

# VOGUE

PHILIPPINES

FEB  
2024



## SEEING RED

Liza Soberano  
and Chau Bui on  
making an impact

## STORM RISING

Capturing  
conservation  
with Gab Meija

# FORCES *for* CHANGE

CLIMATE, CULTURE, COMMUNITY

The way forward with Ann & Billie Dumaliang, Issa Barte, Nicola Sebastian, Camille Rivera, and Bella & Tasha Tanjutco





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# VOGUE

## S P O T L I G H T

NICOLA SEBASTIAN *photographed by* ARTU NEPOMUCENO



*SACAI cut-out satin dress, stylist's own turtleneck*





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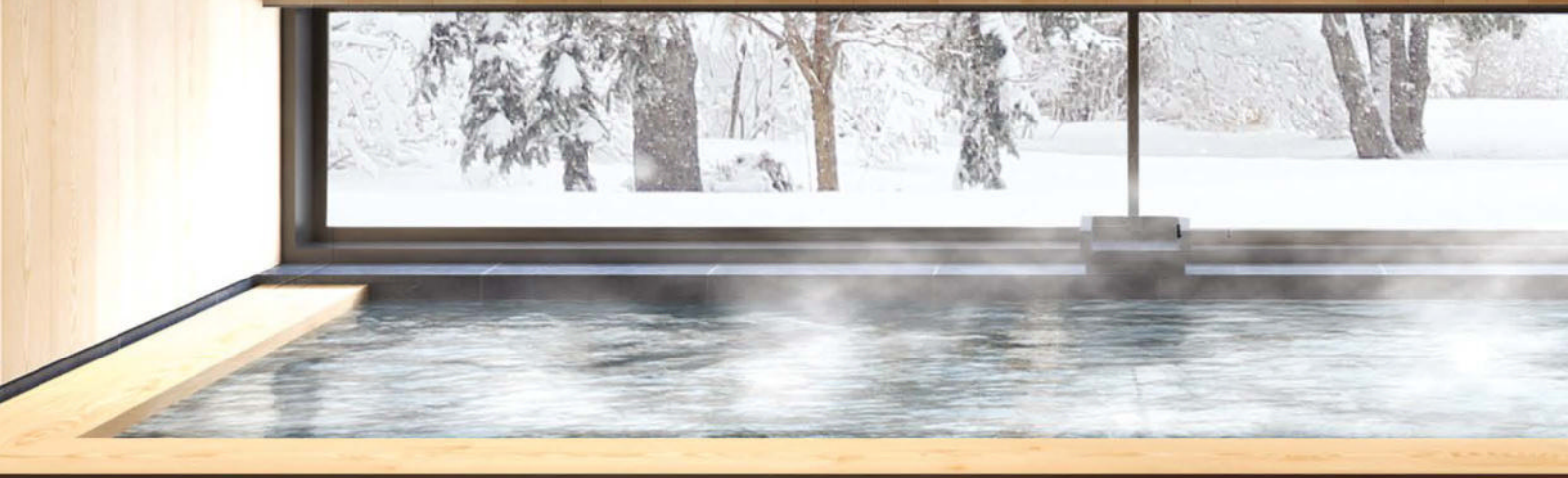
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A

t 5:00 AM, there is only a shallow pool of light from our headlamps, to illuminate a few steps ahead into the darkness. I follow the guide on a slick, carved path, as it snakes between limestone slabs, on to a suspended bridge, swaying above treetops of this Rizal rainforest. As morning beaches, we climb across stone stairs, overlaid with gnarled roots of trees—Balete, Banaba, Alibangbang. Such is the business of catching sunrises at Masungi Georeserve.

With photographer, Artu Nepomunceno, the *Vogue* team watches as dawn breaks across the karst dotted landscape. In the highest peak of the park, atop a cluster of boulders, sit Billie and Ann Dumaliang. They are all smiles and warm welcomes. The Dumaliang sisters affectionately refer to the hectares of Baras rainforest under the Masungi stewardship, as their “little brother.”

Ecology is definitively personal for the seven young women we celebrate this February, in our focus on climate, culture and community. With advocacies that range from mangrove conservation to empowering children from climate affected communities to championing indigenous wisdom, we learn from them about the power of reverse mentorship, and deep listening. From shoreline to rainforest, they co-create with the peoples they encounter, nurturing a cycle of hope into action.

At *Vogue Philippines*, we hope to expand the notion of fashion as an industry to one of fashion as an ecosystem. By examining how and why things are made, from soil to end of life to regeneration, we shine a light on individuals who are galvanized by ideas and ideology. Read more about these intrepid ladies leading the way on page 118.

Carlo Delantar, one of the Philippines’ pioneering advocates for the circular economy shares that 80 percent of the problematic issues of waste can be addressed on the initial drawing board. Thus, giving designers great responsibility to do what they can to shift the needle on ecological challenges.

With her brand Lubay, Belgian bag designer Soho Francotte creates using mindful alternatives to leather. She stumbled on Vegea, consisting of grape skins, stalks, and seeds that were normally discarded after wine production. With this bioregional material, she remains committed to slow design, perhaps as a deeply embedded connection to her Kalinga roots. Ticia Almazan speaks with her on page 32.

This month’s beauty features showcase three brands with a central ethos grounded in mindful production. From the Japan based beauty brand DAMDAM to New York Based Lesse and to the locally-based Pure Culture, we see how the influence of one’s Filipino roots translates into these conscious beauty brands. Explore their world on page 88.

Our fashion editorial, “New Dawn,” on page 72, is headlined by Vietnamese personality Chau Bui and Filipina actress Liza Soberano. Central to this fashion editorial is Gucci’s Signoria slingback pumps in the Rosso Ancora hue. Red shoes have come to symbolize the fight against femicide and violence against women in Italy. Mariane Perez writes of how “the Italian brand has pledged that for a certain time, that a portion of the proceeds from the sales of their Signoria slingback will help build a haven for women” who have suffered from gender-based violence. Soberano, an ambassador for Save the Children Philippines, adds that “women have always been important in society in general. I feel like we not only provide stability, but we also nurture people.”

In our first issue of the year, we celebrate the spirit of change and those who plant seeds in our common ground. From the lens of a young conservation photographer to indigenous wisdom of Ipat healing, this month we look at our relationship with nature, reframing how we see each other, and ultimately, how we see ourselves.

We hope you enjoy.



Tara wears a Clash de Cartier double row necklace in pink gold, a Clash de Cartier XL single earring in pink gold, LOVE bracelets and rings in yellow and pink gold with diamonds, Trinity de Cartier rings in white, rose, and yellow gold with diamonds, all by CARTIER

Photograph by WARD IVAN RAFIK

## DEPTH OF DESIGN

*The Maison CARTIER speaks through the languages of precision, proportion and design.*

FOR CARTIER, every piece of jewelry is designed with an uncompromising feature: the precision and cleanness of the line. This concept had become Cartier's signature, and had conceived regalia that had formed a unique collection of cult jewelry and watchmaking.

As seen on Friend of the Maison Tara Emad, the Maison's designs united the spiked studs of the Clash de Cartier, fluid bands of the Cartier Trinity, and precise lines of the Cartier Love. The balance of figure, shapes and volume interplay with one another, forming structured pieces that continue to stand the test of time.

Among Cartier's other design principles, the precision of its proportions is modeled after the way each

piece is worn, similar to articles of clothing. The oval-shaped Love Bracelet demonstrates this quality with its adjustable screws, allowing for a custom fit across the surface of any wrist. A harmony of movement, this reliance on proportion is established through meticulous ergonomics research, and a thorough understanding of a piece's form and function.

Beyond visual appeal, the design of each creation carries centuries of storied heritage. Through the twist of a screw, the intertwined curves of each ring, or a hug on the wrist by the precisions of the bracelet, Cartier has intentionally crafted silhouettes that have become heirlooms for the future.

# what makes you hopeful about the *future*?



## NINA UNLAY

Writer,  
FORCES FOR  
CHANGE

“I am not a hopeful person, but I don’t need to be because I have a little brother and sister. I’ve seen the future since they were nine years old and already engaging my parents in debates about presidential candidates. The future is bright.”

## GAB MEJIA

Photographer,  
FROM SOME  
ISLANDS AGO,  
WE DREAM

“It is through the power of collective dreams which renders me hopeful of the future amid the vicissitudes and injustices that we disproportionately face in our country and world. Only when we collectively dream in multiplicities, can the threads of hope re-weave itself in our ancient story web.”



## ROKO ARCEO

Stylist,  
FORCES FOR  
CHANGE

“The growing emphasis on sustainability and efforts to address global challenges make me hopeful about the future. Many fashion brands are embracing sustainable materials, ethical production processes, and innovative technologies to minimize environmental impact. Additionally, the growing diversity and inclusion in fashion are paving the way for more creativity and representation in the industry.”



## ROYAL PINEDA

Architect,  
TROPICAL  
LUXURY

“Today, I see a genuine desire to be one with nature again, leading to more responsible living and search for authenticity. In this pursuit, I carry hope for a future where our shared reverence for the environment cultivates a sustainable lifestyle, bringing forth a world characterized by balance, integrity, and the enduring beauty of enriching connections with the world. A world where the wondering youth, inspired by nature’s marvels, become stewards of an intricately woven global tapestry.”



## OSMAN ÖZEL

Photographer,  
SHADOW PLAY

“What gives me hope for the future is the powerful spiritual protection that motivates me, crafted by the precious moments from both my past and the ones yet to come.”

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**Liza Soberano**  
*Actress, Model, Endorser*

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# IN VOGUE



*Solutions with fresh materials. Edited  
by PAM QUIÑONES. Photograph  
by JOSEPH BERMUDEZ*

LOEWE dress in  
kakhi melange, Toy  
pump, and Anagram  
Pebble earrings





1 JIL SANDER mohair and lurex dress 2 COPERNI crystal Swipe bag 3 AMINA MUADDI Charlotte crystal pump 4 BODE striped trousers 5 GUEST IN RESIDENCE cashmere vest

STELLA MCCARTNEY

DIOR MEN

# TOUCHY SUBJECT

*A seemingly tactile frock that tricks the eye, an encrusted pump that's cool to the touch. It's the season for surface and printed textures. Photograph by JOSEPH BERMUDEZ. Styling by NEIL DE GUZMAN*

Art Direction: TINKERBELL POBLETE, Producer: BIANCA ZARAGOZA, Makeup: Sabrina Alora and Tyron Madriaga of Estée Lauder Philippines, Hair: Miggy Carbontilla



1 THE ROW *cashmere sweater*  
2 JACQUEMUS *Le Petit Bambimou denim shoulder bag* 3 JEAN PAUL GAULTIER *pleated denim wrap skirt*  
4 JIMMY CHOO + JEAN PAUL GAULTIER *60 denim slingback pumps*  
5 TIBI *Stella pleated low-rise trousers* 6 OFF-WHITE *embroidered denim jacket*

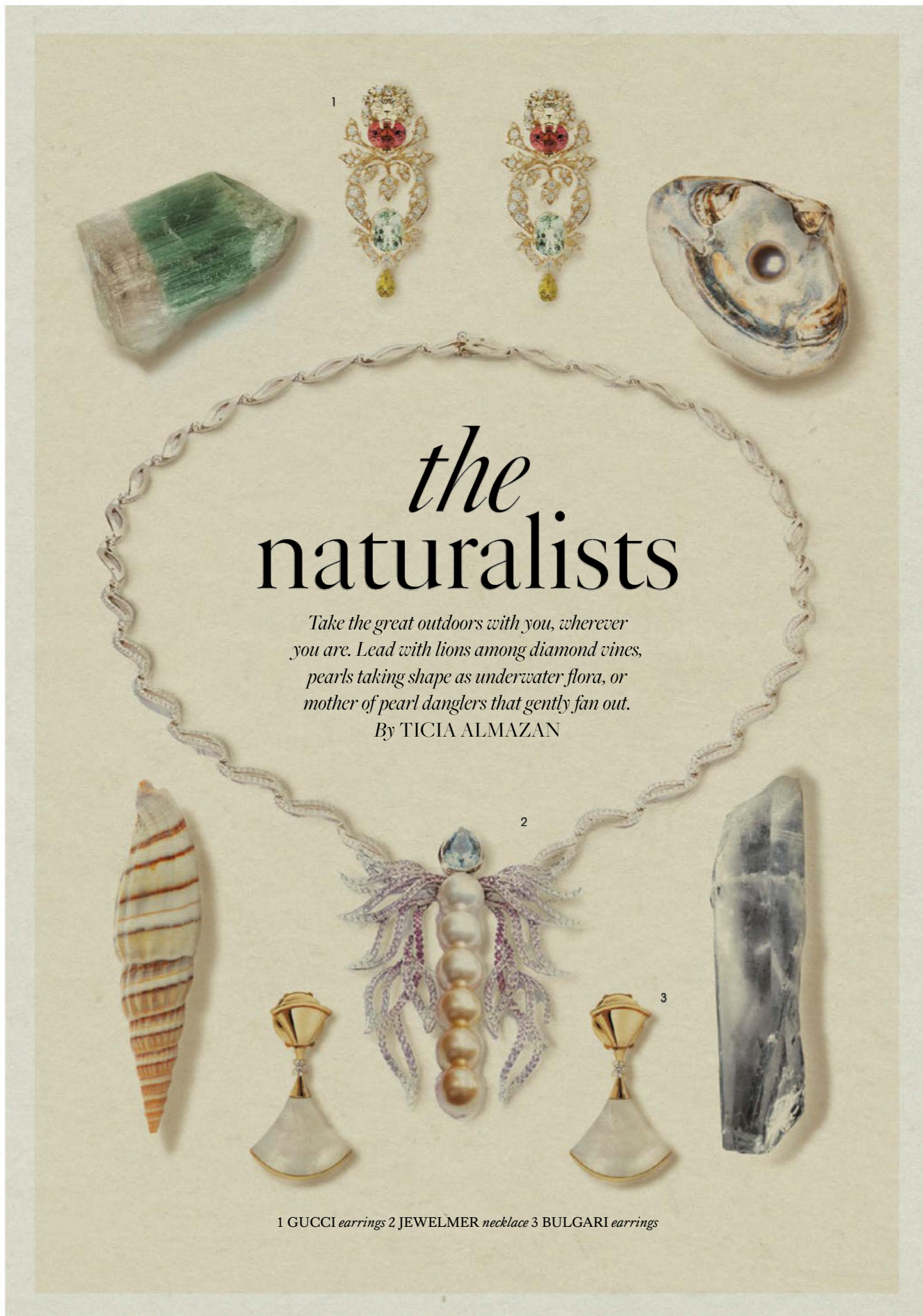
## NEUE JEANS

*In the 1800s, denim was widely worn as workwear for men. Today, the sturdy cotton is elevated to jackets, skirts, and bags, worn by anyone on and off the field. Photograph by JOSEPH BERMUDEZ. Styling by NEIL DE GUZMAN*



VIKTOR MANILA  
*denim jacket and skirt,*  
UNIQLO *turtleneck*





# *the* naturalists

*Take the great outdoors with you, wherever you are. Lead with lions among diamond vines, pearls taking shape as underwater flora, or mother of pearl dangles that gently fan out.*

By TICIA ALMAZAN

1 GUCCI earrings 2 JEWELMER necklace 3 BULGARI earrings

# *craft* endures

*At Bottega Veneta, their complimentary care service is available for leather bags, clutches, and minaudières purchased from November 2022 onward. That includes this of-the-moment metallic Sardine purse, fresh off their Pre-Spring collection.*

*By TICIA ALMAZAN*



BOTTEGA VENETA *bag*



# *second* SKIN

*In Belgium, alternative leather brand LUBAY fashions bags from leftover grape skins, stalks, and seeds. By* TICIA ALMAZAN. *Photographs by* JONATHAN STEELANDT

*BEFORE SOHO FRANCOTTE'S HANDS LEARNED HOW TO CUT AND SEW, THEY WERE ADJUSTING MICROPHONES, playing keyboards, and hitting the drums. "My [partner] sings and plays guitar [for our band Coffee Or Not]," the musician tells *Vogue Philippines*, "we work with loop stations. [We're just] two people but we can sound like a full band."*

By 2020, the duo had been holding concerts and tours around Europe full-time for over a decade, while on the side, Soho was a press officer and tour organizer who promoted other musical projects. When the pandemic hit, however, she was forced to reevaluate her career. Wishing to remain creative, she began designing initial bag prototypes before launching a crowdfunding campaign. From there, she created Lubay, her alternative leather goods brand based on veganism, ethics, and eco-responsibility.

As a vegan of 10 years, Soho has long been committed to the environment. It's why, for Lubay, she turned to materials derived from nature. The designer started with Piñatex pineapple leather, made from fibers extracted from pineapple leaves. "But the main problem was that people were questioning the idea that the pineapple leaves came from the Philippines," she shares. "Well, I come from the Philippines. But somehow it kind of was difficult with the idea of being a sustainable brand and using materials that come from so far away."

So the Belgium-based designer looked closer. She eventually discovered Vegea, which is made from grape skins, stalks, and seeds that were left over from wine production. The leather was developed by Italian furniture designer Gianpiero Tessitore and industrial chemist Francesco Merlino from 2013 to 2016, when the former was unable to source a sustainable alternative to ani-

mal leather for his work. In 2017, their innovation won the H&M Foundation's Change Maker Award, and since then, grape skin leather has been used by leading brands. Calvin Klein and Italian sportswear label Diadora crafted sneakers with the biomaterial, while Bentley used it to upholster the seats in one of their electric vehicle models.

