Marla Maples reportedly believes her ex was a royal in a former life, but the presidency's ceremonial duties ... challenge him.

At Halloween: Handing out candy in the Oval Office, the president told the pint-size trick-or-treaters, "You have no weight problems, that's the good news, right?"



Commemorating African-American History Month: "Frederick Douglass is an example of somebody who's done an amazing job and is being recognized more and more, I notice."

Welcoming Representative Steve Scalise back to Capitol Hill, after a shooting left him hospitalized for months: "Hell of a way to lose weight!"

Signing the Book of Remembrance at Israel's Holocaust memorial: "It is a great honor to be here with all of my friends—so amazing and will never forget!"

Addressing the Boy Scout jamboree: Following a meandering rant about real-estate developer William Levitt, Trump informed the children that Levitt once had a "big yacht" where he engaged in "interesting" activities. "I won't go any more than that because you're Boy Scouts, so I'm not going to tell you what he did," the president continued.



"Should I tell you? Should I tell you?"



Honoring Native American veterans—the famed "Code Talkers": "You were here long before any of us were here. Although we have a representative in Congress who they say was here a long time ago. They call her Pocahontas."

Forgetting Ramadan: For the first time in nearly two decades, the White House didn't hold a celebration for the Islamic holy month.



6. Alienation of Affection, in Four Steps

The alliance between the U.S. and Britain is so deeply rooted it's commonly known as "the special relationship"—or at least it was.

STEP 1

After filling his administration with racist incompetents whose main qualification was loyalty to Donald Trump, the president-elect chose to **publicly pressure Prime Minister Theresa May to appoint the far-right Nigel Farage as U.K. ambassador to the U.S.** The British government politely explained the job was already taken; Farage became a Fox News commentator instead.

STEP 2

Require the press secretary to discredit Britain's intelligence service: In March, Trump announced that Barack Obama had wiretapped his phones during the campaign. The new president later revealed that this charge was based on news reports ... that he'd misread. But it was still probably true! he insisted. So, when a Fox host "reported" that Obama had enlisted British intelligence agency GCHQ to spy on Trump, Sean Spicer dutifully shared the info. GCHQ was not amused.

STEP 3

Accuse London's first Muslim mayor of indifference to terrorism hours after last summer's killings on London Bridge. That morning, Mayor Sadiq Khan told his constituents not to be "alarmed" if they noticed an "increased police presence," as it was merely precautionary. Trump's twisted translation? "At least 7 dead and 48 wounded and Mayor of London says there is 'no reason to be alarmed.'"

STEP 4

In late November, the president decided to **push out three videos from Britain First, an anti-Muslim hate group**, with titles including "Muslim Destroys a Statue of Virgin Mary!" and "Muslim Migrant Beats Up Dutch Boy on Crutches!" (The "Muslim migrant" was actually just another Dutch boy.) After May's office scolded him, Trump wrote to a Twitter account belonging to a different Theresa May, "Theresa, don't focus on me, focus on the destructive Radical Islamic Terrorism that is taking place within the United Kingdom."

72 MINUTES WITH ...

Scott Rogowsky

Playing bar trivia with HQ's "Quiz Daddy"—
the Bob Barker of our time.

BY MAX READ

THE QUIZ DADDY is not, by his own admission, a pub-quiz guy. (He's not much of a drinker.) Nevertheless, he is here at Amity Hall, an Irish pub in Greenwich Village, trying to remember the ship that took Charles Darwin to the Galápagos. "*HMS Majesty?*" the Quiz Daddy ventures. "No, not that. Darwin's ship ..." He trails off, and we sit in hard-thinking, pub-quiz silence.

This is an unfamiliar position for the Quiz Daddy. He is by trade an asker, not an answerer, of questions. In 90 minutes, at 9 p.m., 700,000 people will pick up their phones and open an app called HQ Trivia to play the second of two daily live games. The Quiz Daddy—born Scott Rogowsky—will be their host. For now, though, he's simply another contestant at a bar trivia night. "*The Beagle?* Yeah, that sounds right." I write it down (I'm his Quiz Partner for the evening).

What makes someone a "Quiz Daddy" as opposed to a mere game-show host? (Separate but related: Why did three straight female friends try to crash our interview?) In person at 7 p.m., in a slouchy HQ sweatshirt, Rogowsky is an affable but uncommanding presence; on my iPhone at nine, done up in a sharp suit, he exudes an outsize, off-kilter energy, all raised eyebrows and widened mouth. With a stuttery delivery that seems to mimic the game's not-infrequent glitches, a fondness for corny jokes, and a trace of a New York accent, he's a Borscht Belt Max Headroom. Some find him unlikable; I (and many who tune in) find him compulsively watchable. (Rogowsky says he's "not fully convinced" anyone likes him. He knows he has fans, but "a lot are in high school.")

For all his off-the-cuff weirdness, Rogowsky is serious about his work: "I put hours of prep into this sometimes." It's mostly research into the questions, but, yes, he prewrites many of his puns. "I'm doing my best to entertain," he says. What he offers is a louche nerdiness, merging the showmanship of a talk-show host with the direct-to-the-camera intimacy of a vlogger.

Nine months ago, Rogowsky, 33, was ready to leave New York. After a decade of struggling on the margins of the city's com-

edy scene and, not coincidentally, hosting a self-produced online talk show, *Running Late With Scott Rogowsky*, he planned to give L.A. a try. Then he had an audition. With ... an app?

The app was HQ, the product of the app studio Intermedia Labs, founded by the Vine creators Rus Yusupov and Colin Kroll. The premise is simple: Every weekday, at 3 p.m. and 9 p.m. EST, you open the app and answer 12 increasingly difficult questions. (Which of these animals is *not* a source of ivory? Walrus, rhino, elk. The answer is *rhino*.) Get one wrong and you're out; get all 12 right to split a cash prize with your fellow winners (the highest amount divvied up so far has been \$18,000). There is no catch. The app is free, unless you're one of the VCs who invested—the awards come directly out of the millions Intermedia raised from sponsors such as Lightspeed Venture Partners, the first Snapchat investor. HQ doesn't make money now, but if you're regularly getting 700,000-plus young people to stare at their phones for ten minutes, there are a bunch of big corporations that would like to pay you for some of that attention.

"I approach auditions like, *Welp, probably not going to get this*," Rogowsky says. Indeed, when the HQ offer came, he'd given up his New York apartment for the L.A. move, which is why he commutes to the game's Soho studio on Metro-North: He's living with his parents in Westchester. "Not in the basement," he clarifies.

For this reason and others, the months since he took the gig have been trying. "I have no time for anything," he laments; his sleeping habits are "horrendous." Also, there was the public threat to fire him. In November, Rogowsky gave an interview to the *Daily Beast*. When the reporter contacted his boss, Yusupov, for comment, Yusupov complained that the app wasn't about its *host*: If the article was published, "Scott could lose his job." After an outpouring of support for Rogowsky on Twitter (and in the app's built-in chat), Yusupov apologized.

After all, Rogowsky's now a celebrity. "Four people dressed as me for Halloween," he says, sounding awed. Better yet,

"I basically have agreed to terms" on an ongoing deal, he says, the length of which he can't specify.

He's appeared on *Good Morning America* and *NBC Nightly News*; on New Year's Eve, he popped up in a tux on my television on ABC's show from Times Square. Then he materialized again when a guest at my party broadcast a special 11:45 p.m. edition of HQ from his phone to my Apple TV. And nearly everyone stopped to play. In certain social circles—high-schoolers, college students, millennial East Coast professionals—you can set your watch by the moment people's faces suddenly drop to look at their phones.

This isn't necessarily as dystopian as it sounds: An appealing feature of HQ is its insistence on appointment times in an on-demand, asynchronous world. You literally can't play HQ alone; even if you're physically by yourself, masses of others are with you. And so is Scott. "There are some people who are, like, I never get past Q1 or Q2, but I just like to see a man talking to me! I'm lonely!" And, of course, some of the app's success can be chalked up simply to the fact that twice a day a little man shows up inside it to give you a chance at free money.

For the record, Rogowsky would be decent on *Jeopardy!* After an early stall on the *HMS Beagle*, he mows through the round with assurance: The democratic constitution of what country was signed in 1978? Spain. "Can't Help Lovin' Dat Man" is from which musical? *Show Boat*. "I love books of miscellany and random facts and knowing shit," Rogowsky says. "I don't go very deep in any one field, except maybe '90s baseball." We are rewarded with a perfect score: 11 out of 11.

It's after eight, and Rogowsky has to rush off. He can't take me to the studio, or tell me anything about it. The company wants to maintain whatever competitive advantage it can about HQ's technical setup and filming process, he explains. All he can say is that it plans to keep growing: "Ideally, we can give out a million dollars every time. That's what they'd love to get to."

But the point isn't just to be the biggest app on the iPhone. It's to be the biggest game show on the planet, period. Or maybe just the biggest entertainment property, period. HQ is compelling because it feels like an artifact from one possible future, a glimpse at how all entertainment might look in decades to come—pushed to your phone for 15 minutes, twice a day, with a host who talks directly to you. And millions of fellow viewers. "Vine, at its peak, had 100 million users," Rogowsky says. "I think they'd need a server the size of Rhode Island to make it work." But if the engineers can figure that out? "This is bigger than TV." ■

Photograph by Bobby Doherty



Donald Trump never planned to be president—and he's never recovered from the shock of his victory. ➡ The inside story of how he and his inner circle turned their mind-boggling campaign into the most dysfunctional White House ever.

»
Election Night:
Trump "looked as
if he had seen
a ghost."

Sick of Winning

By Michael Wolff





O

n the afternoon of November 8, 2016, Kellyanne Conway settled into her glass office at Trump Tower. Right up until the last weeks of the race, the campaign headquarters had remained a listless place. All that seemed to distinguish it from a corporate back office were a few posters with right-wing slogans.

Conway, the campaign's manager, was in a remarkably buoyant mood, considering she was about to experience a resounding, if not cataclysmic, defeat. Donald Trump would lose the election—of this she was sure—but he would quite possibly hold the defeat to under six points. That was a substantial victory. As for the looming defeat itself, she shrugged it off: It was Reince Priebus's fault, not hers.

She had spent a good part of the day calling friends and allies in the political world and blaming Priebus, the chairman of the Republican National Committee. Now she briefed some of the television producers and anchors whom she had been carefully courting since joining the Trump campaign—and with whom she had been actively interviewing in the last few weeks, hoping to land a permanent on-air job after the election.

Even though the numbers in a few key states had appeared to be changing to Trump's advantage, neither Conway nor Trump himself nor his son-in-law, Jared Kushner—the effective head of the campaign—wavered in their certainty: Their unexpected adventure would soon be over. Not only would Trump *not* be president, almost everyone in the campaign agreed, he should probably not be. Conveniently, the former conviction meant nobody had to deal with the latter issue.

As the campaign came to an end, Trump himself was sanguine. His ultimate goal, after all, had never been to win. "I can be the most

famous man in the world," he had told his aide Sam Nunberg at the outset of the race. His longtime friend Roger Ailes, the former head of Fox News, liked to say that if you want a career in television, first run for president. Now Trump, encouraged by Ailes, was floating rumors about a Trump network. It was a great future. He would come out of this campaign, Trump assured Ailes, with a far more powerful brand and untold opportunities.

"This is bigger than I ever dreamed of," he told Ailes a week before the election. "I don't think about losing, because it isn't losing. We've totally won."

FROM THE START, the leitmotif for Trump about his own campaign was how crappy it was, and how everybody involved in it was a loser. In August, when he was trailing Hillary Clinton by more than 12 points, he couldn't conjure even a far-fetched scenario for achieving an electoral victory. He was baffled when the right-wing billionaire Robert Mercer, a Ted Cruz backer whom Trump barely knew, offered him an infusion of \$5 million. When Mercer and his daughter Rebekah presented their plan to take over the campaign and install their lieutenants, Steve Bannon and Conway, Trump didn't resist. He only expressed vast incomprehension about why anyone would want to do that. "This thing," he told the Mercers, "is so fucked up."

Bannon, who became chief executive of Trump's team in mid-August, called it "the broke-dick campaign." Almost immediately, he saw that it was hampered by an even deeper structural flaw: The candidate who billed himself as a billionaire—ten times over—refused to invest his own money in it. Bannon told Kushner that, after the first debate in September, they would need another \$50 million to cover them until Election Day.

"No way we'll get \$50 million unless we can guarantee him victory," said a clear-eyed Kushner.

"Twenty-five million?" prodded Bannon.

"If we can say victory is more than likely."

In the end, the best Trump would do is to loan the campaign \$10 million, provided he got it back as soon as they could raise other money. Steve Mnuchin, the campaign's finance chairman, came to collect the loan with the wire instructions ready to go so Trump couldn't conveniently forget to send the money.

Most presidential candidates spend their entire careers, if not their lives from adolescence, preparing for the role. They rise up the ladder of elected offices, perfect a public face, and prepare themselves to win and to govern. The Trump calculation, quite a conscious one, was different. The candidate and his top lieutenants believed they could get all the benefits of *almost* becoming president without having to change their behavior or their worldview one whit. Almost everybody on the Trump team, in fact, came with the kind of messy conflicts bound to bite a president once he was in office. Michael Flynn, the retired general who served as Trump's opening act at campaign rallies, had been told by his friends that it had not been a good idea to take \$45,000 from the Russians for a speech. "Well, it would only be a problem if we won," Flynn assured them.

Not only did Trump disregard the potential conflicts of his own business deals and real-estate holdings, he audaciously refused to release his tax returns. Why should he? Once he lost, Trump would be both insanely famous and a martyr to Crooked Hillary. His daughter Ivanka and son-in-law Jared would be international celebrities. Steve Bannon would become the de facto head of the tea-party movement. Kellyanne Conway would be a cable-news star. Melania Trump, who had been assured by her husband that he wouldn't become president, could return to inconspicuously lunching. Losing would work out for everybody. Losing was winning.

Shortly after 8 p.m. on Election Night, when the unexpected trend—Trump might actually win—seemed confirmed, Don Jr. told

a friend that his father, or DJT, as he calls him, looked as if he had seen a ghost. Melania was in tears—and not of joy.

There was, in the space of little more than an hour, in Steve Bannon's not unamused observation, a befuddled Trump morphing into a disbelieving Trump and then into a horrified Trump. But still to come was the final transformation: Suddenly, Donald Trump became a man who believed that he deserved to be, and was wholly capable of being, the president of the United States.

FROM THE MOMENT OF VICTORY, the Trump administration became a looking-glass presidency: Every inverse assumption about how to assemble and run a White House was enacted and compounded, many times over. The decisions that Trump and his top advisers made in those first few months—from the slapdash transition to the disarray in the West Wing—set the stage for the chaos and dysfunction that have persisted throughout his first year in office.

This was a real-life version of Mel Brooks's *The Producers*, where the mistaken outcome trusted by everyone in Trump's inner circle—that they would lose the election—wound up exposing them for who they really were.

On the Saturday after the election, Trump received a small group of well-wishers in his triplex apartment in Trump Tower. Even his close friends were still shocked and bewildered, and there was a dazed quality to the gathering. But Trump himself was mostly looking at the clock. Rupert Murdoch, who had promised to pay a call on the president-elect, was running late. When some of the guests made a move to leave, an increasingly agitated Trump assured them that Rupert was on his way. "He's one of the greats, the last of the greats," Trump said. "You have to stay to see him." Not grasping that he was now the most powerful man in the world, Trump was still trying mightily to curry favor with a media mogul who had long disdained him as a charlatan and fool.

Few people who knew Trump had illusions about him. That was his appeal: He was what he was. Twinkle in his eye, larceny in his soul. Everybody in his rich-guy social circle knew about his wide-ranging ignorance. Early in the campaign, Sam Nunberg was sent to explain the Constitution to the candidate. "I got as far as the

Fourth Amendment," Nunberg recalled, "before his finger is pulling down on his lip and his eyes are rolling back in his head."

The day after the election, the bare-bones transition team that had been set up during the campaign hurriedly shifted from Washington to Trump Tower. The building—now the headquarters of a populist revolution—suddenly seemed like an alien spaceship on Fifth Avenue. But its otherworldly air helped obscure the fact that few in Trump's inner circle, with their overnight responsibility for assembling a government, had any relevant experience.

Ailes, a veteran of the Nixon, Reagan, and Bush 41 administrations, tried to impress on Trump the need to create a White House structure that could serve and protect him. "You need a son of a bitch as your chief of staff," he told Trump. "And you need a son of a bitch who knows Washington. You'll want to be your own son of a bitch, but you don't know Washington." Ailes had a suggestion: John Boehner, who had stepped down as Speaker of the House only a year earlier.

"Who's that?" asked Trump.

As much as the president himself, the chief of staff determines how the Executive branch—which employs 4 million people—will run. The job has been construed as deputy president, or even prime minister. But Trump had no interest in appointing a strong chief of staff with a deep knowledge of Washington. Among his early choices for the job was Kushner—a man with no political experience beyond his role as a calm and flattering body man to Trump during the campaign.

It was Ann Coulter who finally took the president-elect aside. "Nobody is apparently telling you this," she told him. "But you can't. You just can't hire your children."

Bowing to pressure, Trump floated the idea of giving the job to Steve Bannon, only to have the notion soundly ridiculed. Murdoch told Trump that Bannon would be a dangerous choice. Joe Scarborough, the former congressman and co-host of MSNBC's *Morning Joe*, told the president-elect that "Washington will go up in flames" if Bannon became chief of staff.

So Trump turned to Reince Priebus, the RNC chairman, who had become the subject of intense lobbying by House Speaker Paul Ryan and Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell. If congressional leaders were going to have to deal with an alien like Donald Trump, then best they do it with the help of one of their own kind.

Jim Baker, chief of staff for both Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush and almost everybody's model for managing the West Wing, advised Priebus not to take the job. Priebus had his own reservations: He had come out of his first long meeting with Trump thinking it had been a disconcertingly weird experience. Trump talked nonstop and constantly repeated himself.

"Here's the deal," a close Trump associate told Priebus. "In an hour meeting with him, you're going to hear 54 minutes of stories, and they're going to be the same stories over and over again. So you have to have one point to make, and you pepper it in whenever you can."

But the Priebus appointment, announced in mid-November, put Bannon on a co-equal level to the new chief of staff. Even with the top job, Priebus would be a weak figure, in the traditional mold of most Trump lieutenants over the years. There would be one chief of staff in name—the unimportant one—and others like Bannon and Kushner, more important in practice, ensuring both chaos and Trump's independence.

Priebus demonstrated no ability to keep Trump from talking to anyone who wanted his ear. The president-elect enjoyed being courted. On December 14, a high-level delegation from Silicon Valley came to Trump Tower to meet him.

How He Got the Story

THIS STORY IS adapted from Michael Wolff's book *Fire and Fury: Inside the Trump White House*, published this month by Henry Holt & Co. Wolff, who chronicles the administration from Election Day to this past October, conducted conversations and interviews over a period of 18 months with the president, most members of his senior staff, and many people to whom they in turn spoke. Shortly after Trump's inauguration, Wolff says, he was able to take up "something like a semi-permanent seat on a couch in the West Wing"—an idea encouraged by the president himself. Because no one was in a position to either officially approve or formally deny such access, Wolff became "more a constant interloper than an invited guest." There were no ground rules placed on his access, and

he was required to make no promises about how he would report on what he witnessed. Since then, he conducted more than 200 interviews. In true Trumpian fashion, the administration's lack of experience and disdain for political norms made for a hodgepodge of journalistic challenges. Information would be provided off-the-record or on deep background, then casually put on the record. Sources would fail to set any parameters on the use of a conversation, or would provide accounts in confidence, only to subsequently share their views widely. And the president's own views, private as well as public, were constantly shared by others. The adaptation presented here offers a front-row view of Trump's presidency, from his improvised transition to his first months in the Oval Office.

“In fact,” said Bannon, “I could use your help.” He

Later that afternoon, according to a source privy to details of the conversation, Trump called Rupert Murdoch, who asked him how the meeting had gone.

“Oh, great, just great,” said Trump. “These guys really need my help. Obama was not very favorable to them, too much regulation. This is really an opportunity for me to help them.”

“Donald,” said Murdoch, “for eight years these guys had Obama in their pocket. They practically ran the administration. They don’t need your help.”

“Take this H-1B visa issue. They really need these H-1B visas.”

Murdoch suggested that taking a liberal approach to H-1B visas, which open America’s doors to select immigrants, might be hard to square with his promises to build a wall and close the borders. But Trump seemed unconcerned, assuring Murdoch, “We’ll figure it out.”

“What a fucking idiot,” said Murdoch, shrugging, as he got off the phone.

STEVE BANNON, suddenly among the world’s most powerful men, was running late. It was the evening of January 3, 2017—a little more than two weeks before Trump’s inauguration—and Bannon had promised to come to a small dinner arranged by mutual friends in a Greenwich Village townhouse to see Roger Ailes.

Snow was threatening, and for a while the dinner appeared doubtful. But the 76-year-old Ailes, who was as dumbfounded by his old friend Donald Trump’s victory as everyone else, understood that he was passing the right-wing torch to Bannon. Ailes’s Fox News, with its \$1.5 billion in annual profits, had dominated Republican politics for two decades. Now Bannon’s Breitbart News, with its mere \$1.5 million in annual profits, was claiming

that role. For 30 years, Ailes—until recently the single most powerful person in conservative politics—had humored and tolerated Trump, but in the end Bannon and Breitbart had elected him.

At 9:30, having extricated himself from Trump Tower, Bannon finally arrived at the dinner, three hours late. Wearing a disheveled blazer, his signature pairing of two shirts, and military fatigues, the unshaven, overweight 63-year-old immediately dove into an urgent download of information about the world he was about to take over.

“We’re going to flood the zone so we have every Cabinet member for the next seven days through their confirmation hearings,” he said of the business-and-military, 1950s-type Cabinet choices. “Tillerson is two days, Sessions is two days, Mattis is two days ...”

Bannon veered from James “Mad Dog” Mattis—the retired four-star general whom Trump had nominated as secretary of Defense—to the looming appointment of Michael Flynn as national-security adviser. “He’s fine. He’s not Jim Mattis and he’s not John Kelly ... but he’s fine. He just needs the right staff around him.” Still, Bannon averred: “When you take out all the Never Trump guys who signed all those letters and all the neocons who got us in all these wars ... it’s not a deep bench.” Bannon said he’d tried to push John Bolton, the famously hawkish diplomat, for the job as national-security adviser. Bolton was an Ailes favorite, too.

“He’s a bomb thrower,” said Ailes. “And a strange little fucker. But you need him. Who else is good on Israel? Flynn is a little nutty on Iran. Tillerson just knows oil.”

“Bolton’s mustache is a problem,” snorted Bannon. “Trump doesn’t think he looks the part. You know Bolton is an acquired taste.”



then tried to recruit Ailes to help kneecap Murdoch.

"Well, he got in trouble because he got in a fight in a hotel one night and chased some woman."

"If I told Trump that," Bannon said slyly, "he might have the job."

Bannon was curiously able to embrace Trump while at the same time suggesting he did not take him entirely seriously. Great numbers of people, he believed, were suddenly receptive to a new message—the world needs borders—and Trump had become the platform for that message.

"Does *he* get it?" asked Ailes suddenly, looking intently at Bannon. Did Trump get where history had put him?

Bannon took a sip of water. "He gets it," he said, after hesitating for perhaps a beat too long. "Or he gets what he gets."

Pivoting from Trump himself, Bannon plunged on with the Trump agenda. "Day one we're moving the U.S. Embassy to Jerusalem. Netanyahu's all-in. Sheldon"—Adelson, the casino billionaire and far-right Israel defender—"is all-in. We know where we're heading on this ... Let Jordan take the West Bank, let Egypt take Gaza. Let them deal with it. Or sink trying."

"Where's Donald on this?" asked Ailes, the clear implication being that Bannon was far out ahead of his benefactor.

"He's totally onboard."

"I wouldn't give Donald too much to think about," said an amused Ailes.

Bannon snorted. "Too much, too little—doesn't necessarily change things."

"What has he gotten himself into with the Russians?" pressed Ailes.

"Mostly," said Bannon, "he went to Russia and he thought he was going to meet Putin. But Putin couldn't give a shit about him. So he's kept trying."

Again, as though setting the issue of Trump aside—merely a large and peculiar presence to both be thankful for and to have to abide—Bannon, in the role he had conceived for himself, the auteur of the Trump presidency, charged forward. The real enemy, he said, was China. China was the first front in a new Cold War.

"China's everything. Nothing else matters. We don't get China right, we don't get anything right. This whole thing is very simple. China is where Nazi Germany was in 1929 to 1930. The Chinese, like the Germans, are the most rational people in the world, until they're not. And they're gonna flip like Germany in the '30s. You're going to have a hypernationalist state, and once that happens, you can't put the genie back in the bottle."

"Donald might not be Nixon in China," said Ailes, deadpan.

Bannon smiled. "Bannon in China," he said, with both remarkable grandiosity and wry self-deprecation.

"How's the kid?" asked Ailes, referring to Kushner.

"He's my partner," said Bannon, his tone suggesting that if he felt otherwise, he was nevertheless determined to stay on message.

"He's had a lot of lunches with Rupert," said a dubious Ailes.

"In fact," said Bannon, "I could use your help here." He then spent several minutes trying to recruit Ailes to help kneecap Murdoch. Since his ouster from Fox over allegations of sexual harassment, Ailes had become only more bitter toward Murdoch. Now Murdoch was frequently jawboning the president-elect and encouraging him toward Establishment moderation. Bannon wanted Ailes to suggest to Trump, a man whose many neuroses included a horror of senility, that Murdoch might be losing it.

"I'll call him," said Ailes. "But Trump would jump through

hoops for Rupert. Like for Putin. Sucks up and shits down. I just worry about who's jerking whose chain."

TRUMP DID NOT ENJOY his own inauguration. He was angry that A-level stars had snubbed the event, disgruntled with the accommodations at Blair House, and visibly fighting with his wife, who seemed on the verge of tears. Throughout the day, he wore what some around him had taken to calling his golf face: angry and pissed off, shoulders hunched, arms swinging, brow furled, lips pursed.

The first senior staffer to enter the White House that day was Bannon. On the inauguration march, he had grabbed 32-year-old Katie Walsh, the newly appointed deputy chief of staff, and together they had peeled off to inspect the now-vacant West Wing. The carpet had been shampooed, but little else had changed. It was a warren of tiny offices in need of paint, the décor something like an admissions office at a public university. Bannon claimed the nondescript office across from the much grander chief of staff's suite and immediately requisitioned the whiteboards on which he intended to chart the first 100 days of the Trump administration. He also began moving furniture out. The point was to leave no room for anyone to sit. Limit discussion. Limit debate. This was war.

Those who had worked on the campaign noticed the sudden change. Within the first week, Bannon seemed to have put away the camaraderie of Trump Tower and become far more remote, if not unreachable. "What's up with Steve?" Kushner began to ask. "I don't understand. We were so close." Now that Trump had been elected, Bannon was already focused on his next goal: capturing the soul of the Trump White House.

He began by going after his enemies. Few fueled his rancor toward the standard-issue Republican world as much as Rupert Murdoch—not least because Murdoch had Trump's ear. It was one of the key elements of Bannon's understanding of Trump: The last person the president spoke to ended up with enormous influence. Trump would brag that Murdoch was always calling him; Murdoch, for his part, would complain that he couldn't get Trump off the phone.

"He doesn't know anything about American politics, and has no feel for the American people," Bannon told Trump, always eager to point out that Murdoch wasn't an American. Yet in one regard, Murdoch's message was useful to Bannon. Having known every president since Harry Truman—as Murdoch took frequent opportunities to point out—the media mogul warned Trump that a president has only six months, max, to set his agenda and make an impact. After that, it was just putting out fires and battling the opposition.

