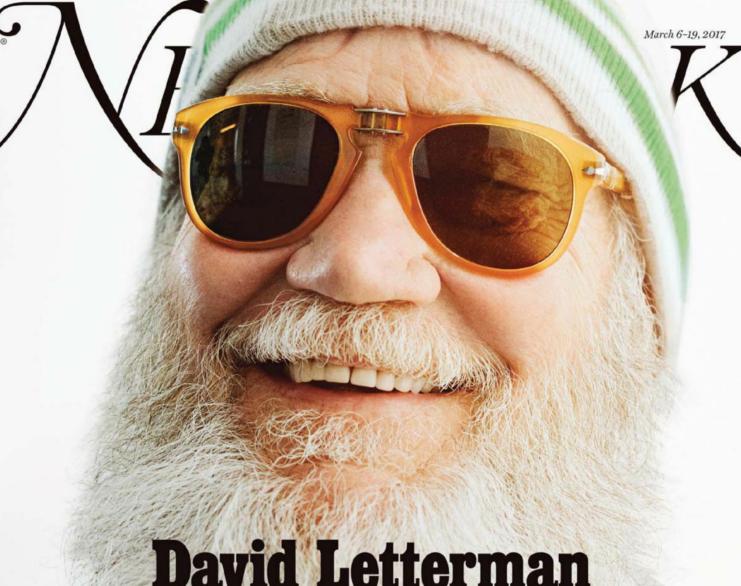
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David Letterman Returns

(On the politics of comedy, and the man he calls "Trumpy.")

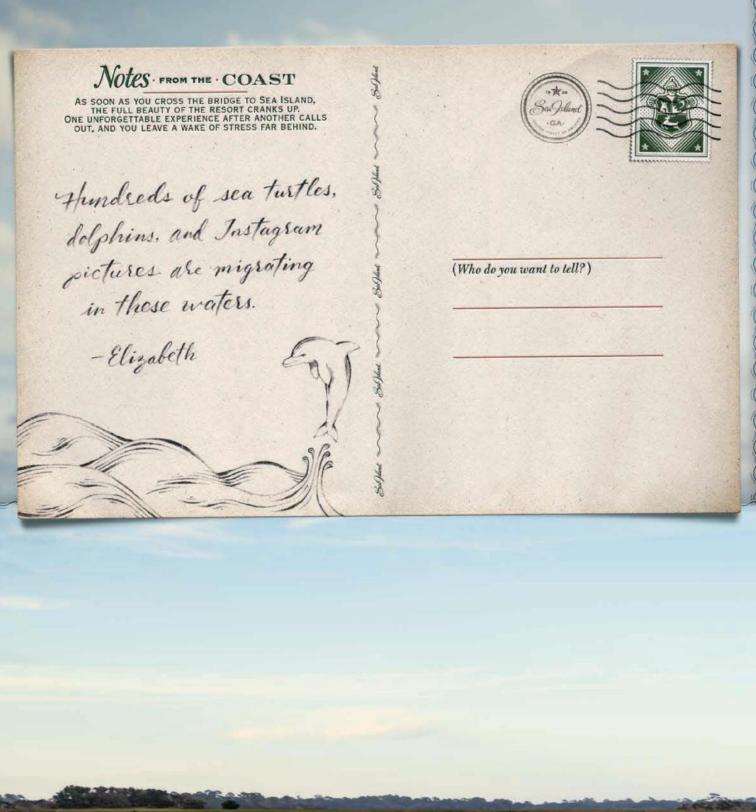
A conversation with David Marchese

Mark Harris ranks the skewerings of late night.







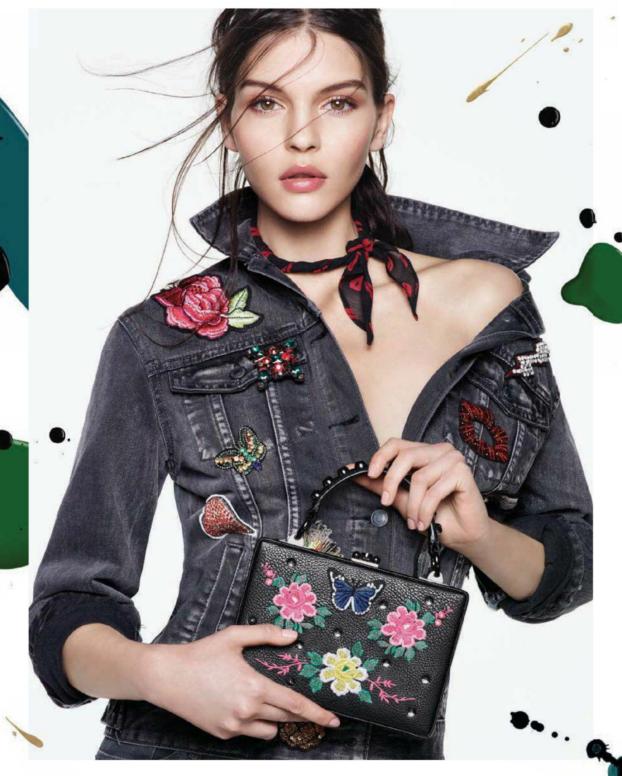






This Page: AQUA beaded/embroidered maxi dress • AQUA beaded/embroidered bomber jacket, lace inset cami and cargo pant • Sunset + Spring patched denim jacket and Alice + Olivia ruffle dress • Opposite Page: Nasty Gal embroidered bag shown with Sunset + Spring jacket and hundreds more

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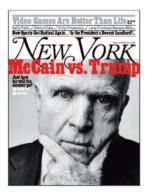






## MICHAEL KORS

#### **Comments**





Gabriel Sherman's profile of John McCain in New York's most recent issue detailed how the so-called maverick is ambivalently, agonizingly taking on Trump ("How Many Chances Do You Get to Be an American Hero?," February 20-March 5). Tom Nichols, a professor at the U.S. Naval War College, thought the story demonstrated that "John McCain's loss in 2008 could be the country's gain now." Nichols wrote, "While McCain is right that he can't be 'the car alarm that always goes off," he is, in fact, one of the last moral lodestones left in a party that has been whipsawed by President Trump's kaleidoscopic change of positions. McCain was pilloried for lack of principle as both a senator and a candidate but now has the seniority and the scars-physical and political-to challenge his own president and party on issues that otherwise terrify lesser GOP lights." Deadspin's Alex Pareene, though, thought Sherman's description of McCain's "taking on the president" gave the senator far too much credit: "McCain has supported every one of Trump's nominees besides one: budget director Mick Mulvaney, who lost McCain's support because he has supported defense budget cuts. McCain's sole inviolable principle is that we must spend an unlimited amount of money on war with everyone forever ... The sum total of McCain's record of brave or maverick-y actions consists of 'giving [a] good quote to reporters.' That's it. Most of the political press is amnesiac and sycophantic enough to fall for it again." The Washington Post's David Weigel went further, arguing that lionizing McCain as the face of Trump resistance is bad for Democrats in the long run: "Democrats need their base to see them resisting ...

In the long New York magazine profile, McCain is not quoted criticizing any aspect of the Trump economic agenda. Democrats can criticize it all day—unless, of course, the story of opposition to Trump is one of a coalition of Republicans and Democrats opposing him over Russia and foreign policy."

"Nine years after LeBron James spoke of a separation between sports and politics, he stood on a basketball court in Nike gear and made clear that times had changed," wrote Reeves Wiedeman in his story about the resurgence of activism among professional athletes—and where it might go from here ("As American As Refusing to Stand for the National Anthem," February 20-March 5). The New York Times' Marc Tracy wrote that Wiedeman did "such a good job capturing this moment," and Martha Ridgway of Athlete Ally tweeted, "This is what an engaged athletic community looks like!!! Very proud to be working with some of these people." In his story, Wiedeman notes that "many male athletes seem to have been coaxed down the road to wokeness by the women in their lives," but some readers were dismayed that the piece didn't feature women in sports. "So you're telling me there weren't more female athletes that could have been in this story?" asked journalist Alyssa Oursler. And Linda Borish, a history professor at Western Michigan University, highlighted some of the women whose political engagement the piece elided. Borish pointed to Annie Smith Peck, Charlotte Epstein, Althea Gibson, and Billie Jean King to show how "gender plays a role in sports and social change and American sportswomen have also been involved in social change and protest and

seeking equality in American society. Today's advocates of equal pay in tennis like Venus and Serena Williams acknowledge the essential role of activists like Billie Jean King."

3 Frank Guan explored how many Americans have replaced work hours with game play and seemingly ended up happier for it ("Why Ever Stop Playing Video Games," February 20-March 5). Commenter illogicaljoker responded, "I don't entirely agree that it's the repetition of games that people are looking for, so much as the familiarity and comfort of a game's rules, especially in a world that seems less and less to have any." No.youshutup agreed, writing, "I'm a 36-year-old female and had never been a devoted video-game player until I was introduced to Skyrim a few years ago. Since the election, I've been playing it again. It's just a better place to be." Daria Kuss, author of For the Horde!: How Playing World of Warcraft Reflects Our Participation in Popular Media Culture, elaborated on this sentiment, writing that video games provide a compelling escape from the trauma—or plain boredom—of real life. "Games allow players to step out of their often boring and repetitive everyday lives, allowing them to gain reputation and be recognized, without having to face the hassles of daily life." But Austin Walker, the editor of Vice's gaming website, Waypoint, chafed against this purely emancipatory view of gaming: "While this style of self-care gaming is valuable," Walker wrote, "we should also push for games that offer more than escape, that engage with the world instead of retreating from it."

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

# There must be an easier way to play music.







January 19, 1987

#### Thirty Years Ago, at 12:30

May we see your 1987 photos, please? By Christopher Bonanos

A visit to the writers' room • "The Twisted Minds Behind the Letterman Show," read the subheadline on Eric Pooley's story. It ran in *New York* at what was perhaps the creative peak of *Late Night With David Letterman*, then marking its fifth anniversary on NBC, where it aired after Johnny Carson's *Tonight Show*. The difference in sensibility between 11:30 and 12:30 could not have been made clearer than it was on the day Pooley visited the control room of Studio 6A at 30 Rockefeller Plaza. Two of Letterman's writers, Randy Cohen and Kevin Curran, were watching as a

technician began slowly rotating the onscreen image of Dave at the start of the show. Over the course of the one-hour episode, the whole show would go through one slow rotation, reaching 90 degrees at 12:45, upside-down at 1:00, and so forth, as Letterman made flight-attendant-ish announcements: "90 degrees. Please, no flash photos."

Yet "twisted minds," despite the slow 360, may have been a slightly wrong description: In Pooley's telling, the writers seemed to be a relatively normal bunch of guys. There wasn't a lot of the antic jumping-on-desks stuff you'd expect from all the stories of Sid Caesar's writers' room, or the coked-up mayhem that had by all accounts been part of Saturday Night Live, just upstairs.

Cohen went on to become much more visible as the original writer of the "Ethicist"

column in *The New York Times Magazine*, and lately he has a radio show called *Person Place Thing*. Recalling his Letterman days, he explains that "it was a very stable staff ... The difference at *Saturday Night Live* was that they had actors. They were permitted their excesses. The only sense I had of a writers' room before that was *The Dick Van Dyke Show*. In real life, it was like civilservice work. You'd come in and put off working and chitchat with your colleagues and went into your office and typed things. And late in the afternoon, you went downstairs, and there were glamorous actresses and trained circus animals."

"It was as if we were writing for a fictional character called Dave Letterman," Cohen continues. "It wasn't so much writing funny lines for him as creating situations for the platonic Dave." As for Pooley's article itself: "You know, I had a writing life before the show, and I was used to getting some attention when something comes out, and writing for TV is anonymous. To get a little attention was thrilling for us. Thrilling!"

At 30 years' distance, the photo above is charming-Dave looks so young!-but what's instantly obvious is its whiteness and maleness. Especially if you know that the co-creator of Late Night, and perhaps of Letterman's TV persona itself, had been the only woman in the writers' corps, Merrill Markoe. She had not only been the head writer but was also in a relationship with Dave; they had reportedly found it too difficult to sustain such an intensely melded life, and she'd just left the show when Pooley visited 30 Rock. She's barely present in the story, mentioned in only a couple of asides. "Today," Cohen says, "it wouldn't be all guys, wouldn't be all white. There was criticism for that at the time, completely deserved. And the show was as much a creation of Merrill as of Dave. Particular pieces that they were still doing in the last week of the show—'Stupid Pet Tricks'-were all Merrill's. Even when she left the show, the structure, the tone, were all hers. Nobody wrote better for Dave than she did."





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From top to bottom: Tommy Hartung, still from *The Lesser Key of Solomon*, 2015. Ultra-high-definition video, color, sound, 8:05 min. Courtesy the artist and On Stellar Rays, New York, Aliza Nisenbaum, La Taleverita, Sunday Morning NY Times, 2016. Oil on linen. Collection of the artist, courtesy T293 Gallery, Rome and Mary Mary, Glasgow, Samara Golden, A *Fall of Corners*, 2015. Foam insulation board, resin, fabric, paint, lighting gels, found objects, mirror, video projection, and sound. Installation view. *Samara Golden: A Fall of Corners*, CANADA, New York, NY, September 12-October 25, 2015. Courtesy the artist. Photograph by Samara Golden. © Samara Golden.

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## Intelligencer

INSIDE: Ryan Adams and his true love, guitars / Camille Paglia is unshocked by the new national landscape



Russian ambassador Sergey Kislyak at Trump's recent address to Congress.

#### The National Interest: Jonathan Chait

#### America Second

What we already know about Donald Trump's ties to Russia amounts to treachery to the republic.

THE HIGH POINT of Donald Trump's presidency to date—the moment when those who desperately wanted to close their eyes and imagine a normal president standing before the country got something resembling their wish—came during his late-February speech to a joint session of Congress. Trump managed to read his address without narcissistic digressions, and the message he delivered ("Nationalism with an indoor voice," as one White House official put it) would have been obvious to any casual listener. Over and over, Trump blamed America's problems on foreigners or the willingness of past leaders to accommodate them: "We've watched our middle class shrink as we've exported our jobs and wealth to foreign countries"; "We've defended the borders of other nations while leaving our own borders wide open for anyone to cross"; "America must put its own citizens first"; "Our obligation is to serve, protect, and defend the citizens of the United States"; "My job is to represent the United States of America."

The display of overt, bellicose nationalism presents a morbid contrast with the unfolding Russia scandal, which exposes the president's boasts of domestic loyalty as containing all the irony of the title of the television show The Americans. The scandal is spinning off in multiple directions, but at bottom it suggests a betrayal of American sovereignty by Trump that is unprecedented in the history of the republic. For a stillunclear combination of reasons—greed for power and money, vulnerability to blackmail, or motivations unknown—the incoming administration cooperated with the undermining of American democracy by a hostile foreign power.

This is already known. On July 4, Franklin Foer wrote in Slate the first major story in the American media identifying a Russian plan to influence the presidential election. He pieced together such evidence as Trump's extensive financial ties to Russia; Vladimir Putin's pattern of intervening in elections in the West in order to support his preferred candidates; Russia's hacking of Democrats' emails; and the fact that a number of Trump advisers had been paid by sources loyal to the Kremlin, including Trump's then-campaign manager Paul Manafort, who had carried out a strategy on behalf of a pro-Russian candidate in Ukraine similar to the one he seemed to be pursuing in the United States.

In the months that have followed, more has emerged on this strange and sinister axis, mostly in the form of reports that have burst onto the scene as bombshells, only to be quickly displaced by other stories in the disorienting, surreal news environment that is Trump's Washington. The New York Times has found that "phone records and intercepted calls" reveal that Trump associates had "repeated contacts with senior Russian intelligence officials" and that U.S. allies had uncovered meetings in European cities between Russian officials and Trump associates.

It is not illegal to meet with Russian agents or spies. However, Trump and his advisers have repeatedly lied or contradicted themselves about these meetings. Former nationalsecurity adviser Michael Flynn lied to the FBI about his discussions with Russia following the election. Attorney General Jeff Sessions, who told a Senate committee during his confirmation hearings that "I did not have communications with the Russians," in fact met twice during the campaign with Russian ambassador Sergev Kislyak. Only after the Washington *Post* reported on the meetings did Sessions agree to recuse himself from his own department's investigation into the matter.

Trump's statements on his relations with Russia have oscillated wildly. Asked in 2013 if he had a relationship with Putin, Trump said, "I do have a relationship, and I can tell you he's very interested in what we're doing here today." In 2014, he recounted, "Putin even sent me a present, beautiful present with a beautiful note, I spoke to all of his people," and that he "spoke indirectly and directly" with Putin. In 2015, he boasted, "I got to know [Putin] very well." Last year, he insisted, "I have no relationship with Putin" and that "I don't know Putin ... I never met Putin."

One well-known explanation for this relationship was supplied by a dossier compiled by Christopher Steele, a British intelligence officer turned private investigator. Steele's report alleged a deep web of financial and personal ties between Trump and Russia, including, spectacularly, a videotape of the now-president engaging in sexual fetishes with prostitutes in Moscow that was being used to blackmail him. The accusations in the dossier remain largely unverified. But since it was made public in January, its credibility has grown. Last month, CNN reported that American investigators corroborated some of the claims in the dossier, and the Washington Post reported that the FBI believe Steele credible enough to consider hiring him to continue his investigation.

While Trump has kept his financial ties to Russia hidden, enough public evidence has emerged to suggest they are extensive. After his company's bankruptcies made him untouchable by U.S. banks, he grew increasingly dependent on foreign sources of capital. "Russians make up a pretty disproportionate cross-section of a lot of our assets," Donald Trump Jr. told a real-estate conference in 2008. "We see a lot of money pouring in from Russia." Trump hired a Russian gangster named Felix Sater, who even worked out of Trump Tower and used Trump Organization business cards.

Trump has tweeted, "For the record, I have ZERO investments in Russia," a defense that evades the question of whether Russia has any investments in his properties. Asked last summer if Trump had "no financial relationships with any Russian oligarchs," Manafort delivered a comically unconvincing denial, averting his eyes from the camera, shrugging his shoulders, and stammering, "That's what he said ... I'd ... that's what I said ... obviously, that's what our position is."

The most glaring untapped source of information on Trump's contacts with Russia would be his tax returns, which Congress could require him to release. But Congress has refused to do so. Instead, with the exception of a handful of critics, the GOP has sheltered its president in a protective envelope. At the behest of the White House, the chairmen of the House and Senate intelligence committees contacted reporters to dispute news of Trump's contacts with Russian officials. "They've looked, and it's all a dead trail that leads me to believe no contact, not even pizza-delivery-guy contact," said House chairman Devin Nunes.

On March 2, House Speaker Paul Ryan asserted that he had seen "no evidence that anybody on the Trump campaign or an American was involved in colluding with the Russians." What evidence would he like? A Trump adviser covly revealing his advance knowledge of stolen email dumps, then admitting he has a "back-channel communication with [Julian] Assange"? Because that exists. Maybe video of Trump asking Putin to hack his opponent's email? Because that exists, too. "Russia, if you're listening, I hope you're able to find the 30,000 emails that are missing," Trump announced at a press conference last summer. "I think you will probably be rewarded mightily by our press." (Trump later claimed he was joking.) Even if Trump had nothing to do with encouraging the Russian hacking, aggressively exploiting it was a conscious choice. Other Republicans, like Marco Rubio—in a rare outbreak of conscience—said the GOP should renounce the use of information from WikiLeaks rather than reward foreign interference in American elections. Trump made the opposite decision.

And Trump's party has mostly decided likewise. All of it is fine—the nondisclosure of tax returns, the unprecedented self-enrichment, the fantastic lies and authoritarian lingo. Republicans in D.C. see him as a useful vehicle for their policy objectives. Indeed, at least for now, Trump's nationalist ravings have utility for special interests from the Kremlin to Wall Street, all of whom look upon the president with smugness and satisfaction at a deal well struck. In Trump's short tenure as president, his demagogic claim that elites have betrayed the American people out of solicitousness to foreign powers has finally become true.

#### Drip, Drip

FEBRUARY 15 JUDY WOODRUFF: "Did you have any meetings last year with Russian officials in Russia. outside Russia, anywhere? CARTER PAGE, former Trump foreign-policy adviser: "I had no meetings.

MARCH 2: CHRIS HAYES: "Did you meet Sergey Kislyak in Cleveland? Did you talk to him? PAGE: "I'm not going to deny that I talked with him.

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#### Ryan Adams

Guitar shopping with the singer-songwriter, who no longer cares what Pitchfork thinks. He swears.

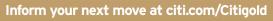
BY LANE BROWN

YAN ADAMS BURSTS through the door of Rivington Guitars, the tiny East Village instrument shop where he's asked me to meet him, and immediately launches into a conversation with the owner, Howie, about the red 1983 Les Paul he bought there last November. "Dude, [the Smiths'] Johnny Marr's guitar tech sent me a DM on Instagram and goes, 'You chose wisely-that's the same guitar I bought for Johnny," says Adams, 42, wearing a Black Sabbath T-shirt under a leather jacket with an Iron Maiden logo on the back. "He told me to go on YouTube and watch [the Smiths] play 'How Soon Is Now?' on Top of the Pops. It's the exact model Johnny had!" "Holy shit," says Howie, valiantly attempting to match his customer's enthusiasm.



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I'd been warned Adams might be tired today; he just arrived from L.A. last night for three concerts this week in support of his new album, Prisoner. But he seems happy to be back in one of his favorite stores, where he's purchased six guitars over the years and says the Gibson Flying V hanging behind the register could be next. Some musicians are agnostic about gear, but not Adams, an obsessive whose socialmedia feeds have largely been given over to rhapsodic endorsements of guitars, amplifiers, and effects pedals from his ever-growing personal collection. (His Instagram review of the Chase Bliss Tonal Recall delay pedal: "If you play guitar and want to go to space for way cheaper than on a Soviet satellite repair rocket, get this fucker.") He recently designed his own signature stomp box, and a prototype was delivered to his hotel room this morning, another reason for his good mood. The VCR-volume, chorus, and reverb-pedal promises to make your guitar sound like Adams's (think Marr's jangly, ten-feet-underwater tone) for \$270, a bargain compared to whatever he paid to sound like himself. The company that built it for him couldn't believe that no single pedal had ever combined those effects before, he says, "and I was like, 'Who's going to use chorus without reverb unless they're in the Police?"-a joke that gets predictably huge laughs from Rivington Guitars' employees.

I hate to be a buzzkill, but I also need to ask about *Prisoner*, a breakup album that's dark even for a chronically heartbroken musical memoirist who seems to make only breakup albums, written during the collapse of his six-year marriage to actress Mandy Moore, and featuring sturdily constructed, Springsteen-evoking, bummedout tracks like "Do You Still Love Me?," "Breakdown," and "Doomsday." So we sit on two stools near the back of the store, and Adams picks up a Stratocaster that he'll hold for a few minutes and then put back down. He's acknowledged that Prisoner is "directly related to my divorce" but tells me the album-which New York's Craig Jenkins called "the best thing he's put out in a decade"-might not have happened without the help of the late Garry Shandling, to whom it's dedicated. "I was in a period where I wasn't playing any music, because I was depressed from having Ménière's disease"—an inner-ear disorder that causes serious vertigo-"and in a stifled romance, and I just didn't know myself," says Adams. But then, backstage at a charity event, he saw the comedian "deliberating and overthinking his material, and he saw me doing the same thing, and he said, 'Ain't it funny what not liking your mom will do for you?' I was like, 'Wow, I love you.'" (Adams has intimated that his childhood in Jacksonville, North Carolina, was dysfunctional, and he says he was raised mainly by his grandparents; when Shandling was a kid, his mother told him his older brother had gone to live with a relative, when in fact he'd died.) "We had this long dialogue that woke me up," Adams says. "He showed me the door out from the Ryan trap. He's Obi-Wan Kenobi."

Though he has his own recording studio in L.A., where he's lived for the past eight years, Adams opted to record *Prisoner* at Electric Lady Studios in New York, where he had lived for the previous 11. "I was going through a public divorce, and although I was doing okay, being in L.A. was kind of a bummer," he says. "Also, there was a girl here who was fucking awesome [he's been linked to the model Megan Butterworth], plus my best friend, Johnny, who plays the drums, and I thought, *I'm going back to New York because I need to have fun.*"

Adams says he wrote many more songs than ended up on *Prisoner*, "tons and tons of songs, just an embarrassment of tunes," which is a thing lots of artists say when they're promoting a new album. But given his productivity—*Prisoner* is his 15th studio album since 2000, and then there are the many one-off singles, EPs, side projects, and live albums, plus his 2015 trackfor-track remake of Taylor Swift's *1989* (which spawned so many think pieces that Adams has since sworn off full-album

"I want to get my hands dirty and do some gardening. I want to design pinball machines." covers)—it's plausible in his case. I ask him to walk me through the process of writing one of the songs on *Prisoner*, but instead he picks up a Guild Starfire and composes a new one on the spot, just to show how fast he can do it. The lyrics are slightly below his usual standards—"Take me through the new songs, so I can understand what it means to write a song/I just really want to know what it means to write a song/I'm writing articles, I'm writing articles …"—but the melody's not bad.

At home in L.A., Adams has a circle of collaborators around, for when inspiration strikes. His studio, Pax-Am, hosts regular jam sessions with a revolving lineup that frequently includes Bob Mould, Jello Biafra, Jenny Lewis, members of Fall Out Boy, Liz Phair (for whom he's producing a double album), and Johnny Depp, an underrated guitarist in Adams's opinion: "He can play the shit out of solos. It's like a wild tangent of unbelievable licks. I had this amp that I loved, but it had a bad transformer and I was afraid one of my cats would get zapped, so I gave it to him. He makes that thing sound great."

With cats out of harm's way, life on the West Coast is good. "I always got a lot of shit when I lived in New York, because it was the first time when media became an aggregated, blog-centered thing, and I couldn't even open Time Out New York without getting battered," he says, acknowledging that some of his hobbieswhich included leaving angry voice-mails for journalists and releasing goofy homemade rap tracks via his website-occasionally attracted more attention than his work. "So I thought, I want to go someplace where I can really build something. I want a studio. I want to get my hands dirty and do some gardening. I want to design pinball machines." He now owns a 3,500-square-foot warehouse filled with over 100 vintage pinball machines. "It's my private portal to the '80s, a retro arcade for myself and an overloaded vape pen." (He's been sober since 2007, unless you consider pot a drug, which Adams sure doesn't.)

Even though, in a few minutes, on the way to his *New York* photo shoot, he'll surmise that the Pitchfork reviewer who gave *Prisoner* a 6.2 this morning probably looks like Trump adviser Stephen Miller, Adams says he's "older now and more impervious" to criticism. "I'm making my best shit. There are gonna be some people who don't get it, and that's cool, because they're not awake to what I'm making. But I know what my groove is now, and there's nobody that can tell me different. I feel grateful to know the path I want to be on, so I'm going to blaze it and get blazed on it."

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#### Love and War:

#### Camille Paglia Predicted 2017

What the '90s provocateur understands about the Trump era.

BY MOLLY FISCHER

N THE DAY I met Camille Paglia for lunch, I arrived early at the Greek restaurant she had selected and let the hostess guide me to a table in the back. To me, this seemed like a perfectly fine table. Paglia, who arrived a few minutes later, disagreed. It was a booth. And there were people right beside us. There was a table near the front, Paglia said, where she had taken meetings before; perhaps we could sit there. Accompanied by the hostess, we walked to the new table and considered it. Paglia allowed that probably the hostess could not grant the two of us this six-top. We needed a smaller table—but one that was quiet, and private. By this point, a second restaurant employee had joined us. Another booth was proposed, another booth rejected. Paglia felt it imperative that we have real chairs. Sitting on a booth's cushions might lull us into a state of haremlike drowsiness, she felt. We needed to be alert.

I found myself swept along by her willingness to be difficult, which did not manifest itself as rudeness or a sense of entitlement but as a perfect, inviolable comfort in pursuing exactly what she wanted. She was going to get the correct table. And what was I going to do, apologize for Camille Paglia? If it is possible to possess immunity to the unspoken expectations of female behavior—to be impervious, on a cellular level, to the will of the patriarchy (to use one of her least favorite terms)—then Paglia possesses that immunity.

At last, we were seated at a small table a few yards from the first. We would remain there for the next four hours and 45 minutes. In the grand scheme of Paglia interviews, mine was brief. When Francesca Stanfill profiled her for a *New York* cover story in 1991, their conversation lasted ten hours, long enough for Paglia to consume two steaks: one for lunch and a second for dinner.

"Normally I would order meat, but I think it's going to interfere," Paglia explained as we considered the menu. "Because I'll be talking nonstop." She selected a moussaka and a Corona, and began.

Here are some things of which Camille Paglia—perhaps the most famous alleged anti-feminist feminist in American history-approves: football, Bernie Sanders, Katharine Hepburn, Rihanna, the Real Housewives franchise, taramasalata (it tastes like lox, not like Nova, which is good, because Nova is too refined; it's missing all the fish taste). Here are some things Camille Paglia scorns, and should you have a problem with her scorn, know that she enjoys a fight: Michel Foucault, Doris Day, Lena Dunham, college students who are always whining about date rape. Here are some things of which Camille Paglia used to approve but which have since been exiled from her esteem: Bill Clinton, Madonna. She continues to believe in both the '60s and rock and roll.

Paglia's new book, out this month, is called Free Women, Free Men; it compiles writings from throughout her career, addressing sex, gender, and feminismin other words, her most cherished and contentious themes. Paglia first came to prominence in a previous era of political correctness, with the 1990 release of Sexual Personae. It was a 700-page book based on her Yale Ph.D. thesis, and the rare academic volume that might be described as swashbuckling. Sexual Personae cut an eccentric interdisciplinary path across Western culture from antiquity onward, recounting what Paglia viewed as the ceaseless battle of nature (which is violent, irrational, untamable, and female) versus culture (aesthetic, logical, ever struggling and failing to tame nature, and, ves, male).

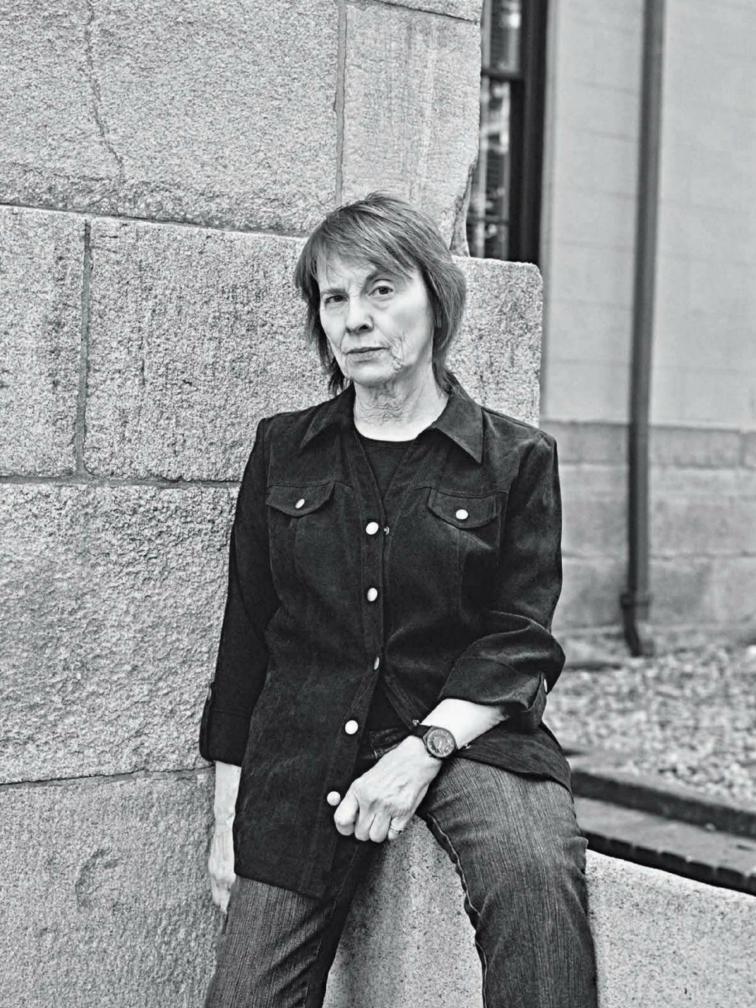
Amid the culture wars of the early '90s, she presented a seductive alternative to liberal pieties and an academy enamored of French theory and multiculturalism. A self-described libertarian advocate of sexual freedom and free speech, she thought that second-wave feminism had become

a homogenized, repressive force for ill (also that it was intellectually bankrupt). What if, she demanded, Western civilization and the white men who built it deserved some credit? What if feminists were ignoring everything that was important not just about art but about sex? What if she, Camille Paglia, was the true feminist because she believed women shouldn't be asking some sexual-harassment grievance board to protect them from the world's dangers? In her pop-culture-friendly tastes and noisy, splashy flair for performance, she offered herself as the populist foil to the liberal elite-she was, for a time, irresistible to the press, claiming the throne of anti-p.c. provocateur par excellence. "Her calling herself a feminist," Gloria Steinem said back then, "is sort of like a Nazi saying they're not anti-Semitic."

The past few years have felt like a return to the identity-politics wars of the 1990s, another period when liberals (especially those inside the academy) began to draw bright lines dictating the boundaries of acceptable discourse. Paglia was always on the wrong side of those lines—and in some ways she seems never to have left those years, when her persona was forged in the crucible of contrarianism. Is it that she hasn't learned any better, or that everyone else hasn't?

Paglia may have set out to make feminism great again-to restore it to some imagined golden age of tough screwball heroines and Simone de Beauvoir-but she's been taken up by the opposite force altogether. The men's-rights activists of the "manosphere" and alt-right conservatives find fundamental truths in Paglia's ancient understanding of sex roles: the notion that women bear terrifying, mysterious powers of seduction and reproduction, and therefore men need to prove themselves by creating, competing, and conquering. Milo Yiannopoulos, perhaps today's most high-profile hater of feminists, has called Paglia a chief influence; the alt-right news site Breitbart often cites her work approvingly.

She herself is wary of any alignment with the right wing. Back in the '90s, she took umbrage when she was sometimes branded a conservative and would respond by stressing her rebel credentials: She was out as a lesbian in the late '60s; she hated censorship, hated prudery; wanted to liberalize alcohol and drug laws—how could she possibly be a conservative? And yet, by the logic of shared mutual enemies, her attacks on liberalism make her work useful artillery for the right (with the added credibility of coming from someone ostensibly in the enemy camp). She hasn't paid much atten-



tion to the rise of the alt-right, but, she said, "Elite discourse about gender has become so nonsensical and removed from reality that rowdy outbreaks of resistance and rebellion are unsurprising."

Though Paglia still writes from time to time about politics and culture, for the most part she has receded from the center of feminist debate. "It must be stressed that my flamboyant media presence lasted scarcely four years and was boosted by the official book tours for three best sellers in a row (1991-94)," she writes in the new book. "After that, like the Roman general Cincinnatus returning to his plow, I simply resumed my cherished seclusion as a teacher and writer. As I often say, I'm just a schoolmarm!" She has been ensconced at the University of the Arts, a school of visual and performing art in Philadelphia, for 33 years. In the past decade, she's undertaken solitary research into the Native American tribes of southeastern Pennsylvania, collecting artifacts and noting rock formations that she believes appear man-made. She hopes this research might develop into a book but said her agent foresaw little commercial appeal.

Paglia is small and, at 69, a little stooped. The severe chic of her '90s styling-dark eyebrows, sharp cheekbones, salt-andpepper crest—has softened a bit with time. Lately, she wears her hair in a light-brown shag, which she got after bringing a photo of Jane Fonda's Klute cut to her stylist. Her ex, Alison Maddex (a co-founder of New York's Museum of Sex), lives nearby, and the two are parents to a 14-year-old son. ("I wouldn't have known how to raise a girl," Paglia said. "I mean, the idea that I would have to-pink nail polish, all that, oh my God. I don't know what I would have done.") The only TV she watches is Turner Classic Movies and the Real Housewives. She has no interest in Facebook, Twitter, or the Kardashians.

Despite her brawler affect (she liked showing up for photo shoots with swords and whips) and her confidence—the kind required to declare that the "ur-model for Sexual Personae as magnum opus" was "undoubtedly the Metropolitan Museum of Art"—Paglia was stung by the way the intellectual and feminist Establishment, and those she viewed as rightful allies, had rejected her. Like *The Village Voice* ("I am a CHILD of The Village Voice!" she wrote me in an email), which portraved her as a conservative and an "intellectual fraud" in a 1991 cover story and which she eventually threatened with legal action for its "pattern of malicious conduct." And like Madonna, whom she praised in 1990 for teaching "young women how to be fully female and sexual while still exercising control over

their lives." The two of them should have been allies, in Paglia's mind. "For her to complain that she never had any female peers, when I was right there and ready," Paglia said wistfully. She still thinks she could have improved Madonna's *Sex* book if she'd been given the chance. "I'm just another Italian-American like her."

"I'm 43 years old," she said, remembering the response to *Sexual Personae*. "A middle-aged woman, you know, who has struggled for 20 years to write a 700-page book, and this is the way they treat her? Like she's an enemy of the human race? And malign me? It's unbelievable. So that's why I became popular. I got a flood of mail from people who had been treated the same way by feminists."

"I was fearing talking to you, actually," she told me during our lunch, as we watched the wait staff change over and the lights brighten then dim again for dinner. "I had no idea if you'd be a political ideologue." I had graduated not too long ago from a liberal East Coast college; I work in the liberal New York media: To Paglia, all this was ominous.

Paglia was not surprised by the election results. "I felt the Trump victory coming for a long time," she told me. Writing last spring, she'd called Trump "raw, crude, and uninformed" but also "smart, intuitive, and a quick study"; she praised his "bumptious exuberance and slashing humor" (and took some pleasure in watching him fluster the GOP). In fact, she has had to restrain herself from agreeing with the president, at least on certain matters. "I have been on an anti-Meryl Streep campaign for about 30 years," she said. When Trump called the actress "overrated" in a January tweet, "I wanted to leap into print and take that line, but I couldn't because Trump said it."

"I was horrified, horrified by the pink pussy hats."

It's true that there is not infrequently something Trumpian in Paglia's cadence (lots of ingenuous exclamation points— "This tyrannical infantilizing of young Americans must stop!"), as well as her irresistible compulsion to revisit enemies, slights, and idées fixes (substitute "Gloria Steinem" and "Lacan" for "the failing New York Times"). And then, perhaps most important: She, like Trump, gives her audience the vicarious thrill of watching someone who appears to be saying whatever the hell they want. She can't possibly really mean that, you think, and laugh, bewildered—but can you imagine how annoyed it must make people?

She doesn't seem especially troubled by the rise of a certain kind of outlandish vitriol on the right. When I asked her about Yiannopoulos over email, she wrote back, "Too many gay men have lost the scathingly cruel wit for which they were famous in the pre-Stonewall era. None of his satirical jibes seem any worse than the campy insults that the great female impersonator Charles Pierce had Bette Davis fling at Joan Crawford. However, true reformers need to build as well as attack. When I burst into notoriety, I had a 700-page book behind me and campaigned on a detailed agenda critiquing both the left and the right."

Paglia's displeasure over the election is largely reserved for the liberal Establishment and Hillary Clinton, whom she's criticized lavishly for the past 20 years. "I like Hillary because she's kind of a bitch," Paglia said in a 1993 interview, but her assessment has since changed. She now calls Clinton "a walking neurosis." During the primaries, Paglia preferred Bernie Sanders-"an authentic leftist" who brought her back to the '60s. "That is what real leftists were like," she told me. "They're not post-structuralists, with their snide, cool, elitist jargon." In the general election, as a resident of Pennsylvania, she voted for Jill Stein.

But she commended—of all things—the Women's March held the day after Trump's inauguration. "I think it's important that women rediscover solidarity with themselves," she said. "It really wasn't about feminism. It's really not about Trump. It's not about any of that. It was all of a sudden, *Oh, wow, to be with all the women.*"

Still, the pussy hats: She buried her face in her hands as she discussed them. "I was horrified, horrified by the pink pussy hats," she said; the pink pussy hats were "a major embarrassment to contemporary feminism."

"I want dignity and authority for women," she said. "My code is Amazonism. I want weapons."

#### French Art de Vivre

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"How's this interview going? Do you think you're talking to a normal person here?"

> BY **DAVID MARCHESE**

SINCE RETIRING FROM *The Late Show* two years ago, David Letterman has kept a low public profile aided by the growth of a truly impressive beard. But that doesn't mean he hasn't been as fixated on politics as the rest of us. "If I still had a show," says the 69-yearold, dressed in a baggy sweater and cargo pants and sitting high above midtown in a conference room at his publicist's offices, "people would have to come and take me off the stage. 'Dave, that's enough about Trump. We've run out of tape.' It's all I'd be talking about. I'd be exhausted." Late-night TV comedy has offered some of the sharpest—and most-remarkedupon—responses to the Trump presidency. But despite the work of Stephen Colbert, Seth Meyers, Saturday Night Live, and the rest, it's hard not to wish Letterman, late night's greatest ironist and most ornery host, was around to take aim. And so we've brought him out of retirement to weigh in on life after television and his old frequent guest and punching bag, the man he calls Trumpy.



David Marchese: I've always loved Leaves of Grass, so it's a pleasure to meet the man who wrote it.