Unlike these global companies that rely on production manpower, Lubay's bags are designed and made by Soho herself. In commitment to slow and rigorous work, Soho holds an Artisanat Certifié or Certified Artisan certification from the Belgian government. When she applied for the certification two years ago, it was under the legal status of an entrepreneur with sole proprietorship, which means that Soho is a hundred percent in charge of the brand.

"The Belgian government needs to make sure that you don't employ people to



*"It's quite thrilling to see that it is now possible to offer alternatives to leather, which are always more and more sustainable, more beautiful, and of course ethically produced," says Soho. "[It's] such a positive sign for brands like mine, which have sustainability, ethics, and aesthetics as core values."*

[do] the work for you," she explains. "They will need to make sure that you made everything from A to Z. You really need to prove that you are behind every piece."

When asked about the provenance of her brand's name, Soho reveals that it was a suggestion from one of her aunts. Lubay means "a pair of earrings, traditional earrings with designs in Kalinga. And they say it's not at all related to bags, but that it is a name with pure roots."

Her own roots are in the north of the Philippines, but she only discovered that last year. Born in the Philippines and adopted in Belgium at the age of six months, Soho had never met her biological family nor ever been to her homeland. Her search for her parents' identities began when she was a university student, one or two years shy from turning 20. "I think I managed to find my mother like five years ago, and my dad [a year] ago," she recalls. "It's

such a long process, actually, because it's not that easy when you are put in the orphanage."

It was through her parents that Soho discovered her Kalinga heritage. It turns out, the inked markings running up and down her left arm were prophetic. "I made them before I knew it was Kalinga, it's crazy," she reveals, "it was, I don't know, something kind of magical." Describing herself as intuitively attracted to the culture and inspired by how Kalinga patterns hold great history and meaning, she took four traditional patterns and interpreted them her own way, then worked with a hand-poke artist to tap the tattoos into her skin.

But her appreciation for the Philippines isn't skin deep. She promised herself that once she found her biological parents, she would step foot in her motherland for the first time. While that time has finally come (she planned

to make the journey as early as May 2023), she has had to postpone.

It's because of Lubay. She's still the sole owner and employee to date, handling everything from design, production, press, social media, and e-commerce. She landed as a finalist for the Best Belgian Brand category at the Belgian Vegan Awards 2023, and she's busy encouraging her followers to cast their votes. She's launching a new design in a couple of days and her band is back on track too, with an album on the way. "If days might be 10 hours longer, that would be amazing," Soho laughs. She continues to surprise clients, and herself, with the fact that her hands make all this possible.

"It's because I'm a musician," she says matter-of-factly. "I don't like letting someone else [do it] because it would make me feel empty. If you create something in your head, you need to be able to make it happen in the physical world." ○









*follow the*  
**SUN**

*For his debut collection at Louis Vuitton, men's creative director and acclaimed musician PHARRELL pays tribute to his African heritage, and a long, collaborative history with the French house. Photographs by JALAN AND JIBRIL DURIMEL. Art Direction by BEGOOD STUDIOS. Styling by MATTHEW HENSON*

**How did you approach your first collection and show for Louis Vuitton?**

In moments like this, when you've been chosen to do something, the sun is shining on you. The quintessential question that I ask myself all the time, and ask people I care about, is, "Hey, if the sun is shining on you, what would you do with the light?" When the sun shined on me for an opportunity like this, it changed my life across the board. If I'm going to get this appointment, I'm going to use it to do two things: one, to share all my learnings as a perpetual student; and two, to share my love and appreciation. I'm choosing to shine a light back on this city, these people, all my friends here, who have kept me lifted all this time.

*“Hey, if the sun is shining on you, what would you do with the light?”*

**What is the premise of the collection?**

For me, LV means LVERS. If you appreciate Louis Vuitton, you're a lover of the curation. You love the product but deeper than that, it's a love for the culture that embodies a like-mindedness of taste. The humans who buy and wear Louis Vuitton have five modes: dandy, which is tailoring for business and events; comfort, which is what you wear at home and to the gas station; resort, for when you're on the beach; sport, for activity and working out; and finally, the core staples of the House, which I'm going to iterate on every season. It's thinking across the board of the demographic. Everything you want to do, we made something for you.

**Why did you choose the Damier patterns as a key component in the collection?**

I came into this knowing that I wanted to make some serious indelible marks, the first of which was: I know the Monogram is historically a very dominant force within the House. I had the Bastille bag in Damier, I had shoes and boots in Damier. I saw it as an opportunity. The fact that it has the chessboard setup, we could use the grid as a platform to play with different artistic techniques. The first was to treat the blocks like 8-bit Atari graphics. I worked with ET Artist, who's really good at it. The super powerful one is the Damouflage, which fuses Damier and camo. I wanted to make a print that makes people say, "Okay, that's P. And that's Damier."

**Why did you choose to re-imagine the Speedy bag for your first campaign?**

The Speedy was always a men's canvas bag until they made a smaller version for Audrey Hepburn in 1965. I wanted to take something

I felt would be unisex and just make a great bag for humans. It is an everyday icon conceived for every walk of life. It's inspired by Canal Street in New York. It's flipping it on its head. I want to come in on a bag level and make a splash. Primary colors are where you start. Then you see the bag has wrinkles in it and that it's droopy, and you know instantly that it's not a regular Speedy. That's not canvas. It's butter-soft leather.

**How did your personal relationship with Louis Vuitton evolve?**

I was introduced to Louis Vuitton through rappers and the after-market clothing that was made by Dapper Dan out of Harlem. You'd see rag tops on cars made out of Louis Vuitton bag materials. We were blown away by that. I never thought I would be able to afford it. I don't even know if I was necessarily interested in it for me, because it was just so next level. I started working in music and as things evolved, I met Marc Jacobs. In 2004, he asked Nigo and me to collaborate on the Millionaire sunglasses. In 2008, Pietro Becari, who was at Louis Vuitton at the time, asked me to design a jewellery collection for the House. My first foray into fashion was because of Marc's generosity at Louis Vuitton, and it only grew from my relationship with Pietro. Over the years, we stayed in touch. When he offered me the job as men's creative director, I was excited, not only for the job, but to work with him again.

**In your show notes, you pay tribute to "the giant before me."**

Virgil has always been a brother in spirit. Now, that is literally what we work with here. He left a lot of hits with the House. As far as I'm con-

*For his debut collection, Pharrell collaborated with artist and painter Henry Taylor. Taylor's miniature portraits are embroidered on tailored suits, denim jackets, and accessories alongside the LV monogram. "That's what my appointment is for. I put a particular focus on African descent because we don't get enough of that light," the creative director says.*





*"I'm collaborating with his spirit," says Pharrell, when asked how he pays tribute to the late menswear creative director Virgil Abloh.*


cerned, I'm collaborating with his spirit. I'm honored. When he got this appointment, I was really, really happy for him. Right until he started here, we were working together on JOOPITER, this online auction space we had. It was crazy what the connections were, and the respect he had for us, and which we continue to have for him. I can tell you that Virgil and me being here has to say to kids who look like us, "Oh, I can do anything. I can be anything."

**What does your appointment at Louis Vuitton mean to you?**

When you come from a culture that has been purposefully blocked and set in disadvantaged situations, you can't imagine what's even possible. But there's this narrative that's changing. So many of us are being swept up from one place and landing in fertile soil in other places, and being treated and watered and sunned like all souls should be. I can say there is an impact in that way, which is changing. It's not enough but it's happening. I'm very honored to be a part of that. When I say the sun is shining on me—and it's shining on all of us—is listen, this is a French house but they went right back to America and found another Black man, and gave me the keys.

**Henry Taylor created artworks for the collection and appears in the filmic prelude. What does he represent to you?**

Henry is a genius man and having him involved in this is beautiful, not only because he's talented but because that's what this platform is for. That's what my appointment is for. We have all kinds of human beings as ambassadors but I put a particular focus on African descent because we don't get enough of that light. That may sound like I have some sort of agenda, but I don't have an agenda. I am the agenda. And I didn't take this appointment. I was chosen. So, I'm doing what I was chosen to do. And Henry is one of those things. ○



*"When you come from a culture that has been purposefully blocked and set in disadvantaged situations, you can't imagine what's even possible," Pharrell muses. "But there's this narrative that's changing. I'm very honored to be a part of that."*

# FASHION



*Optimism in new chapters. Edited  
by PAM QUIÑONES. Photograph  
by ÖZEL OSMAN*

MARNI *top*  
and *boots*,  
ALEXANDER  
MCQUEEN *belt*,  
SANKUANZ  
*skirt*, SAINT  
LAURENT *gloves*







*shadowe*  
PLAY

*Let your gaze fall on an illuminated shoulder,  
collarbone, or cheek. All the bright places tell you  
where to look. Photographs by ÖZEL OSMAN.  
Styling by PENINAH AMANDA*



VERSACE  
blazer, MARNI  
dress, KERMIT  
TESORO  
shoes. Opposite:  
LOEWE, dress  
and shoes



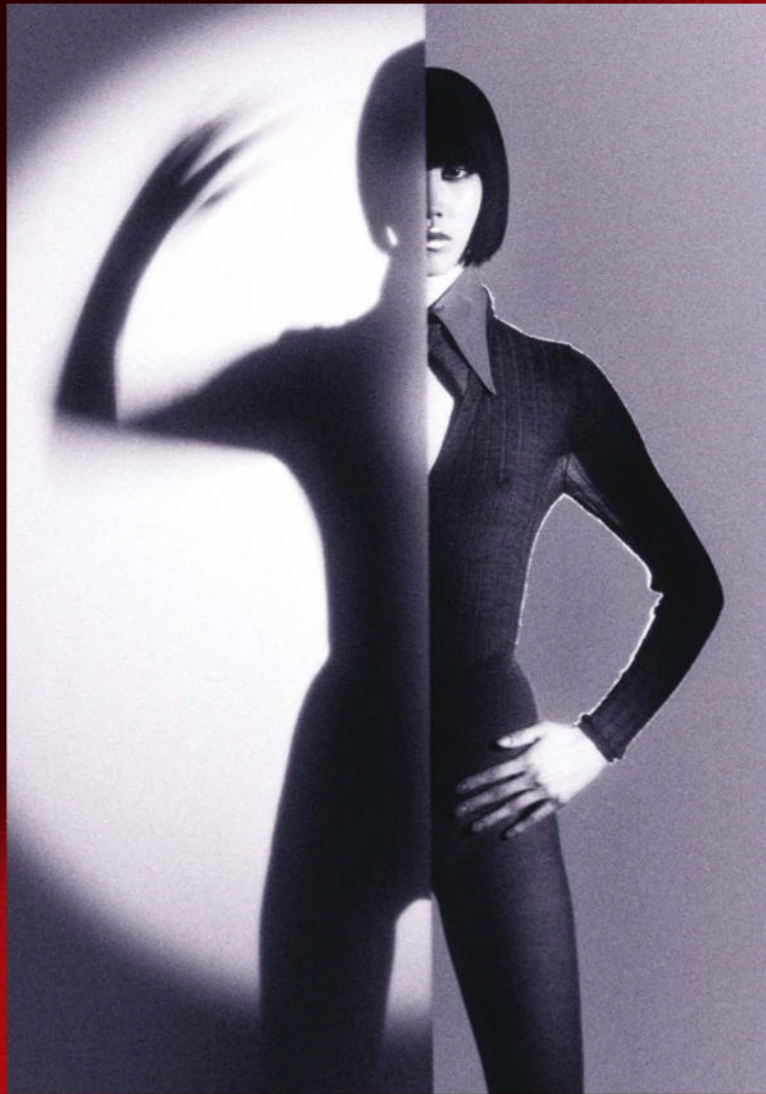


SIA ARNIKA *dress  
and skirt*, PRADA  
*shoes*. *Opposite:*  
GUCCI *necklace*, ET  
OCHS *dress*, DAVID  
KOMA *boots*



SIA ARNIKA *vest*,  
ROKSANDA *dress*,  
SAINT LAURENT  
*gloves*, LOEWE  
*shoes*. *Opposite*:  
PRADA *cardigan*,  
WOLFORD *tights*





ANY OLD  
IRON *blazer and  
trousers*, FENDI  
*belt*, MAISON  
LUMIERE *earrings*,  
CASADEI *shoes*





**O** *strike*  
**FO**  
**LOL**

*Noir and gold textures invite  
a sleek sartorial elevation.  
Photographs by CARLA  
GULER. Styling by  
CARLOS MANGUBAT*



VIDI BLAK  
*dress*, SUSAN  
CAPLAN  
*vintage* NINA  
RICCI *earring*,  
MANOLO  
BLAHNIK *shoes*

Makeup @ Hsiu, INDIA RAWLINGS. Model - CIA TANG OF MILK MODEL  
MANAGEMENT. Stylist & Assistant: CHRISTINE SKOWRON

PINKO dress,  
MAISON LUMIERE  
earrings, MANOLO  
BLAHNIK shoes



MOSCHINO dress,  
JU-NNA shirt and  
sheer shirt, SUSAN  
CAPLAN vintage  
CHRISTIAN DIOR  
earrings and vintage  
CHANEL earring worn  
as a brooch, DEA RAIL  
JEWELS ring



BURBERRY  
*dress, trench coat,*  
*shoes, and bag,*  
WOLFORD  
*tights, SUSAN*  
CAPLAN *vintage*  
CHRISTIAN  
DIOR *earrings*



BRADLEY  
SHARPE  
*dress*, SAINT  
LAURENT  
*scarf*, DEA RAIL  
JEWELS *ring*,  
SUSAN CAPLAN  
*vintage earrings*



DOLCE &  
GABBANA bra,  
earrings, shoes,  
and cape worn as  
a skirt, JENNY  
CHHIM gloves



CHAU RISING  
*top and trousers,*  
MAISON LUMIERE  
*earrings, PALOMA*  
SUAREZ *shoes.*  
*Opposite: PINKO*  
*coat, SUSAN*  
CAPLAN *vintage*  
CHANEL *earrings*







A photograph of a vase with red flowers against a red background. The vase is dark and has a textured, spiky rim. The flowers are red and have a unique, almost trumpet-like shape. The background is a solid, deep red color. The lighting is dramatic, highlighting the texture of the vase and the petals of the flowers.

# Renaissance Man

*Sabato De Sarno has emerged from behind the scenes to take Gucci into a whole new era. Jason Horowitz meets the designer in the spotlight. Portrait by ANTON CORBIJN. Photographs by THEO LIU*

## PROFONDO ROSSO

*De Sarno in his Rome apartment, which showcases his signature color, Ancora (also the name of his debut runway collection).*



*SABATO DE SARNO DOES NOT LOVE HAVING PEOPLE OVER TO HIS HOME.* “I never host anyone,” De Sarno, the creative director of Gucci, tells me as we are seated on his living room couch across from his snoozing dapple dachshund, Luce. Colleagues aren’t invited for dinner; his husband lives in Brussels—even his parents don’t get to spend the night. “It’s my place, where I relax,” says De Sarno, a baby-faced 40 with closely cropped hair and beard, as he fidgets with the strings of his vintage Jurassic Park sweatshirt. “Where I disconnect from work.”

The walls of the apartment, on a winding street in the Renaissance quarter of Rome, are decorated with contemporary works by Jannis Kounellis, a Greek artist who scrawled words over his lithographs, and Sidival Fila, a Franciscan friar who paints canvases of sewn fabrics. There are prints of Italian icons, including one of the writer and director Pier Paolo Pasolini. (De Sarno proudly tells me the value of the latter has skyrocketed since his predecessor at Gucci, Alessandro Michele, staged a show of the print’s photographer, Paolo Di Paolo, at a Rome museum.) Beneath coffered ceilings and atop the room’s minimalist deco furniture rest fertility sculptures from Sardinia, one of which has the deep bordeaux color with which De Sarno is repainting Gucci’s bags and shoes and skirts and jackets. He gave the color, and his first runway collection last September, the name Ancora, which means “again”—in the insatiable sense, he tells me—“of when you kiss someone that you like and you don’t want to stop doing it.” That is his ambition for Gucci, too, he tells me: to imbue it with passion. “I want Gucci to touch people’s hearts,” he says.

Behind him, as he tosses a chew toy to Luce, is a monograph on Valentino, the Roman fashion house that was his home for the last 14 years and from which the fashion giant Kering plucked him to lead Gucci, its flagship brand, in January 2023. Beyond the closed doors behind us on the sofa, meanwhile, is an off-limits studio bursting with ideas for the February runway show—closets filled with works in progress and boxes he is packing as Gucci moves the company’s design operation to Milan.

Resting among the fashion and art books, including the works of Tom Ford, lining the hallway are two ceramic hands from his native Naples that one of his brothers gave him, one hand making the sign of a cuckold, the other with a middle finger in the air. “He says I don’t work,” De Sarno says with a half smile. “Maybe he’s right.”