This was the message whose urgency Bannon had been trying to impress on an often distracted Trump, who was already trying to limit his hours in the office and keep to his normal golf habits. Bannon's strategic view of government was shock and awe. In his head, he carried a set of decisive actions that would not just mark the new administration's opening days but make it clear that nothing ever again would be the same. He had quietly assembled a list of more than 200 executive orders to issue in the first 100 days. The very first EO, in his view, had to be a crackdown on immigration. After all, it was one of Trump's core campaign promises. Plus, Bannon knew, it was an issue that made liberals batshit mad.

Bannon could push through his agenda for a simple reason: *because nobody in the administration really had a job.* Priebus, as chief of staff, had to organize meetings, hire staff, and oversee the

←
**Roger Ailes and
Steve Bannon
meeting on
January 3, 2017.**

Jared offered to marry Joe and Mika. “Why would they

individual offices in the Executive-branch departments. But Bannon, Kushner, and Ivanka Trump had no specific responsibilities—they did what they wanted. And for Bannon, the will to get big things done was how big things got done. “Chaos was Steve’s strategy,” said Walsh.

On Friday, January 27—only his eighth day in office—Trump signed an executive order issuing a sweeping exclusion of many Muslims from the United States. In his mania to seize the day, with almost no one in the federal government having seen it or even been aware of it, Bannon had succeeded in pushing through an executive order that overhauled U.S. immigration policy while bypassing the very agencies and personnel responsible for enforcing it.

The result was an emotional outpouring of horror and indignation from liberal media, terror in immigrant communities, tumultuous protests at major airports, confusion throughout the government, and, in the White House, an inundation of opprobrium from friends and family. *What have you done? You have to undo this! You’re finished before you even start!* But Bannon was satisfied. He could not have hoped to draw a more vivid line between Trump’s America and that of liberals. Almost the entire White House staff demanded to know: Why did we do this on a Friday, when it would hit the airports hardest and bring out the most protesters?

“Errr ... that’s why,” said Bannon. “So the snowflakes would show up at the airports and riot.” That was the way to crush the liberals: Make them crazy and drag them to the left.

ON THE SUNDAY AFTER the immigration order was issued, Joe Scarborough and his *Morning Joe* co-host, Mika Brzezinski, arrived for lunch at the White House. Trump proudly showed them into the Oval Office. “So how do you think the first week has gone?” he asked the couple, in a buoyant mood, seeking flattery. When Scarborough ventured his opinion that the immigration order might have been handled better, Trump turned defensive and derisive, plunging into a long monologue about how well things had gone. “I could have invited Hannity!” he told Scarborough.

After Jared and Ivanka joined them for lunch, Trump continued to cast for positive impressions of his first week. Scarborough praised the president for having invited leaders of the steel unions to the White House. At which point Jared interjected that reaching out to unions, a Democratic constituency, was Bannon’s doing, that this was “the Bannon way.”

“Bannon?” said the president, jumping on his son-in-law. “That wasn’t Bannon’s idea. That was my idea. It’s the Trump way, not the Bannon way.”

Kushner, going concave, retreated from the discussion.

Trump, changing the topic, said to Scarborough and Brzezinski, “So what about you guys? What’s going on?” He was referencing their not-so-secret secret relationship. The couple said it was still complicated, but good.

“You guys should just get married,” prodded Trump.

“I can marry you! I’m an internet Unitarian minister,” Kushner, otherwise an Orthodox Jew, said suddenly.

“What?” said the president. “What are you talking about? Why would they want *you* to marry them when *I* could marry them? When they could be married by the president! At Mar-a-Lago!”

The First Children couple were having to navigate Trump’s volatile nature just like everyone else in the White House. And they were willing to do it for the same reason as everyone else—in the

hope that Trump’s unexpected victory would catapult them into a heretofore unimagined big time. Balancing risk against reward, both Jared and Ivanka decided to accept roles in the West Wing over the advice of almost everyone they knew. It was a joint decision by the couple, and, in some sense, a joint job. Between themselves, the two had made an earnest deal: If sometime in the future the opportunity arose, she’d be the one to run for president. The first woman president, Ivanka entertained, would not be Hillary Clinton; it would be Ivanka Trump.

Bannon, who had coined the term “Jarvanka” that was now in ever greater use in the White House, was horrified when the couple’s deal was reported to him. “They didn’t say that?” he said. “Stop. Oh, come on. They didn’t actually say that? Please don’t tell me that. Oh my God.”

The truth was, Ivanka and Jared were as much the chief of staff as Priebus or Bannon, all of them reporting directly to the president. The couple had opted for formal jobs in the West Wing, in part because they knew that influencing Trump required you to be all-in. From phone call to phone call—and his day, beyond organized meetings, was almost entirely phone calls—you could lose him. He could not really converse, not in the sense of sharing information, or of a balanced back-and-forth conversation. He neither particularly listened to what was said to him nor particularly considered what he said in response. He demanded you pay him attention, then decided you were weak for groveling. In a sense, he was like an instinctive, pampered, and hugely successful actor. Everybody was either a lackey who did his bidding or a high-ranking film functionary trying to coax out his performance—without making him angry or petulant.

Ivanka maintained a relationship with her father that was in no way conventional. She was a helper not just in his business dealings, but in his marital realignments. If it wasn’t pure opportunism, it was certainly transactional. For Ivanka, it was all business—building the Trump brand, the presidential campaign, and now the White House. She treated her father with a degree of detachment, even irony, going so far as to make fun of his comb-over to others. She often described the mechanics behind it to friends: an absolutely clean pate—a contained island after scalp-reduction surgery—surrounded by a furry circle of hair around the sides and front, from which all ends are drawn up to meet in the center and then swept back and secured by a stiffening spray. The color, she would point out to comical effect, was from a product called Just for Men—the longer it was left on, the darker it got. Impatience resulted in Trump’s orange-blond hair color.

Kushner, for his part, had little to no success at trying to restrain his father-in-law. Ever since the transition, Jared had been negotiating to arrange a meeting at the White House with Enrique Peña Nieto, the Mexican president whom Trump had threatened and insulted throughout the campaign. On the Wednesday after the inauguration, a high-level Mexican delegation—the first visit by any foreign leaders to the Trump White House—met with Kushner and Reince Priebus. That afternoon, Kushner triumphantly told his father-in-law that Peña Nieto had signed on to a White House meeting and planning for the visit could go forward.

The next day, on Twitter, Trump blasted Mexico for stealing American jobs. “If Mexico is unwilling to pay for the badly needed wall,” the president declared, “then it would be better to cancel the upcoming meeting.” At which point Peña Nieto did just that, leaving Kushner’s negotiation and statecraft as so much scrap on the floor.

want *you*,” Trump said, “when *I* could marry them?”



NOTHING CONTRIBUTED TO THE CHAOS and dysfunction of the White House as much as Trump's own behavior. The big deal of being president was just not apparent to him. Most victorious candidates, arriving in the White House from ordinary political life, could not help but be reminded of their transformed circumstances by their sudden elevation to a mansion with palacelike servants and security, a plane at constant readiness, and downstairs a retinue of courtiers and advisers. But this wasn't that different from Trump's former life in Trump Tower, which was actually more commodious and to his taste than the White House.

Trump, in fact, found the White House to be vexing and even a little scary. He retreated to his own bedroom—the first time since the Kennedy White House that a presidential couple had maintained separate rooms. In the first days, he ordered two television screens in addition to the one already there, and a lock on the door, precipitating a brief standoff with the Secret Service, who insisted they have access to the room. He reprimanded the housekeeping staff for picking up his shirt from the floor: “If my shirt is on the floor, it's because I want it on the floor.” Then he imposed a set of new rules: Nobody touch anything, especially not his toothbrush. (He had a longtime fear of being poisoned, one reason why he liked to eat at McDonald's—nobody knew he was coming and the food was safely premade.) Also, he would let housekeeping know when he wanted his sheets done, and he would strip his own bed.

If he was not having his 6:30 dinner with Steve Bannon, then,

more to his liking, he was in bed by that time with a cheeseburger, watching his three screens and making phone calls—the phone was his true contact point with the world—to a small group of friends, who charted his rising and falling levels of agitation through the evening and then compared notes with one another.

As details of Trump's personal life leaked out, he became obsessed with identifying the leaker. The source of all the gossip, however, may well have been Trump himself. In his calls throughout the day and at night from his bed, he often spoke to people who had no reason to keep his confidences. He was a river of grievances, which recipients of his calls promptly spread to the ever-attentive media.

On February 6, in one of his seething, self-pitying, and unsolicited phone calls to a casual acquaintance, Trump detailed his bent-out-of-shape feelings about the relentless contempt of the media and the disloyalty of his staff.

The initial subject of his ire was the New York *Times* reporter Maggie Haberman, whom he called “a nut job.” Gail Collins, who had written a *Times* column unfavorably comparing Trump to Vice-President Mike Pence, was “a moron.” Then, continuing under the rubric of media he hated, he veered to CNN and the deep disloyalty of its chief, Jeff Zucker.

Zucker, who as the head of entertainment at NBC had commissioned *The Apprentice*, had been “made by Trump,” Trump said of himself in the third person. He had “personally” gotten Zucker his job at CNN. “Yes, yes, I did,” said the president, launching into a favorite story about how he had once talked (Continued on page 84)

Trump berating
Jared Kushner on
January 29, 2017.

The Rockefellers

vs.

Descendants of John D. Rockefeller, from left: Miranda Kaiser, Peter Case, Rebecca Rockefeller Lambert and her husband, Michael Lambert, David Kaiser, and Neva Rockefeller Goodwin, in Seal Harbor, Maine, last summer.

A photograph of a family of four in a forest. On the left, a woman with blonde hair in a red and white plaid shirt and blue jeans stands with her arm around a man in a blue and white plaid shirt and brown pants. In the center, a man with a grey beard in a blue and white plaid shirt and blue jeans stands with his hand on the shoulder of an older woman on the right. The older woman has grey hair and is wearing a white short-sleeved top and a colorful patterned skirt, sitting on a large rock. The background is a dense forest of tall evergreen trees.

The family that pioneered the oil industry in
America wants to expose what Exxon
hid from the public about climate change.
By Reeves Wiedeman

the Company

That Made Them Rockefellers

Photograph by Ben Stechschulte

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JOHN D. ROCKEFELLER once said that “God gave me my money,” much as He had given human beings dominion over the Earth, and though John D. couldn’t have known it then, the original sin of the Rockefeller family would be committed in 1863, when he opened his first oil refinery in Cleveland. Within a few decades, Standard Oil controlled more than 90 percent of petroleum production in the United States, and by the time of his death in 1937, God had given John D. a fortune that made him the richest man in the world.

As the 20th century wore on and John D.’s descendants converted the family’s oil money into a broader empire—building Rockefeller Center, becoming governors, senators, vice-presidents—the world began its fossil-fuel-induced march, with increasing speed, toward environmental disaster. Climate change wasn’t directly the Rockefellers’ fault, of course: The family more or less got out of the oil business in 1911, when the Supreme Court deemed Standard Oil too big to exist, splitting it into 34 companies, including two that became Exxon-Mobil. And if John D. hadn’t dug the wells, someone else would have. But as the 21st century dawned, it became impossible for younger Rockefellers to spend time at the family’s island estate in Maine without recognizing that the waves lapping closer and closer to their home were the result, at least in part, of their good fortune.

All of which is how ExxonMobil found itself in federal court this past November arguing that the Rockefellers were funding a conspiracy against it. Judge Valerie Caproni of the Southern District of New York was hearing the latest arguments in a legal battle that had begun more than two years prior, when members of the Rockefeller clan, in their latest attempt to pressure the erstwhile family business to deal with climate change, funded journalists who uncovered documents showing Exxon had known about the dangers of burning fossil fuels for decades while publicly denying it was much of a problem at all. The Rockefeller-backed reports had inspired multiple state attorneys general to investigate whether Exxon might be liable like tobacco companies that lied about the cancer risks of smoking had been.

“Didn’t Standard Oil grow up to be Exxon?” Caproni asked Justin Anderson, one of Exxon’s lawyers, after Anderson repeated Exxon’s conspiracy claim against the Rockefellers. “That’s ironic, don’t you think?”

“It’s disturbing, Judge,” Anderson said.

“No, it’s ironic—come on,” Caproni said.

“It could be both,” Anderson said. “Ironic and disturbing at the same time.”

“Fascinating,” Caproni said. “What happened to those Rockefellers?”

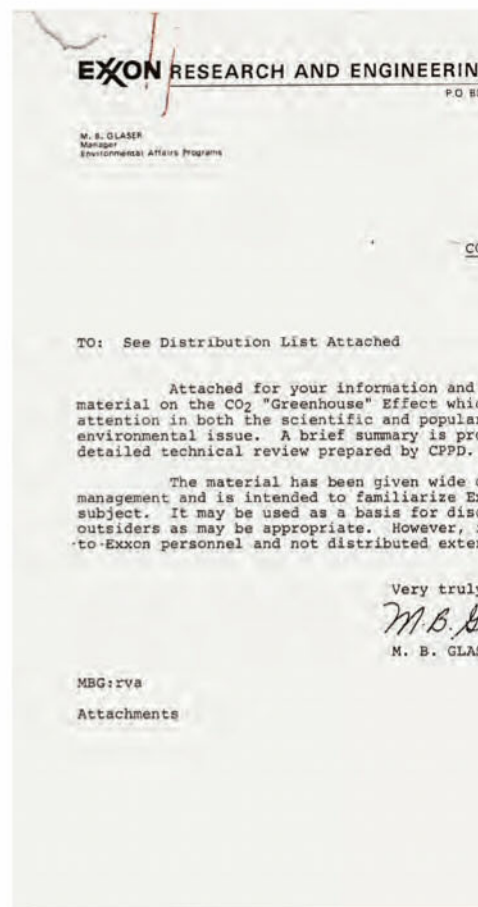
“Your Honor, what happened was they got on this bandwagon—” Anderson said, before Caproni cut him off to interject: “They care whether subsequent Rockefellers can breathe.”

TWICE A YEAR, many of the 270 living descendants of John D. Rockefeller gather in New York for a family reunion. Attendance is nonmandatory and irregular—“Half of the 270 people I wouldn’t recognize,” said David Kaiser, one of John D.’s great-great-grandsons—and the activities range from the traditions of any family reunion (sharing baby photos, catching up) to the tasks required for maintaining one of America’s largest fortunes: debating, for instance, how to manage Kykuit, the family’s sprawling estate on the Hudson.

During the winter reunion in 2016, Kaiser stood at the front of a conference room at the Museum of Modern Art, which the family helped found. He was addressing a group of his relatives (uncles, cousins, his mom), some of whom wanted to air their grievances about an article detailing the climate allegations against Exxon that Kaiser had recently published in the *New York Review of Books*. Not every family member was thrilled with their sudden collective position as anti-Exxon crusaders. For one thing, a significant portion of the family’s wealth is still tied up in Exxon stock. “If Exxon’s stock price suffers, the whole family will lose money,” Kaiser said.

While the Rockefellers have been overtaken by more modern fortunes, they remain America’s 23rd-richest family, tied with the Butts (Texas grocers) and one spot ahead of the Gallos (booze and cheese). For decades, Rockefellers have inhabited the most powerful circles of American society: John D.’s grandsons included Winthrop, a governor of Arkansas; David, the CEO of Chase; and Nelson, who was Gerald Ford’s vice-president. “The members of that generation were the ultimate insiders,” said Lee Wasserman, who runs the Rockefeller Family Fund. “They were able to sit down with any world leader they wanted.”

Today’s Rockefellers have comfortable nest eggs but relatively little of their ancestors’ backroom influence. David Rockefeller,



his generation’s last surviving member, died in 2017, and Jay Rockefeller, who served as West Virginia’s senator for 30 years, retired in 2015, leaving behind descendants who are academics, aspiring novelists, digital marketers, green architects, couture equestrianwear designers, and the owners of hip clothing stores in Minnesota. (In 2008, *The Wall Street Journal* reported that newer branches of the sprawling family tree would be unlikely to live solely off their ever-smaller slices of the Rockefeller trust.) If the Rockefellers have a modern means of exerting influence, it is primarily through their web of philanthropies: the Rockefeller Foundation, one of the country’s largest private charities; the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, named for John D. Jr.’s five sons—“There was also a sister, but times were different back then,” Wasserman said—and the Family Fund, which the brothers created to encourage their children’s philanthropy.

America’s business titans have a tradition of turning, late in life, to charity. Andrew Carnegie gave away nearly 90 percent of his fortune, and Henry Ford left much of his to an eponymous foundation, which now has an endowment of \$12 billion. But it is rare for an American dynasty to confront the source of its wealth. The Sacklers, for instance, recently passed the Rockefellers on the *Forbes* list of the country’s wealthiest

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November 12, 1982

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H. N. WEINBERG
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WHAT EXXON KNEW IN 1982

In addition to the effects of climate on global agriculture, there are some potentially catastrophic events that must be considered. For example, if the Antarctic ice sheet which is anchored on land should melt, then this

could cause a rise in sea level on the order of 5 meters. Such a rise would cause flooding on much of the U.S. East Coast, including the State of Florida and Washington, D.C. The melting rate of polar ice is being studied by a number of glaciologists. Estimates for the melting of the West Antarctica ice sheet range from hundreds of years to a thousand years. EtKins and Epstein observed a 45 mm raise in mean sea level. They account for the rise by assuming that the top 70 m of the oceans has warmed by 0.3°C from 1890 to 1940 (as has the atmosphere) causing a 24 mm rise in sea level due to thermal expansion. They attribute the rest of the sea level rise to melting of polar ice. However, melting 51 Tt (10¹² metric tonnes) of ice would reduce ocean temperature by 0.2°C, and explain why the global mean surface temperature has not increased as predicted by CO₂ greenhouse theories.

The company's scientists predicted dire effects from climate change.

families, thanks to profits from OxyContin, now one of America's most abused drugs. They have donated many millions of dollars to museums, universities, and other institutions but have given next to nothing to combating the opioid epidemic.

The Rockefellers, however, have long been interested in environmental issues. The Family Fund, in particular, "came of age at a time when there was considerable tumult in society, and the interests of the cousins were those kinds of issues—the environment, economic justice for women, corporate accountability," said Wasserman, who is not a Rockefeller. Many of the family's newer members have adopted the wealthy liberal's preferred mix of safely progressive causes combined with a mild embarrassment at their inherited affluence: Several told me how much easier life was for those who had married out of the family name. When I asked Kaiser, the Family Fund's current board president, how much of the family's environmentalism stemmed from guilt, he demurred. "I always think it's sort of embarrassing when people talk about how proud they are of their great-great-grandfather," he said. "I don't think I get any credit for the good things he did. I also don't think I deserve any blame for any of the bad things." But others pointed out that, guilty or not, there was an element of atonement.

"There's something about the moral imperative of what we're doing—or trying to 'undo,'" Peter Case, another of John D.'s great-great-grandsons, told me. "I mean, what would you do?"

THE ROCKEFELLERS' campaign against Exxon began in 2003, when Neva Rockefeller Goodwin, an economist at Tufts and John D.'s great-granddaughter, co-sponsored a resolution at Exxon's annual shareholder meeting demanding the company study climate change's impact on its business. Investor activism was unusually plebeian for a Rockefeller—Goodwin's father, David Rockefeller, told her it was "mostly carried out by nuts"—and the resolution failed. But a year later, Goodwin and several other family members secured a meeting at Rockefeller Center with Exxon's head of investor relations. "We wanted to say, 'There's a crisis building, and you're part of it,'" Goodwin told me. The Exxon employees seemed surprised, she said, and responded by saying, "I guess our PR folks should be fired."

In 2006, Lee Raymond, Exxon's former CEO, invited David Rockefeller, who remained one of the most influential people in New York finance, to lunch with Rex Tillerson, who was taking over Raymond's job. Rockefeller had become concerned about

climate change and asked that his daughter join them. Goodwin told me Raymond's staff initially objected on the grounds that "Tillerson didn't need to be subjected to that kind of thing," but her father insisted, and the foursome met at a seafood restaurant looking out on the Rockefeller Center skating rink. (At Exxon's Texas headquarters, Raymond and Tillerson often ate in the company's Rockefeller Room.) Goodwin said she "was told to behave myself and not say much," but she managed to ask why the company wasn't investing more in alternative energy. "We tried that, and it didn't work," Raymond said. According to Goodwin, Tillerson largely deferred to Raymond.

The following year, Exxon earned the largest profit in American corporate history—\$40.61 billion—but the 2006 release of Al Gore's *An Inconvenient Truth* had also served as a galvanizing moment for the environmental movement. During a meeting at the family's summer reunion at Kykuit, in a building decorated with portraits of their ancestors, a dozen Rockefellers agreed to take on Exxon in public. In 2008, Goodwin and several others held a press conference at the Parker Meridien Hotel to announce they were sponsoring three climate-change-related shareholder resolutions. "ExxonMobil needs to reconnect with

It quickly became clear that Exxon had not only done the most robust climate research but had also sown doubt about climate change.

the forward-looking and entrepreneurial vision of my great-grandfather,” Goodwin said at the time, encouraging Exxon to pursue wind and solar energy just as John D. had embraced the shift from whale oil to petroleum. It was a relatively buttoned-up moment in the annals of activism—“These are people who were bred not to raise their voices too forcefully in public,” Daniel Gross wrote in *Slate*, reviewing the press conference—and the resolutions were soundly defeated. The effort prompted a *Wall Street Journal* columnist to ask, “Do the Rockefellers still matter?”

A number of family members signed letters urging Tillerson to take action on climate change, but the company’s response to one letter, Goodwin said, was, roughly, “If you don’t like the company, sell your stock.” Exxon—currently valued at \$367 billion—had grown so large that, during the shareholder battle, Exxon said that the dissenting family members owned just .006 percent of its shares. Those Rockefellers who tried to sell their stock found that much of it was tied up in a trust whose managers rejected requests to divest. When the Brothers Fund considered divesting from Exxon in favor of renewable-energy stocks, which it eventually did, some board members expressed concern about diminishing returns.

Meanwhile, the Family Fund had begun pursuing “a project that seemed potentially interesting but might not go anywhere,” Kaiser said. In 2013, Wasserman met with Steve Coll, the dean of Columbia University’s School of Journalism, who had published a book called *Private Empire: Exxon-Mobil and American Power*. As they discussed the fund’s possible endowment of a reporting project on climate change, Coll said one topic from his book that had gone uninvestigated was the suggestion that what Exxon knew about climate change internally did not fit with its public proclamations. “Don’t believe for a minute that ExxonMobil doesn’t think climate change is real,” a former Exxon manager had told Coll.

The Family Fund gave Columbia \$550,000 to look into the topic. Around the same time, InsideClimate News, a website that covers the environment and receives significant funding from the Brothers Fund, began a similar investigation. Both sets of journalists say they initially looked into a number of fossil-fuel companies but it quickly became clear that Exxon had not only done the most robust climate research but had also sown doubt about climate change. When Coll gave an update to the

Family Fund, he warned it that the soon-to-be published investigation would likely focus on Exxon.

SO WHAT DID EXXON KNOW? “There is general scientific agreement that the most likely manner in which mankind is influencing the global climate is through carbon-dioxide release from the burning of fossil fuels,” James Black, an Exxon scientist, told company executives in 1977. “Present thinking holds that man has a time window of five to ten years before the need for hard decisions regarding changes in energy strategies might become critical.” Five years later, an internal report declared that without “major reductions in fossil fuel combustion,” a number of “potentially catastrophic” events, such as the eventual flooding of “much of the US East Coast, including the State of Florida and Washington D.C.,” could occur. The changes wouldn’t come for decades, the report said, but “once the effects are measurable, they might not be reversible.”

The journalistic investigations, published in late 2015 by InsideClimate News and the *Los Angeles Times*, which collaborated with Columbia, made it clear that while Exxon’s scientists acknowledged the inherent uncertainty in predicting the future, they said that the scientific community had reached consensus and that Exxon had an “ethical responsibility” to study the problem and make its findings public. The company seemed to agree, spending \$1 million in 1979 to outfit a supertanker with equipment to analyze carbon-dioxide levels along the ship’s route between the Middle East and the Gulf of Mexico.

It wasn’t surprising to find that Exxon, which employs some 16,000 scientists and engineers, was an early climate-research leader. “They have astrophysicists on their payroll, for Chrissakes,” Kaiser said. What was surprising, and helpful to the journalists, was that some former Exxon employees turned out to be pack rats and had kept copies of decades-old reports. An early break came when InsideClimate News spoke to Mike MacCracken, a former government scientist whose great-grandfather, coincidentally, was John D. Rockefeller’s legal counsel. (“We still have the silver tea set he gave my great-grandfather,” MacCracken told me.) MacCracken had worked with Exxon in the 1980s and ’90s and said its research was among the best, citing a 1985 report that concluded that the Earth would

warm two to five degrees Celsius by 2100. “That’s exactly what we’d say today,” MacCracken said.

By the late ’80s, the rest of the world had begun to grasp the problem; for 1988, *Time* named the “Endangered Earth” its second-ever nonhuman “Person of the Year,” after “The Computer.” By then, Exxon and other fossil-fuel companies had begun factoring climate change into their business decisions. “We considered climate change in a number of operational and planning issues,” Brian Flannery, Exxon’s in-house climate adviser at the time, told the Columbia reporters. In 1989, Shell raised a natural-gas platform in the North Sea by several feet to accommodate rising sea levels, while engineers designing a pipeline owned by several companies, including Exxon, said they would have to account for the “considerable increase of the frequency of storms as a result of climate change.” A researcher at an Exxon subsidiary even argued that climate change offered a silver lining as the company looked for oil in the Arctic: “Potential global warming can only help lower exploration and development costs.”

Publicly, however, Exxon was working to cloud the debate. In 1988, an Exxon spokesperson wrote a memo arguing the company should “emphasize the uncertainty in scientific conclusions.” In the decades to come, Exxon gave millions to groups that denied climate change, including the American Petroleum Institute, which waged a \$6 million public-relations battle in the late ’90s against the Kyoto Protocol, one of the world’s first attempts to deal with the issue. “Victory will be achieved when: average citizens ‘understand’ (recognize) uncertainties in climate science” and when “recognition of uncertainties becomes part of the ‘conventional wisdom,’” one memo read. The strategy echoed one promoted by a tobacco executive in 1969: “Doubt is our product.”

Lee Raymond, Exxon’s CEO at the time, was a devout believer in fossil fuels. He once suggested carving the words “Crude Oil” into stone at company headquarters, and shut down Exxon’s early efforts in renewable energy, which he saw as acquiescence to environmentalists in Washington. “Presidents come and go,” Raymond told Steve Coll. “Exxon doesn’t.” In public, Raymond pressed the case that climate science was far from settled. “Many people—politicians and the public alike—believe that global warming is a rock-solid certainty. But it’s not,” he said in 1997. In 2000, as the world considered the Kyoto Protocol, Raymond

put up a slide at Exxon's shareholder meeting showing a widely circulated list purporting to include thousands of scientists who had signed a petition questioning the climate consensus—a list that included several *Star Wars* characters and a Spice Girl. A year later, the Bush administration abandoned Kyoto.

THE ROCKEFELLER-funded articles sent climate activists into a frenzy. Bill McKibben, the writer and environmentalist, was arrested while protesting at an Exxon gas station with a sign that read, THIS PUMP TEMPORARILY CLOSED BECAUSE EXXONMOBIL LIED ABOUT (#EXXONKNEW) CLIMATE. A hashtag was born, and activists tried naming a melting Antarctic iceberg “Exxon Knew 1” and brought a 13-foot “Exxon Knew” ice sculpture to the company's shareholder meeting. For the Rockefellers who had taken a risk with the grant, the results were validating. “It proved the whole debate over climate change was a phony construct from the beginning,” Wasserman said.