David Letterman: I've given up on making that kind of joke because I ran out of people with beards other than Walt Whitman<sup>1</sup> that anyone knew—the joke didn't work as well when I used Frederick Douglass. But great things have happened to me since I've been walking around with this beard. I was in Santa Monica, at the Ocean Park Café, and this woman comes over and she says, "Are you who I think you are?" And I said, "That depends on who you think I am." She said, "You're Chuck Close." I said, "Yeah, yeah, I am." She said, "Oh my God"—she has a whole story. She was an art major, and for her final project she did a pencil-drawing portrait of Chuck Close. She said, "It was the best thing I did in all of college." I finally said, "I'm not Chuck Close." Boom, she's out like a shot. Gone. Then she comes back and says, "That really disappoints me."

The other thing is that somebody who loves Chuck Close that much might know that, unlike you, he's in a wheelchair. Good point. I wish you had been with us. Another time with this beard, I was in New York City standing on Sixth Avenue, and a woman on the sidewalk looked at me and said, "Do you have a television show?" "No, I don't." "Did you used to have a television show?" "Yes, I did." "What happened?" "I got fired." "Are you David Letterman?" "Yes, I am." And then she said, "Man, they fucked you up."

**Did CBS fuck you up?** What do you know? What have you heard? If anybody fucked me up, it was me, by getting old and stupid.

Have you ever wondered what you might've said if you'd been doing *The Late Show* the night after Trump was elected? No, I haven't thought about it. See, I was out running one day when he was still president-elect, and I thought, *Let's call him.* I've known the guy since the '80s. I was one of a few people who had routinely interviewed him. I'm not blinded by the white-hot light of "president-elect." I mean, we elected a guy with that hair? Why don't we investigate that? He looks like Al Jardine of the

This interview has been edited and condensed from two conversations.

Beach Boys. I don't know. I'm sorry for rambling. I'm afraid something has happened to me hormonally. I can't stop talking.

And that's why you're okay with being off the air? I'm afraid if I still had a show, it would be a lot of, "We're spending quite a lot of money on editing, Dave. If you could just keep it to an hour, we'd all appreciate that, because we have big stars who've flown in from Hollywood to be here."

As someone who interviewed Trump dozens of times, how did your estimation of him change over the years? The first time he came on *Late Night*, in '87, there's deference on your part to the idea that he might know something about the economy. He was a mogul, for God's sake.

By 2012, you're making fun of his hair apparatus and explaining to him that his neckties were being made in China. I always regarded him as, if you're going to have New York City, you gotta have a Donald Trump. He was a joke of a wealthy guy. He'd sit down, and I would just start making fun of him. He never had any retort. He was big and doughy, and you could beat him up. He seemed to have a good time, and the audience loved it, and that was Donald Trump. Beyond that, I remember a friend in the PR business told me that he knew for a fact—this was three or four presidential campaigns agothat Donald Trump would never run for president; he was just monkeying around for the publicity. So I assumed that was the story and now it turns out he's the president. Now, who owns New York?

It's a family. The Wassersteins. Say the head of the family, let's say his name was Larry Wasserstein. If Larry behaved the way Donald behaves, for even a six-week period, the family would get together and say, "Jesus, somebody better call the doctor." Then they'd ask him to step down. But Trump's the president and he can lie about anything, from the time he wakes up to what he has for lunch, and he's still the president. I don't get that. I'm tired of people being bewildered about everything he says: "I can't believe he said that." We gotta stop that and, instead, figure out ways to protect ourselves from him. We know he's crazy. We gotta take care of ourselves here now.

**How is comedy useful for that?** Comedy's one of the ways that we can protect our-

selves. The man has such thin skin that if you keep pressure on him—I remember there was a baseball game in Cleveland, and a swarm of flies came on the field and the batters were doing this [mimes swatting at flies] while the pitcher was throwing 100 miles an hour.<sup>3</sup> Well, that's Alec Baldwin and Saturday Night Live. It's distracting the batter. Eventually Trump's going to take a fastball off the sternum and have to leave the game.

There's this idea that reducing Trump to a punch line could make him seem harmless or help to normalize him. Is there any validity to that argument? I guess it's a possibility. On the other hand, Donald Trump can be Donald Trump, but if he doesn't help the people that need help, then he's just a jerk. That press conference that he held berating the news media? I mean, how do you build a dictatorship? First, you undermine the press: "The only truth you're going to hear is from me." And he hires the Hunchback of Notre Dame, Steve Bannon, to be his little buddy. Bannon looks like a guy who goes to lunch, gets drunk, and comes back to the office: "Steve, could you have just one drink?" "Fuck you." How is a white supremacist the chief adviser to our president? Did anybody look that up? I don't know. How's this interview going? Do you think you're talking to a normal person here? Don't I seem like I'm full of something?

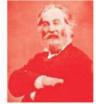
You're sure you're not missing being on the air? It seems like you've got a lot to say. This is the way I'd be every night, and the next thing you know, I'd be slumped over in my chair and that would be it.

But it's such an amazing group of targets. The comedy potential is incredible. It's delightful. Kellyanne Conway was my favorite for a long time. This thing about her telling everyone "Go buy Ivanka's shoes; 'I'm going to go buy Ivanka's shoes. Hell, *I'll* buy you a pair of Ivanka's shoes." Then they had to counsel her. Boy, if this administration decides you need counseling—whoa. And poor Sean Spicer is a boob who just got out of a cab and now here he is. Then the other kid, is it Miller?

**Stephen Miller.** Wow, that guy is creepy. He fell out of a truck. And the guy from Exxon, Rex Tillerson. Don would say, "Rex, if you're talking to your friends, ask them"—I'm sure the Russians groomed

Footnotes:

**1.** Most famous bearded poet.



American painter who began as a photorealist, then adopted a dappled, pixelated style after becoming paralyzed in 1988. No resemblance to Letterman.



3. Actually it was the other way around. In a 2007 playoff game, a swarm of midges from Lake Erie caused Yankees reliever Joba Chamberlain to blow the game with a few wild pitches.

Trump. They gave him tips: "You want to be an authoritarian dictator? Sure, that's not a problem. We'll tell you how to do it."

Do you feel any better about your fellow Indianan Mike Pence? He only got elected because he looks like Bobby Knight. Jeez, Pence scared the hell out of me. There was a therapy ...

Conversion therapy. There's debate about whether Pence actually supported it. 5 Yes, conversion therapy. That's when I just thought, Oh God, really, Indiana? I don't care if you're a fundamentalist Christian—even they have gay relatives. They can't be saying homosexuality is a sin. It's horseshit. Then this transgender issue that just happened, I just think, Are you kidding me? Look, you're a human, I'm a human. We're breathing the same air. We're trying to get through our day. Who the fuck are you to throw a log in the road of somebody who has a different set of difficulties in life?

Aside from SNL, who else in late-night TV comedy is doing good work? I don't watch any of it. I don't watch my old show. I will see clips now and stuff. I was at a thing the other night and so was Lorne Michaels. People are waiting in line to thank him for what he's doing to Trump. He's given us a little breathing room. He's loosened the noose. And the scary goddamn thing is that Don would like that not to be the case.

It's clear he cares how he's portrayed. He would really rather not have a society where free speech was going to be a factor. I'm telling you, there's something between him and the Russians. "What color tie should I wear?" "Tell him red." "They say red, Don." "Okay, red it is." I do like the idea that Putin has something on Don and decided "Let's get him in office and we'll get things to go our way." That's beginning to sound like an Alex Jones theory, but that'd be fun, wouldn't it?

Well—since we're on the topic of black-mail, you're a famous person who has been blackmailed, or at least someone attempted to blackmail you. If Russia does have compromising material on Trump, would that make you have any sympathy for him? Does being blackmailed make someone behave as seemingly irrationally as he's behaving? Well, yes, I was blackmailed. But in baseball you have the major leagues and you have your instructional leagues. My situation would

have been down in the instructional leagues. I was dumb enough to put myself in a position where I was vulnerable. If what they're saying about Trump is true, that's major-league blackmail. There's no sympathy there. Yes, I went through a blackmailing; yes, it's horrible; yes, my behavior hurt a large number of people. But do I equate it with the possibility of international interference from an authoritarian dictator? No, I don't. I don't even think of it as the same thing, really. Maybe I'm not thoughtful enough.

I have a conspiracy theory that your blackmail was a Vladimir Putin long game to get you off the air. You weren't very nice to him over the years. Now we be having a conversation! Wow. I'm going to look into this. This is tremendous. This is the scene in the movies: Stop the presses. We have

about this subject after Jimmy Fallon was criticized for goofing around with Trump like he's a cuddly teddy bear. Norm's opinion was that criticizing Fallon for not asking hard-hitting questions wasn't fair. It's like criticizing a penguin for not flying. I know exactly what you're talking about with Jimmy Fallon. Jimmy got a fantastic viral clip out of that. The comparison that comes to mind is during the Vietnam War, Johnny Carson had an unstated policy that he would never mention the war. He would talk about the personalities involved, but not the war. His theory was, with the sixo'clock news, the last thing people wanted to hear more of was young Americans dying painfully.

I'm not sure how that comparison shakes out in terms of Fallon. There is that obligation. We used to have a joke we'd do



Letterman's first interview with Donald Trump, December 22, 1987.

a new page one. Holy crap, that would be great, wouldn't it? I mean, that would make Ed Snowden look like a third-grade shop teacher ... That joke didn't make any sense. You can fill in your own joke. But I'm going to look into this theory of yours. Jesus. I can turn that into something.

If you're a comedian or a late-night host, is there a responsibility to be taking on Trump? I think you have an obligation.

I remember talking to Norm Macdonald

about booking guests: "Guess what?" "What?" "Neil Armstrong is going to be on the show." "Neil Armstrong? That's fantastic." "He doesn't want to talk about the moon." I don't want to criticize Jimmy Fallon, but I can only tell you what I would have done in that situation: I would have gone to work on Trump. But the thing about it is, you don't have to concoct a complicated satirical premise to joke about Donald Trump. It's not, "Two guys walk into a bar ..."

4. The chair-throwing longtime Indiana Hoosiers men's-basketball coach.



5. In 2000, Pence's gubernatorial-campaign website stated that resources should be directed toward institutions that "provide assistance to those seeking to change their sexual behavior." In 2016, Pence's spokesman told the *Times* that the statement was not referring to the "pray the gay away" psychotherapy known as "conversion therapy."

i. In February, the Trump administration reversed the Obama administration's directive that instructed schools to allow transgender students to use the bathroom that corresponds to their gender identity.

The premise being that the president is a lying idiot? Your words, not mine!

For probably the first half or so of your TV career, you stayed away from politics. Because Carson was my model. I'll tell you the other thing: All of that changed because of Jon Stewart.

Because what he did on The Daily Show influenced you? I wouldn't say that, but he made it so that not doing political stuff got to be the elephant in the room. And also it was having Monica Lewinsky and President Clinton. We're always looking for the easiest path, the most obvious joke. Bill Clinton having sex with the intern, well, that's not comedic heavy lifting. After that it became George W. Bush, and I thought he was funny in a harmless way. I mean, Dick Cheney was the guy to keep your eye on at a party, because he'd be going through your wife's purse. But George W. was nothing but fun.

You mentioned Fallon and viral videos. Part of the job now of a late-night host is to generate bits that'll get shared online. When you used to do bits, even the "Top Ten" list, it always seemed like you were suffering through them. How do you feel about late-night shows becoming vehicles for social media? I knew it was happening, and I recognized that it was a good idea, but I didn't know how to do it. When people around me would come up with ideas, I felt like, This is exploitation beyond the pale. We're just going to produce some little precious moment here and put it up on the internet? But nobody wants to sit through an eight-minute interview with fill-in-the-blank. So these things are useful. But the idea of Twitter: Trumpy-my son, Harry, and I call him "Trumpy"-has really got something with it. Rather than a laughable expression of ego run amok, it could be a useful tool. If we get a president sometime soon who does not have a mental disorder, Twitter will be useful. So-I'm lonely, I can't stop talking.

Do you feel like— This is like visitors' day at prison for me.

I wish we were all better at ignoring the tweets. Just because Trump blurts something on Twitter doesn't mean we have to run around pulling our hair out every time he does it. It seems counterproductive. That's my point: Let's stop that. We don't need more confirmation that there's something wrong with Donald Trump. Let's instead find ways to rebuild what is rational. And the Democrats, goddamn it, get a little backbone, get a little spine. The only person I can trust anymore is Al Franken,8 who has a great brain and a great heart. I believe what he says.

And what's he been telling you? We haven't talked much about Trumpy. We talked during the election about Ted Cruz. He told me, "Ted Cruz is one of the smartest men I've ever met. He's scary smart."

You figure, for somebody as viscerally unlikable as Ted Cruz to get as far as he's gotten, he must be pretty smart. And this was coming from Al Franken, who I think is one of the smartest people I've ever met. And one of the three funniest.

Who are the other two? Norm Macdonald<sup>9</sup> and a guy named Jim Downey.<sup>10</sup>

Aside from the hunt for viral videos, it seems like late night also had a shift in its style of comedy. It moved away from the irony and sarcasm you were known for and toward something more earnest. I mean, Jay Leno would seem like a smartass now. Did you notice that shift happening? No. I didn't. I was so single-minded in getting through the hour, and sarcasm is so easy. The quote is "Sarcasm is the lowest form of wit." If you can't think of something funny, say something sarcastic. That worked and also got me in a lot of trouble. People would accuse me of being mean. Well, yes, sarcasm probably is mean; but on the other hand, I'm just trying to get a laugh, so leave me alone. "Hey, nice shirt"—hah, hah, hah. Big, big laugh: "Nice shirt." Good night, everybody!

It's also interesting how the late-night hosts have gotten softer with their interviews at the same time as they've gotten more biting with the news. Is something valuable lost when the discussions between the hosts and guests are always so pleasant? Well, at some point publicists took over the talk shows. They were the people who booked the guests, and they had six or seven guests, so you had to be awfully nice to Guest A if you wanted to get to Guest B or C. I was not aware that this was going on until people started saying, "So-and-so is not going to be back on the show if you don't be nice to so-and-so." And I said, "What do we care?" And they'd say, "Well, because they also manage so-and-so and so-and-so's sister,

and we want those people on the show." I realized not early into it that we were a tool for the careers of other people, which mediates what you're going to talk about: "I'm Harrison Ford, and I can't talk about landing a plane on a golf course."11 I'm not saying it even makes the show worse. I can remember having a conversation via the sales department about Tylenol, and we had Bill O'Reilly on the show, and we were talking about something in the news, not particularly unpleasant but just something in the news. Tylenol called up and said, "You know what? We're just going to lay out tonight. We'll be back." And rightly so. They said, "People just want to see movie stars talking about their movies." If you want to see adversarial conversation, you have cable news channels all day long.

Were there ever instances where you thought, Maybe I was too hard on that person? Oh, yeah. I always felt like we got 500 people in the audience and it's my responsibility to get a laugh. Many times, the laugh would come at the expense of the guest. I regret that now, but at the time you think, I've got to do anything to keep my head above water. So it's "Hey, nice shirt." And then it's "Oh, my mother made this shirt—how could you have said that?"

Your interview with Paris Hilton was famously rough. I remember that. She went to jail<sup>12</sup> and had a sandwich or whatever she did there and then came home. I was fascinated by this. And the poor woman said to me, "I don't want to talk about being in jail." I felt like I could circumnavigate that. I said, "Well, that's all I want to talk about." If you had a chance to talk to Paris Hilton in those days, you just kind of want to talk about, "Well, no, seriously, you were in jail." But that upset her and she cried and I called her and apologized. I think I bought her a car, too. As the guy operating the machinery sometimes, it was "You're going a little fast here, pal." It was easy to overdo it.

Joaquin Phoenix is another one you wouldn't let off the hook. 13 I mean, he came out begging to be beat up. How can you not take a couple of swings?

The line you had at the end of that interview was perfect: "I'm sorry you couldn't be here tonight." Is it sexist of me to make this observation? You have Paris Hilton, who is beautiful and kind and introverted, versus Joaquin Phoenix, who

- In 2009, CBS producer Joe Halderman tried to extort \$2 million from Letterman for having sex with several staff members of The LateShow, including Halderman's girlfriend. Letterman apologized on-air to his staff and his family; Halderman served four months in Rikers.
- Al Franken, the junior senator from Minnesota, was a writer and castmember on SNL for 15 years.
- On his last Late Show appearance, SNL veteran Macdonald told the audience, "Mr. Letterman is not for the mawkish, and he has no truck for the sentimental. But if something is true, it is not sentimental. And I say in truth, I love you.'



One of SNL's longest-tenured writers, **Downey** is responsible for the "strategery' joke in Will Ferrell's Dubya impersonation.



### BEST SHOW ON TELEVISION\* THE PEOPLE V. O.J. SIMPSON A M E R I G A N G R I M E S T O R Y







## BEST COMEDY ON TELEVISION\*

\* THE PEOPLE V. O.J. SIMPSON: AMERICAN CRIME STORY - MOST #1'S OF ANY SHOW ON TELEVISION 2016 |
A V. CLUB \* COMPLEX \* DECIDER \* EAST BAY TIMES \* ESOUIR \* FORBES \* HALL OF FAME MAGAZINE \* MERRYJANE \*
A V. CLUB \* COMPLEX \* DECIDER \* EAST BAY TIMES \* ESOUIR \* FORBES \* HALL OF FAME MAGAZINE \* MERRYJANE \*
MTV NEWS \* NEW YORK MAGAZINE \* NEWSDAY \* THE OREGONIAN \* ORLANDO SENTINEL \* PHILADELPHIA
DAILY NEWS \* SALON \* SCREENER \* SIOUX CITY JOURNAL \* SLATE \* THE STAR-LEDGER \* ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH \*
TIME MAGAZINE \* TVGUIDE COM \* UPROXX \* USA TODAY | THE AMERICANS \* MOST #1'S OF ANY DRAMA SERIES OF
\* TELEVISION 2018 | ADWEEK \* A.V. CLUB \* THE BOSTON GLOBE \* BUZZFEED \* COLLIDER \* THE HOLLYWOOD REPORTER
\* IGN \* LAS VEGAS WEEKLY \* PASTE MAGAZINE \* POLYGON \* REASON \* ROGEREBERT.COM \* SCREENER \* TV GUIDE
\* MAGAZINE \* US WEEKLY \* THE WEEK | ATLANTA \* MOST #1'S OF ANY COMEDY SERIES OR NEW SERIES ON
\* TELEVISION 2016 | A.V. CLUB \* BUSINESS INSIDER \* CLEVELAND SCENE \* NPR \* NEW YORK MAGAZINE/VULTURE \*
\* THE NEW YORK TIMES \* OMAHA WORLD\* HERALD \* THE PLAYLIST \* QUARTZ \* REDBULL.COM \* THE RINGER \*
\* ROGERCATLIN.COM \* ROLLING STONE \* SAN FRANCISCO CHRONICLE \* SLANT MAGAZINE \* UNDEFEATED \* VARIETY



comes out in a Halloween costume. So you can say that line to him. I don't know that you can say it to her. Anyway, I ought to be in prison as a result of this conversation I'm having with you right now.

If you could snap your fingers and make it happen, who'd be a dream interview for you? I think about that all the time. It would be great to talk to Bob Marley. Because when Bob Marley left us, he was politically active. He was the biggest musical star in the world, and he came from such desperate circumstances. It seems like we don't have that person now whose life and music and behavior apply to soothing the waters of world strife.

Bob Marley's last two albums were called *Survival* and *Uprising*. I don't know that he'd only be singing "One Love" in 2017. But I think also the situation politically was probably ignored back then and he was bringing it to light, whereas now we're more aware. It might have been easier to overlook things in those days; hence the music. But I'm just fascinated by the guy. I read the biography *Catch a Fire*. That's where my interest was born. And how about the music? It's still great.

**How about somebody who's alive?** I'll take Living Legends for \$100, Alex. Let's see, somebody who's alive. Well, Trump.

How would you handle it? I would just start with a list. "You did this. You did that. Don't you feel stupid for having done that, Don? And who's this goon Steve Bannon and why do you want a white supremacist as one of your advisers? Come on, Don, we both know you're lying. Now stop it." I think I would be in the position to give him a bit of a scolding and he would have to sit there and take it. Yeah, I would like an hour with Donald Trump; an hour and a half.

It was clear that as *The Late Show* went on, you were more interested in the conversations than the comedy. What sort of guests were you most excited by? Bill O'Reilly—before he became standard talkshow fare. All I knew about him was that his ideology seemed counter to mine. My premise with him was that "You're too smart to believe the things you're saying. Aren't you just playing the part of the rightwing buffoon?" For a long time, I used to think that was true. I always liked having folks on that were not the mainstream.

In the early days, there was Harvey Pekar. Oh, God, Harvey Pekar. He would get under my skin so bad. He was so irritating. I don't know how to describe Harvey, but he was tremendous. Just a tremendous guest. I can remember one time he went and started attacking G.E.

And calling you a sellout. Yeah, and then I admonished him for it. We were constantly negotiating with Harvey, "Oh, can you come back?" "No." "Please?" I don't know if shows have guys like Harvey on these days.

I don't think they do.Well, are there guys like Harvey? That was great fun, and it was when we were on at 12:30 a.m., and we were working to not get just the left-overs from *The Tonight Show*. We had to establish an identity for ourselves. And Harvey and others were instrumental in that. Andy Kaufman, too, of course. One wonders, if he were alive today, what those appearances would be like. Jesus, that was fantastic.

I'm lonely,
I can't stop
talking.
This is like
visitors' day
at prison
for me.

I know you mentioned you don't really watch the late-night shows, but do you have even an ambient sense of how Trump has been useful for guys like Seth Meyers and Colbert? People tell me nice things about Seth Meyers, that he's good and thoughtful. But I mean, can you imagine *not* doing Trump jokes? That would seem bizarre.

What are your thoughts on Colbert? Only just what you say, that a lot of people have been able to root themselves in the Trump tsunami and Stephen is one of them. I'm aware that Stephen has been able to solidify his position, or—having not seen the show, I don't know what the situation was prior. I can't say much about these shows, because I just don't watch them.

Are you not watching because you're not awake at 11:30 or because you did it for so long that you're no longer interested? The latter is correct. Having done it for 30 years with this blind devotion to the project, and then having been a participant in the late-night wars, 15 which, there's no war now at all—and it was always me and Leno and me and Leno and me and Leno. I realize, Jesus, what was the matter with me? So, well ... the truth is I can't stay up that late.

Have you and Jay been in touch at all since you left *The Late Show?* No. I'm assuming I will bump into him before we die.

You've said elsewhere that you'd hoped CBS would have considered a woman to replace you. Why do you think there has been such resistance to having a woman host a late-night talk show? I think it's inertia. Inertia is hard to break. It's like, "Oh, we gotta get a new face in there. It's always been a man, so we don't want to rock the boat by adjusting to a new face which happens to belong to a woman." I just think that a woman host would have been cool. At the top of the list are Tina Fey and Amy Schumer.

Your writers' room over the years didn't exactly have the most egalitarian reputation. I don't know about my writers' room. I never went to the writers' room, so I have no idea what went on there. I stayed away: "Just call me when you're done."

Going back to the late-night wars—doesn't the fact that you and so many viewers cared so much about who was

11. In 2015, Ford
broke his pelvis in
an emergency plane
landing at an L.A. golf
course. In February,
he accidentally landed
on an airport taxiway
in Orange County.

12. After violating her probation for a DUI, Hilton was incarcerated for 23 days in June 2007.

As a stunt for his fake documentary I'm Still Here, Phoenix mumbled through his 2009
Late Show appearance.
Letterman: "What can you tell us about your days with the Unabomber?"



14. The curmudgeonly file clerk who authored the comic-book series American Splendor.

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Letterman with Donald Trump in 2012, when Trump admitted his neckties are made in China.

winning late night seem a little crazy? Why did it matter who was No. 1? Both shows were being seen by millions of people. I cared. Jay cared. I can remember being on Johnny Carson's show toward the end of his run, and during the commercial break I said, "Honestly, what's the deal here?" Because he seemed like he was still the Johnny that we all loved. And he said, "I want to go out on top." So he cared. When I began, if you didn't have a 30 share, get in your car and go home. For a time, I looked at the ratings every single morning. If our number was bigger than The Tonight Show's number, I would feel good. If it was not as big, I would feel bad. That was every day. Now I don't know if anybody cares. I keep saying to people, "Where are the latenight wars?" "Oh, the U.N. came in and Ban Ki-moon put a stop to it."

Your son, Harry, is 13. Does he have a sense of his dad's career? I remember Jack Paar<sup>16</sup> came out of retirement after years of being gone. People said to him, "What are you doing?" And he said, "I want my daughter to understand what it is I did." Well, I don't feel that way. The other day, I said, "Harry, I get the sense sometimes you don't like going places with me in public." And he said, "Well, you have bad people skills. Just be normal."

How are you not normal? I can't stop talking. We go and have cheeseburgers every Friday night, and I'm always worried that, you know, in the old days, you got a cheeseburger with everything. Not a problem. Now you may not get everything. So I have to grill the counter kid: "Am I going to get everything on the burger?" And Harry's just, "Oh my God. Stop it, please." So I want him to be proud of me, but I don't know that having a television show is what makes a kid proud of you.

He doesn't pester you with questions about what Alan Kalter<sup>17</sup> was really like? Well, that, he's fascinated by. It's funny, Harry used to come to the show. He would watch the show. When I said to him—because I was a ninny; I just assume everything is going to be an earthquake for the kid—I said, "Harry, pretty soon I'm not going to have a job. I'm retiring. But everything will be the same." And he said, "Will I still get to watch the Cartoon Network?" That was his concern about my retirement.

What was the verdict on the Cartoon Network? No more Cartoon Network when Daddy's retired.

It's no secret you were slightly insanely self-critical and competitive about your work. Now that the show is no longer part of your life, are those qualities still around? Yes, but not in a crippling, paralyzing way. A friend of mine, my doctor, said, "You know, you don't need to kill yourself. It's just TV." Then he convinced me to try one of these selective-serotonin-reuptake inhibitors. I resisted it. I thought, *No, just put me in a state hospital*. But I did try it, and suddenly that wiring had less power than it used to. I still have vestiges of it—I think that's about where you want to be. You don't want to be putting your fist through a wall, but I can't imagine going through life not questioning my own worthiness. So, yes, I still have those qualities, but in a lower gear.

What do you beat yourself up about now? Mostly about my role as a father. I will say to my wife, Regina, <sup>18</sup> "What about this, and do you think that?" Then from the next room, you hear, "What are you guys talking about?" And you realize, *Oh shit, Harry's heard every God-dang thing I didn't want him to hear.* The universe of worries and anxieties that I possess with regard to my son's welfare seems to be infinite. Now, if I had a daughter, then I would have ill treatment from men to add to that universe of worries and anxieties.

What does a regular day look like for you now? Right now, I'm missing *The Price Is Right*; thanks a lot. A regular day is structured around my wife and son. I am secondary to their schedule. But my days—I was just in California with some people. It was business-related. So I do a lot of that, and I do a lot of pro bono work, as they say in the legal industry. But mostly I sit on the edge of the bed and stare at the floor. That's why I was stunned when you—"Did we have to call and pay them to come?"

You mean when we asked to do this interview? Yeah, "Is there anything we can do for Dad? He's getting a little ..."

Was it hard to adjust to civilian life? It's still hard. I have trouble operating the phone. That's the God's truth. I needed a pair of shoelaces. And I thought, *Hell, where do you get shoelaces?* And my friend said, there's a place over off I-84, it's the Designer Shoe Warehouse. So I go over there, and it's a building the size of the Pentagon. It's enormous. If you took somebody from—I don't know, pick a country where they don't have Designer Shoe Warehouses—blindfolded them, and

L5. When Johnny Carson retired in 1992, he expected Letterman to host 'The Tonight Show.' Leno got the gig, Letterman moved to CBS, and the two fought it out in the ratings for a decade. (Leno generally had the better numbers.)

Paar's observational wit got him the job as "The Tonight Show' host from 1957 to 1962 and a return stint to host Jack Paar Tonite in 1973.

L7. Letterman would kick
over to Kalter, the
Late Show announcer,
for short, left-field
bits that would often
end with the redheaded sideman beat
up, in tears, or
running offstage.

18. After dating for 23 years, Letterman and Regina Lasko married in March 2009.



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- Charles Isherwood, The New Hork Etmes

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- Peter Marks, The Washington Post

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- Terry Teachout, THE WALL STREET JOURNAL



# DEAR Critics'Pick EVAN HANSEN

turned them loose in this place, they would just think, You people are insane. Who needs this many shoes? It's sinful. It's one of these places where there's no employees and every now and then there's just a scrum of shoe boxes. I'm not finding the damn shoelaces, and finally I think, Maybe it's one of those items they've got at the counter. I go up there and I'm nosing around the counter and, by God, there's shoelaces. This is after about an hour. So now I'm waiting in line and the woman checking people out says in a big loud voice, "May I help our next shoe lover, please?" I just started to tremble. Nobody else seems to have a problem with going to a store! You don't want to have painted yourself into some elite position where it's "Bob, go out and get me some shoelaces." It makes you feel stupid. Here's where I'm comfortable: There's a bait-andtackle store near my house. They've got guys in there, and you can buy live bait, you can buy artificial bait, they'll put new line on your reel. You can talk to them about rods. They'll tell you where to go for a largemouth bass. That's exactly where I want to be.

This is the kind of question you'll probably blanch at, but, you know, even a schmo like me- That's right, you're a schmo.

Just a schmo. Send the schmo to talk to Letterman!

Just in idle moments now and then, I'll have dumb things pop up in my mind that I'm proud for having done in my career. Standing in the line at a DSW or wherever, do you ever have those little flashes where you think back with pride about the work you did? I don't have those kinds of memory flashes. Somebody will say, "Remember when so-and-so happened," and I'll say, "Jeez, I sure don't." Paul Shaffer<sup>19</sup> and I get together about once a month and have dinner, and nothing about the show ever comes up. Memory lane is closed for repairs.

What do you and Paul talk about? He took his daughter, Victoria, to the Grammy party. We talk about stuff like that. He's good friends with Marty Short,<sup>20</sup> so we talk about what Marty is doing. Paul's son, Will, is applying for colleges now, and his kid is fascinating to me. Paul is maybe the least athletic person I've met in my life, but Will's a high-school quarterback and his hope is to apply to a school where he can

walk on and try to make the team. Paul and I don't yak about the show.

How about in this moment, then? Is there anything about your career you can say you're proud of? I have this conversation with my wife, who is also a schmo. And she will say, "Thirty years. Think of all of the people you employed." I thought, Yeah, by God, that's good enough. I was able to give jobs to people. That's an accomplishment.

But as far as on-camera stuff, there really isn't anything you can look back at and say, "That was pretty good"? Some nights the show would be okay; some nights the show would not be okay. But the one thing you can't assail is what my wife was shrewd enough to point out, so that's what I have settled on. It's not like, *Boy*, how about the time that we had the donkey that came out and the jockey threw up?

You're being maybe excessively selfdeprecating. People are so much nicer to

I mean, we elected a guy with that hair? Why don't we investigate that?

me now that I'm not on the air that my impression of myself is beginning to soften, but I'm sticking with jobs as my accomplishment.

Last year, you did the National Geographic<sup>21</sup> documentary about India and climate change, but what else have you come close to doing since wrapping up The Late Show? There were rumors that you were going to do something at the Beacon **Theatre.** We were going to re-create the annual Late Show Christmas special for like three days. Then people said, "The ticket prices are going to be so-and-so" and I said, "Oh Jesus, no. That's larceny. We can't do that." We couldn't ask people to pay that kind of money to come see something that they got for free on television for so many years.

What other offers have you gotten? There's been offers to be on a lot of shows. I'm a big fan of *Veep*, and here's how nice they were: They asked if I would consider a cameo. Holy shit-I got so scared. I thought about it for 24 hours and then I told them, "Here's what would happen: I'm going to do your show. I'm going to worry about it, I'm going to get sick to my stomach, and I'm going to ruin it. I can't do that to you." I proved years ago that I can't act. I was on *Mork* & *Mindy*, 22 and the night the episode aired, I had to stand on the front porch while my girlfriend watched inside. I couldn't watch myself.

You were okay in Cabin Boy.23 Well, thank you very much. I appreciate that.

I said you were "okay." That's better than what I usually hear. I remember going to see that in a theater shortly after it was released. I had never seen myself in a movie. My scene comes up, and the audience is dead silent. You could hear the sprockets in the projector clicking. It was humiliating.

Is it fair to say you're not interested in revisiting a late-night talk show? My interest has shifted. When I'm talking about things to do now, it's not like, God-dang, let's get right back into comedy. Let's call the Butterball hotline on Thanksgiving.

You know, I think we're just about out of time. You're talking to a man who has nothing to do. When we're done, I'll be calling you.

Oh, no, it's Dave again. Yeah, it's asshole again. He's back.

19. Letterman's diminutive bandleader and comedic sidekick.

20. The actor Martin **Short** appeared on the Late Show more than 30 times.

Letterman went to New Delhi in 2016 for Years of Living Dangerously, to discuss India's evolving energy policy.

Letterman played a skeevy motivational speaker in an episode of the '70s sitcom starring Robin Williams and Pam Dawber.

23. Letterman basically plays himself in a 30-second cameo in this 1994 box-office flop written and directed by Late Night alums Chris Elliott and

Adam Resnick.





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### How Much to Laugh at Trump: For late-

## night hosts, the president is a gift, and a quandary.

BY MARK HARRIS

JOHNNY CARSON opposed the Vietnam War. In his private life, he was something of a social liberal as well as a civil-rights advocate who had Harry Belafonte and Martin Luther King Jr. on *The Tonight Show* just two months before King's assassination. If you watched over decades, you could, faintly, discern Carson's politics by his choice of guests, or by the way he leaned into some interviews but could barely bother to make eye contact during others. In 1970, a year before Roe v. Wade went to the Supreme Court, he was drawing 10 million viewers a night and told *Life* magazine, "In my living room I would argue for liberalization of abortion laws ... there are times when I would like to express a view on the air ... But I'm on TV five nights a week; I've nothing to gain by it and everything to lose." ¶ By the time Carson died in 2005, the three-network universe of his heyday had given way to the niche multiverse. Jon Stewart was deep into his *Daily Show* run, and the detached, wry, politically nonspecific View From Nowhere that Carson had embodied was rapidly eroding. (Continued on page 44)





### 117 Days, **A** Million Trump Jokes A First Draft History, With Punch Lines

### **POSTELECTION** REACTION

> CONAN O'BRIEN: Two things happened last night: Donald Trump got elected president, and my job just got easier for the next four years. • SETH MEYERS: Donald Trump won the presidential election last night, and then, out of habit, Kellyanne Conway said, "No, he didn't!" . JOHN OLIVER: Instead of showing our daughters that they could someday be president, America proved that no grandpa is too racist to be leader of the free world. • CRISTELA ALONZO: I was a little bummed after the election, but I thought I was going to be okay until the day after, when I started getting all these phone calls and texts from my white friends making sure I was okay. Nothing scares the hell out of you

like white people being worried about your future ... They'd send me calls like, "Hey, Cristela, we tried. Don't worry, it gets better." "Hey, Cristela, our thoughts are with you. Let me know if you're okay." I'm like, was I running against him? Is that why he won? Because I didn't campaign at all. . CONAN O'BRIEN: Some people are admitting that it's weird to say "President-elect Trump." It's especially weird for me because 'President-elect Trump" happens to be my safe word. • JIMMY FALLON: Donald Trump is gonna be president. Republicans hope he'll keep his promise to build the wall, and Democrats hope he'll keep his promise not to accept the election results. • JIMMY KIMMEL: It was a big surprise. I think it was even a big surprise to Donald Trump. Did you see his vic-

• DAVE CHAPPELLE: Donald Trump, he did it. He's our president. I feel bad saying it. I'm staying at a Trump hotel right now. I don't know if he's going to make a good president, but he makes a swell hotel suite. Imma tell you that. Housekeeping comes in in the morning, cleans my room. And I just, "Hey, good morning, housekeeping." Grab a big handful of pussy and say, you know, Boss said it was okay." · BILL BURR: I don't understand why everybody is so upset. What's going to happen to you? If you liked Obama, did he call you at all in the last eight years? Did he ever put a sandwich on your table? You do that. You're going to keep doing that. You're gonna be fine. KEEGAN-MICHAEL KEY as Luther, Obama's anger translator: Y'all gonna vote for the dude that's going to make America hate again? Don't you understand? This is how The Hunger Games starts! · SAMANTHA BEE: Electing Trump was the democratic equivalent of installing an aboveground pool. Even if we're lucky and it doesn't seep into our foundations. the neighbors will never look at us the same way again. • AZIZ ANSARI: I'm sure there's a lot of people voted for Trump the same way a lot of people listen to the music of Chris Brown where it's like, "Hey, man! I'm just here for the tunes. I'm just here for the tunes! I don't know about that other stuff. I just like the dancing and the music. I don't condone the extracurriculars." If you think about it, Donald Trump is basically the Chris Brown of politics. And "Make America Great Again" is his "These hoes ain't loyal." • MICHELLE WOLF: If there's one thing that's keeping me going: As much as we hate the idea of Trump as president, it's nothing compared to how much he's going to hate being president. He has no idea what's coming. It's like I'm watching him walk into a car wash without a car. • SAMANTHA BEE: Last month, Americans in their wisdom elected a leaky whoopee cushion full of expired cottage cheese.

tory speech? He didn't

want this. He wanted to

win-but he doesn't actu-

ally want to be president ...

His plan was to go home to

Mar-a-Lago, play 5,000

rounds of golf, phone in to

Trump TV every morning

for ten years, and then die

on the toilet. • HASAN

MINHAJ: For the past 15

years, I've been blamed for

9/11 White Americans are

now responsible for 11/9.

### TRUMP'S **PRESIDENTIALNESS**

**▶**TREVOR NOAH: Look at his face. Look at that man. That is the face of a man whose bluff has been called, and he's only holding a two. And now that face will be the face that represents America to the world. That is the face that will address the nation after a tragedy. That is the face that will command the most powerful military in the world. Washington, Lincoln, Roosevelt, Kennedy, Reagan, Obama. And, now, Trump. One of these things is not like the other. And if you're thinking it's Obama because he's black, you probably voted for Trump. • DAVE CHAPPELLE: Trump went to go see Obama last week, did you see that? You see Trump's face when he came out of the meeting? ... He looked shook. Probably came in there, "How are you, Mr. President? Good to see you." "Hello, Donald. How ya feeling?" "Oh, God. Got to tell you, this job looks like it's going to be a lot harder than I thought." "Really? It's not that hard, I mean at least you get to be white while you're doing it." "I'm just saying, I'm a little nervous." "Nervous? Come on man, relax, you haven't even met the aliens yet. It's going to be all right." • BILL BURR: Dude, the star of a reality show is going to run the country. The guy who decided if Bret Michaels or Cyndi Lauper would make a better CEO for a company that doesn't exist is going to be running stuff. • KEEGAN-MICHAEL KEY as Luther, Obama's anger translator: He doesn't even want the job, y'all. I saw it in his eves. The dude was shook. The only reason he ran is because his factory in China made too many red hats! • STEPHEN COLBERT: With roughly seven weeks until he takes office. President-elect Donald Trump still has a few things he's researching, like, What does the president do?" • SETH MEYERS: I have been wrong about him every step of the way. Wrong that Trump wouldn't run; wrong that he wouldn't get the GOP nomination; wrong that he wouldn't win. The good news is, based on my pattern of getting it all wrong, he's going to be a great fucking president.

### THE INAUGURATION

**>>** CONAN O'BRIEN: It's expected to rain in Washington during Donald Trump's inauguration. In response, Donald Trump tweeted, "The sky is

B-Street Band, a Bruce Springsteen cover band that was booked for an inauguration gala, has since decided to cancel out of respect for Springsteen's opposition to Donald Trump. You know it's bad when even a cover band is like. "We don't want to compromise our artistic integrity like that." • JIMMY FALLON: Donald Trump's inaugural committee is actually encouraging protesters to show up on Friday, saying, quote, "We'll give you cookies and Kool-Aid." Then Republicans in Congress were like, "Actually, we drank all the Kool-Aid." • CONAN O'BRIEN: Donald Trump's inauguration is expected to be the most costly in U.S. history. And that's not even factoring in the money. • LEWIS BLACK: You want to know why so many celebrities died in 2016? It was to get out of playing the goddamn inauguration ... I've got my tickets, and I'm going to go no matter what-because I want to be there when Trump touches the Bible and his hand catches on fire. • JIMMY FALLON: I saw that Trump himself is selling inauguration sweatshirts for \$79. I know it sounds expensive for a sweatshirt, but just imagine how much they would have cost if they were made in America. • SETH MEYERS: Donald Trump's inauguration ceremony is this Friday, which means Mike Pence's is on Monday. • TREVOR NOAH: I have a feeling January 20, 2017, will be the day timetravelers go back to try and save the future. Around 11:30 today, part of me was expecting Marty McFly to show up and say, "Doc, Doc ... we've got to stop him!' • SAMANTHA BEE: Listen. Mr. President, you don't know me, I'm Sam Bee. I make a lot of jokes about vou. I don't think vou're Hitler. However, that Goldman Sachs wormtongue who tells you what to say is filling your mouth with more Nazi code than Enigma. Are you the only 70-year-old man in America who doesn't watch the

### TRUMP MATH

History Channel?

**>>CONAN O'BRIEN:** Yesterday, Donald Trump tweeted that millions of people voted illegally on Election Day. Then someone told Trump it's not illegal for women to vote. • SETH MEYERS: President Trump had dinner with Mike Pence in the presidential dining room rigged." • JAMES CORDEN: It | today. Pence said grace, and | bed. • SETH MEYERS: The

was announced that the | Trump said, "There were 1.5 million people at my inauguration.