Family is central to De Sarno. Two days earlier, he joined his mother and father and brother in the northern city of Como, where they all moved decades ago. They ate tuna pesto and squid as his mother interrogated him





Photographs by THEO LIU

VIVA ITALIA  
"For me," De Sarno says,  
"Italian-ness means  
bringing our qualities into  
the world." Model Lila  
Moss, on Rome's Ponte  
Sant'Angelo, wears Gucci  
throughout story. Here a  
top, jeans, sunglasses, and  
bag; gucci.com. Fashion  
Editor: Gabriella  
Karefa-Johnson



about Jennifer Lopez and Ben Affleck and all the other celebrities he dressed, and met, at Gucci's Los Angeles County Museum of Art gala in November; he told her how he hit it off with Kirsten Dunst, and how strange it was to be treated as famous by the famous. "This is the first time that I was a celebrity, too," De Sarno tells me, talking with some awe about Kim Kardashian coming over because she wanted to meet him, or being introduced to Brad Pitt and Leonardo DiCaprio. "I've seen *Titanic* 15 times."

He was joined at LACMA by his husband of four years, Daniele Calisti, a lawyer with the European Commission in Brussels whom he met in 2012 on the black sands of the Sicilian island Stromboli. Their first kiss, on a dance floor, is recorded on De Sarno's art-heavy Instagram account, but in the apartment there are no pictures of his husband or his family. The only family photo is a childhood image of De Sarno himself. "This is me," he says in the foyer, pointing at the toddler with curly blond locks seated on a mini Vespa with training wheels and wearing red pants and a mock turtleneck sweater. There are even more embarrassing ones, he says, but when I ask to see them, he declines. "Let's not overdo it," he says with a laugh.

For nearly the last decade, Gucci turned overdoing it into both an ethos and a business plan. Under the maximalist, envelope-pushing vision of Michele, whose "Last Supper" look and bejeweled fingers made him a prophet of the fashion-celebrity industrial complex, sales multiplied to nearly 10 billion euros a year. But Michele, who widened the runway to make room for all walks of fashion life, was not on board with Kering's strategy to grow that number to as high as 15 billion by shifting his design

and expanding its audience beyond the young and diverse crowd of fashion fanatics to target deeper pockets and a broader constituency. When Michele left in November 2022, Kering sought a designer who, like Michele and Ford before him, could once again—ancora—transform the brand by connecting it more directly to its heritage and selling more to the kind of people who could afford to buy and wear it.

"I didn't want a rupture—I wanted an evolution," Kering's chairman and CEO François-Henri Pinault tells me. To achieve the brand's potential, he says, it needed to avoid overexposure, maintain its joyfulness, enhance its sexiness, and appeal to a "broader audience of luxury consumers" who, he says, "we've never tried before."

To reach them, he turned to De Sarno, then Valentino's fashion director of men's and women's ready-to-wear. De Sarno's mission at Gucci is, in a way, to make the storied house a little bit more like his own: urbane, contemporary, and chic, with sensual hints of intrigue behind the doors.

De Sarno's first runway show in Milan in September began with a long gray wool overcoat opened over short shorts cinched by a GG-branded belt and a tight white tank top. A taste of color came from the classic Gucci red and green in the coat's vent and the gold from a chunky necklace, but the real flavor was supplied by the crimson—or ancora red—of the Jackie bag over the shoulder and the platform horsebit loafers that hearkened back to the early aughts, when De Sarno, then a student in Milan, first became immersed in high fashion. (If De Sarno's Gucci takes off, people are going to look a lot taller this year.)

The colors were mostly muted—blacks and blues and whites, a lacy pink lingerie dress under a beige overcoat. Crystal embroidery on shirts and bras and tinsel fringes on almost shaggy-looking heels made appearances, but always as refined accents, not blurted-out declarations of self-expression.

"People have written of my fashion as minimal, quiet luxury, but to me it's really the opposite," De Sarno says. "My overcoat has a shape that is the result of a curating process. We tested it, we chose for wearability." To get a more rounded effect in the silhouette, he studied the weave and warp, even the width of the thread, with fabric suppliers. "At the end, you see a gray coat, but it's a little more than a gray coat."

Instead of making costumes for an alternate universe, De Sarno tells me, in what seems to be a reference to his predecessor, he wants to dress people who go to work and go on



**HOUSE & HOME**  
*De Sarno and husband Daniele Calisti. Top left: De Sarno (seated) overseeing a fitting in Gucci's Rome headquarters before the move to Milan.*

TOWER OF  
POWER

*Moss has her hands  
ecstatically full in a Gucci  
trench coat, dress, bags,  
shoes, and necklace.*









“I don’t want the invitees to my runways to say, *Wow, wow, and then forget about it,*” he says. He wants people to dream about it—“and buy it and wear it”

dates—and he wants them to wear the smartest, sexiest, most Italian Gucci outfits he can imagine.

“I don’t want the invitees to my runways to say, *Wow, wow, and then forget about it the next day,*” he says. He wants people to appreciate the quality and the hidden detail of his designs; he wants them to dream about it—and then to go into the stores in four months “and buy it and wear it.”

It’s nearly noon and De Sarno, usually at the office by 9, has to get to work. On the street, he is clad in a black Gucci overcoat and carries a black leather Gucci bag with a metallic tag reading *My 1st LAC-MA*. The green and red stripes on the tongues of his white Gucci sneakers match Luce’s leash, a gift from his team for the *Ancora* runway show. “She loves Gucci more than I do,” he says, revealing that Luce is the inspiration for the new “bassotto,” an elongated, wiener dog version of a clutch.

De Sarno points out the places where he goes (the Fellini-esque haunt on the Piazza Farnese, where there are “different people, not just one type”) and the places he doesn’t (a wine bar where “everyone goes, and so—no”). Avoiding the Pantheon and streets clogged with tourists, he mourns the loss, in central Rome, of artisans and, with them, certain Italian traditions of craftsmanship, good taste, and quality that he wants to reinject into Gucci. “Italian-ness is know-how,” he explains. “All of the French brands—they do production in Italy. Already this is an explanation: There’s Dior, Chanel—but it’s we Italians who make this stuff, we who touch these products and make them become something. It’s our grandparents, our aunts and uncles and relatives.”

But he also wants to bring a sense of “an Italian who lives in the world. I’m an Italian, but I don’t live the *dolce vita*. I go to Brussels, to New York—but I go as an Italian. For me, Italian-ness means bringing our qualities into the world.” In De Sarno’s Gucci, he envisions the clothes—and the stores—as envoys for his culture and heritage.

#### HEARTS & FLOWERS

*“People have written of my fashion as minimal, quiet luxury, but to me it’s really the opposite,” De Sarno says. Gucci jacket, shorts, sunglasses, shoe, and earring.*



“‘The new Gucci I want,’ De Sarno said, is about ‘freedom and exhilaration—I just want to have fun’ ”

As we walk, De Sarno sidesteps the garbage and broken glass of Rome—a city, he says, “I’ve never fallen in love with.” (Compared to Milan, he says, Rome is “not at all a free city.”) He crosses the Via del Corso, says “Andiamo, Luce” with a gentle yank of the leash, and enters Gucci headquarters—where, for now at least, he is free to do whatever he likes.

Until January 2023, few people outside fashion’s tightest circles had heard of De Sarno. When Michele split with Gucci, the lists circulating of potential successors included the house’s studio design director, Remo Macco, or longtime Gucci designer Davide Renne.

As Pinault tells it, though, the internal candidates were not quite seasoned enough, and so, in a rigorous recruitment process, he looked outside—breaking with a long Gucci tradition of promoting from within but keeping with the Kering practice of finding top talent from behind the scenes. That’s where De Sarno came in.

“The giant is Gucci—I am Sabato,” De Sarno tells me over a lunch of risotto under frescoes in his august office. “I’m not a singer who became a creative director or an actor who became a creative director,” he says. “I was a designer for 20 years. I have touched the clothes, I changed and modified them, I invented them. They have chosen someone who knows how to do this job—if you like it or not, that’s another story—but I surely know how to do this.”

Pinault tells me he is bowled over by De Sarno’s energy, which he saw firsthand at LACMA, but also with his maturity and pa-

tiency: Rather than trying to do everything at once, De Sarno seems to be slowly but surely building on his work in successive collections.

Still, despite all the market research and advertising budgets of a major brand like Gucci, fashion success remains an alchemy, not a science. When Michele asked to be put forward in 2014 for the top job, Pinault didn’t even know who he was, though his maiden—and, for many, mad—show ended up being the first unorthodox step in a wildly successful, and lucrative, journey. De Sarno might be hitting all of Kering’s buttons—luxury, sophistication, sexiness, and wearability—yet hitting the zeitgeist is another matter.

Pinault, for his part, remains confident.

“We are taking our time to make sure that everything goes perfectly at the right moment, because it’s always dangerous,” Pinault tells me. “But so far, so good.”

The eldest of three children, De Sarno grew up in a three-floor house with his parents, his uncle’s family, and his grandparents in Cicciano, a small town northeast of Naples. His mother, who learned how to embroider with her six sisters, had him at age 17. His father had followed his own father, whom Sabato is named after, into the construction business. De Sarno endured taunting over his name, which means Saturday (“Is your brother named Wednesday, Thursday?”), and, as he got older, more vicious teasing about his emerging sexuality. Instead of talking with the people around him, he sometimes drew faces on paper, “emojis before emojis,” he says—including a mouth zipped closed when he didn’t want to talk.

“As a child, it was the most beautiful place in the world; as an adolescent, the ugliest,” he says of Cicciano. Around the age of 13, he began to see Gianni Versace as a role model. “He represented what I wanted to be when I grew up: He was gay, very attached to the family, from Southern Italy, and lived in Milan.”

As De Sarno became more comfortable in his own skin in high school, he led protests to (successfully) demand the return of a civics teacher who dared talk to students about sexuality. He also organized parties and nights out on the town and at 15 began hitting the local main street dressed to the nines—and studying what everyone wore (or, as he puts it, “the choices they made”). He made some interesting choices of his own: During a goth phase, he wore tight pants and flesh-colored silk shirts, painted his fingernails black, and listened to Evanescence. <CONTINUED ON PAGE 158>

WRITTEN  
IN STONE

*(And leather, and skin.)  
Moss—at Rome's Fontana  
della Dea Giunone—wears  
a Gucci jacket, shorts,  
sunglasses, belt, shoes, and  
earring. opposite: Gucci  
jacket. In this story: hair,  
Benjamin Muller; makeup,  
Kali Kennedy. Details, see  
In This Issue.*



# D *new* A W N

*Liza Soberano and Chau Bui on fresh starts, purposeful influence, and manifesting change. By MARIANE PEREZ. Photographs by ZANTZ HAN. Fashion Director PAM QUIÑONES*

*Liza spotlights Gucci's Signoria slingback pump which was named after the central piazza in Florence. A part of the proceed from its sales are donated to Nosotras Onlus, an association that supports the development of Casa delle Donne, a collective focused on empowering women.*





*Chau wears a slit  
frock from Ancora  
Norte, creative  
director Sabato  
De Sarno's debut  
evening wear  
collection which  
is exclusively  
made-to-order.*



GUCCI *jacket*  
*and shorts*





# MEANINGFUL IMPACT

*Vietnamese fashion influencer Chau Bui on connecting through creativity and authenticity, as she uses her platform to advocate for the greater good*

*FOR CHAU BUI, ONE OF VIETNAM'S MOST INFLUENTIAL SOCIAL MEDIA FIGURES*, fashion has always been a means of self-expression. The 26-year-old recalls how she got her start, raiding her parents' closets, and thrifting at second-hand stores, not really expecting the massive attention her unique stylings would get online.

These days, she's often seen in eye-catching outfits at high-profile events, or at fashion weeks all around the globe. "Fashion was my playground to get creative. And until now, what I love about working in fashion is the boundless creativity of it all," she tells *Vogue Philippines*.

With millions of followers across her many online channels, the model-slash-influencer has won various awards in her industry, been on numerous magazine covers, and was even listed as one of *Forbes Vietnam's* 30 Under 30.

Inspired to make a difference, she is keen on championing worthy causes like promoting local talent. "From fashion designers to creative directors, from makeup artists to photographers, it's so inspirational to see the industry thriving in such a relatively short period of time. I want to do my part to bring these amazingly creative minds and products from Vietnam to the global fashion scene," she declares.

Having been working in fashion for nearly a decade, Chau is also a supporter of mindful consumption. "I understand that in order for the industry to continue growing, we need to prioritize sustainability, not only in what we produce, what we wear, but also in our daily habits and choices," she shares.

Aside from creating content around the concept of a more sustainable lifestyle, she also initiated a project called "Sharing is Caring" five years ago, which raises funds by reusing and recycling clothes for the benefit of various charities around Vietnam. The annual event now attracts thousands of young people eager to create a meaningful impact on their communities. "I got to work with social workers who tirelessly support orphans, human-trafficking victims, underprivileged children and so much more. To see that my platform has the ability to connect and empower people through these projects has been one of the most rewarding aspects of my professional career," she shares.

She is also set to launch an affordable skincare brand called Good Day this year, which she says will be formulated with all-natural ingredients from Vietnam. It will debut with

a line of serums. "Beyond taking care of your skin, I want users to wake up each morning with a renewed sense of confidence and energy, knowing that you have everything you need to look your best," she says.

Despite her many successes, and various brand partnerships and endorsements, Chau has likewise faced her share of challenges. Her most recent one was health issues late last year that required her to take a break. But this also allowed her to reflect on her career, and what impact working in the spotlight has had on her life and relationships. "What I realized was that working in such constant presence of social media and technology, a lot of people my age had been under a tremendous amount of pressure to build a certain persona in the public eye, without proper tools and support for self-reflection, self-love and self-balance against these pressures," she says.

This then inspired her and her team to come up with "Introspection," a project that she says wants to "provide the platform and tools for young people to empower their inner self." This kicked off with a healing retreat where Chau, and a handful of their country's top content creators, gathered for a series of special activities facilitated by experts and specialists. "In Vietnamese culture, we often say, 'Take one step back, two steps forward.' Sometimes it is extremely important to slow down, to look within, instead of outward, to find what's most important to you at the moment, to find your own inner peace," she shares.

Knowing that almost 70 percent of her followers are young women, Chau also believes it is important that she use her voice to promote the importance of female empowerment. She considers Gucci's commitment to raise awareness against gender-based violence "an extremely important initiative." The Italian brand has pledged that for a certain time period, a portion of the proceeds from the sales of their Signoria sling-back in Rosso Ancora red will help build Casa delle Donne, a new haven in Florence.

Chau believes self-awareness is the first step to loving oneself. "By being aware of your strengths and weaknesses, by being honest and vulnerable to yourself and those around you, we connect better to our inner self and open up opportunities for growth," she says. "My platforms will always be a space to celebrate, to express, and to empower individuals."





*Exploring multiple fields, 26-year-olds Liza and Chau forge their own paths, uplifting and advocating for women. Both wear GUCCI choker and ring*



GUCCI *Jackie bag*



## IN WITH THE NEW

*Liza Soberano is bravely conquering new ground, and despite the challenges, is intent on enjoying the ride*

*THERE'S SOMETHING ABOUT LIZA SOBERANO.* The young thespian seems wise beyond her years. As someone who's played everything from a strawberry farmer, a down-to-earth heiress, a blogger, to a warrior, the 26-year-old is imbued with a certain self-awareness she generously attributes to her craft.

"The thing that I love most about acting is being able to portray different people, different characters. It's like allowing myself to completely kind of let go of everything that makes me, me," the award-winning actress tells *Vogue Philippines*. "I think as an artist, it just makes me feel so empowered, to hone such a skill or talent."

It is likewise something that she believes helps her see things in a nuanced light. "It helps me understand the world a bit more," she says. "It helps me just better understand how people operate, again empathize with things that go on in other people's lives."

Her latest foray into this world of make-believe is likewise her first in Hollywood, playing Taffy, the sister to Kathryn Newton's character in *Lisa Frankenstein*. The horror comedy, which premiered this month, was something that was both nerve-wracking and yet exciting for Soberano. "It was such a big jump from only doing film and TV projects here in the Philippines, then all of a sudden, going outside of my comfort zone, and working with a completely new production company and work culture," she shares. "But at the same time, it was very inspiring and challenging."

And yet with this foray into uncharted waters, the actress feels like she has, in a way, come full circle. "It was such a special moment I think for me just getting to see all the actors that I once could only see on the big screen, and then being alongside them," she says.

She shares that her number one motivation for exploring a career abroad was her hunger for growth. "I've always been the type of person that is constantly wanting to learn more, wanting to evolve, wanting to become better at anything that

I do in life," the actress declares. "I wanted to push myself, and kind of scare myself a little bit, because I think that's what makes me feel the most alive."

Liza is also set to start filming another Hollywood-based project, on top of other television and movie projects that she will also be producing. She's also keen on getting into directing, where her background is proving quite valuable. "I always immediately take it from an actor's point of view," she shares. "As someone who is trying to get into doing all those three things, I think it's a really good combination because you have an understanding of how all these different aspects work in making a successful film."

Her drive for success is also tied to her desire to see other women succeed. "Women have always been important in society in general. I feel like we not only provide stability, we nurture people," says Soberano, who is an ambassador for Save the Children Philippines. The 26 year old believes the best way we can empower ourselves is to put ourselves in another's shoes. "I think that's the way we can truly support one another, is by just truly listening to our pains, our struggles, and even our successes. Like just learn from one another, and always prioritize that."