Exxon, meanwhile, struggled to come up with a defense. The company sent a letter to Columbia, accusing its journalists of cherry-picking documents, to which Coll responded with a six-page letter defending the reporters and pointing out that Exxon didn't seem to be challenging any facts. (The journalists suffered cyberattacks after their stories were published but weren't able to determine who was responsible.) During a Fox Business appearance, Tillerson punted on a question about the controversy—“I'm not sure how helpful it would be to talk about it”—just as he did later, during his confirmation hearing as nominee for secretary of State.

By spring, Exxon had decided to play the victim. “We all sat around the table and said, ‘This feels very orchestrated,’” Suzanne McCarron, Exxon's vice-president of public and government affairs, told Bloomberg in 2016. Exxon cited a meeting between various environmental groups at offices shared by the Brothers Fund and the Family Fund; one participant had sent an email with possible discussion topics, including how “to establish in the public's mind that Exxon is a corrupt institution that has pushed humanity (and all creation) toward climate chaos and grave harm.” When the Family Fund announced it was divesting from Exxon as a result of the company's “morally reprehensible” behavior, Exxon responded, “It's not surprising that they're divesting from the company since they're already funding a conspiracy against us.”

There was, of course, precedent for condemning the Rockefellers as shadowy puppet masters. The Trilateral Commission, which David Rockefeller founded in 1973 to connect nongovernmental organizations in different countries, has long been a central node in any conspiracy theorist's map of the globalist power structure. David Rockefeller never completely rejected the accusation—“Conspiring with others around the world to build a more integrated global political and economic structure—one world, if you will. If that's the charge, I stand guilty, and I am proud of it,” he wrote in his memoir—and his descendants did not deny having coordinated their efforts to bring Exxon to task. They simply disagreed with the idea that they had done anything wrong. “We're getting creamed by the right, and Exxon, for doing nothing but associating with other civic associations to try to address larger societal problems,” Wasserman said. “They



Rex Tillerson and Lee Raymond in 2005.

are attacking behavior that is pretty central to what this country is about.”

Kaiser expected Exxon to go after the family but was surprised by the ferocity of the attack. “There's not a giant appetite for being the next name after Soros in all these right-wing screeds,” Kaiser said. A writer for Natural Gas Now, one of numerous pro-oil sites that began denouncing the family, declared, “It's time to RICO the Rockefellers.” (“This guy from Daily Caller writes about us every other day,” Wasserman said.) Lamar Smith, a Republican congressman from Texas, filed subpoenas against the Rockefeller funds and various environmental groups alleging they were attempting to “deprive” Exxon of its First Amendment rights. When Kaiser went on an NPR call-in show alongside an Exxon spokesman who dismissed the allegations as “so-called journalism that was hired and paid for by two Rockefeller organizations,” Kaiser took a call from Tony in Michigan, who identified himself as “somewhat of a skeptic” about climate

change. “I feel that the taxes and all the things that happen because of the so-called climate-change crowd affect a small person like myself as opposed to Mr. Rockefeller,” Tony said, referring to Kaiser. “I would just like to ask Mr. Rockefeller how he gets around the country and the world—is it one of his family's many private jets or private yachts?” Kaiser replied that he flies commercial—“economy, by the way”—and that every family, including his, could do more.

The Rockefellers themselves are not uniform in their views. There are conservative and liberal Rockefellers. Some still work in the fossil-fuel business. Ariana Rockefeller, a 35-year-old competitive equestrian rider who runs an eponymous fashion brand, called the campaign by her relatives “deeply misguided,” and told CBS, “I don't think denouncing a family legacy is the best way to go about doing this.”

Kaiser would not admit to any significant familial tension—“Ari and I just disagree about this”—and the Rockefellers I spoke to were generally just as committed to a patrician sense of discretion as they were to the environment. Whenever I asked about intrafamily conflict, Kaiser would pause, then speak at a pace that would make any lawyer proud. He was nervous enough about the family reaction to his *NYRB* piece that he warned some relatives about its impending publication and asked the *NYRB* not to title it “*The Rockefellers v. Exxon*.” During the discussion at MoMA, several relatives objected to the Exxon campaign on ideological grounds, while others said they simply didn't like seeing the family name in the news. But Kaiser declined to say which of his uncles and cousins thought what. “We had a very civil conversation,” he said. “And nobody persuaded anybody of anything.”

IN 2015, Lee Wasserman met with New York attorney general Eric Schneiderman's office to discuss whether Exxon's alleged climate deception might have violated the Martin Act, a wide-ranging New York State securities law that prohibits “all deceitful practices contrary to the plain rules of common honesty.” Schneiderman was already pursuing similar claims against Peabody Energy, the world's largest public coal company, and shortly after the Exxon articles were published, Schneiderman announced he would investigate whether Exxon had defrauded its shareholders, and the public, by denying the impact of climate change.

Exxon has since devoted considerable effort to delaying that process. As attorneys in Schneiderman's (Continued on page 86)

How fast can
a beauty blogger
become the millennials'
Estée Lauder?
About three years.

By Amy Larocca

Photograph by Ben Hassett

The
Magic
Skin
of
GLOSSIER's
Emily Weiss

*Aglossed
Weiss.*



Emily Weiss is standing on Lafayette Street, just north of Canal, wearing a red lace Valentino dress with a puffy pink fur jacket draped awkwardly over her shoulder. It's an incongruous outfit for the season (mid-November) and the weather (*brrrr*) and the time of day (just after 9 a.m.), but it's also exactly the kind of thing someone would wear if she expected to show up on lots of social-media feeds within the hour.

Weiss is smiling as she ducks into a storefront: Its windows are opaque, but the whole thing is glowing red, matching her dress and her jacket—it's just all so beautifully photographable. There are a few small letters on the front: GLOSSIER YOU, the name of her first fragrance. This is the pop-up shop to launch the perfume, the 22nd product from her not-yet-four-year-old, \$34 million company Glossier, and if it follows the trajectory of the other 21, it could have a waiting list and a line around the block full of young girls with clear complexions eager to pay \$60 to smell a little bit like musk but mostly, the description promises, like subtly improved versions of their already-fragrant selves. Six floors up is the company's showroom and main retail establishment, which, though it operates without the benefit of a street-level window, generates more sales revenue per square foot than the average Apple store, according to Weiss.

Until recently, the pop-up space had been a Dunkin' Donuts, but it's been rebuilt for an army of Glossier girls: upholstered in undulating waves of red, with a pink curtained ceiling, pink tinted mirrors, and—in a slightly S&M touch—a leather-strap-bound pink pouf. Beautiful young women wearing red pantsuits make deep eye contact and speak in whispery voices. "Welcome," says one, as she lifts a bell jar, wafting the odor about. "Do you like it? All that's missing is ... you." A hand in a red patent-leather glove holding a jar of perfume emerges from a mirrored closet, spritzes, waves, retreats—

a cross between a glory hole and the ground floor of Saks.

"I don't know what to tell you," Weiss says, "except that it's really, really, really weird in here!" She's talking through a big, dimpled grin. "For you to go out of your house and make a pilgrimage somewhere, there needs to be a reason. And this," she says, gesturing around the shop, "this is the new luxury!"

The Glossier aesthetic is sometimes described as makeup for people who are already pretty—it's a bit like Alexander Wang, clothing for off-duty models to toss on for Vespa-ing between shows in Milan. It's the idea that peeling away artifice and pomp leads to an even more thrilling beauty: the real thing. It didn't matter that the models weren't the ones buying it; consumers were devouring backstage photography as much (if not more) than they were devouring runway images, and it created a pared-back, super-cool-girl language of its own. The Glossier appeal is similar: The makeup is for gilding your lovely lily, for people who reject the beauty-queen, done-face ideal. The brand's motto is skin first, but Glossier doesn't bore you with science. (In fact, Weiss chooses not to share the details of her products' formulations. She just doesn't think her customers care about ingredients if they're happy with the results.)

The company launched online in 2014 with only four products: Milky Jelly Cleanser, a priming moisturizer, Balm Dotcom lip balm, and a misting spray. Everything was available only via Glossier's millennial-pink-accented website and priced for a young market. The products shipped in resealable pink bubble-wrap pouches with a little strip of graffiti-doodle stickers inside, which Weiss hoped her customers would plaster all over their stuff, then take pictures of the stickers plastered all over their stuff to post on social media. Customers sharing with other customers was a key part of the business model, and although Weiss is a perfect manifestation of the brand's ideal, she consciously decided to cede ground to her clientele. "It's not about one person being the rule-maker tastemaker," she says. "That's not how people are shopping anymore. Women are discovering beauty products through their friends, full stop."

Weiss's plan was for customers to feel like the brand itself was a close friend—a friend who was maybe a little older, and maybe a little cooler, who maybe moved to the city when you stayed in your hometown but never lost her sense of humor or humility—more likely to cross her eyes in a photograph than make a duck face. "I wanted to create a brand whose sweatshirt you wanted to wear," she says.

Last year, Glossier launched a "rep" program—highly motivated users get product credit and a commission for referring friends who become buyers, virtual Avon ladies for the digital age. Reps get their own pages on the Glossier website ("Hi! I'm Alyssa ... Each individual product plays a part in making me look refreshed, dewy, and natural every single day"), and Weiss swears she and her staff read their feedback carefully. They've started working on travel sizes for their Soothing Face Mist and Milky Jelly Cleanser, for example, because customers complained that the TSA had thrown out the bottles for being too big. On the Glossier You page, "Dis Good. Dis Real Good," "Holy grail perfume," and "I use this perfume every day and it actually is a boost of confidence!" are typical posts. But also: "Glossier You doesn't actually smell like the mall—it smells like the CONCEPT of the mall ... Imagine going back to your fondest hometown mall, minus all the people you'd rather not run into, and that's what 'You' smells like ... Weird because you bought a fragrance online without actually smelling it because of pretty images of women who own it. Capitalism is WILD!"

Emily Weiss has been something of a millennial icon, the star of her own fairy tale, ever since 2007, when she

♦ *Instagrams from the Glossier You experience.*



PREVIOUS SPREAD: MAKEUP BY MARLA BELT AT STREETERS USING M.A.C COSMETICS; HAIR BY JOEY GEORGE AT STREETERS USING AG HAIR; NAILS BY NAOMI YASUDA AT STREETERS; STYLING BY ANNA TREVELYAN. THIS PAGE: PHOTOGRAPHS: @LALLY_TRILLI_ROLLY/INSTAGRAM (EXTERIOR); @QUI_RA/INSTAGRAM (YOU SMELL GOOD); @MICHELLE...LAW/INSTAGRAM (RED SUIT).

showed up on three episodes of MTV's *The Hills*. Weiss was the New York intern, the sophisticated brunette to the scattered L.A. blondes, flown in when the L.A. girls were flailing. She immediately, unflaggingly, took over, sorting some shit out (peonies, obviously!). Lauren and Whitney blushed and referred to Weiss, in hushed, jealous-slash-nasty tones: "Superintern."

Weiss is from Wilton, Connecticut, a *Gilmore Girls*-y town in Fairfield County full of white clapboard houses on big, glittering lakes, a commuter burb with a Cheever vibe. Weiss's father worked as an executive at Pitney Bowes, and her mother was a homemaker. "I had a really great childhood," she says. At the public school, where everyone played lacrosse, she was "a theater nerd doing art in my corner." When she was in seventh grade, she wrote a Letter to the Editor to *Vogue* after admiring an Arthur Elgort shoot starring the model Trish Goff. "I wrote in and said, 'Thank you for showing young women how to wear short skirts in a classy way, Signed, Emily Weiss, Wilton, Connecticut.'" When they published it, I died."

She babysat on weekends for a neighbor who worked at Ralph Lauren. "It was like, 'I like your kid and all, but what I really want is to work at Ralph Lauren,'" Weiss says. The neighbor was charmed, and Weiss began commuting to Madison Avenue ("With the men," she says, "honestly, it was all the men") the summer of her 15th year. "I proved myself to be very valuable," she says. "You have to be so many things. You have to be a sponge, you have to be respectful, you have to roll up your sleeves. I really earned my right to be there. I was just like, 'Put me to work. I love work!'" When she went back to school in the fall, she persuaded her parents to allow her to play hooky during collections so that she could go back to help out at Ralph Lauren. Eventually, Whitney Fairchild, then a senior design director at the brand, called Amy Astley, then the editor-in-chief of *Teen Vogue*. "She said, 'Okay, I have never done this before, but I have someone you really have to meet,'" Astley says. "So I did, and wow. She had incredible style and taste, she was sophisticated and driven, she was that young person who just wanted to work and who really preferred being around adults. Lena Dunham used to babysit my kids, and I remember thinking that Emily was very much the same way—an old soul."

"She was also," Astley says, "great to photograph. The MTV people loved her. But Emily said, 'I don't want to be a reality-television star.' She knew that was a trap. I always knew that Emily would go far, and one of the ways I knew was that she just walked away from MTV." Weiss had figured out where real power lies, and it



Instagrams from the Glossier showroom.

"The MTV people loved her. But Emily said, 'I don't want to be a reality-television star.'"

wasn't going to come from moaning about her boyfriends on TV.

Instead, Weiss got a series of assistant jobs at Condé Nast—first in the fashion closet at *W* magazine, then as an assistant to the stylist Elissa Santisi, who was then on contract at *Vogue*. She began traveling for shoots with Santisi, grilling the hair and makeup teams about their work. Once, on a Terry Richardson shoot in Miami, Weiss admired the model's tan, and the model, Doutzen Kroes, recommended a self-tanner to Weiss. She tried it, loved it, and, although she'd never written about beauty before, asked *Vogue*'s then-beauty director Sarah Brown if she could write about it for the magazine's website. "It was a total unlock moment," Weiss says now. "I was like, 'God, I love this. How fun is it to write about beauty? To talk about beauty?' I just kind of caught the bug."

That August, sitting on a beach in Connecticut with her parents, she made up her mind. "Guys, I think I'm going to start a blog," she told them. "It's going to be about women and

putting them and their narrative and their story at the forefront and giving them a voice and a platform and just really encouraging them." She beams her superstar smile. "I mean, I didn't really say all that. That's what it became."

Into the Gloss launched six weeks later, an intimate look at insiders' habits. In its signature vertical, the Top Shelf, fashion people Weiss had met during her time at *Vogue*, like the editor Sally Singer and Kroes, allowed Weiss to photograph their medicine cabinets and then discussed, at length, their groom- (Continued on page 87)

PORTLANDIA THE FINAL SEASON



PORTLANDIA THE FINAL SEASON THURS 10

THURS 10P | JAN 18 **IFC**



OP | JAN 18 **IFC** PORTLA

THE CUT

The Moon Over Marine Serre

A just-out-of-school designer captivates fashion's toughest crowd.

~~~~~  
*By Cathy Horyn*  
~~~~~

Photographs by Erik Madigan Heck

STYLING BY REBECCA RAMSEY





←
Moon-print stretch top,
\$250, leggings, \$380,
and boots, \$630,
at Dover Street Market,
160 Lexington Ave.

→
Moiré jacket, \$1,300, and
trousers, \$770,
at Dover Street Market.

T

HE CORNERSTONE of Marine Serre's 2016 graduation collection from La Cambre, the Belgian design school, was a print of a tiny crescent moon. Although the celestial symbol has links to a number of cultures and religions, it is most commonly associated with Islam, and it was in that context that Serre used it in her collection, which she named "Radical Call for Love." Born in 1991, Serre is French, part of a generation that has grown up fearing terrorism but also the reaction to terrorism. The attacks in Paris in November 2015 and in Brussels four months later occurred during her final year at La Cambre. Her collection, which included references to 19th-century dress and contemporary sportswear, was a response to those events, although Serre stopped short of calling it a political statement.

Sitting on the jury at the La Cambre student show was Romain Joste, who, with Anaïs Lafarge and Guillaume Steinmetz, founded the Paris concept store the Broken Arm. Joste, unable to pinpoint the exact feelings Serre's collection had elicited in him—a plus in his view—invited her to meet his partners in Paris. There, they offered to put some of her garments in the shop's windows during Fashion Week. In 1984, a London boutique had done the same thing for a guy named Galliano. The Broken Arm owners also told Serre they'd help pay to produce the roughly 15 styles.

"Radical Call for Love" was only Serre's second collection, yet she was now in the same store as big names like Balenciaga, Loewe, Céline, and Raf Simons. Among those who stopped by was Adrian Joffe, the president of both Dover Street Market International and Comme des Garçons International, the label designed by his wife, Rei Kawakubo. He offered to carry Serre at Dover Street and to help with production costs. By last fall, when Dover Street opened Marine Serre pop-up shops in four international locations, the designer had won the LVMH Prize for the same work, collecting roughly \$357,000. The moon print was often spotted in the crowds at New York and Paris Fashion Weeks.

"Radical Call for Love" demonstrated that, before she even had a business, Serre had created a brand. What's more, the moon print could be read in the context of Islamic iconography or as a kind of Pop graphic, just as her wide headbands could be read as a take on an athletic band or a hijab. Serre, who will hold her first proper show this February, during the Paris collections, told me, "There are people who think the print is quite radical, and there are others who don't know anything about politics and think it's just cute. And this is exactly what I love."



Left: Pleated cotton-and-silk-hybrid dress with jersey tank top, \$4,120 at Dover Street Market. Right: Pleated cotton-and-silk-hybrid dress with surf-shirt jersey top, \$5,100 at Dover Street Market.



Carpet dress in viscose and cotton, \$3,265 at matchesfashion.com. Knit headband with metal and glass jewelry, \$670 at ssense.com. Francesco Russo shoes, \$990 at nordstrom.com.

HAIR BY TAKASHI YUSA USING L'ORÉAL AT MAM-NYC; MAKEUP BY YUKI HAYASHI AT STREETERS; SET DESIGN BY ANDREA HUELSE

A woman with dark hair pulled back is shown from the waist up, wearing a strapless white ball gown. The gown features a pattern of small red crescent moons. She is looking upwards and to the left. The background is a solid, vibrant red.

Ball dress in printed cotton, \$1,165 at nordstrom.com. Knit headband, \$125 at matchesfashion.com.



the metamorphosis



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STRATEGIST

..... A SNEAKER SHOP THAT
AERIN LAUDER'S UPPER EAST SIDE AT

SC N 1

AR IN SOHO
AG CHAIRS

ADAM PLATT'S

Where to Eat

2018

AFTER A YEAR of eating his way through the city's best oyster frittatas, Iraqi dumplings, Nagasaki eels, and goat-only menus, our critic Adam Platt has assembled his annual best-restaurants survey. Changes abound: Once a no-go zone, midtown is suddenly home to actually good places to eat. Beef is back, as is breakfast. It was the year of top-rate *omakase* and excellent global cuisine (like **Guan Fu Sichuan**, seen here and found in the basement mall underneath Flushing's Hyatt Place hotel). And for those looking to forget that 2017 happened at all, there were lots of fine new bars to get completely blotto in while gorging on Manila clams and patty melts.

BEST BETS

FIRST LOOK

In mid-March, Australian yoga studio **Humming Puppy** will open 4,157 square feet of (literally) humming studio space (119 W. 23rd St.).

Acoustics: 40-Hz. frequencies make a hum that supposedly activates gamma waves in the brain to help yogis achieve peak athletic performance.



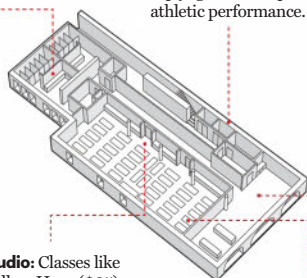
Lounge: Herbal tea and coconut water for pre- and post-class.

Floors: Tiered, so every yogi can have an unblocked view of the instructor.

Studio: Classes like Mellow Hum (\$35), which focuses on yin-inspired postures, and Advanced Hum, which entails difficult inversions and balances.



Locker Room: Showers stocked with soaps and shampoos from Australian brand Aspar, plus hair dryers and straightening irons from ghd.



2x2

Beanbag Chairs for Grown-ups

Beyond the rec room.

STRUCTURED

SLOUCHY

CHEAPER



Cooper velvet lounge chair, \$249 at urbanoutfitters.com.



Pillows By Elissa Boho lounger, \$160 at etsy.com.

PRICIER



Faux-fur beanbag in wolf, \$468 at coxandcox.co.uk.



Vintage kilim beanbag No.003, \$1,200 at store.koskela.com.

THREE IN ONE

Sun Collective, a hub for clean beauty products and mystical ceremonies, has opened on the Lower East Side (16 Clinton St.).



SHOP Beauty products like a Scandinavian cloudberry balm (\$24) and Malaya Organics face serum (\$95); "sex oil" by Province Apothecary (\$28).



EVENTS Tea ceremonies with meditation teacher Catrina Armendariz (\$20); tarot-card readings (from \$10); essential-oils workshops with company Sun + Glory (\$40).



POP-UPS Two-day trunk shows featuring brands like "modern cowgirl" boutique Wild West and custom-suit-makers Chookhare & Sons.

ASK A SHOP CLERK

Erik Fagerlind, co-founder of Swedish sneakerhead emporium **SneakersNStuff**, arrived downtown (22 Little W. 12th St.).



You have a bar in the basement?

"We wanted something to set us apart from other shoe stores. So in addition to having online sneaker raffles—instead of in-store 'drops'—we are going to have performers at night. *Nas* played at the opening party. We're not going to have the bar and store open simultaneously; *New York doesn't like you to drink while you shop.*"

URBAN EXPORT

Philip Lotko, co-founder of Danish raingear line **Rains**, opened the brand's first Stateside store, with downpour-resistant trenches (292 Lafayette St.).



"Our coats are lightweight and treated with polyurethane, which makes them very soft to touch. We're trying to make stylish designs—like a bomber jacket (\$230) and a trench (\$135)—that are still within the rain universe. The store has birch-veneer shelves and a thermoplastic-and-wool cash register—very Scandinavian, very minimal. We started selling in America four years ago, and we've done well in New York and rainy cities like Portland and Seattle. We've only done okay in L.A."

TOP FIVE

➤ In late December, **Aerin Lauder** debuted a by-appointment-only shop for her eponymous luxury homewares line (595 Madison Ave., fifth fl.; newyork@aerin.com).



"This gold heart **picture frame** (\$275) is an easy baby gift: Someone has a baby, you give them a heart frame with a picture of the baby."



"Men and women love these white **faux-shagreen dominoes** (\$1,100) equally. You can play dominoes at all ages—it's a good game for different generations."



"Irene Danilovich makes this customizable **bracelet** (\$5,900). Usually people will order ones that say 'Happy' or 'Smile,' or their kid's name. Mine has my name, 'Aerin.'"



"This Isla Simpson **stationery** (\$85) was made custom for us. We're right by Barneys and Bergdorf, so it's important we have things you can't find elsewhere."



"These **ceramic flowers** (\$3,500) are by Vladimir Kanevsky, who just had a show at the Hermitage. I love his geraniums; they remind me of Long Island."

THE LOOK BOOK

LIZ KLEIN

Art Adviser

That looks like a very warm coat. It is. It's Fendi. I like the cold. I don't like to *be* cold, but I know how to dress for the cold. You have to channel Julie Christie and Omar Sharif from *Doctor Zhivago* and look like you're about to set out across the tundra in a sleigh. In the winter, I only wear wool and fur. I look around and see people in jean jackets and sweatshirts and want to go up to them and say, "I can help you! No cotton!" Cotton is a plant, it attracts moisture.

Where are you from?

I grew up in Manhattan, on the Upper East Side, and went to an all-girls school—Nightingale. Growing up here, you miss out on pool parties, cheerleading, and drunk driving. Instead, we got to go out dancing all the time—to Tunnel, Limelight, Palladium. We would wear these tiny tight spandex skirts and oversize men's coats we'd buy from Canal Jeans. It'd be the dead of winter, we'd be waiting in line to get into these clubs, and these coats were not warm at all.

INTERVIEW BY
ALEXIS SWERDLOFF



LIGHTNING ROUND

Neighborhood:

"Downtown." **Reading:** Anna Karenina, "for my book club. We have an English professor come and walk us through the books so we don't sit around and gossip and chitchat."

Favorite New York meal:

The sea urchin at Omen. **Last TV show binged:** The Crown.

Most-missed New York spot: Florent.



2018

ADAM PLATT'S

Where

An agenda for eating
(and drinking) the very best New York
has to offer right now.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY BOBBY DOHERTY

The Lost Lady

A man with dark hair, blue eyes, and extensive tattoos on his arms is seated at a table, eating with chopsticks. He is wearing a yellow and black horizontally striped shirt. The table is filled with various Japanese dishes, including a bowl of ramen, a plate of oysters, a bowl of cucumber salad, a bowl of fried food, and a glass of beer. The background features a wall with pink cherry blossoms and a mural of a person. The text "Eat to Eat" is overlaid in large white letters.

Eat to Eat

Tokyo Record Bar

W

HERE SHOULD I BE EATING these days?!" is the question your humble critic always hears this time of year, echoing incessantly from colleagues and family members and even from dimly known acquaintances, as I stagger down the wind-swept avenues on the way to my next meal. The answer, as

always in the roiling, ever-evolving cosmos of New York dining, is everywhere, including that perpetually challenged, overpriced region known as midtown, which lately has undergone a renaissance, replete with freshly renovated seafood palaces, futuristic cocktail bars, and even a new upscale destination taco joint. Elsewhere around town, venerable dining establishments are receiving all sorts of wild and modish makeovers, breakfast has suddenly become the new "It" meal among even the most ambitious superstar chefs, and inspired little establishments serving specialties from far-off places like Tel Aviv, Hanoi, and even Yunnan, China, have been popping up at a dizzying clip. In the city's ever-expanding beefsteak circles, this has been another bumper year for burgers, Korean barbecue, and that timeless fat-cat delicacy thick-cut prime rib, and in the realm of drinks and spirits, New York's barkeeps, bless their souls, keep coming up with ever-more-ingenuous ways to get seriously blotto in the alarming Age of Donald Trump.

Where does one obtain the finest selection of Middle Eastern dumplings in the Greater New York City dining universe, or a New Age version of that Victorian breakfast specialty kedgerie? Is it actually possible, in this increasingly stratified dining era, to get your monthly sushi fix for a reasonable price? We endeavor to answer these ageless questions for you, too, along with many, many more, including where to experience the finest example of "flame forward" cooking, which is suddenly all the rage in certain adventurous kitchens out in Brooklyn, and where to go in Flushing, or down in Chinatown, for the perfect platter of kung pao chicken, or Peking duck. In accordance with what has now become settled New Year's custom, we've also compiled the usual collection of random, highly subjective listicles laying out our favorite new restaurants of the past year and all of the foibles and trends in this mannered, reliably snooty, fashion-conscious world that are driving your increasingly dyspeptic critic slowly insane. And while we're at it, let's say a quiet prayer as we mercifully close the books on one eventful, star-crossed dining year and open the first pages of 2018, for the end of boorish behavior in kitchens and dining rooms everywhere and the beginnings of a kinder, more equitable, more truly hospitable restaurant era.

1 Midtown Renaissance



SOME OF US remember the days—say, ten or 12 months ago—when midtown Manhattan was a no-go zone on the great gourmet heat map of the city, a forbidding region clogged with tourist chain restaurants, moldering expense-account steak joints, and the usual lunchtime jumble of salad bars and heavily trafficked halal trucks. But thanks to a sudden influx of high-profile downtown chefs (and prodigious amounts of local capital), this previously challenged dining neighborhood has morphed overnight into a multi-star destination filled with a variety of interesting, if predictably pricey, places to eat. Exhibit A in this unexpected little boomlet is Alex Stupak's posh new taco emporium **Empellón** on East 53rd Street, where the bar was jammed, the last time I dropped in, with crowds of local burghers dressed in sensible business attire, snacking on nachos dressed with pats of gourmet sea urchin and fresh crab while merrily knocking back frosty after-work margaritas touched with apricot nectar and saffron-infused tequila cocktails. There's an excellent version of that old midtown favorite steak tartare on the menu, served under a layer of melted queso, and a delicious confit of short rib chopped into little cubes and tossed with a tangy picadillo garnish. Be sure to enhance your feast with bowls of fresh guacamole (it's served with seven different kinds of salsa) and to save room for Stupak's desserts, which include the former award-winning pastry chef's famous, uncannily accurate avocado parfait, one of the year's few made-for-Instagram creations that actually live up to the hype.