### POST-INAUGURATION

**≫JOHN OLIVER:** "President Trump": Two words that will always sound unnatural together, like "fuckable clown" or "Wolf Blitzer." • STEPHEN COLBERT: Trump might want to put in some more hours if he just wants to get his popularity up. He's got the lowest approval rating of any incoming president in modern history, But, hey it's not a popularity contest. And neither was the election. • SAMANTHA BEE: Friday, the world watched America swear in, as its 45th president, the concept of white-male mediocrity. Oh yeah, it really happened. Donald Trump laid his little pussy-grabbing paw on top of two more books than he's ever read in his life and spoke the most solemn vow he's ever uttered since his third wedding. • STEPHEN COLBERT: We're just ten days in and it feels like it's total chaos at the White House. This is supposed to be the honeymoon. How could Trump blow the honeymoon? He's had three of them. . SETH **MEYERS:** President Trump took office one month ago today. Wow, it's hard to believe the past few years have only been a month!

### TRUMP'S CHARACTER

**≫BILL BURR**: He is the greatest shit talker of all time. He sat at a \$100,000 [White House Correspondents' Dinner], sits there, the guy totally trashes him. he's absolutely humiliated, and within two or three years, he had that guy's job. You could never talk shit to him, "Hey, Don, one time I was in a bar and this guy came up to me-?" "Oh, really? One time I paid \$100,000 for breakfast and President Obama trashed me and two years later I had his fucking job. I kicked him out of his house." . SETH MEYERS: Donald Trump visited President Obama in the White House today, which got Trump really excited to do his favorite thing: evict a black family from their home. • COLIN JOST: Donald Trump is considering splitting his time between the White House and his Manhattan residence, which would cost taxpayers tens of millions of dollars. But it's all worth it to help a billionaire go night-night in his big-boy

price of gold increased today after falling to its lowest level in almost a year. Which can only mean one thing: Trump is remodeling his bathroom. . JIMMY KIMMEL: This might not be the best time to make contact with aliens. They say, "Take us to your leader." What do we do at that time? "Our leader's a little busy on Twitter right now. How about we take you to Oprah? She's nice, you'll like her." • TREVOR NOAH: [Trump] doesn't want to read. he doesn't want to have briefings. Trump watches Fox to get his news. You realize the reason that we need the news is because we don't have what the president has, which is all of the information! And then Trump is turning on the news going, "I wonder what I do today. I wonder what happens." You are the news! • JIMMY FALLON: A new report finds that protecting Donald Trump and his family is costing New York City taxpayers over a \$1 million a day. Then Trump was like, "Thank God I'm not a taxpayer!" • JOHN OLIVER: Donald Trump is: America's wealthiest hemorrhoid, America's walking, talking brush fire, Rome burning in man form, an ill-fitting suit full of chickens coming home to roost, Twitter's id made manifest, a sentient circus peanut, a racist voodoo doll made of discarded cat hair, a clown made of mummified foreskin and cotton candy, an upsidedown piece of candy corn in a wig made of used medical gauze, a clear plastic bag filled with cheeseburgers and Confederate-flag belt buckles, an old piece of luggage covered in Cheez Whiz, a kidney dropped on the floor of a Supercuts, what happens if the secret gets into the wrong hands. • SETH MEYERS: The latest polls show President Trump has an approval rating in the low 40s, which means he's probably about to dump it for one in the low 20s. • MICHAEL CHE: Crazy as it sounds, maybe it's better if Trump doesn't know what's going on. We can't trust him with secrets. This guy tweets every thought that pops into his head, and he's so petty and so vindictive. How long before he tweets out the president of China's home phone number because he got a bad egg roll somewhere? I hope they tell him as little as possible. When Trump shows up to a briefing, I hope they give him headphones and an iPad and make him watch Frozen. • COLIN JOST: On Tuesday, Donald Trump tweeted that he wants to cancel an order with Boeing for a new Air Force One because it cost too much. Which is weird, because Trump usually waits until after the work is done before he refuses to pay. • STEPHEN COLBERT: [Trump said, "I inherited a mess."] No, you inherited a fortune we elected a mess. • COLIN IOST: It was revealed Donald Trump will keep his job as the executive producer of The Celebrity Apprentice while he's president. It's an absurd, unethical, and potentially illegal conflict of interest—only on NBC.
• SETH MEYERS: President Trump today met with executives from the pharmaceutical industry, and they once again explained to him that there's no such thing as Viagra for your hands.

### TRIIMD'S CABINET

**■** JAMES CORDEN: Yesterday. Donald Trump sat down to dinner with Mitt Romney at the gourmet Jean Georges French restaurant in the Trump International Hotel, because nothing says "man of the people" like eating an \$800 dinner in a tower you named after yourself. • STEPHEN COLBERT: Check one's calendar, because right now we are 43 days from the inauguration, and Donald Trump continues to fill out his Cabinet. Watching Trump pick these people is like watching your nana get a sponge bath: You know it has to be done, but it's still upsetting. • JIMMY FALLON: Today, the Senate officially confirmed Betsy DeVos as Education secretary, with a vote of 51 to 50. Or, as Trump calls that, "a landslide." • SETH MEYERS: According to the New York Times, the White House kitchen has been stocked with President Trump's favorite snacks, including Lay's potato chips. And his Cabinet has been filled with crackers. • CONAN O'BRIEN: Donald Trump's pick for secretary of State, Rex Tillerson, was once the president of the Boy Scouts of America. Or, as Donald Trump calls that, "government experience.

### TRUMP ON **IMMIGRATION**

**≫BILL BURR:** "I'm going to build a wall." Really, you're going to do that? You're going to build a wall from fucking California to Texas? Have you ever done that drive? Dude, I've done that drive. Took the 10 East out of Los Angeles. That's a two-day drive at 80 miles an hour. Wall, wall, wall. You're in there like John Goodman in Raising Ari-

done? Look how long it took to build the Freedom Tower, and we wanted that shit. It took 15 years. • ANDY BOROWITZ: It's so unfair that Trump is banning some people who want to destroy the U.S. from entering the country while putting so many others of them in his Cabinet. • IIMMY KIMMEL: If Donald Trump stops all the immigrants from coming into the country, where's he going to find his next wife? ANDY BOROWITZ: At this point, the U.S. should remove the Statue of Liberty or face lawsuits for false advertising. • SETH MEYERS: Donald Trump told supporters last night not to harass Latinos and Muslims, saying, "I will say right to the cameras, 'Stop -and then he winked so hard his wig unsnapped. · AZIZ ANSARI: We've always been divided by some of these big political issues ... The problem is, there's a new group. I'm talking about this tiny slice of people that have gotten way too fired up about the Trump thing for the wrong reasons ... You know who I'm talking about. There's like this new, lowercase KKK movement that started, this kind of casual white supremacy ... I'm talking about these people that are running around saying stuff like, "Trump won! Go back to Africa!" "Trump won! Go back to Mexico! They see me: "Trump won, go back-to where you came from." Yeah. They're not usually geography buffs.  $\bullet$  ANDY BOROWITZ: So far, Trump has created thousands of jobs for immigration lawyers and airport police. CONAN O'BRIEN: Today, President Trump signed an executive order authorizing the building of the border wall. It's guaranteed to keep out all Mexicans unless they get their hands on a ladder or a shovel. • COLIN JOST: A federal judge last night temporarily blocked President Trump's travel ban from being enforced. But Trump's not too worried about it, because for him, getting temporarily blocked

zona. How many times are

you going to go to Home

Depot? You actually think

you're going to get this

### TRIIMD AND RUSSIA

is just foreplay.

**≫STEPHEN COLBERT:** We just learned from multiple intelligence sources that Trump aides were, quote, "in constant touch with senior Russian officials during the campaign." Constant Touch, by the way, is

do not believe our new President Donald Trump paid Russian prostitutes to pee on him. I believe they did it, I just don't believe he paid them! • JIMMY KIM-MEL: Trump spoke with a number of foreign leaders over the weekend, including the president of Mexico. the prime minister of Germany. He also spoke with Vladimir Putin for about an hour. Putin wanted to know if Trump liked the gift he got him. Donald told him, yes, he was enjoying the presidency very much. SETH MEYERS: Organizers have announced that Donald Trump will attend two inaugural balls during his first week in office. One in Washington, D.C., and then, of course, the real one in Moscow. . CONAN O'BRIEN: In a tweet today, Donald Trump compared the way he's been treated to Nazi Germany. Which is unfair, because everyone knows Hitler won his election without the help of the Russians. • COLIN JOST: In 2013, Putin awarded [Rex] Tillerson the Order of Friendship, which is one of the highest honors Russia gives to foreigners. In fact, the only higher honor Russia can give you is President of the United States.

### TRUMP'S INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

>CONAN O'BRIEN: In an interview yesterday, Donald Trump said he has a replacement for Obamacare that will provide insurance for everybody. Yeah, it's called "move to Canada". • JIMMY KIMMEL: Am I the only one who gets nervous every time he meets a new world leader? It's like introducing a heavily tattooed girlfriend to your parents. • CONAN O'BRIEN: Yesterday, without mentioning Donald Trump, Pope Francis urged everyone to build bridges, not walls. So today, without mentioning the pope, Donald Trump said, "Francis is a girl's name." • SETH MEYERS: Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu said today that there is no greater supporter of the Jewish state than President Trump. Said Trump, "Absolutely, I love Florida." Fantastic Jewish state." • TREVOR NOAH: Trump is either a genius or he's the biggest idiot the world has ever seen. Because I honestly wonder if Trump's plan is to be such a bumbling fool, that Israel and Palestine are going to get together in a room and be

code name. • BILL MAHER: I | agree that guy's a fucking moron. We'd better sort this problem before he tries to help out." . JOHN OLIVER: Just a quick message to all other countries on earth: In the future. you're going to find your-self wanting to ask, "What is your president talking about?" a great deal. And the answer is almost always going to be, "We have no fucking idea." COLIN IOST: I think one interesting thing is how much we're learning about government and the world from Trump. Before this. I never knew who the prime minister of Australia was, because our president had never hung up on him before. We're learning which Muslim countries are threats, and which Muslim countries have Trump hotels ... And we're learning that Frederick Douglass is alive and well, and that he's doing an amazing job and is getting recognized more and more, Trump noticed. And we're definitely learning about checks and balances, because this is all becoming a dark, gritty reboot of Schoolhouse Rock, where a bill becomes a law on its own terms.

### TRUMP AND THE MEDIA

>> CONAN O'BRIEN: A Trump administration official said that whenever the media criticizes the president, they will call it "fake news." And whenever the media praises the president, they will call it "Fox News."

• JOHN OLIVER: Trump dominates the news cycle like a fart dominates the interior of a Volkswagen Beetle: There is simply no escaping him.

### **CULTURE WARS**

**>>**CONAN O'BRIEN: Yesterday, Donald Trump threatened to send federal troops to Chicago. The weird part is, not the city, the musical. SETH MEYERS: Meryl Streep was given the Cecil B. DeMille lifetime achievement award at the Golden Globes last night and used her acceptance speech to criticize Donald Trump. That's right, the alltime queen of American drama was criticized by Mervl Streep.

### THE TRUMP FAMILY

**≫JIMMY KIMMEL:** Today Trump said he believes in torturing prisoners. Which also Trump's Secret Service | like, "I think we can both | is bad news for Melania. | Compiled by Matthew Love

 SETH MEYERS: [The White House press secretary] Sean Spicer said today that Nordstrom's decision to stop carrying Ivanka Trump's clothing line is "an attack on the president's policies and his daughter." Well, that's what his mouth said: his eyes said, "Help me, my boss is insane!" • CONAN O'BRIEN: Kellyanne Conway compared Donald Trump to Jesus. That's right, two guys who started out by inheriting their father's business. • SETH MEYERS: Us Weekly released their new cover story on Donald Trump's children and promised 'everything you didn't know about the Trump kids." "Is it their names?" asked Trump. • CONAN O'BRIEN: Today, Al Gore met with Donald Trump to discuss climate change. To try to explain it in terms Trump would understand, Gore said, "The planet is getting hotter than your

### THE NEXT FOUR YEARS

daughter Ivanka."

**≫MICHELLE WOLF:** The irony is, after all of this, Trump's reward is a library. A library. The guy who never reads. What's he going to do with a library? It's like giving Stephen Hawking a bicycle. • JIMMY KIMMEL: You know how over the course of his time in office, over four years or eight years, the president gets old and his hair turns gray? During this administration, instead of him. that's going to happen to all of us. • TREVOR NOAH: We all know that Donald Trump is going to destroy the world. But we cannot deny that it's going to be an amusing destruction. • MICHAEL CHE: I'm starting to feel bad for Donald Trump. In just the span of one day, he was in a losing battle with three federal judges, a decorated war hero, and a department store ... It's sad, man. I hope Trump quits. Donald, is this really how you want to spend the last two years of your life? • MICHELLE WOLF: Trump never wanted the job of president. He just wanted to be Mr. U.S.A., put on a sash, and tell people how you change the world without actually having to change it. But instead, Trump has gone from being a carefree billionaire to a public servant. Yeah, Donald J. Trump, you just became America's butler. Now go fix our health care and make me a sandwich, you sunburned bitch.







(Continued from page 40) What little of it remained was incinerated this past November by the permanent state of emergency that many people in the crowded late-night field (not to mention their viewers) seemed to shift into after the election. For them, the ascendancy of Donald Trump has posed a double challenge: How political are they going to be, and how oppositional are they going to be?

Building your comedy around the premise that Trump is a grave danger to all of us is probably not going to offer a laugh a minute, but on the other hand turning him into a buffoon—hitting only the tortured coiffure, the orange war paint, and the oblivious self-aggrandizement—can be a way of making him seem like less of a threat than he is, an approach that's been the subject of dispute since Charlie Chaplin did it in *The Great Dictator*. Late night's various takes on Trump mostly seek a midpoint between apocalyptic and shrug emoji, but the hosts can also be charted along a different spectrum: How comfortable are they with politics in the first place? When they (or their writers) read the news, are they sifting it for information, outrage, or just joke potential? And how much of who these people are in their own living rooms can they afford to be when they come into ours?

Late-night TV is, more than any other part of the medium, an implied conversation: Comedians talk to us, and a live audience gives them real-time feedback. Right now, the main subject—really the only subject—is Trump. As a target, he has always been both irresistible (because he's hypersensitive to critique) and frustrating (because he's unaltered by it). That's underscored now that his presidency has redrawn the power map in late-night comedy.

The biggest beneficiaries are, no question, the Splenetics: Daily Show vets John Oliver and Samantha Bee. Bee, whose remarkable TBS half-hour Full Frontal is just starting its second year, forged her show in the crucible of an election whose gender hypocrisies especially enraged her. She is searingly, intoxicatingly livid in a way that might be wearying on a nightly basis but is a bracing cold slap once a week. Fearless in her contempt for the kind of old-boy networks to which the very existence of her show is a rebuke, she is literally willing to take it to the streets, whether in Washington, D.C., for the Women's March or on road trips to last year's conventions. Leave it to others to be bemused or concerned by the man she has called, among other things, a "crotchfondling slab of rancid meatloaf": She and her small, diverse, mostly female set of correspondents are pissed. As is Oliver, whose ability to toggle between hilariously profane spluttering and sustained, lucid investigation of an infuriating injustice makes him into the kind of seethingly adversarial journalist that adversarial journalists who are permitted to see the only inwardly sometimes wish they were—and that they believe they could be if they just had 20 more minutes to tell a story and 20 fewer constraints preventing them from doing it.

If Clinton had won, Bee and Oliver would both have been just fine, speaking truth to power while heaping scorn on her obstructers. But these two were built for more difficult times; embattlement becomes them. Their vibe isn't "This too shall pass"; it's \*resist (although neither one is above a good hashtag joke). And their status as immigrants (Bee, born in Canada, is an American citizen; Oliver, who is married to a U.S. Army veteran, is not) lends extra sting to their perspective; when they say "we" or "us," it means something. You know where they're coming from.

Because their shows air weekly, Bee and Oliver have the luxury of prep time. But for the nightly hosts, the job is to process the day for people, synthesizing everything that happened into another chapter of an ongoing narrative, a rage aria, or a riff. If Trump demands a stepping-up of one's game, Seth Meyers has demonstrated that this was the chance he was waiting for. When he segued from Saturday Night Live's "Weekend Update" to his own show in 2014, Meyers seemed prepared to become an affable, better-read version of your basic late-night host: an opening monologue followed by a desk bit and interviews. But the long campaign either coincided with a personalizing and sharpening of his style or helped spark it. Meyers is the right guy at the right time: You can tell he's an avid, all-day consumer of news, and his distaste for Trump feels gratifyingly specific. He may not be the policy wonk that Oliver is, but he's got a good range of distress: He's genuinely angered by bullying, sees through bluffing and bravado, and is merciless about double-talk and dishonesty. That's a useful set of triggers to have in the Trump era, and whether dueling Kellyanne Conway to a draw or choking up the night after the election when talking about his mother and his baby son, Meyers has found real focus; his droll, disgusted "A Closer Look" segments, often prereleased to the internet, are funny, precise, and self-defining.

Likewise, Stephen Colbert, whose 2006 White House Correspondents' Dinner keynote remains the single most savage and daring piece of political stand-up in the past dozen years, seems to have rediscovered his voice since the election, after shelving it in his jump from *The Colbert Report* to David Letterman's old slot on CBS. Colbert may never find a vehicle for political comedy as bespoke as his alter ego "Stephen Colbert." When he speaks as himself, his strengths are neither outrage nor heart-on-sleeve sincerity. But as even-keeled and reasonable as he is, when he wants to, he can come at you hard, and there's something legitimately subversive about doing so on stately old CBS. When he talks about the transgender-bathroom issue and, after showing a clip of Sean Spicer, snaps, "Oh, grow a pair—is there any more cowardly phrase than 'This is a states'-rights issue?," the White House is not getting mocked by the class clown. It's getting told off by the school principal.

It's no surprise that a reenergized Colbert is suddenly edging Jimmy Fallon in the ratings. The happy-all-the-time *Tonight Show* 







host clearly wants to be the heir to Carson's "What I think doesn't matter" ethos, but as his catastrophic Trump interview in September proved, there's a difference between neutrality and servility. What hurt Fallon so much—the reason that too-close encounter has stuck to him like tar and feathers—isn't that he ruffled Trump's hair; it's that he thought it would play well.

Fallon has become a paradox: He's polarizingly apolitical. To him, a talk show is still Fun Central, a safe-space bubble in which you check your opinions at the door. (He recently had Susan Sarandon on—they talked about her new show, then they played a game of musical chairs involving cups of beer. It's like that. It's never not like that.) The problem is, willfully forgoing a point of view isn't fun these days. Even James Corden, whose show rivals Fallon's for manic cheerfulness, doesn't tiptoe around politics, partly because Corden, for all his karaoke jubilance, doesn't feel nervous about throwing a punch the way Fallon does. Fallon still relishes his job;

nobody looks happier to come through the curtain (he loves being a talk-show host the way Brian Williams loves being a newscaster). Lately, he's rolled out an undangerous Trump impersonation (he blusters and repeats things and has tiny hands and ... that's it) and infused his monologues with more politics. But his Trump jokes are just that: unconnected jests that evaporate before you hear the rim shot. You can practically feel them on the cue cards and count them down as Fallon reels them off, but they don't build to anything or tell a story. It's not comedy of the moment so much as comedy of no moment.

Spoofing the unspoofable is impossible: What to do in a world where "The travel ban is not a ban which makes it not a ban" is written for a sketch, and "The news is fake because

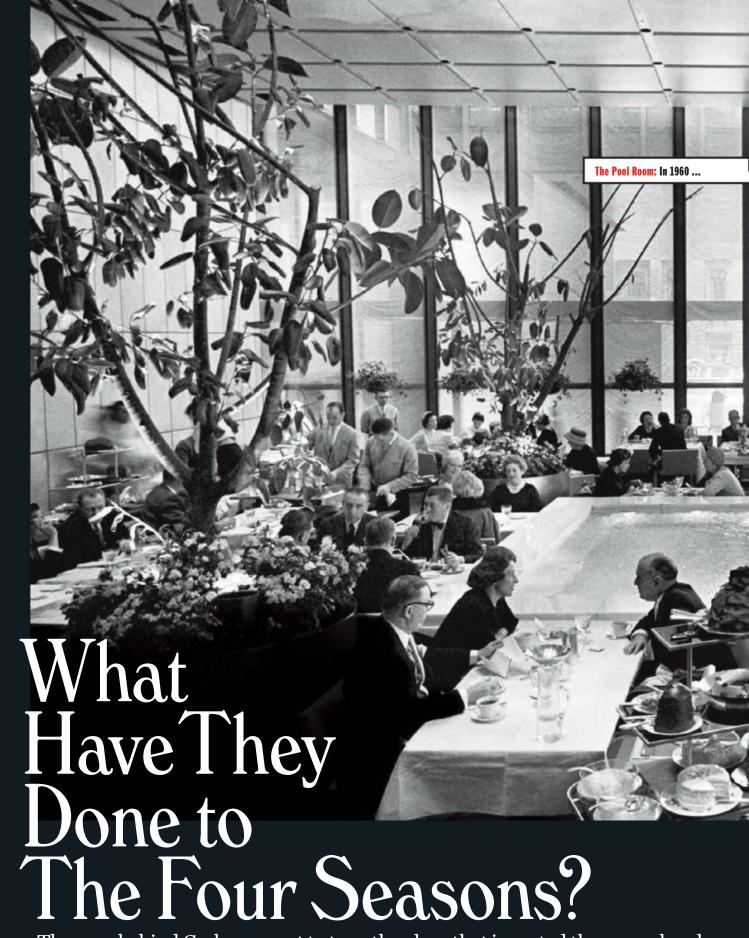
so much of the news is fake" is spoken by a president? Not everyone is finding his way. The Daily Show's Trevor Noah often seems to be hunting for a contrarian perspective that doesn't owe allegiance to the left or right. As an immigrant and a person of color, he could theoretically seize this chance. But it's never easy for a member of a minority who craves mainstream appeal to own his anger publicly (ask Obama how that worked), and when discussing Trump, Noah often falls back on generic "Can you believe this guy?" scorn (as did Obama; ask him how that worked). And Jimmy Kimmel and Conan O'Brien, while not locked out of Trump-era comedy, don't seem to have an immense appetite for it. The Oscar-night potshots Kimmel aimed at Trump weren't nearly as heartfelt (or numerous) as the ones he aimed at Matt Damon; it's not shocking that he has told Variety he's mulling retirement or that TBS is considering taking Conan down to once a week. Give these veterans a subject about which they can remain aloof and they're matchless, but neither Kimmel's L.A. guy's-guy vibe or O'Brien's Harvard Lampoon/ Simpsons absurdism is a perfect fit for tackling this president.

The current colossus is, of course, *Saturday Night Live*. In its 42nd season, it's an event again, even more so than in 2008, when Tina Fey's Sarah Palin became a major news happening. It's the only one of these shows Trump watches, which is both empowering and queasy-making. More than most, Lorne Michaels understands Trump as, among other things, a product of NBC, and, as if in ongoing apology for having let him host in November 2015, the show has decided to go after him, with ratings that recently topped those for any prime-time network series.

But go after him how? *SNL*'s specialty has always been takedown by impersonation rather than by especially incisive political commentary. That's why it went through many different Trumps before enlisting Alec Baldwin; casting is often the most powerful—and last—creative decision the show makes. Occasionally, performance and writing will merge so triumphantly, as they did with Melissa McCarthy's unannounced first appearance as Sean

# As a target, he's always been irresistible (because he's hypersensitive to critique) and frustrating (because he's unaltered by it).

Spicer, that the viral result becomes front-page news. But often, coming up with one joke about someone (say, Steve Bannon as the Grim Reaper) makes it impossible for SNL to make any others. And misfires like the Kellvanne Conway Fatal Attraction sketch are a reminder of just how old-school SNL can be. The show road-tested a convictionless version of Conway last October as a loyal spokesperson at the mercy of a loony boss, then pivoted, rendering her as a sexualized psycho whose lifeblood is the camera lens. The result was not a cheap shot so much as a terribly aimed one, a default let's-make-her-a-whore perspective that suggested a writers' room overmatched by the pace of events. Right now, SNL feels burdened by the knowledge of how badly its audience wants it to draw blood. Samantha Bee and John Oliver always know why they hate someone; sometimes, SNL just knows that it hates someone. That's not enough. Saying that nobody can afford to miss may be a burdensome constraint under which to place people who make their living being funny. But nobody ever said comedy was fair.



The guys behind Carbone want to turn the place that invented the power lunch



 $Mario\ Carbone,\ Jeff\ Zalaznick,\ and\ Rich\ Torrisi.$ 

into an actual food destination. BY ERIC KONIGSBERG



FEW WEEKS AGO, in an empty dining room of what used to be The Four Seasons restaurant, Jeff Zalaznick arrived late to a meeting with his business partners, the chefs Mario Carbone and Rich Torrisi. He was winded and his cheeks flushed beneath his beard. Normally, his attire consists of opencollared shirts, limited-edition Nikes, and drawstring pants. But today, he wore a blue Tom Ford suit. He had just been interviewed live on television, where he was asked to explain how their six-yearold restaurant group, which had

given downtown New York no fewer than six meticulously orchestrated new destinations, with two Michelin stars among them and ten stars cumulatively from the New York Times, would remake one of America's most historic restaurants.

For the past 20 months, the three young men—all are between 33 and 37—have begun work on the first floor of the Seagram Building on Park Avenue at 52nd Street, where, from 1959 until last summer, The Four Seasons had resided. Soon, the place will adopt the cumbersome title of the Landmark Rooms at the Seagram Building, and the famed Grill Room and Pool Room will be run as two separate restaurants, named the Grill and the Pool. The Grill, a retrospectively influenced chophouse with Continental flourishes, to be overseen by Carbone, will open in early April. The Pool, an inventive seafood restaurant under Torrisi's direction, is expected to open this fall.

"There are huge stakes," Zalaznick said, sitting down with Carbone and Torrisi at a steel-legged table. And, in the words of Drew Nieporent, the co-founder of Nobu and a friend of the trio, "it's a huge burden." The Four Seasons, after all, birthed the power lunch (the term was coined by *Esquire* in 1979, in a story that detailed the Grill Room's seating chart), which now, Nieporent notes, doesn't really exist. "That crowd has aged out, and the younger crowd doesn't operate that way."

But that, in any case, wasn't what made Zalaznick late. En route from the studio, he'd decided to cram in a ten-minute lunch at the Parisian steak chain Le Relais de Venise L'Entrecôte. "I even got in a walk on the way here—exercise," he told his partners. Carbone called that a stretch. The restaurants are two blocks apart. "It was brisk," Zalaznick said. He checked his phone, noting that "a lot of people" were sending him text messages because they'd just caught him on television. "Everybody says I look skinny." Carbone asked if he'd done the interview from a phone booth.

As a matter of personal dimensions, only Zalaznick's approach epic: He stands six feet four and sends a needle to the far side of 275 pounds. "I can't help it if all day long I'm surrounded by delicious food," he said, adding that because he's married and has two children already, his girth is evolutionarily irrelevant. (Carbone, who noted that he weighs 75 pounds less than he did when he was younger, and Torrisi are in shape enough that both have run the New York City Marathon.)

And yet, in culinary terms, everything about the sensibility of the three men, whose restaurants—Parm, Carbone, Santina, Dirty French, ZZ's Clam Bar, Sadelle's—are managed by an entity they've registered as Major Food Group-is big. They claim to be, as Carbone put it, "hands-down, the biggest seller of veal in New York" (on the back of the 14-ounce veal parmigiana at Carbone, currently listed on the menu for \$72). It makes a kind of sense that they would assume the mantle of a project as grand as this. But it's also a quixotic quest, attempting to install a food-centric restaurant in a venue where food was always beside the point.

"THE FOOD WAS THE FOOD" is how even the most admiring regulars of The Four Seasons put it. In its heyday, it was the sort of place where Barbara Walters, Sandy Weill, and Calvin Klein knew they could run into one another and get a plate of crab cakes (\$56). It functioned as a clubhouse whose waiters didn't need to take the order of Simon & Schuster editor-in-chief Michael Korda (Table No. 35) because for years it was an article of faith that he wanted a simple baked potato with olive oil (not listed on the menu).

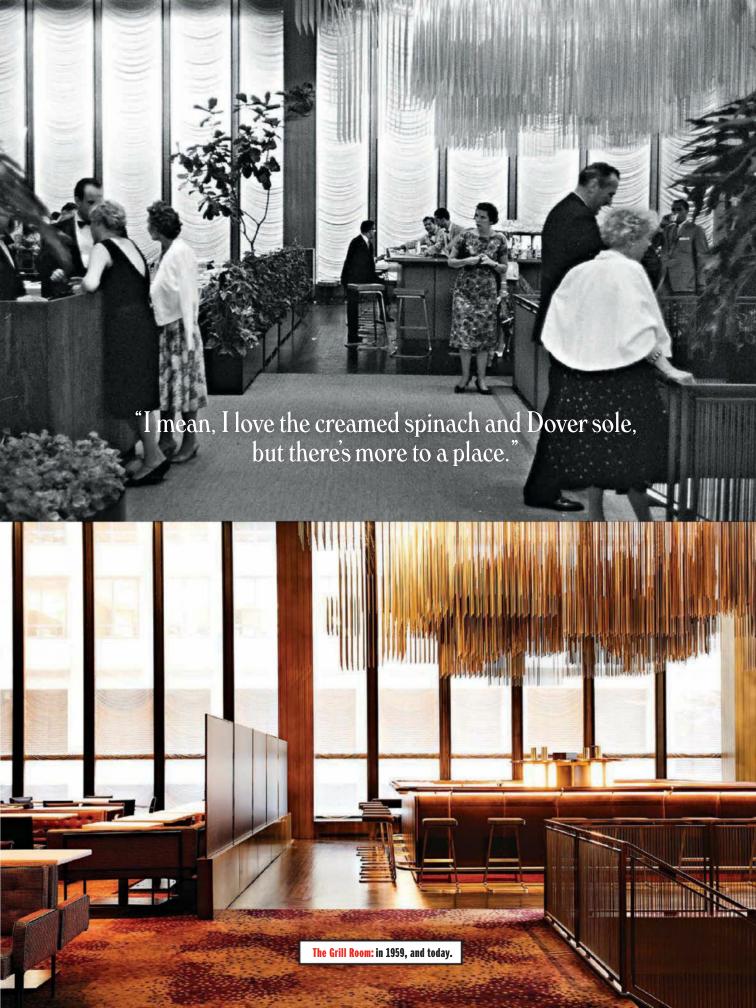
Even the physical plant felt as if status, rather than luxury, was what the architects had in mind. The landmarked interiors and exteriors, a wonder of the International Style-Ludwig Mies van der Rohe designed the building and his young protégé, an upand-comer named Philip Johnson, did the rooms—are full of iconic touches like glass walls, steel beams, shimmering metallic curtains, and the famous Richard Lippold sculpture of bronze rods that hangs from the ceiling of the Grill Room bar. Johnson's design made blessedly inefficient use of 30,000 square feet, giving diners space to be seen but not heard. "If we got a corner, it was the only place Jackie and I could go where people didn't bother her," says Joe Armstrong, the former magazine publisher who often ate there with Onassis. "It was the most public place, but it felt quiet."

For nearly 40 years, the soul of the rooms had been Alex von Bidder and Julian Niccolini, longtime managers who in 1995 assumed ownership of the restaurant and its name, though not its august environs. Then, in 2000, Aby Rosen, an art collector and property tycoon, purchased a majority stake in the Seagram Building. Rosen courted a different kind of celebrity: Bono showed at one of his birthday parties, and guests at the dinner he holds during the Miami Basel art fair have included Leonardo DiCaprio, Kanye West, and Naomi Campbell. His portfolio of holdings has taken on a number of hotels and restaurants—in addition to more than 100 Warhols and he had been hoping to replace The Four Seasons with something "younger," he says. "Those are the people with taste and money, the 30-to-35-year-olds."

Rosen, a 56-year-old German émigré with a mane of flowing white hair, feuded with the operators for years "about the new energy I needed, and they were not up to it," he says. "Their clientele had evolved. Women didn't want to go there anymore. They thought they just needed to refresh it a little bit." In the spring of 2015, Rosen announced that he was not renewing their lease. "We all went there for the history, but it was saggy and tired. I mean, I love the creamed spinach and Dover sole, but there's more to a place." (It hardly helped that Niccolini was charged with sexual assault for forcing himself on a woman at a party at The Four Seasons in 2015; he pleaded guilty to a misdemeanor and was sentenced to no jail time.)

Rosen consulted with a number of restaurateurs before he made his choice, including, he says, Eric Ripert (Le Bernardin), Stephen Starr (Le Coucou), Danny Meyer (Gramercy Tavern), Daniel Humm (Eleven Madison Park), and Thomas Keller (Per Se). He had been introduced to Jeff Zalaznick by Vito Schnabel, the son of the artist Julian Schnabel and a Major Food Group investor. "When I met with Jeff, I asked him only a couple of questions: What does the architecture mean to you, and where is this place going?" When Rosen asked Zalaznick to name his ten favorite restaurants in the world, he was delighted that nine of them were also on his list, including L'Ami Louis and Le Duc in Paris. Also, Rosen adds, "a place in Bilbao."

"The old guard was unhappy" to see The Four Seasons go, he says. "Henry Kissinger told me I was making a mistake. Martha Stewart, too. Robert Stern, Norman Foster"-architects fond of the restaurant as much as the rooms—"they told me, 'Don't change the old grande dame."





"My God, it's like losing your childhood home—and learning that they've moved it to the Bronx," says Joni Evans (Table No. 5), the former publisher of Random House and a regular. "I have no interest in going back. I don't want to see what they've done."

The new tenants expect some resistance. "There will be attacks," Zalaznick says. "They'll say we got rid of too much, but the only memorable thing we threw out was those four shitty fake trees in the four corners of the Pool Room." He notes that although Phyllis Lambert, the daughter of Seagram's founder and the guiding force behind the building's construction, was initially critical about any changes to the interiors, she toured the new restaurants in January and was so pleased she decided to hold her 90th-birthday party in the Pool. The biggest renovations were to turn what used to be a private dining area for the Pool Room into a lounge and bar, and to install a giant "vertical garden" by the artist Paula Hayes along the wall that divides the two restaurants.

"We also removed 50 years of nicotine from the paneling and ceilings," says William Georgis, the architect behind the modest renovation, who characterizes his role as "just an act of reverence and respect, a matter of 'How can I not mess it up?'

Niccolini and Von Bidder have signed a lease to open a new Four Seasons by the end of the year, three blocks away at 280 Park Avenue. "I don't know why Aby did what he did, but it was his decision," Niccolini says. "I'm not going to try to give you some crème Chantilly about it." He adds that they hired Isay Weinfeld, a Brazilian architect, to design the restaurant, and construction began late last month. "The only thing we took was the plaque on the building, on 52nd Street. And we kept our executive chef, Pecko Zantilaveevan. Some of our old staff will be coming back. And we're keeping a lot of our favorite dishes: Dover sole, Châteaubriand, crisp shrimp with mustard fruits, of course. What do you think people like?"

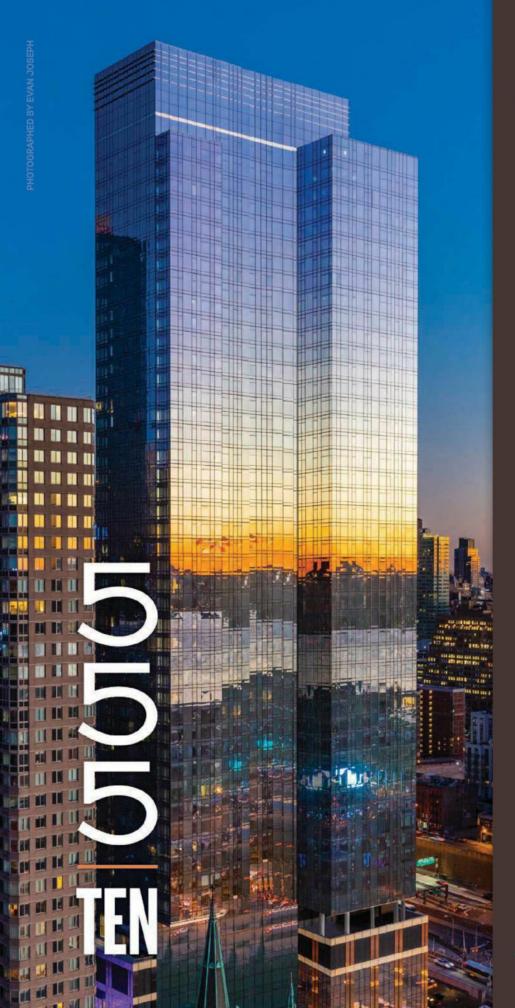
The new owners seem less concerned with antagonizing the old crowd than with cultivating a new one. "At the end of the day, there were only about 20 people who felt welcome under the previous regime," Zalaznick says.

ALTHOUGH MAJOR FOOD GROUP has a back office in Brooklyn, the three principals hold their morning meetings don style, in the windowless dining room of ZZ's Clam Bar in Greenwich Village, and most afternoons you can find any two of them a few blocks away, in the open kitchen of the storefront that used to house their first restaurant, the late Torrisi Italian Specialties, on Mulberry Street. "Mario and I sit apart from each other—I'm at the desk, he's at the table," Torrisi said there one afternoon, after having disappeared for a while "to run over to Dirty French to find a duck that we can play with," his chef de cuisine, Joe Cash, explained.

Both chefs come from middle-class bridge-and-tunnel households-Carbone grew up in Flushing and, later, Bayside; Torrisi in Dobbs Ferry. "By the time I was 14, I'd made a firm decision that my life would be in the kitchen," Torrisi says. "Mario feels like he chose cooking out of the need to find a trade. I just followed what I loved to do."

Torrisi's parents worked at the federal courthouse in lower Manhattan. His childhood epiphanies involved lunches in Chinatown and his grandmother's meatballs with Sunday gravy, "which I realized early on was so much better than what my non-Italian friends were eating." He was taken with the "cultish" environment of the professional kitchens he began working in as a teenager in Westchester—a local Chart House, then the Kittle House in Chappaqua. "I loved the camaraderie and the hierarchy, the way you learned not to look up when the broiler cooks yelled at you, the way the head chef's own knife pack was like a samurai kit.

He met Carbone at the Culinary Institute of America in Hyde Park. "I didn't really like him; he didn't like me," Torrisi said. But in



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2001, they overlapped while working at Café Boulud and became friends. Torrisi found a mentor in Boulud's executive chef at the time, Andrew Carmellini, who recalls Torrisi as "the most competitive person, always coming in and asking to work on specials-king crab, rare-mushroom dishes, very chef-y things." Carbone found the stint less transformative and "too French," so he decamped for Wylie Dufresne's wd~50 (the now-closed Lower East Side stronghold of molecular gastronomy) and, later, Mario Batali's Del Posto. "I knew in my heart that I would always end up making Italian food," Carbone said from across the room.

Several years on, following a series of brief, unpaid gigs in the great kitchens of France, Torrisi told Carbone he was "pessimistic about doing anybody else's cooking." One day, the two shared their disenchantment with the city's Italian delis, a vanishing species whose remaining operators served mostly premade food. "The Italians of a certain age wanted to own a business, they just didn't want anything to do with cooking," Torrisi said. "Mario was fascinated about working in the same idiom. We realized we had a strong bond, in our upbringings and how we felt about restaurants."

In 2009, they borrowed about \$250,000 from family and friends to open Torrisi Italian Specialties, a high-minded luncheonette that served turkev heroes at lunch and a \$50 prix fixe at dinner. The Times raved about the "aggressively technical" cooking, with dishes like sweetbreads Milanese and tilefish with blue crab and fried artichokes, and took affectionate note of its paper napkins. "We used to call it a 400-square-foot rocket ship," Carbone said.

Zalaznick was an early patron. At the age of 27, he had cycled through an entry-level stint at JPMorgan and was working as a greeter at the Mandarin Oriental hotel while putting out his own restaurant blog, Always Hungry (a sample of his oeuvre: "Beyond the Parks: Best Dining in Orlando"). "Jeff would come in and approach us all day long about opening a restaurant together," Torrisi said. "He made us laugh, and he was very intelligent about food. It was another meeting of the minds."

Zalaznick had grown up on the Upper East Side, graduated from Dalton and Cornell, and was well connected. His father is a prominent private-equity investor, and his maternal grandfather was Paul Milstein, a titan of New York City real estate (an uncle, Edward Milstein, has one of the great wine collections in New York). Where to Torrisi and Carbone a life in food represented opportunity and exotic thrills, Zalaznick saw it as both more familiar and elusive. His family dined weekly at Shun Lee and celebrated his grandparents' anniversary every year at The Four Seasons. He has "formative memories of being blown away by the seafood sausage at Chanterelle and saying, 'What is this?'" he says. "But it took me longer than Rich and Mario to realize that chasing that feeling could be my life's work."

In 2011, the three opened Parm, the comfort-food trattoria next door to Torrisi. In very rapid succession came Carbone, ZZ's Clam Bar, Dirty French, Santina, and Sadelle's-all of them downtown, and all more expensive and spectacle-oriented than the original place. By 2015, there were several branded outposts in Las Vegas and Hong Kong, and a Parm counter at Yankee Stadium. Carbone, which opened in 2012, remains the group's standard-bearer, the truest expression of its evolved sensibility—crowd-pleasing, inventive, and umami-rich; popular with hedge-funders, hip-hop stars, and young Hollywood; difficult to get a table at; heavy on semiironic shtick. (Try to name another place with three stars from the *Times* that serves spicy rigatoni vodka.)