Having shot to stardom at such a young age out of relative obscurity, and working non-stop since then, she relishes the chance to now slowly soak all of the experiences in. Now that she's working in a different country, she feels like "a rookie all over again. But this time I'm a little bit more aware of that. And I'm a little bit more knowledgeable."

She shares that what excites her most about 2024 is that she has no idea what's going to happen. "I love being surprised, I love spontaneity, I just love the unknown. Which is odd, because it can be a bit uncomfortable," she shares.

"My mantra for 2024 is to just have fun, and be more intentional, but have fun while doing so," eager to see where life and her career takes her. "I'm truly excited to experience the year for whatever it has to offer me, the good and the bad. I'm gonna soak all of it in, and enjoy it." ○

GUCCI *jacket, tights,  
pumps, and bag*



GUCCI jacket,  
tights, and pumps





# BEAUTY

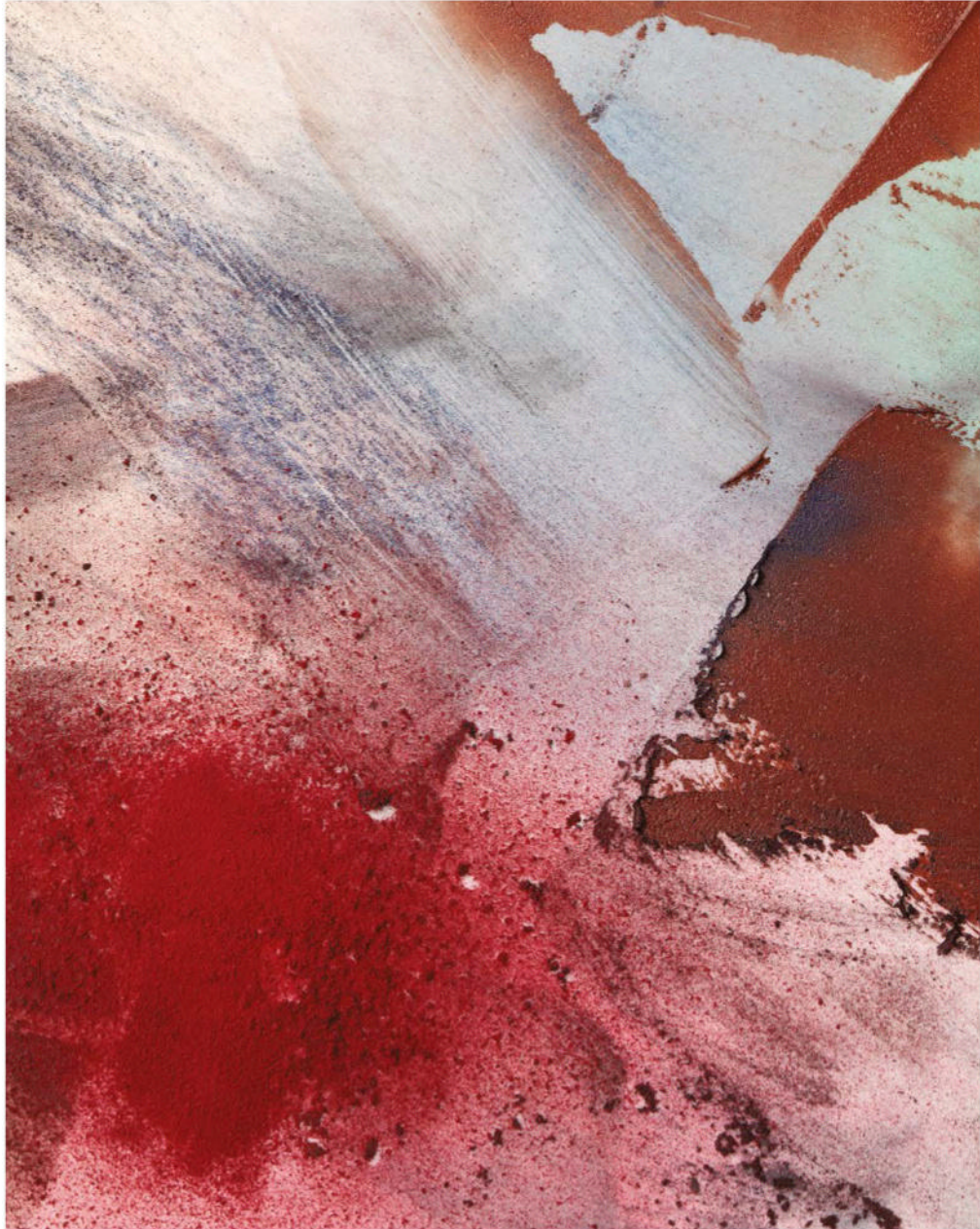


*Clean looks, more options. Edited  
by JOYCE OREÑA. Photograph  
by LAWRENCE DE LEON*



# S W A T C H O U T

*Vibrant and energizing hues of purple, orange, and sage green set the optimistic tone of the new year. Immerse in spirited symphonies of rich and upbeat colors that offer a sense of simplicity and luxury. Beauty Editor JOYCE ORENA.  
Photographs by AMBER CANTERBURY. Product Styling by PAKAYLA RAE*



1 HERMÈS rouge hermès satin lipstick 13 beige kalahari (PHP4,000) 2 HERMÈS ombres d'hermès eye shadow quartet 02 ombres végétales (PHP6,300) 3 HERMÈS trait d'hermès volume mascara 06 violet indigo (PHP3,900) 4 HERMÈS plein air healthy glow mineral powder in 03 sahara (PHP5,700) 5 HERMÈS hermesistible infused care oil 05 rose kola (PHP3,200)



*A shift is essential to mend our relationship with Mother Earth. Here, we introduce Filipino-run conscious beauty brands who believe that nurturing the skin fosters mindful consideration for the planet. By BIANCA CUSTODIO. Photographs by ERWIN CANLAS & LAWRENCE DE LEON. Product Styling by RIZA ROSAL. Beauty Editor JOYCE OREÑA*

FILE

WOMEN

TALENT

# LESSE

NEADA DETERS SPEAKS ON THE  
POWER OF STRIPPING DOWN TO THE  
ESSENTIALS AND FINDING BEAUTY IN  
YOUR NATURAL SKIN. PHOTOGRAPH  
BY LAWRENCE DE ELEON

*WITHOUT MISSING A BEAT, NEADA DETERS ENUMERATES THE FEW ITEMS SHE CAN FIND ON HER DESK:* a couple of books, a set of headphones, and photos of her family. “These are all I need,” she says.

Her mind for minimalism started back when she was still in university. Then, she went on a backpacking trip across Asia with only a small bag and a few choice items. “I didn’t need much to have such a fulfilling experience,” she shares, “and that taught me a lot about life.”

Deters’ “Less is More” principle extends to her beauty brand Lesse, which she founded in New York in 2018. While others might advocate for an extensive skincare regimen, the Fil-Australian and her brand promotes a stripping back to the essentials to build a ritual, not a routine. Lesse started out with a single product, the oil-based Ritual Serum, which is made of turmeric and sea minerals. It was a solution to the founders’ own struggles with her skin, particularly her constant bouts with cystic acne.

“I had a lot of fear that, you know, what if people don’t connect with this?” Deters shares. “But it was such a statement. And for many people, it cut through the noise and really helped us succeed.”

The entrepreneur says that her mindful lifestyle was inspired by her childhood days visiting family in the island of Alabat in Quezon. A small beach hotel, pristine sands, and lovingly prepared meals from freshly caught crabs—these memories

have reinforced the values of simplicity and contentment for Deters. “My grandmother and my mother have always drilled into me that you have to really detach yourself from material things and focus on what really matters,” she says.

Deters says that her brand is committed to high-quality natural ingredients and working with suppliers who are ethically verified. They employ ingredients such as wild mushrooms and Australian native extracts, drawing inspiration from Eastern medicine.

The founder also wants to create a space that is inclusive, extending value not only to their consumers but also to their suppliers, the farmers they partner with, as well as the earth that will receive all of it back. “Companies are accountable for the way that they’re creating things in a way that they haven’t been for a very, very long time,” says Deters, who is hopeful that sustainability in beauty is more than just a trend. “When we talk about beauty, we’re constantly thinking about something that is beyond what we are right now. But I think beauty comes with not just self acceptance, but a real celebration of self, of your own skin and every square centimeter of that being that you are.”

She emphasizes that it is “not about a certain look, hairstyle, or glass skin. It’s really a state of being; it is how you walk through the world. It is the way that you engage with others. And it’s the way that you take time to engage with yourself.”



*Giselle wears an  
ISSEY MIYAKE  
top. Philippe wears  
a HANSEN bib,  
NICOLÒ sheer shirt,  
UNIQLO shirt*





# D A M D A M

GISELLE GO AND PHILIPPE TERRIEN'S SUSTAINABLE LIFESTYLE IS FOUNDED ON A DEEP RESPECT FOR HERITAGE, BUILT COMMUNITY, AND CONTENTMENT.  
PHOTOGRAPH BY ERWIN CANLAS

*JAPANESE CLEAN SKINCARE BRAND DAMDAM FINDS ITS SANCTUARY IN THE HISTORIC NEIGHBORHOOD OF GION IN KYOTO.* Displaying products made entirely of native ingredients to furniture crafted by local artisans, the flagship store unfolds as a sensory experience. It is only fitting, as the word “Damdam” in Tagalog means “feeling.” Co-founder Giselle Go emphasizes that “beauty is a feeling. It’s not and it shouldn’t be just about looking good, but it’s about feeling good, too.”

Her journey began with 10 boxes of skincare products during her move to Japan. As a former beauty editor, Go would regularly receive new releases from different brands. But, she admits that as she was getting older, she “started to learn which products or ingredients my skin was responding more positively to and which ones it wasn’t. So, I stopped trying all the products getting sent to me and I just started to gravitate towards more naturally made products.”

In Japan, despite being a country renowned for high quality skincare, Giselle says she noticed the lack of products that used minimal, clean ingredients. So, she embarked on formulating her own, mixing facial oils and brainstorming on ways she could sell them to the Japanese market albeit in small doses. Giselle’s partner and Damdam co-founder Philippe Terrien is experienced in Japanese business having built the Tokyo-based creative agency TFC Japan. He encouraged her to prepare a business plan and she sent him a 96-page document that had innovative ideas for clean skincare that made

use of ingredients native to Japan such as shiso. The brand resonated with Philippe completely, and he too was on board.

While a commitment to clean and sustainable living might not yet be a widespread practice for many, it’s always been the case for Philippe who grew up in rural France in a family of environmental activists. “There was no intention, I think, [of living a sustainable lifestyle] but that was the way it was. It was a part of my life,” he says.

Among cousins who grew crops without pesticides and a mother who was into alternative medicine, Philippe took an interest in agriculture and natural ingredients at a young age. Once the couple set out to build Damdam, they first searched for regenerative farmers whose practices were also grounded in a mindfulness for the environment. “We realized that it was better, sustainably speaking to produce things, to reduce our carbon footprint and source ingredients locally,” explains Giselle.

When Philippe moved to Japan at the age of 19, he developed fondness for Japanese culture and traditions, particularly ancestral crafts passed through generations. “When I had the chance together with Giselle to build this brand,” he tells *Vogue Philippines*, “It was natural for me to go to these craftsmen, artisans, farmers, and try to do something with them because I love them so much that I wanted to incorporate them in our art form.”

And with many things within Japanese tradition, Damdam’s art takes time. “We’re not in a rush; we want to do things properly and slowly,” Philippe says.

# PURE CULTURE

PURE CULTURE OFFERS AN ALTERNATIVE PERSPECTIVE: WHEN YOU SEE YOUR SKIN AS A MICROBIOME AND LEARN TO CARE FOR IT AS AN ENVIRONMENT SO TOO CAN YOU BEGIN TO TAKE OWNERSHIP OF YOUR EXTERNAL ENVIRONMENT.  
PHOTOGRAPH BY ERWIN CANLAS

*WHEN ALEX GENTRY FOUND HER BATHROOM FLOOR COVERED WITH THE SOAP SHE MADE*, with no room left to step, she knew it had become more than just a hobby.

What began as a stress-relieving activity during lockdown evolved into an exploration of high-performance organic skincare ingredients, leading her to enroll in a two-year course with Formula Botanica. This journey, fueled by a passion for clean ingredients and a gap in the market, laid the foundation for Pure Culture, a local clean beauty brand that Gentry says is committed to redefining beauty through accessible, science-driven skincare.

Pure Culture is founded on a sense of responsibility, starting with the intention to call their market “beauty citizens” rather than consumers. “As a citizen, there is accountability to think beyond me,” explains Alex. “We really wanted to educate Filipinos on a few things, the first being to rethink the definition of beauty. What does beauty really mean? And what does beauty really mean to you?”

Gentry, along with friends and co-founders Kim Reyes-Palanca, Rina dela Calzada, and Steph Oller, all share an equally personal connection to their products: Alex, earlier motivated by a need for clean ingredients during pregnancy, gave longtime friend and brand builder Rina a call, who eventually became the COO of the company. With ultra-sensitive skin prone to allergies, dela Calzada was eager to create products free from reactions. Kim desired to materialize her mindfulness advocacy into sustainable products while CEO Steph Oller, dealing with eczema, sought skincare relief and inner confidence.

Starting with straightforward, minimalist, and multitasking products, Pure Culture introduced sets made of *lato-lato*, or Philippine wild algae, which caters to oily and acne-prone skin in high humidity, and a Bulgarian rose line designed specifically for dry

to mature skin. They say that this is a reflection of the brand’s dedication to addressing specific skincare needs within the Philippines’ unique climate.

Central to Pure Culture’s identity is the concept of the microbiome, a recognition that the skin is an ecosystem. “Your skin is not a blank canvas that needs to be alcoholized and cleaned. In fact, we’re more microorganisms than we are cells,” Alex explains. “And if you have that understanding that your skin is an ecosystem, therefore my body is an ecosystem, therefore my community is an ecosystem, therefore my country, planet, is an ecosystem, then there’s just a better reflex of understanding that your choices that you make, however small, really ripples through.”

The brand strives to bridge the gap between non-toxic, luxurious, and effective formulations and wants to advocate for biotechnological innovation. “There are so many things that biotechnology can do for the industry that we’re in to make it more effective and more sustainable, and I think beauty should embrace that,” Alex says.

“We always think about legacy because we’re all moms. We think, ‘what are we gonna leave behind for our children?’” adds Reyes-Palanca, the company’s chief marketing officer. “Advocating for mindfulness and a beauty centered on wholeness is our way of contributing to the beauty landscape of the Philippines and to the generations to come.”

Since the brand’s conception in the pandemic, it has faced numerous challenges—from sourcing environmentally friendly packaging to navigating the complexities of certifications. Still, the founders say they remain resilient, driven by the belief that elevating the industry is worth the effort. “It’s a commitment to build a community of ‘beauty citizens’ who think beyond themselves, embrace diversity, and contribute towards a more sustainable industry.” ○

*From left: Alex wears a HARLAN+HOLDEN shirt, Karina wears a COPERNI shirt, HARLAN+HOLDEN trousers, JACQUEMUS shoes, PRANCA earrings, Steph wears a GANNI top, OPÉRASPORT shorts, HARLAN+HOLDEN skirt, JACQUEMUS shoes, Kim wears a HARLAN+HOLDEN top and trousers, PRANCA earrings*





CLEAN BEAUTY

*Thoughtfully-sourced products with optimal results and minimal impact on the planet.*



- 1 LESSE *every tone* spf 30 (PHP4,754) 2 DAMDAM *citrus glow vit. c & hyaluronic serum* (PHP2,775)  
 3 LESSE *refining cleanser* (PHP3,635) 4 DAMDAM *silk rice cleansing oil* (PHP2,043) 5 PURE CULTURE  
*bulgarian rose everything elixir* (PHP1,185) 6 LESSE *ritual serum* (PHP5,033)



**TRAVERTINE**  
LONGEVITY & WELLNESS

**RECONNECT TOGETHER  
LIVE LONGER**

KEEP IT  
CLEAN

*Paloma Elsesser  
wears TORY  
BURCH. Hair,  
Sondrea "Dre"  
Demry-Sanders;  
makeup, Yumi  
Lee. Details, see  
In This Issue.  
Fashion Editor:  
Max Ortega*



# Sensitivity

*IT IS A WOMAN'S DUTY TO USE ALL THE MEANS IN HER POWER* to beautify and preserve her complexion," wrote the Irish dancer Lola Montez in her delightful 1858 guidebook, *The Arts of Beauty*. How closely, but misguidedly, have I followed this advice! From the time I've been able to roam the drugstore unsupervised, I have been engaged in a battle for beauty. In my youthful zeal for perfect skin, I leaned upon scrubs and heavy-duty toners, most of which chafed and stung—to my great satisfaction. When acne came for me in college, I armed myself with prescription-grade gels and capsules that blitzed my spots and made my skin flake. A fair price to pay, I reasoned. Recent decades featured laser treatments and powerhouse potions I one-click purchased as I brewed my morning coffee.

But amid the ambient noise about skin sensitivity, I began to wonder: Might it be time to start easing up? Not long ago, an obsession with so-called clean beauty had us all fretting about how our potions might be polluting our insides. Now skin sensitivity—the new gluten intolerance!—has us setting our sights on the surface. A new crop of ultra-gentle, if not ultra-simple, products caters to those prone to itching, stinging, and inflammation—or who, like me, just want something soothing after a lifetime of chasing the burn.