Similarly enticing creations are on display high over Columbus Circle in the sky lobby of the Mandarin Oriental hotel, where Grant Achatz and his itinerant troupe of herbalogists, "drink-makers," and madcap cooks have opened the New York branch of his famous Chicago bar **The Aviary**. Yes, the lobby setting feels a little impersonal, and if

you're familiar with the famous chef's experiments back in Chicago, purchasing one of the many booking options on the restaurant website might feel a little like buying tickets to the performance of a traveling production of *Cats*, say, or a long-running Vegas magic show. But for grizzled, no-nonsense New Yorkers who're used to taking their ritual martinis straight up, and who've endured enough comfort-food manias over the past decade or so to last a lifetime, there's a certain pleasurable release in sitting back and enjoying, at least for one boozy evening, Achatz's carefully staged culinary creations, which include pork rinds as big as palm fronds, weirdly reimagined gin-and-tonics that look like the green contents of lava lamps, and painstakingly deconstructed Bloody Marys, which are reassembled table-side, like a magic trick.

If you can afford the extravagant prices, an antic sense of occasion pervades the diverse, cruise-ship-style portfolio of restaurants that the ever-expanding Major Food Group empire, and its various fat-cat investors, have opened on the ground floor of the Seagram Building on Park Avenue. I'm not sure midtown Manhattan really needs a Japanese-themed surf-and-turf establishment, but if you have a few hundred dollars to drop on giant "to share" platters of tomahawk rib-eye chops rubbed with cumin and Sichuan pepper, along with a whole array of sushi and fusion treats dreamed up by the decorated downtown sushi master Tasuku Murakami, then I suggest you join the revelers below decks at **The Lobster Club**, which used to be called *Brasserie* but has been redone in swank, tastefully glowing fashion by the architect Peter Marino, with coral-colored, Jetsons-like café chairs and roomy, slightly raised leather banquettes covered in shades of nautical light green. The original pool upstairs in the former Four Seasons Pool Room remains intact, although the new proprietors have hung a slowly spinning Calder mobile above it and turned the famous cathedral space into a high-end seafood concept called **The Pool**, complete with acres of blue carpet on the floor, a selection of cocktails, and a million-dollar collection of that favorite hedge-fund libation of yesteryear Chateau d'Yquem. Rich Torrisi's diligent, connect-the-dots seafood has its admirable qualities (the oysters, the uni toast, the Meyer-lemon meringue for dessert), but if it's real fin de siècle fireworks you're after, head across the hall to **The Grill**, where his chef-partner, Mario Carbone, has hijacked Philip Johnson's famous old Grill Room and turned it into a kind of raucous homage

to the dining specialties of Gilded Age, robber-baron New York. With its booming, exuberant soundtrack and multitudes of tuxedo-wearing wait staff perambulating trolleys filled with haunches of prime rib and great flaming desserts, the mid-century-modern space can resemble a fever dream straight out of the show *Billions* during the crowded dinnertime service. So go at lunch, when the decibel level drops to a civilized murmur, and it's a pleasure, especially if someone else is paying, to graze on postmillennial spins on old American classics like cool, gold-rimmed bowls of vichyssoise dressed with spoonfuls of caviar, generous crab cakes made with flattened wafers of golden crisped potato and chunks of real blue crab, and slices of the fine grasshopper Charlotte for dessert, which combines the minty, chocolaty qualities of grasshopper pie with a delicate Continental wisp of sophistication and disappears to nothing on the tip of your tongue.

2 Beefeater-palooza



FOOD ENTHUSIASMS come and go in this fickle town, but lately your overfed critic has noticed an uptick in that most durable big-city dining trend of all: the untrammelled consumption of messy cheeseburgers, rib platters, and great haunches of beef. Our favorite new lunchtime burger is the ingenious Gorgonzola, anchovy, and radicchio-topped umami bomb that Ignacio Mattos and his team of cooks serve at their ever-improving West Soho establishment **Café Altro Paradiso**. The sturdy, tomato-confit-topped Piedmontese burger is one of the better things I tasted on a recent visit to the noted vegetable-forward chef John Fraser's new, decidedly non-vegetarian Bleecker Street brasserie, **The Loyal**, where the menu includes numerous beefy, non-vegan cuts, the best of which is a thick bone-in rib eye that the kitchen piles, in classic trencherman style, with baked mushroom caps. For the ultimate in burger pleasure, however, this year's blue ribbon goes to the fabled double-decker monster that the red-meat aficionados of

Chicago's Hogsalt restaurant group are serving up in their tiny, lavishly appointed new West Village outpost, **4 Charles Prime Rib**. Sure, the narrow, streetcar-size *faux*-speakeasy space is impossible to get into, and once inside, you'll find the brown leather banquettes filled largely with leather-lunged Wall Street hucksters of the most insufferable kind. But if you're a discerning burger snob, it's worth the hassle to get a taste of this perfectly weighted creation, which is constructed, like its fabled Au Cheval sibling back in Chicago, with two four-ounce patties of prime beef and a classic topping of pickles, onions, and Kraft-like American cheese, all squeezed between a shiny-topped brioche bun.

As the name indicates, 4 Charles also serves several tender, properly thick, gently bleeding cuts of prime rib (if you have room after the burger, order the trimmer Chicago Cut with a side of horseradish cream), although our favorite edition of this suddenly trendy ye olde chop of beef is the beautifully aged, two-pound monster that Angie Mar roasts and serves on Sundays only, with cherry Bordelaise sauce and all the trimmings, for the crowds of downtown swells who've been filling the tables lately at her beef-centric reimagining of that old West Village standby **The Beatrice Inn**. The best new rib chop in midtown is the spit-roasted beauty Mario Carbone and his army of well-trained meat cooks serve out of their shiny, state-of-the-art "Prime Rib Trolley" at the aforementioned Grill on Park Avenue, although if a slightly more rusticated rib-eye cut is your particular thing, then I suggest you hop a train to Norberto Piattoni's popular new restaurant **Metta**, which opened last spring on a leafy corner of Fort Greene. Piattoni is a disciple of the famous Argentine asado barbecue master Francis Mallmann, and he turns out all manner of "flame forward" specialties on his Rube Goldberg network of wood and charcoal grills in the back, including bowls of shredded "crispy" lamb and a beautifully charred market-special rib eye. If it's on the menu, order that steak, which you can wash down with what's undoubtedly the most sophisticated selection of magnums and jeroboams of venerable French wines in the entire neighborhood.

If spicy sausage is your particular addiction, the best version I tasted during the course of my gastronomic travels this year is the homemade merguez that the talented White Gold Butchers alum Christina Lecki has been serving over a toasted sourdough flatbread at Andrew Tarlow's Williamsburg dining destination **Reynard**, in the Wythe



Eleven Madison Park



Metta

The Best New Restaurants

1. **Atla**

Enrique Olvera's all-day post-gourmet coffee, breakfast, lunch, and dinner bar checks all of the boxes by combining the economy and comfort of first-class Mexican home cooking with the elevated sensibility and technique of a first-class kitchen.

2. **The Grill**

Mario Carbone's glamorous, endlessly hyped, elaborately priced ode to the fat-cat delicacies of mid-century Manhattan can be overwhelming at dinnertime, but if you go at lunch, when the service is less hectic and the temperature in the great room drops by several degrees, it's one of the best new meals in town.

3. **Cote**

Simon Kim's pricey American-steakhouse-meets-rough-and-tumble Korean-barbecue concept is so ingeniously simple you wonder why no one ever thought of it before.

4. **Ato**

We're as weary as the next expense-account warrior of pricey *omakase* dinners, but the combination of homespun simplicity and focused classical style makes William Shen's refreshingly simple Soho establishment

feel like the kind of memorable, unexpected place you'd stumble on while wandering down one of the more stylish culinary backstreets of Tokyo.

5. **Hanoi House**

What David Chang did for ramen noodles and the Torrisi boys for the chicken parm, John Nguyen does for pho. Many of the other dishes—the crêpes, the “shaking beef,” the sundae-style ché dessert—are also worth a special trip.

6. **Empellón**

After honing his unique comfort-food formula downtown, the hyper-talented Alex Stupak finally gives midtown the taco joint it deserves. The inventive taco combinations have their charms, but many of the entrées work just as well with a stack of steamy, fresh corn tortillas, and be sure to save room for the award-winning desserts.

7. **abcV**

Yes, antiseptic décor can look, on bright, hung-over mornings, a little too much like the cafeteria of a high-priced rehab facility, but even a grumpy old carnivore can't argue with the range or quality of Jean-Georges's meatless, veggie-saturated menu, which includes what is arguably the

finest breakfast service in this breakfast-mad town.

8. **Ugly Baby**

In a year of comebacks, makeovers, and revivals in restaurant land, Sirichai Sreparplarn's return to the kitchen in this brightly colored, railcar-size establishment in Carroll Gardens might be the most momentous of all, especially for those addicted to authentically fiery Thai cooking.

9. **Chez Ma Tante**

In the annual, highly contested, pound-for-pound best-new-restaurant-in-town competition, Aidan O'Neal and Jake Leiber's pint-size Greenpoint bistro gets our vote. Everything on the small, neighborly menu punches above its weight, especially the great offal specialties like pig-head terrine, grilled veal tongue, and the smooth, faintly boozy chicken-liver pâté.

10. **Guan Fu Sichuan**

The city is in the midst of a Chinese-restaurant renaissance, fueled largely by chefs from the homeland.

If you want a taste of real Sichuan cooking circa 2017 instead of, say, 1968, you'll find it at this polished little Flushing establishment.

3

Revivals & Second Acts



➔ IN THE HOTHOUSE, high-pressure, ever-theatrical world of New York dining, chefs and restaurateurs are in a constant state of reinvention, but with tastes changing (and leases expiring) at lightning speed, 2017 was a bumper year for new venues, second acts, and grandly staged restaurant revivals. Down in Danny Meyer's famous culinary Yoknapatawpha County around Union Square, bereft regulars of the original flagship establishment on 16th Street have been eagerly jostling for tables at the larger, spiffier, slightly more impersonal version of **Union Square Cafe** that the maestro and his ever-growing team of hospitality experts opened in the great, double-height former City Crab space on lower Park Avenue. Revivals are a tricky business in restaurant land, where star chefs come and go, and it's difficult to re-create that certain organic sense of intimacy that makes a long-running hit special in the first place. But as I've written before, Meyer and his team do a deft job of sprinkling some of the old magic fairy dust around this barn-size production especially behind the scenes, in the kitchen, where the chef, Carmen Quagliata, manages to preserve the sensibility of the original menu while reworking it in a variety of inventive, updated ways. Many of the familiar old favorites, like the pastas and the fried calamari, have been enlivened with an extra ingredient or two, a first-ever Union Square Cafe house baker is now on staff to supply a steady stream of warm, fresh goodies to the new, much larger, more populist crowd of regulars, and when I belied up to the bar not long ago and called for my usual lunchtime tuna burger, I was shocked to find that, thanks to a few subtle improvements—the bun is fresh baked, the yellowfin is now molded together in strips, instead of ground—it was actually better than the fabled original.

On the evening I visited **Majorelle**—the former La Grenouille front-of-the-house man Charles Masson's predictably baroque,

Hotel, although for the ultimate in all-around meat-eating pleasure, Mrs. Platt suggests you reserve one of the large banquettes in the back of her favorite restaurant of the year, **Cote**, which has been mobbed by members of the city's haute-Korean-barbecue community ever since it opened its doors several months back in a boxy, utilitarian space on 22nd Street in the Flatiron District. After toiling for years in the rarefied, increasingly challenged, white-tablecloth-restaurant world, the proprietor, Simon Kim, had the ingenious idea of combining the quality of prime corn-fed American beef

with the traditional communal comforts of classic, high-end Korean barbecue, and the result is that rare fusion experiment that manages to feel entirely new, complete with a daiquiri riff made with soju instead of rum (the excellent Seoul-Side), sizzling cuts of prime-cut Miyazaki beef and 45-day-aged rib eye on the grill, and home-style favorites like marinated galbi, generously sized bowls of *dolsot bibimbap*, and a delicately fluffy example of the Korean egg soufflé called *gyeran-jjim*, which is better than anything you'll find in the old-warhorse establishments along 32nd Street.



The Pool

very pricey Upper East Side homage to old-fashioned haute-French cooking—Alec Baldwin himself was wandering among the tables of elderly gentlemen and bejeweled ladies from the neighborhood, dressed in a very presidential-looking dark-blue suit. It wasn't clear if the great man stayed for dinner, but there was nothing technically wrong with my slightly miserly serving of "oxtail braisé au vin de Bourgogne," or the well-turned baba au rhum dessert, which the kitchen decorates with racy slices of kumquat. If you wish to relive that magical time long, long ago when you tasted your first crispy scallion pancake or that first miraculous bite of sesame noodles, there's no better venue than the sprawling new three-floor Chinatown establishment **Hwa Yuan**, down on East Broadway, where the family of the great sesame-noodle pioneer Shorty Tang is reviving deliciously faithful versions of all sorts of durable favorites from the city's Chinese-food past, like tasty helpings of fat, sticky baby-back ribs sweetened with honey; crunchy little stacks of crispy orange beef flavored with bits of orange peel; and a first-rate example of the most magical Chinese dish of all, Peking duck, cooked to order in a giant, state-of-the-art silver oven imported directly from the home country.

If you're a fan of the kind of elaborate, early-aughts brand of gourmet Italian cuisine popularized by the talented neo-rustico chef Scott Conant, I suggest you pay a visit to his pricey but polished new comeback establishment, **Fusco**, on East 20th Street, and if you want to glimpse David Chang's particular vision of what a forward-thinking Italian restaurant might be, you'll find it at his clean, surprisingly posh makeover of **Momofuku Nishi**, on lower Eighth Avenue, where the highlights of our recent pasta feast included generous tangles of noodles folded with the silky, Changian chickpea creation called hozon (in the ceci e pepe) and flakes of chile and spoonfuls of uni (the spaghetti alla chitarra), which we mopped up with chunks of fresh-baked sourdough focaccia from the kitchen. In other breathless restaurant-makeover news, Jean-Georges Vongerichten has finally pulled back the curtain on the rebooted, postmillennial version of his first, seminal New York restaurant, **JoJo**, on East 64th Street, where the old Continental bric-a-brac has been cleared out of the pocket-size townhouse dining room in favor of clean white walls and tidy rows of modish café tables, and the duck breast on the retooled, farm-forward menu is sweetened by honey-glazed pumpkin instead of the usual thick goutts of sauce à l'orange. In case you haven't heard, the restless brain trust that runs the

world's (and therefore the city's) official No. 1 restaurant, **Eleven Madison Park**, has instituted similar, if slightly less radical, changes to its famously cavernous dining room, which after several months of renovation looks sleeker but also a bit more generic than it did before. When I crept in not long ago for a preliminary taste of the new menu and a stiff drink, I was a little sad to see that the woodsy, slightly idiosyncratic bar area had been replaced by the kind of sleek, gray-toned furniture you usually find in the lobby bars of grand, recently constructed international hotels, although there was nothing wrong at all with the stately procession of snacks we tasted from Daniel Humm's minimalist, crisply edited new menu, which included tiny canisters of foie gras spread with the faintest scrim of caramel, curls of peach-colored lobster tail plated with chanterelle mushrooms and a half-moon of perfectly constructed potato tart, and a fiendishly delicious wintertime cheese-course creation that combines the warming pleasures of stodgy bread pudding, classically light cheese soufflé, and a faintly boozy, New Age beer fondue in a single bite.

4 Breakfast Fever



➡ NOT SO VERY LONG AGO, breakfast was an afterthought in the city's never-ending merry-go-round of food obsessions, but these days, the opposite appears to be true. Having busied themselves for years desperately perfecting burgers, fried chicken, and all manner of other wildly popular comfort foods, talented big-name chefs all over town are turning their attentions to every aspect of the morning-meal experience, from egg sandwiches to high-angle designer doughnuts to that great line-cook staple the all-day diner breakfast. New York's resident culinary genius and noted short-order breakfast freak Wylie Dufresne has been experimenting with "science-driven" doughnut flavors at his new Williamsburg venture, **Du's Donuts and Coffee**, although the innovation I can't stop thinking about is the tidy, weirdly addictive scrambled-egg sandwich, which the master infuses with bits of bacon and two kinds of

cheese and griddles to a melting, buttery crisp on both sides. For an equally satisfying if slightly more conventional interpretation of this suddenly chic breakfast classic, my breakfast-loving daughter, Penelope, suggests you run, don't walk, to Danny Meyer's fast-casual **Daily Provisions**, next door to the new Union Square Cafe, where the excellent egg sandwiches are constructed with fat strips of Berkshire bacon or round breakfast sausages in the classic lumberjack style, or, if you're in a healthier frame of mind, deposits of egg whites dressed with spinach, avocado, and spoonfuls of tangy-sweet tomato jam. For a more dainty, Parisian-style omelet, my Francophile daughter, Jane, prefers to visit the latest addition to Gabriel Stulman's durable West Village dining empire, **Fairfax**, on West 4th Street, where breakfast begins every morning at eight in the comfortable little potted-plant-filled room and runs on weekends until three in the afternoon. The slim, perfectly textured house omelet is creamy yellow and sprinkled with clippings of baby chives, and if it doesn't fill you up, you can always do what Dad does and call for a side of bacon and the soft-boiled eggs, which are brought to the table in a little teacup with a neatly cut slab of toast soldiers spread with butter and a thin crust of baked Parmesan.

I'm not normally a member of the breakfast-pancake club, but the lightly fluffy flapjacks served during the weekend daylight hours at the excellent bistro **Chez Ma Tante** are worth a special pilgrimage out to the wilds of Greenpoint, and so are the other artfully rendered afternoon snacks, like wedges of tortilla española plated with scoops of stiff, garlicky aioli; generous helpings of boozy chicken-liver pâté buttressed with country toast; and an admirable, post-modern version of that old Victorian breakfast dish kedgeree, which the kitchen makes with flakes of cod and soft-boiled eggs, all tossed together with plenty of greenery in a bowl of faintly curried jasmine rice. Closer to home, the Platt family's favorite new venue for a proper weekend brunch feed is former ABC Kitchen chef Dan Kluger's solo venture, **Loring Place**, on 8th Street in Greenwich Village, where we like to dine on frittatas piled with crispy fried oysters, great hubcap-size stacks of Cheddar-laced waffles garnished with smoked ham, and wheels of Kluger's signature whole-wheat pizza topped with sweet dates and squares of sizzling bacon set in pools of melted mozzarella. Similar gut-busting pleasures are available every day until four in the afternoon at John DeLucie's spiffed-up remake of the famous **Empire Diner** on Tenth



Fairfax



Trends We're Tired Of

Clickbait dishes.

Yes, they're part of the jangled, intrusive, interconnected world we all live in, and yes, some of them are works of genius. Most of them, however, are not.

Really, really, really expensive restaurants.

The cost of doing business is out of control, it's true, but the increasingly conspicuously high barriers to entry, especially in Manhattan, are turning "fine dining" in this great dining city into a millionaire tourist's game.

Domineering-male-dominated kitchens.

As many have pointed out, this tradition is as old as the history of restaurants. Here's a little New Year's wish that, at long last, we're beginning to see the end of it.

Gourmet breakfast sandwiches.

I'm as guilty of the hype as the next breakfast-sandwich lover, but as wacky ingredients (and prices) keep piling up, this diner icon threatens to become the new chef burger.

Avocados.

I propose a six-month moratorium on all discussion relating to this tired topic, including the skyrocketing price, the grimly large carbon footprint, and how citizen police are guarding the precious trees in Mexico.

Vegan madness.

The V-word seems to have superseded "veggie" in the food-buzzword firmament, which is all fine and admirable, unless it's your professional duty to sample the stuff.

Fashionable earthen tableware.

A relic of the recently ended Scandi craze, this phenomenon prompted one of my recent dining guests to cry, "Who do they think we are? Peasants from the Swedish countryside?"

Avenue in Chelsea, where I repaired with a grizzled fresser of my acquaintance, not long ago, to graze on a light noonday snack of soft scrambled eggs folded in the *cacio e pepe* style with Parmesan, black pepper, and bits of speck; several pieces of weirdly excellent fried chicken encrusted in crushed sourdough pretzels; and a bite or two of the egg sandwich, composed of sausages, a fresh buttermilk biscuit the size of a small grapefruit, and a whole fried egg.

Enrique Olvera's wildly popular new restaurant **Atla** serves a similarly sturdy selection of casual, diner-style Mexican cooking around the clock, but my favorite time to visit the clean, tastefully designed little room on Lafayette Street is in the morning, before the adoring crowds arrive, when sunlight streams through the tall windows, the room smells of freshly brewed coffee, and it's possible to enjoy those great totems of the Mexican breakfast experience—huevos rancheros with steamy tortillas on the side, the superb scrambled eggs "a la Mexicana"—in relative peace. For the ultimate in high-minded, New Age breakfast bliss, however, there's no more eclectic morning menu in town these days than the one Jean-Georges Vongerichten and his team of juicers, protein-shake technicians, and vegan cooks have put together at the new vegetable-only establishment **abcV**, which opened last summer among the clutch of other JGV-branded restaurants on the ground floor of the ABC Carpet & Home department store. You won't find a more artful selection of eggs to go with your hemp-chia shake anywhere in this breakfast-saturated town (try them poached, with mushrooms, or folded, over easy, in giant South Indian dosas), and Jean-Georges's farm-to-table, veggie-only take on that rice-porridge Cantonese breakfast staple congee is one even a bilious, meat-loving restaurant critic can love.

5

Capital of the World



MAYBE THE WHISPERS we keep hearing are true: that, thanks to all sorts of insidious forces (high rents; ridiculous top-50 restaurant lists; the relentless,

leveling democracy of the internet), New York really is no longer the dining capital of the Free World. During the course of our bleary gastronomic wanderings, however, we couldn't help noticing that, in quality, variety, and quantity, this has been a bumper year for new restaurants specializing in delicious food from across the globe. Or so I thought to myself, not long ago, as I slurped down the layered, two-fisted version of that great Vietnamese street classic pho, which the talented young chef John Nguyen serves up every evening at his excellent new restaurant, **Hanoi House**, in the East Village. The stock for the chef's famous beef soup is simmered for hours using a veritable butcher's bag of ingredients (neck bones, shin bones, oxtail), and the green-papaya salad served here happens to be actually green (it's topped with ribbons of fried pig's ear for an extra umami crunch), but be sure to save room for the festive Southeast Asian sundae-style dessert called *chè*, which is supplemented, in big-city style, with scoops of tropical-flavored gelato (call for mango, if they have it) instead of the usual crushed ice.

If you want a taste of cutting-edge Israeli cooking without hopping a flight to Tel Aviv, you could do an awful lot worse than Meir Adoni's bustling new Flatiron establishment **Nur**, where the young Israeli chef turns out a whole cavalcade of flamboyant Middle Eastern recipes, like foie gras parfaits designed to be spread over challah toast with rosewater gelée; and a beefy, hand-cut "Palestinian Tartare" mixed not with capers and egg yolk but smoked eggplant, sheep's yogurt, and a radical dash of raw tahini. Some of these experiments work better than others, but nothing on the menu is boring, and if rosewater gelée isn't your thing, it's possible to make a fine dinner out of the exotic breads alone, especially the sesame-speckled Jerusalem bagel served with za'atar, and the puffy, crown-shaped loaf of Yemeni kubaneh, which Adoni also serves in Tel Aviv, with a cooling bowl of grated tomato and olive oil and a bracing Yemeni hot sauce called *zhug* on the side. My contacts among the city's growing rabble of Thai-food connoisseurs can't stop nattering about the return of the former Kao Soy co-chef, Siri-chai Sreparplarn, whose excellently named new Carroll Gardens restaurant, **Ugly Baby**, serves faithfully rendered dishes from all over that venerable dining country, including fiery bowls of egg noodles and beef-shank curry from the north, skewers of generously sized "southern-style" chicken thighs, and a properly melting version of the great Thai feast dish five-spice pork leg, which is garnished with handfuls of garlic



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and fresh coriander and was soft enough on the afternoon I enjoyed it to eat with a spoon.

If you're a fan of first-class Mexican barbecue, then I suggest you proceed to the fine new Oaxacan-themed establishment **Claro**, which opened a while back on a bumpy stretch of Third Avenue in Brooklyn, not far from the Barclays Center, where the kitchen was serving what my waitperson merrily described as an "all-goat menu" on the evening I dropped by. It consisted of delicious forkfuls of roasted, mole-rubbed whole goat piled over a bed of wet, crinkly blue-corn tortillas, which my fellow barflies and I washed down with flights of Oaxacan mezcal poured in little earthenware cups, along with bottle after frosty bottle of Tecate beer. If you wish to experience, for a brief, Proustian second or two, the ancient, comforting pleasures of Kurdish beef dumplings, or Syrian lamb dumplings, or Iraqi vegetable dumplings stuffed with mushrooms, you'll find them at Melanie Shurka's new Pan-Middle Eastern comfort-food establishment, **Kubeh**, on Sixth Avenue in Greenwich Village, and if you have a passion for braised chicken feet, or fried turnip cake, or pearly, translucent-skinned shrimp siu mai that taste like they've been transported directly from the crowded kitchens of Kowloon, I recommend you elbow for a spot (yes, the three-hour line is ridiculous) at the small standing counter at the front of the house of the New York outlet of the famous Hong Kong dim-sum chain **Tim Ho Wan**, which opened last winter on the corner of 10th Street and Fourth Avenue, blissfully close to the Platt residence. If you're one of legions of desperate Peking-duck loons who have been unable to obtain a table in the glamorous multistory Bryant Park satellite of the famous Michelin-starred duck palace from China, **DaDong**, my dumpling-and-noodle-addled daughters recommend you hop the 6 train downtown to Simone Tong's breezy, satisfying East Village establishment, **Little Tong Noodle Shop**, and console yourself with a bowl or two of light, soupy mixian rice noodles from the far-southern Chinese province of Yunnan, followed by several steaming bamboo towers of the perfectly shaped, delicately small Shanghai soup dumplings at the new Soho dumpling destination **Pinch Chinese**, whose head chef, Charlie Chen, can trace his lineage all the way back to the famous Taiwanese establishment Din Tai Fung, which helped begin the great xiao long bao craze nearly half a century ago. For the ultimate in contemporary, out-of-body Chinese dining, however, the train to take, as usual, is the 7, out to the spiffy, marble-and-lacquer-appointed dining room at **Guan Fu**

Sichuan, which two former New York-area grad students from China, Xu Wei and Li Boru, opened several months back in a small subterranean-mall space under the Hyatt Place hotel in Flushing. The glossy, impressively photographed menu is filled with intricately prepared old specialties like twice-cooked pork smothered in fresh leeks and a deliciously subtle kung pao chicken tossed with fermented bits of soybean. Unlike at many monochromatic, fire-breathing Sichuan joints around town, however, the sauces here are made in house and vary in spice and heat levels from dish to dish, and if you really want to feel like you're dining on the streets of Chengdu, there's an abundance of forbidden pleasures to choose from, ranging from "hot stone" boiled sea cucumbers, to several varieties of finely seasoned pig's trotter and braised turtle, to a generous helping of boiled bullfrog, which was chopped into palatable little pieces on the evening our small band of thrill-seekers enjoyed it and served in a large, ceremonial terrine floating with cucumbers, giant bulbs of garlic, and great waves of chile oil.