"Carbone is a show," Torrisi said. "The captains are the stars there, always performing and filling glasses before they need filling. They bring the whole idea to life. When we first opened Torrisi, it was all about the food. But now I'd say our identity is about so much more." This has lost the group some admiration from foodies and critics ("Like the average New York bagel," the Times' Pete Wells wrote in a mixed review of Sadelle's, an upscale boutique of Yiddishkeit and caviar, "its growth needs to be reined in.") But the men's broadened ambitions were hardly accidental—they just occurred at a higher velocity than any of them envisioned. "We always wanted to be more than great chefs," Torrisi said. "We love being entrepreneurs and businessmen." Carbone said, "Why should chefs just cook? Why is that looked down upon?"

IT WAS A TUESDAY LAST FALL, which meant tasting day for the Grill. "I don't feel it vet," Torrisi said about Carbone's early-American corn pudding. But Zalaznick disagreed. "This is signature," he said. "Instant classic. As a side, every table's gonna get it."

Carbone and Torrisi respect Zalaznick's palate, but they also like to teasingly remind him that, fundamentally, he's of a different breed—the George Martin to their John, Paul, George, and Ringo. "I have the mind of a chef but not the training," he conceded.

"He used to invent one dish on the menu at every restaurant the Caesar salad at Carbone was his—but we told him to stop," Torrisi said.

"The key is getting the proportions right," Zalaznick said. "I made a mess in the kitchen."

"He got stuck inside a chef's coat," Carbone said.

Torrisi and Zalaznick were seated at a small butcher-block table in their test kitchen. As two underlings in chef's whites worked deftly between the giant Molteni oven and range burner, Carbone stood flexing his thumbs expectantly, like a point guard waiting for a time-out to end. While Zalaznick is gregarious, his chefs are prone to verbal retreats either soulful (Torrisi) or standoffish (Carbone). Both are unmarried, though Torrisi is engaged to Mayana Neiva, a Brazilian actress, whom he met on the street one day in front of one of their restaurants. "She was doing a photo shoot and I just fell in love with her instantly," he said. He likes to tease her about Brazilians' eating habits. "They eat cheese all day. She'll eat a wheel of Camembert for breakfast, which I have to respect."

Carbone's "spring chicken with king's hash" came next (two plates, in different brines), followed by potato dumplings ("Strategically, it's good to have," he said). The group paused between courses to watch a video, on Zalaznick's phone, of the retired NFL wide receiver Randy Moss kicking a field goal wearing a tailored suit. Then came a beef tenderloin whose wholesale cost of more than \$40 a pound made the group crack up. Dan Haar, the head chef for both Landmark Rooms, said that at standard markup, the entrée would sell for \$80.

"That's what tenderloin is for," Torrisi said.

They cut the steak into small pieces, which they ate with their fingers. "It's Allison Ranch, from Texas," Zalaznick said. "It's silky, but it's a question of being able to get enough of it. We had to wait two months just to get it in to try it."

Trying to showcase the American culinary tradition in the former home of The Four Seasons is something of an archaeological trick. Not only is the lineage compact, but it harks straight back to the origins of The Four Seasons itself. "The place really invented classic American fine dining," Zalaznick said. "It was rooted in an idea of a Continental restaurant—basically a London chophouse with some French, some German, some Italian influences." They spent time poring over menus from mid-century and before-Carbone has collected them on eBay for years—from institutions that begat The Four Seasons, such as the '21' Club and Delmonico's. "We got a lot of menus from the New York Public Library."

Research also included a ten-day, 30-meal trip to Europe, a sort of pilgrimage to Continental cuisine. "We went to old prime-rib houses like Simpson's-in-the-Strand in London to check out the trolley service, to the George V in Paris to check out the floral arrangements," Zalaznick said. "The first chef of The Four Seasons, Albert Stockli, was Swiss, so we spent a day in Zurich," Carbone said, where they are beef stroganoff at Kronenhalle. The dish appeared on the original Four Seasons menu, which (continued on page 136)



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## PANDASWILL



# EVERYTHING



HILDREN LOVE PANDAS!" declared Representative Carolyn Maloney with the giddy conviction of a politician getting behind something incontrovertible.

Up on the 18th floor of the soonto-be-gutted, now-owned-by-the-Chinese monument to American Greatness the Waldorf Astoria, a crowd of 450 was deep in thrall to a strange panda fantasia—one that

has drifted through the city's power elite like a wishful-thinking, public-spirited psychedelic reverie over the past few months (intensified, in a way, by the anti-Establishment election).

The event was to raise money—\$50 million is the estimated goal—to bring a couple of pandas to live in Central Park. The dream had proved unbelievably flexible: Democrats for pandas, Republicans for pandas, and, above all, New York (and Chinese) money for pandas; pandas as cuddly "Can't we all just get along?" political metaphors and icons of world trade; pandas for peace and mutual respect, and the branding opportunities that could bind rival empires together, but in any event pandas who could never be pressed into military service over the islands in the South China Sea. Pandas as crowd-pleasing trophies of city pride (the D.C., Atlanta, San Diego, and Memphis zoos have them, but the Bronx Zoo last had them, and only briefly, in the late 1980s); pandas as paragons of a kind of toddlerlike, clumsy innocence—we must protect them!—and of conservationism (there's a reason the World Wildlife Fund has a panda as its logo; without human support, it'd be hard for them to even survive the Anthropocene). This is all besides their being such adorable plushie fluff (for those fluffy people who were hoping to make their world a little fluffier again). Who knows why we are supposed to care about these sleepy-eyed creatures, reallythough we instinctively tend to—much less how practical this grand panda dream is. The important thing seemed to be that, emerging bleary-eyed and anxious from the election season, New York's powerful people had to care about something uncontroversial, had to gather together at charity galas and sit in those faux-bamboo chairs at the benefit for *some* reason. And suddenly the list of inoffensive causes had shrunk so radically that it seemed maybe a couple of fat black-and-white bears—who eat almost exclusively what is the world's least nutritious vegetation and who take a rather lackadaisical approach to procreation—were the only thing these people could agree on anymore. It's panda populism: Check out the National Zoo's panda cam!

And so, on the evening of February 8: the Black & White Panda Ball. Maloney was dressed, intentionally, rather like a panda, in a sleeveless black-with-white-polka-dots L.K. Bennett dress she'd bought for the occasion. Onstage at the Starlight Roof, she was extolling what pandas could do to heal this city, maybe even this country, in the face of American Carnage. "They are also a symbol of good luck, and after the tumultuous time we had over the past two decades, I think it's time to have some of these pandas."

The room was crowded, with guests paying \$1,000 for a ticket. PNC Bank, Bank of America, and Leonard Lauder were among the \$25,000-a-table "Bamboo"-level sponsors; China Construction America, Cushman & Wakefield, JPMorgan Chase, and China Merchants Bank had their logos on the program. Guests included Maurice "Hank" Greenberg, who for many years ran AIG, which has been in China since 1919; Joe Piscopo, the nowleathery former Saturday Night Live star turned Trump surrogate, who, shortly after this event, told the *Times* he wants to run for governor of New Jersey; former mayor David Dinkins; retired representative Charlie Rangel; Stephen Baldwin, the Republican Baldwin; the 85-year-old fashion model Carmen Dell'Orefice; Larry and Wendy Rockefeller; China's consul general to New York, Ambassador Zhang Qiyue; and the admittedly befuddled musician and performance artist Casev Spooner, who'd come along as someone's guest to fill out a table, but, when I ran into him during the cocktail hour—in which crab cakes and Pekingduck egg rolls were passed, and a professionally friendly person dressed in an actual panda outfit mingled with the crowd, posing for selfies—he wasn't sure what the whole evening was about, exactly, and made it clear that he is personally rather uncomfortable with the entire idea of animals being kept in captivity.

"I just want to say hello. We're lucky to have this happen," said John Catsimatidis, Maloney's chief ally in the panda crusade. The garrulous Gristedes-supermarket-and-oil-refining mogul, municipal-gadfly radio host, promiscuous political contributor, and perennial mayoral aspirant was holding forth from the stage as guests ate "candy-cane beet and mango salads" and perused the program, which read, on the cover, THE PANDAS ARE COMING TO NYC (adding parenthetically, in smaller type, perhaps helpfully for those unfamiliar with where pandas live when not in zoos, that "they are coming all the way from China"). "What we want—we want the pandas in Central Park," he added. "We love the pandas. We're going to have an additional 5 million tourists to New York City." (Hmm-5 million?) "Everybody will do great ... and most important, the cultural exchange between New York and China, which will bring everybody closer together, and that's what we want, right?"

The evening's emcee was Fox 5 NY's implacably affable Ernie Anastos, who had just a short time before he confronted the Asian-American children of the Joyous String Ensemble—who'd navigated a recognizable version of "Every Breath You Take" and who'd, Anastos told us, been on both Fox & Friends and, my tablemate and I agreed we heard him say, "Helen DeGeneres"—with this demand: that they tell him about their "love of the pandas."

"We're so excited for two cute, cute pandas to come to New York City," one said. "Wouldn't it be cute to name one of the pandas Joy?"

ALONEY HAS BEEN in panda pursuit for a number of years now; for her powerful friends, it's a testament to her quirky determination. But pandas clearly mean something to her-something like a symbol of a kind of state of cozy grace in this dirty, unlucky world. You can see it in her face in an August 2014 photo of her with a panda, looking a bit smitten, on a visit to the Chengdu Research Base of Giant Panda Breeding in the Sichuan province of China; it was projected on a screen at the event. "That's a real panda, not a stuffed animal, and we're holding hands," Maloney said wistfully.

When I asked Maloney later what caused her to be so interested in the bears, she said one of her daughters, Virginia, was obsessed with them when she was a child, going so far as to decorate her room with a map of China, showing where they could be found. Today, Virginia is collecting graduate degrees from MIT and Harvard and going to work for Facebook, so her phase of wanting to be a "panda scientist" turned out to be just a phase.



Inside Carolyn Maloney's Black & White Panda Ball, held at the Waldorf Astoria February 8.

But Maloney says she's always brought up pandas whenever she meets officials in China, and it would always "break the ice to talk about pandas—everybody was happy."

It wasn't quite the same back home. After her trip to China in 2014, she went on Catsimatidis's radio show to complain about how the Chinese authorities she spoke to about getting pandas for the city had wanted to confirm that the local authorities were onboard. "The mayor wasn't interested," she said, before adding that Mayor de Blasio "doesn't like horses [in Central Park], and I guess he doesn't like pandas [either]." She said Governor

Andrew Cuomo backed her efforts and had dispatched State Parks commissioner Rose Harvey to help.

Who wouldn't want a panda? De Blasio was worried they were too expensive—the bamboo alone!—and the Wildlife Conservation Society, which runs the world-class zoos in the city, wasn't interested in reshuffling resources to the people-pleasing pandas just to please a congressperson. At one point, the *Times* reported, a Conservation Society official complained to City Hall that Maloney's advocacy had reached "a new

level of absurdity," and suggested, "I think a statement saying that we appreciate her passion but we are not interested in pandas would be very helpful ... Clearly she doesn't hear it when we say it to her respectfully."

The conservationists understood, in ways a crushed-out panda lover might not, that what makes them lovable is also what makes them difficult: They are incompetent creatures who somehow lucked into an evolutionary loophole by which they seduced the world's most powerful creatures into swooning over them because they are so cute (cuteness being, evolutionarily speaking, how humans process vulnerability and lack of independence). In the wild, pandas are solitary creatures, designed, like other bears, with a digestive tract to eat meat but who subsist instead on a great deal of bamboo every day. It's a foraging-intensive diet, and pandas' low metabolic rate accounts for their stoner allure—all they do all day is sort of roll around and munch. Panda males in captivity aren't particularly amorous, either: Researchers have taken to showing them panda porn to try to get them in the mood. Or just orient them. On top of that,

female pandas can become pregnant on only a few days a year, occasionally accidentally crush their offspring, and seem able to raise only one of them at a time if they happen to bear twins (or, in one super-adorable case, triplets).

In addition to all that, all pandas are the property of China and must be leased, with heavy regulations, at about a million dollars a year for a set, if the government bureaucracy lets you have them at all. According to the terms of a cooperative breeding agreement, any offspring—which everyone agrees are of course the cutest—

must be returned before their fourth birthday, as happened just last month with Bao Bao, the National Zoo's beloved cub (CNN covered her journey home to China closely). Until about a hundred years ago, pandas were virtually unknown in the West, outside of a few improbable taxidermied specimens in science museums. But since the arrival of Su Lin, the first panda to survive the journey to America, in 1936, pandas have been cuddly, spectacular draws for zoos: Su Lin spent some time in New York before being sold to suburban Chicago's Brookfield Zoo, drawing hundreds of thousands of

"Wouldn't it be cute to name one of the pandas Joy?" visitors, including Helen Keller and Al Capone. Within a decade, six more pandas had arrived in the U.S., including two at the Bronx Zoo. They became the main attraction of the 1939 New York World's Fair. The Bronx Zoo got another gift of two in 1941, Pandah and Pandee, from Mrs. Chiang Kai-shek, as a gesture of friendship by the non-communist Chinese to this country.

Once the communists won, panda emigration was banned, and America became panda-depopulated. Then came Richard Nixon and his 1972 trip to China, which brought Ling-Ling (1969-92) and Hsing-Hsing (1970-99). In return, the U.S. government sent China a pair of musk oxen. Good deal!

Maloney's is a different kind of diplomacy—the power of private money. She eventually got the mayor to come around by promising no public funds would be used (the governor had a similar stipulation). The core backers are Catsimatidis; Yue-Sai Kan, the

Chinese-American television personality; and Hank Greenbergthe guy who sued the government for \$40 billion for overstepping its legal authority in how it bailed out his company, AIG, in 2008. Along with Maloney, the three run The Pandas Are Coming to NYC, a pro-panda 501c3.

When I met with Greenberg a couple of weeks after the Panda Ball, at his Park Avenue office decorated with Asian art both ancient and modern, he wanted to make sure I understood why they're all allied in this project. "All for different reasons," he said, with the sageness of a very rich 91-yearold man. "If you're a politician, it helps your constituency. If you're an aspiring politician, you're hoping it will help you." He paused. "I'm not either of those." So what is he in it for? "It's a beautiful animal," he said. I noticed inch-high role-playing figurines on his desk

that appeared to show one man begging for his life while another, in a metal helmet, held a sword over him. I asked him if that was inspiring for doing business, and he laughed a little.

T THE PANDA BALL, Catsimatidis introduced Ed Cox, the chairman of the New York State Republican Party (whose son was married to Catsimatidis's daughter for a while). "All right, a little bit of history here," Cox said, mounting the stage in front of American and Chinese flags. "I was a senior in college in 1968. I was dating this beautiful girl, Tricia Nixon. We'd been together for four years since high school." Her father was running in the New York primary against Nelson Rockefeller-whose nephew Larry was at the Panda Ball. Cox asked Nixon what this rumored secret plan for peace was that Rockefeller kept going on about. "And you know what he said? 'I am going to go to Beijing and Moscow, and we're going to bring a "Generation of Peace" in the world.' That's what he said. And then he became president. The world was facing a potential nuclear war between the Warsaw Pact and NATO. And the Chinese were fighting all these border wars. And we were losing 300 draftees a week in a proxy war in Vietnam. All this was going on. And what's the symbol of that? The panda. That is the hope for peace in the world. China is emerging on the world stage, the second biggest economic power in the world, and there is the dispute over the islands in the South China Sea ... More than ever, we need to have this symbol. As a symbol of peace in the world. Yes, there are pandas in Washington, D.C., but it doesn't count unless there are pandas here in NYC, the capital of the world! Am I right?"

Most at the ball would tend to agree. Where it gets complicated is that zoos in New York don't want pandas imposed on them. So what to do? How about building your own singlespecies exhibition pavilion for the pandas, paid for with private funds, in the northern section of Central Park (Maloney says they will have a design competition, but I.M. Pei is interested). Maybe even get the Trumps involved: Catsimatidis told the New York Post that he spoke to a representative of the Trump Organization about Donald Jr. and Eric Trump maybe cottoning to pandas the way their dad had to Wollman Rink in the 1980s. "What I'd say to

Eric is, 'You'd be doing for the panda project what your father did with the Wollman Rink. Can you build a panda facility that follows in the footsteps of your father?" Catsimatidis told the paper. He later said to me, "You bring the pandas up to people on the street, and 80 percent of them say, 'Yeah, bring the pandas!" Which seems accurate. "It's a plus-plus for the hotel-andrestaurant industry. I think it will increase the relationship with the Chinese and New Yorkers ... I jokingly was saying to the Chinese people, 'I'm going to talk to Trump; you guys build good walls.' They have a good sense of humor."

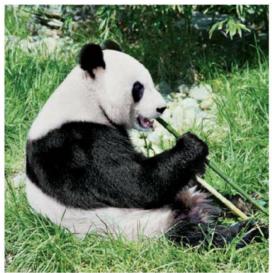
And how did Yue-Sai, whom Catsimatidis calls "the Barbara Walters of China," get involved? Ten years ago, she had the same idea and even went to the Bronx Zoo and "asked the guy who was the head of the zoo how to do it," she told me on the phone from Shanghai, where her allergies were bothering her ("Today it's so smoggy and scary. You can't see across the street"). The zookeeper said he remembered the last time they had pandas, she told me, in 1987, for six months under a deal Ed Koch had brokered. (In the 1980s, the Chinese were offering pandas on short-term rental, but after the World Wildlife Federation sued the U.S. government on grounds that this was bad conservation policy, new regulations

"It's so expensive," Yue-Sai realized, so she was happy to join Maloney's crusade. The Panda Ball raised \$500,000, which isn't much for a project like this, even though Maloney told me she thought it could be done for less than the \$50 million estimate, and others involved told me they thought they could even cut a deal on the pandas from China for less than the usual \$1 million a year.

were put in place offering them for only ten years at a time. Koch

told the *Times* that having pandas in town got him reelected.)

Yue-Sai also had some other ideas. Why not "get a construction company to donate the materials? That would be phenomenal. And someone to sponsor all the bamboos? That would be so cool, so, so cool," Yue-Sai said. "You need a very big anchor sponsor," she thought. She had a thought about that, too: Panda Express, the fast-food chain. "I think that would be ideal," she said. "How perfect is that?"



Yong Yong, one of a pair of the last pandas to live in New York, at the Bronx Zoo in 1987.



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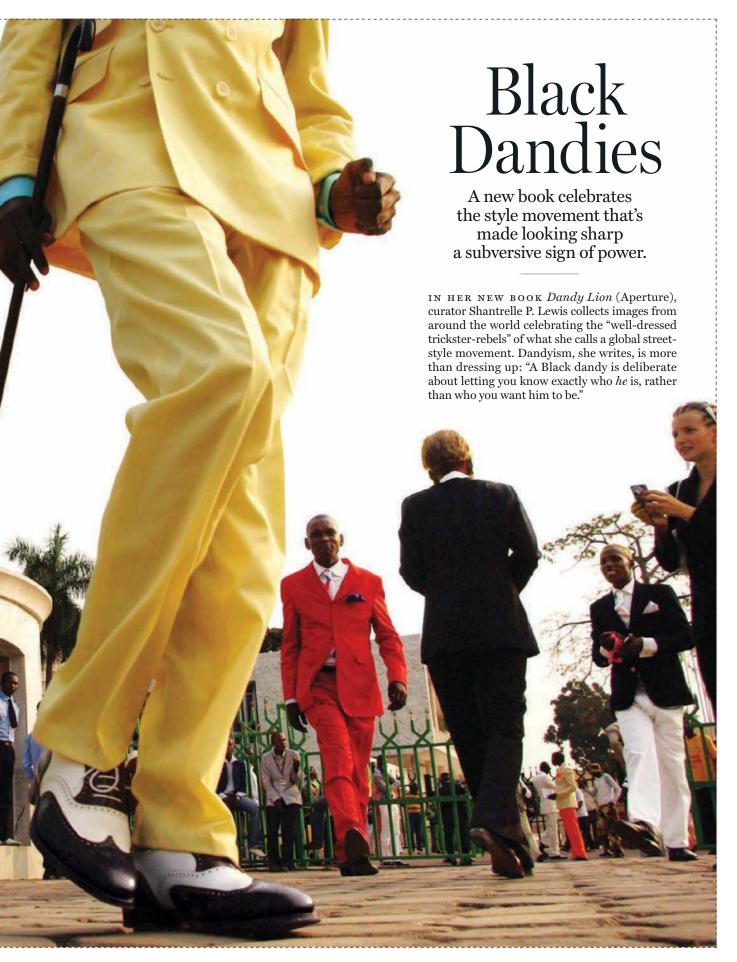
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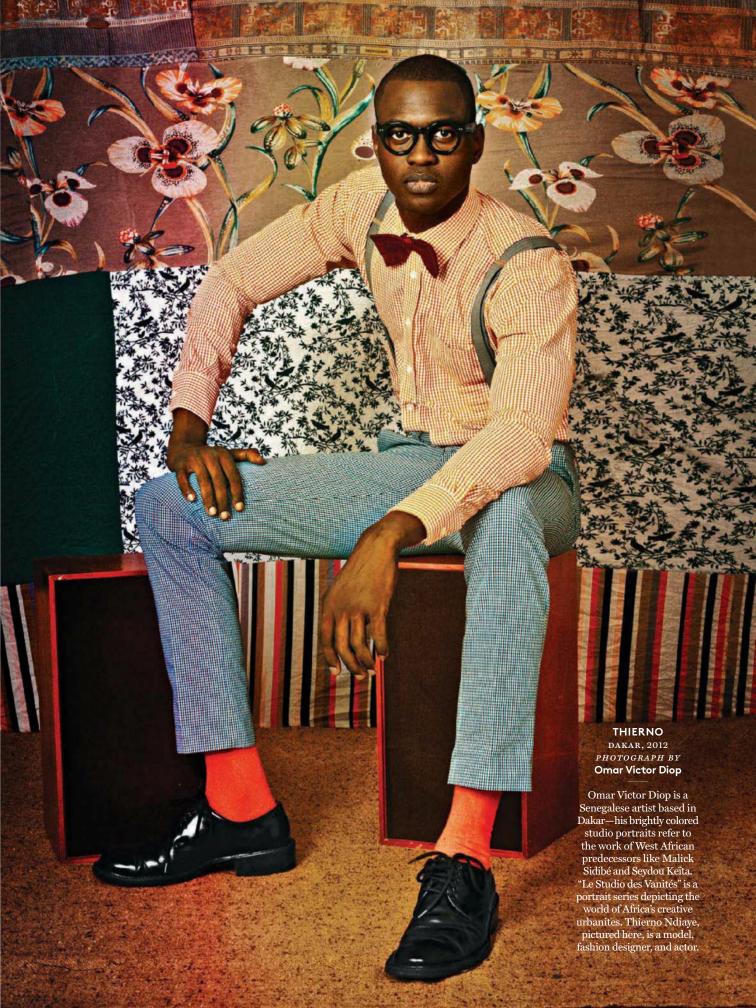
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### **SLUMFLOWER** for Street Etiquette

NEW YORK, 2013 PHOTOGRAPH BY **Rog Walker** 

Joshua Kissi and Travis Gumbs, former high-school friends from the Bronx, founded the style blog Street Etiquette in 2008; the editorial shoot "Slumflower" took place at a Chelsea housing project and starred their friends. It was conceived with a few simple questions in mind: "What if all the men here were wearing suits? Would people be less afraid of the projects? Would they care more?"



### **V FOR VICTORY**

JOHANNESBURG, 2014 PHOTOGRAPH BY Harness Hamese

The South African collective Khumbula took its name from the Nguni word meaning "to remember." The group draws inspiration from antiapartheid freedom fighters. From top, the members pictured are Bafana Mthembu, David Maledimo, and Andile Biyana.



### MR. TOLIVER LONDON, 2010 PHOTOGRAPH BY

Hassan Hajjaj

Hassan Hajjaj lives and works in London and Marrakech, where he makes vibrant, stylish portraits in collaboration with both his subjects and a tailor. This photo is from a series called "My Rock Stars," which features international musicians and performerslike Marques Toliver, an R&B singer and classically trained violinist.





### STRATEGIST eating shopping health & self home & help fun 68 96 78 86 92

WE INTERRUPT THE NEWS of shuttering institutions-Carnegie Deli, BookCourt, Other Music-to bring you our annual "Best of New York" roundup. The list continues to spotlight the most impressive new (or under-the-radar) shops, restaurants, and services-shoemakers, calzone bakers, and Elvis impersonators among them. And as always, it draws on our obsessive, year-round coverage of the city's retail- and food-scape as well as the wisdom of our in-the-know associates. For the second year, we also anoint the absolute best (newness be damned) in a number of categories—this time, we've ranked ten different cuisines, plus three types of bars-with a much wider assortment ever evolving at nymag.com.

### BEST OF NEW YORK

# eating

BEEF-FAT POTATOES, TRANSPORTING FISH STEW, AND INDIAN EGG TOAST.

### Salad

**EDDA BAR** 

 $47\,S.\,5th\,St., nr.\,Wy the\,Ave., Williamsburg\\929-337-6792$ 

Is there a foodstuff on this planet that a Nordic chef hasn't attempted to smoke, cure, or pickle? Nothing is safe. Even salad. Which explains why Fredrik Berselius's whole heads of young lettuce on the bar menu of his tasting room, Aska, only appear to be plucked from nature. In fact, they're subject to multiple labor-intensive manipulations: creamy whipped house-smoked hake piped between the leaves, a vinaigrette made from smoked oil and preserved ramp seeds, and a final flourish of dill powder and preserved ramp flowers. It's land meets sea, cured meets raw, and all it requires is a knife, a fork, and a suspension of all modern-day salad-bar presumptions.

### Steak

**FLORA BAR** 

945 Madison Ave., at 75th St. 646-558-5383

Ignacio Mattos may be a downtown cook, but he's long been known in

restaurant circles as a chef with consummate uptown skills, and his sophisticated version of the ultimate uptown steak dish draws on influences from both worlds. Instead of the usual strip or filet, the beef is flavorful flap steak, prepared with a dash of uptown sherry and that beloved downtown condiment Vietnamese fish sauce for an extra umami kick. The garnish of beets matches the smooth, earthy texture of the beef, a little thatch of dandelion greens adds a dose of Greenmarket cred, and the impeccably made béarnaise bathes everything in the kind of classic gourmet goodness that staunch Upper East Siders expect.

### **Potatoes**

WHITE GOLD BUTCHERS

375 Amsterdam Ave., at 78th St. 212-362-8731

What does it say that the best thing on the menu at April Bloomfield's meat-lover's paradise is a potato? Well, it says that Bloomfield is an ambidextrous chef, as practiced in the delicate vegetable arts as she is in meatier matters. Also: Where there are exceptional fried potatoes, there is bound to be animal fat. And so it is with White Gold's Yukon Golds—paper-thin slices, layered like croissants, confited in beef fat, pressed thinner still under weighted pans, cut into small lasagnalike squares, then deep-fried in more of that transformative tallow until they're as crisp around the edges as Pringles yet soft and creamy within. They come four to an order, propped up like a bowl of Rubik's Cubes, and it's not too much to say that they're the ultimate expression of starch and fat.

### Cruller

**DAILY PROVISIONS** 

103 E. 19th St., nr. Park Ave. S. 212-488-1505

Until recently, we hadn't devoted a lot of time to pondering crullers, those twisty sticks of fried dough whose name comes from a Dutch word that means "to curl." That changed when Daniel Alvarez unleashed his mapleglazed version at Daily Provisions last month. His is actually a ringshaped variation called a French cruller, made from eggy pâte à choux and possessing a delicately crunchy outer shell, a remarkably moist, creamy interior, and maple icing that contrasts perfectly with the almost

savory batter. Think light and airy doughnut crossed with a stack of French toast drizzled with maple syrup, but even better. To put it in Modern Pastry Achievement terms: A maple cruller could give a Cronut an inferiority complex.

### Food Court

GREAT NORTHERN
FOOD HALL

Grand Central Terminal, Park Ave. at 42nd St: 646-568-4020

Thanks to Danish gastropreneur Claus Meyer, Metro-North commuters and everyday straphangers now know the flaky pleasure of the frøsnapper, the creamy comfort of a morning bowl of øllebrød, and the artful construction of a smørrebrød, the open-faced sandwiches of Denmark. These treats and more are available every day in Meyer's elegant conversion of Grand Central's Vanderbilt Hall into a Nordic smorgasbord of thoughtfully sourced, well-made Scandinavian specialties (including Brooklyn-roasted coffee). It deserves the highest compliment one might pay to a train-station food court: You'd want to eat there even if you're not going anywhere.



### BEST OF NEW YORK

### **Carnitas**

LALO

104 Bayard St., nr. Baxter St. 646-998-3408

The Mexican-American chef Gerardo Gonzalez is an unabashed fan of carnitas bubbling away in their familiar vat-of-fat street-food milieu. But for his version of the Michoacán specialty, he makes a tropical braising liquid out of pineapple juice and beer, plus oranges, lemons, onions, garlic, and reserved carnitas fat from prior batches (mother fat, as he calls it), and slowcooks chunks of shoulder for hours. Before sending them out, he crisps them up and anoints them with white sauce (a family recipe of mayo, evaporated milk, and garlic), red sauce (chiles and pineapple), and, ingeniously, crushed corn nuts for texture. On the side: hot flour tortillas made with coconut milk and more of that precious mother fat.

### **Onion Rings**

**CANNIBAL LIQUOR HOUSE** 

111 E. 29th St., nr. Park Ave. S.

You know those onion rings that when you bite into one a slimy strip of something (presumably onion) shoots out like an eel on a waterslide? These aren't those. These beer-battered beauties are built more along the lines of jelly doughnuts, the rings of Spanish onion buried deep within and well secured by an airy web of dough. Chef Francis Derby attributes their puffy size and considerable savoriness to resting the yeasty, Colt 45-spiked batter overnight in the fridge. To follow through on the allium theme, he plates these substantial specimens with a convincingly trashy French-onion dip housemade from crème fraîche, Kewpie mayo, caramelized onions, fried shallots, and a dash of beef jus.

### Ramen

374 Johnson Ave., nr. Bogart St., East Williamsburg; 718-381-0491

Certain foods taste better in certain environments. Hot dogs, for instance, are extra-delicious gobbled on the street, at the ballpark, or in their natural habitat-on the Coney Island boardwalk, where salt air and ocean breezes act as flavor enhanc-



Ichiran's ramen.

ers. But who knew that tonkotsu ramen is at its best when consumed alone inside an isolated slurping pen called a "flavor concentration booth," as this Japanese chain would have you believe? The good news is that the soup, even when swallowed among other humans in the restaurant's adjoining dining room, is pretty great—deep and creamy with a long finish. The noodles are exceptional, too, as firm and springy as a brand-new Posturepedic, and you can custom-calibrate everything from the richness of the broth to the strength of the tare.

### **Toast**

**PAOWALLA** 

195 Spring St., at Sullivan St.; 212-235-1098

It looks innocent enough, like something your mom might have served for lunch alongside a bowl of tomato soup when you were 6. But Floyd Cardoz's egg Kejriwal-a blanket of serrano-spiked melted Cheddar, drizzled with green-chile chutney, and completely concealing a sunnyside egg on a slice of toasted brioche—is no nursery food. This addictive super-snack was named long ago for a furtive Bombay fresser who conspired with the kitchen at his local club to sneak him the eggs that are verboten under his community's strict brand of vegetarianism. Cardoz's interpretation is spicysweet (there's coconut oil in the chutney), deceptively complex, and

compulsively edible-vegetarianscofflaw cuisine at its finest.

### Calzone

**OPS** 

346 Himrod St., nr. Wyckoff Ave., Bushwick 718-386-4009

Calzones are the redheaded stepchildren of pizzerias, demeaned as stuffed blobs of dough not worth the carbs. On weekends at this Bushwick pizzeria, a lighter, Neapolitanstyle version is served that's worlds away from the gut bombs of your vouth. The sourdough bread is light and springy, the fillings not stuffed inside like cheese is going out of style. There's always creamy, housemade ricotta, but that's the only common denominator for now. You might get the pugnacious combination of escarole, olives, capers, and anchovies. Maybe ricotta and salami, or soft, nutty kabocha, ricotta, and thinly sliced ribbons of guanciale, both served with a side of tomato sauce. Regardless, one bite confirms: The carbs are justified.

### Curry

55 Bond St., nr. Bowery; 212-677-2223

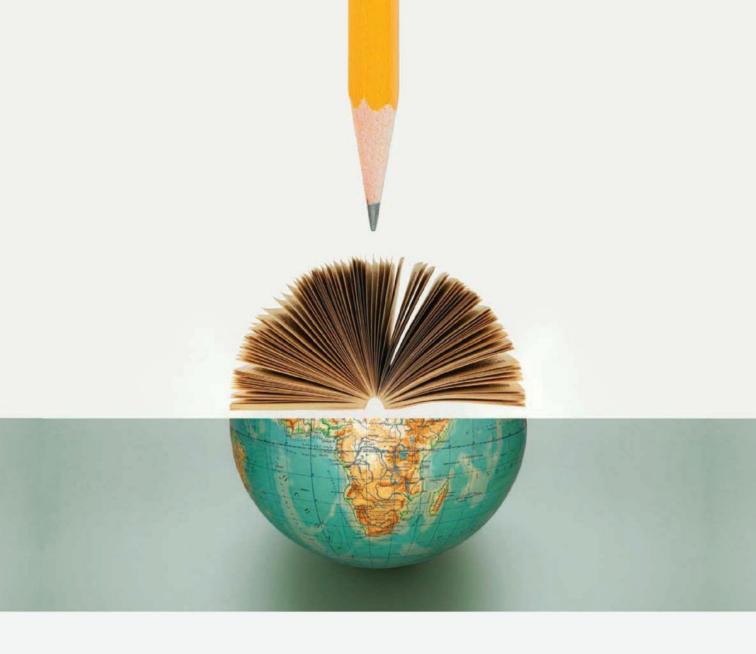
In New York of late, sweet Americanized pad Thai has given way to a flood of restaurants serving the pork-crazy, chile-mad food of Northern Thailand. But the chefbrothers at Fish Cheeks take a multiregional approach, heading south for their coconut crab curry. Spices are ground the old way into a paste, which paints the coconut a shade of Thai-iced-tea orange. It's a perfect vehicle for the briny blue stone crab, which comes in generous islands luxuriating in the coconut milk, enhancing its natural sweetness while the spices and bitter betel leaf temper it.

### Fish Sandwich

CAFÉ ALTRO PARADISO

234 Spring St., at Sixth Ave.; 646-952-0828

One of the beauties of the fish sandwich is its adaptability, which may be why the cooks at this new Italian bistro in Soho have been tinkering with their excellent lunchtime-only creation for a while now. The bread was a baguette when we first enjoyed it; now it's a fat brioche bun. The fresh cod used to be broken into soft, flaky shingles; now it's sizzled in a fat golden-fried fillet. From the very beginning, however, the mayonnaise has been whipped fresh, the toppings have remained constant (piles of arugula and thin, crunchy ribbons of onion), and its place on the general deliciousness scale (a solid ten out of ten) has remained steadfastly the same.



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#### Coq au Vin

#### LE COQ RICO

30 E. 20th St., nr. Park Ave. S. 212-267-7426

Unlike many practitioners of this classic, oft-abused recipe, the noted Alsatian poultry chef Antoine Westermann takes care to marinate his free-range bird the day before cooking it in a garlicky mix of herbs and red wine. Then it's browned and braised, and eventually combined with mushrooms and bacon. The modest \$19 sticker price adds to the allure, although right now the dish is available only as a weekly blue-plate special every Tuesday at lunch.

#### **Delivery** Dish

#### **SUSHION JONES**

348 Bowery, at Great Jones St.; no phone

Just because start-ups now deliver pork cheeks and lobster tacos, it doesn't mean these restaurant dishes taste as good on your couch. That's especially the case when it comes to sushi, since freshness and temperature are critical. Enter Sushi on Jones: a tiny Bowery Market spot that delivers its \$50 omakase via Caviar, UberEats, GrubHub, and Postmates. Twelve pieces of nigiri, plus a tuna roll, arrive in a bambooprinted paper box that's perfectly sized so the fish doesn't slide around. Inside, you may find a tender scallop topped with black charcoal salt, a double dose of uni, yuzu-dotted arctic char, and sweet botan shrimp. They miraculously don't suffer during the commute, arriving at their optimal flavor and texture.

#### Samosas

#### PONDICHERI

15 W. 27th St., nr. Broadway; 646-878-4375

Like many exotic street foods popularized in this town over the years, the New York samosa tends to be a pale imitation of the real thing. At her eclectic Indian canteen in the Flatiron District, however, Anita Jaisinghani, who comes to the city from Gujarat by way of Houston, has the samosa skins of these golden beauties rolled fresh in-house instead of pulled prefrozen from a package. For the record, they're also fried to order (instead of popped into the nearest microwave) and filled with the kinds of ingredients you'd expect to find in a good Indian home kitchen (spiced potatoes, lentils, shreds of braised goat), instead of the overheated buffet tray of your local curry joint.

#### Fish Stew

#### **LE COUCOU**

138 Lafayette St., at Howard St. 212-271-4252

What distinguishes this magisterial dish from the average faux-Provençal fish stew you find around town is certainly the fumet stock, which is served in a pot fresh from the stove and tastes like it's been boiled down from the husks of a thousand shellfish (which it has). There's also the mélange of local seafood goodiesplump shrimp, steamed mussels and clams, a perfectly cooked black sea bass, all plated and served with style and precision. But what really clinches it is the thick aïoli, which arrives on the side, in a small bowl. and makes everything it touches taste like the essence of the Côte d'Azur.

#### Eggplant Parm

26 Broadway, nr. Kent Ave., Williamsburg 347-987-4500

The renovation of tired red-sauce recipes has been all the rage in haute Italian dining circles recently, and no one does a better job of it than Staten Island's own Albert Di Meglio. At his Williamsburg restaurant, you can enjoy refurbished versions of cannoli and Grandma's meatballs. But for our money, the best of these new oldschool formulations is this delectable version of eggplant Parmesan, which is constructed with two kinds of artisanal cheese (mozzarella and Parm), vividly fresh tomato sauce, and half of a "wood roasted" eggplant, which tastes like it's just been snipped from nonna's garden.

#### Ice-Cream Sandwich

#### WINSON

159 Graham Ave., at Montrose Ave., East Williamsburg; 347-457-6010

What's the key to this imposing, endlessly Instagrammable Taiwanthemed ice-cream creation? You could argue it's the ice cream itself, a generous scoop of the kind of rich, creamy, gently melting vanilla rarely

#### **Critics' Picks**

#### The Best New Burgers in Town



#### ROB PATRONITE

#### 4 Charles Prime Rib 🕯

4 Charles St., nr. Greenwich Ave. 212-561-5992

The secret behind 4 Charles Prime Rib's burger is that there is no secret. Nothing here you haven't seen before. Two griddled four-ounce patties, American cheese, soft bun, pickles, onion, Dijon-spiked mayo, with the squishy, acquiescent bite of a fast-food burger. I'd even go so far as to say that its cheesy, pickly, oniony flavor profile owes more to McDonald's than anything else. But every detail is spot-on, the execution flawless, the ingredient synergy unsurpassed. This isn't the best double cheeseburger I've tasted in the past year; it's one of the best burgers I've tasted in my entire artery-clogging, burger-chomping career.

#### **ROBIN RAISFELD**

#### Untitled at the Whitney

99 Gansevoort St., nr. Washington St. 212-570-3670

Modest size (five ounces), careful sourcing (grass-fed beef from an upstate farm), and terrific toppings (a Jasper Hill Farm cheese blend of Cabot Cheddar and Alpha Tolman, pickled-pepper-seasoned minced onions, puffy beer-battered onion rings, ketchup-aïoli-cognac sauce) make this sandwich museum-quality.

#### ADAM PLATT

#### Chumley's

86 Bedford St., nr. Barrow St.

Like many of the elaborate pub burgers in this opulent-burger era, Victoria Blamey's double-decker monster comprises numerous carefully considered elements (two top-round patties, crisped shallots, melting bone marrow, a "secret" coffeetinged sauce, a flap of gooey American cheese) that add up to an impressively satisfying, if messy, whole.

seen these days. Or maybe it's the softly textured mantou bun, which is slightly larger than your average mantou and deep-fried on its exterior to a golden crisp. But our vote goes to the syrupy pour of sticky, sweet condensed milk, which binds all of these elements together and raises them from the crowded icecream-sandwich category into something much rarer: a first-class Asian-fusion dessert.





### HEMANT PATHAK, NEW YORK MARGARITA OF THE YEAR FINALIST

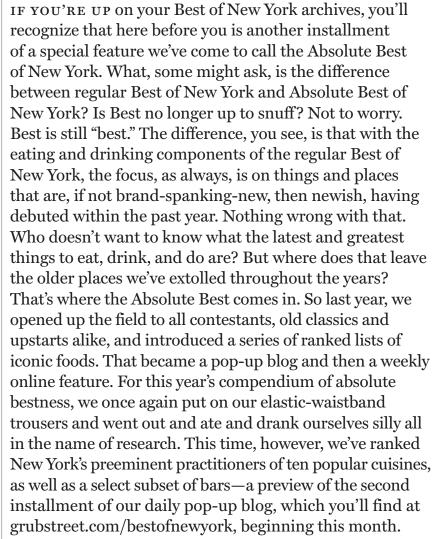
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# absolute best



ROB PATRONITE AND ROBIN RAISFELD



#### **↑ FRENCH**

Le Bernardin

To those who dare suggest that this quintessentially New York restaurant is not really French at all, Eric Ripert has a stock reply. "Look at our technique." He's talking about the first-class kitchen, stocked with sauciers, fish cooks, and pastry chefs, all of them skilled in the ancient art of haute cuisine; the dining room, which remains as close to the Parisian three-star ideal as any; and the everevolving menu, which still contains some of the finest examples of grand French cooking (sautéed Dover sole, lobster à l'américaine, the desserts) that money can buy.