Skin sensitivity isn't an official medical diagnosis, though anywhere from 60 to 70 percent of women say that they suffer from it, and women are stepping

forward in droves to claim the delicate mantle of the moment. Lila Moss's sensitive skin played into makeup artist Fara Homidi's inspiration for the model's walk down the runway in barely-there makeup for Chloé's fall 2023 show. Zendaya, Sofia Richie, and Euphoria star Sydney Sweeney are all sensitive-identifying, while Marisa Tomei one-upped the lot when she told Vogue she has a "sensitive system." We are all, it appears, snowflakes, each special in our own way.

Our skin can become sensitive due to an array of triggers—cosmetic ingredients, pollution, extreme UVs, or TikTok-inspired DIY bathroom-sink chemical peels. The damage is to the skin barrier; when defenseless, our outermost layer stands no chance against irritants. "Imagine a sheet with a high thread count versus a lower thread count, or a canvas bag versus a plastic CVS bag," says Manhattan plastic surgeon Lara Devgan, MD, giving me a crash course on the states of skin barriers, and the myriad ways we can wreak havoc on them.

Welsh-born aesthetician Sofie Pavitt, a former designer for Tory Burch, once took regular trips to Korea and learned everything she could about 10-step cleansing routines. It was all so elaborate and thrilling! But now, Pavitt says, "I take a more minimalist approach," borne out in her newly launched skin care line—a supertight edit of a mere three products. Pavitt's Manhattan atelier resembles a therapy office. "I specialize in problematic skin," she advises. "I talk to my clients about their diet and lifestyle, and we'll work on a home

routine." I start using her products—a gel face wash that takes its time to form suds and a light exfoliant serum—and they have a gateway effect.

Over the coming days, I set off on a tender bender. Ren Clean Skincare's Evercalm Overnight Recovery Balm melts on my fingers. I dig into the tinted balms that anchor Bobbi Brown's "clean no-makeup" line Jones Road. I slather on French pharmacist Natacha Bonjout's Le Balm, a solution that smells faintly of roses and comes in an ivory tin that looks like a chubby macaron. Every time I apply a dollop of Biography's Long June, a silky chamomile and camellia-seed-packed oil formulation, my face feels as though it's sipping a mug of herbal tea. I put in a preorder for Lesse's moisturizer, whose key ingredient is Kakadu plum extract, known to be a potent yet gentle source of vitamin C.

It all feels divine, and smugly salubrious—but am I going overboard? The dermatologist Shereene Idriss, MD, tells me that not everyone needs so radical a refresh. "I just feel like it's overkill to limit yourself from products that might bring you better results overall," she warns.

A dose of wisdom comes from celebrity makeup artist Gucci Westman, who recently posted a picture of herself that revealed thumbprint-size red splotches. "I think it started from using overly aggressive active products," the 53-year-old tells me. Her cult line, Westman Atelier, is geared for the needs of people with skin sensitivities; its latest Skin Activator serum has 12 ingredients said to strengthen the moisture barrier. I confide that after a lifetime of product promiscuity, it's doubtful I could ever land on a one-serum solution. The profusion of gentle giants on my bathroom counter has been way too tempting, and I've been pouncing on every vial and tube in sight. "It's okay to be curious," Westman tells me, saying she too can weaken in the face of possibility. "There is a chance that I might launch something else." ○

*Gentle skin care is the regime du jour. Does that mean less is more? Or creams and serums galore?* LAUREN MECHLING investigates. Photograph by STEFAN RUIZ

# Training

# *the last* LETTER

*Why does the world tell Geloy Concepcion their secrets? Vogue Philippines sits down with the photographer to talk about a project that will last as long as people trust him with their thoughts. By PATRICIA VILLORIA. Portraits by JAKE VERZOSA*

*IN MANILA, EVERYONE TALKS TO YOU LIKE THEY'VE KNOWN YOU FOR AGES.* Weaving through the busy alleys of the Dangwa flower market, it's apparent. Linger at a stall a second too long and its owner might convince you to bring a small bouquet home (or maybe more if they're really good).

That is how Geloy Concepcion finds himself looking at tulips inside a florist's cold room tucked in one of the flower shops in the area. After casually chatting with a florist along Dimasalang street, their conversation somehow led them to a detour to see the flowers hidden in a huge cooler. Walking out with nothing in hand, Geloy laughs. "At least *nakita na natin kung ano nasa loob ng mga ito, 'di ba!*" ("At least we got to see what's inside these things, right?") He's used to situations like this.

Growing up in Manila, surrounded by care-free, blunt, but hospitable talkers of all kinds molded Geloy's work as a portrait photographer and an artist for many years. His online persona always feels familiar, even to strangers. It's also why so many people from around the world trust him with their closely kept secrets.

After migrating to the United States in 2017, he began a project to dispose of old film photos that had been piling up from his work as a photographer. Feeling lonely and struggling with his family to adjust to a new country so far away from home, he was thinking of ways to reach out to the world from his small room. On his social media account he posted one question for his friends to see: What are things you wanted to say but never did?

"*Sana magaling ako mag-English para hindi isipin ng mga Amerikano na tanga ako,*" (I wish I was good in English so the Americans don't think I'm stupid.) his first post read, scribbled down on old film. And perhaps it's that candid admission that invites others to let down their guard, too. As a portrait photographer he knows that his vulnerability and how he connects with others is essential in his art.

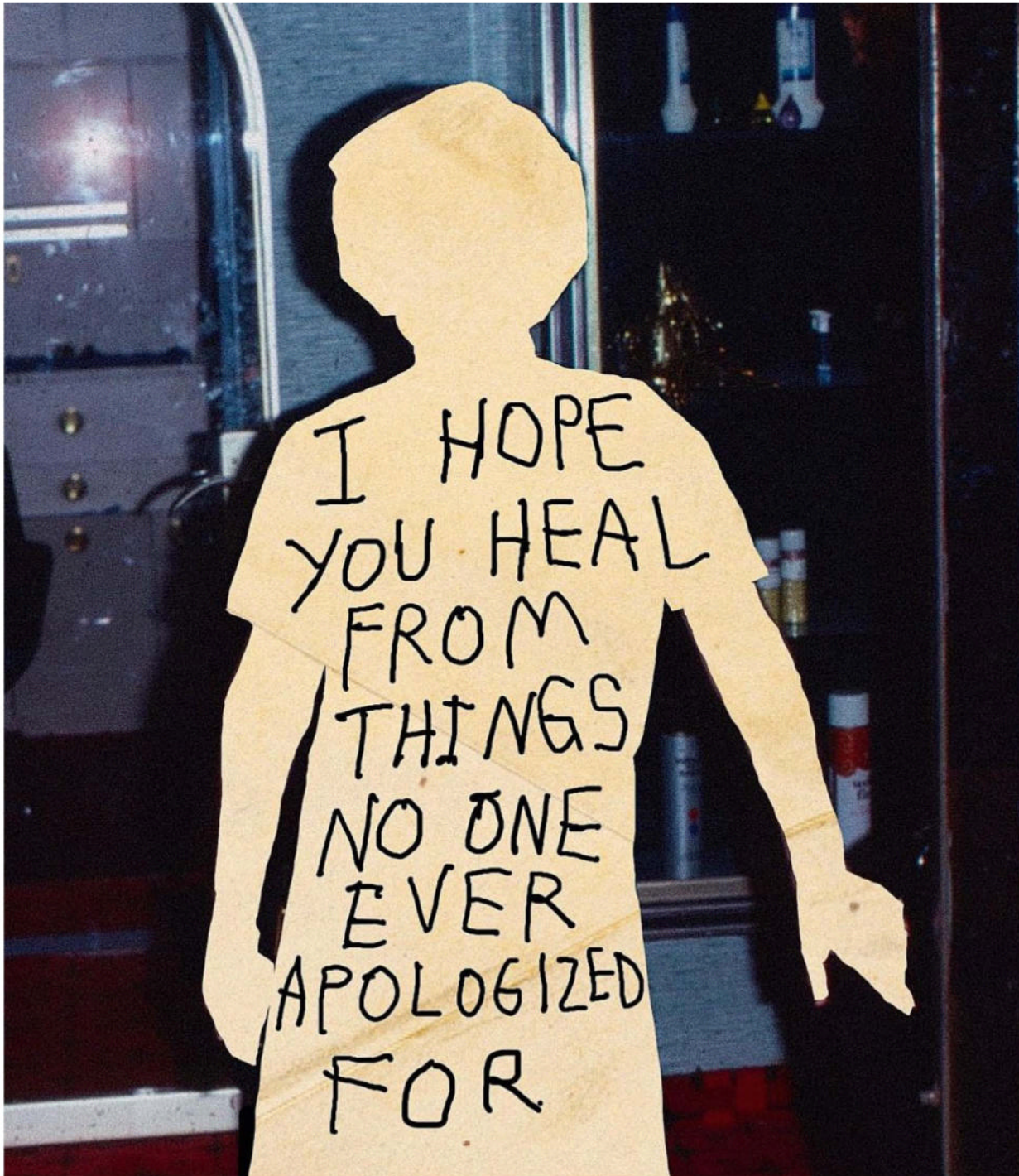
"*Sa totoo lang, pinagkakatiwalaan ka ng tao ng mabilis,*" he says. "*Mas at ease ang mga tao kapag nakakausap mo sila. Kasi kailangan mo din yun eh. Kung may sasabihan ka ng mga sikreto, dapat kilala mo sila.*" ("Honestly, you have to make people trust you quickly. And they are



Art Director: JANN PASCUA. Shot on location at Dangwa Flower Market



*Gelay Concepcion photographed at the Dangwa Flower Market in Manila, not too far from where he grew up.*



Photos courtesy of GELOY CONCEPCION



“If anyone’s going to tell you their secrets, they have to know you first”

more at ease with you if you talk to them. You need that connection. If anyone’s going to tell you their secrets, they have to know you first.”]

As a self-described homegrown Manila boy, he has an innate skill to talk to—and reveal himself—to everyone like an old friend. The effect is evident even in his portraiture: it’s in his subject’s eyes, the slack of the shoulders, and the lips—upturned while laughing, shaped like an “o” in the middle of telling him a fascinating story, or relaxed in a barely-there smile.

After his first post, he expected about 40 submissions, then he’d be done with the project. But more responses kept piling up. At one point, he turned to his wife and admitted that he may be onto something big.

Now, his virtual mailbox has amassed over 200,000 letters already. It’s akin to a virtual, communal confessional. Letters could be from a stranger from the Philippines or the United States. But these days, he tells me, most of his submissions come from Serbia, Kazakhstan, Poland, Pakistan, and countries far away. All sent to a tattooed man from Manila who used to draw graffiti around the city and likes taking photos.

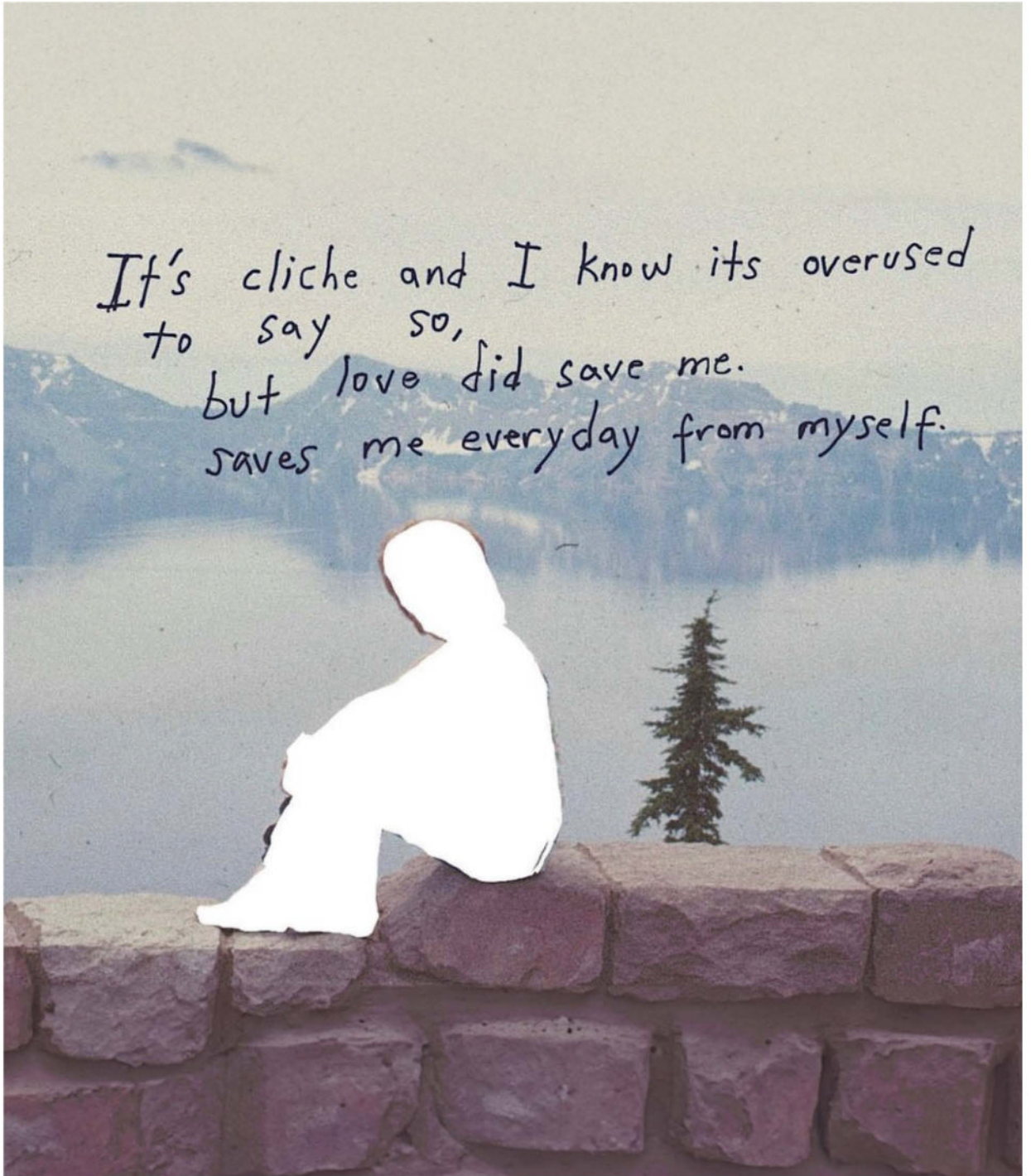
While telling his story, he doesn’t claim to be anything more than an artist who wants to listen. He reads each of those strangers’ confessions and writes it onto a photo that is then posted among other confessions on his Instagram page. They contain stories of hurt, re-

gret, and trauma. But he sifts through the submissions to find bright spots too—sometimes people send over stories of hope. Wishes for the future are tossed in as well, waiting to be spoken, into existence. Each post has become a pocket community of readers. People start conversations in the photos’ comment section, who then find others who are going through the same experiences.

At this point, the project has become an archive of the mental state of one sizable corner of the internet. His book, a guided journal titled after the question he’s known for asking, is an extension of his online project. He wants his questions to reach people outside of social media in hopes that the reflection could help others. “*Para ito sa mga taong walang Internet, mga nasa kulungan, sa home for the aged. Kasi kung sa Instagram lang ang project na ito, limited din siya in a way.*” [“This book is for those who don’t have internet access, those in prison, in homes for the aged because if I just keep this in Instagram, its reach is also limited in a way.”]

Reading all these strangers’ thoughts has made him kinder and more considerate of people’s hidden struggles. Maybe, the same could happen to others if he reaches a wider range of people. “*Mahalaga kasi sa akin yung relationship, kaysa sa kabit ano,*” he reasons. [“Relationships are important to me above anything else.”] So he promises to continue the project, until he receives the last letter. ○

If's cliché and I know its overused  
to say so,  
but love did save me.  
saves me everyday from myself.