6 New Age Omakase



AS USUAL in this oversaturated *omakase* era, there are plenty of flashy new venues at which to drop several of your hard-earned paychecks on a ritual, multi-course extravaganza featuring morsels of tuna belly, caviar, and rare slivers of Japanese needle fish. But this year, we've noticed that there are plenty of other new places around the city—in food halls, in the West Village, and even, miracles of miracles, on the Upper West Side—where it's possible to get your sushi or tasting-menu fix while actually saving a few bucks. Exhibit A in this welcome phenomenon is **Sushi Kaïto** on West 72nd Street, where the cost of my well-procured 12-piece sushi dinner was \$75 before tip, a price that included a place card with my reserved name scripted on it at the bar and a fine example of king salmon carefully folded in a fresh shiso leaf, with useful instructions from the loquacious chef to place the fish first on the tongue instead of

the rice, "in order to enjoy the full flavor of the sushi experience." I've managed to employ this technique with some success during my visits to **Sushi by Bou**, where, on one occasion, the friendly tourist couple next to me, who were visiting from London, couldn't stop raving about the surprisingly excellent quality of the pearly shrimp and the wet, generous helpings of fresh Santa Barbara uni, which are offered at lunch and dinner as part of the \$50, 12-piece *omakase*. If you're in the market for a slightly more salubrious, classically Japanese setting for a relatively economical sit-down, set-course dinner, you'll find it at the new lower Sixth Avenue branch of the beloved Park Slope institution **Sushi Katsuei**, where, for a cool \$60, the nine-piece meal included slices of medium-fatty hagashi tuna, vividly orange uni from the chilly waters of Hokkaido, and soft pats of freshwater eel flown in from Nagasaki, which the bespectacled chef behind the bar presented in the purist Brooklyn style, with just a sprinkle of sea salt.

Whenever I'm ambling around midtown with a few extra dollars in my pocket and feel the urge for a slightly more upmarket, old-school Jiro-style *omakase* experience, I like to descend the twisting black-marble staircase to Toshio Suzuki's discreet new ten-seat dining counter called **Satsuki**, on 47th Street off Sixth Avenue, where it's a pleasure, early in the evening or after the lunchtime rush, to listen to one of the godfathers of the city's original sushi scene discourse in his friendly, dignified way on the traditional style of doing things ("There are too many tricks today; too much sauce masks bad fish!") while dining on classic delicacies like slices of clam sprinkled chastely with sea salt and squirts of udashi lime; tangy bits of gizzard shad dressed, in the old Edomae style, with bits of kelp marinated in vinegar; and the chef's signature eggy tamago, which he mixes the way the sushi masters in the old country taught him to do, with dashes of tofu and yam, because eggs were a scarce commodity back in wartime Tokyo. If you're in the market for a festive, updated taste of modern Tokyo, you'll find it in another snug, subterranean space on Macdougal Street, where that practiced sake and Champagne connoisseur Ariel Arce convenes a twice-nightly seating in honor of the famous vinyl bars of Japan at **Tokyo Record Bar**. Unlike at the real vinyl bars, there's no smoking in this boisterous spot, which Arce and her friends have decorated with Technicolor paintings of Japanese mountains and tiny pink silk cherry blossoms, although the turntable spins out

Host a cut above



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an endless, reliably funky stream of nostalgic '70s-era reggae and disco hits, and if you can't secure a spot at the \$50-per-head set-course dinner, do what I did and show up at 10:30 p.m., when the reasonably priced à la carte menu included, on the evening I visited, iced oysters tipped with shiso, \$8 plates of mushrooms seized in a tempura batter, and fat caviar sandwiches squeezed between crunchy slices of toasted brioche. William Shen's neighborly, deceptively excellent little Soho atelier, **Ato**, is the place to go for an inventive, slightly more upmarket taste of modern Japan. The menu options range from classic lunchtime helpings of plump, expertly grilled unaju eel, to the young Masa-and-Jean-Georges-trained chef's elaborate dinnertime *omakase*, which, on the evening I sampled it, included tiny bowls of bouillabaisse dressed with seabream and crispy potatoes; large, plum-sweet scallops wrapped in barely toasted slips of seaweed; and some of the best nigiri sushi (sardines, silvery pike, finely carved pieces of gizzard shad) I've tasted all year.

If money is no object, however, this year's trophy for most opulently crafted *omakase* feast goes to the Manhattan re-creation of César Ramirez's famous, now-shuttered Brooklyn tasting room, **Chef's Table at Brooklyn Fare**, which you will find next to the pasta and virgin-olive-oil display at the back of the Brooklyn Fare grocery store on the far-western fringes of 37th Street. Sure, the multi-hour, multicourse extravaganza costs a small fortune before you even crack a bottle of wine, and when I showed up for my appointed reservation without a jacket, the stern gentleman guarding the door by the pasta rack loaned me one that was a size or two too small for my giant frame. But if you're feeling nostalgic for the olden days of haute cuisine, when chefs conjured up magical recipes by pairing a variety of reductions and sauces with a whole grab bag of ingredients flown in from around the globe, it's a pleasure to take a seat at the wide, 18-seat counter and watch Ramirez and his team turn out dish after dish of the chef's classically informed, Japanese-influenced cre-

ations (pay attention to the seafood and the squares of beer-fattened beef from Miyazaki Prefecture, in Japan), like practiced actors on an intimate, beautifully lit stage.

7 The Booze Patrol



IF YOU'RE LIKE ME, you could probably use a stiff drink (or three) as you scroll, with mounting horror, through the ceaseless stream of sex-creep scandals, nuclear scares, and assorted other grim bits of flotsam that emanate ceaselessly from the Twitter feed during the demoralizing Age of

The Directory

abcV

38 E. 19th St.
212-475-5829

Air's Champagne Parlor

127 Macdougall St.
212-420-4777

Atla

372 Lafayette St.
no phone

Ato

28 Grand St.
646-838-9392

The Aviary NYC

80 Columbus Cir.
no phone

Bar Moga

128 W. Houston St.
929-399-5853

The Beatrice Inn

285 W. 12th St.
212-675-2808

Café Altro Paradiso

234 Spring St.
646-952-0828

Cervo's

43 Canal St.
212-226-2545

Chef's Table at Brooklyn Fare

431 W. 37th St.
718-243-0050

Chez Ma Tante

90 Calyer St., Greenpoint
718-389-3606

Claro

284 Third Ave., Gowanus
347-721-3126

Cote

16 W. 22nd St.
212-401-7986

DaDong

3 Bryant Park
212-355-9600

Daily Provisions

103 E. 19th St.
212-488-1505

Du's Donuts and Coffee

107 N. 12th St.,
Williamsburg
718-215-8770

Eleven Madison Park

11 Madison Ave.
212-889-0905

Empellón

510 Madison Ave.
212-858-9365

Empire Diner

201 Tenth Ave.
212-335-2277

Fairfax

234 W. 4th St.
212-933-1824

4 Charles Prime Rib

4 Charles St.
212-561-5992

Fusco

43 E. 20th St.
212-777-5314

The Grill

99 E. 52nd St.
212-375-9001

Guan Fu Sichuan

39-16 Prince St., Flushing
347-610-6999

Hanoi House

119 St. Marks Pl.
212-995-5010

Hemlock

65 Rivington St.
646-649-2503

Hwa Yuan

42 E. Broadway
212-966-6002

JoJo

160 E. 64th St.
212-223-5656

Kubeh

464 Sixth Ave.
646-448-6688

Little Tong Noodle Shop

177 First Ave.
929-367-8664

The Lobster Club

98 E. 53rd St.
212-375-9001

Loring Place

21 W. 8th St.; 212-388-1831

The Lost Lady

171 Ave. C; 347-455-0228

The Loyal

289 Bleecker St.
212-488-5800

Majorelle

28 E. 63rd St.
212-935-2888

Metta

197 Adelphi St., Ft. Greene
718-233-9134

Momofuku Nishi

232 Eighth Ave.
646-518-1919

Nur

34 E. 20th St.
212-505-3420

The Office

80 Columbus Cir.
no phone

Pinch Chinese

177 Prince St.
212-328-7880

The Pool

99 E. 52nd St.
212-375-9001

Reynard

80 Wythe Ave.,
Williamsburg
718-460-8004

Satsuki

114 W. 47th St.
212-278-0047

The Spaniard

190 W. 4th St.
212-918-1986

Sushi by Bou

Multiple locations

Sushi Kaito

244 W. 72nd St.
212-799-1278

Sushi Katsuei

357 Sixth Ave.
212-462-0039

Tim Ho Wan

85 Fourth Ave.
212-228-2800

Tokyo Record Bar

127 Macdougall St.
212-420-4777

Ugly Baby

407 Smith St.,
Carroll Gardens
347-689-3075

Union Square Cafe

101 E. 19th St.
212-243-4020

Trump. Luckily, there are plenty of lively new venues around this great boozing city where you can forget about the cares of the world for a minute or two and get completely blotto while inhaling all sorts of exceptional things to eat. The new Gotham branch of Grant Achatz's Chicago speakeasy bar **The Office** is as good a place as any to begin this epic pub crawl, although serious drinkers should make an effort to secure one of the plush, swiveling chairs at the actual six-seat bar, which is the best place to quiz the knowledgeable barkeeps about the contents of antic, labor-intensive mixology creations like the Amaretto sour (containing Amaretto, Cynar artichoke liqueur, and a hint of black truffle, among other things) and the frothy, curiously refreshing Gran Classico, which manages to taste like a breezy summer cocktail despite the presence of coconuts, egg white, togarashi powder, and a healthy dose of peat-heavy Scotch. Like at the Aviary in the Mandarin Oriental lobby next door, it's possible to run up a frighteningly large tab after just a round or two (the "Dusty Bottle Cocktails" section of the menu features a \$600 martini made with ancient Tanqueray gin), so save some of your cash for the chef's bar-food creations like flower-and-egg-yolk-decked steak tartare, or the superb steamed mussels, which are bubbled in a creamy, herbaceous sauce filled with lemons, bulbs of garlic, and bits of bacon and brought to the table with a fresh-baked baguette for dipping. The best patty melt I've inhaled recently was the one grilled up by the well-traveled comfort-food savant PJ Calapa at his popular new West Village watering hole, **The Spaniard**, although the classic double "smash" cheeseburger isn't too shabby either, especially if you visit the commodious, high-ceilinged room at lunchtime, when the roiling crowd pressing around the great double-sided bar space isn't quite as thick as it is during the evening drinking hours, and it's possible to peruse the well-curated house selection of more than 100 whiskeys with proper scholarly care. This year's winner in the ever-competitive best-new-faux-Japanese-bar category goes to **Bar Moga**, which opened on a hectic corner of West Houston Street last summer, where the signature rum-and-whiskey Moga cocktail is mixed with smoky Japanese whiskey, plum liqueur, rum, and a splash of bitters, and the best of the modestly priced, surprisingly accomplished drinking dishes (the tempura-quality prawn ebi fry; creamy kani potato croquettes; the milky, vegetable rich kari kari ramen) have as much polish as anything you'd encounter during an evening of boozing in Osaka or Tokyo.

The Iberian love affair with gin-and-vermouth cocktails stretches back almost to the dawn of cocktail history, which may be why one of the better, more economically priced martinis I enjoyed all year is the one served straight up, with a proverbial twist, at **Cervo's**, which the Brooklyn owners of the much-praised Bedford-Stuyvesant establishment Hart's opened not long ago down among the rapidly gentrifying storefronts along eastern Canal Street. You can get a smooth Portuguese version of a whiskey sour touched with Madeira in the snug, railroad-car space, along with shots of vermouth poured over the rocks or spritzed with simple splashes of soda, just like in the bars of Lisbon, but be sure to linger for a little while over dishes like the grilled head-on prawns, spiced with a sour-sweet combination of chile and oranges; plates of Manila clams tossed in garlic and white wine; and slices of chocolate olive-oil cake, for dessert, which I enjoyed, after my martini, with a warming glass of port. The cozy, blonde-toned dining counter at **Hemlock** on Rivington Street is my favorite new place to peruse the latest offerings in the trendy, ever-expanding world of natural and biodynamic wines, and if you have a stronger head for Champagne than I do, you'll find all sorts of fizzy pleasures at Ariel Arce's other new Macdougall Street drinking establishment, **Air's Champagne Parlor**, where you can dine on a revolving selection of oysters on ice, three varieties of caviar, and one of the better grilled cheese sandwiches in town while perusing the entertaining, informative menu that, the last time we checked, numbered over 120 bottles of bubbly and non-bubbly wines. For the ultimate dive-bar-bender experience, however, I recommend you stagger down to Alphabet City and rope yourself into one of the comfortable captain's chairs that line the bar at **The Lost Lady**, which the team behind the East Village bar the Wayland opened not long ago among the riotous saloons that now run up and down Avenue C. All of the libations I sampled on a recent mind-numbing visit to this nautically themed establishment were well worth the relatively reasonable \$12 price tag, although if you're pining for an early taste of the warm weather, call for a plate or two of the house fish tacos for ballast, followed by several rounds of the cheery, Creamsicle-colored Capsized Colada, which the chatty, competent bartenders pour with light, summery draughts of gin, instead of rum, and mix with pineapple, Aperol, and generous flagons of sweet coconut cream.

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The CULTURE PAGES



“We Create the Culture”

Lena Waithe is simply telling the stories that she knows best. The difference is that, suddenly, everyone wants to listen. *By Allison P. Davis*

S

SILVER LAKE'S LAMILL COFFEE SHOP is crowded for a late afternoon, just a few days after Christmas. The sleek black tables are dotted with white cups and plates and laptops open to Final Draft or some other screenwriting program. The gaudy, metallic-teal leather chairs are full of attractive people who look like they've answered a casting call: Extras needed for café scene, male or female, age: late-20s/mid-30s. Any ethnicity (but predominantly white). Talent should look hip; tattoos preferred.

It's the perfect scene for actress and writer Lena Waithe to walk into, wearing a vintage *Tales From the Hood* T-shirt, tapered heather-red Nike sweats, and sneakerhead-approved Nikes. And not just because she's a screenwriter in fashion joggers in a coffee shop during working hours, or because this could easily be a Los Angeles-based episode of *Master of None*, the Netflix show she appears on as Denise, a black lesbian sneakerhead who dispenses love advice to Aziz Ansari's hapless Dev. It's because, after writing an Emmy-winning episode for the show's second season, Waithe is the person you'd want to imagine the inner lives of every mustachioed barista and blunt-bobbed vintage-store owner currently in the shop. She'd take these stock characters and imbue them with nuance and life and humor. She'd probably get a series order and maybe even pick up another Emmy.

After she grabs a lavender lemonade, Waithe joins me at a table and looks over the room for a moment.

"Okay, how many stories could you write about the people in this room?" I ask.

"Oh, a million," she says. "I've always been more interested in exploring the lives of these people that I see on the street. You know what I mean?"

All right, write me a show, I suggest, hoping she'll come up with some story about a delicate-nosed woman who has her auburn hair in giant rollers, wrapped up in a silk scarf.

Waithe waves off the request. Right now, she tells me, her mind is full of her own characters. Actually, she explains quickly—Waithe is a fast talker, and talking to me means she's taking a break from her writing day, she says while glancing at her watch for emphasis—she's working on a script she hopes to get made by 2019, which apparently means not wasting a minute in 2017.

And anyway, the story of the Silver Lake white-hipster set is not the story she is interested in telling.

"At the end of the day, it's like, I care about my people. Like, that's what I care about. I have a vested interest in the black men, black women, poor community—I care about us and trying my best to show who we are, through my lens. *How can I paint an accurate picture of what black life is?* I know my people and I want to write for them. I want to write to them."

"It kind of felt like Michael Jordan at Game Six, almost. Like all my life I had been preparing for that moment."

The facet of black life Waithe has chosen to focus on for *The Chi*, the series she's created for Showtime, takes her back to where she's from, the South Side of Chicago. Still, the neighborhood featured in the show isn't reflective of the community she remembers. "I grew up in a peaceful neighborhood," she says of the predominately black "utopia" where she was raised by her single mother, Laverne Hall, along with a close-knit group of her mother's friends and a steady diet of TV shows like *A Different World*, *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*, and *Martin*. "It wasn't perfect," Waithe says of the neighborhood, but it wasn't the South Side depicted in *The Chi*.

Instead, the idea for the sprawling and slow drama came from headlines Waithe

would see about the rampant gun violence on the South Side. The year she wrote the pilot, 2015, there were 468 murders and 2,900 shootings in Chicago, mostly concentrated in neighborhoods on the south and west sides of the city.

The Chi focuses largely on four male protagonists connected by the fallout from two shootings. There's Brandon (*Straight Outta Compton*'s Jason Mitchell), a hopeful chef who is using his talent to escape the neighborhood but feels responsible for his mom and younger brother, Coogie (Jahking Guillory); Emmett (Jacob Lattimore), a sneaker-obsessed teen with an unplanned child; Ronnie (Ntare Guma Mbaho Mwine), who is trying to avenge his son's death; and preteen Kevin (*Moonlight*'s Alex R. Hibbert), who navigates junior-high crushes, theater rehearsals, and bearing witness to a murder.

The structure and subject matter—how violence and gangs threaten everyday life—have earned the show comparisons to *The Wire* and the lukewarm *Shots Fired*, which Waithe expects but disagrees with. She cites David Simon's earlier work, *The Corner*, as an inspiration, as well as *Downton Abbey* and James Baldwin. "I'm not writing about the cops. I'm not writing about the system. I don't care at all about trying to write about the system. But I can write about how the cops make me feel."

Fans might be surprised that the show isn't autobiographical—though certain elements are all Waithe. One character is named for her mother; another, Ronnie, for an uncle of Waithe's who recently passed. The character of Emmett is based on a friend from high school. It was non-negotiable for Waithe, a lesbian, to include at least one black queer female character. And Waithe does see herself in one character. "I'm Brandon, 100 percent. I made him a chef because it'd be too meta to make him a writer," she says. (Brandon's girlfriend, Jerrika, is modeled on Waithe's fiancée, Alana Mayo.) Waithe notes that the sensitive black chef struggling with family responsibilities was the character TV executives had the hardest time understanding.

It was only two years ago that Waithe started shopping around the script for *The Chi*, but it was a totally different climate. "This was before Issa [Rae], this was before Barry [Jenkins] and before *Moonlight* won the Oscar, before Jordan Peele." And, it bears noting, even before the appearance of *Master of None* and Waithe's character, Denise. In fact, Denise was originally supposed to be white and straight, a possible love interest for Dev.

In meetings with television executives about *The Chi*, they kept asking her, “What’s the hook?” Waithe recalls. “Are they selling drugs? Are they singing? Are they ... Are they ... Are they athletes?” That’s what everyone was comfortable with, certain categories: drug dealer, kingpin, singer, dancer, music industry. They kept asking, ‘Oh, is he gonna win? Is he gonna make the basketball team? Is he gonna get the record deal?’ It’s so cheesy. And I was like, ‘It’s about being black and human in a city that’s very complex. That’s it.’ I write black people in rooms talking.”

In the past year, Waithe admits, things have changed. There is more opportunity, for her and for others, to write black people in rooms talking. Barry Jenkins has now written *Moonlight*, Issa Rae has now written and starred in *Insecure*, Donald Glover won an Emmy for *Atlanta*, the show he created. There’s *Greenleaf* and *Queen Sugar*. Ava DuVernay (who once gave Waithe a job, as a production assistant) has directed *A Wrinkle in Time* and Ryan Coogler has directed *Black Panther*; two potential blockbuster films. Television and film are much blacker than ever before.

“Look, this will be controversial,” she says, her hand emphatically hitting the table with every word that follows, “but the truth is, we create culture. We create the fucking culture, we do. But I think ultimately black people are making content that not just black people want to watch but everybody wants to watch. Now white execs are like, ‘Okay, well, we gotta find our Issa Rae. We gotta find our Donald Glover. We gotta find our Lena Waithe.’” She sits back and sips her lemonade.

AT 33, WAITHE BECAME the first black woman to win an Emmy for outstanding writing in a comedy series. The episode she wrote for the second season of *Master of None*, “Thanksgiving,” is ambitious and highly personal, but simple. It’s her own story of how she came out to her family. “Aziz asked me to tell him stories about my life, and he liked this one and asked me to write an episode.” At first she declined. She felt overcommitted with *The Chi* and was in London filming the upcoming Steven Spielberg film *Ready Player One*. But Ansari insisted. “He said, ‘I can write *my* stuff, but everything you explained, like, I can’t write that. Only you can.’” She conceded and Ansari flew to London; the two of them hunkered down in a hotel room and wrote the episode in three days.

“I didn’t expect that to happen so early in my career,” Waithe says of the Emmy win. “But for me, it was like, *I’m just going to tell my story*. It kinda felt like [Michael] Jordan at Game Six, almost. Like, all my life I had been preparing for that moment.”

In interviews after she won, Waithe stressed that, yes, opportunities on television were getting better, but no, the work isn’t done. In a speech at a party for United Talent Agency earlier in December, Waithe said, “Make sure that you’re making your own shows, because I still don’t think the television landscape represents this society.”

For the first season of *The Chi*, her writers’ room is made up entirely of black writers, she notes proudly—a team of writers she is now mentoring to help

them cultivate their own projects. “It was me and four black writers.” She ticks off the lists of names and accomplishments. “Our showrunner was really committed to having all black writers.”

I ask Waithe if it was complicated to have a white male showrunner, Elwood Reid, helming a show written by a black woman and a team of black writers, when it’s hyperspecific about black life and black people and black culture.

She winces. “I mean, I think ... *Is it complicated?* You know, I mean, maybe, but the truth is, again, it’s like, that is because there weren’t ... there were not a lot of other options,” she says cautiously. And then, more emphatically, “I think the showrunner is just that. They, like, make sure the trains run on time. Creatively there’s no influence. For me, it was really about tapping into those black writers and making sure their voices were heard. And that was everyone’s mission, just to make sure the show didn’t feel like it was a black show written by somebody that don’t know the culture.”

Waithe glances at her watch again, needing to wrap it up. She has a movie to write—a romance that will potentially be directed by Melina Matsoukas (who directed “Thanksgiving,” episodes of *Insecure*, and Beyoncé’s “Formation” video). Then Waithe has to make her comedy *Twenties*, a lighter half-hour loosely based on her life as a 20-something in L.A. Hopefully, there will be season two of *The Chi* to think about, too. “I want to make it blacker,” she says, picking up her keys to go. “That’s the mission. I just want to make Hollywood blacker.” ■

THE CLARIFICATION

Addressing potential pop-culture confusions.



9-1-1

A new first-responders procedural from producer Ryan Murphy, airing on Fox. The show boasts a standout cast, including Connie Britton, Angela Bassett, and Peter Krause. Critics have praised it despite its familiar format, with one calling it “a pretty solid way to start 2018.”



9JKL

A new sitcom created by actor Mark Feuerstein and his wife, Dana Klein, that debuted on CBS in October. It centers on a man in apartment 9K, with parents and siblings in adjacent units. Critics blasted its familiar format, with one lamenting the “jokes that are beyond stale.”



Reno 911!

A spoof series that ran on Comedy Central from 2003 to 2009, conceived as a satire of *Cops*. Largely improvised, the show featured members of the comedy troupe the State. One critic recommended it for “fans with a tolerance for out-there buffoonery.”



90210

A reboot of the popular teen drama *Beverly Hills, 90210*, this show premiered on the CW in 2008 and ran till 2013. One critic wrote that it “really isn’t so horrible after all,” while another noted, “It wasn’t *Masterpiece Theatre*, and it wasn’t outright terrible.”

The Great Awakening

What happens to culture in an era of identity politics?

By Molly Fischer

IN 2017, it was possible to see parables everywhere. A racist reality star was in the Oval Office, and actual neo-Nazis were claiming Taylor Swift as their Aryan princess; surely the time had come to scrutinize the content we consumed (binged, bought, shared, streamed, absorbed glassy-eyed) and determine what it actually said about the America we inhabited. It was the perfect year to take pop culture very seriously.

On January 20, 2017, Donald Trump was sworn in as president. The same day, *The Big Sick* premiered at Sundance. From the Capitol steps, Trump declared that it would now be “only America first”; in Park City, Utah, a genial romantic comedy from Pakistani-American comedian Kumail Nanjiani and his wife, Emily Gordon, emerged as a festival favorite. *The Big Sick* would go on to sell for \$12 million, and in the positive press that followed, its success was cast as a rebuke to presidential xenophobia—the right reassuring story to tell ourselves about ourselves.

Another parable: *Moonlight*, a delicately wrought coming-of-age story about black masculinity, won the Academy Award for Best Picture. It had appeared to be an underdog; that presenters in fact gave its trophy to front-runner *La La Land* (big, white, and nostalgic) seemed a heavy-handed illustration of the odds stacked against the film. And how revealing, went an immediate narrative, that headlines were now given over to the graciousness of the *La La Land* team in relinquishing an Oscar they hadn’t won. This was a story about the ease of white victory and overlooked black talent.

It had become impossible to discuss art without discussing identity. A fundamental question (perhaps the first question; some-

times the only question) to ask of a work was how well it fulfilled certain ideals: In what ways did it engage with the values of a pluralistic society? Who got the chance to make mass culture?

Behind the scenes, artists looked out onto a new landscape. “From Tuesday night to Wednesday morning, I think my show changed,” said Kenya Barris, creator of the sitcom *Black-ish*, of Election Night 2016. The show’s following season began with a premiere he described as a “historically significant think-piece”: an episode-long lesson on Juneteenth and the end of slavery, complete with segments in the style of *Schoolhouse Rock* and *Hamilton*.

Among critics, the language of identity emerged from unlikely sources and found

unlikely objects. *The Wall Street Journal* called Gal Gadot’s Wonder Woman “the dazzling embodiment of female empowerment”; *Teen Vogue* condemned *Riverdale*, the live-action Archie show, for Jughead’s “asexual erasure.”

The past year abounded with familiar pop products retooled to suit contemporary ideals. Spike Lee reimagined *She’s Gotta Have It* as a Netflix series, this time with less rape, more female writers, and a heroine who described herself as a “sex-positive polyamorous pansexual.” Disney’s remake of *Beauty and the Beast* (starring celebrity feminist Emma Watson) touted its inclusion of an “exclusively gay moment.”

2017 was the year *Girls* ended its six-season run with Hannah Horvath unforeseeably the mother to a brown child. It was the year *I Love Dick*, a theory-heavy feminist cult novel, somehow became a TV show. It was the year in which Christian Bale—Batman—remarked that our culture would be “so much richer” once it wasn’t “all white dudes who are running things.”

After all, if Donald Trump’s election was the first seismic event to shape the cultural landscape of 2017, to shake loose a radical sense of anger and possibility, the other was the reckoning over sex and power that followed the fall of Harvey Weinstein. A tide of accusations against prominent men in media and Hollywood brought with it a fresh awareness that these were the people who had decided which stories were worth telling, which voices worth hearing, which characters worth taking seriously. Louis C.K., disgraced, had to shelve *I Love You, Daddy*, his Woody Allen tribute. Jeffrey Tambor, similarly disgraced, appeared likely to leave his role as the titular trans parent on *Transparent*. The news prompted Slate to observe that “*Transparent* had made the world too woke for *Transparent*.”

And somewhere in the middle of all this, sometime cultural appropriator Katy Perry—she of the geisha costumes, the candy-colored cornrows, and the blank-white readiness to reflect a trend—emerged with a new album. She embarked on a press tour that found her telling activist and podcaster DeRay Mckesson about how she’d recently come to understand the power of black women’s hair. “I can educate myself,” she said.

“Don’t you feel like we’re in a race to become the most woke?” Perry asked another interviewer. “Can someone tell me where the starting line and the finish line of all the wokeness is?” Whether or not Perry was indeed woke, she seemed to have registered that cartoon costumes and Swedish hooks were no longer adequate for stardom.