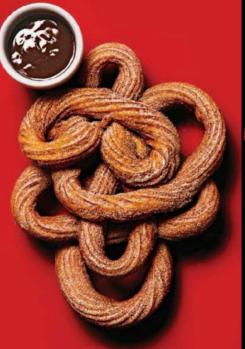
2 Le Coucou
138 Lafayette St.
For New Yorkers
who wish to reintroduce
themselves to classics
like celeri rémoulade,
fried veal's head, and
pike quenelles poured
with gouts of pink
lobster sauce, there's
no better venue in town.

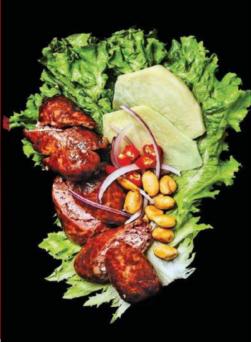
**Daniel** 60 E. 65th St. The great Jean-Georges Vongerichten may have elevated his restaurants into the stratosphere of global fusionism, but Daniel Boulud's famous canteen remains at heart a neighborhood joint. Go for the roasted pigeonneau, the fricasséed escargot, and the veal sweetbreads, which, the last time we checked, were served with a radical garnish of pickled kumquats.

A Bâtard 239 W. Broadway Bâtard's chef, Markus Glocker, is Austrian, but the prix fixe menu is peppered with numerous French classics (steak tartare, braised porcelet shoulder, pear tarte Tatin), and at four courses for \$85, you won't find a better gourmet deal in the city.

La Grenouille 3 E. 52nd St. The quality of ageless specialties like lobster bisque, grilled sole, and crêpes flambées may go up and down, but as long as the proprietors own their midtown townhouse, the gilded, rose-scented, fin de siècle Frenchness of this landmark restaurant will endure.

ADAM PLATT







#### ↑ MEXICAN

Cosme 35 E. 21st St. LEnrique Olvera and his deputy, Daniela Soto-Innes, make it hard to choose: The milk-and-Coke-tenderized duck carnitas are as great as ever, but try the beef tartare, made new and compelling by its smoked domingo rojo purée and a flurry of cured yolk. And on the sweets front, the cloudlike meringue still scans mesmerizingly like fresh corn, but make time for the brunch-only churros, which arrive in a pull-apart whorl of fried dough, with warm dark chocolate on the side.

**El Atoradero** 708 Washington Ave., Prospect Heights The mole poblano packs such a fruity, rich, and smoky wallop not only because Denisse Lina Chavez infuses chile seeds in warm oil one by one but because she also handstirs the paste for hours, until it turns from red to sheeny brown.

**Empellón Cocina** 105 First Ave. High-concept molten-pozole ravioli and mezcal-apricot mochi are among the dishes on offer at the edgier chef's table, but bone-in pork deckle with huitlacoche comforts like the best smothered pork chops, and an ungarnished, plainseeming braised-goat taco is one of the city's great dishes, especially when paired with a happy-hour beer for \$5.

#### Los Tacos No. 1 and Los Mariscos

75 Ninth Ave. It doesn't matter that there's always a wait and no place to sit when there are beautiful tortillas. griddled into existence no more than five minutes ago, loaded with spit-roasted pork. The seafood-centric sister establishment features addictive chilepeanut salsa and \$3 fish tacos. Also, chairs.

Casa Enrique 5-48 49th Ave., Long Island City The white paint job, bar stools, and pozole bowls lend a subdued glow. Refried beans and chorizo crown sopecitos fluffier than the softest polenta, and nothing beats swiping a tortilla through a dish of rajas, or poblanos with crema and cheese. HUGH MERWIN

#### THAI

#### Ayada Thai

77-08 Woodside Ave., Elmhurst The star of Queens's booming Thai-food scene has made its name with stunners like golden-fried frogs' legs draped in holy basil; salty minced pork hiding rich quarters of black (preserved) eggs; and a tantalizing tamarind-infused sour curry, bobbing with shrimp and fluffy cubes of omelette. The small dining room is elegant without feeling too formal, the service attentive and extremely pleasant.

Thailand's **Center Point** 63-19 39th Ave., Woodside Chef-owner Annie Phinphattakul's menu mixes traditional northern dishes and her own witty concections like the "egg sandwich," richly sauced chunks of stir-fried pork scattered across one shatteringly crispy fried egg and topped with another.

Sripraphai 64-13 39th Ave., WoodsideThe many-paged, multiregional menu of this Queens pioneer encourages repeat visits, each with its own rewards, from the slowburn jungle curry to the horizon-expanding crispy watercress salad.

Kitchen 79 37-70 79th St., Jackson Heights If the food of Isan. Thailand's largest and most northeastern

region, has become well-represented in New York, we could use more from the south, like Kitchen 79's gaeng tai pla—a deeply fishy, insanely fiery mackerel-based curry, teeming with curls of shrimp, tender cubes of pumpkin, and half-globes of barely crunchy Thai eggplant.

Pok Pok NY 117 Columbia St.,  $Columbia\ Street$  $Water front\, District$ Eating at Andy Ricker's Pok Pok is like taking a culinary tour of the country and its neighbors, from the Vietnamese-style (and now-iconic) fishsauce wings to the curry with pork belly and pork shoulder (a Chiang Mai classic with Burmese roots) and the Chineseinfluenced clay-pot prawns with glass noodles. Cool off with a tart drinking vinegar.

HANNAH GOLDFIELD

#### DELI

#### Katz's Delicatessen

205 E. Houston St.

For most New Yorkers, deli means pastrami, and pastrami means Katz's. This is simply a fact of life, like death and taxes. But Katz's exceptionalism is based on more than the meat. It's based on the joint's insistence on hand-slicing and the relationship it fosters between customer and cutter (tips appreciated!). It's based on the clanking, chaotic living history of the place itself—less stuck in time than beyond time, somehow. And it's based on the fine line Katz's walks between tourist trap and local treasure, where every segment of society strolls in, takes a ticket, and surrenders to the ebb and flow of the archaic ordering, seating, and payment system.

Frankel's Delicatessen & ▲ Appetizing 631 Manhattan Ave., Greenpoint It would be easy to write off this year-old deli as a hipsterinfested exploitation of a food-nostalgia trend. But the young brothers Zach and Alex Frankel take their ancestral cuisine (Zabarsian, a.k.a. Upper West Side Jewish) quite seriously. The pastrami is remarkably on point. the brisket even better.

Pastrami Queen 1125 Lexington Ave. There's lots worth ordering, but the pastrami's the thing. Request it hand-cut, which makes all the difference. So does the Orwasher's rve it's served on.

2nd Ave Deli 162 E. 33rd St. 4 102 L. . . It ain't on Second Avenue anymore, but everything is still delicious, especially chicken in the pot, which has doubtless cured colds in every neighborhood in the delivery zone.

Mile End 97A Hoyt St., Boerum Hill By doing all its own curing, smoking, baking, and more, Mile End revived a tradition that had been growing as stale as a day-old bagel. And let's not forget what may be its greatest contribution to the deli canon: smoked-meat poutine.

> ROBIN RAISFELD AND ROB PATRONITE







#### INDIAN

Indian Accent 123 W. 56th St.

At this upscale outpost of a critically acclaimed Delhi restaurant, chef Manish Mehrotra masterfully reimagines traditional recipes like the gheeroasted lamb-served with a bamboo steamer filled with roti pancakes, inspired by Peking duckand the delicate stuffed Kashmiri morels, crowned with a play on the traditional cracker known as papadum, made here with Parmesan cheese.

**Ganesh Temple** Canteen 43-09 Holly Ave., Flushing Located in the basement of a Hindi house of worship and often filled with people who have just come from prayer, this ultracasual community hub dispenses expertly prepared, extremely inexpensive South Indian vegetarian treats from fiery mirch bajji (similar to jalapeño poppers) to crisp masala dosas, which come with sides of chutney and sambar.

Moti Mahal Delux 1149 First Ave.

With over 100 locations across India, Nepal, and New Zealand, this international franchise may be formulaic, but only in the best sense of the word: The kitchen's formulas ensure vou'll eat some of the city's finest butter chicken and tandoori chicken.

Dhaba 108 Lexington Ave. Curry Hill's preeminent Indian restaurant, as you might expect, is also one of the very best in the entire city, whether it's for chefowner Hemant Mathur's greatest-hits lunch buffet, which includes a perfectly cooked piece of tandoori chicken delivered tableside, or for dinner, when the menu includes nearly 100 dishes from across Northern India, plus a whole section devoted to London-style grub.

Junoon 1149 First Ave. Like Indian Accent, Junoon, too, aims to normalize the idea of fine-dining Indian in New York-and succeeds heartily, to the point that it's earned a Michelin star-but plays it a bit safer and stuffier.

H.G.

**↑ CHINESE** 

Hao Noodle and Tea by Madam Zhu's Kitchen 401 Sixth Ave.

Sure, the name is a mouthful, but take a bite of the painstakingly constructed dan dan noodles, or Zhu Rong's wonderful "family recipe" for Chongqing tomato stew, and you'll see why we're declaring this to be the finest Chinese restaurant to arrive on our shores since the great General Tso invasion of the 1970s. Everything on the dynamic, seasonally attuned menu is good, but pay attention to the noodle, soup, and dumpling sections, which read like a carefully curated, Bourdain-style tour of the markets and noodle dens of modern China.

**Mission Chinese** 171 E. Broadway The totemic dishes (thrice-cooked bacon, Heritage-pork ma po tofu, e.g.) are still worth a special trip. but the addition of executive chef Angela Dimayuga and the move to a larger venue have raised this restaurant up into the pantheon of New York's next-generation Chinese destinations.

**Lake Pavilion** 60-15 Main St., Flushing The key to this bustling Cantonese seafood palace is demand, which leads to freshness, which leads to an endless array of variety. Up to five kinds of crab are available, depending on the season, but if you happen to have \$60 in your pocket, try the

Dungeness monsters, which arrive direct from the chilly waters of Alaska.

**Little Pepper** 18-24 College Point Blvd.,  $College\ Point$ The cooking at this deceptively sophisticated little destination is a blessed relief from the overoiled, overspiced, one-note Sichuan menus that have been proliferating lately all over this Sichuan-mad town.

**Fung Tu** 22 Orchard St. The term Chinese fusion used to be a joke in grand dining circles, but thanks to the creations of a new generation of practitioners like Jonathan Wu, nobody's laughing anymore.

#### **↑ SOUTHERN**

Pies-n-Thighs

166 S. 4th St., Williamsburg

The menu's big and it's virtually all good: the hot-sauce-coated, honey-butter-sweetened chicken biscuit, which is the stuff of hangover legend; the sweet apple pie with a slice of Cheddar; the unstoppable rich cheese grits. Even the green stuff is great. The Big Salad counters the chicken skin you'll be licking off your fingers with avocado, carrot, and sprouts, though the real stars are the dressings-ask for the cilantro-lime vinaigrette and buttermilk ranch to be mixedand the accompanying side of fantastic, addictive buttered anadama toast.

**Bobwhite Lunch and** Supper Counter

94 Ave. C. In a laid-back setting, devour terrific crisp-fried-chicken sandwiches; tangy collard greens; and rich, al dente mac and cheese. That last is a real accomplishment: There are too many goopy messes being served around town.

SpaHa Soul 2294 Second Ave. Come by for brunch (and BYOB), order everything on the chalkboard menu, and wait for the parade of updated soul-food hits to begin. Many are influenced by the chef's years spent cooking in Mexico: Corn bread is made with masa. and creamy, smooth, buttery grits are topped with a poblano sauce.

Peaches HotHouse Hotmouse 415 Tompkins Ave., Bedford-Stuyvesant Of the great Peaches family, HotHouse is especially nice. Start with the regular hot ("extra hot" is insane) chicken dinner: three pieces of bird atop white bread that will turn red from the cayenne dusted on the crispy chicken skin, plus pickles, corn bread, and a side.

The Commodore 366 Metropolitan Ave., Williamsburg Brooklyn's arresteddevelopment set's favorite destination for eating divey fried chicken, quesocovered nachos, and poblano-spiced "adult" grilled cheese while guzzling Pacifico.

> MARY JANE WEEDMAN







#### **↑ STEAKHOUSE**

Porter House Bar and Grill

10 Columbus Cir. ■ There are more atmospheric steakhouses, and certain kitchens arguably produce better specific cuts of cow. But all things considered-first-class service, opulent side dishes, grand wines, traditional and trendy cuts of beef-Michael Lomonaco's Columbus Circle restaurant remains the gold standard for the postmillennial, chef-driven, fat-cat New York steakhouse. If you have the resources, fight for a table by the window and call for a towering stack of buttermilk onion rings and the double-cut côte de boeuf, which arrives on a silver salver with a pot of red-wine sauce mingled with fatty bits of bone marrow.

#### Sparks Steak House

△ 210 E. 46th St. The \$55 prime sirloin at this venerable midtown joint is the best single cut of beef in the city. Order it at the bar before the dinner rush, watching the first pitches of the Yankees game, and you'll feel the beefeater ghosts of the city, from Paulie Castellano to Diamond Jim Brady himself, rising up all around you.

**Bowery Meat** Company 9 E. 1st St. Josh Capon's downtown establishment offers something for everyone, including "zucchini carpaccio" for vegetarians and one of the city's best cheeseburgers. But the specialties of the house remain the expertly

prepared steaks, which in variety, quality and, yes, even price are hard to beat.

Steakhouse 72 W. 36 St. No chophouse in the city exudes a more pleasingly funky sense of old-fashioned

Keens

charm. With apologies to mutton-chop lovers, the dish to get is the "King's Cut" rib chop.

St. Anselm 355 Metropolitan d Ave., Williamsburg "Grass-fed" is not a phrase you often hear echoing through the dining halls of ye olde steak joints around town, but the fine grass-fed strip at this next-wave Williamsburg restaurant stands on its own.

A.P.

#### ↑ VIETNAMESE

#### Hanoi House

119 St. Marks Pl. Vietnamese-American chef John Nguyen has parlayed his fine-dining experience into something new: Frogs' legs in a tempuralike batter are served steaming with pickled chiles and crushed peanuts. Emulsified brown butter and fish sauce commingle at the base of a sautéed-morning-glory side dish with capers, while oxtail and marrow bones infuse with brisket in shimmering pho broth. It's the kind of place that inspires multiple visits because you want to know how it'll evolve.

Madame Vo 212 E. 10th St. Motown plays at this ambitious new spot, where brisket steeps 24 hours in pho stock, amplifying the bonebrothiness, and specials include bún riêu, a hard-to-find tomatobased soup laden with minced pork and crab.

Bunker 99 Scott Ave., BushwickThe new digs are equal parts postapocalyptic skate park and Pee-wee's Playhouse, but the bánh xèo are as crisp as ever. New Brooklyn alert: The mushrooms for the havarti bánh mì are cultivated at a fungi start-up next door.

**District Saigon** . 37-15 Broadway, Astoria Plump, betel-leafwrapped torpedoes of ground lamb are

mounted on skewers over a fussy thatch of plant matter, while soytoned wings come with taro fries. The woodand-herb-smokedbrisket pho plays it the most traditional.

Nightingale 9  $329\,Smith\,St.,$ Carroll Gardens Gowanus-greenhouse basil and rounds of 'nduja, the soft, spreadable Calabrese sausage, may seem like awfully odd pairings for fresh rice noodles and the pork shoulder that chef Rob Newton crisps in lard for his "very loose" interpretation of bún bò hue. Some might label his cooking fusion, but the chef's attention to detail and passion for the cuisine

translate into true

flavors that imbue

the entire menu.

H.M.

#### ↑ ITALIAN

**I Sodi** 

105 Christopher St.

Unlike a bastion of French haute cuisine or an upmarket sushi den, the best Italian restaurant, by our estimation, must be a neighborhood joint, a place you can roll into with minimal forethought and grab a seat at the bar, order some well-sourced salumi and cheese or a perfect plate of pasta, and let the worries of the day dissipate with a bracingly bitter negroni. You can do all these things at Rita Sodi's sleek, unfussy paean to the food she grew up eating in Tuscany: simple salads blanketed with cheese, seasonal specials like chestnut tortelli, pancettawrapped rabbit, and destination lasagna. The drinks and service are spot-on, the mood jovial but civilized. There's nowhere better to become a regular.

Carbone 181 Thompson St. Of course, if it's spectacle you want, here's where to find it. This scripted homage to Italian-American dining is pricey and dripping with shtick but also undeniably fun and delicious-especially the tableside Caesar, the angel hair AOP, and a limited-supply lasagna sold by the \$85 pan that could feed an entire crew of Gambinos.

**Del Posto** 85 Tenth Ave. Del Posto demonstrates what Italian fine dining can and should be: stylish and sophisticated, elegant but unstodgy, and devoted to updating and refining traditional

flavors and recipes for modern palates.

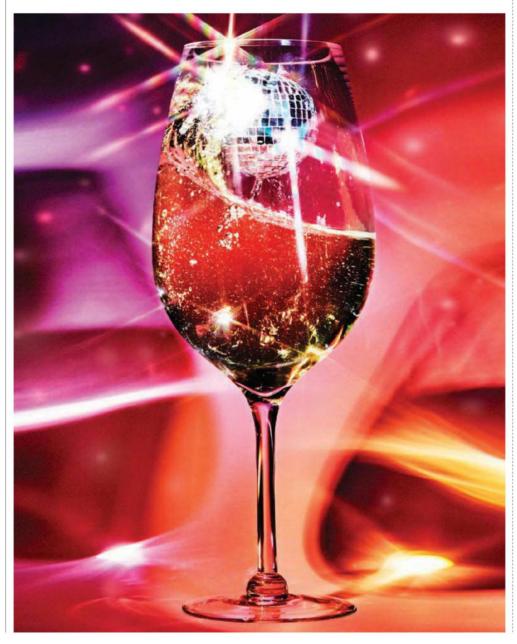
Marea 240 Central Park S. When all is said and done, you judge an Italian restaurant on the strength of its pasta, and based on the merits of its fusilli with braised octopus and bone marrow alone, Marea earns a place on this list.

Lilia 567 Union Ave., Williamsburg Nothing comes between fine-dining fugitive Missy Robbins and her pasta extruder, the tool responsible for such al dente triumphs as ruffly mafaldini with pink peppercorns and big fat commas of rigatoni diavola.

R.R. & R.P

# fun

GROWN-UP DANCING, ELVIS IMPERSONATORS, FANCY FERNET.



#### Winter Mini-Golf

SHIPWRECKED MINIATURE GOLF

621 Court St., Red Hook; 718-852-4653

During warmer months, the city has so many outdoor putt-putt places you'd think you're in the burbs. But come rain or winter, there's only one game in town: Shipwrecked, the city's sole indoor mini-golf spot for all ages. Opened last April by a pair of theaterdesigner pals renowned for their over-the-top holiday light shows in South Slope, this 18-hole course is nestled on the second floor of an old warehouse and features a campy pirate story line that takes players through four exquisitely crafted rooms, including a luminescent  $underwater\, wonderland\, and\, a\, snazzy$ subway car. Weekends attract the family crowd, while evenings host lots of date nights. Once its beer-andwine license is approved, it's sure to be even more fun for grown-ups.

#### Gluten-Free **Brewery**

DEPARTED SOLES

150 Bay St., Ste. 2A, Jersey City 201-479-8578

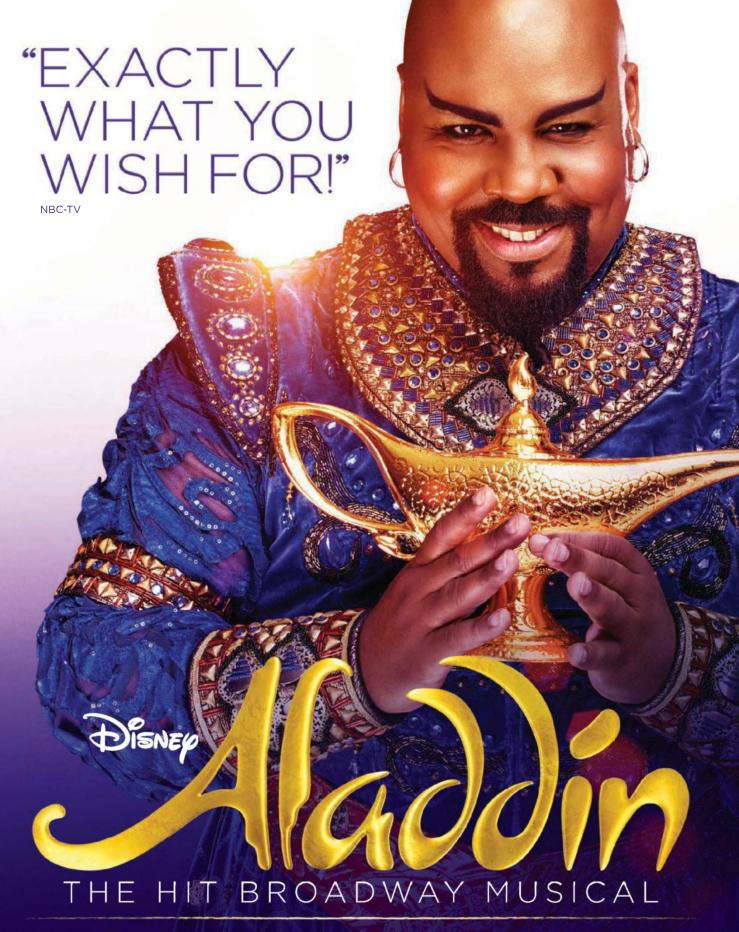
Located just off the Grove Street PATH station, Departed Soles is the only gluten-free brewery in the tristate area. And while most wheatless suds taste like watery runoff, Brian Kulbacki's IPAs are deliciously light on the tongue with a fragrant and floral aftertaste thanks to a healthy steeping of aroma hops like ahtanum, centennial, and cascade. The eclectic space-think graffiti-tagged walls adorned with old sneakers and MLS jerseys—is often filled with recent city transplants and those grabbing a drink before dinner on Newark Avenue's restaurant row. Note: The brewery serves gluten-full beers as well and shares a space with a gelato shop.

#### Bar for 27-Year-Olds

JUPITER DISCO

1237 Flushing Ave., nr. Gardner Ave., Bushwick; jupiterdisco.com

Finding the door to this bar can be challenging, but once inside, the crowd is all 27-year-olds sporting Carhartt jackets and bleached hair, bopping to thumpingly loud dance and electronic music. A bar this cool doesn't have to serve great drinks,





Little Cinema

but Jupiter Disco's are outstanding, their names flashing by on two TV screens in a green script that will remind patrons of MS-Dos font circa their parents' first computers. Try a \$3 cheese empanada paired with the super-smooth Well Deserved Punch (\$12), a rum, pineapple, lime, strawberry, and basil drink you sip through a recyclable black paper straw.

#### Dance Club for 37-Year-Olds

PAUL'S CASABLANCA

305 Spring St., at Renwick St. 212-620-5220

Because cocktails are \$20, it's a bit of an older crowd at Paul Sevigny, Brian McPeck, and Dominick D'Alleva's new spot, a more polished, Moroccan-tiled version of the old Sway space. On weekends, the dance floor in the back is full of models, art folks, and those who'd be embarrassed to buy bottle service in the Meatpacking District but aren't about to cross any bridges to Brooklyn. Thursday is only hip-hop from the '90s to the early aughts. DJs from that same period (Goldfinger, even Mark Ronson), when Lotus and Cheetah reigned supreme, can be found behind the decks the rest of the week, while Sundays feature a resuscitated Morrissey Night.

#### **Bring-the-Kids Bar** KINGS COUNTY

**BREWERS COLLECTIVE** 

381 Troutman St., nr. Wyckoff Ave., Bushwick; no phone

The post-industrial playground that is Bushwick is fast welcoming the stroller set. Which raises the question: Where to park them? Last August, the brewing triumvirate of Zack Kinney, Pete Lengyel, and Tony Bellis turned a 5,000-square-foot warehouse into a sunny expanse with floor-to-ceiling windows, handsome tiled backsplash, and plenty of space to stash a stroller army. Weekend afternoons welcome parents for whom 2 p.m. is happy hour, as they congregate over the low-slung tables and sip housemade pilsners, fruited sours, and citrusy IPAs like Dangerous Precedent.

#### **Fernet Tasting**

ARCANE **DISTILLING FERNET** 

33 35th St., nr. Second Ave., Ste. 6A, Sunset Park; 718-490-6171

From cookies to charcuterie, it's all too easy to stuff yourself silly in Industry City's food hall. Luckily, a

salve for overloaded stomachs waits in a nearby warehouse, where, after riding an elevator to the sixth floor, you'll find Arcane Distilling. It's headquartered inside an alcohol wonderland that's also home to several small-scale breweries and Industry City Distillery, which spins beet sugar into vodka. But you're really here for Dave Kyrejko's local take on fernet. His is an amaro that dials down the intense bitterness and cloying sweetness typical of the spirit, deploying 21 herbs, including gentian root, peppermint, and a rotating assortment of American and European hops. Order a shot at the bar and let the clean, bracingly minty digestif work its magic while you admire views of lower Manhattan and the Statue of Liberty.

#### Unpretentious **Cocktails**

**LION LION** 

332 E. 116th St., nr. First Ave. 917-262-0517

These days you might wait two hours for a seat at Death & Co., but a decade ago it was a place you could stop by on a whim early Saturday evenings to have terrific drinks in an attractive, transportive, peaceful space. Lion Lion feels like a throwback to that era. Coowned by a former bartender at two other of the city's cocktail temples, Attaboy and Dutch Kills, the basement space is darkly lit by red lampshades; the bar top is black granite; jazz and reggae play over the stereo. In back is a little sixstool bar, plus counter seating opposite; in front are two-seater tables, with retro-feeling, halfmoon-shaped red-and-orange banquettes. If you come at happy hour, your bill will be light-drinks like rum swizzles are only \$9.

#### Movie Theater

LITTLE CINEMA

2 Wyckoff Ave., nr. Jefferson St., Bushwick no phone

Going to the movies is an event once again, what with newcomers like Alamo Drafthouse, Syndicated, Metrograph, and BBQ Films offering food and themed parties along with (often retro) film. But perhaps the most unusual movie house of all is Little Cinema, with biweekly Tuesday screenings at the House of Yes performance space. Guests take a seat (with a lucky raffle winner watching from an honest-to-God bathtub) as classic and cult films (The Craft, The Warriors) are "remixed" with costumed musi-



#### Proud to present tomorrow's classics.

AT&T is proud to be the presenting sponsor of the 2017 Tribeca Film Festival celebrating independent film and the future of entertainment.







cians, dancers, and circus performers acting out scenes while the movie screens behind them. At a recent viewing of The Wizard of Oz, a band played the entirety of Dark Side of the Moon while flying-monkey aerialists swooped in from the ceiling. During Donnie Darko, a live bubble artist gave life to the film's CG time-travel tubes. Remarkably, the entire show is put together in under a week, SNL style. Creator Jay Rinsky has been known to scout aerialists or subway "Showtime!" dancers mere daysor even hours-before curtain call.

#### Elegant Drinks

#### WHILE WE WERE YOUNG KITCHEN & COCKTAILS

183 W. 10th St., nr. W. 4th St.; 917-675-6272

Whether you're seated at the curved white-marble bar next to a vase of pink roses, or at the counter next to floor-to-ceiling windows looking out onto West 10th, or at one of the tables abutting a tufted pale-pink mohair banquette, this attractive restaurant is an excellent spot for a couple's night out. The attention to detail is masterful: Service is friendly but professional; cocktails are shaken in gold tins or stirred with gold spoons; checks are presented along with a bag of tiny Haribo gummy bears; the bathroom has a pull-chain toilet. Even the drinks are pretty—the Too Good for You, a kale-and-cucumber margarita, is a bright shade of green. There's also a full restaurant menu including ricotta and roasted squash and vegan pappardelle.

#### Gay Party

#### BATTLE HYMN, SUNDAYS AT FLASH FACTORY

229 W. 28th St.

While other gay dance parties like Trade and M.E.A.T. are as hormone-fueled as they sound, Ladyfag's Battle Hymn is a more sceney, mixed, and frolicsome romp. Held at Flash Factory—a techno club with a religious theme, complete with stained glass and pews—the party attracts 30-ish gays in T-shirts and baseball caps, along with an occasional woman, drag queen, or celebrity. The crowd has been flooding onto the dance floor since last

spring; amid flashing lights that make the place look like the old Limelight crossed with the Starship *Enterprise*, they dance jubilantly, with arms pounding the air thanks to resident DJs Honey Dijon and the Carry Nation.

#### Playground Made of Garbage

PLAY: GROUNDNYC

40 Barry Rd., Governors Island 347-470-4238

Last summer, the city's first "adventure playground" since the '70s became a creative mecca for freerange kids to play, build, and run amok. Founded by a group of local parents looking to foster a free-play environment, the 15,000-squarefoot dirt patch overflows with wooden planks, beat-up tires, and ropes, which tykes have transformed into forts, swings, and a rustic tree house using hammers, nails, and saws all on their own. (Play workers ensure it never devolves into Lord of the Flies.) Free drop-in weekend play returns this season beginning the first Saturday in May, while the sliding-scale summer camp runs weekdays from June 26 to September 1. Unlike traditional playgrounds, which cater to tots, play:groundNYC's hands-on experience appeals to a wide range of ages. Even tweens drop the 'tude when they get to mess around with heavy-duty tools.

#### Elvis Impersonator

CITY COFFEE

77-17 37th Ave., Jackson Heights 718-639-8169

For the past six years, Elvis impersonator Gregg Peters has donned a Hawaiian lei or sequined jumpsuit to croon live renditions of the King's greatest hits at City Coffee, an unassuming diner on Jackson Heights's main drag. These semi-regular Elvis "brunches," occurring monthly on Thursday mornings or evenings and marketed guerrilla style, with a flyer in the window and maybe a listing on the Jackson Heights Beautification Group website, are put on by the Jackson Heights Men's and Women's Club, a notorious gang of octogenarians who've been congregating at the coffee shop and local restaurants for decades. With a \$5 donation to St. Jude's, everyone is welcome. Because of the median age of the participants, there's not a lot of hip-shaking going on-you'll have to look up Peters's son Lamar's "Young Elvis" show for that. But for another \$6, you can get a plate of pancakes or a hot dog to go with your "Hound Dog," and the wine is surprisingly not bad.

#### Hip-Hop Night

THE REMEDY

Highline Ballroom, 431 W. 16th St.

It's hard to find a decent hip-hop party in the city these days, especially since Webster Hall's weekly House Party closed for good last year. But up sprang the Remedy this past December, from the promoters behind House Party and the team responsible for the live-streamed underground-party phenomenon Boiler Room. At this monthly night, a DJ spins in the center of the room surrounded by a diverse crowd of young (it's all ages) music obsessives who might otherwise meet only in the Soundcloud comments section. Guest DJs like Nadus and Travis Scott's DJ Chase B have popped in for sets, and the resident act is hiphop stalwart Just Blaze. There are live performers (a rotating cast of rap's newest stars like Young M.A and Dave East), and every party has a different crew of hip-hop dancers performing onstage.

play:groundNYC



hotograph: Philipp Klaus (Playground)

Journey to the past.

## ANASTASIA

THE NEW BROADWAY MUSICAL



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Inspired by the Twentieth Century Fox Motion Pictures

DIRECTED BY

Darko Tresnjak

Broadway Previews Begin March 23

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Broadhurst Theatre, 235 West 44th Street

ANASTASIABROADWAY.COM 👓

### the absolute best bars



#### ↑ PUB

#### Swift Hibernian Lounge

34 E. 4th St., nr. Bowery; 212-260-3600 ■ It's a favorite of bartenders, in part thanks to its reliable 4 a.m. close time, even on Christmas. And invariably, when you take a place at the bar, you'll be seated next to a group like a trio of young Irish men discussing how they can't remember when they left the bar the night before. The beer list is long and varied, but what you want is a Guinness; those particular about how that stout is poured flock here.

Cronin & Phelan's 38-14 Broadway, Astoria; 718-545-8999 It's a bit like the sitcom version of a pub: an older crowd, mostly men; wives drop in occasionally to say hello or pick their charges up for dinner at home. It also serves better-thanaverage burgers.

7 Hartley's 14 Putnam Ave., nr. d Grand Ave., Clinton Hill; 347-799-2877 Those who question whether you can build a pub and quickly give it character should visit the year-old Hartley's, where a crew of locals has already settled in. Order the Mr. Hartley, made with Tullamore Dew Irish whiskey.

The Irish Rover 37-18 28th Ave., **1** Astoria; 718-278-9372 A real bargoer's bar, it's the type of place where bartenders remember your name after one visit, and the locals who frequent it are fiercely loyal. A regular might even stop in to say hi and drink a glass of water.

Duffy's Tavern 650 Forest Ave., West Brighton, Staten Island; 718-447-9276 This homey bar is filled with men who get together every Sunday to watch football and recap their weeks. (If you're curious where New York's Trump voters might be drinking, well ...) MARY JANE WEEDMAN

#### ↑ HAPPY HOUR

#### Boilermaker

 $13\,First\,Ave.,\,at\,1st\,St.;\,212-995-5400$ Happy hours in worker-heavy locations get crowded quickly; those in Brooklyn close too early for commuters. Boilermaker's location is a good compromise. Weekdays from 5 to 8 p.m., 12 fantastic cocktails like mai tais and daiquiris are \$8 each, and there are \$4 Brooklyn Lagers and \$7 wine. Plus: If you stay after 8 p.m., you can still drink \$7 beer-and-shots all night.

#### La Compagnie des Vins Surnaturels **4** 249 Centre St., nr.

Broome St.; 212-343-3660 From 5 to 7 p.m. on weekdays, dishes like za'atar-spiced chickpeas are \$5; wine is \$5 off. There are lots of seating options in the mirrorheavy room, making it good for groups.

Terroir 24 Harrison St., nr. Greenwich St.; 212-625-9463 Once upon a time, Terroir offered free sherry during happy hour. While that's no longer true, the excellent selection of wines by the glass are still several bucks off from 4 to 6 p.m. and 11 p.m. to closing daily.

169 Bar 169 E. Broadway, nr. Rutgers St.; 646-833-7199 PBR and a shot are \$3 from noon to 7:30 p.m. at this dive, which is happiest during the day, when the sun still streams through the shutters and before the 24-year-olds pile in.

Donna 27 Broadway, at **d** Dunham Pl., Williamsburg: 646-568-6622 Happy-hour specials run from 5 to 8 p.m. most weekdays and till 11 p.m. on Tuesdays, when two tacos are \$5 if you buy a drink. The Haslegrave-designed space is beautiful, and service is warm and attentive. M.I.W.

#### ↑ HOTEL BAR

#### The Library at the NoMad Hotel

1170 Broadway, at 28th St.; 212-796-1500 Is it worth including a bar that you can't really drink in at night? Yes, because of the afternoons. The Library is open only to hotel guests after 4 p.m. But before then, bar director Leo Robitschek (also behind Eleven Madison Park's liquor program) has designed a day-drinkingfriendly menu full of low-ABV options and a wine list even his other restaurant wouldn't scoff at.

#### **Lobby Barat** the Marlton Hotel

5 W. 8th St., nr. Fifth Ave.; 212-321-0100 Get here early, and the light at the end of the tunnel-shaped bar is literally the sunset. Of course, that's not the only draw: The cocktail list is full of imaginative upgrades of your favorite drinks.

#### Westlightat the William Vale Hotel

111 N. 12th St., at Wythe Ave.; 718-307-7100 With a cocktail program designed by Anne Robinson, the NASA-sleek penthouse offers lesser-known classics (like a Tuxedo #2), originals (try the In Good Company), and excellent views.

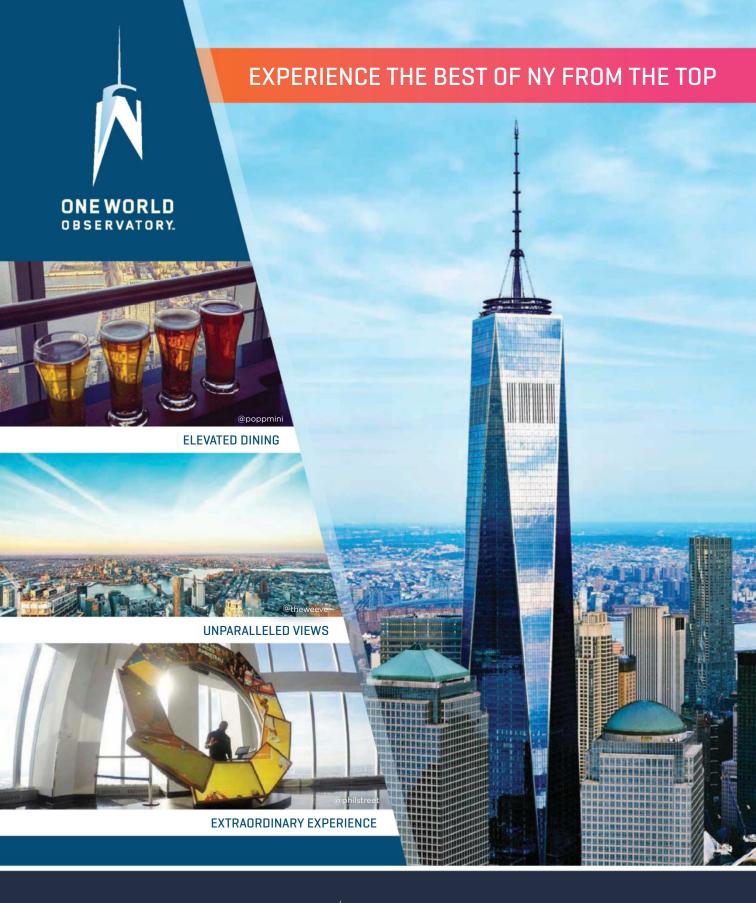
#### The Bar Room at the Beekman **I** Hotel

 $5\,Beekman\,St., nr.$ Nassau St.; 212-233-2300 The grand lobby bar is bracketed by Fowler & Wells (with which it shares a staff) and Augustine. But even with neighbors like that, the lobby is the hotel's best spot for drinking.

#### **Bemelmans** Bar at the Carlyle Hotel

35 E. 76th St.: 212-744-1600 The martinis and Manhattans sent out into this iconic piano bar, sparkling under the gold-leaf ceiling, are as well made as a room like this deserves.

MARK BYRNE



















Located at the top of One World Trade Center at the corner of West St and Vesey St







# shopping

HEFTY SWEATPANTS, ALT MARIMEKKO, BRONX COUTURE.



#### Restaurant **Plates**

#### NOBLE PLATEWARE

87 19th St., nr. Third Ave., Gowanus 347-683-8781

Ceramicist Wynne Noble makes much of the understated dinnerware vou see at Contra, Momofuku Ko, and Gramercy Tavern, among other restaurants. She's been honing her craft for decades, rolling and pinching clay slabs (as opposed to throwing on a wheel) into organic shapes with natural textures and colors. Her wide, shallow Sapphire bowls (\$11 to \$31) are glazed in their namesake hue; roughly textured taco holders (\$35 for a set of two) mimic the curvy shape of the food they're intended for. After years in Dumbo, Noble recently relocated her studio to a larger space in industrial Gowanus, which is open to the public by appointment and for the occasional walk-in. It's probably not the kind of place you'd wander into by accident, but if you plan for it, Noble will show you around her working studio space and set you up with a new set of plates, bowls, or tiny handcrafted sauce vessels at retail prices from \$10 and up.

#### Cool **Jewelry**

#### **QUIET STORMS**

142 Grand St., nr. Berry St., Williamsburg 718-782-1547

Sleek collar necklaces, earrings in the shape of fried egg whites, evil eyes galore: The selection at Quiet Storms is of the subtly outré sort you might find in the jewelry department of Dover Street Market or Barneys. But here, you're tucked away among mostly Brooklyn locals and unpretentious salespeople. The average piece of jewelry (say, one of J. Hannah's gold signet rings) is between \$400 and \$800, and there are much pricier things, too—like Jemma Wayne's emerald-and-pavédiamond ear climbers (\$5,000). But there's also a selection in the \$100 range, including an extra-tiny single-hoop earring by Maria Tash.

#### Menswear Store

#### **TODD SNYDER**

25 E. 26th St., nr. Madison Ave. 917-242-3482

Todd Snyder is the former head of menswear at J.Crew, so it makes sense that his own line has nearly the LET YOUR FANTASIES UNWIND

F THE OPERA

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Margaux

same breadth. Offerings at his new flagship store, on the northern edge of Madison Square Park, include everything from soft T-shirts (from \$50) and hefty sweatpants (from \$118) to a full line of suits and even tuxedos (from \$595). Plus Snyder has brought in his friends and chosen them well: the Moscot wall in back, the forthcoming El Rev outpost near the front, the Aesop grooming products and the vintage watches from Hodinkee. And if none of them wins you over, the bathroom in back-a rarity in retail-may just save your day anyway.