*Ola is adorned  
in delicate  
and romantic  
Anemone.*





*first* of  
SPRING

*Listen to nature and learn from her wisdom. As the season transitions, the vernal equinox signals a fresh start. Take a closer look at each pattern, texture, and shape and hone a deeper understanding of botanical bliss. Photographs by AGA WOJTUŃ. Makeup by OLGA WOLSKA-JERZAK. Beauty Editor JOYCE OREÑA*



*Like flowers, there is strength in diversity and hope that springs eternal.*

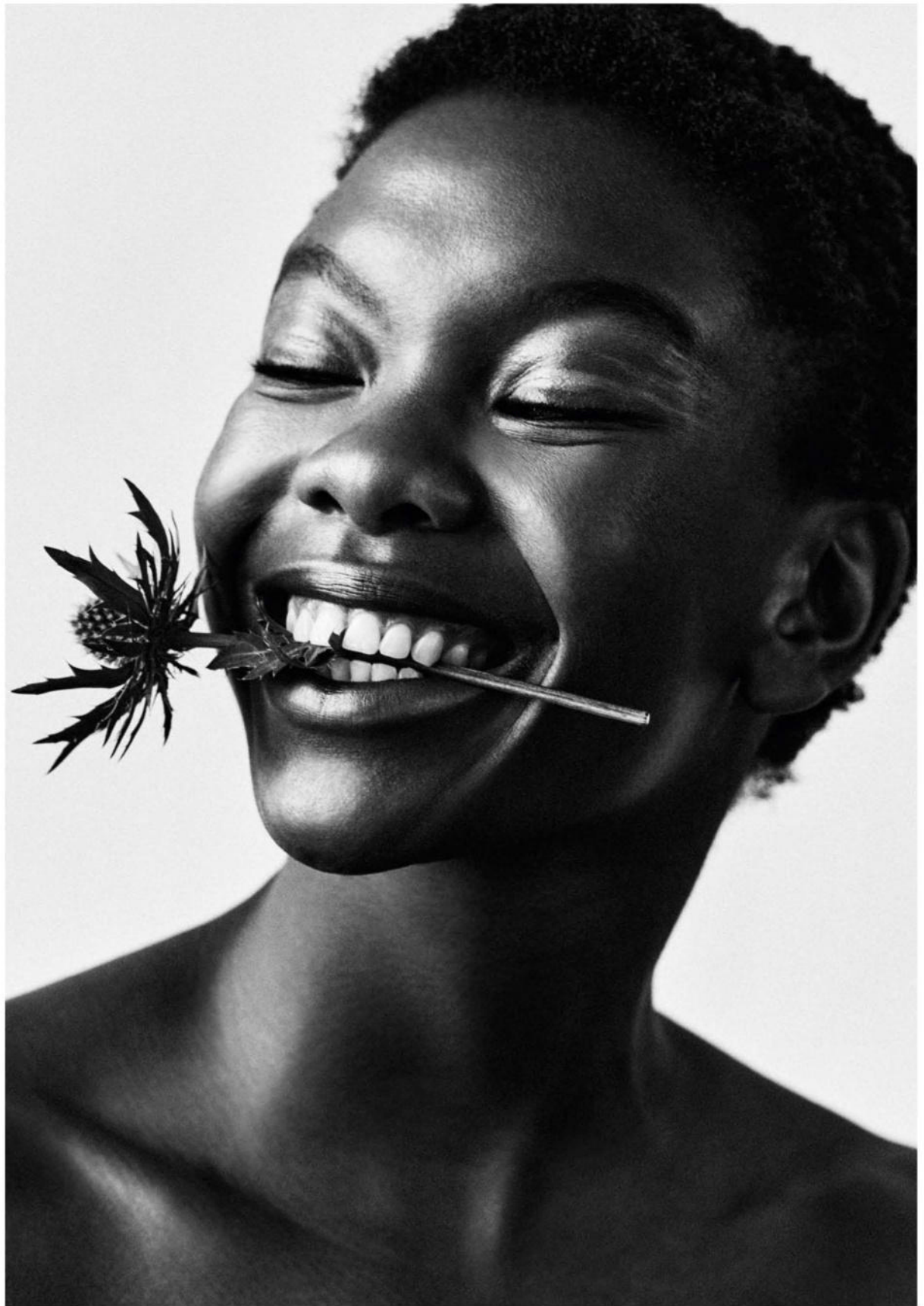












*Awaken the power of healing and rejuvenation with the Eryngium flower. The perennial sea holly is said to represent resilience, courage, and independence.*



1 DIOR BEAUTY rouge dior velvet  
720 (PHP3,000). 2 CHANEL  
BEAUTY n°1 de chanel revitalising  
lotion (PHP4,100). 3 DIOR  
BEAUTY prestige le baume de  
minuit (PHP43,000). 4 CREED  
absolu aventus (PHP22,400).  
5 LABEL.M pure botanical  
nourishing conditioner (PHP2,700)

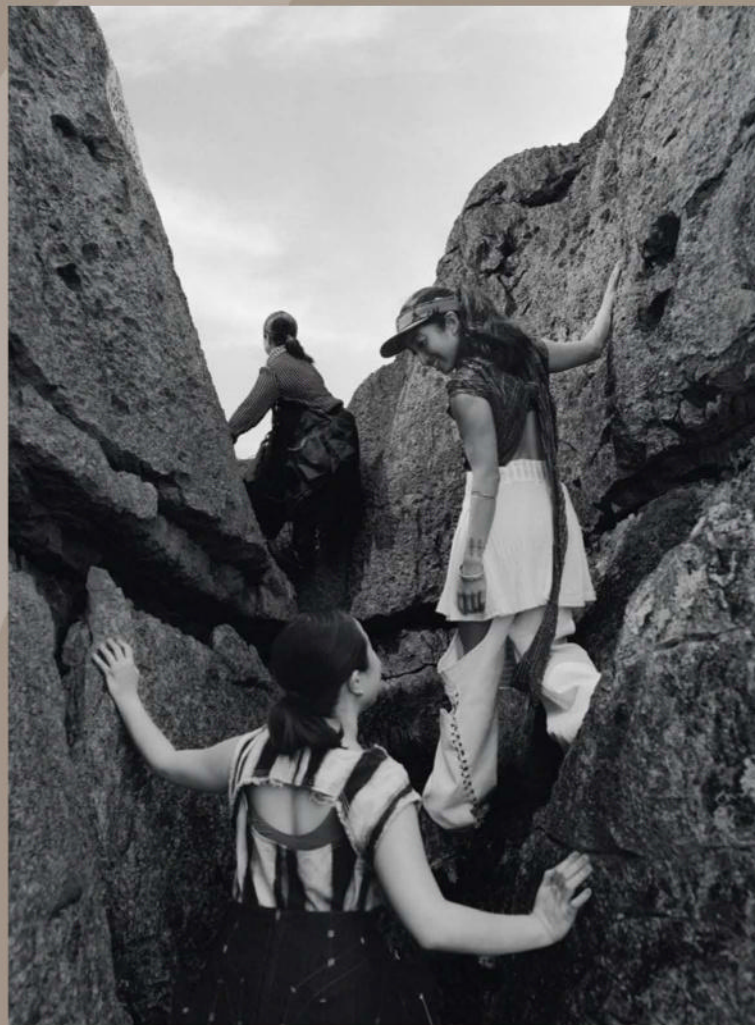








# CULTURE



*Joining forces for the Earth. Edited by  
AUDREY CARPIO. Photograph by  
ARTU NEPOMUCENO*



*From left: Issa wears a CAROLINA HERRERA coat, AIGLE rain boots. Bella wears a YOYA jacket, DONA LIM skirt. Ann wears a vintage BURBERRY trench coat, APARA dress. Billie wears a CAROLINA HERRERA coat, HALOHALO skirt. Tasha wears a YOYA button-down, top, and skirt*

# FORCES *for* CHANGE

*These seven women are forging different paths to the same goal: restoring our relationship with the Earth. Photographs by ARTU NEPOMUCENO. Fashion Director PAM QUIÑONES. Introduction by AUDREY CARPIO*

*JUST BEFORE SUNRISE, ANN AND BILLIE DUMALIANG LED THE WAY TO THE PEAK OF A ROCK FORMATION KNOWN AS TATAY.* It is the highest point in Masungi, from where you can survey a vast landscape of karst and forest, a green corridor of some 2,700 hectares that the sisters have devoted their lives to protecting and restoring. They've grown up with Masungi and have always thought of the place as a sibling. "Our dad probably spent more time here than with us. So yes, it's like our younger brother," says Billie. "And it's also like my dad's mistress. But the time that was spent caring and protecting the area was just infectious to everyone on the property, so that's how we grew to love it."

There's a saying that we will only conserve what we love, and we will only love what we understand. How do we begin to understand a world that is so wide? It begins with getting to know a place and its inhabitants: the tide pools at the shore, the wilderness at the edge of the city, your backyard garden. Spending time in nature, being with nature, and entering into conversation with everything around you. Seeing for yourself the intricate web of relationships between the mushrooms and the trees, the birds and the seeds, finding ourselves belonging to this web of life, and approaching creation with the reverence and enchantment that we might have had when we were children.

"We're so disconnected from nature, but if we bring back that value of empathy and the love for nature, you can get more done on the ground and make a difference," says Camille Rivera, marine biologist and co-founder of Oceanus Conservation, a science-based organization focused on restoring mangroves around the Philippines. Taking the love and respect for nature to its logical next step, Camille dreams that the rights of nature will be recognized, citing countries like Panama which recently granted Nature the same legal rights as humans, prioritizing the needs of the ecosystems over the desires of society. "We always extract and exploit, so we need to make sure that there are rights for nature and for the animals that live within the ecosystem," she says. "I really hope to see that in the Philippines as well, as we are one of the most biodiverse countries in the world."

Indigenous communities have long held the sacredness of the natural world; they have always shared a spiritual relationship with the Earth. A recurring declaration among each of the women in this feature is the importance of holding space for Indigenous voices and knowledge, which they have come to know firsthand in their various advocacy work with communities on the frontlines. "If we see Indigenous solutions that have been working for thousands of years, those are the solutions that we should be channeling all our energy into. And that's where we find hope," says Tasha Tanjutco, who co-founded charity organization Kids for Kids and creative consultancy TAYO with her sister Bella when they were teenagers. On hope, Bella adds, "When you work with communities, that's

where we find the most energy and hope because the work is not just a one-transaction thing. It's something that's collaborative."

Writer Nicola Sebastian similarly witnessed how communal responsibility works while researching for *Homelands*, photographer Jacob Maentz' book documenting over 40 Indigenous communities across the archipelago: "I learned so much of what community and collaboration looks like. In a community with good leadership, there's this sense of shared investment where everyone is involved, everyone decides together." Nicola believes that, at a deep level, Filipinos do know how to collaborate and act for the collective good. The project of Emerging Islands, the arts organization she co-founded in La Union, seeks to foster greater co-creation and collaboration around ecological issues.

Issa Barte, an artist and co-founder of youth organization For The Future, holds art workshops in Indigenous and climate-affected communities with the goal of empowering kids to tell their own stories. With the Aetas of Yangil in Zambales, she showed 10 teenagers

how to take photographs with a disposable film camera, and set them off with the question, "Why should your home—your forests, rivers, trees, and birds—be protected?" Their photographs changed the way she thought about the climate crisis. "It is a lesson I am learning from the children—about how our relationships to our ecology could shift our sense of self, of beauty, of climate—and ultimately help us envision a better future for all," Issa writes in an essay. "They are teaching me an inward route about how our solutions exist within our own communities, our own ecologies, our own truths."

As daylight started to fade over the Upper Marikina Watershed, the women went deep into conversation about conservation. They don't really have an agreed upon name for what they do—they insist that the true environment defenders are the rangers and those on the frontlines—all have

been transformed by the forces of nature. All have been in deep communion with its beauty, seen up close its devastating power, and understand that the path forward involves love, empathy, and compassion, for humans and non-humans alike.

Reflecting on a year that began with the cancellation of quarrying at Masungi and ended with "No More Cruel Summers," a Taylor Swift-inspired advocacy action at COP28, Ann says that "it's really beautiful to see that solidarity exists on the local ground and on the international stage." Still, the memory that always keeps hope alive for the Dumaliangs despite the challenges is the day the Indigenous groups and the military got together at a *bulalohan* in Rizal and shared a meal. Previously on opposing sides of the often dangerous conflict, they've both become Masungi's strongest partners on the ground. "You sit there and have bulalo with them and see them find ways to help each other on common ground—on taking care of home, on national pride," she says, getting teary eyed, "on loving this country."

“Our relationships to our ecology could shift our sense of self, of beauty, of climate”

*From left: Bella wears a THE NORTH FACE vest at R.O.X., HINDY WEBER net skirt, MERAKI skirt. Issa wears an ADIDAS x STELLA MCCARTNEY jacket, IT'S VINTAGE cargo skirt, SALOMON sneakers at R.O.X. Tasha wears a MOON RIVER top, APARA maxi skirt*



*Vintage*  
CARHARTT  
*jacket from IT'S*  
VINTAGE



# *ann & billie* DUMALIANG

*Conservation may be a tireless job, but ANN AND BILLIE DUMALIANG are going to do it forever.* By NINA UNLAY

*THERE IS SOMETHING IN THE WAY ANN AND BILLIE DUMALIANG SPEAK ABOUT CONSERVATION THAT REVEALS TO YOU THAT THEY'VE BEEN TALKING ABOUT IT FOREVER.* In another life, Ann says she'd be an engineer; Billie, an entrepreneur. Or a K-Popstar. "They look like they're having so much fun!" she laughs.

But in this lifetime, in their words, Masungi is a "forever thing."

Conservation is in their DNA, passed down from their father. Their answers are instinctive, informed by years of lobbying against political rivals and bonding with scientists. Their shared vocabulary is equally diplomatic and academic. They geek out about snails even when they are the only two in the room that can understand.

Despite their young age, their work is prolific.

Aren't they tired?

"Tired? Um... yes," Billie says, laughing, before adding "physically, mentally, spiritually" for emphasis. "But we can't stop. Eight years have passed in the blink of an eye."

—  
Ann and Billie are trustees of Masungi Georeserve, a multi-award-winning conservation site and geotourism destination tucked away in the rainforests of Baras, Rizal. It was in 2017 that these restoration efforts were formalized. Over 68,000 native trees have been planted to this day. People will recognize the name Masungi Georeserve because they've stepped foot on its wildlife trails, which take them to an abundance

of trees, jagged cliffs, and unique karst formations, an hour-and-a-half drive from Metro Manila.

"It's always been about getting more people to love Masungi," Ann says. "That's what the trails are for." It is a veritable forest of dreams, and as they nurture it, people will come.

As karst landscapes make up only 10 percent of the entire world's topography, the biodiversity of Masungi Georeserve is increasingly valuable. It gives birth to endemic wildlife, both plant and animal species that can only thrive under these rare and specific circumstances.

But just a few decades ago, this land was barren. Privately managed by the Dumaliang family in partnership with the Philippine government, Masungi Georeserve is one of the largest and most successful reforestation efforts in the Philippines. The funds generated from its popularity in geotourism are used to conserve the area and raise awareness. But the site is not without challenges.

"This year has involved a lot of relationship building. I used to kind of believe that, you know, all of this politicking could be solved in a few years, but it looks like it's something that will be there... forever," Ann says.

—  
It takes at least 20 years to grow a forest, and a lifetime to protect it.

When asked where they find the energy to keep going, the sisters don't give places but a list of names: Tatay Rudy, Tatay Karling, Rolly Pena, Gina Lopez.

*“ They’ve always asked us to help safeguard their knowledge about the place and the plants and to share it with others and make sure it isn’t forgotten ”*

These are names of two elders from the Indigenous Dumagat community, a revolutionary geologist, and the former DENR Secretary. All champions of Masungi Georeserve who have passed away.

“Oh no, I always cry, okay!” Ann warns, not long before the tears start falling. She begins by saying that when she first consulted Tatay Rudy and Tatay Carling, Masungi as we knew it hadn’t even begun.

“They’ve always asked us to help safeguard their knowledge about the place and the plants and to share it with others and make sure it isn’t forgotten. They were already in their 70s,” Ann says. “That’s why I get so emotional. It’s not just them, it’s Gina and it’s Sir Rolly... all these champions who spent the last year of their lives, their whole lifetimes, and then passing the buck on to us. They had so much heart. And they aren’t here anymore. *’Di nila nakita*. [They didn’t get to see it.] I guess that’s why I cry. I don’t want it to die with them. I want it to continue. I don’t know how else to express it.”

A long silence follows. There is still much more work to do.

The determining factor in whether or not they will succeed is how much support they receive from the government. This is likely the reason why we talk about former DENR Secretary Gina Lopez, a champion and a supporter.

“Gina listened. She went on the ground. She had a true heart for environment defenders and grassroots practitioners,” Ann says. “She’s genuinely for empowering communities and

empowering conservation. When you say you have a multi-stakeholder, it’s a genuine and authentic multi stakeholder approach and she knows how to bring everyone together and build on their knowledge and capabilities. She’s courageous. She acts on things with urgency. *Maraming kailangan mangyari* [A lot of things need to be done] but she will take the necessary first steps. People always say ‘slow down, it’s not a marathon’ but Gina understood that a marathon is composed of sprints.”

The majority of the time spent talking to the Dumaliang sisters, Anna and Billie spend talking about other people: their mentors and their team members. Their deep ecological empathy tunes into the actions of those connected to the community.

The last person they mention is Ate Irene, a middle-aged mother, one out of roughly a hundred park rangers who look after the Masungi Georeserve. She walks 30 minutes every day to get to her station in Masungi, despite her bad knees. She sits quietly in the back during meetings with Rangers.

For almost three months, Ann missed her. “There was just so much work to do in Metro Manila.... My time was divided between meeting people in coffee shops and being in Masungi. So I didn’t see her for a long time. But one day, she comes up to me and says she didn’t understand before but now she sees what can happen. That now, she loves every seedling she plants. That day she ended with, ‘You haven’t given up, right?’

I said ‘No, I haven’t given up, but it’s nice to know you haven’t given up either.’”



*Vintage CARHARTT  
jacket and vintage  
button-down from  
IT'S VINTAGE,  
AIGLE rain boots*



*Billie wears a vintage  
CARHARTT  
jacket from IT'S  
VINTAGE, CARL  
JAN CRUZ  
top and shorts. Ann  
wears a vintage  
CARHARTT  
jacket and vintage  
button-down from  
IT'S VINTAGE,  
AIGLE rain boots*





RENZ REYES  
*jacket*, CARL JAN  
CRUZ *bib*, IT'S  
VINTAGE *cargo*  
*skirt*, SALOMON  
*sneakers* at R.O.X.