THE TERM Perry grabbed onto was one that had been around for a while, and had made its way from black culture to the New York Times. “Woke,” for her purposes, seemed to mean something along the lines of *sensitive to the experiences of racial, cultural, sexual, and gender identities besides one’s own and to the injustices that shape our world*; for different speakers, at different times, it had served variously as a statement of purpose (“I stay woke,” Erykah Badu sang in 2008), a term of approval (“Can We Talk About How Woke Matt McGorry Was in 2015?”), and one of knowing skepticism (“World Weeps in Gratitude for Woke Hungarian Who Did 7 Types of Blackface to Save Africa From Going Extinct”).

Examining issues of identity in art is, of course, no new undertaking. But the striking development of the 2010s was the scale. Social media gave people (especially young people, idealism still intact) a public voice they’d never before had. All discussions of contemporary pop culture demanded weighing such concerns; should a filmmaker or showrunner or singer choose not to grapple with them directly, others would do so, vocally. Squabbles over what was and wasn’t acceptable—plus the accompanying self-righteousness of all parties, whether styling themselves unimpeachably correct or bravely defiant—were surely the most exhausting feature of the past year in pop culture. To dismiss woke-ness as the handiwork of p.c. thought police, though, would be to ignore its reality: an altered pop-culture ecosystem, a Great Awakening in full bloom.

At its most simplistic, the discourse of the Awakening involves delineating the identities a given work depicts, then saying whether that depiction is good or bad, particularly in relation to restrictive norms or harmful stereotypes. “Woke” becomes a valuable nutrient no matter how dubious the product. Thus, headlines like Bustle’s “The CW’s ‘Dynasty’ Is Doing What Every Reboot Should—Righting the Wrongs of the Original” (i.e., dispensing with blatant ‘80s-era homophobia and adding a black billionaire to the roster of white ones) or “13 Ways ‘Stranger Things’ Season 2 Sent Oppressive Gender Roles Back to the Upside Down” (No. 7: “Hopper Lets His Emotion Shine Through”). Praise in this register tends toward routine hyperbole “groundbreaking,” “powerful”—with “problematic” and “not okay” as terms of censure. Readers become accustomed to learning that a popular TV show “Has a [Rape/Race/Woman] Problem,” or that a new movie offers “The [Teenage Heroine/Same-Sex Love Story/Portrayal of Depression] We Need Now.”

A minor but instructive case study arose in 2016, in the shape of a bisexual Latina taco. Autostraddle, a website for lesbian and queer women, had published a warm review of the Seth Rogen adult cartoon *Sausage Party*, and in particular an anthropomorphic supermarket taco shell voiced by Salma Hayek. Yes, she was a cartoon taco, but according to writer Elyse Endick, she was “a massive contribution to the normalization of queer female characters onscreen.”

Endick’s audience disagreed. “We heard from Latinx readers who believe the portrayal of Salma Hayek’s taco was racist and that it reinforced harmful stereotypes,” reported editor Heather Hogan in a follow-up post. “We heard from readers who were upset that we labeled the taco a lesbian when it seems more likely that she was bisexual.” Autostraddle removed the review and offered an extensive apology.

Breitbart, the Daily Caller, the Federalist, Reason, and *National Review* all covered

A minor but instructive case study arose in 2016, in the shape of a bisexual Latina taco.

the incident, reveling in what they read as a too-good-to-be-true self-parody of p.c. excess. The taco aside, Hogan’s post included a forthright account of her site’s critical practices, using as an example its coverage of *Orange Is the New Black*:

My main priorities in our OITNB coverage were: 1) Making sure the majority of our reviews were written by women of color. And 2) Making sure any writer who shared an identity with an episode’s feature character had first dibs on writing about that episode ... And I personally edited every review so I could make sure the opinions voiced by our white writers were in line with the voices of Black writers I was seeking out every day for their opinions on every episode.

Autostraddle is a niche site; its readers arrive with a different set of expectations than they might bring to the New York Times or *Entertainment Weekly*. Still, the policies Hogan described are similar to those recently adopted by *Kirkus Reviews* for covering young-adult fiction: Because there is “no substitute for lived experience,” *Kirkus* announced, it would strive to assign “books with diverse subject matter and pro-

tagonists” to “‘own voices’ reviewers.” The approach reflected a new expectation of public accountability.

HBO’s bungled *Confederate* rollout demonstrated the new force of crowdsourced criticism. An alternative-history series set in an America where slavery persisted, the show would be the next project from the creators of *Game of Thrones*, and the network announced *Confederate* with a fanfare that suggested it had totally failed to anticipate what came next. What came next was outrage, which showrunner D.B. Weiss sought to quell by explaining his hope that *Confederate* could depict “how this history is still with us.” Nonetheless, the hashtag #NoConfederate trended nationally; who were David Benioff and Weiss to tell a story of black suffering in America? Production on *Confederate* was slated to begin in 2018, which meant that here, critical debate had transcended the need for any extant art to criticize: Criticism itself was the event. Inasmuch as “a show about slavery by the *Game of Thrones* guys” was a thought-provoking premise, the thoughts had been provoked.

THE AWOKENING was apparent in shifting tastes. In place of the self-serious drama of the Difficult Man on shows like *Mad Men* or *Breaking Bad*, there was the messily humane sad-com of identity on *Girls* or *Transparent*. It was apparent in who got the credit: In place of the tortured god-artist as a source of authentic creativity, there was the diverse, collaborative writers’ room of *Atlanta* or *Insecure*. In the past, critics asked viewers to take TV shows seriously by comparing them to Dickens or Shakespeare. Now the claim for value lay in its broken ground—shows that spoke with a voice we hadn’t heard, that confronted us with a new perspective.

For some critics and audiences, the vigilant, wishful agenda of the Awakening could be frustrating. *Girls* inspired a buffet of objections over the course of its run, but one of the earliest and most persistent had to do with the homogeneity of its cast. Yet what the initial outcry at the whiteness of *Girls* elided was that it might be all too possible for a midwestern liberal-arts-college graduate to move to Brooklyn and wind up with an entirely white social life—and that a truly biting portrayal of such a character’s limitations might involve confronting this reality rather than cosmetically amending it.

The critical climate could foster a tone along the lines of an after-school special. On the *Times* podcast *Still Processing*, co-hosts Jenna Wortham and Wesley Morris described the dutiful attitude of a show like *Dear White People*: As Wortham put it, recounting an episode in which a white

character is patiently taught that he shouldn't say the N-word, not even while rapping along to a song: "Is this a *Schoolhouse Rock* for white people, for understanding how to be around black people?"

Or consider Aziz Ansari's Netflix series *Master of None*, which depicts the life of an actor named Dev in New York. At its best, *Master of None* gives a platform to voices too rarely heard. More often, however, the show mines the rich material of human difference for tidy lessons in empathy. In the episode "Ladies and Gentlemen," the show's précis on sexism, situations occur that illustrate the problem of sexism. Then the women Dev knows sit around in bars and restaurants explaining to him (and to viewers) that sexism exists. Dev learns a lesson. The lesson is that sexism exists. Presumably viewers are to learn this also. It is difficult, though, to imagine a viewer likely to be simultaneously surprised by and receptive to such lessons. This is not a blow to the patriarchy; this is *Sesame Street*.

When the grand ideals of inclusion are reduced to complacent correctness, the results are merely smug. *Master of None* devotes much time to establishing Dev's connoisseurship—to impressing upon us that he is a man of expert taste. When—at the end of an episode illustrating the pitfalls of dating apps—he finds himself in bed with a woman who keeps condoms in an Aunt Jemima cookie jar, it is a signal of racism as abrupt, clumsy, and blatant as the intrusion of the kitsch jar itself into Dev's perfectly prop-styled world. Racism: How tacky.

LOOKING BACK over the past year suggests two paths for the Awakening, illustrated by one complicated failure and one resounding success. Louis C.K.'s rise had coincided with a moment when audiences were willing to regard comedians as voices of sociopolitical morality—to applaud John Oliver for "destroying" a governmental hypocrisy or Amy Schumer for her "empowering" response to body-shamers. Louis's stature depended on his reputation as simultaneously audacious and a good guy. In a bit from 2013, he outlines a working definition of rape culture: "How do women still go out with guys, when you consider that there is no greater threat to women than men?"

For a faction of his audience, moments like these were an opportunity to hear their own beliefs given voice in the most appealing way possible—to be reassured of their rightness in a context that made their rightness feel somewhat special, possibly subversive. Proximity to dick jokes made Obama-era identity truisms sound like risqué truth-telling. The viewer's experience, in this context, was one of deep self-satisfaction.

QUIZ

Just How Woke Are You?

NO DOUBT YOU'VE been following the past year in culture, but have you been following the past year in woke culture? Do you know your "Sunken Place" from your *Good Place*? Can you stream *Seinfeld* on Hulu with a clear conscience? Is Lena Dunham a force for good or a force for evil, or both? Here's our handy quiz to let you know.

1.

"The Sunken Place" is:

- (A) A purgatorial realm in which innocent people are trapped by evildoers.
- (B) A bracing metaphor for the alienation black people feel in a world defined by white privilege.
- (C) The place the kids on *Stranger Things* disappear to.
- (D) The coffee shop on *Friends*.

2.

Taylor Swift is:

- (A) America's sweetheart.
- (B) An irrelevant relic of a genre of pop music built on systemic cultural appropriation.
- (C) The unwilling poster child of alt-right neo-Nazis.
- (D) Prominently featured on *Time*'s "Person of the Year" cover celebrating women who spoke out against sexual harassment, which, yes, she was involved in that one lawsuit, but still, it was kind of distracting.

3.

Who is your favorite late-night host?

- (A) Jimmy Fallon. He just keeps it light!
- (B) Stephen Colbert. His Emmy bit with Sean Spicer was hilarious!
- (C) Seth Meyers. I love his takes on the news of the day!
- (D) Jimmy Kimmel. His impassioned tales of his son's health troubles inspired the "Jimmy

Kimmel test" and helped sink GOP efforts to repeal Obamacare!

4.

The Big Sick is:

- (A) Raymond Chandler's greatest novel.
- (B) Another successful comedy from producer Judd Apatow.
- (C) Jake Paul-derived slang for "partying too hard."
- (D) A delightful and inclusive tale about a Muslim American navigating his family and his romance with a Caucasian woman that has been unfairly underrepresented in year-end awards consideration, surprising exactly no one, given Hollywood's continued myopia on diversity.

5.

The correct casting choice for young Han Solo should be:

- (A) Alden Ehrenreich.
- (B) Ansel Elgort.
- (C) Donald Glover.
- (D) Issa Rae.

6.

Lena Dunham's most notable achievement in 2017 was:

- (A) Ending *Girls*.
- (B) Crafting the stirring and prescient stand-alone *Girls* episode "American Bitch," which explored the complex dynamics of sexual harassment.
- (C) Preemptively

defending a *Girls* writer online against sexual-harassment charges, then apologizing for her preemptive defense.

(D) Becoming the vehicle by which the world was familiarized with the concept of "hipster racism."

7.

Seinfeld is:

- (A) Simply hilarious.
- (B) A groundbreaking sitcom that changed the rules of television.
- (C) Impossible to rewatch because of its depiction of ethnicities as caricatures who exist solely to catalyze the white characters' comic exasperation.
- (D) Still easier to stomach than rewatching *Friends*, given its laughably whitewashed version of New York and Chandler's transphobia.

8.

Jill Soloway is:

- (A) An important advocate for diverse stories and the "female gaze."
- (B) A Jeffrey Tambor enabler.
- (C) The person whose show *I Love Dick* provided fodder for a joke that spurred the downfall of Amazon Studio head Roy Price.
- (D) My favorite show is *Chicago Fire*, and I have no idea who Jill Soloway is.

SCORING: If you have to take a quiz to see how woke you are, you aren't.

That comfort shattered, of course, when women went on the record with accounts of Louis C.K.'s sexual harassment. One lesson might be that we should have taken all those jokes about compulsive masturbation more seriously. But more than that, the revelations were a warning to audiences about outsourcing moral conscience to celebrities, and about the cheap pleasure of being told what you want to hear.

The great woke-culture triumph of 2017 succeeded on opposite terms: Jordan Peele's *Get Out* was art about identity that declined to make a woke white audience comfortable or reassure it of its own correctness. The widespread desire to look woke was, in fact, an object of the film's satire. *Get Out's* villains style themselves as the kind of white people who are definitely not racist; as *The Last Jedi* director Rian Johnson pointed out on Twitter, if *Get Out* existed in the world of *Get Out*, they'd all be talking about how much they loved *Get Out*. The wit of casting Bradley Whitford (best known for *The West Wing*, another era's brand of high-minded liberal entertainment) and Allison Williams (best known for *Girls*) gave bite to its unsparing view of ostensibly right-thinking white complicity.

Near the film's end, its hero, Chris, lies on the pavement beside his dead girlfriend, a houseful of dead white people down the road just behind him. He has just escaped a murderous nightmare—and then there's a police siren and flashing lights and the bottom falls out of the viewer's stomach. You know as well as Chris does that he's fucked.

What the movie accomplishes in this moment—generating an instant, unthinking awareness that the arrival of the cops is only going to make things worse, that they will not believe Chris's version of events, that he's about to be treated as a criminal—is to use the apparatus of horror-movie storytelling to dramatize a vital experience of race in America. And maneuvering a white audience into having this experience is more ambitious, more effective, and more riveting than delivering a Very Special Episode treatise on the plight of innocent black men killed by police.

ANOTHER DISTINCTION, as vital amid an Awakening as in any other era: An artist can be so perfectly attuned to the moment that he or she makes art precision-engineered to flatter contemporary taste. Or an artist can be so perfectly attuned to the moment that he or she sees what's unsaid and so says something new. The first category is disposable; the second is not. The work of a critic—alert to ideals, alert to ambition—is telling the difference. ■

THE Anticipation Index

What we're excited about this year.

THE YEAR IS YOUNG (one week and counting) and, even in this season of resolutions, there's plenty still unresolved about what's coming up, culture-wise, in 2018. But there's also plenty to get psyched about—and it's never too early to feel unreasonably excited about things you'll have to wait weeks (or months) to see, hear, or read. Here are seven.

KEY

... Anticipation Mounting | ... Anticipation Waning | ... Worthwhile Revisit | ... Long Awaited
... Good Pedigree | ... Return to Form | ... Cautious Optimism | ... Red Flag | ... Timely

Great Trailer

- 1 Black Panther**
Marvel Studios, February 16
WHAT IT IS: A superhero film about an African king that promises to be a) actually good and b) possibly revolutionary. **GET EXCITED:** Because you need to be excited about *something* these days—why not hotshot director Ryan Coogler (*Creed*), a cast to die for, and a movie that in every way seems determined to reinvent the stories that make up our collective pop mythology.

Arriving Next

- 2 The Assassination of Gianni Versace: American Crime Story** FX, January 17
WHAT IT IS: Versace gets the Ryan Murphy treatment. **GET EXCITED:** Because whether you love true crime, high camp, or the antics of MurphyWorld, this is the year's first pass-the-popcorn, phone-on-airplane-mode appointment viewing.

- 3 You Think It, I'll Say It, by Curtis Sittenfeld** Random House, April 24
WHAT IT IS: The first short-story collection from Sittenfeld, author of the novels *Prep* and *American Wife*. **GET EXCITED:** Because Sittenfeld—whose *American Wife* deftly imagined the interior life of a thinly veiled version of Laura Bush—has proved to be an astute observer of cultural anxieties and an expert translator of said anxieties into fiction—a skill set which seems, you know, particularly timely.

- 4 SremmLife 3, Rae Sremmurd**
Release date TBA
WHAT IT IS: The third album from the duo (read their name backward) behind two recent massive culture-tilting hits: Beyoncé's "Formation" and their own meme-inspiring single "Black Beatles." **GET EXCITED:** Because, simply put: Rap is the new rock, and Rae Sremmurd are rock stars.

On the Radar

- 5 Sharp Objects**
HBO, Summer 2018
WHAT IT IS: A TV adaptation of the first novel by Gillian Flynn, who also wrote a book you may remember called *Gone Girl*. **GET EXCITED:** Because while Flynn's adaptations have been up and down—up for the *Gone Girl* movie, down for *Dark Places*—this one is getting the full HBO gussy-up, from top-line star Amy Adams to director Jean-Marc Vallée, who helmed *Big Little Lies*.

- 6 Creative Quest, by Questlove**
Ecco, April 24
WHAT IT IS: A book on creativity from the charismatic Roots drummer. **GET EXCITED:** Because if it makes you one-quintillionth as cool as Questlove—who's magically gone from a hip-hop percussionist to an icon so famous you recognize his silhouette, like Hitchcock—it's well worth the price. **CAVEAT:** If you became even one-quintillionth as cool as Questlove, you'd literally drop dead.

- 7 Annihilation**
Paramount Pictures, February 23
WHAT IT IS: Jeff VanderMeer's celebrated sci-fi novel gets adapted by director Alex Garland. Starring Natalie Portman! **GET EXCITED:** Because—this is a weird one. Garland wrote and directed *Ex Machina*, one of the best sci-fi films of the past decade. Yet this film was scooped up by Netflix, reportedly after a conflict with David Ellison of Skydance over proposed recuts. Paramount is still releasing it Stateside, so the good news is: You'll see Garland's original vision—in theaters!

JUST MISSED THE CUT: Laura Lippman's noir novel *Sunburn*; *Westworld*, season 2; Justin Timberlake's new album, *Man of the Woods*, which has such a high possibility of being disastrous that it may well turn out to be genius.

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The CULTURE PAGES

CRITICS

Christian Lorentzen on the career of Denis Johnson.



BOOKS / CHRISTIAN LORENTZEN

Denis Johnson, Undead

With a new, posthumous book, the author of *Jesus' Son* still haunts the culture, for good reason.



HOW MANY READERS of Denis Johnson's *Jesus' Son* have wondered what happens to Fuckhead when he grows up? Johnson's 1991 masterpiece—a lean and quivering book of 11 linked stories told by a barfly, a junkie, and a petty criminal whose voice is somehow older and wiser than his years—ends with Fuckhead sobered up and working at a home for the aged, demented, amputated, and otherwise infirm. He spends his days among the unwell who nobody else ever sees. His duties include making the patients feel human, touching them once in a while so they know they're not lepers: "All these weirdos," the book ends, "and me getting a little better every day right in the midst of them. I had never known, never even imagined for a heartbeat, that there might be a place for people like us."

**THE LARGESSE
OF THE SEA MAIDEN**
DENIS JOHNSON.
RANDOM HOUSE.
JANUARY 16.
224 PAGES. \$27.

A tempting answer to the question of what happened to Fuckhead is that he became his author, who died on May 24, 2017, at age 67, of liver cancer. Sometimes the biographical fallacy isn't a fallacy, and we know that Johnson spent a lot of his 20s in a haze of alcohol, heroin, and whatever else came his way. He quit drinking in 1978, at age 29, and his first novel, *Angels*, appeared in 1983. By the time of his death, he was the author of 19 books of fiction, plays, poetry, and reportage—one of which, the Vietnam War novel *Tree of Smoke*, won the National Book Award in 2007. He's called a writer's writer, but his audience is in fact legion. There are people walking around who know his books by heart. You probably know somebody like that.

Now there is a 20th and last book, *The Largesse of the Sea Maiden*, which Johnson finished just before his death. It collects five

short stories, all of them death-haunted: “It’s plain to you that at the time I write this,” ends one story, “I’m not dead. But maybe by the time you read it.” Two are told from Fuckhead territory—by desperate young men, one of them in jail, the other in a half-way house—and two are told by middle-aged writers with plenty of ghosts. These four stories rank with Johnson’s best work, but the title story, a catalogue of singular moments related by a man who tells us he’s passing through life as if it were a masquerade, ranks with the best fiction published by any American writer during this short century. None of these narrators is Fuckhead, but all of them, we suspect, could be. After all, we never learn his real name.

SALVATION PLOTS DEFINED Johnson’s life and work—the rare American writer who worked in exile from the American Dream. Even William S. Burroughs wrote in reaction to that dream—with his rants against breeders and churchgoing folk—not simply apart from it. Stability, striving, homeownership, prosperity—when these things enter Johnson’s work (they hardly ever do), it’s as if by accident or as part of a charade. His characters live and die on the lonely fringes, on highways and in hospitals, in bars or behind bars, scavengers and hermits in the swirl outside the zone of American normalcy. The ones who hold a job or build a family seem aware that they’re doing so as if under cover, like the narrator of “The Largesse of the Sea Maiden.” Johnson himself knew there was something spectral about his own survival and his art. You can hear it in his titles: *Resuscitation of a Hanged Man*, *Already Dead*.

Within the spectrum of postwar American fiction, Johnson is hard to classify. He arrived at the end of the heyday of the Dirty Realists (among them his friend and teacher Raymond Carver), and his books had a harder edge, more liable to explode into violence. He garnered early praise from both Philip Roth and Don DeLillo, and while all three writers have their eye on the American berserk, there’s nothing in Johnson’s work like Roth’s relentless psychologizing or DeLillo’s probing of society’s secret systems. Like Marilynne Robinson, Johnson is a thoroughly Christian writer, but while Robinson’s novels are explicitly religious, it might be news to many of Johnson’s characters if you told them what they were experiencing was a crisis of faith or a conversion. It may even surprise some of his readers. Those approaching Johnson’s putative epic, *Tree of Smoke*, expecting a sweeping and integrated social novel that explains the country (the sort of book the writers of the generation that followed

him—Jonathan Franzen, Jennifer Egan, Jeffrey Eugenides—are constantly attempting) will be disappointed. Rather than representative men and women, Johnson wrote about hard cases, freaks, and ghosts.

Johnson’s legend began with shades of an American Rimbaud. A first book of poems, *The Man Among the Seals*, appeared in 1969, when Johnson was just short of 20. These were the verses of a romantic teenager imagining his way beyond his years: “i would like to be just an old man with my gin,” one poem begins. An affinity for elemental landscapes (deserts, seas, wide horizons), a disillusionment with suburban life (televisions, detergent, mousetraps), and an intimacy with the bottle pervade the book. The 1970s were Johnson’s lost years. “I went from prodigy to prodigal in a hurry,” he told the *New York Times* in 2002. He took two degrees from the University of Iowa, where he studied writing and hit the bars with Carver. But becoming a writer requires more than an M.F.A. and a drinking habit. Johnson associated intoxication with inspiration, but his vices were an obstacle to writing. Hospitalized more than once for alcoholism, he also used heroin, though he was never a full-on junkie. “You can’t just go into a drugstore and say, ‘I’ll have some heroin, please,’” he told David Amsden in this magazine in 2002. “You have to be prepared to enter into all kinds of adventures that I wasn’t strong enough for.”

He wasn’t strong enough, either, to become a novelist. That took salvation, in the form of giving up drinking, and another five years. *Angels* set a template of dissolution, transgression, and redemption, in cinematic set pieces rendered in amped-up prose. These are the elements Johnson would modulate across genres in his fiction for the rest of his career. *Angels* is a love story that begins on a cross-country bus and a tale of crime and punishment that ends in the gas chamber after something like a jailhouse conversion. There’s a rape committed by a man in a red suit who could easily be confused with the devil himself. The climactic bank robbery is one of the prettiest scenes in all of American crime fiction. When the hero Bill Houston, until now a more or less likable deadbeat, murders a security guard, we see him for the holy innocent he is: “The smoke of gunfire lay in sheets along the air around his head, where light played off the fountain’s pond and gave it brilliance. In the center of his heart, the tension of a lifetime dissolved into honey.” What Johnson was doing wasn’t psychological realism, and it never would be. The damned and the saved lie someplace beyond what we call psychology. So do ghosts.



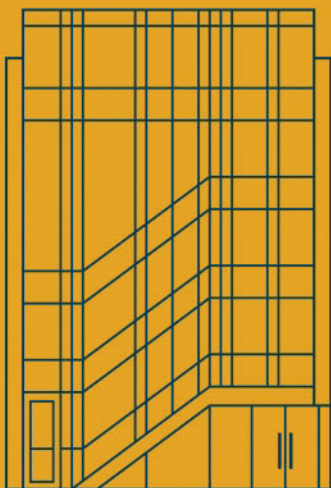
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Johnson in 1976.

Angels began a quartet that looked at the shadow side of American life and found (or didn't find) the cracks where the sun came in. Characters show up across different books, and the country is seen through the lenses of various genres. *Fiskadoro* (1985) is set in a postapocalyptic Florida Keys, a corner of the country spared from nuclear devastation. Johnson said, "That book is America made bleak. If you take away the TVs, what've you got?" When you take the American Dream out of America, what do you have left? Tribes of weirdos living in huts on the beach decorated with parts from cars that no longer drive.

The Stars at Noon (1986) is a thriller set in Managua in 1984, narrated by a woman who passes as humanitarian, journalist, and prostitute; its Nicaragua is an amoral inferno of total duplicity. The hippie flourishes of Johnson's prose till now give way to a truly hard-boiled voice. Fans of Sonic Youth will immediately notice in *The Stars at Noon* what appear to be allusions to *Daydream Nation*—"Does this sound simple, fuck you? Does fuck you sound simple enough?"; in fact, Kim Gordon wrote "The Sprawl" by raiding Johnson's prose. If he wasn't yet famous, he was seeping into the culture.

But the quartet finished with a dud. The intense, lyrical spell of Johnson's early work is broken by *The Resuscitation of a Hanged Man* (1991), about a survivor of a suicide attempt who makes his way from Kansas to Provincetown, a medical-equipment sales-

man who finds himself in an unrepressed America and falls for a lesbian. He takes in drag shows and goes to church a lot. Religion moves from subtext to text. The prose is low-octane and for once hard to confuse with poetry. Three decades on, the story of a straight-laced Midwesterner entering a zone of licentiousness lacks any edge it might once have had. One of the hazards of wringing a novel out of the year you spent in a beach town on a fellowship is that it may be obvious you spent a year in a beach town on a fellowship.

Around this time Johnson's life wasn't entirely un-fucked up. A trip to the Philippines for *Esquire* yielded an unfulfilled assignment and a case of malaria. A second marriage fell apart, and the IRS was after him for \$10,000. He was in need of saving again. This time it was his past that saved him. *Jesus' Son* is a reimagining of Johnson's wastrel years and seen through what John Updike called the "agreeable haze" of retrospect. The doubleness isn't simply a matter of a narrator in and out of time: It's also moral, a matter of spiritual questing.

In Christian terms, the junkie is the sinner pushed to the extreme, the saint inverted. Fuckhead's questing sometimes gets confused with scoring a fix and the criminal undertakings (burglaries, shake-downs) that entails. "Fuckhead's very hostile but at the same time he's worshipful," Johnson told the journal *Columbia* in 1993. "He displaces his hopes by attaching them to the kind of person he's going to run into on a

train—he's not going to find anybody, male or female—yet he keeps thinking he wants something transcendent expressed to him, but he can't get it." He sees a man on a train and follows him to a laundromat: "His chest was like Christ's. That's probably who he was." He sees a woman behind a bar and looks into her future: "Your husband will beat you with an extension cord and the bus will pull away leaving you standing there in tears, but you were my mother."

Within the book's fallen world, everyone seems to have a dual identity. A farmhouse full of jocks turns out to be a drug den: "Football people. I didn't know they ever got like that." This applies to Fuckhead too. One moment he's helping a stranger home, and the next he's threatening to beat up a woman whose husband sold him bad drugs. It's not simple drunken sentimentality that lets Fuckhead see light inside the worst people he encounters. Here he's talking about Dundun, who's just killed a man, who's said he ought to work as a hit man, and who, we're told, will torture another and beat a third nearly to death:

Will you believe me when I tell you there was kindness in his heart? His left hand didn't know what his right hand was doing. It was only that certain important connections had been burned through. If I opened your head and ran a hot soldering iron around in your brain, I might turn you into someone like that.