#### Custom Ballet Flats

MARGAUX

37 W. 20th St., nr. Sixth Ave., Ste. 1206 347-855-4803

It might seem like a lot to spend \$275 on a pair of ballet flats that aren't Manolo Blahnik, but in this case—a line started by two former Harvard roommates and housed discreetly upstairs in a prewar Flatiron office building—the Manoloquality Italian suede is crafted

specifically for your feet. An obsessive customization process, turned around within just two weeks, involves a series of eight measurements along with notes about ankle width, foot volume, and bunions; you also get to choose from a rainbow of suede and leather shades—tangerine and lemon, pale gray and cream. The brand's signature shape keeps toe cleavage to a minimum, with a just-round-enough front that's both elegant and supportive. Ready-made options are also available, for \$185.

#### Analog Toy Store

**GEOMETRY KIDS** 

48 Grand St., nr. Kent St., Williamsburg 718-388-4480

Don't expect to pick up the latest Hatchimal behind the blush-pink door of this classic toy store. You're more likely to find attractive non-electric toys and clothing curated with a designer's eye—the store's owners include an architect and the woman behind the culty flower shop

Sprout Home—like beechwood toy Broncos (from \$25), framed art prints (\$175), and Collégien slippers decorated with clouds (\$32), all displayed between neon fried eggs and cacti lamps that dot the walls. And if you want to encourage your kid to go completely off the grid, there's even a working typewriter on display from the set of *Girls* (not for sale).

#### Fancy Dog Store

MAX-BONE

21 Crosby St., nr. Grand St. 646-484-5846

Nearly hidden among all the design stores is the chic-est pet store in New York. It's but a small box of a shop with just one big ceiling-grazing plant for decoration. The light-wood floating shelves hold poop bags (\$12) and knit jumpers (\$55), and doggy toys are arranged in piles on the floor. While the space looks more like the perfume shop down the block than a pet store—it probably smells like that perfume store, too, thanks to the Byredo candle by the register-the staff is obsessive about pampering dogs, whether it's by dressing them in the latest sailingrope leashes (\$85) or setting them up with a two-tone teepee (\$220).

#### General Store

**REGULAR VISITORS** 

149 Smith St., nr. Bergen St., Boerum Hill 646-766-0484

Situated on a bustling corner in Boerum Hill and brimming with

Odeme candles, copies of The Gentlewoman, and kombucha on tap, Regular Visitors isn't the first brand to try to Brooklynize the old-school general store. But while you might find yourself dropping \$350 for a throw blanket at the more upscale versions of this trope, the selection here tends to be more reasonably priced: a handsome leather-band watch for \$43, a Minor History leather tote for \$185. And even though the pastry offerings admittedly aren't the thing here, you can grab a croissant and coffee, pull up a seat at the marble countertop that looks out onto Smith Street, and people-watch for as long as you want.

#### Marimekko Alternative

SAMUJI

12 Prince St., nr. Elizabeth St. 646-495-6549

Imagine you're looking at a Marimekko print through a wabi-sabi lens, and you have Samuji, another quintessentially Scandinavian (though much more muted and slightly more splurgy) brand from former Marimekko creative director Samu-Jussi Koski. The spacesoft tones and birch wood and smoked glass—is a fitting backdrop for clothes like accordion-pleated pants (\$390), slouchy canteloupecolored wrap coats (\$590), and summer-weight knit dresses in speckled olive (\$790). Same goes for Samuji's Koti (the Finnish word for "home") line of décor, which includes mouth-blown-glass watering bulbs (\$65), burled-wood bowls (from \$240), and indigo-dyed Japanese linens and Finnish fabrics available by the yard (from \$29).

 $Owner Jerome \, LaMaar \, at \, 9J$ 



OTOGRAPHS: COLIRTESY OF THE VENI



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and a story you'll
never forget.

Stephen Sondheim Theatre 124 West 43rd Street
BeautifulOnBroadway.com





Pintrill

#### Pin Store

231 Grand St., nr. Driggs Ave., Williamsburg 718-782-1000

Pintrill has made a success story out of the pin store. The shop's founder, Jordan Roschwalb, takes inspiration from Supreme and similar streetwear shops by making limitededition runs of pins, including an enamel pair of Yeezys (\$15). Hundreds of pins stick out of clear acrylic holders along the all-white walls: mini-bottles of Sunny D (\$35); Alpha Industries collaboration packs (\$38); and a caseful of rare finds from around the world, such as a ten-year-old Mr. Met bobblehead (\$40) and a Keith Haring Radiant Baby from Japan (\$99). Sit back and look through them all from the comfort of a worn-in chesterfield couch.

#### **Bronx Boutique**

41 Bruckner Blvd., the Bronx 646-770-7187

Owner Jerome LaMaar calls it a "gallotique." The store mixes LaMaar's custom pieces-like a recent run of nine oversize denim jackets embroidered with Swarovski crystals (price upon request) and denim lab coats (\$200)—plus unusual brands that match LaMaar's flashy sensibility (see the \$300 hand-embroidered tunics by Ukrainian brand Foberini). Couture clients have included Beyoncé and Hailey Baldwin; Tina Knowles and Michele Lamy have even made it to the Bronx to shop in person.

#### Designer **Boutique**

VIVIENNE WESTWOOD

14 E. 55th St., nr. Madison Ave. 917-893-3556

How to translate Vivienne Westwood's British punk sensibility to Midtown East? It starts with small touches throughout the three floors of Westwood's first New York store in a decade: penis whistle key rings (\$325), for example, are hidden among luxurious leather gloves (\$370) and wallets (from \$150). There's also the at-first-unassuming metal racks, which actually have hooves, the UFO-print carpet topping a quiet beige floor, and, of course, the clothes: from men's cow jackets (\$4,460) on the basement level to women's squiggle-printed oxford trousers (\$1,110) up top.

#### Upscale Head Shop

VILLAGE GRANNIES 346 E. 9th St., nr. First Ave.

212-254-1555

Cast aside all your typical sketchy associations with the East Village head shop. Helmed by two delightful women of a certain age, Village Grannies is all reclaimed-wood displays and hand pipes dangling from the ceiling. The prices are slightly higher than your standard smoke shop (\$5 to \$12 for one-hitters; \$50 to \$150 for glass bongs), but the goods are of superior qualityamong the standouts is a one-of-akind glass giraffe water pipe-and all made in the USA.

#### Regular Sunglasses

ATELIER MIRA

224 Grand St., nr. Driggs Ave., Williamsburg 718-747-8844

In a year of wild sunglasses-the far-out Korean brand Gentle Monster, the futuristic Barton Perreira, and the groovy Garrett Leight all debuted New York shops—Atelier Mira stands out for its wearability. The just-cool-enough glasses and sunglasses range from Frenchmade La Petite Lunette Rouge metal frames inspired by Kraftwerk (\$315) to Toronto-made Rapp frames in acetate and titanium formed in unusual circle-square shapes (\$545). Beyond the frames, the spacious shop features Isaac Reina leather goods and of-themoment Memphis home-décor pieces, including squash ashtrays by Maria Sanchez (\$240).

#### Gift Shop

**AHA FRONT** 

147 Front St., nr. Jay St., second fl., Dumbo 646-454-1110

Shauna Mei thought New York needed a store like Paris's Colette and Milan's 10 Corso Como. So she brought her e-commerce juggernaut AHAlife, a place that curates goods from more than 2,500 artisans worldwide, to a physical space. To accommodate all the gold-beaker candles from Melbourne (\$59), marble Apple Watch charging docks made in Las Vegas (\$120), and powder-coated-steel Jaeho tables handcrafted in Chicago (\$780), the merchandise constantly rotates. Each piece sits next to a card noting its maker and origin. And for the perfect housewarming gift, friends of the brand like Fern Mallis and Bradford Shellhammer have labeled picks throughout the store.





# HEALTH

My motto? Don't age gracefully, age ferociously.

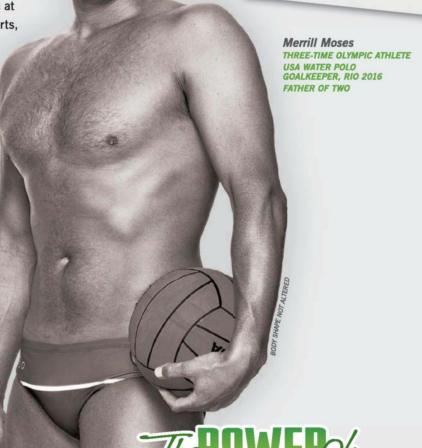
Rejoining the USA Men's Water Polo team was a bold decision for an athlete pushing forty. To compete at Rio in one of the world's toughest endurance sports, I knew I would have to train harder, eat smarter, and be more prepared than ever before.

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# health &self

BROW TATS, IMAX WORKOUTS, THE DRYBAR OF HAIR COLOR.

#### **Niche Asian Beauty**

**UME COSME** 

318 E. 9th St., nr. Second Ave. 646-964-4348

There's no shortage of sprawling Asian beauty emporiums in K-Town and Flushing (Tonymoly, Besfren Beauty), but relatively few in this part of town. And what Ume Cosme lacks in square footage it makes up for in curation, packing a surprisingly large array of high-quality brands onto its petite shelves: Skin Prestige Crème d'Escargot anti-aging snail creams (\$60), Creamy Cleansing Foam from Japanese luxury line the Ginza (\$90), and long-lasting Missha lip tints (\$12), among countless other brightly packaged delights. The staff can be hit-ormiss, alternating between chatty and monosyllabic, but most of the products have English translations on the labels if you're having a tough time figuring out which peel-off face mask is right for you.

#### Color Touch-ups

MADISON REED COLOR BAR

7 W. 19th St., at Fifth Ave. 646-682-9432

Essentially, this unpretentious salon is the Drybar of hair color: It offers services that are fast, unfussy, and cheaper than you'd expect. The most popular option, a root touch-up, is \$45 for 45 minutes; glosses or blowouts are offered as add-ons. Though it's not the place for a drastic change of color or a complicated service like balayage, clients keep coming back to tide themselves over between appointments at their regular salon, often after a class at SoulCycle across the street or one of the other fitness studios nearby. (After work is also a busy time here: Four nights a week, Madison Reed stays open until 9 p.m.) The offshoot of a beauty brand that specializes in dyed hair, the salon also sells a range of products to use at home.

#### **High-Intensity Interval Training**

**HIIT BOX** 

527 Carroll St., nr. Fourth Ave., Gowanus 917-937-6777

Students spend only half a minute to a minute on each move in Maryam Zadeh's 30-to-50-minute classes. ("You can do anything for 30 seconds," she says.) Her fastpaced sequences, which cover both cardio and strength and are set to top 40 hits, zip by, thanks largely to her motivational skills (she's like that one high-school sports coach who rode you hard but made you feel great about yourself). Perhaps best of all, the size of the single-location studio ensures that classes are capped at five people. This means personal-traininglevel attention at prices on a par with the city's bigger-box highintensity, barre, and boot-campstyle classes (about \$30, depending on how many you buy at once)-without any of the branded merchandise or culty jargon.

#### Two-Chair **Barbershop**

**SPOSITO** 

61 Greenpoint Ave., nr. Franklin St., Ste. 115, Greenpoint; 917-502-8324

Once you find this three-month-old barbershop, down a warren of hallways on the ground floor of Greenpoint's Pencil Factory, you're welcomed by what the kids call "chill vibes"-natural light, neon sign, looming cacti, a mid-century lounge area that looks like Palm Springs, and not a cashier or computer in sight. Your barber will be Mike Sposito or his pal Kevin Baker, both of whom logged time at bustling shops like Freemans and Fellow Barber before transitioning to house calls for GQ editors and then a storefront. They draw PR dudes and North Brooklyn line cooks with the kind of shaggy, boyish, not-too-done clipper cuts (\$50) that Adam Levine would never request. Another plus, Sposito takes on-the-hour appointments online, every day from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m.



#### Witchy Wonderland

THE ALCHEMIST'S KITCHEN

21 E. 1st St., at Second Ave. 212-925-1267

To meet all your holistic needs in this ever-more New Age-y age, you might spend the day bouncing from Maha Rose for a healing crystal to Enchantments for some intentionbased incense to Higher Dose for a hit of the infrared sauna. Or you could get all this (plus vegan snacks in the first-floor café) at the sprawling Alchemist's Kitchen. The main floor has dozens of herbal medicines like He Shou Wu, a longevityand-circulation tonic (\$55), and botanical bath and beauty products like Monk Oil City Skin potion (\$24). The shop also leases space to several independent wellness providers: infrared saunas run by Higher Dose (\$45-\$65), 15-minute cryo-facials from the Cryosphere (\$85), NutriDrip IV hangover relief (\$100 to \$250), energy-restoring reiki (\$120), and Theraphi, a hardto-find electromagnetic-wave treatment inspired by the work of Nikola Tesla (\$60).



**PIRET AAVA** 

59 Franklin St., nr. Broadway, Ste. 206 646-847-9070

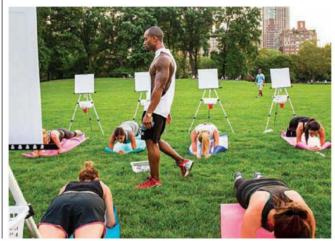
For those who suffer from sparse or patchy brows-whether from overplucking as a '90s teen, a wax gone awry, an autoimmune disease, or even chemo-Piret Aava (or "the



**IMAXShift** 

Eyebrow Doctor," as she's known on Instagram) has the cure. To achieve this semi-permanent version of an actual tattoo, Aava-who did waxing and plucking at Warren Tricomi before social media convinced her she needed to get in on the makeuptattoo game-starts by drawing in your brow shape so you can see how the ink is going to look. Then she uses a tiny blade to deposit pigment under the skin that looks virtually indistinguishable from actual hair. This part hurts a little more than a wax, and the price is a whopping \$1,200, but the results are truly remarkable (check out @eyebrowdoctor on Instagram for proof) and last for as long as three years. Plus, you can throw away all your fill-in pencils, powders, and gels that never quite did the job anyway.

Hiip Hype



#### **Fancy Organic** Skin Care

CREDO

9 Prince St., nr. Elizabeth St. 917-675-6041

Though the offerings are strictly focused on "clean" beauty and skin care-made with ingredients that are all natural and often organic-the vibe at Credo is more glamorous than granola. More than 100 lines are laid out in a gleaming, intimate space beyond the turquoise-painted exterior: well-known brands like Tata Harper (her Resurfacing Mask goes for \$58) and RMS (whose two salient mascaras are \$28 a tube) to discoveries like Beuti Skincare, a reported favorite of Kate Middleton's that only Credo carries in America.

#### **High-Intensity Interval Painting**

HIIP HYPE

12 St. Marks Pl., nr. Third Ave.  $no\ phone$ 

Sayco Williams was working as a trainer at New York Sports Club, but his clients kept telling him they hated exercising there. His solution: mixing fitness with one of his favorite hobbies in a hybrid called High-Intensity Interval Painting (\$30). Each 75-minute class includes 30 minutes of painting; for every minute of pushups, planks, and scissor kicks, there's one minute of painting on a canvas. The class ends with a 15-minute showcase where everyone presents their work to the class and explains both what ended up on their canvas and what they had meant to create. Williams provides all the materials: canvas, paintbrushes, acrylic paint, and yoga mats, to be used outside when it's warm or in a studio space during the winter.

#### Spinning With a View

**IMAXSHIFT** 

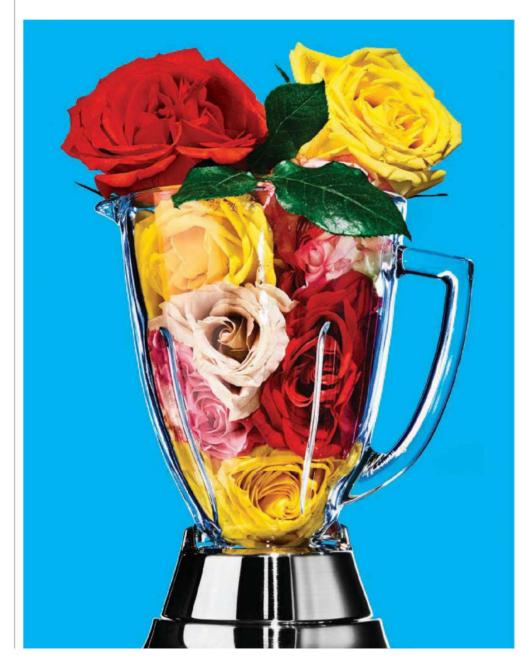
127 Plymouth St., nr. Pearl St., Dumbo 718-858-1200

The thing about spinning-and working out in New York's small quarters in general—is the unpleasantness of having to stare at the sweaty back of the person in front of vou. IMAXShift solves that problem with a 40-foot-wide IMAX screen and four tiered rows of 50 bikes. When the music starts, so does the movie, rotating through a series of scenes with each song. A recent Monday-morning class (\$34) started by looking out over a beach; then the beat dropped, and the cyclers got a first-person view of riding through the ocean as if on a Jet Ski. From there it was on to a Drake music video (there are entire classes dedicated to music videos), a romp through distant space, a visit to Rome, and a ride up and down a roller coaster the instructor called the hyperdrive.



### home & help

LONG-LASTING DAHLIAS, BESPOKE LAMPSHADES, A CHEESECAKE ENGRAVER.



#### Dog-Food **Delivery**

THE FARMER'S DOG

the farmers dog.com

It's like Blue Apron, but for spoiled pups: You fill out an online form with your canine's age, size, actual weight, ideal weight, and activity level, and you're sent, from a kitchen in Westchester, a box every three weeks full of pouches of custom-made, puréed, "human-grade" food. It basically looks like hash—heat it up and crack an egg on it and you might be tempted to serve it to your people friends for brunch. The box comes with chicken, beef, and turkey pouches, so the dog gets to switch it up and won't get bored with the same-old-sameold. It's not cheap—prices start at \$20 a week. But one staffer with a finicky older dog who was getting both fat and listless swears by the service: Now the pooch is excited again to eat-and far more energetic.

#### Home-Appliance Hub

DIDCH

200 Lafayette St., at Broome St. 212-951-0696

Pirch feels like an art gallery when you walk in, a spotless space lined with futuristic ovens and stoves. But what sets it apart from every other home store is that everything here is interactive, meaning you can cook a meal in a carbon-fiber oven; book an appointment to take an aromatherapy shower in the Sanctuary, a spa in the basement featuring 38 showerheads, including the Perrin & Rowe Georgian Era Pressure Balance model (from \$2,000); or make Neopolitan-style pizzas in a five-foot stone hearth oven by Wood Stone (\$16,000), guided by a professional chef. Before you leave, head to the Pirch lavatory, where you can testdrive a Kohler toilet with seat heating and a built-in bidet (\$4,500).

#### Gallery-Quality Framer

154 Montague St., nr. Clinton St., Brooklyn Heights; 718-643-0229

Owner Muhsin Kenis is the go-to framer for BAM (those vintage movie ads are his handiwork) and the Brooklyn Historical Society, but he treats regular-people projects with just as much care. That means he'll patiently spend a half-hour with you



pondering a rainbow of frame colors for a cat painting by your 6-year-old niece (and remember your name and hers when you pick it up). Kenis has a wide array of frames—he estimates he has around 1,200 moldings with prices starting at \$9 per foot and going up to \$90, and he'll happily work within your chosen budget (a simple black wood frame and matte for an 81/2-by-11-inch print runs about \$85). Turnaround time is typically two weeks, but if you need something sooner, Kenis can usually oblige at no extra charge.

#### **Affordable** Jewelry Repair

**KATHE JEWELRY** 

226 First Ave., nr. 14th St. 212-475-2986

For more than 30 years, behind an unassuming East Village storefront. Ecuadoran-born Jonas Rueda has been repairing, crafting, and selling a wonderfully motley array of jewelry. What doesn't seem to have changed much in the past three decades are the prices: Traditional repair services like ring-sizing, stone-setting, chainsoldering, and necklace-restringing all start at \$10 (prices will vary depending on material and amount of workmanship needed) and can usually be completed within 24 hours, often sooner. Both custom work and remakes are also on offer. so you can bring in a picture of Grandma's old silver ring that you weren't bequeathed and he will whip up a new version for you (\$50).

#### Monogrammer EMBROIDERY PLACE

222 W. 30th St., nr. Seventh Ave. 212-244-4672

Located in an unmarked building on a warrenlike floor of garment businesses, Embroidery Place is a small room crammed with industrial sewing equipment. Steven Cottman (a.k.a. "Stix"), the proprietor, greets customers at his wedged-in desk and is happy to tour you through his myriad threads and fonts as he helps design your monogrammed velour sweatsuit, his-and-hers robe set, or Chuck Taylors. The affordable work (about \$15 for a basic stitched monogram) is expertly and efficiently finished-usually in less than a weekcompared to online services that offer shoddy laser-printing and bulkonly orders. And if you've got a crest, logo, or portrait in mind, he'll even create customized patches (he does a particularly strong Barack Obama).

#### Engraver

**IRON & GLORY** 

44 Stewart Ave., nr. Harrison Pl., Bushwick 855-691-7446

Richard Brandt was working in marketing when his company bought a small engraving machine for promo purposes. He started playing with it, got more and more ambitious, and went off to start his own business. He sells ready-made dice (\$30) and combs (\$25), but it's the custom work that sets Brandt apart. He's made dominoes for Anthropologie and trinkets for Pottery Barn, but he'll also engrave custom designs, at \$60 per hour, for anyone who calls. In the past, he's drawn a painstakingly precise Gray's Anatomy anatomical heart onto a round flask (\$100) and creates specially made Ouija boards (\$40), and he'll even do food-once, he engraved a cheesecake (from \$50).

#### Dahlia Seller

**BEAR CREEK FARM** 

The Union Square Greenmarket and Rockefeller Center Greenmarket; check for days at bearcreekfarm.com

Most Greenmarket vendors sell only one kind of cut dahlia ("Café au Lait"), but Debra Kaye grows more than 80 varieties at her upstate farm in rich shades like oxblood, bronzy peach, and ombre pink. They're some of the largest, strongest flowers you'll see-her biggest measures 10 to 12 inches in diameter, which she sells for \$10 per stem (you can buy smaller varieties for \$3 or \$4). That's a splurge, but Kave has come up with a way to make her dahlias last longer than others, watering them from overhead, cutting them with long stems, and storing them at a tropical temperature, so they last a full week, and often up to two.

#### Wine Advisers

KING STREET SOMMELIERS

kingstreetsommeliers.com

Wine collecting is more than just a hobby for the fraction of the one percent who care about such things. And as with art, those people want the best advisers. That is where King Street Sommeliers plays its hand. The business was founded in 2015 by Grant Reynolds and Robert Bohrthe somms and principals behind Charlie Bird and Pasquale Jonesand Arvid Rosengren (who took top honors at the equivalent of the sommelier Olympics). Not only do these wine pros help stock your cellar with Dujac Clos St. Denis-a range of services are included in the hefty fee (get in touch for pricing). If, say, you're a hedge-fund manager throwing a 40th-birthday party at home, not only will they help you plan a menu that pairs the best Chablis with your caviar course, they'll come help uncork, decant, and pour the wine and talk about it with your guests.

#### Bespoke Lampshades

**COUTURE SHADES** 

315 E. 62nd St., nr. Second Ave., No. 2 212-753-5455

While inferior lampshade-makers will use glue and a hot iron to keep pleats in place, the seamstresses at Couture Shades wouldn't dare. Every shade is completely hand sewn, from the inner silk lining to the fringe. David Reitner (he apprenticed under his great-uncle Marvin Alexander, who worked with Jackie Kennedy on restoring the White House's collection of museum-quality lighting) started his custom business last year and has worked alongside designers like Jamie Drake to craft shades in styles from drum to Empire. Prices start at around \$350, and he'll use any fabric you bring in or will help you choose between the silk shantungs, Egyptian-cotton strings, and woven papers he carries in-store.

#### Floor Installer INNOVATIVE FLOORING

**SOLUTIONS INC.** 

innovativefsi.com 646-575-8564

Joe Crosby treats his floors with surgical precision—from shaving off a 16th of an inch of hardwood to gutting from the ground up. Jobs start around \$5,000; before moving a speck of dust, Crosby and his team spend days cutting and staining deepred mahogany or soundproofed Oshkosh oak, mimicking the eventual floor's grade, width, and color. He's even more exacting when it comes to the support system underneath, which starts with a layer of durable concrete reinforced with wood beams. And Crosby's clients are just as supportive: Decorator Matthew Smyth, for example, recently considered flying him across the pond to use him on a flooring project in Paris.

#### Well-Priced **Upholsterer**

UPHOLSTERY SERVICES

43-01 21st St., No. 207B, Long Island City 917-977-0027

Mario Villamar launched his boutique business last year and already has his hands in the much-anticipated renovation of the Woolworth Building. Whether it's hand-stitching a custom pillow (\$175) or reproducing a mid-century Robsjohn-Gibbings chaise longue from scratch (\$4,000), Villamar keeps overhead low and prices competitive, using the sales experience he acquired in his 11-year tenure at Anthony Lawrence-Belfair. While reupholstering a three-seater might run you \$3,000 in Manhattan, a sofa-surgery bill from Villamar could start at \$1,900.

#### **Art Hanger**

**D DEREK** 

dderek.com401-932-9949

For D Derek-an illustrator, painter, and printmaker-hanging pictures went from a TaskRabbit side gig to curating art in the homes of CNN anchors and working with fancy professional organizers. Charging \$50 an hour, Derek will hang just one picture above the couch or work closely with clients to create a gallery wall in the entryway. Derek studied interior design at Parsons, and he's also a certified feng shui practitioner, so he's attuned to the flow and balance in each room and ready to dispense tips, like how it's a bad idea to hang family pictures in the bedroom (it'll kill your sex life).

CONTRIBUTORS: Samuel Anderson, Joshua M. Bernstein, Leah Bhabha, Stella Bugbee, Mark Byrne, Chris Crowley, Rachel Felder, Jamie Feldmar, Hannah Goldfield, Priya Krishna, Michael Musto, John Ortved, Rob Patronite, Adam Platt, Seth Porges, Jessica Pressler, Robin Raisfeld, Hilary Reid, Lauren Schwartzberg, Raven Snook, Kurt Soller, Carl Swanson, Sierra Tishgart, Fiorella  ${\it Val de solo}, and {\it Mary Jane Weedman}.$ 



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David Rooney, The Hollywood Reporter

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Christopher Kelly, The Star-Ledger



Are you ready to wake up?



ACHEL CUSK IS TALL. She does not take milk. She does not play card games, possibly because she associates them with her childhood, about which she feels ambivalent. She taught writing for nearly a decade and then quit. She believes fate is a female system of self-deception. She does not understand computers. She likes chess because it involves two people and thus resembles sex or war. She has never written a book without a dog in it; in real life, she is allergic to dogs. She hasn't spoken to her parents in two years. She believes satire promotes political powerlessness; "Once you laugh," she says, "it's over." She sees writing as a job. She is attracted to situations where it's hard to agree on a common version of events. She does not care what happens to her in the future. She's always earned the money in her household. She does not make small talk, but she does, for long stretches, talk. She wears all blackish. She is six days from turning 50. She desires a muffin.

Cusk is the author of three memoirs and nine novels, most recently *Transit*, which came out in January to rapturous reviews. It is the second in a planned trilogy that has, along with her memoirs, made her a cultish figure. She writes about motherhood and marriage and houses. In the hands of a different writer, these might be neutral topics. Neutral love in neutral boxes. Cusk is not neutral. She is divisive. Readers love her or readers really do not love her. She, Cusk, the human being, is often hated.

She lives in London with her two teenage children and her second husband. (She was born in Canada and has lived in the United Kingdom since the 1970s.) In early February, when she was visiting New York, I invited her to my work studio. Last year, Cusk published an essay called "Making House: Notes on Domesticity"; she was

both commended and criticized for statements like "Entering a house, I often feel that I am entering a woman's body."

I thought—in addition to interviewing her—that I might observe her in the act of observing my woman's body.

I did not observe her observing much, however, at least not in any way that was observable to me. She was formal. She was contained. She was nearing the end of her U.S. book tour; between coastal commitments, she'd flown down to Baja, where she'd seen whales, though it was the sounds they made, and the color of the light and the water, that most impressed her.

We talked about author photos and the act of putting one's face on a book. "I hate having an author's face when I'm reading a book," she said. "I want to forget about them, you know." Still, we agreed, it was

such a skill to be photographed; it was a self-representational riddle to navigate. Cusk said, "I cannot bear having my photograph taken, and I always think that I won't be in it."

We marveled at people who evaded capture by photography. Sylvia Plath, for example; no matter how many images existed, she remained impossible to *see*. Cusk mentioned meeting Plath's daughter once; the daughter, like her mother, she wagered, would be too "protean" to photograph. "Tall and like a big, healthy tree in the sun," she said of Plath's daughter. "With this sort of amazing smile and madness, madness, absolutely."

EARLY IN HER CAREER, Cusk was not especially controversial. She published three novels influenced by Evelyn Waugh. These books were deemed witty and clever. She won awards and gained notice.

Then, after the birth of her first child, she began a memoir about her initiating years of motherhood called A Life's Work, which was published in 2001. Most women I know used the word brave to describe this book. Instead of contributing to the affirmation propaganda many motherhood books peddle, Cusk, these women said, wrote a competing narrative, one that allowed (albeit in Cusk's stately way) for motherhood to totally fucking suck. "Birth is not merely that which divides women from men," Cusk writes, "it also divides women from themselves, so that a woman's understanding of what it is to exist is profoundly changed.

Some readers, however, did not agree that Cusk was brave. The so-called mommy police indicted her of the non-literary crime of being a bad mother. Less-reactionary readers accused her of indulging in "beautifully written whining."

Unlike my friends, I did not find *A Life's Work* to be a revelation. To clarify: I did not think she was a bad mother or a bad feminist. I was not putting her on trial for normative gender violations. Moreover, it is impossible to know what kind of mother "she" is, because the "she" of *A Life's Work* is not, or is not exactly, Rachel Cusk. Rather, the Cusk that appears in her memoir is—as is nearly always the case with nonfiction "I" narrators—despite what readers might otherwise assume, a construction.

"It's the trench that I've dug very, very, very laboriously between something that looks like a person, that looks like an identity and then the person who's actually creating," Cusk said of her literary personae, both the fiction and the nonfic-

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tion ones. "There's a very, very big difference between those two things."

At the time of A Life's Work, however, the trench was not as deep or as wide as it would later become, and that is what dissatisfied me about it. In the book's final pages, Cusk, exhausted and depressed, takes a child-free trip to London. In a shop, she watches a young mother with a days-old baby "raking through racks of baby clothes ... her face a fist of concentration." The young mother is with her mother; the two of them get into a "debate" and the baby starts to cry and, says Cusk, "I know that this means the woman has less than a minute to choose and purchase an outfit." The young mother, Cusk implies, has yet to accept that motherhood has changed her and that her life will not proceed as before.

Writes Cusk, "Go home, I think ... Just give in and go home. She doesn't give in. She has an image of this shopping expedition and she is clinging to it with sharp teeth."

Much might have been interpolated from the scene between the two mothers—one of whom is mother to the other—but Cusk was not practicing what she currently believes about characters or other people, which is "You don't become them, you listen to them." Cusk pronounced rather than listened. She imposed her narrative on the woman in the shop, rather than struggling to hear what, beyond Cusk's own experience, this woman—this pair of women—might be trying to express.

A Life's Work explores the many incursions that motherhood makes into the female self; the act of mothering erodes the individual, but equally obliterating is the mainstream cultural narrative of how unceasingly great motherhood is. Cusk generated a competing narrative about motherhood, to be sure, but then she performed a similar act of incursion.

After A Life's Work, Cusk wrote four more novels and a memoir about traveling through Italy, all comparatively gently received, or mostly gently (the Italian memoir attracted a lawsuit, forcing the original U.K. print run to be pulped). Then, in 2012, she wrote a memoir about her divorce from her first husband. This book—Aftermath—caused her detractors to lose their minds all over again. Many took issue with what they saw as her "self-absorption" and her "emotional narcissism"; a reviewer remarked that the first few sentences in which she spoke of her ex-husband were "vertiginously condescending."

Aftermath begins with a confession. When the marriage ended, Cusk writes, she believed the children belonged to her.

THE CONTROVERSIAL RACHEL CUSK





A Life's Work (2001) Cusk's elegy for her pre-motherhood self infuriates mothers and critics alike. 'This isn't what it's like to have a baby:

it's what it's like for a depressed and melodramatic novelist to have a baby." (The Sunday Times)



Aftermath (2012)
An unsentimental look
at her divorce from her
stay-at-home husband.
"This is writerly
greed, swooping
on everything

and wringing meaning from it, transforming it into something else rather than just letting it be." (THE GUARDIAN) "Every experience, from having a tooth extracted to Cusk's daughters' hamsters' inability to live together, is turned into another metaphor for the author's anguish." (THE INDEPENDENT)



Saving Agnes (1993)
Cusk's Whitbreadwinning debut is a
highbrow Bridget Jones.
"Although some plot lines
are infinitely recyclable—
indeed, even irresistible

and forgivable—for your basic firsttime novelist, the shock of the old sets in immediately." (THE NEW YORK TIMES)



Outline (2014)
Cusk earns praise with a novel that's the opposite of a confessional memoir.
"This has to be one of the oddest, most breathtakingly original

and unsettling novels I've read in a long time." (The Guardian)
"Like the nonfiction that came before it Outline is a book about what it means to be a woman, but in it Cusk has transformed sentiment that was derided as gushing self-obsession and self-pity into a uniquely graceful and innovative piece of artistic self-possession, which achieves the rare feat of seamlessly amalgamating form and substance." (The Independent)





**Transit** (2016)

A more expansive sequel to Outline.

"Cusk is now working on a level that makes it very surprising that she has not yet won a major

literary prize." (THE GUARDIAN)

She admitted her reaction was irrational. Her husband did the majority of the domestic labor. He spent more time raising their children. Still, she could not deny that she strongly felt that the children were hers, not his.

(I thought "she" was probably a pretty great mother when I read that.)

What seems most notable about Aftermath, however, is that it introduces a more ruminative narrator, one that prefigures the groundbreaking approach in Cusk's two most recent novels, Outline and Transit; it's as if she had chipped a tunnel through her nonfiction to reach a new kind of fiction—one sourced from a deeply disembodied and depersonalized psychic realm.

Both *Outline*, which came out in the U.S. in 2015, and *Transit* are narrated by a woman named Faye, who, like Cusk, is divorced, has two children, and is a writer. Faye describes, or really more accurately transcribes, her encounters with other people. In *Outline*, she travels to Greece and meets a man on a plane; she goes to a restaurant with a friend; she teaches a writing workshop. She is less an interlocutor than a recording device or a processing machine. She receives. Faye, in literary terms, is a cipher. She is a zero, a naught, a nothing.

In *Transit*, Fave becomes slightly more "visible" (and audible) via her involvement in a home-renovation project; she converses with contractors and pacifies angry neighbors. Nothing happens, really, but these books are nonetheless gripping selfportraits of multiple humans. They are like eavesdropping on strangers, or watching a secret video feed of strangers, if those strangers were also casual philosophers. The conversations vacillate between the mundane and the lofty, as if the characters—enabled by Fave's presence—are always grasping at bigger life questions. Outline and Transit both are welcome breaches of privacy that emphasize the intensely shapeless loneliness of people. They are books about middles.

Faye, while she shares biographical data with Cusk and appears to present and process events from Cusk's actual life, is quite different from the characters devised by other autofiction writers of late—Sheila Heti, Ben Lerner, Karl Ove Knausgaard—with whom Cusk is frequently grouped. The books of these writers, though distinct from one another, more centrally feature an authorial self; about Heti, for example, Cusk says, "She uses herself, her Sheila-ness, much, much, much more than I do." Cusk does not, in these novels, use her Cuskness.



And yet she's filtering through a narrator that does not by accident resemble her.

Cusk, meanwhile, is not entirely spared from reader controversy, though now the debates involve which of these two beloved novels is more beloved and why. Personally, I prize the formal radicalism of Outline. The novel does not bother with interiors (or even exteriors) save via the briefest brushstrokes. Outline feels composed of voices in an empty room, without any "realist" set designing. But the bourgeois artifacts that so define conventional realist novels, and which Cusk, in a radical act of deaccessioning, gutted from Outline's interior-those artifacts start to creep back into Transit. Every smelly rug is a means to a crushing revelation about humans, true, but I won't deny that I was slightly crestfallen by the return of things. Outline suggested a future for the novel in which we might no longer need characters and, by extension, all of their crap. Transit's formal radicalism seemed more tempered. (A writer and critic remarked to me, "Outline felt like it had to be written." He praised its urgency; Transit, he said, by contrast, seemed more "obligatory.")

Sheila Heti, for one, disagreed. She preferred *Transit* to *Outline*. She wrote, "What I like about *Transit* is that you can see everyone except the narrator—which is really true of life, that we see everyone around us but never ourselves. And yet nothing would appear without this void that is ourselves. *Transit* really revealed the strangeness of that to me. Whereas for me, *Outline* resembled maybe books of philosophy a bit more, where there is no exterior."

Of the third and final novel in the trilogy, Cusk will say only that it is "going toward termination and vanishing."

CUSK DOES NOT check the time. She does not ask questions. She does not let her children watch The Simpsons. She cannot, when she's working, have anyone around. She does not look at her proposed book jackets; she simply replies to the emails, "That's fine." She frequently mentions someone named Siemon but never explains who Siemon is. (As it turns out, he is her second husband.) She no longer believes in narrative. Because she is female, and a mother, her time is not her own. She's not interested in the view of life that promotes being yourself and being comfortable with being yourself. She is not a social hugger. She is not late for her lunch date. She would love to be Anthony Trollope, but she would not love to be old and fat and Victorian and dead.

A CONTRADICTION CUSK, the public persona—which is just as constructed, I suspect, as both of her nonfiction and fiction personae, i.e., I am probably, while in her presence, peering over another variety of trench-embodies: She is against coercion, she resists being told how to behave and what to think, yet her opinions can seem dogmatic. She is interested in the moral implications of people's choices—of form, of belief, of behavior-but after making up her mind about, say, the dangers of comedy and satire, she can come across as brittle-minded and doctrinaire. Laugh at John Oliver, for example, and you've forsaken your power.

Refusing to laugh is powerful. (Cusk, the public persona, does not laugh.) So is refusing to speak. "Silence," she said, "is going to become a very powerful thing."

"My honesty
isn't brave, because
it's not for me,
it's not about me.
It's just that
I'm all I've got."

She will not go back to writing fiction the way she used to write it. Fate, she said, is the fundamental engine of narrative, and women are particularly vulnerable to the fake security it promises. When we spoke about irrational systems of prediction-psychics and horoscopes (Transit begins with an astrologer)—she said that people consult these systems because they believe in a happy ending. "You would never consult the runes otherwise," she said. "That comes from a feminine lack of control with destiny and willful self-deception about what happiness actually is and what the good outcome actually is."

Willful self-deception occurs in the making of novels, too. Women writers in particular must be mindful of relinquishing their power and autonomy, even (or especially) to the voices of imaginary authorities in their own heads. "There's a type of writer—and always has been—who claims not to know what's going to happen in their own book," she said. "And

they say, 'I sit down and just let the characters take over.' When I hear women say it now, I think, *Well*, *be careful*. These are dangerous times."

When asked how she relates to the feminism practiced by younger generations, Cusk segued into what might sound like a semi-sexist battle cry in the service of fighting sexism. She mentioned "the disgusting, endless photos of Donald Trump at beauty pageants," and while castigating Trump ("He is almost communist in his weirdness") for his sexually abusive behavior, she was also critical of women who partake in male-dominated power dynamics. "I think, Sorry, darling, but you were in a beauty pageant wearing a swimming costume. You know, that is not a powerful position from which to be a woman. Yes, it was wrong that [Trump] did that, but there needs to be something a lot stronger than that to get this person out. You know, saying 'I was your victim' when, you know, you ... It's not aggressive enough."

Cusk, the public intellectual, does not countenance pushback. When her statement about women using systems of prediction to self-deceive was challengedwhen it was suggested that men are also vulnerable to irrational systems, for example, superstition—she said, "That's more like ADHD," and suggested, "Well, that's just the pain of being the self in the world." A person might thus conclude that men are victims of medically (or existentially) diagnosable afflictions; their selves suffer in the genderless grandiosity known as the human condition. Women, however, do not suffer nobly (or pitiably); they eventually become their own victims, falling prey to "female" delusions.

A person might also conclude that Cusk, in person, is certainly not a cipher; that she is thus dramatically different from the literary persona she adopts in her recent novels. A person might conclude that Cusk's blind spot, as a public intellectual, is her position of relative privilege. A person might conclude that Cusk is struggling to construct a female identity—in books as well as in life—that does not submit to the power structures that oppress it. Cusk's version of womanhood can seem assembled from warnings and prohibitions. She assembles it from *nots*.

Cusk said that she aspired to a state of being advocated by D. H. Lawrence. She couldn't recall his words specifically, but generally the Lawrencian approach, which she said was "not [my] mantra, exactly, but I believe it with all my heart," decrees that "if you know something with sufficient thoroughness, just one

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thing, you know everything." Later, discussing the limits of empathy and imagination in fiction, Cusk echoed Lawrence: "The only way you would ever, you can ever understand anything is through personal honesty. And if you are sufficiently honest with yourself, you will find every quality, every quality that is manifested outside yourself."