# camille RIVERA

CAMILLE RIVERA *and* OCEANUS CONSERVATION *are bringing life back into communities through mangroves.* By JACS T. SAMPAYAN

*LIKE MANY GREAT STORIES, CAMILLE RIVERA'S CONSERVATION JOURNEY BEGAN WITH A MOMENT OF WONDER.* She was a child enjoying a beach day with her family in Camiguin when she decided to put a seemingly dormant starfish back into the water. "When I put it back in the ocean, I saw the feet of the starfish move," she says. "It's been out of the water for hours, right? That made me very curious."

From witnessing that "rebirth," her curiosity eventually turned to a passion for bringing life back to different communities. Today, Camille runs Oceanus Conservation, a non-profit she founded over the pandemic whose focus and expertise are on the planting and preservation of mangroves. According to its mission statement, it aims to "protect and and restore blue carbon habitats and the surrounding wildlife to contribute to the conservation, education, and community development of the Filipino people." They believe in "sustaining biodiversity in order to provide ecosystem services such as food security for the Filipino people in the years to come."

Having grown up in landlocked Bukidnon, Camille was always surrounded by nature. She was raised by her father Francis, a horticulturist, and mother Mayette, a social scientist. "Bukidnon has clear skies, no noise pollution, no light pollution," she shares. "And so I was exposed to that."

She enjoyed going to the beach, which was about an hour away from her home. Camille would stay all day in the water until her hands would go wrinkly. Though she didn't know how to swim, and despite being initially afraid of the ocean, she felt it called to her. All her fears disappeared when she finally saw what lies underneath the water's surface.

She eventually pursued marine biology both at Xavier University and through the Erasmus Mundus program in different European countries.

—  
Mangroves weren't a particular interest for Camille at university. That changed when she worked for Marine Conservation Philippines in Siaton, Negros Oriental.

"I would manage communities in different ecosystems," Camille shares, adding that this included marine protected areas and

mangrove ecosystems. "I went there every day. I would understand how they're connected with nature, how communities get back and get resources from nature."

There, she met Evelyn, a community leader. One day, she asked Rivera to go with her to check out the flora in the area. "We would go into this forest [and] I remember [it was] super peaceful. You hear the sounds of the birds. And then she would just point out the names of the trees as if she knows each one like a best friend. I was so shocked. She named them and I was writing it down really fast," she recalls.

They then came upon one tree that Evelyn didn't know. Camille took a photo of it and later discovered that it was a *Campostemon Philippinensis*, an endangered mangrove specie. Both women expressed a desire to protect it, which also sparked a burgeoning affection for mangroves in Rivera. "At that moment, I realized that mangroves are cool. It's so unappreciated and undervalued," she says. A mangrove is full with life apart within it, above it, and underneath it: birds, bats, fireflies, crabs, fish. "No one knows how beautiful it is... I felt that at that time with Evelyn I wanted to give mangroves a voice because sila 'yung hindi pinapansin (they weren't being given attention)."

There is always a focus on corals, whales, and mammals, Camille says, but rarely on ecosystems or habitats. Mangroves in particular can solve a host of needs. "For example, there is a mangrove that specifically protects us from a storm, there's a species just for that. There's a mangrove, because of its root system, that would protect from soil erosion. If you want to see more crabs, there is also a type of mangroves for it," Rivera says. According to her, many communities during the COVID lockdowns actually sourced mussels and oysters for their daily food from surrounding mangroves.

Food security, as mentioned, is one of the main thrusts of Oceanus. "I always have this saying: There's a time where you plant the tree. And there's a time where you sit under the shade. So there's that gap in between because it takes time for you to receive the benefits of you planting the tree, right?" Camille, an International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) changemaker, says. "That gap is where you have to fill fisheries,

fill a livelihood, and so we do try our best to fill in that need of the community.”

A lot of their efforts go into turning abandoned fish ponds into mangroves. “It’s phase by phase and it takes a while. We raise the soil, we plant, and then we reintroduce crab, shrimp, or fish,” Rivera, also a National Geographic Society Explorer in 2022, explains. “Right now we’re trying to pilot it in Surigao del Sur. So it’s still a while because we’re making sure *na* there’s enough height of the mangroves before we introduce some crabs, and those crabs are supposed to help sustain the community, the livelihood, *na kung wala silang trabaho* or *wala silang pagkain* [if they don’t have a job or if they don’t have food] they could get it from that ecosystem.” They found success with an earlier project in Aringay, La Union.

Aside from being natural water filters, mangroves are also blue carbon ecosystems: they capture carbon from the atmosphere. “I think we just need to bring our connection back to nature, you know, like, understand that there’s so many benefits that they could give us,” Camille says.

Then, there are the benefits that cannot be measured in income, meals, or carbon absorption. While talking to a fisherman, Rivera also realized that it could be a way of improving mental health. “He said, ‘you know, I like mangroves. It’s a nice place to relax and recall, *muni-muni* [reflect],” Camille recalls. “He would go there to the boardwalk that we built for them. And he would just sit down daw, and just relax. Sometimes you don’t do that as a service. There’s that benefit that no one sees.”

At Oceanus, Camille shares that they have three pillars that they focus on when they take on a project. The first is to make a proper biophysical assessment of the situation. “We would really look at the Science of Things,” she explains. “The second is community engagement. *Kung wala’yung community doon* [if the community is not there], we won’t work. It won’t be sustainable.” A community can become invested into their future by having them be involved in the process such as helping in the reforestation efforts or acting as data gatherers; like Evelyn, many can spot the plants and animals that naturally grow in their own locale. “Through collecting data, they earn an income,” Rivera says. “That’s what we call a conservation income.” Given that a mangrove could take a couple of years to properly grow and effect change in a locale, short term income matters.

Finally, Camille says that to ensure the sustainability of a project, it needs institutional support. It needs an alignment with the government. If they do not do so and if the LGU’s plans differ significantly from their project’s goals, it would be difficult to go up against them.

While the work is filled with purpose, the Oceanus director and co-founder admits it has its share of struggles. “I would have doubts, like just questioning ‘is this even the proper way?’” she shares. “But

you just learn it through the ropes, but you learn it by doing. You look at other organizations, what they’re doing and learn from them. And I’m actually really fortunate enough that I had friends from the NGO field that would help how to do things. And so there’s a lot of collaboration and helping each other when we have to work in the environmental space.”

But, there’s also competition. “There are bigger NGOs. The funding they will get will not trickle down to smaller NGOs. So that was also another challenge *na parang* they will just absorb everything and *wala nang naiwan* [for others], and that becomes a challenge *sa labat ng* small NGOs because we compete for the grants.”

Still, there are those who are glad to see new organizations like Oceanus such as Dr. Jurgenne Primavera. Rivera says she has been following in the footsteps of the marine scientist from Mindanao, who has been working with mangroves and promoting sustainable fish farming for years and was part of *Time Magazine*’s Heroes of the Environment in 2008. Dr. Primavera told Camille that she was happy to finally see a young person taking on the work that she’s

been doing. She advised her to be patient. “I think it’s a lot of dealing with bureaucracy that you have to deal with, which is true and that’s what we’re dealing with now. But that goes with being as young as we are, we can still push for it,” Camille says. “But the opposite side of it is that we’re not taken seriously. Being a young person doing environmental work, you have to prove yourself all the time.”

Youthful creativity and drive remain the hope in seeing lasting change happen when it comes to the environment. At an IUCN event she attended last year, Camille was surrounded by young innovators and activists. “That really gives me hope because *parang* the push, the tenacity of

young people is there. We won’t give up until we see the solution that we want to see. I think that’s lost on other generations. I would talk to other generations and they would say like, ‘*yan na e*,’ [it is what it is] or ‘*wala ng magawa’y an na’yung reality*’ [you can’t do anything about it, that’s reality],” she says. “And for me, no, I don’t want to accept that. And I feel like we just—if you just bring all the young people together—and there’s so many of them, I’ve been in different groups—they have so many ideas. And you have to funnel that energy, their energy, and ask ‘what do we want to create?’”

She wants to continue bringing that voice to more communities. “What I know and all this knowledge that I’ve seen, all the knowledge that I’ve learned, I just want to show that to so many people. That’s why I’m doing what I’m doing now,” Camille shares. “I am very fortunate that I actually have this job because not all would be able to find their passion in environmental space. But I’m privileged that I’m dedicating my life to conservation, and I have hope that other people, other young people, are doing the same.”

“Being a young person doing environmental work, you have to prove yourself all the time”

COLUMBIA x KITH  
*vest,* CARL JAN CRUZ  
*cardigan and shorts,*  
RECESS *pullover*



*Tasha wears a MOON RIVER top, APARA maxi skirt, SALOMON sneakers at R.O.X. Issa wears an ADIDAS x STELLA MCCARTNEY jacket, IT'S VINTAGE cargo skirt, SALOMON sneakers at R.O.X. Bella wears a THE NORTH FACE vest at R.O.X., MERAKI skirt. Opposite: CARL JAN CRUZ top and skirt, RAFGLANG trousers, THE NORTH FACE visor at R.O.X.*







SACAI cut-out  
satin dress,  
stylist's own  
turtleneck



# nicola SEBASTIAN

*As a surfer, NICOLA SEBASTIAN spent time immersed in the ocean. But only until a powerful typhoon made landfall did she consider what it meant to call an island home. By*  
AUDREY CARPIO

IN THE AFTERMATH OF SUPERTYPHOON HAIYAN, Nicola Sebastian found herself on a beach in Eastern Samar, one that was previously known as Jagnaya Beach before it was renamed Yolanda, after the deadly storm surge of 2013 rearranged its landscape. She went there in the wake of a breakup, wanting to understand and bear witness to how people piece themselves together after such devastating loss. “I was unsure if people would want to talk about their traumas, but really the stories poured out,” she says. Listening to the stories of Yolanda survivors, reading historical texts on Samar, she found herself asking a different kind of question: How does the geography of the Philippine islands shape how Filipinos relate to ourselves, to each other, and to the world? This was the starting point of Nicola’s emergence as a writer grounded in ecology, and more specifically, islandness—an approach to thinking and creating that is informed by the archipelago.

Years later, when the global pandemic forced the world into lockdown, Nicola would meet three friends from different creative practices who had all happened to shelter in place in the surftown of San Juan in La Union: photographer Hannah Reyes Morales, independent curator David Loughran, and communications strategist Samantha Zarandin. The four of them co-founded Emerging Islands, a coastal-based arts organization and residency whose activities are developed from the framework of archipelagic thinking. “Emerging Islands is the applied part of our creative practices, where we’re not just writing about ideas and championing ecological stories, we’re trying to help build up a baseline ecological awareness by connecting communities and artists and scientists together,” Nicola explains.

Residents and collaborators have included British conservation photographer Mandy Barker, seaman-turned-painter Joar Songcuya, and Brussels-based performance artist Joshua Serafin. Last December, Emerging Islands transformed Mebuyan’s Vessel, the many-boobed alien space pod art installation of Leeroy New, into a queer island rave co-hosted by Elephant and Manila Community Radio. “It wasn’t just a party,” Nicola says, “it was about queer spacemaking in a more holistic sense. Northern Luzon Pride [an LGBTQIA+ organization] set such a powerful example of what it

means to organize and resist in a region where queer and progressive politics are a tenuous, even dangerous position to take up.” The first day was devoted to dialogue where the collaborators dove into what it means to grow community from the ground up, and how to think of creativity as an ecosystem and as a communal act. The musical lineup of the second day was “transcendent,” as Nicola describes, with drag performances and dance music that wove Pinoy hip hop, budots, and other genres into transgressive new forms.

Climate justice is also queer justice, and Nicola is exploring this intersection through in a community storytelling project with the Talaandig and Manobo groups of Bukidnon, who are stewards of some of the last old-growth forests in the Philippines. Spending time in the forest with the Kulahi Performing Arts group whose members include queer and trans individuals who are also baylan (shamans or healers), Nicola came to realize that that queer spirituality is “deeply connected to the abundance of the Philippines. It’s the meeting place of the life and language of the Philippines.” Titled *The Forests Speak, Their Spirits Cry*, the film and book document the indigenous ancestral knowledge that has protected the sacred forests for centuries. “The project has also been a convergence of many different storytellers coming to support these storytellers, and I think that’s what we have to see happen more, where we’re taking the lead from communities at the frontlines.”

Nicola says she doesn’t necessarily think of herself as a climate worker, because she believes it’s a cause that shouldn’t just be relegated to activists or environmentalists, but something everyone has to get involved in in their own way. “There’s a lot of talent and abilities and experiences that people can bring to responding to this crisis. I hope to see unexpected collaborations, surprising solutions or innovations in responding—not even fixing, but just responding to it.” And where should people start? “I honestly think it comes from just loving the country, getting to know the cultures of the communities,” she says. “There’s so much beauty and abundance and wisdom in the diversity of our islands. The awakening to this climate awareness and developing a practice around supporting the changes we need to make—that comes from a place of love.”

# • issa BARTE

*Whether it's planting six million trees or publishing a book co-authored by 600 indigenous youth, Issa's dreams become realities.* By NINA UNLAY

*IN HER IDEAL WORLD, ISSA BARTE WOULD LIVE ATOP A MOUNTAIN*, learning how to paint and dance. But only because in this future world, her job is finished. The Philippines would be decolonized. Indigenous communities wouldn't need to fight for their land. Perhaps an Indigenous person is even president. Advocacy workers have become community workers. NGOs don't exist. Because they don't need to.

"I have dreams that change monthly," Issa says. "But I know whatever I do will always be connected to community work. I feel like I'm delusional about the fact that there's a better world for tomorrow, but I truly believe it."

She refers to herself as "delulu" (slang for "delusional") many times in conversation, but not quite as many as she expresses how she believes anyone can make a difference.

A National Geographic Explorer and co-founder of the youth-run organization For The Future, Issa is her own best case study. In 2019, she became a staunch advocate for reforestation, climate action, and culture change while working with indigenous communities all over the Philippines. Leaning on her background as a storyteller and visual artist, she created the capacity-building workshop "Stories from the Frontlines" in 2020. Funded by a National Geographic grant, it taught Indigenous youth from over six communities across the Philippines to tell stories through film.

Issa is the type of person who examines her life experiences measuring its growth and social impact. For her, counting trees on her 23rd birthday in the indigenous Yangil community in Zambales was the cornerstone of her path towards environmentalism.

"That's where my world opened up," Issa said. "I went tree-planting with friends. There was a group of 20 people and by the end of the afternoon, we planted 800 seedlings. I was like, 'Oh my god, 800 new trees in one afternoon!' It just clicked for me. If more and more people knew about it, then we'd have a whole forest by now. I couldn't get that out of my mind. We could have millions and millions of trees. I feel like that possibility is what ignited my delulu about the world."

From that point on, nothing was impossible. "I went crazy *talaga!* I just kept thinking about six million trees, six million trees. If each of Nadine Lustre's followers planted a tree, we could do it. Why can't we have six million trees?" (For the Future eventually collaborated with the celebrity for a tree-planting mission.)

When I ask Issa what her latest delusion is, she replies simply: A cultural reawakening.

"[Working with Indigenous communities] has truly changed the way that I advocate for conservation. Before I would see land degradation and think, oh my gosh, that thing is something that we need to protect. But now I feel it in my heart. These experiences opened me up to seeing land as a friend."

Her latest project is an attempt to bring that change in perspective to the rest of the country. The Philippine Youth Atlas is going to be the first-ever book of its kind, co-authored by over 600 children from 19 Indigenous communities in 17 regions across the Philippines. A testament, Issa says, to how our climate solutions exist already within our Indigenous heritage.

The goal is to document these solutions through art, photography, and counter mapping workshops with Indigenous youth; and finally, to create a symbol of determination based on the values of *kaluluwa* [soul], *kalikasan* [environment], *kabutihan* [well-being], and *kapwa* [community]. In the end, the Atlas will be redistributed back to the communities and installed in Museo Pambata.

"[The concept of] *kapwa* has been my flaming heart. It's changed my work and everything that we're doing," Issa says. "One of my friends from the Yangil tribe, I remember asking her what beauty was. I thought she would talk about skin or hair... that kind of stuff. But she said, 'Beauty is waking up in the morning, and before I even open my eyes, I hear my birds singing because I planted this tree 10 years ago. That [even] when I hear the birds, I don't want to open my eyes because I can smell my fruits.'"

D.D.DAILY  
*tailored vest*, THE  
NORTH FACE  
*utility trousers* at  
R.O.X., AIGLE  
*rain boots*







DONA LIM  
*silk georgette  
shirt and skirt*





# *tasha & bella* TANJUTCO

*Isabella and Natasha Tanjutco believe that creative thinking will lead to impactful change in climate work. By PATRICIA VILLORIA*

*“IMAGINE IF YOU COULD FILL UP A CONFERENCE ROOM IN GLASGOW WITH THE AMOUNT OF FLOOD WATER THAT FILLED UP OUR COMMUNITIES [IN THE PHILIPPINES],”* says Natasha Tanjutco.

She and sister Isabella wanted to conjure this image in the minds of the leaders present at the first Conference of Parties (COP) they attended in 2021. In the air-conditioned rooms in Glasgow, Scotland, the sisters felt that the people making important climate decisions were disconnected from the reality they experience on the ground in the Philippines.