Johnson pulls this zoom-out trick of having Fuckhead address the reader or the other characters across the years several times in *Jesus' Son*, which he modeled on Isaac Babel's "Red Cavalry" stories. The stylistic debt is obvious. Babel: "The orange sun is rolling across the sky like a severed head"; Johnson: "Under Midwestern clouds like great gray brains we left the superhighway." Babel and Johnson were writing about casualties of different sorts, but a landscape of derangement fits both war and addiction. Under such circumstances, the pathetic fallacy—a character's feelings being projected onto the world—becomes concrete reality. John Jeremiah Sullivan has pointed out that much of the prose in *Jesus' Son* is indistinguishable from his poetry if you break up the lines. The book is also marked by a few radical technical decisions: no backstories, no transitions, spliced timelines, and jumbled tenses. These moves, which are also shortcuts out of psychology, have the paradoxical effect of both mimicking the addict's consciousness and heightening the reader's attention. The book provides the illusion of a clarifying delirium, like a good drug experience.

There's one more element to the power of *Jesus' Son*: sudden and singular images

that emerge as if out of dreams or nightmares. These characterize all of Johnson's fiction, but in this book they're delivered at a high concentration. "Emergency," the collection's best story, is a litany of images: a patient who walks into an emergency room with a knife stabbed into his eye socket; a drug guru being interviewed at a county fair with eyeballs that "look like he bought them at a joke shop"; the eight baby rabbits Fuckhead's friend Georgie cuts from the belly of an animal he runs over, later crushed to death when Fuckhead sits on them; the movie playing at a drive-in theater seen through a September blizzard ("Famous movie stars rode bicycles beside a river, laughing out of their gigantic, lovely mouths"). Elsewhere in the book there's a baby lolling in the backseat of a car that's just been wrecked, feeling its cheeks to see if they're still there; a woman flying aloft tied to a kite pulled down the river by a speedboat; the scars on both cheeks of the hospital roommate Fuckhead shaves, marks of the bullet that passed through his head. You don't soon forget these images, though you might forget that they all fill the same book.

There's one more stark image: Fuckhead spies on a Mennonite woman in her townhouse as she showers and dines in the evening with her husband. There's something about her purity and apartness that he can't look away from, that he wants to run away with. He sees her husband wash her feet in what seems to be a gesture of apology. Would he be forgiven for being a peeping Tom? Fuckhead's questing and his transgressing are still one and the same impulse.

JESUS' SON got the IRS off Johnson's back, gained him a cult following that eventually outgrew the term *cult*, and was adapted for the screen in 1999 with Johnson as the man who walks into the hospital with a knife in his eye. He lived between Idaho, Arizona, and Texas; had what was by all accounts a loving and steadying third marriage; and with his wife Cindy homeschooled their children. He reported from Iraq, Afghanistan, Liberia, Somalia, and remote corners of the United States, reportage collected in *Seek* (2002). He wrote four plays.

The six works of fiction—five novels and a novella—that Johnson published between *Jesus' Son* and his death are promiscuous in form and tone. One useful way to categorize them is as a set of opposing pairs. There are two long novels, *Already Dead* (1997) and *Tree of Smoke* (2007). The former is a violent and gothic (there's a character called Frankenstein) descent into California's drug culture; it's creepy, funny, and bonkers in darkly satisfying ways, perhaps too strange to be justly appreciated as

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THEATERS
59
59

January 16 - February 25

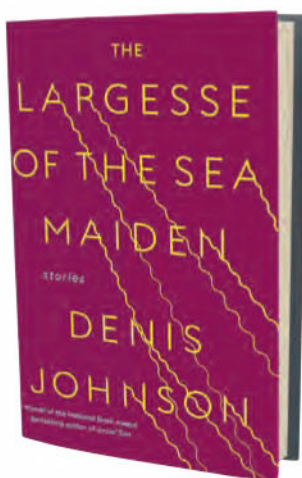
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one of Johnson's major works. The latter married Johnson's lyrical style—at times as delirious as the prose in *Angels*, the novel included the Houston brothers among its large cast of characters—to big historical subject matter.

Two books are too self-consciously slight: *The Name of the World* (2000), the story of a widowed former Washington speechwriter's encounter with a beguiling performance artist, an experience that sends him in flight from his staid life to report on the first Gulf War; and *Nobody Move* (2009), a comic noir in prose pared down to an unrecognizable minimalism. The historical novella *Train Dreams* (2011), a nominee for the Pulitzer that wasn't awarded in 2012, and the thriller *The Laughing Monsters* (2014) are best considered—as the novelist Norman Rush, along with Sullivan, Johnson's most incisive critic, have pointed out—Christian parables: One recounts, with the spareness of late Tolstoy and in the most refined prose of Johnson's career, the life of an upstanding man in the Northwest of the early-20th century whose wife and child are taken from him by a forest fire “stronger than God”; the other, a hard-boiled and unsympathetic number, traces the unsavory doings of a pair of operators, selfish agents of foreign powers, in Africa, villains neither punished or redeemed.

The Largesse of the Sea Maiden is only Johnson's second collection of stories, but it's further proof that the form was his natural mode. The middle-aged man who narrates the magnificent title story lives in San Diego and works in advertising. We know enough about his life—college at Columbia, two years working for the *New York Post*, 13 years making television commercials on Madison Avenue—to know that if he had some Fuckhead-like lost years, he isn't telling us. But his past isn't squeaky-clean either, and memory is a zone of regret. He's an impostor in the matrix of the American Dream. The bonds he's formed are with people one way or another broken, or with healers, like his partner, Elaine. She does volunteer work, things like teaching adults how to read.

It's Elaine who brings together the characters in the story's opening scene, a dinner party. There's a survivor of a coronary, a woman who became a grandmother at 37, the brother of a Tourette's-syndrome case embarrassed at his sibling's compulsion to shout about penises in public. The story's focus settles on a veteran of the Afghanistan War whose leg was taken by a land mine on the outskirts of Kabul. A woman wants to see the amputee's stump. The man agrees to remove his prosthesis if she kisses his scar. After some hesitation, she agrees,



but, on her knees, with the half-missing limb two inches from her face, she starts to cry and the room goes quiet. The silence is broken by a man who boorishly mentions once seeing the amputee beat up a couple of men outside a bar. The narrator tells us this “ruined” the moment, but he also informs us that six months later the amputee and the woman he asked to kiss his stump were married.

In the same manner as “Emergency,” the story goes on accumulating its power with indelible images, some tragic, others comic to the point of absurdity. Life is equated with a masquerade, and the narrator acknowledges wearing a mask of his own, though one he's worn so long it's stopped being a disguise. Like many of Johnson's narrators, this one is indifferent to our sympathies. Altogether, the story's catalogue of moments from middle age constitute a preparation for death. Of his wife the narrator says, “Elaine: she's petite, lithe, quite smart; short gray hair, no makeup. A good companion. At any moment—the very next second—she could be dead.” Of himself, a man whose most notable achievements are a few prime-time TV ads from decades back, he says: “I have more to remember than I have to look forward to. Memory fades, not much of the past stays, and I wouldn't mind forgetting a lot more of it.”

The rest of *The Largesse of the Sea Maiden* splits neatly into halves, of young men and older men and their reckonings with death: the addict's brushes with death, murders intentional and accidental committed by convicts, deaths of friends, stillborns, the ashes of 9/11. The wildest story

in *The Largesse of the Sea Maiden*, “Doppelgänger, Poltergeist,” springs from an acquaintance of mutual admiration between the narrator, a writer teaching at Columbia, and Marcus Ahearn, a student with obvious poetic talent. Marcus also has a long-standing obsession with Elvis Presley that spins out into a supernatural conspiracy theory, involving miscarried twins (including Elvis's own), grave robbing, reincarnation, murder, and the CIA. The Twin Towers fall halfway through the story, a whopper of an allegory for American paranoia.

The narrator of “Triumph Over the Grave,” who will spend much of the story looking after dying friends, gives this account of his calling:

Writing. It's easy work. The equipment isn't expensive, and you can pursue this occupation anywhere. You make your own hours, mess around the house in your pajamas, listening to jazz recordings and sipping coffee while another day makes its escape. You don't have to be high-functioning, or even, for the most part, functioning at all. If I could drink liquor without being drunk all the time, I'd certainly drink enough to be drunk half the time, and production wouldn't suffer. Bouts of poverty come along, anxiety, shocking debt, but nothing lasts forever. I've gone from rags to riches and back again, and more than once. Whatever happens to you, you put it on a page, work it into shape, cast it in a light. It's not much different, really, from filming a parade of clouds across the sky and calling it a movie—although it has to be admitted that the clouds can descend, take you up, carry you to all kinds of places, some of them terrible, and you don't get back where you came from for years and years.

This is a more easygoing vision of being a writer, terrible descents aside, than the one implied by the rules Johnson gave to his writing students:

Write naked. That means to write what you would never say.

Write in blood. As if ink is so precious you can't waste it.

Write in exile, as if you are never going to get home again, and you have to call back every detail.

These are romantic bromides—a hard-core version of “Find your voice” and “Write what you know”—but they do imply elements of what made Johnson the lyrical Christian visionary we'll be reading for a long time to come. His material was the stuff of the confessional and the AA meeting. His youth had taught him that life could be, would be, short. He lived in exile from that youth and transformed it into books that are the sort of redemption that never ends. ■

For full listings of movies, theater, music, restaurants, and much more, see nymag.com/agenda.



The CULTURE PAGES

To

DO



Twenty-five things to see, hear, watch, and read.

JANUARY 10-24

POP

1. See Cracker & Camper Van Beethoven

Double dose.

Highline Ballroom, January 14.

Texan singer-songwriter David Lowery is one of rock's most underrated jugglers: His '80s band Camper Van Beethoven recorded scrappy, wry gems like "The Day That Lassie Went to the Moon" and "Take the Skinheads Bowling," and his '90s flagship Cracker served considerably beefier fare, like the grunge-era standard "Low." Dig the versatility as Lowery brings both acts out for the same Highline Ballroom night.

CRAIG JENKINS

ART

2. See Genesis P-Orridge: Tree of Life

Vision of a post-Fluxus world.

Invisible-Exports, 89 Eldridge Street, through February 4.

By some measures, the artist Genesis P-Orridge is a living legend, branded in 1976 by a member of the British Parliament as a "wrecker of civilization." Here we see works newly come to light from he/r early days: snippets, collages, original mail art done on envelopes and posted, musical allusions, and more. Until a major museum undertakes a survey of this pivotal figure, make it your business to imbibe this artist.

JERRY SALTZ

CLASSICAL

3. Hear Roomful of Teeth

Very vocal.

Zankel Hall, January 11.

When Caroline Shaw's *Partita for 8 Voices* won the Pulitzer Prize in 2013, the piece also drew

attention to the orchestrallike a cappella ensemble she sings in and wrote it for. Now that group, Roomful of Teeth, performs that work and also joins up with jazz pianist and composer Tigran Hamasyan for the local premiere of his *Ser Aravote* and of Ambrose Akinmusire's *A Promise in the Stillness*.

JUSTIN DAVIDSON

TV

4. Watch Modern Family's 200th Episode

A major milestone.

ABC, January 10.

This series has won so many Emmys that at a certain point it became a pro-wrestling-level bad guy in the awards world, but the continuing adventures of the Pritchett-Dunphy-Tucker clan have proved a remarkably consistent source of entertainment over the years. Phil (Ty Burrell) suffers stomach pains and gets rushed to the hospital by Gloria (Sofia Vergara) in this one, but as always, it's the shtick and the feels that really matter.

MATT ZOLLER SEITZ

THEATER

5. See Ballyturk

New work from a creepy, Beckettian bard.

St. Ann's Warehouse, through January 28.

The Irish playwright Enda Walsh is becoming something of a writer-in-residence at St. Ann's Warehouse, where his plays *The Walworth Farce*, *The New Electric Ballroom*, *Penelope*, *Misterman*, and *Arlington* have found their American home over the past ten years. His latest offering finds two men trapped in a strange room with their lives unraveling. Walsh specializes in dramatizing the agony of waiting, of delict spaces where nothing is happening ... yet.

SARA HOLDREN

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MOVIES

6. **Go to '60s Verité**

For the times they are a-changin'.

Film Forum, January 19 to February 6.

This 64-film series showcases the on-the-fly documentary style that flowered at roughly the same time as flower power while showing seminal bits of life a half-century ago. Along with musical numbers (*Monterey Pop*, *Gimme Shelter*), you should check out the electric Jane Fonda portrait *Jane* and a James Baldwin double bill, *Take This Hammer* and (in conversation with Dick Gregory) *Baldwin's N****r*. DAVID EDELSTEIN

JAZZ

7. **Hear Benny Goodman: King of Swing**

That Carnegie Hall night, 80 years on.

Jazz at Lincoln Center, January 11 to 13.

This concert pays tribute to a landmark in jazz history: Benny Goodman's 1938 Carnegie Hall concert, arguably the night jazz made its debut in the serious-music mainstream. Clarinetist Victor Goines will step into Goodman's role for the night to lead tunes from the original show by the likes of Gershwin, Fats Waller, and Louis Prima.

BOOKS

8. **Read Modern Loss**

Taking on the ultimate taboo.

Harper Wave, January 23.

Gabrielle Birkner and Rebecca Soffer both lost parents as young adults, and the pair co-founded the website Modern Loss to create a dialogue around grief and resilience. Now they're releasing this book of essays collecting insights on topics like social media, triggers, and sex, with contributions from CNN's Brian Stelter and singer Amanda Palmer.

THEATER

9. **See He Brought Her Heart Back in a Box**

The grande dame returns.

Theatre for a New Audience, January 18 to February 11.

The great Adrienne Kennedy, playwright of the groundbreaking *Funnyhouse of a Negro*, is premiering her first new play in a decade at 86 years old—and the moment couldn't be riper. Directed by Evan Yionoulis, this heart-wrenching memory play is set in both Georgia and New York in 1941, and it's a story of segregation, desire, and doomed love that touches on everything from the horrors of Jim Crow to the poetry of Christopher Marlowe. S.H.

ART

10. **See Gordon Matta-Clark: Anarchitect**

Breakdown to breakthrough.

Bronx Museum, through April 8.

The late downtown hero Gordon Matta-Clark, known for carving up Paris buildings, shines forth in this show documenting his many projects in the then-world capital of 1970s Western decay: the Bronx. Working directly with communities, Matta-Clark brought great art to the people via sculpture, film, drawings, prints, etc. J.S.

CLASSICAL MUSIC

11. **Hear** Susanna Mälkki With the Philharmonic

What might have been.

Geffen Hall, January 11 to 13.

Susanna Mälkki's 2015 debut with the New York Philharmonic left some audience members wishing the orchestra could immediately appoint her music director, especially since the Los Angeles Philharmonic soon named her principal guest conductor. The consolation prize is a sole engagement this season, leading a program of Debussy and Tchaikovsky, sandwiching "Helix" by her fellow Finn Esa-Pekka Salonen. J.D.

POP

12. **Listen to** Mania

Pushing boundaries.

Island Records/DCD2, January 19.

The pop-punk vets in Fall Out Boy continue their slow push into straight-up pop and electronic music with this January's release. Electro-rock flights are aided this time around by co-writes from chart-topper Sia and co-production from scribes like the sometime Weeknd collaborator Illangelo. C.J.

TALKS

13. **Go to** 50 Years After MLK: A Dream Deferred

Taking stock.

Apollo Theater, January 14.

Brian Lehrer and Jami Floyd from WNYC will moderate this panel discussion on what has and hasn't changed since Martin Luther King's death half a century ago. Guests will include Women's March co-founder Linda Sarsour and Black Lives Matter co-founder Patrisse Cullors.

BOOKS

14. **Read** Everything Here Is Beautiful

Deploying empathy.

Pamela Dorman Books/Viking, January 16.

Like Adam Haslett's *Imagine Me Gone*, Mira T. Lee's debut looks at a mental-illness sufferer—in this case, New York City journalist Lucia, diagnosed with "schizoaffective disorder"—through her own eyes as well as those of narrators closest to her, including older sister Miranda and Ecuador-born partner Manuel. BORIS KACHKA

TV

15. **Watch** This Time Next Year

Resolution road.

Lifetime, January 16.

Based on the same-titled U.K. series and perfectly timed to the start of a New Year, this Lifetime series follows individuals as they embark on sustained campaigns to change some aspect of themselves, whether through weight loss, reconstructive surgery, infertility treatment, or reuniting with an estranged loved one. M.Z.S.

THE MET

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The exhibition is made possible in part by The Horace W. Goldsmith Foundation, The Jay Pritzker Foundation, the Jane and Robert Carroll Fund, and the Aaron I. Fleischman and Lin Loughheed Fund.

It is supported by an Indemnity from the Federal Council on the Arts and the Humanities. It is organized collaboratively by Tate Britain, London; the Centre Pompidou, Paris; and The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

David Hockney, *A Bigger Splash*, 1967, acrylic on canvas. Tate, purchased 1981. © David Hockney. Photo © Tessa London, 2017.

NEW YORK



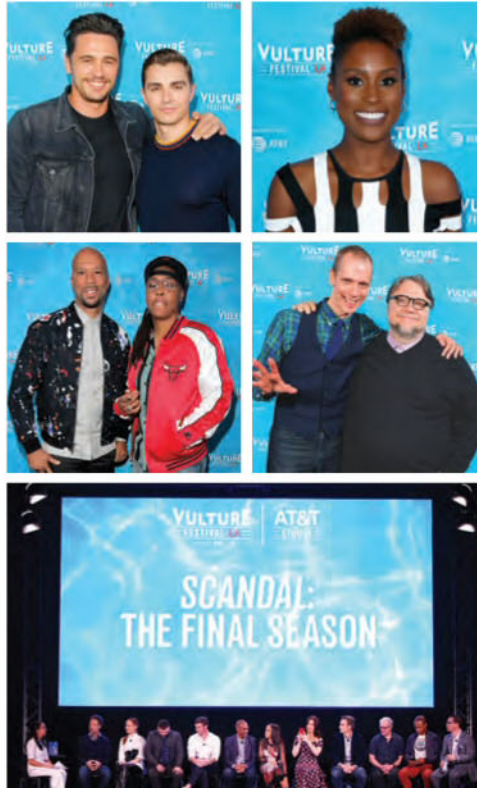
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ENTERTAINMENT

VULTURE FESTIVAL LA

Vulture Festival, born in New York City four years ago, expanded to Los Angeles this past November 18–19, drawing A-list talent that included Kerry Washington, Natalie Portman, Issa Rae, Sarah Silverman and James Franco. Held at the Hollywood Roosevelt hotel, the weekend featured popular events like a sing-a-long with the cast of *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend*, a scavenger hunt led by *Search Party*, and panel discussions with the creators (and star Finn Wolfhard) of *Strangers Things*. Key sponsors included AT&T, Citi, JetBlue and TNT. Vulture Festival NY returns to Manhattan this May.

► vulturefestival.com/la


EVENTS

BUDWEISER PROHIBITION REPEAL CELEBRATION

On December 5, *New York* partnered with Budweiser to celebrate the anniversary of the repeal of prohibition at Troy Liquor Bar in the Meatpacking District. Guests were granted access once they provided the secret password. Inside, revelers enjoyed Budweiser's Repeal Reserve, 1930s music, and classic Budweiser archives.

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MOVIES

16. See The Oscar Contenders (Ladies Taking Names Edition)

Women on the verge.

In theaters now.

Ahead of the Oscar blitz, check out the year's buzziest leading-actress performances, among them: Saoirse Ronan as a prickly-dreamy teen in *Lady Bird*; Frances McDormand and Diane Kruger as grief-stricken mothers in, respectively, *Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri* and *In the Fade*; Margot Robbie as a militantly trashy Tonya Harding in *I, Tonya*; and Annette Bening as the dying Gloria Grahame in *Film Stars Don't Die in Liverpool*. J.D.

OPERA

17. See Fellow Travelers

Of this moment.

Gerald W. Lynch Theater, January 12 through 14.

Gregory Spears and Greg Pierce's urgent opera about the danger of being a gay government employee in the McCarthy era opened in Cincinnati in 2016 days after the attack on a gay nightclub in Orlando and makes its New York debut at a time when the topics of sexual politics and the purging of federal agencies have shape-shifted into a new kind of timeliness. J.D.

ART

18. See Gordon Parks: I Am You, Part 1

New views from a late visionary.

Jack Shainman Gallery, 524 West 24th Street. Opens January 11.

The first installment of two, this show devoted to the great photographer of the civil-rights movement focuses on lesser-known work from the '50s and '60s, like portraits of artists including Calder and Giacometti and vérité fashion photography that paved the way for today's street-style portraiture.

POP MUSIC

19. Listen to Camila

Breaking out.

Epic Records/Syco Entertainment, January 12.

Cuban-American singer Camila Cabello, Fifth Harmony's one that got away, steps into a promising solo career with her self-titled debut, which soars to winsome heights on the yearning "Never Be the Same" and "Real Friends" and zipped up pop charts worldwide with the salsa-infused "Havana." C.J.

THEATER

20. See Cute Activist

Satire in the Nutmeg State.

The Bushwick Starr, January 10 through 27.

The young theater company New Saloon garnered great praise for *Minor Character*, an exploded/imploded riff on Chekhov's *Uncle Vanya*. Now it's back with a new play by Milo Cramer set in a mythical Connecticut town where a hip young army of "part-time activists" wages war with an evil landlord in a wry fable about the place of activism in our anxious contemporary lives. S.H.

BOOKS

21. **Read** Red Clocks

Close to home.

Little, Brown and Company, January 16.

In Leni Zumas's mysterious new novel, five women in small-town Oregon push the boundaries in a world where abortion is illegal, IVF is outlawed, and incredible rights are granted to embryos. Sound familiar?

CLASSICAL

22. **Hear** the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra

Abundance of riches.

Carnegie Hall, January 17.

Wagnerians have a heady few months coming up: Next month, the Met stages *Parsifal*; in mid-February, the New York Philharmonic performs Act I of *Die Walküre* in concert; and in April, the Boston Symphony Orchestra performs Act II of *Tristan und Isolde*. This undeclared festival gets going with a *Parsifal* preview: two excerpts conducted by Daniele Gatti as an intro to Bruckner's *Symphony No. 9*. J.D.

MOVIES

23. **See** The Way I See It: Directors' Cuts

Original vision.

Quad Cinema, through January 18.

This series celebrates the revenge of the auteur



THE 60-SECOND BOOK EXCERPT

'WINTER'

By Ali Smith (Pantheon, January 9)

"Christmas Eve morning, 10 am, and the disembodied head was dozing. Lacy green growth, leafy looking, a tangle of minuscule leaves and fronds, had thickened and crisped round its nostrils and upper lip like dried nasal mucus and the head was making the sounds of inhalation and exhalation in such a lifelike way that if anyone standing outside this room heard it he or she'd have been convinced that a real whole child, albeit one with a bad cold, was having a nap in here."

on studio executives and other non-auteurs. The usual suspects like *Blade Runner*, *Brazil*, and *Once Upon a Time in America* are here, but the goodie is Kenneth Lonergan's three-plus-hour

cut of *Margaret* (starring Anna Paquin as a high-strung teenager), which turns a messy failure into a messy masterpiece. (Lonergan will confirm as much in a Q&A.) D.E.

THEATER

24. **Go to** the Under the Radar Festival

Binge-watch them all.

The Public Theater, through January 15.

The Public's annual festival of innovative, off-the-beaten-track theater is back and, as always, is worth multiple visits to Astor Place during January. From a *Hamlet*-themed extravaganza by the drag performer and "lip-sync maestro" Dickie Beau to an exploration of the Wild West by the Obie Award-winning Nature Theater of Oklahoma to reworkings of classics like *Antigone* and the Chinese dramatic masterpiece *Thunderstorm*, the eclectic, exciting offerings of Under the Radar should be on yours. S.H.

MOVIES

25. **Watch** The Truman Show

Never felt fresher.

Netflix.

Peter Weir's 1998 satire about an average guy (Jim Carrey, at his best) who's the unknowing star of a reality show anticipated the way our media-rich environments and ubiquitous cameras would turn us all into walking, talking Trumans.



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P	A	R	T	Y	H	A	N	D	S	H	E	S	S	E	T	C	H
I	D	A	H	O	O	N	E	U	P	A	S	T	I	G	R	A	Y
T	A	C	O	M	A	W	A	S	H	I	N	G	T	O	N	G	O
A	P	E	S	N	E	T	R	O	G	E	R	P	R	O	S	E	
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S	A	N	G		T	I	N	Y		S	E	A	L	S		S	L



CONTINUED FROM PAGE 25

Zucker up at a dinner with a high-ranking executive from CNN's parent company. "I probably shouldn't have, because Zucker is not that smart," Trump lamented, "but I like to show I can do that sort of thing." Then Zucker had returned the favor by airing the "unbelievably disgusting" story about the Russian "dossier" and the "golden shower"—the practice CNN had accused him of being party to in a Moscow hotel suite with assorted prostitutes.

Having dispensed with Zucker, the president of the United States went on to speculate on what was involved with a golden shower. And how this was all just part of a media campaign that would never succeed in driving him from the White House. Because they were sore losers and hated him for winning, they spread total lies, 100 percent made-up things, totally untrue, for instance, the cover that week of *Time* magazine—which, Trump reminded his listener, he had been on more than anyone in history—that showed Steve Bannon, a good guy, saying he was the real president. "How much influence do you think Steve Bannon has over me?" Trump demanded. He repeated the question, then repeated the answer: "Zero! Zero!" And that went for his son-in-law, too, who had a lot to learn.

The media was not only hurting him, he said—he was not looking for any agreement or even any response—but hurting his negotiating capabilities, which hurt the nation. And that went for *Saturday Night Live*, which might think it was very funny but was actually hurting everybody in the country. And while he understood that *SNL* was there to be mean to him, they were being very, very mean. It was "fake comedy." He had reviewed the treatment of all other presidents in the media, and there was nothing like this ever, even of Nixon, who was treated very unfairly. "Kellyanne, who is very fair, has this all documented. You can look at it."

The point is, he said, that that very day, he had saved \$700 million a year in jobs that were going to Mexico, but the media was talking about him wandering around the White House in his bathrobe, which "I don't have because I've never worn a bathrobe. And would never wear one, because I'm not

that kind of guy." And what the media was doing was undermining this very dignified house, and "dignity is so important." But Murdoch, "who had never called me, never once," was now calling all the time. So that should tell people something.

The call went on for 26 minutes.

WITHOUT A STRONG chief of staff at the White House, there was no real up-and-down structure in the administration—merely a figure at the top and everyone else scrambling for his attention. It wasn't task-based so much as response-oriented—whatever captured the boss's attention focused everybody's attention. Priebus and Bannon and Kushner were all fighting to be the power behind the Trump throne. And in these crosshairs was Katie Walsh, the deputy chief of staff.

Walsh, who came to the White House from the RNC, represented a certain Republican ideal: clean, brisk, orderly, efficient. A righteous bureaucrat with a permanently grim expression, she was a fine example of the many political professionals in whom competence and organizational skills transcend ideology. To Walsh, it became clear almost immediately that "the three gentlemen running things," as she came to characterize them, had each found his own way to appeal to the president. Bannon offered a rousing fuck-you show of force; Priebus offered flattery from the congressional leadership; Kushner offered the approval of blue-chip businessmen. Each appeal was exactly what Trump wanted from the presidency, and he didn't understand why he couldn't have them all. He wanted to break things, he wanted Congress to give him bills to sign, and he wanted the love and respect of New York *machers* and socialites.