What works in fiction, however, does it work in life? I ask because while the Lawrence mind-set produced boundlessly capacious novels like *Outline* and *Transit*, such a mind-set could also ennoble incuriosity or narcissism and, in the wrong hands, justify the perpetual belief that one is right and knows everything (after consulting nothing and no one).

All these potential uses of Lawrence would seem to risk propagating the peril of self-deception Cusk repeatedly refers to, and the self-absorption of which she is sometimes, in her nonfiction work, accused. Might one believe one is being sufficiently honest, and still be way, way off the mark?

I put this question to Cusk. "I'm not remotely interested in me as a subject," she said. "I'm interested in me as an object, and my honesty isn't brave, because it's not for me, it's not about me. It's just that I'm all I've got."

JAN THIJS/COURTESY

WHILE ATTEMPTING to sort through Cusk's various literary and publicintellectual personae, and wondering how close, if at all, I'd come to witnessing the unconstructed human, I never got as near as this story, told to me by Heti: A few years ago, Heti and Cusk were doing an event together in London. They were smoking outside beforehand, and a young man in an "Oscar Wilde-ish" furlined coat walked past. Heti complimented the man on his coat, and because she was cold, he loaned it to her. She wore the coat inside. Standing backstage, Heti started to feel insecure about her outfit. Cusk, Heti said, looked so sleek and stylish, all in black, maybe even leather. Heti decided she did not like her outfit, in comparison. She decided to wear the man's coat onstage. "That man's huge, strange, beautiful coat was much better than what I was dressed in," Heti said. She did not say a word about her decision, but Cusk, it seems, was listening to her; Cusk understood that Heti felt safer in the coat, and she did not want her to feel out of place in front of the audience. So Cusk performed an act of female solidarity. Before walking onto the stage, she put her coat on, too.

# Land of the

THE RECENT NEWS that Denis Villeneuve, the Oscar-nominated director of Arrival, will helm a big-screen adaptation of Dune is a good-news-bad-news proposition. The good news: Villeneuve has an excellent track record. The bad news: Dune, the 1965 science-fiction novel by Frank Herbert, has long intrigued talented directors, only to leave their dreams in tatters. In the past 50 years, no less than Ridley Scott, David Lynch, and Alejandro Jodorowsky have taken runs at the sprawling novel, with disappointing, and occasionally catastrophic, results. Here, we present a time line of the pitfalls, near bankruptcies, and premature deaths that have greeted those foolhardy enough to tackle it.





# A Rubinstein-produced TV-mini-series version of Dune airs on the Sci-Fi Channel to generally good reviews. It wins two Emmys.

# 1996 The film rights are acquired by Richard P. Rubinstein, who produced Dawn of the Dead and Pet Sematary.



A group of Spanish students releases a four-minute trailer for a fan-made version of **Dune** that was seven years in the making. The trailer is removed from You Tube at the request of the Herbert estate, and the film is never released.

2007

#### Paramount attempts to set up a new adaptation of the novel. **Peter Berg** and **Pierre Morel** (*Taken*) are attached as directors, but after four years the project

is abandoned.

2008

As Hollywood prepares a new adaptation of the As Hollywood prepares a new adaptation of the sci-fi novel *Dune*, here's a look back at all the utterly disastrous attempts to adapt *Dune*.



writes Dune, an award-winning epic about interstellar factions feuding over a precious "spice."



#### 1971

Film producer Arthur P. Jacobs. responsible for the Planet of the Apes film series. acquires the film rights to Dune.





The Dune film rights are acquired by a group of French film producers on behalf of Alejandro Jodorowsky, the director of cult hit El Topo. Jodorowsky tries to enlist, among others, Pink Floyd, Orson Welles, and Salvador Dalí as collaborators, but his ambitious project fails.

De Laurentiis hires Ridley **Scott**, fresh from the success of Alien, as his director. "Dune would be a step very, very strongly in the direction of Star Wars," Scott says. But when his brother Frank dies unexpectedly, Scott drops out. He goes on to direct Blade Runner instead.



Star Wars

becomes a national phenomenon, stoking a market for space epics.



Producer Dino De Laurentiis, who produced Fellini's La Strada and Barbarella. acquires Dune's film rights.



Principal photography on Dune begins in Mexico. The film features then-unknown Kyle MacLachlan and Sting. The soundtrack is by the '80s band **Toto**, known for the hit song "Africa."



#### 1984

Lynch's Dune is released and is a theatrical disaster. Costing \$45 million, it grosses \$31 million and is savaged by critics; Roger Ebert calls it the worst movie of the year. Writer Harlan Ellison later says, "It was a book that shouldn't have been shot. It was a script that couldn't have been written. It was a directorial job that was beyond anyone's doing ... and yet the film was made."



As was common with movies at the time, an even longer, three-hour version of Lynch's Dune is recut for TV. A clumsy prologue is added that uses concept art from the film. Lynch disavows this version, forcing producers to attach the pseudonymous "Alan Smithee" as the director's credit. Lynch also removes his name from the writing credit, replacing it with "Judas Booth."



#### 1986

Stung by his experience, Lynch retreats to smallscale filmmaking, reuniting Dune stars Kyle MacLachlan and Dean Stockwell in Blue Velvet, which turns out to be a career-making masterpiece.

world."



Dune author Frank Herbert

#### 2013

Jodorowsky's Dune, a documentary about that filmmaker's early attempt to make Dune, premieres at the Cannes Film Festival to excellent reviews. Ironically, Jodorowsky's Dune is, to date, the most critically successful film associated with Dune



Legendary Films acquires the film

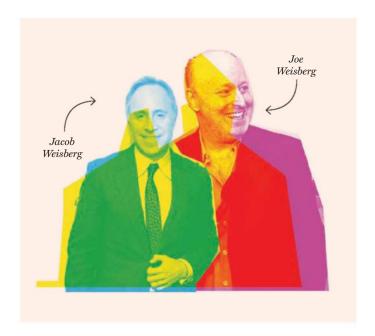
2016 and TV rights to Dune. says, "Dune is my

#### 2016 Denis Villeneuve releases Arrival. which earns an Oscar nomination for Best Picture. In interviews, he

#### 2017

Villeneuve is hired to direct a new adaptation of Dune.





# The Russians Are Coming!

On the eve of a new season of *The Americans*, the Weisberg brothers—Joe, a former CIA officer who created the show, and Jacob, a political journalist discuss how a Cold War-era potboiler became the most relevant drama on TV. By Andrew Rice

THE AMERICANS returns for its fifth season March 7 on FX.

HE AMERICANS tells the story of a Russian espionage operation so mind-boggling it seems absurd-or at least it did until, well, you know. The show, which stars Keri Russell and Matthew Rhys as Elizabeth and Philip Jennings, a seemingly normal 1980s suburban couple who are actually super-competent Soviet spies, debuted in 2013. Critics have long praised the crackling verisimilitude of its depiction of a tense marriage, while forgiving its pulpy espionage-plot contrivances. A fantastically successful foreign infiltration of Washington? Who would believe that?

Consider our disbelief suspended. After an election tainted by suspicions of Russian meddling, Cold War paranoia has returned like a long-dormant psychosis, and the period mood of *The Americans* feels current in a way its creator, Joe Weisberg, never could have foreseen. He says that causes him some dramaturgical dismay. "The whole premise of the show is, Hey, these aren't the bad guys anymore in our political world, so it's a good time to sit back and explore their humanity," Joe said one recent afternoon, sitting on a couch in the Gowanus warehouse building that serves as The Americans' production office. "So to all of a sudden have it whipping up again, everybody screaming about how they're the bad guys, just doesn't fit with the conception of the show. It's distracting."

Joe's older brother, Jacob, sitting next to him on the couch, cut in with a mordant reality check: "I also wish it weren't happening.

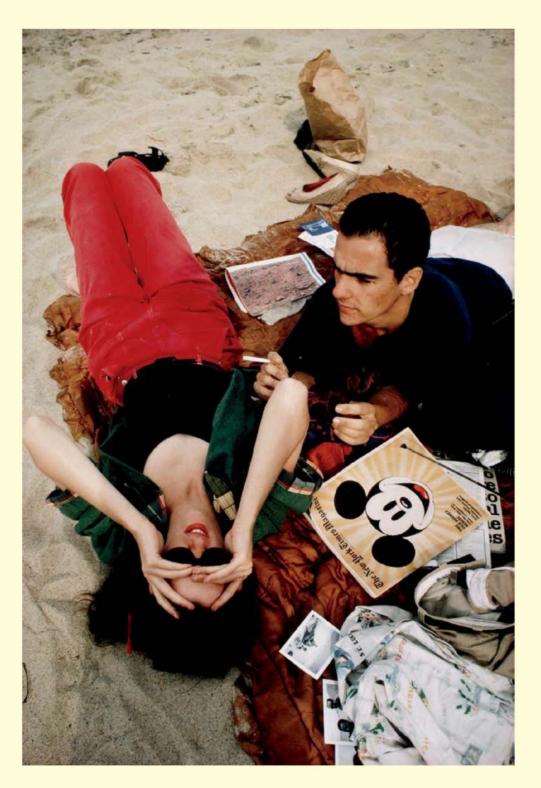
The Americans is, first and foremost, a family story, so it felt appropriate to bring the Weisberg brothers together to talk about the Cold War and its present-day echoes. Like the Jennings children on the show, the Weisbergs were teenagers during Ronald Reagan's presidency, though it affected each of them differently. Jacob became a liberal opinion journalist. (He is now editor-in-chief of the Slate Group, for which he hosts an interview show called Trumpcast, which caustically covers the current president.) Joe, who studied Soviet history at Yale, joined the CIA, where he trained to be an undercover operative. "It was like being swept up in the struggle," Joe recalled. "I had a passion. People were suffering. People were being oppressed. And I not only hated it but I wanted to do something about it, and when Ronald Reagan spoke about it, to me he sounded very simple and clear-eved."

The brothers come from an intellectual Chicago family (their mother, Lois, that city's former cultural-affairs commissioner, was the subject of a Malcolm Gladwell profile illustrating the power of social connections), so Joe's anti-communist fervor was a form of rebellion. But he has since moderated, while Jacob has reassessed his view of Reagan, publishing an admiring biography of him last year. "I have been thinking a lot about Reagan in relation to Trump, in the way that people didn't take Reagan seriously," Jacob said. "In retrospect, I accord Reagan great respect, but at the time I thought he was a joke." For many liberal Americans in November 1980, Reagan's election felt like a dangerously destabilizing event, likely to lead to confrontation-or worse-with the adversary he called the "Evil Empire." The Americans began on this note of alarm, presenting Reagan's inauguration from a Soviet perspective. "The American people have elected a madman as their president," a KGB spy says in the pilot episode. This assessment was actually reflective of what historians found in the Soviet archives.

"They were very scared of him," Joe said. "A lot of people there thought that Reagan was really serious about possibly trying to come up with a way to launch a nuclear strike on the Soviet Union." Thankfully, this turned out to be faulty intelligence.

"When you look back at the historical record now," Jacob said, "what you see is exactly the opposite. Reagan was more than ordinarily freaked out by the idea of nuclear war."

## **Nan Goldin: The Ballad of Sexual Dependency**



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Nan Goldin. C.Z. and Max on the Beach, Truro, Massachusetts (detail). 1976. Acquired through the generosity of Jon L. Stryker. © 2017 Nan Goldin

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In the end, the world survived the misunderstanding, and that allows The Americans to cast the gloaming of the Cold War in a soft nostalgic light. Philip and Elizabeth may be agents of a totalitarian system, but viewers know that it's about to fail, and that makes it possible to sympathize with the characters. "The interesting thing about the story is that it's both an American story and a Soviet story," Joe said. "And like in many European stories, a tragic ending as opposed to a happy ending is okay. It seems sort of natural." Yet the characters don't know that their Wall is about to fall. They are still in 1984.

In the late 1980s, after college but before the Joe joined the CIA, the Weisbergs traveled around Eastern Europe together. "You didn't know that those states were going down the drain," Joe said. Communism was thought to be indomitable. Yet in their reminiscence, the signs of imminent collapse were everywhere: the cheap cans of caviar, the cigarette bribes required for services, the grand restaurant without food, the spy peering through the hotel keyhole. "Romania for me was like going back to Stalin's time," Joe said.

"The population was terrorized," Jacob said.

"I remember we went out to the countryside, and people were pushing around carts, and you felt like you were in the 19th century," Joe said. "And then in Bucharest, there was urban-style Stalinism."

"We didn't go to Bucharest," Jacob said, and they squabble for a minute about their differing recollections.

Joe has said he developed a "coldwarrior mentality," which led him to the CIA, where he learned to put his expertise to use in cultivating human assets as an undercover operative. That experience in deception is the basis of The Americans. "As interesting as the show is," Jacob said, "if you're Joe's brother it's even more interesting, because I knew Joe when he was in the CIA." He turned to address his brother. "To me, I always come back to the experience you had of having to lie to your friends. Joe has this very close group of friends he's had since early childhood, and I think it was sort of a life-changing experience for you to have to deceive them. And I have to say, you have the most clueless group of friends! Not one of them had a passing thought that Joe was in the CIA. But just the corrosive effect of having to do that, as a way to live."

Joe was only in the CIA for a few years, during which time the Soviet



## Susan Sarandon Is Ready to Rumble

FEUD premieres March 5 on FX.

IN A SENSE, Feud, which is about the filming of What Ever Happened to Baby Jane?, stars four iconic actresses: Susan Sarandon as Bette Davis and Jessica Lange as Joan Crawford. E. Alex Jung spoke to Sarandon about the perils of playing the drag-friendly Davis, the election, and her own mini-feud with Debra Messing.

#### You've said that being on set is always a ratio of fear and fun, but that there was a lot more fear in taking this role. Why?

Bette Davis is a person whose idiosyncratic speech patterns, sense of humor, and talents elevated her to the status of an icon. People are aware of her in a very exaggerated fashion. She valued the fact that she was imitated by drag queens. So, how do you take someone that everyone knows in such an exaggerated fashion and make it real? I've played real people before, but those were people that the public wasn't as familiar with. Not many people know what Sister Helen Prejean is like.

# As with Bette Davis, I think of you as someone who is very straightforward—who is not afraid of being political.

I don't think that you're not afraid. I think there's a certain need for authenticity. But that doesn't mean you're not hurt when people shun you or say horrible things about you.

#### You got criticism for not supporting Hillary Clinton after Bernie Sanders lost the primary. Why do you think people had such a vitriolic reaction to your statements?

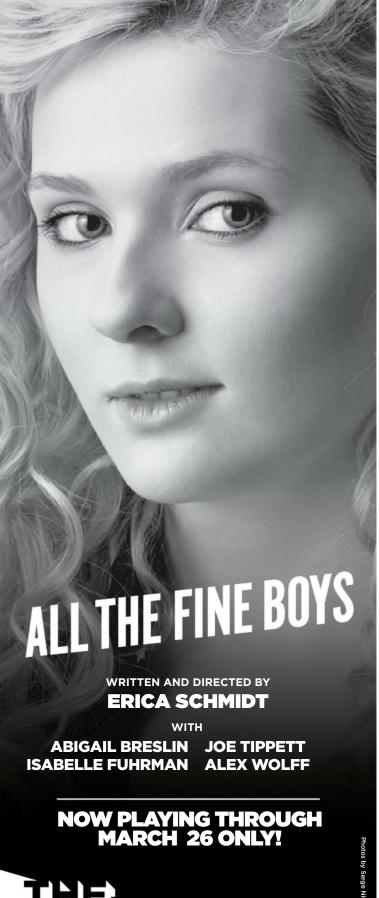
I think those people are just at a loss as to really examining what happened. It's easy to blame me. But I mean, seriously, there's me and Viggo Mortensen against all the people that supported Hillary. Does that make sense to you?

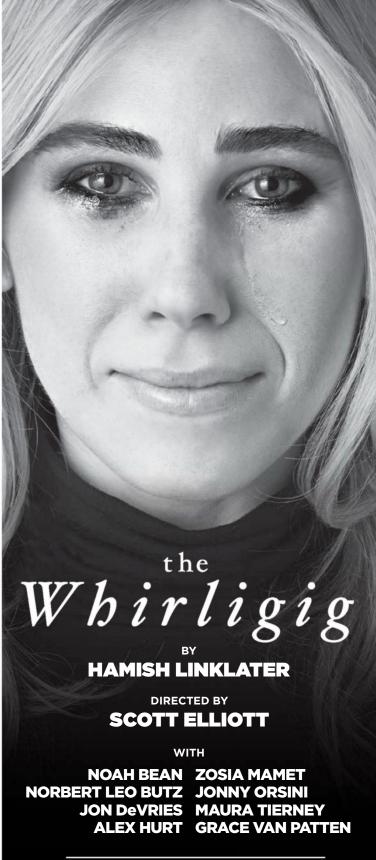
# You suggested Donald Trump's victory could bring on a revolution. Do you feel like that's happening?

Absolutely. Money has been running our country for a long time. Now we have a guy who is so clumsy and so obvious that suddenly people are awake. I'm certainly not in any way defending Trump—let me go on the record to say that. He's a horrible person. But the good news is that he has exposed all the cracks in our system and now the light can get in.

#### Have you spoken with Debra Messing since your Twitter argument about supporting Hillary?

No. I haven't spoken to Debra, but I would certainly look forward to any opportunity to say hello.





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Union ceased to exist. He left disillusioned, thinking that the value of intelligence wasn't worth the risks the agency was asking its assets to take. "How much damage does it do to our reputation and our national security to go around the world recruiting spies?" he asked. "It's given us a pariah status in many countries, and even our friends in many cases become angry and bitter at us, and that's a very high cost." It was only much later, Joe said, that he began to question his entire view of the Cold War. He read the memoirs of former KGB officers and discovered that their ideals and gripes were not so different from his own. "Suddenly, the idea of saying it was an Evil Empire became a sort of childlike view of it, which I ceased to have," Joe said. That revelation, too, informs The Americans.

One of the most appealing characters in the series is Arkady Zotov, the wily but kind KGB chief at the Washington rezidentura. At the end of season four, Zotov was diplomatically expelled from the United States, one of several characters now back in Moscow as the Soviet Union decays. The season finale also introduced Philip's long-lost Russian son, an embittered veteran of the Soviet-Afghan war. "If you think about our own society and about Vietnam and all the complexity around there, why would their society be any less complex?" Joe said. "It's easy to look at it and say people hated the war, they suffered, it helped to bring down the system. But that's just robbing it of all the complexity that was really there."

"One of things that's really interesting," Jacob said, "is this idea that you were telling me about that the KGB was the highintegrity part of the Soviet bureaucracy."

"The whole KGB felt—and it was not just a feeling, it was true—that they had not been corrupted like the rest of the Soviet bureaucracy," Joe said. "So if you saw Putin on *Charlie Rose*, Charlie Rose said to him, 'Many people say you're basically a mobster,' and Putin said, 'I don't know what you're talking about, I came up in the KGB.' That was, I believe, a completely sincere comment." Joe said that, in contrast to his brother and many of his friends, he wasn't terribly shocked by Putin's alleged interference in America's election. "I understand, when there are two candidates running for president and one of them clearly would continue the sanctions and one might not, why they might mount an intelligence operation to make the one who would not continue the economic attack on their country win. That seems like a pretty good idea.

"It's possible," Joe went on, "that I think about it that way because I worked at the CIA, where mounting intelligence operations was what you did. And I'm not myself so mad at Russia in general that I can't look at it and say, 'Ehhh, we would do that too.'"

Joe called Trump's desire for better relations with Putin "his one good idea" but said he feared that Democrats and Republicans were aligning to brand Russia "a terrible, terrible enemy." He said his experiences taught him to be wary of raw intelligence, and he has followed the news with some incredulity as previously levelheaded liberals have become avid molehunters, poring over the salacious and unsubstantiated Trump dossier produced by a former British intelligence operative and tossing around previously exotic terms like *kompromat*.

"There is a bizarre role reversal," Jacob said. While Democrats were suddenly placing great faith in the intelligence community, Trump was assailing its integrity. "You have the president engaging in this kind of moral equivalence that you would more often hear on the extreme left," Jacob said. "That, like, we kill people too."

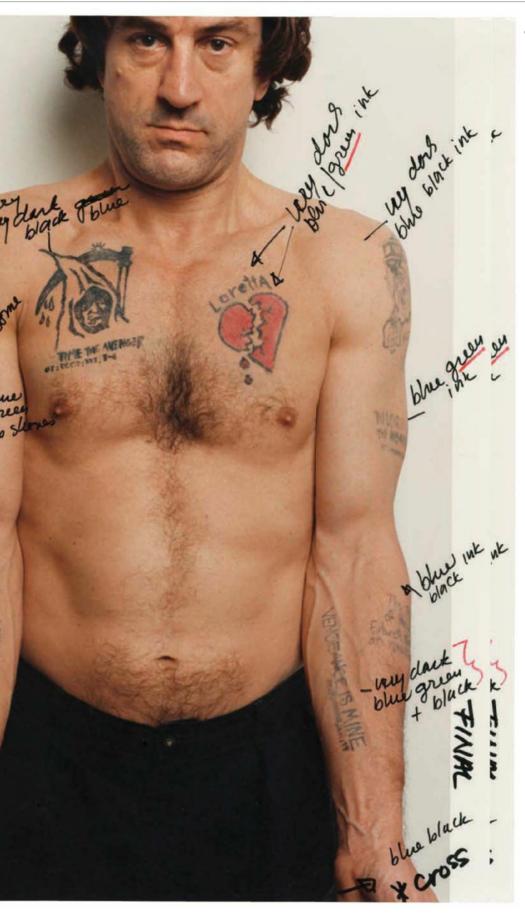
"The whole landscape has shifted," Joe said. "It's such a strange feeling."

"I feel like the past decade or so in politics has been a series of discoveries that one thing after another that was a bedrock assumption shared by nearly everybody turned out to be false," Jacob said. "You have to then ask yourself, 'Well, what else could we be collectively wrong about?' To me, the frightening answer to that question is: assumptions we've made about the fundamental stability of American democracy."

Maybe we actual Americans are more like Weisberg's characters than we realize—unknowingly headed for a dark rendezvous. But I, for one, am eager for a thrilling escape. At the end of our conversation, Joe walked us out of the offices, which are decorated with old spy-gear props and kitschy memorabilia. Near the door, there's a big bulletin board covered with events from 1984: "Thriller," AIDS, the Los Angeles Olympics, Miami Vice. Joe said the show tries to hit the right cultural notes for the generation that grew up in the 1980s without succumbing to what he called "the temptation to put in a little cutesy something." So, he assured me, we will definitely not be encountering the flamboyant owner of the USFL's New Jersey Generals.

"There's no young Donald Trump," Joe said.





#### "Every Man Has to Go **Through Hell** to Reach Paradise"

By ADAM STERNBERGH

MARTIN SCORSESE is on display at the Museum of the Moving Image.

IT'S NO SURPRISE that Robert De Niro plays a prominent role in the exhibit "Martin Scorsese"—the duo are contemporary cinema's most famous, and arguably most fruitful, director-actor combination. They've made eight feature films together, with a ninth, *The Irishman*, set to begin filming this year. The exhibit spans Scorsese's unparalleled filmology, from a storyboard he drew at age 11 for an unproduced swordand-sandals epic titled *The* Eternal City through Mean Streets, Taxi Driver, Raging *Bull*, and more. But perhaps no image on display is more striking than this simple continuity photo, taken during the production of Scorsese's 1991 remake of Cape Fear, in which De Niro plays the psychopath Max Cady. (The headline above is a quote from the film.) The purpose of the photo is to document the design and placement of his elaborate tattoos. The effect, however, is to remind the viewer, viscerally, of the intensity of this performance, and of the iconic collaboration that produced it.

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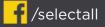






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The CULTURE PAGES

# RITICS

Christian Lorentzen on Joan Didion's South and West: From a Notebook ... David Edelstein on Personal Shopper and I Called Him Morgan ... Matt Zoller Seitz on Feud.



BOOKS / CHRISTIAN LORENTZEN

#### **Time Travel With Joan Didion**

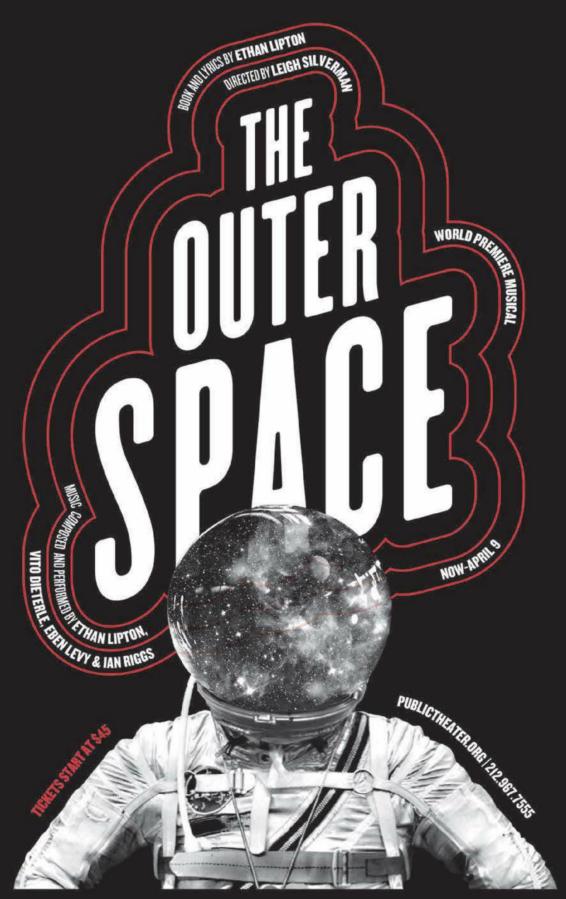
Two years after *Slouching Towards Bethlehem*, she went in search of the South.

IN THE SUMMER of 1970, Joan Didion was 35 years old, truly famous for the first time, and professionally adrift. Play It As It Lays, her second novel, was published to rapturous reviews: In the *Times*, John Leonard called it "just about perfect

according to its own austere terms" and compared her to Nathanael West; it would be nominated for the National Book Award and garner a hefty advance for paperback rights, welcome after several precarious years she and her husband, John Gregory Dunne, had spent freelancing. But The Saturday Evening Post—the magazine that had sustained the couple through the late 1960s and the original home to most of the essays collected in Slouching Towards Bethlehem (1968)—

SOUTH AND WEST: FROM A NOTEBOOK BY JOAN DIDION

160 PAGES. \$21.







had gone belly-up. Didion had been writing a column for Life that exposed her sometimes very personal writing to a mass audience ("We are here on this island in the middle of the Pacific in lieu of filing for divorce," she wrote in the winter of 1969), but Life wouldn't send her where she wanted to go-to Vietnam. "Some of the guys are going out," her editor told her. As Tracy Daugherty reports in his 2015 biography, The Last Love Song, sometimes Life didn't even run the columns she filed, so she broke the contract after six months. The release of the first film from a Didion-Dunne screenplay, The Panic in Needle Park, was still a year away. Didion was at the height of her powers, but as a journalist she was homeless.

That June of 1970, Didion and Dunne set out on a monthlong trip to New Orleans and the Gulf Coast. "At the time," she writes, "I had thought it might be a piece." Her jottings from that trip are now the bulk of her new book, South and West: From a Notebook, a slim volume that includes a short fragment from an abandoned assignment to cover the Patty Hearst trial of 1976, in San Francisco, for Rolling Stone. Both pieces are raw and clearly unfinished, but both are fascinating documents spiked with virtuosic turns. "I had only some dim and unformed sense," Didion writes in a passage that comes as close as she gets to a statement of purpose for her southern passage, "a sense which struck me now and then, and which I could not explain coherently, that for some years the South and particularly the Gulf Coast had been for America what people were still saying California was, and what California seemed to me not to be: the future, the secret source of malevolent and benevolent energy, the psychic center."

Nearly half a century later, it's difficult to evaluate this vague and ominous pronouncement. Certainly, there was a lot of benevolent and malevolent energy coming out of the South at the time, in the form of the civil-rights movement and the violent reaction it faced, which was being harnessed by the Republican Party in the "southern strategy" that has shaped national politics ever since. And the South of 1970 has a claim on our present in the southernization of rural America; as country-music stations crept north, Confederate flags followed. The effects on our politics are evident in the alliance between the race-baiting demagogue in the White House and the Alabama senator he installed as attorney general. On the other hand, the thesis has its limits: The personal computer wasn't invented in Biloxi.

Didion's portrait of New Orleans is a vivid exercise in modern gothic. "The place

is physically dark," she writes, "dark like the negative of a photograph, dark like an X-ray: the atmosphere absorbs its own light, never reflects light but sucks it in until random objects glow with a morbid luminescence." She watches a woman crash a car into a tree and die at the wheel. She dines with a local aristocrat who scolds Didion's husband for letting her "spend time consorting with a lot of marijuana smoking hippie trash" in the course of her reporting. She sees in the city's preoccupations with "race, class, heritage, style, and the absence of style" the source of a "childlike cruelty and innocence" that had been erased in the West by a frontier ethic that denied those distinctions.

Casting the South as a foil for the West, Didion is seeking out a counter-America unleveled by defense contractors, agribusiness, and corporate media. "I guess you think Southerners are somewhat anachronistic," an old friend had told her, and there's something wishful about her sense of the South as a beacon for the American future. There's also something circumscribed about her interactions with Southerners. She seems to meet most of them either at dinner parties through social connections or at nail salons, Pony League baseball games, and roadside burger joints. As she'd write in 1988 when she went on the campaign trail, "It had not been by accident that the people with whom I had preferred to spend time in high school had, on the whole, hung out in gas stations." Her sociological methods are idiosyncratic, and though she's brilliant at the art of overhearing, the technique goes only so far. Without a central event to cover or an angle to pursue, her vision of gothic isolation keeps recurring, occasionally punctured by the sight of someone who seems out of place, as on one afternoon at Ole Miss: "I saw a black girl on the campus: she was wearing an Afro and a clinging jersey, and she was quite beautiful, with a NY-LA coastal arrogance. I could not think what she was doing at Ole Miss, or what she thought about it." And oddly, the famously shy reporter doesn't seem to have asked.

There's an aftermath quality to the landscape, in the form of debris lingering from 1969's Hurricane Camille, and an aftermath quality to the mentality of southern whites: "The time warp: the Civil War was yesterday, but 1960 is spoken of as if it were about three hundred years ago." Many of them bemoan the passing of "the feudal system" and are paranoid about the presence of the FBI. Just after midnight on May 15, 1970, two black students at Jackson State were killed by police in an incident that drew national attention in the

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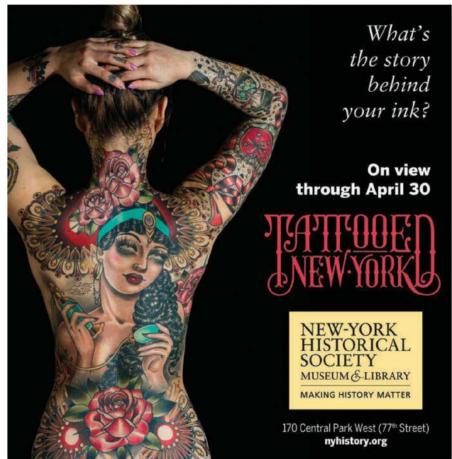
"Jami Attenberg's All Grown Up is one part Denis Johnson, one part Grace Paley, but all her.

Every sentence
pulls taut
and glows—
electric, gossipy,
searing fun

that is also a map to how to be more human."

—Alexander Chee





wake of the National Guard killings at Kent State; Didion hears a lot of defensive talk about the incident but doesn't visit Jackson, even to meet Eudora Welty, as she'd intended. (She says she fears that if she goes to Jackson, she'll board the first flight to one of the coasts.) A pair of relatively liberal plantation owners speak well of school integration, even as they admit to sending their children to private schools. "I can't sacrifice my child to my ideal," a father says. Her longest interview is with Stan Torgerson, white owner of the black radio station in Meridian, Mississippi. "We're not nearly as inbred as we used to be," he boasts to her, mentioning that the local Sears now has a couple of black department heads. He's all for the coming of industry, education, and integration, but he has his limits: "I'm not saying I'm going to have a black minister come home to dinner tonight, 'cause I'm not." Didion seems to have come up against her own limits on the Gulf Coast, and she knew it. There are few black voices in these notes, mostly just glimpses as at Ole Miss.

It's not uncommon for writers to publish work from the drawer when they reach Didion's age—she's now 82—and these fragments would be of interest even if Didion's sojourn in the South didn't resonate with our moment of political reaction. They cast light backward and forward on her work, illuminating her reportorial process and the themes she would develop in later novels and nonfiction works like *Miami*, *Salvador*, and *Where I Was From*. But most intriguing is the mystery of the last line of her southern notebook: "I never wrote the piece."

Failure is part of the origin myth of the New Journalism: Tom Wolfe procrastinating until he sent Esquire his notes on the hot rod and it published them in lieu of the piece; Gay Talese interviewing everybody except the subject of his profile; George Plimpton humiliating himself on the gridiron. In the decades that followed, the story of the failure to get the story would become its own genre of reporting, though rarely a glorious one. Didion was aware that the South had somehow defeated her: "The way in which all the reporting trips I had ever known atrophied in the South. There were things I should do, I knew it: but I never did them. I never made an appointment with the bridal consultant of the biggest department store in any town I was in. I never made the Miss Mississippi Hospitality Contest Semifinals, although they were being held in little towns not far from where we were, wherever we were. I neglected to call the people whose names I had, and hung around drugstores instead. I was underwater in some real sense, the whole month." South and West is a marvelous time capsule, and a reminder that sometimes even the great ones let themselves down. Didion wasn't one to make a show of failure in her prime, but five decades on, South and West is an act of generosity.

MOVIES / DAVID EDELSTEIN

#### Separated at Death

Kristen Stewart reaches out to her dead twin in Personal Shopper.

KRISTEN STEWART is practically the only person in Olivier Assayas's haunted-soul saga Personal Shopper, and she plays a young woman without an identity. As in the same director's Clouds of Sils Maria, she's an American living in Europe and working as an adjunct to a rich and famous person, in this case a brusque socialite who's rarely around and for whom she selects fabulously expensive clothing and accessories. Stewart's character, Maureen, cannot try the clothing on, though. It's forbidden. And there's another void in her life. She has lost her twin, Lewis, a brother who promised he'd reach out to her from the beyond if such a thing turned out to exist. Maureen—an amateur medium-thinks it does, and she has been feeling a presence, something watching her. The problem is that he/she/ it does not seem particularly fraternal.

If you have a penchant for mood pieces that flirt with genre but are too pretentious to deliver the full climactic payload, Personal Shopper is for you. I loved nearly all of it, disposed to forgive Assayas his arty withholding for the pleasure of watching Stewart through his eyes. He's a demon for good actresses who are in tune with a certain kind of spiritual indefinition—a vacuum that drives them into

perilous psychological (and often physical) realms. You can imagine Assayas gazing at Stewart in their last project and thinking, I would

PERSONAL SHOPPER DIRECTED BY OLIVIER ASSAYAS. CG CINEMA. R.

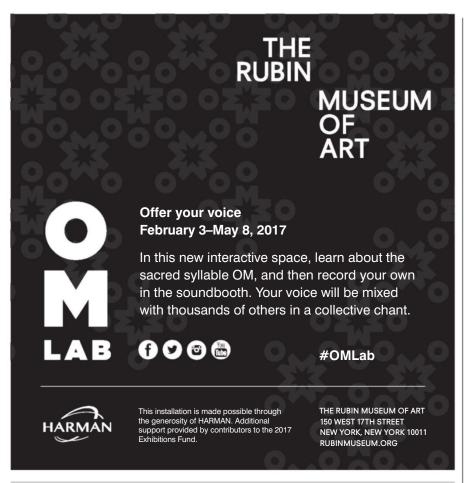
I CALLED HIM MORGAN

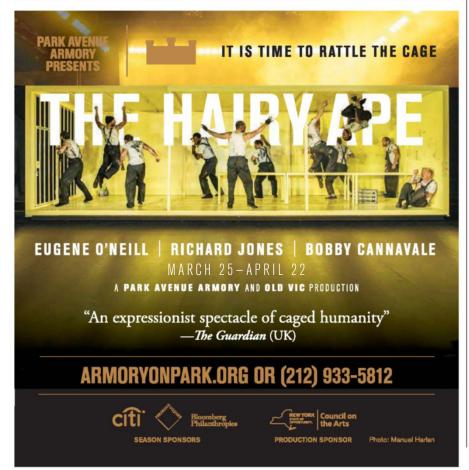
DIRECTED BY KASPER COLLIN. KASPER COLLIN PRODUKTION. NR.



gripping baritones—Mariusz Kwiecien and Peter Mattei—sharing the title role.

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love to make a movie that dislocates her in every way imaginable and then see how she fills the void.

Tantalizingly, as it turns out. Not so long ago, Stewart starred in a movie called Catch That Kid, and something in her will always resist capture. It's not that she's estranged from her own body but squirmy inside it, with an eye for a potential escape hatch. Her Maureen vaguely hunches in her jeans and leather jacket, hands in pockets, as if trying to disappear into her clothes. When she finally slips into her employer's outfits, she's both a glamorous icon and a skinny little girl playing dressup. Late in Personal Shopper, Maureen's search for an identity has a weird offscreen correlative: In a tense encounter with a homicide detective, Stewart gets all blurty in the manner of Jesse Eisenberg, her costar in Adventureland, American Ultra, and Café Society. Is she consciously channeling Eisenberg, or has he momentarily possessed her, like an absent twin? It's altogether ooky.

Although Maureen is fascinated by the work of a female Swedish artist determined to create "abstract paintings from higher levels of consciousness," the poltergeists are surprisingly literal, swirling around and vomiting ectoplasm as in a CGI-heavy Disney picture. That Assayas uses such genre tropes with relish makes it all the more irritating that he shrugs off the movie's murder mystery, leaving a major encounter behind closed doors. The ambivalence about what to show and what to withhold is so damn



Kristen Stewart

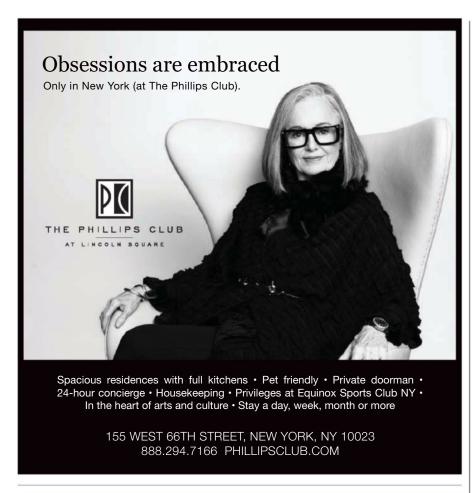
French I want to throttle him. But just because this is an unsatisfying film doesn't mean it's not a beauty.

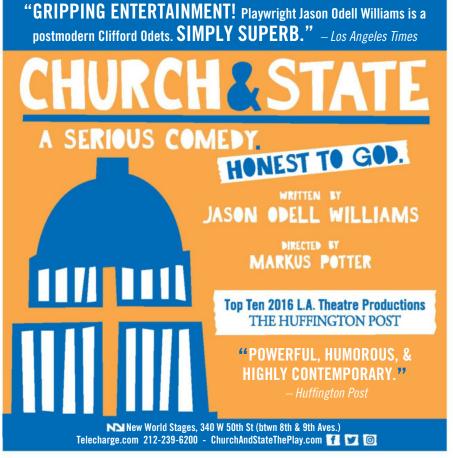
THE "I" IN THE ghostly documentary ICalled Him Morgan is Helen Morgan, the "him" Lee Morgan, the transcendental bop trumpeter whom Helen (his wife) shot in the chest on a snowy night in 1972, some years after she'd pulled him out of the gutter and helped him kick the heroin habit that had ended his career. The movie's Swedishborn director, Kasper Collin, makes magic with ingredients that are magical to start with: a handful of contemporary interviews; black-and-white candids of Morgan and such friends and colleagues as Wayne Shorter, Bennie Maupin, Billy Harper, and Charli Persip; and an audiotape of Helen, sounding old but firm a scant month before her death in 1996. Oh, yes, there's music, lots of it. If you don't know Lee Morgan, it will be love at first listen.

The events recounted in *I Called Him Morgan* are elemental, in the world of 20th-century bebop perhaps even archetypal: Morgan's auspicious debut with Art Blakey; his growing fame; the drugs that led to a burn scar on his scalp from when he OD'ed and fell against a radiator; his rehab and new life and then evident feeling of entrapment; and his infatuation with a younger woman who now insists to Collin that Morgan's "sexuality was very, very limited." Not much of the above is filled in, but it hardly needs to be. The movie is like a record you could spin again and again. The









musicians must be the most photogenic men alive—almost every shot evokes a freedom of spirit, a simultaneous relaxation and alertness. Collin supplies a visual motif as connective tissue: ash, smoke, snowflakes, rain, all of them swirling against winter skies or clubs like Slugs or the apartment building on the Bronx's Grand Concourse where Morgan got his chops back. The movie has the perfect soundtrack for swirling. It's mesmerizing, too vivid to be evanescent, too precious to hold.

TV / MATT ZOLLER SEITZ

#### Hollywood Horror Story

Joan Crawford and Bette Davis face off in *Feud*.

"THE WRITING doesn't begin to capture how women get under each other's skin," says Joan Crawford (Jessica Lange) in Feud: Bette and Joan, Ryan Murphy's limited series recounting the making of the 1962 gothic horror classic What Ever Happened to Baby Jane? "The intent is there, but the execution is lackluster." Kudos to producer-director-cowriter Murphy for being brazen enough to stock this production with lines like this, which amounts to offering critics a full sack of golf clubs with which to beat him. After a few episodes, even the most charitable viewers might sigh and settle on the nineiron. Murphy is still riding high after the success of The People v. O.J. Simpson: American Crime Story, but this is a weak follow-up. The limited series needs a rocksolid, original take on Crawford's rivalry with her co-star, Bette Davis (Susan Sarandon), to justify the decision to stretch this thing out to eight episodes. Barring that, it needed a consistent, laser-focused tone. Feud fails on both counts.

The writing is mainly to blame. Working from an acclaimed unproduced screenplay

titled Best Actress, by Jaffe Cohen and Michael Zam, Murphy and his regular American Horror Story cowriter Tim Minear present a take on the

FEUD FX. SUNDAYS. 10 P.M. Davis-Crawford relationship that too often feels like a heap of research that hasn't yet been shaped into art. And it's selfcontradictory as hell. Feud is a critique of Hollywood misogyny that fixates on its female stars' pettiness and cruelty toward each other, as well as their obsessions with their hair, makeup, skin, and weight. The show is almost luridly fascinated with the sight of Crawford's skin-maintenance rituals, but it tries to frame them as sympathetic biographical details that drive home the double standard Crawford and Davis battled throughout the second half of their careers: Men become distinguished as they age; women just age. Unfortunately, whether Feud is rubbernecking at film-industry sexism or decrying it, it never seems fully invested in either perspective. It lacks the nerve to lean into the freak-show aspect and produce a sort of Kabuki theater of stereotypical gender role-playing, as John Waters or Lee Daniels might have done had they been in charge, and as Baby Jane director Robert Aldrich (played here by Alfred Molina) did so magnificently during Crawford and Davis's heyday, turning a low-budget horror film with two faded stars into an Oscarnominated box-office smash. But at the same time, Feud is not intuitive and insightful enough to get inside the heads of two great, troubled actresses while their director and his boss, studio head Jack Warner (scene-stealer Stanley Tucci, whose first line is "Would you fuck 'em?"), contrive to escalate their resentments into a catfight that will play out in the press and create advance publicity.

The result ends up stranded in a nowoman's-land of dramatic inertia, not particularly engaging as a soap opera, docudrama, satire, or anything else. Murphy's camera comes at the action from ominous low and high angles, viewing the characters through wide-angle lenses that slightly caricature their faces and bodies and transform the show's period sets, costumes, and props into a mausoleum of mid-century wealth: a blocky 35-mm. motion camera looming atop a crane, a hi-fi cabinet the size of a sofa, a banana-Creamsicle-colored Cadillac with tail fins driven by gossip queen Hedda Hopper (Judy Davis). All appear to be in mint condition and are presented with as much fanfare as the show's human actors. But the writing pushes against the semi-gothic visuals, treating Davis and Crawford's story as a sympathetic but tediously prosaic exposé of Hollywood sexism-one that often requires its actresses to deliver dialogue that could be lines from a hypothetical Vox explainer piece titled "What You Don't Know About Hollywood in the '60s."



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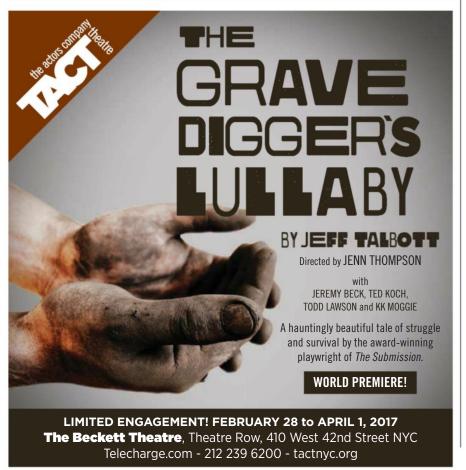


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Some of the narrative embellishments are both specious and unnecessary. Feud superimposes a weird critical narrative of Crawford and Davis as performers, portraying Davis as a brave, gritty, and "real" actress-posthumously validating Davis's (possibly apocryphal) insistence that she was "the Marlon Brando of my generation"-while making Crawford seem as if she were too obsessed with glamour and money to properly cultivate her own genius. A Google image search of "Bette Davis" and "glamour" should instantly put to rest the idea that Davis wasn't worried about her appearance or public image, and watching any scene of Crawford in Mildred Pierce or Johnny Guitar should instantly shatter the idea that she wasn't a Davislevel talent. Worse still are the bracketing sequences of former screen goddesses Joan Blondell (Kathy Bates) and Olivia de Havilland (Catherine Zeta-Jones) giving interviews backstage at a 1970s Oscar telecast for a documentary about women in Hollywood. As if Feud's Wikipedia-level summing up in the Bette and Joan scenes weren't clunky enough, Blondell intones, "When Bette had to choose, she always picked the professional over the private."

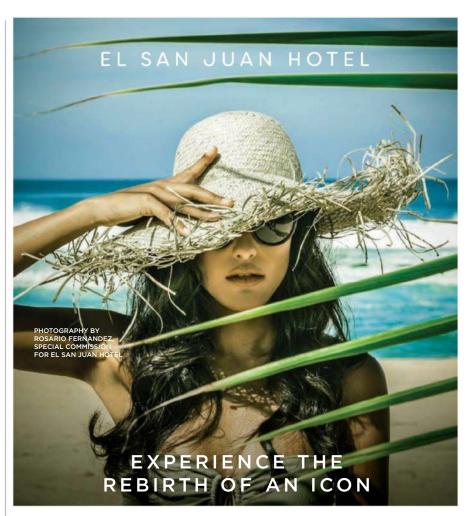
Lange is spot-on as Crawford, playing most of the series from a defensive crouch and sometimes lashing out like a cornered animal. Sarandon, who's been described as having Bette Davis eves her entire life, finally gets to train them on Davis's world; her performance, more so than Murphy's



 $Susan\,Sarandon\,and\,Jessica\,Lange$ 

script, seems to have a fully developed point of view on its subject, paying special attention to the fine undercurrents of conflicting emotion Davis feels when the spotlight leaves her and she has to deal with being a mother (to Mad Men's Kiernan Shipka). And there's smart backup work by a deep bench of character actors, some of whom do skilled impressions of actors you might not have thought could be imitated. ("Mark Valley captures the essence of Davis's exhusband, actor Gary Merrill" is not a sentence anyone expected to read.) But much of the time, Feud fails to do either its actors or its subjects justice, and there are so many anachronisms and unbelievable moments that your eyes might ache from rolling. De Havilland describes Davis's work as having "a ballsy intensity"; I can picture Murphy saying this, but not his characters.

It's a shame. Over the past couple of decades, TV networks have aired a number of intelligent showbiz docudramas, but none that zeroed in on a single project in depth. The finest examples of the form, TNT's James Dean (starring James Franco) and ABC's Life With Judy Garland: Me and My Shadows (starring Judy Davis), ran two and three hours, respectively, and covered their subjects' whole lives. The rise of the new TV anthology, in which the unit of measure is the season rather than the episode, could encourage filmmakers to pore over the cultural history of Hollywood in granular detail. Murphy's Feud deserves credit for getting there first, but that's about it.



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The CULTURE PAGES



MARCH 8-22

#### MOVIES

#### 1. See Logan

Prepare to be gobsmacked.

In theaters now.

The new Marvel number is deservedly R-rated for splatter, dismemberment, disembowelment, decapitation, and the bleakest story line this side of *Manchester by the Sea*. Is it good? Yes, but if you think studios never dump major characters for fear of ending so-called franchises—boy, do you have some surprises in store.

DAVID EDELSTEIN

rν

#### 2. Watch Underground

Forging ahead.

WGN, March 8.

Season one of this action thriller about slave rebellion ended mainly in frustration, leavened by notes of hope: Most of the Macon 7 were recaptured, injured, or killed, but one made it out and allied herself with abolitionist Harriet Tubman (Aisha Hinds). Essentially *Roots* by way of *Prison Break*, this is a series that found itself as it went along, and it stands poised to enjoy a terrific second season.

MATT ZOLLER SEITZ

POF

# 3. Go to Green Day and Against Me!

Stadium showdown.

Barclays Center, March 15.

It's shocking that the purveyors of lean, hooky punk rock that explores the intersection between matters personal and political, NorCal gamechangers Green Day and Gainesville, Florida, vets Against Me!, have never done a full tour together before. Be there at Barclays for the sparks.

CRAIG JENKINS

#### ART

#### 4. See Julian Lethbridge

Labyrinthine visions.

Paula Cooper Gallery, 534 West 21st Street, through March 18.

Feel time slow down, undulate a little, and deepen and then flex in the structures of these sensually intellectual paintings. Chancy dashes and perfectly placed daubs are combed over with homemade tools, creating intense fluctuations of abstracted petal shapes, beaks, and ocean swells.

JERRY SAL

#### OPERA

#### 5. See Fidelio

Music for the resistance.

 $Metropolitan\ Opera, opens\ March\ 16.$ 

You couldn't ask for a timelier classic than Beethoven's stirring ode to anti-authoritarianism. The composer's ideas of democracy were hardly ours, but the opera has stood for victory over fascism, opposition to communism, and so on. However, since large opera companies' schedules move more sluggishly than shifting political winds, the fact that this work is returning for the first time in over a decade is purely coincidental.

JUSTIN DAVIDSON

#### MOVIE

#### 6. See The Last Laugh

In on the joke.

In theaters now.

Ferne Pearlstein's doc is about the joy and danger of offending people—those on the political right and left or just people who don't think you should joke about, say, the Holocaust. Mel Brooks, Sarah Silverman, and Harry Shearer are among the brave (but, more important, funny) interviewees.

D.E.

#### BOOKS

#### 7. Read Age of Anger: A History of the Present

Attitude adjustment.

**FSG** 

Dusting off that old Nietzschean byword *ressentiment*, Pankaj Mishra argues that irrational envy wasn't defeated in 1945 or even in 1989. The book is a provocative call to reexamine our Enlightenment pieties that couldn't be better timed.

BORIS KACHKA

POI

#### 8. Hear Hot Thoughts

 $Another\,knockout.$ 

Matador, March 17.

Austin quartet Spoon is an indie-rock institution that, after over 20 years, seems reliably incapable of releasing a bad record. *Hot Thoughts* is album No. 9, and just like the band's 2008 single "Don't You Evah," the aim is to nudge the group's taut, perfect timing as close to straight-up funk as it gets.

C.J.

TV

#### 9. Watch Shots Fired

 $Superior\,social\text{-}problem\,drama.$ 

Fox, March 22.

Racially charged shootings in a small southern town create a ripple effect, jostling the local power structure out of its complacency and unearthing very old grievances. Sanaa Lathan, Stephan James, Helen Hunt, Aisha Hinds, Richard Dreyfuss, and Will Patton lead the formidable cast. M.Z.S.

#### CLASSICAL

#### 10. Hear New York Philharmonic

Virtuosos unite.

David Geffen Hall, March 15 through 18.

Esa-Pekka Salonen keeps giving music lovers new reasons to be happy that he pulled back from conducting in order to compose; the latest is a cello concerto he wrote for Yo-Yo Ma. Alan Gilbert leads into the new piece with John Adams's 32-year-old *The Chairman Dances (Foxtrot for Orchestra)*, a winsome hallucination of an evening chez Mao, and concludes with Berlioz's *Symphonie Fantastique*. Sold out; check secondary outlets.

#### THEATER

#### 11. See The Strangest

Both sides now.

4th Street Theatre, March 11 through April 1.

The plot of Albert Camus's *The Stranger* turns on the murder of a man never identified except as "the Arab." *The Strangest*, suggested by the classic novel, turns the tale inside out, exploring the mysterious murder through the device of a traditional Arab storytelling café in which the audience is immersed. Betty Shamieh (*The Black Eyed*) is the author; May Adrales (*Vietgone*) directs.

JESSE GREEN

#### ART

#### 12. See Vija Celmins

Quiet brilliance

Matthew Marks, through April 15.

If you want to see the greatest visionary realism being made in America today, go get lost in the show of MacArthur-grant-winning artist Vija Celmins (pronounced *Vee-ah Sell-mens*). See her perfect small-scale paintings, and prints of waves and the night sky and uncanny replicas of rocks. Stars glimmering and water rolling never beckoned so beautifully.

J.S.

#### BOOKS

#### 13. Read Running

International affair.

Simon & Schuster.

Cara Hoffman's third novel follows three drifters in Athens who work as "runners," hustlers who lure tourists back to low-rent hotels in exchange for kickbacks. Spanning multiple continents and time periods, Hoffman's haunting, original narrative weaves a gauzy portrait of youthful longing, sticky romance, and regret.

#### THEATER

#### 14. See God of Vengeance

Uptown girls.

Theatre at St. Clement's, March 14 through 26.
Earlier this winter at La MaMa, the New Yiddish
Rep produced a rare revival of Sholem Asch's *God*of Vengeance (Got fun Nekome)—the controversial

# GEORGIA O'KEEFFE LIVING MODERN

#### ON VIEW NOW

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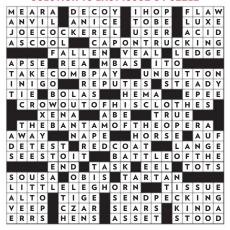


# Brooklyn Museum

The accompanying book is supported by the Wyeth Foundation for American Art and the Carl & Marilynn Thoma Art Foundation and is published by the Brooklyn Museum in association with DelMonico Books • Prestei. | Photo: Alfred Stieglitz (American, 1864–1946). Georgia O'Keeffe, circa 1920–22. Gelatin silver print, 41/2 x 31/2 in. (11.4 x 9 cm). Georgia O'Keeffe Museum, Santa Fe, N.M.; Gift of The Georgia O'Keeffe Foundation, 2003.01.006. © Georgia O'Keeffe Museum



#### **SOLUTION TO LAST ISSUE'S PUZZLE**





1907 play (with lesbianism!) at the center of Paula Vogel's Off Broadway hit *Indecent*. Now that *Indecent* is making the move to Broadway, where it opens in April, why shouldn't *God of Vengeance* move uptown too? The Times Square incarnation is completely restaged, as befits its new location in a church.

POP

#### 15. See Deafheaven

Commanding yowl.

Warsaw, March 14.

With the texture of shoegaze and the unyielding rhythms of black metal, this Bay Area quintet is one of the most creative metal acts around. Front man George Clarke sweetens the deal with his extreme vocals.

TV

#### 16. Watch American Crime

You reap what you sow.

ABC, March 12.

John Ridley's anthology series is back for another round with Regina King & Co., this time tackling couldn't-be-timelier topics such as reproductive rights and the economic divide in America. The show has a slower burn this season but is no less unsettling.

OPERA

## 17. See Curlew River and Dido and Aeneas

 $Double {\it feature}.$ 

BAM, March 15 through 19.

Nearly three centuries separate Purcell's *Dido* and Aeneas from Britten's Curlew River, and three decades divide Mark Morris's productions of the two chamber operas. That double span compresses into a haunting evening of music about faithfulness and loss.

J.D.

MOVIES

# 18. See The Ottoman Lieutenant

Your escort awaits you.

Opens March 10.

Game of Thrones's most romantic mercenary, Michiel Huisman, is well on his way to becoming the thinking woman's heartthrob. In this WWI drama (and his first leading role), he's a Turkish officer on the eastern front who falls for the strong-willed American nurse he's tasked with chaperoning.

COMEDY

#### 19. See The Untitled Kondabolu Brothers Project

Family circus.

Littlefield, March 19.

Brothers Hari and Ashok Kondabolu return to Littlefield for another improv-based show of political comedy and meandering conversation. Expect riffs on everything from gentrification to family embarrassments.

#### THEATER

#### 20. See Home/Sick

They are a-changin'.

JACK, March 9 through 25.

The Assembly's much-praised 2011 panorama of 1960s activism traces the lineage that led from idealistic antiwar protests to the Weather Underground. This timely revival is less a history lesson than a chance "to reconsider the promise and peril of radical activism and dissent."

#### POF

#### 21. Hear The Navigator

Activist pop.

ATO Records, March 10.

Bronx Puerto Rican singer-songwriter Alynda Lee Segarra's acclaimed folk-rock act Hurray for the Riff Raff infuses its acoustic sound with a shock of electrics on their new album, an auspicious collection of songs about gentrification and immigrants being squeezed out of cities. C.J.

#### MOVIES

#### 22. Go to The Brit New Wave

Explosive cinematic Brexits.

Film Forum, March 22 through April 6.

Two John Osborne adaptations directed by Tony Richardson—Look Back in Anger and The Entertainer—launch this festival of '60s British classics.

D.E.

#### WHAT ARE YOU READING?

At the 69th annual Writers Guild Awards, Vulture asked presenters and nominees which books they would take on a spring-break trip.

Seth Meyers "I'm about 300 pages into A Gentleman in Moscow, by Amor Towles, and that's a really fast, good beach read."

Lewis Black "You know what I'd read again on spring break? Slaughterhouse-Five, because it always applies. What [Kurt Vonnegut] wrote applies more now."

Alex Gibney "Insane Clown President, by Matt Taibbi, and you can pretty much guess why."

Jill Kargman "I'm reading Carrie Fisher's The Princess Diarist right now. I just got it at the airport yesterday, and I'm almost done in one sitting. You really get inside of her mind, and I didn't realize until she was gone that I had a Princess Leia-shaped hole in my heart."

Joel Fields (showrunner, The Americans) "Everyone in the office right now is obsessed with Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind, by Yuval Noah Harari. It's extraordinary. One of the best books any of us has read in the last many years." POF

#### 23. See Africa Now!

Global all-stars.

Apollo Theater, March 11.

The World Music Institute presents this showcase of five groundbreaking African artists, including lively reggae-rock from the Congo's Mbongwana Star and Tuareg 12-bars from Mali's Songhoy Blues.

#### TALKS

#### 24. Go to In Situ

Let the choir sing!

St. John the Divine, March 16.

Creative Time and the NYPL kick off their new site-specific conversation series with the theme "How to Reasonably Believe in God." Watch a matchup of Iranian-American artist Shirin Neshat and Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Žižek, moderated by Sister Helen Prejean.

#### DANCE

#### 25. See Paul Taylor Dance Company

American-made moves.

Koch Theater, March 7 through 26.

The much-lauded modern-dance company returns to Lincoln Center for classic PTDC dances, as well as the world premiere of Taylor's *Ports of Call* and the New York premiere of his *The Open Door*.



# Spring Getaways

This section's online directory can be found at nymag.com/ springtravel

Who says Spring Break is just for kids? After a long New York winter, we are all well-deserving of a spring vacation. Whether it's enjoying a staycation in the city, or skipping town for a beach getaway, you can celebrate the new season with a multitude of options.



## Experience Southern Hospitality at Sea Island

#### **SEA ISLAND**

877-554-0743 | seaisland.com

NESTLED ON THE SOUTHEASTERN coast of Georgia and conveniently located between Jacksonville and Savannah international airports, **Sea Island** is a Forbes Five-Star resort that is easy to find and so enjoyable it's even harder to leave.

Featuring five miles of private beaches, a Beach Club, Yacht Club, Shooting School, and Camp Cloister, Sea Island makes filling up an itinerary effortless. Steeped in golf tradition, Sea Island is also home to three championship golf courses, including Seaside and Plantation, the home of the PGA TOUR'S RSM Classic.

It's not just the recreational activities that make this resort so ideal. Sea Island is also equipped with four different lodging options to fit various vacation needs, including The Cloister, both lovely and inviting, and The Lodge, an English-style manor overflowing with Southern charm. If you still need more convincing, Sea Island is the only U.S. resort to host a G-8 Summit

of world leaders and the only resort in the world to receive four Forbes Five-Star awards for nine consecutive years—The Cloister at Sea Island, The Lodge at Sea Island, The Spa at Sea Island, and the Georgian Room restaurant.

Whether your spring vacation or group conference involves taking a nature boat ride, scoring a hole-in-one, or enjoying much-needed pampering, there's no better place to kick off the season.

#### Extraordinary Moments at El San Juan Hotel

#### **EL SAN JUAN HOTEL**

6063 Isla Verde Avenue, Carolina, 00979, Puerto Rico 787-791-1000 | elsanjuanhotel.com

IF YOU ARE A TRAVELER seeking authentic experiences in a luxury lifestyle setting, the recently renovated **El San Juan Hotel** has everything you need for an unforgettable vacation.

Every room on this exclusive property has been fully remodeled so you can relax in a modern, tropical setting. El San Juan Hotel features four pools, luxury cabanas and upscale drinks and dining on two miles of pristine beach. During the day, indulge in treatments at the all new spa, take classes at the two story fitness center or sunbathe at the Well & Being Pool. Nights are just as versatile, with a variety of culinary and cocktail options,



a lobby with nightly live music and the legendary Club BRAVA—fit for dancing the night away.

The "no passport required for U.S. citizens" rule makes El San Juan Hotel excellent for an upcoming destination wedding, boasting 40,000 square feet of event space, including lush outdoor areas and an elegant ballroom.

Located five minutes from the international airport, El San Juan Hotel is close to visitors' favorite activities in Puerto Rico and is surrounded by restaurants, bars and shopping. From pristine beaches to vibrant nightclubs, El San Juan Hotel in Puerto Rico will make you forget you ever had winter blues.

# Enjoy a Rooftop with a View

#### UPSTAIRS AT THE KIMBERLY HOTEL

145 East 50th Street 212-888-1220 | upstairsnyc.com

EVERYONE KNOWS New Yorkers are on a constant search for the best rooftop in the city and **Upstairs at**The Kimberly Hotel satisfies even the loftiest of expectations.

Located 30 stories above Manhattan, The Kimberly Hotel's highly regarded rooftop lounge boasts 3,000 square feet of an urban oasis offering a panorama of the city, including unparalleled views of the iconic Chrysler Building. Deliberately shying away from outdoor lounge furniture typical of

most rooftop bars, Upstairs at The Kimberly Hotel takes a fresh spin on old Hollywood glamour, incorporating vintage lights and furniture, and creating an intimate atmosphere of supreme sophistication.

Appealing to refined tastes, the dishes are as upscale as the setting, including Truffle Mac and Cheese, Tuna Tartare, Spiced Duck Cigars, and Baby Lamb Lollipops with Ratatouille.

Brunch on Saturday and Sunday afternoons features dishes that rival the lounge menu. In addition to great food, the bar features a sumptuous list of specialty cocktails and has an extensive wine and champagne menu.

This year-round, temperature controlled, weather adaptable room promises to be comfortable on even the rainiest of spring days. Remember Upstairs at The Kimberly Hotel the next time you want to channel your inner Fitzgerald and bask in luxury.





CONTINUED FROM PAGE 52

led the group, once back in the kitchen, to a lengthy but unsuccessful revival bid.

"That's the dish we really thought would be the hallmark of the menu, which was stupid," Carbone said. "It started awkward and we got it to okay."

"It was a tasty seven," Zalaznick said. "We killed it when we realized it had no chance of achieving ten."

"It was a beef tenderloin with truffle sauce, basically," Torrisi said.

"I fell for the language," Carbone said. "'Rare stroganoff." There's still plenty more where that came from, though, on the Grill's menu: "filet mignon à la mode," "Amish ham steak pineapple chow chow," Dover sole prepared "Neptune's Roast" style, "larded squab."

At another tasting, the group invited Mimi Sheraton, whom they'd hired as a consultant. Best known as the restaurant critic for the *Times* in the 1970s and '80s, she had put together the first Four Seasons menu with Stockli and James Beard. She liked the larded squab—prepared by covering the spatchcocked bird with whipped, cured pork belly and cooking with Seville oranges—but advised them to drop the word *larded*. This suggestion was ignored.

Later, Carbone mentioned he was planning to offer only five salads, and the group considered them all in relationship to one another. Of the crab Louie, Zalaznick said, "That's a slam-dunk." There was discussion of the merits of Dungeness-crab meat ("I don't know why anybody would brag about peekytoe," Sheraton said). They also tested the "Mimi Salad," something Sheraton had created for the original Four Seasons—with seafood, cold dressing, and shallots.

"I think it's much better to call it the Bouillabaisse Salad," Sheraton said.

"What, are you crazy?" Zalaznick said.

All four tasters shared a single salmon fillet in Chartreuse sauce. Torrisi thought Carbone should add a few peas—perhaps seven or eight. Zalaznick joked that that would enable them to charge another couple of dollars. Everybody laughed.

"Was it the most expensive restaurant when it opened?" Torrisi asked Sheraton.

It was. "They sat there with all the menus from other restaurants when they set the prices," she said. THERE'S NO QUESTION the Landmark Rooms will be among the most expensive restaurants in the city. "The Major Food guys are not known for bargain places, but in this case they don't have a lot of leewaythey're probably paying the highest rent in the city," says Drew Nieporent, whose \$60 omakase meal at Nobu was considered prohibitive when he opened the restaurant in 1994 (it now runs to \$150). Just the magnitude of the Grill and Pool's combined space-around 400 seats if you include the bars and lounges that adjoin each dining room-sets a very high floor. "But they're very good at keeping their customers," says Nieporent. "The one thing about Jeff is that he perceives that some people like to spend more, and he's found that clientele. For most of us, pricing is based on costs, but in this space, it's on what the people expect to pay."

The decision to split the old Four Seasons into two separate entities with markedly divergent offerings is a way of spreading bets and managing expectations. A trickier problem, according to fellow restaurateurs, is demand. Zalaznick estimates the average cover at the Grill and Pool will be around \$150 per person at dinner (including wine)—resulting in a back-of-the-envelope combined take of about \$100,000 a day, or something like \$36 million per year. But that requires both dining rooms to average two and a half seatings at every table at dinner, and that would require not merely serving remarkable food, but pulling off the kind of personalized service The Four Seasons was beloved for. "Trideep, the maître d', ordered for me every day," Barry Diller (Table No. 26) says. "His only instructions were that I was not to get fat. I miss it terribly. I thought, Why should it end? I still don't really understand."

The budget for putting the new restaurants in the Seagram Building is \$30 million. (It includes eventually opening a third Major Food Group restaurant, in the home of Brasserie, which occupied the basement level on the opposite side of the building.) Rosen said he considered turning The Four Seasons space into a private club. Instead, he and Zalaznick raised money from the hedge-fund and real-estate sectors and other investors to finance the cost of renovations. "The idea of raising the renovation money from investors was so we can have a similar effect—so that there are patrons who feel an attachment." He has 98 investor-patrons so far. "So it's like \$300,000 per person, which is easy."

Regardless of whether the indulgent business lunch is endangered, Zalaznick says that midtown is "on the verge of a full renaissance." "You've got a bunch of highend residential towers being built, a lot of wealthy international customers coming to what was always a commercial area." He points out that other restaurateurs, including Joël Robuchon and Daniel Humm, have signed leases to open places near the Landmark Rooms—as did, of course, Niccolini and you Bidder.

It was two months before the closing of the old restaurant when they announced their gambit of opening a new and transplanted Four Seasons. Niccolini says that a number of his old customers are among the 20 investors in his new venture, which will be smaller. "Think 120 seats," he says. "When we first took over The Four Seasons, the restaurant was there; we just added maybe more recipes. This is very expensive, totally different, very expensive." He finds the whole endeavor exhausting. "And in the morning, you get a stomachache."

Rosen, at least, says he doesn't expect much competition from it. "They will screw it up," he says. "These guys never built a restaurant from scratch. Jeff has built 11 restaurants from scratch. They're going to do a '50s design, but it will be retro, like a theme park. They're just taking their old story on the road. They'll do the same staged food. I feel bad for them, they boxed themselves into this very limited situation. Whatever."

HE GRILL'S TABLES, banquettes, guerdons, and serving pieces all arrived at once in December, so Rosen held a walk-through one evening to see how everything looked. He hired a three-piece jazz combo and opened a \$1,000 jeroboam of Dom Pérignon rosé. Rosen likes to have his way. As part of his deal with his tenants, he retains control over the physical space—the architecture and, important to him, the art on the walls. In 2014, he notoriously fought with the New York Landmarks Conservancy for the right to take down a 19-by-20-foot Picasso painting that hung in the hall between the Grill Room and the Pool Room, referring to the piece, according to the conservancy, as "a shmatte." (He denies saying this.)

Rosen, who'd arrived in a black Borsalino hat, a silk scarf, and a zippered, fine-gauge cardigan, paused in front of a wheeled trolley that Zalaznick was lovingly separating from its plastic wrap, a gleaming marvel of cherrywood and heavy brass fittings, with a domed sterling-silver lid. Rosen asked what it was.

"The prime-rib cart," Carbone said.

"Tell me what you would do with it," Rosen said.

"The name kind of gives it away," Carbone said.

A battalion of service trolleys had been commissioned from a small family business in Brooklyn "with a machine the size of a studio apartment that stamps the sil-





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ver," Carbone said. Zalaznick ventured that with each trolley costing them about \$10,000 apiece, "we're making their year. Not many people are doing a Viennese dessert cart these days." They'd bought two, in addition to two flambée carts, a whiskey cart, and a cheese cart. In one corner, a table had been set: For each diner, there were three forks, three spoons, and four knives. While the Major Food trio examined a steak knife (Hawaiian acacia-wood handle, Japanese steel blade, \$253 a pop), Rosen walked impatiently to the balcony level to check out two private dining rooms, windowless chambers with hundreds of tiny lights embedded in the ceiling and burnished walnut paneling.

"This is the best fucking room," Rosen said of one. "The ceiling used to be a pissy beige. This is much better." He asked if anyone had a measuring tape, then opened a manila folder. Out came some pictures of artworks he owns. He began affixing them to the walls. "Look, here's a Twombly," he said. "This one here, and that one will go there. We are going to make this artist's estate worth a lot more. And in the other room, Lee Krasner. We'll call it the Krasner Room."

Rosen's son Charlie, who'd arrived straight from his last final exam at Bard (Picasso in the 20th Century—"Crushed it"), asked what the ceiling height was in the private rooms.

Rosen shrugged. "Fifteen, sixteen?"

"Badass," Charlie said. He rubbed the cut-velvet Knoll fabric on an upholstered bench. "Check this out. It's, like, plush."

Zalaznick handed Rosen a dinner plate and explained that the pattern was a custom, modernized version of the original china designed by Lenox, but never manufactured, for the Kennedy White House. "Someone should be writing this down," Rosen said. He made his way to a cheese cart and began opening the drawers, then flipping the Lucite lid up and down.

ome of the other names considered for the new place were the Seagram, Seagram's, 375 Park, 99 East, Sea (for the Pool), and the Rose Room or the State Room (for the Grill). "The naming was a whole thing in itself," says Richard Pandiscio, the founder of a luxury-branding agency that Rosen hired to work with the restaurateurs on everything from logos to uniforms to the sturdy doggy bags (the Grill's will be cordovancolored on the outside with a rose-hued interior, not unlike a steak).

For a while, Pandiscio feuded with Zalaznick, Carbone, and Torrisi over their desire to engrave ever more objects and components. "They wanted to brand everything," he says. "My job partly was to get them to understand the power of the rooms. I was always saying, 'Let's make that *G* on the Grill silver a little smaller.' But there's a certain pride to how customized everything they're doing is."

The Major Food brethren might even classify these touches as moves. "At Carbone, we call it 'the move' to hit the table with food the minute they sit down, before they even get their menus—cheese and salumi and Mario's tomato bread," Torrisi says. "But we refer to a lot of things as the move. The move can be a signature dish, the things people identify our restaurants with. You need a certain number of them on the menu."

To this end, Torrisi has gone through more than 50 classic potato preparations to come up with the only potato side dish he plans to serve at the Pool. "You blanch coin-size Idahos in salty water, stack them in a mold with butcher's string, pour raging-hot duck fat on them, and fry them in the oven," he says, waxing rhapsodic. "They're crispy on the outside and molten like a confit in the middle." His staff has suggested, jokingly, that he name it pommes Richard, after himself.

He has also tried dozens of versions of foie gras and, with his deputy chef, came up with a presentation that involves slicing it thinly on a girolle and arranging it like coral or a blossoming flower. "Now it's a matter of how to prepare it—with sweet potatoes, tart shells, dried orange chips, curried bananas, bruléed bananas. I'm still never satisfied."

Carbone, for his part, has hit upon a signature pasta dish as a way to offset what he calls "the disturbing tendency of noodles to take over a restaurant concept." The problem is that even the most unremarkable pasta on a menu is usually popular, threatening to become what a kitchen is known for. (It's also a great moneymaker because the costs are low; the trio brag that the spicy rigatoni vodka at Carbone, at \$27 a serving, will put all their children through college.) The solution, which grew out of a 150-year-old recipe book published by the original chef of Delmonico's, will be called pasta à la presse and involves bringing roasted legs and carcasses of duck and other game birds to the table in a custommade press that is squeezed over the diner's pasta, releasing the juices. "It was a matter of asking, 'What's the most Grill-like way to have pasta?" Carbone says.

In a sense, this represents a triumph—or at least an assertion—of branding and the notion that eating choices can be sold to consumers as stops on their own personal narratives. "The first thing we had to figure out when we signed the lease was, 'What's

the story we want to tell?" Zalaznick said one day. "Our worst nightmare is to open a good restaurant and have everyone who goes there wondering, What does that place stand for?"

"All our restaurants are easy to talk about," Torrisi added. "Carbone is 'Italian-American fine dining.' Santina, which is mostly Mario's invention, is 'modern coastal Italian.' Dirty French, which was my idea, is the only one that requires more than a sentence to understand." While the place's theme came to include a lot of stuff-Vietnamese, North African, and Creole influences, and a good deal of pink neon in the dining room—the three men sold it with less than a sentence. Zalaznick said he simply wrote in an email to Sean MacPherson, who owns the Ludlow Hotel, that the restaurant they wanted to open in his lobby would be a place to serve "octopus tunisienne," as Zalaznick recalled. "I came up with it out of nowhere." He's never heard of such a dish.

Sometimes, they get so excited about what a dish represents that they have a hard time abandoning it when it's not working. Consider the Lobster Club, which Carbone describes as "an entire restaurant we had to abort over a black-hole dish, because we were so emotionally attached." He explained that before ZZ's Clam Bar opened in 2013, it was very nearly the Lobster Club, a 12-seat restaurant that would have served only one thing: lobster club sandwiches.

"Me and Jeff have a deep-rooted passion for club sandwiches," he said. "We believe you can tell how good a hotel is by its club sandwich." But it was not to be. "We printed the menus, we put down pink tile, but when Jeff and Rich started to develop the sandwich, they couldn't get it above an eight and a half." Carbone said.

"We realized we've only had a lobster club that was a nine or a ten in our fantasies." Zalaznick said.

"Something about the combination of fat-on-fat-on-fat," Torrisi said. "Lobster, bacon, mayo, the potato-flour bread soaked in butter. We got physically ill."

"It's a structural flaw," Zalaznick said. "We tried a hundred iterations, eating two a day. One day Rich looked up and said, 'I hate this fucking sandwich. I never want to eat it again.' We said, 'Done. Let's do the clam bar.' We were a week from opening. I went to the Bowery to buy blue tiles that afternoon."

The group now plans to use the Lobster Club name for its final restaurant in the Seagram Building, in the former home of Brasserie. It is scheduled to open toward the end of the year. "We're not doing the sandwich, but we'd already had matchbooks made," Zalaznick said.

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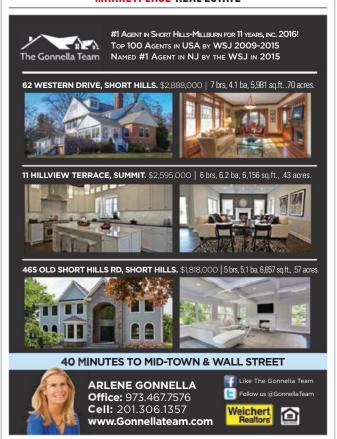
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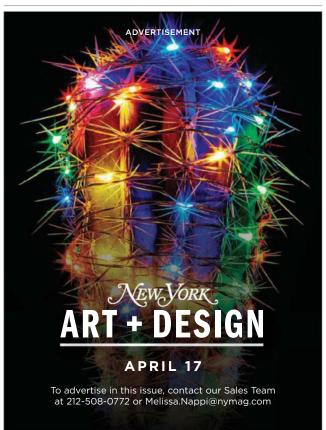
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- Fictional fawn 6
- "We gotta get goin'!" 11
- 15 Droops
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- 20 Grant's Civil War side
- 21 Vagabond
- Over again
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- Surgically placed tube 24
- 25 "In your dreams!"
- 26 Sup in style
- Biblical action of no mere babbling brook?
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- 34 Sapient
- 35 Least well
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- 41 Sticky kind of stick
- 43 Hawke of "Boyhood"
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- 120 SpaceX founder Musk
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- 125 "Moonstruck" star
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- Stun, in a way
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- Country lodging
- Welcome back customers
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- Total flop 6
- Naysayer
- Personal bearing
- Hookah-like pipe
- 10 Visiting locally
- 11 Schmoozes
- Israeli Defense Minister Dayan or Arens

- 13 Award for "Rent"
- 14 Offering just the basics
- Tack-shop buy
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- Fruit often eaten dried
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- 31 Like out of hell
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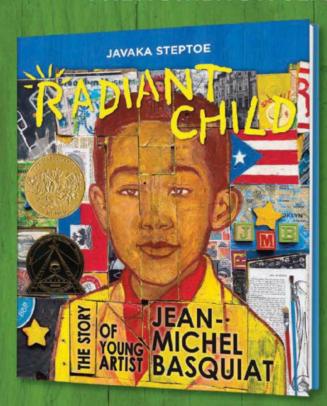
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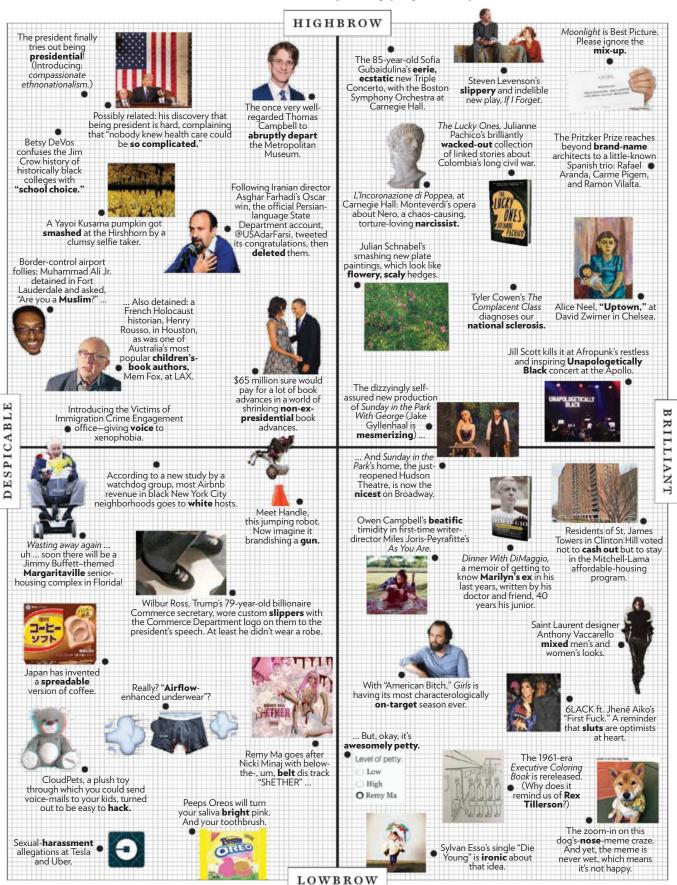
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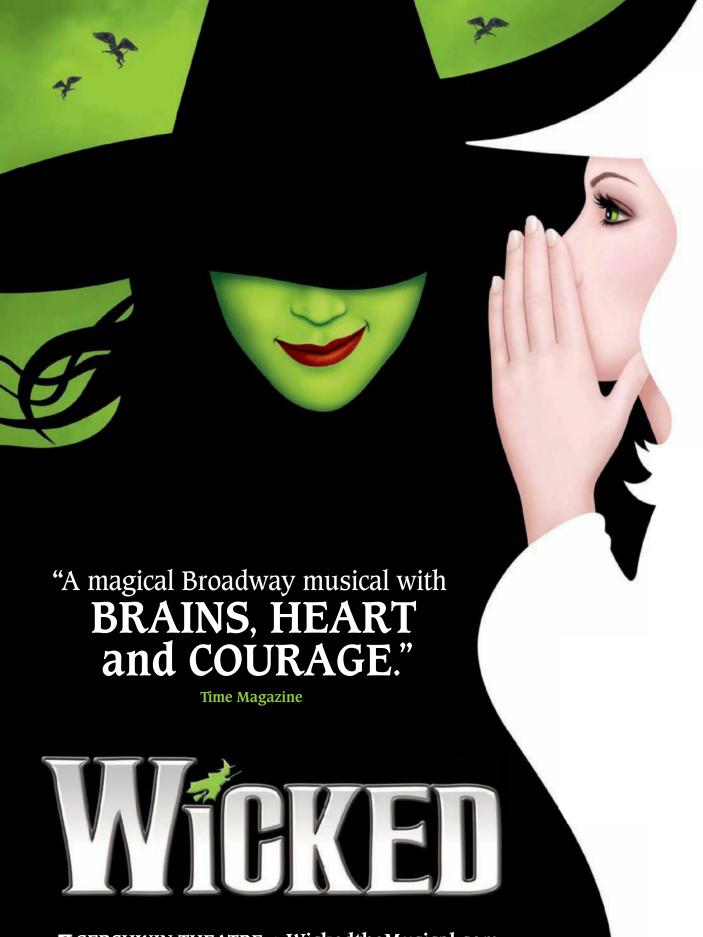
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