As soon as the campaign team had stepped into the White House, Walsh saw, it had gone from managing Trump to the expectation of being managed by him. Yet the president, while proposing the most radical departure from governing and policy norms in several generations, had few specific ideas about how to turn his themes and vitriol into policy. And making suggestions to him was deeply complicated. Here, arguably, was the central issue of the Trump presidency, informing every aspect of Trumpian policy and leadership: He didn't process information in any conventional sense. He didn't read. He didn't really even skim. Some believed that for all practical purposes he was no more than semi-literate. He trusted his own expertise—no matter how paltry or irrelevant—more than anyone else's. He was often confident, but he was just as often paralyzed, less a savant than a figure of sputtering and dan-

gerous insecurities, whose instinctive response was to lash out and behave as if his gut, however confused, was in fact in some clear and forceful way telling him what to do. It was, said Walsh, “like trying to figure out what a child wants.”

By the end of the second week following the immigration EO, the three advisers were in open conflict with one another. For Walsh, it was a daily process of managing an impossible task: Almost as soon as she received direction from one of the three men, it would be countermanded by one or another of them.

“I take a conversation at face value and move forward with it,” she said. “I put what was decided on the schedule and bring in comms and build a press plan around it ... And then Jared says, ‘Why did you do that?’ And I say, ‘Because we had a meeting three days ago with you and Reince and Steve where you agreed to do this.’ And he says, ‘But that didn’t mean I wanted it on the schedule ...’ It almost doesn’t matter what anyone says: Jared will agree, and then it will get sabotaged, and then Jared goes to the president and says, see, that was Reince’s idea or Steve’s idea.”

If Bannon, Priebus, and Kushner were now fighting a daily war with one another, it was exacerbated by the running disinformation campaign about them that was being prosecuted by the president himself. When he got on the phone after dinner, he’d speculate on the flaws and weaknesses of each member of his staff. Bannon was disloyal (not to mention he always looks like shit). Priebus was weak (not to mention he was short—a midget). Kushner was a suck-up. Sean Spicer was stupid (and looks terrible too). Conway was a crybaby. Jared and Ivanka should never have come to Washington.

During that first month, Walsh’s disbelief and even fear about what was happening in the White House moved her to think about quitting. Every day after that became a countdown toward the moment she knew she wouldn’t be able to take it anymore. To Walsh, the proud political pro, the chaos, the rivalries, and the president’s own lack of focus were simply incomprehensible. In early March, not long before she left, she confronted Kushner with a simple request. “Just give me the three things the president wants to focus on,” she demanded. “What are the three priorities of this White House?”

It was the most basic question imaginable—one that any qualified presidential candidate would have answered long before he took up residence at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue. Six weeks into Trump’s presidency, Kushner was wholly without an answer.

“Yes,” he said to Walsh. “We should probably have that conversation.” ■



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CONTINUED FROM PAGE 31

office made their way through Exxon's subpoenaed emails, they found an address with the name "Wayne Tracker," which they discovered was an alias used by Tillerson. Exxon had not turned over all emails from the account, and an attorney for the company said that it would be "an interesting test of whether the attorney general's office is reading the documents." (Exxon says that many emails from the account cannot be found.) The company also sued Schneiderman and Maura Healey, the Massachusetts attorney general, who had launched an inquiry, arguing that their investigations were politically motivated. Exxon filed the suit in Texas, where Judge Ed Kinkeade wondered aloud whether New York and Massachusetts would be so worried about climate change if they had as much oil as Texas. "I'm just saying, think about it," Kinkeade said. (Kinkeade eventually acknowledged he didn't have the jurisdiction to hear the suit and sent it to Judge Caproni.) In the meantime, 11 Republican state attorneys general filed a brief questioning the AGs' right to conduct the investigation—and thus their own ability to conduct similar investigations—by arguing that they "falsely presume that the scientific debate regarding climate change is settled" and that, "regardless of what one believes about global warming and climate change, no one's views should be silenced."

The First Amendment claim was a curious one for Exxon, in part because its official position on climate change has shifted. The company's spokespeople routinely respond to questions about its climate record by noting that, today, "ExxonMobil acknowledges the risk of climate change is clear and warrants action." When Tillerson became CEO in 2006, other fossil-fuel companies had begun acknowledging the problem—British Petroleum changed its name to BP, for "beyond petroleum"—and Tillerson created a task force to reconsider the company's position. In 2007, Exxon promised to stop funding climate-change deniers, and just before Barack Obama's inauguration, Tillerson announced his support for a carbon tax. The shift was more of a strategic adjustment to new realities than a sincere change of heart: The Obama administration was

pushing a cap-and-trade system that would have tackled the issue more aggressively than a carbon tax, and some observers believe Exxon's carbon-tax campaign helped scuttle the administration's plan. The change also appeared to have a more practical rationale: According to Coll, Exxon had begun to realize that its climate position "might do shareholders real damage, in ways comparable to the fate of tobacco companies," and that "if ExxonMobil were ever judged in a courtroom to be cooking science, it could be devastating."

Proving Exxon's legal culpability remains a difficult task, and veterans of the tobacco litigation, which produced more than \$200 billion in settlements, point out that it took many years for incriminating documents to emerge and the legal process to play out. Exxon's lawsuit against the AGs remains in front of Judge Caproni, and there is no saying when a trial might begin, if ever. But the Rockefeller-funded journalistic investigations have helped open the door to a range of litigation. Several coastal cities in California, including San Francisco and Oakland, have sued Exxon and other fossil-fuel companies over the costs of adapting to rising seas, and the SEC launched an investigation into whether Exxon has improperly valued what have come to be known as "stranded assets"—oil reserves that companies count as potential profit on their books but that may go unused if the world makes a serious effort to regulate fossil fuels. In January 2017, Exxon wrote down more than \$2 billion in such assets, and the company seems nervous enough about potential lawsuits that when it recently renewed its support for a carbon tax, it backed a plan that would also protect it from liability in climate litigation.

In May, Exxon's shareholders approved a resolution, for the first time, demanding the company prepare a report on the impact of climate change on its business. (An equal-pay resolution got just 8 percent of the vote.) Neva Goodwin, who led the Rockefellers' early shareholder efforts, said she had largely lost faith in the strategy but that things had changed when major financial institutions like BlackRock and Vanguard expressed their concern about stranded assets. Bob Litterman, a former head of risk management at Goldman Sachs, told me that he had helped the World Wildlife Fund make what he called a "stranded-asset total-return swap" as part of its endowment strategy, essentially betting against companies with potentially stranded assets, like Exxon, which is one of the swap's largest positions. So far, it has returned a 64 percent profit.

WHEN I MET David Kaiser for coffee in the fall, his family had come under attack again, this time for sponsoring two Harvard re-

searchers' analysis of Exxon's claim that the journalists had "cherry-picked" documents. The academics rejected Exxon's assertion, but the company's supporters quickly dismissed the report as part of "the Rockefeller Family Fund cabal," and Exxon accused the Rockefellers of seeking "reparations." Kaiser admitted as much—adapting to climate change will cost trillions, and someone will have to pay for it—but insisted he and his relatives weren't interested in destroying the family business. "I would be delighted if ExxonMobil was able to stick around, but looking very different," he said, citing renewable energy as a way forward.

But Kaiser said he believed the most good would come from Exxon admitting that its history of climate denial had been disingenuous all along. A recent study found that Republicans identify with Exxon more than any other brand—Democrats see themselves most in Starbucks—but climate change had not always been partisan. "It's not a liberal or conservative thing we're talking about," George H.W. Bush said, urging action on global warming in 1988. In Kaiser's view, Exxon had turned it into a divisive issue and was now uniquely positioned to undo that damage. "I would like to see Exxon come clean and admit to the public what they've done," Kaiser said.

What the Rockefellers hoped, in essence, was to push Exxon toward the light, just as their own family came to understand the various ill effects of its success. In the early 1900s, Ida Tarbell wrote a series of articles in *McClure's* magazine lambasting John D. Rockefeller's business practices:

Our national life is on every side distinctly poorer, uglier, meaner for the kind of influence [Rockefeller] exercises. From him we have received no impulse to public duty, only lessons in evading it for private greed; no stimulus to nobler ideals, only a lesson in the further deification of gold...

Over time, the family took such criticism to heart. After the 1914 Ludlow Massacre, in which two dozen workers were killed during a strike at a Rockefeller-owned mine, John D. Jr. tried to improve relations with workers. His son John D. III later wrote his college thesis on the topic and said his father's efforts hadn't gone far enough. And in 1932, five years before his death, John D. himself acknowledged the fortune God had given him would require amends. "As a nation," Rockefeller said, "looking proudly to our past where it has been noble, and recognizing with humility our mistakes of extravagance, selfishness, and indifference, let us with faith in God, in ourselves, and in humanity, go forward courageously resolved to play our part in worthily building a better world." ■

The Magic Skin of Glossier's Emily Weiss



CONTINUED FROM PAGE 35

ing habits and rituals. Weiss had built solid relationships, and it was a moment when voyeurism seemed as good a reason as any to read a blog. (Coveteur launched around the same time.) There's a democracy inherent in people's actual beauty lives—many women use Chanel *and* Vaseline—and Weiss captured that in a sort of proto-natural way, which is not to say that her subjects were ordinary women who'd combed the aisles at Walgreens. But wouldn't you like to know what the fashionistas picked?

The idea to transition the blog into a brand was always sort of there. As the blog became successful, Weiss learned about the market, and she already had hundreds of thousands of potential customers who were growing, week after week, to trust her authority. She'd also realized that the beauty industry is dominated by a few massive brands, many founded around World War II. Many of the "boutique" brands are often absorbed, quickly, by these larger ones, maintaining their smaller image while benefiting from big, centralized labs that make it possible to release and market new products to the crowded marketplace, but they lose a bit of their personality along the way.

Weiss's idea was different, to be something of a—that dreaded word—"disrupter" of the beauty industry. Start small. Don't aim at wholesale (no Sephora, no Duane Reade). Crowdsource pretty much everything, through social-media platforms, affiliate sponsorships and links, and just through gossip.

But creating a beauty brand is a lot harder than creating a blog, which she estimates cost her \$1,000 at first (\$700 of which was for a digital camera). The price tag for launching with four products was about \$1 million.

"I had no idea what I was doing," she says. "I was 28 years old. I didn't have an M.B.A. I went to art school." But she put her ideas together and took her show on the road. She visited 12 venture-capital firms, and she received 11 "no" answers.

The sole "yes" was from Kirsten Green, a San Francisco VC interested in brands started by women. "I see a lot of beauty lines that are beautiful," Green says, "but we're trying to work with founders who are looking at

the entire thing holistically, from a unique viewpoint. What Emily was pitching was a multilayered vision. She wasn't out there pitching Glossier; she was really thinking differently, and I thought, *I need to work with this woman. I don't know what we're going to build, but it's going to be different and interesting.* Emily is my best case study in having a gut instinct on somebody."

Once Weiss had the funds, she was ready: "I wrote out, 'Here are all the things we need to launch: website. Chemist. Office space.' And then I just checked them off, one by one. Put all the balls in the air. Got pregnant with Glossier. Incubated. Gave birth to four beautiful products."

"It was very *Homeland*," Weiss says. She put a whiteboard up in her apartment and began to define the mood through a series of images that are—to anyone versed in millennial fashion icons—not hugely shocking. There's a touch of Phoebe Philo, a dab of Kate Moss, an older woman with white hair and perfect cheekbones—an entire board about a beauty brand where the only evident colors are flesh and a spot of pink.

The products themselves are also not so revolutionary: Glossier You, for instance, was designed by the same nose that brought us Axe Body Spray scents and Le Labo's Santal 33, though its packaging was designed by a 23-year-old Glossier employee named Laura Yeh. "I was like, 'That's what we hired you for!'" Weiss says. "It was just sort of, go buy the software that you need and do it, and then you'll have something really cool to show your professors." And there was no surrealist ad campaign with confusing language and impossibly attractive models. "Sometimes iPhone photos get the point across better," Weiss says. "It's more us."

Glossier is also the first beauty brand to speak the visual language of the millennial: pared back, lots of white space, simple fonts. The first body products were launched with an ad campaign featuring nude women of varying shapes and sizes and ages with Barbara Kruger-esque red text boxes obscuring the important parts.

Weiss herself is obviously Glossier's secret sauce—its gloriously friendly, photogenic, hardworking face, the Estée of this baby. But maintaining both that image and distance from it is a complicated dance—there are thousands of pictures of Weiss out there in the world, so many Q and As, and it takes a while to figure out how carefully drawn and maintained her boundaries are. It's hard to imagine Weiss taking her readers on the miscarriage and pregnancy journey, for example, as Man Repeller's Leandra Medine (in many ways Weiss's closest peer) did in 2016, describing her self-doubt and insecurities. Weiss did flirt with openness around her 2015 wed-

ding. There was a preparation diary—she described the colonics, the microcurrents ("butt=higher"), and even shared a few photographs from the day, which happened in the Bahamas and included only 37 guests. That two-step is not unusual for Weiss—gestures of intimacy deployed alongside strategic walls. She gets right in there on the comment boards, replying to her customers one-on-one, but you never get the sense that Weiss is vulnerable. There is something of the goddess about her, and it feels like a subversion of the notion that it's a moment for sharing everything. Turns out, even the millennials like their heroes on a pedestal.

"This isn't a traditional, top-down, lifestyle, myth-creation, inspiration story," she says. "This isn't a Tory Burch, a Ralph Lauren, an Estée Lauder. A lot of our customers don't even know who I am." Weiss sees herself not as a visionary but as someone who realized something was happening—social media was transforming the way beauty products were talked about and bought—and then worked her ass off to get on top of it. If people want to be like her, well, it is the era of the aspiring she-E-O. "Me being CEO is probably aspirational to a lot of customers," she admits. "There were very different value systems when a lot of different beauty brands were created in the '40s and '50s, and it had to do with glamour and a life of luxury. I think right now it's about power."

STREET-LEVEL RETAIL is planned, finally, for later this year—after the company moves to a 25,000-square-foot Rafael de Cárdenas-designed Soho headquarters, funded in part by a recently closed series-B fund-raising round. In the meantime, Weiss tries to visit the showroom every day, to check in with her customers, to eavesdrop a bit. The staff is young and Glossier clear-faced—they wear pink overall workshirts, some tied at the waist, revealing those \$60 gray Glossier sweatshirts, which regularly sell out online. None has a beauty background, and they hang out unobtrusively. "We're sort of more like friends," says Michaela Del Viscovo, an FIT student who works 20 hours in the store and began, like a great number of Glossier employees, as a customer.

As Weiss adjusts a crooked photograph on the wall, a middle-aged woman wearing diamond hoop earrings and a parka comes over, clutching her full shopping bag a bit sheepishly. "Mother of boys," she says to Weiss, "but I do have nieces, and now they're going to love me like crazy. I've always been the cool aunt, but if we take a picture, then forget it. I'll be cool for life." Weiss smiles graciously. "Of course! I have a weirdly long selfie arm." They both grin, delighted. ■

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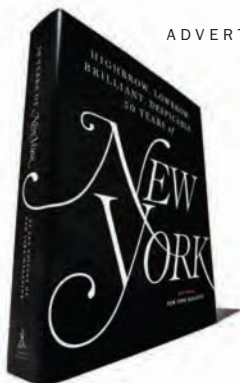


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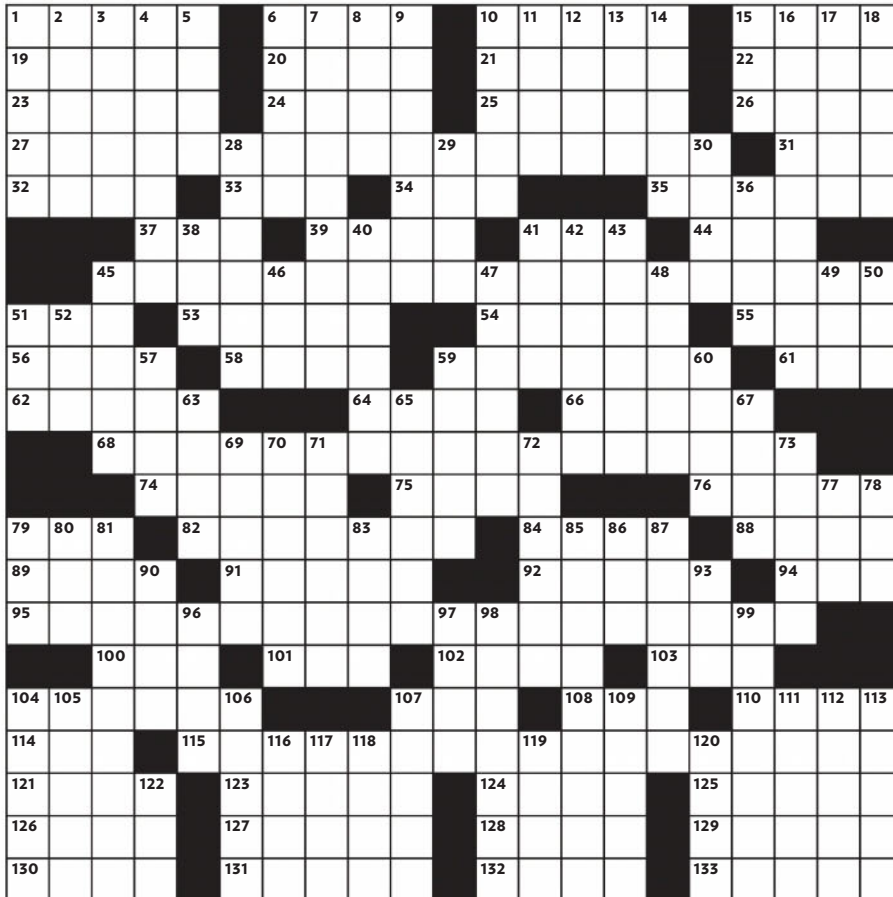
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Shape-Up

New York Crossword by Maura B. Jacobson

Maura Jacobson, the constructor of this page's puzzle from 1980 through 2011, died last month at 91. Here, in her memory, we reprint the first of the 1,400 crosswords she created for the magazine.



Across

- 1 Break into smithereens
- 6 "Madam, I'm ____"
- 10 Cloak-and-dagger figures
- 15 New Testament book
- 19 Jay Silverheels role
- 20 Picnic ham
- 21 Stickum
- 22 Copperfield's wife
- 23 Black macaw
- 24 ____ even keel
- 25 Make void
- 26 Fail to include
- 27 Start of a verse
- 31 Diamond Lil portrayer
- 32 Soviet refusal
- 33 Scottish single
- 34 Pose questions
- 35 Dieters' fare
- 37 Midpt.
- 39 Irish king Brian
- 41 Lube-job item
- 44 Author Fleming
- 45 More of the verse
- 51 Peerce of opera

- 53 Kind of offering
- 54 Xmas exchanges
- 55 City on the Truckee
- 56 Up to snuff
- 58 Resort near Venice
- 59 Kin of 129 Across
- 61 Joined the marathon
- 62 Jelly source
- 64 Sky: prefix
- 66 Equal, to Brigitte
- 68 Title of the verse
- 74 Truman's birthplace
- 75 Butcher's offering
- 76 Battery terminal
- 79 Young billy
- 82 Was a competitor
- 84 Footless one
- 88 Headliner
- 89 On the briny
- 91 Farther down
- 92 Aligned
- 94 Soufflé ingredient
- 95 More of the verse
- 100 Babylonian deity
- 101 Sigmoid shape

- 102 In balance
- 103 Actress Balin
- 104 Munchausen, et al.
- 107 "You ____ My Sunshine"
- 108 Asian holiday
- 110 Like gooey desserts
- 114 Newt
- 115 End of the verse
- 121 Type of poker
- 123 More contemptible
- 124 Before dextrous or valent
- 125 Mirror sight
- 126 Architect Saarinen
- 127 "Crème de la crème"
- 128 Fish lung
- 129 Fabric from flax
- 130 Family lineage
- 131 Potion portions
- 132 Robert ____
- 133 Four: comb. form

Down

- 1 Dry cleaner's target
- 2 Voracious eel
- 3 "What's in ____?"

- 4 Calisthenics direction
- 5 Practical joke
- 6 Would-be oak
- 7 Waltz musicians
- 8 Jai-____
- 9 Roof type
- 10 Take to the woodshed
- 11 Throe
- 12 "If This ____ Love"
- 13 Needle case
- 14 Purveys
- 15 Trifling flurry
- 16 Officer in charge
- 17 Threesome
- 18 Surfeit
- 28 Unexpected verbal blast
- 29 "The jig ____"
- 30 Not of the cloth
- 36 "Oz" lion
- 38 Washboard locale
- 40 Playing one-night stands
- 41 The long and the short ____
- 42 More doubtful: slang
- 43 Releases one's hold on
- 45 Kin by marriage
- 46 Before Sat.
- 47 Neighbor of Kenya
- 48 Make ____ at (try)
- 49 Anecdotal collection
- 50 Hither's partner
- 51 Spree
- 52 ____ Dhabi
- 57 Malefic
- 59 Made a sheepish sound
- 60 Fitzgerald of song
- 63 Hebrew month
- 65 Backslide
- 67 Poetic twilights
- 69 One of the Brontës
- 70 French department
- 71 Shrimps' relatives
- 72 Nebraska river
- 73 Highway inn
- 77 Diplomat Hammarskjöld
- 78 Unit of work
- 79 Chiang ____-shek
- 80 Doctrine
- 81 Leave-taking
- 83 Underpinnings
- 85 Fit for publication
- 86 Umpire's call
- 87 Clinton of canal fame
- 90 Pisa's river
- 93 Clamor
- 96 Cousin's mom
- 97 Bandsman Alpert
- 98 Median figure
- 99 Wyoming city
- 104 Hem in
- 105 Following
- 106 Economized
- 107 Actor Lew
- 109 Roman official
- 111 "____ a girl just like ..."
- 112 Hoop star
- 113 Wolf-like animal
- 116 Metric weight unit
- 117 Ivy League team
- 118 Dole (out)
- 119 Pianist Gilels
- 120 Sword handle
- 122 Anonymous John

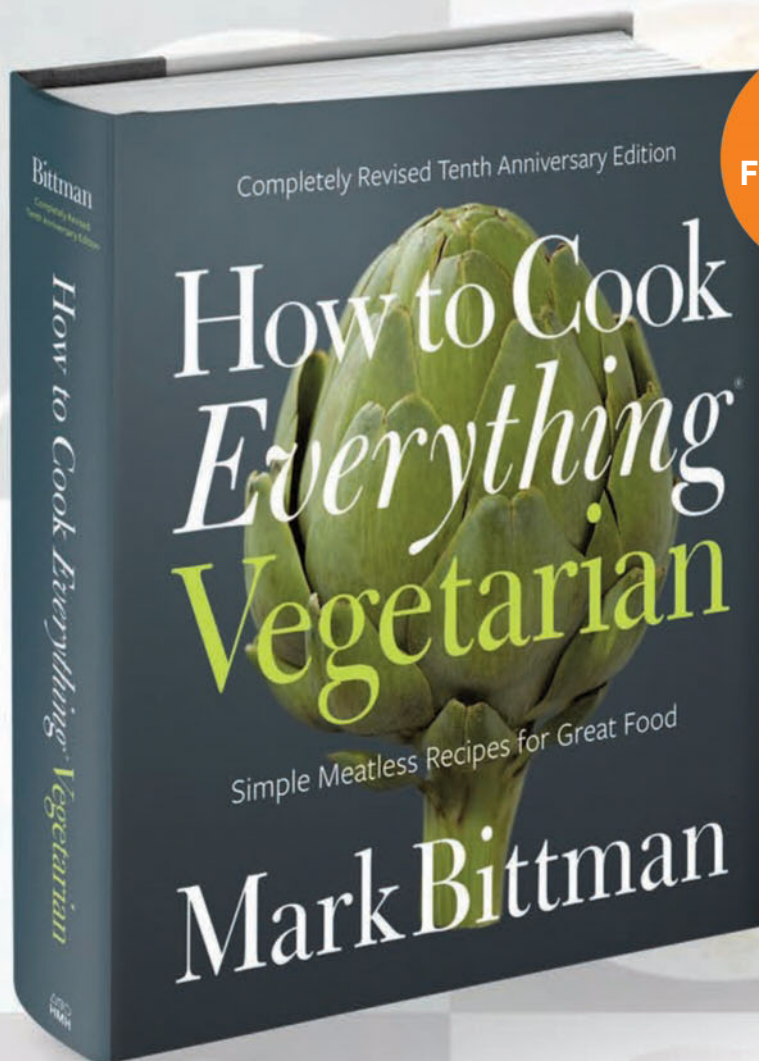
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HIGHBROW



The **deep-sinxing** of Obama's offshore-drilling moratorium should work out nicely with that other proposal to gut post-Deepwater Horizon regulations.

Peter Martins, ballet **dictator**.



The all-too-**brief** life of Swedish artist Carolina Falkholt's Broome Street penis mural.



All the **depressing** reporting in the *Times* expose of why subway expansion is so corrupt and expensive here ...



Artforum's **lively** first issue under editor David Velasco.

Time's Up, say some of Hollywood's most **powerful** women.



MoMA dug up 130 works made by artists when they were **45 and older** for a show called "The Long Run."

The **ambivalent** millennial glories of Hermione Hobbs' *Neon in Daylight*.



The ravishing **decadence** of Neue Galerie's "Wiener Werkstätte" show.



... Oh and sure, Governor Cuomo, we'd love a **Red Hook** subway line.



The Met's lavish, **conventionally** satisfying *Tosca*.



Bosses in Iceland must now **prove** that they are paying women and men equally—or else.



The Foundation for Contemporary Arts, which is funded by art-world biggies, gave \$40,000 apiece to three **poets**, who can now afford to buy art.

Broadway has its biggest box-office week ever! (Too bad you can't **afford** a ticket.)



Ryan Murphy's rambunctiously entertaining, **post-gritty** series 9-1-1.



The alternative-history comic book *Batman: White Knight* posits a world where the Joker is the crusading **good** guy.



The **epic** satisfactions of Ava DuVernay's video for Jay-Z and Beyoncé's "Family Feud."



Wu-Tang Clan **rolling** papers. Send them to Martin Shkreli in prison!



Jeopardy! did not accept as correct a contestant's pronouncing **gangsta** as "**gangster**."

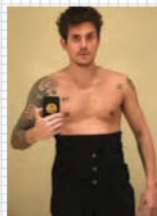


The nearly-impossible-to-conquer video game *Getting Over It With Bennett Foddy*. We are all **Cauldron Man** in 2018.



... And **Mariah Carey's**.

The Kylo Ren Challenge, in which people post photos of themselves in **very-high-waisted** pants.



If enough people answer "strongly **disagree**" to "Is Facebook good for the world?"—the automated poll on the site—will Facebook shut itself down?



According to "Page Six," newly single Brad Pitt uses the name **William** when flirting. We would have used Tyler.



LOWBROW

DESPICABLE



The world's 500 richest people became **\$1 trillion** richer in 2017. Hopefully they'll all see *All the Money in the World*.

The GOP war on high-tax states—you know, the ones with **social safety nets** and good schools.



"**Raw water**" jerks.



An art teacher in Utah was fired for distributing **porn**—or, rather, letting his sixth-graders look at images of art-historical paintings.

Some of the **spiciest** gossip in the Richard Avedon biography might not be true. Avedon would have been **shocked**.



Dave Chappelle too often **punches down** in his Netflix specials. Weren't we supposed to take him seriously now?



No, the internet isn't going to get any **better** in 2018: A guy claiming to be a top government official posts on 4chan about a coming "counter-coup" against the "deep state," and many people believe him ...

... And YouTube **bro** Logan Paul shows his audience a dead body ...



While Donald Trump predicts the media will insist on his reelection because he's such reliable **clickbait**: "So they basically have to let me win."



Andy Cohen's New Year's Eve ...



Anthony Bourdain abandons a plan he'd **hyped** for four years to open a food hall on Pier 57.



Global warming and less rain in regions where cacao plants live could mean an **end to chocolate** by 2050.



East Village Cheese abruptly shuts, leaving the cheese locked in to **age** fragrantly.



Brrrrrr.

BRILLIANT

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