“The leaders were talking as if the climate crisis was going to happen in the next five to 10 years,” Tasha says. But growing up working with urban and island communities in the archipelago, the sisters already knew that the climate crisis was happening.

From that experience abroad, they realized that the answer to the climate crisis was in their creative identity and culture as Filipinos. Years of research and grassroots community building with their youth organizations, TAYO House of Culture & Creativity and Kids for Kids, has helped them understand that Filipino culture has always been creative and collaborative. And, if world leaders are making decisions from so far away, then creativity will step in and act as a bridge for ideas that catalyze decisive change.

Proof of concept for their approach is the Kapuluan ng Kabataan movement, where they work in partnership with young designers and remote communities to build creative spaces and cultural sanctuaries across the archipelago. They hope to build a climate school on an island that is in the process of disappearing.

In Isla Halian, an hour of sailing away from General Luna, Siargao, the coastline has receded about five meters within the past five years. Aside from helping out with typhoon recovery and food security, the sisters’ organizations are doing what they can to keep the island’s biodiversity and culture alive. This includes nurturing the area’s turtle hatchlings, providing creative workshops for the local youth, and sharing the stories of the island community’s lively history.

“If you’re able to use imagination to make people understand the reality [of the climate crisis], then you can come up with actual solutions,” Tasha explains. A hurdle in their climate work has been to dismantle outdated notions on creativity. Having a mother who was an art educator has made it easy for the sisters to see the transformative value of creativity, but people may believe that their push to fuse art and imagination with these hard hitting issues is a failure to understand the gravity of the problems they’re tackling.

*“We don’t want  
the conversation on  
climate solutions to be  
an echo chamber”*

But they believe that this creative thinking is what will get more people on board to achieve impactful change. Essential is the belief that creativity is not limited to visual art; it can also come in the form of ideas and creative solutions. Communication has to be factored in climate work. This is why an idea as simple as imagining a flooded Glasgow conference room, for example, can spark an urgent political discussion.

“When we inject art and creativity [with the climate advocacy], people often mistake that we’re not taking this seriously,” Tasha says. “But we don’t want the conversation on climate solutions to be an echo chamber,” says Bella. “We also want to educate people who want to know about what is happening but are too intimidated to enter the space or understand all the complicated jargon.”

They’ve seen success in this framework with their recent work for the Arts & Culture & Creative Industries Bloc of the Congress (ACCIB). Together with the coalition of legislators, they poured over government documents and hours-long congress meeting notes to lobby for the Philippine Creative Industries Development Act, which was successfully passed last year. Through heavy research and creative solutions, they turned white paper documents into a series of fun and colorful collaterals that educated Filipinos online about the bill and how creativity, art, music, and food intersects with the economy.

With that approach, what becomes the core of their climate work is an effort to remind the world that the climate crisis is a humanitarian crisis. They hope people will see that the gravity

of these creative and indigenous solutions is just as dense as the problems they are addressing.

The tides seem to be shifting in this direction. Last November, Kids for Kids received a Philanthropic Excellence Award for Children, placing them among the ranks of longstanding companies such as Estée Lauder, the Jollibee Group Foundation, and National Bookstore. The sisters also deem the most recent COP in Dubai to be more successful as there was now a (small, but hopefully growing) platform for indigenous people to speak on their climate concerns.

Reflecting on the eventful year they have had, Bella and Tasha share that the longest journey in their line of work is from their head to their hands. How can they transform data and theory, already abundant in the climate conversation, into effective solutions?

“One thing people forget is that before it gets to your hands, it has to pass through your heart,” says Tasha. Adds Bella, “[Our solutions] can be backed by science but it can be solved by culture and humanity”.

They, and many other climate advocates on the ground around the country have also seen that Indigenous wisdom—which is, knowledge innate to our Filipino culture—has always been where our solutions lie. There is a pre-colonial belief that things that come from the ground have to come back to it, and it predates newly-coined concepts popularized today, such as the circular economy. As Bella says, “As humans, we’re made to co-create with the world we are in.” ○



CAROLINA  
HERRERA  
*sweater, APARA  
maxi skirt*





*Tasha wears a  
MOON RIVER  
top, APARA  
maxi skirt,  
SALOMON  
sneakers at  
R.O.X. Bella  
wears HINDY  
WEBER net skirt*

from  
some  
*islands*  
ago, we  
*dream*

*Conservation  
photographer GAB  
MEJIA on the power  
of stories, photography,  
and community.*







*Fireflies dance in the starlight on the island of Danjugan.*

*IT WAS AN EERIE AFTERNOON IN SEPTEMBER 2009*, at the height of Typhoon Ketsana (locally named Ondoy), when my family's home in Metro Manila became submerged in flood water. Our old family albums, artworks, tables, and wooden chairs bellowed in the depths of torrential rain from the distant ocean that ultimately surrounds our island nation. I rushed, climbing to the second floor of our house, a privilege, the last island left, as my family's belongings slowly slipped away. I held on tightly to the loving arms of my parents and my late grandmother. More than 700 people died in the typhoon.

I was 12 years old then. Do we still remember?

More than a decade has passed since that storm, and other deluges that continue to shape a nation of 7,641 islands and 100-million Filipinos amid the ecological crisis. Every colonial history, every personal memory, every culture, every language, and every tide cradles an intertwining story waiting to unfold. An archipelago

is what we are, and it will not be too long before the Philippines becomes fully self-aware of its own identity, capacities, and greatness, but perhaps it will be too late. Storms have intensified and the seas continually rise. The sandcastles that we have built now crumble as these waters draw closer to our shores. Despots lead our institutions, wildlife go extinct, populations disperse for greener pastures, forests are destroyed, and the indigenous peoples further crippled from defending themselves and their homes, where by then, we may have nothing left but stories to tell. Stories of water and flood that have shaped my life, communities, and country, and the collective island stories that give me hope and make me dream.

I could not bear to sit idly as the waters continued to rise. We are not victims, but dreamers, and stories are our boats for survival. Much like our seafaring ancestors, who have found their ways in between islands by looking to the stars,



*“I could not bear to sit idly as the waters continued to rise. We are not victims, but dreamers, and stories are our boats for survival”*







*Gab Mejia's "The Passage of Storms" was awarded first place at the CreateCOP28 Art competition organized by creative agency Art Partner and the United Nations.*

I have fondly found my way by looking through the reflections of my photographs; both a tool and a vessel that has allowed me to look closer at these same stars and seas, that there are indeed answers and solutions found within the diversity of our culture and communities in our country amid the polycrisis we continue to disproportionately confront.

Stories like the Agusan-Manobo indigenous people, who have coexisted for centuries in the heart of the Agusan Marshlands. Their ingenious floating houses, which adapt to the rise and fall of water amid changing seasons, are a living testament to the possibilities of adaptability. Stories from the frontlines of the environmental youth movement like For the Future and Kids for Kids Philippines, who have devoted themselves to providing support and relief during the Super Typhoon Odette in 2021, are living beacons of empathy and

hope that there exists a space for Filipino children to live, create, play, and dream. Community to community and island to island, stories emerge from a fault line between the collision of the plates of remembrance and dreaming. There in this line exist the gaps we have to collectively fill together, where water can then become a bridge.

By weaving these stories across the islands and regions of our country, beyond the reflections of our photographs and the art we create, I have been reminded of the power of stories, photography, and community, which allows us to affirm the multitudes of our history, identities, and creativity as an elixir amidst the ecological crisis. To grieve for what the floods and seas have taken, and to reclaim and reimagine these island narratives as dreams for the future.

We are an archipelago. Do we remember now? ○

# journey to the DIVINE

*To those who have experienced it, MAGUINDANAO's sacred tradition of the IPAT has become a path to personal growth and awareness. By LYDIA QUERIAN. Photographs by JACOB MAENTZ*

*AS A CATHOLIC ALMOST HALF OF MY LIFE*, I believed I knew the depths of my faith. But it was an extraordinary awakening, a revelation that left me awe-inspired and humbled. In the heartland of Maguindanao, I experienced the Ipat ritual, a sacred tradition that predates the arrival of colonialism, Islam, and Christianity. It was a glimpse into the heritage that flowed through the veins of my ancestors. Surprisingly, it was my migration to the United States that ignited my awareness of culture more than ever before. The distance and separation from my homeland had an unexpected effect, drawing me closer to my roots and igniting an insatiable hunger to learn and embrace my culture. And so, it was through a life-changing tribal tour that I found myself standing on the precipice of transformation, forever touched by the profound power of the Ipat ritual.

A pivotal moment in my journey occurred in 2015 when I joined a tribal tour program led by Alleluia Panis of Kularts, a renowned presenter of Filipinx Contemporary Art in the US. She had been organizing these tours since the late 1980s, forging relationships with Indigenous communities across the country, even in places I had nev-

er imagined were on the Philippine map. Education in the Philippines, much like in the United States, often filters and selectively presents information, leaving me feeling deprived of crucial knowledge about my own ancestry. This tour became a catalyst for reconnecting with something that had been lost over generations of trauma. It initiated a profound process of my self-discovery. It emphasized the importance of cultural exploration, challenging societal narratives, and seeking a more profound understanding of my own identity as a Filipinx in the diaspora.

Part of the tour is through Maguindanao, which has been depicted by mainstream media as a dangerous warzone torn between the Islamic and Christian communities. As we drove through Iligan City from Lanao Lake, I couldn't help but be on high alert. Recent massacres had occurred in the area, intensifying my fear. Although my parents were apprehensive, I felt an inner calling to embark on this adventure.

We ventured deep into the heart of Cotabato City where I learned about a sacred ritual known as Ipat, a three-and-a-half day ritual that has been in practice for many centuries by the Maguindanaoan people.









This ceremony allowed me to embark on a transformative journey like no other.

The Ipat ritual holds deep cultural significance in Maguindanao, dating back centuries to the pre-colonial and pre-Islamic era. Derived from the Maguindanao word that means “to invoke or summon,” the Ipat is conducted by the community to seek protection, blessings, and guidance from ancestral spirits.

We gathered in a designated sacred space in a home near the Pulangi River where the homeowner allowed the community to set up their space, adorning it with beautiful inaul fabric, candles, and cloth of green, yellow and red (traditional Maguindanao colors). The shaman led the ceremony, invoking the spirits and connecting the physical and spiritual realms through chanting. The ritual involves offerings such as uncooked rice, popped rice, boiled eggs, delicacies, grilled and boiled native chicken, turmeric rice, and other symbolic items to appease the spirits and establish a spiritual connection. I learned that the ritual could last from seven to 30 days, but this one I participated in was a shorter version to accommodate the tour’s travels and to keep it subtle among the local society who may not understand much about the practice.

Chants, kulintang [an instrument made of knobbed bronze gongs], and traditional dances accompany the ceremony, further heightening the spiritual ambiance. The participants were encouraged to wear a malong [a traditional Filipino-Bangsamoro garment] and engage in movements that symbolize their respect and reverence for the spirits.

As a participant and observer, Ipat was a celebration of cultural identity and solidarity. It reinforces the bonds among the community, reminding them of their living traditions and the wisdom passed down through oral history. Today, the ritual continues to be practiced, continuing the cultural legacy and spiritual traditions of Maguindanao. Islamic leaders and some government agencies have discouraged the practice of the ritual but the community found ways to keep the living tradition as part of their lives.

The Ipat ritual shares similarities with the Ayahuasca ceremony from Peru. Both

aim to facilitate spiritual awakening and self-discovery. While Ayahuasca utilizes the properties of a plant-based psychedelic brew, Ipat relies on the mastery of the shaman’s chanting and their ability to guide participants through deep meditation, visualization, and energy manipulation. Unlike other ceremonies, Ipat does not rely on the support of mind-altering substances, just pure music, chanting, deep meditative movements and incense. It harnesses the power of indigenous wisdom and ancient techniques to induce a state of spiritual elevation. The absence of drugs highlights the belief in the inherent capability of the human mind to explore realms beyond the ordinary, allowing us to tap into our innate spiritual potential.

As I entered the space, the air was heavy with the fragrance of incense, creating a serene and meditative atmosphere. Soft chants, accompanied by kulintang music resonated throughout the surroundings, transporting me into a heightened state of awareness. The auditory stimulation played a crucial role in preparing my mind for the journey. Wearing vibrant malong, the Shaman guided me through a series of physical gestures and movement, symbolizing the connection between the earthly and the divine. This engagement fostered a profound sense of trust and intimacy, further deepening the overall experience.

## BALANCE AND CONNECTION

The duality of shamans plays a vital role in the journey towards the divine. It encompasses the harmonious blend of masculine and feminine energies, symbolizing balance and the interconnectedness of all aspects of existence. This fusion allows for a holistic and inclusive approach, where both the light and shadow aspects of one’s being are acknowledged and embraced.

Patutunong are known to possess a unique duality that is both spiritual and physical. They are believed to have the ability to bridge the physical and spiritual realms, often reflected in their shamanistic practices. The balance of masculine and feminine energies is a fundamental aspect of shamanistic



*Participants in the Ipat ritual can enter into a trance-like state. Photo by Jacob Maentz*

practices in the Philippines. It is believed that both energies are necessary to achieve a state of spiritual balance and harmony, and this balance is often reflected in their movements and the pitch of their chant. The duality is essential to their practice of the ceremony as they are able to channel their healing powers effectively and achieve a state of balance that is beneficial to the community.

The ritual incorporates the offering of uncooked rice, eggs, native chicken, and oils. These offerings symbolize gratitude and reverence for the divine forces at play. Uncooked rice represents fertility, abundance, and nourishment, while eggs symbolize new beginnings and the potential for growth. Native chicken signifies the spiritual connection between the earthly and celestial realms, while oils represent purification and healing.

Participants are asked to pick one offering to eat while doing a reading based on the Shaman's interpretation of the offering picked. The fourth day is the finale where we send the spirits back to their homes. We were asked to be part of building a huge spiritual banquet offering for the spirits with rice shaped like a crocodile which is believed to be their spiritual ancestor along with hanging baki, a rice delicacy wrapped in coconut leaves. The huge offering also included freshly slaughtered native chicken, where the blood becomes part of the offering and the chicken is boiled and added to the banquet table each representing the number of participants attending the ceremony.

Central to the Ipat ritual is the presence of the biday, a symbolic boat that holds deep cultural significance. The biday represents the vessel of the self, sailing through the waters of existence toward spiritual enlightenment. It serves as a metaphorical vehicle, allowing us to traverse the boundaries of the physical realm and embark on a transformative voyage to the divine. It is swayed back and forth during the beginning and the end of the ceremony allowing the spirits to travel to the living world. During the last day, a small boat with offerings is sailed through the river as we wrap up this intense journey and say goodbye to the spirits.

The Ipat ritual is an extraordinary experience that allowed me to connect to the divine that had encouraged me to commit to doing it every other year. I've been doing it every other year since then. Every Shaman, household, family who hosts it has their different take and execution. It became a church or a little retreat for cleansing, healing and reconnecting to something that the Western society tends to separate me from. The ritual underscores the power of the human mind in exploring divine realms and highlights diverse spiritual paths. It was a doorway to my personal growth, self-awareness, and a profound connection with the sacred that I have never experienced before. ○

*Writer's note: I offer this article to Shaman Ismael who transitioned in March 2022. He has been an incredible resource and inspiration in this journey. May he rest in peace.*



1 SOUTHEAST METRO  
ARTS Volcanic ash  
loung chair 2 JINGGOY  
BUENSUCESO "Ink"  
molten aluminum sculpture  
3 VITO SELMA Rattan  
backed chair for Artipelago  
by Design Center of the  
Philippines 4 TRIBOA  
BAY LIVING Traveler's  
palm hanging lamp



# *tropical* LUXURY

*With Tarlac's New Clark City, architect ROYAL PINEDA envisioned more than just a greener and more sustainable city, but one that redefined Filipino design and architecture—it was the Modern Filipino city. Taking design inspiration from the region's culture and integrating materials like lahar, Pineda showed the world what practical luxury looks like, as do these objects, all crafted in the Philippines.*



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## RENAISSANCE MAN

When that passed, he ran with a crowd he describes as “beautiful people who liked fashion.” During a high school trip to Rome, he scored a red velvet Tom Ford jacket. While no one around him knew it was Gucci, “I did,” he says.

He chose Milan’s Carlo Secoli Institute as a fashion school because it taught more “concrete” things—and because it cost less than others. Over summers, he worked odd jobs—waiter, data entry at a provincial office, salesman at Diesel.

In the back of design classes, he made fast friends with Nel Ratnayake, a fashion student from Milan. The two cracked each other up imitating the teacher constantly telling them what they couldn’t do—but De Sarno could do lots of things: For a final exam in 2002, he designed a skirt cut in stripes that seemed black when immobile but flashed seven colors—including fabrics he incorporated from his classmates—when it moved. The piece won the school’s Golden Needle prize.

In that moment, “my dream wasn’t only a dream,” he says. “It was starting to become real.”

The skirt caught the attention of a scout for Prada, where he soon found himself working on patterns under the mentorship of Delia Coccia, the house’s master coatmaker. When Ratnayake followed him there, the two had a ball, waiting together for hours outside Gucci shows, drinking aperitivi at the ATM Bar, and partying at Club Plastic. They broke hearts—and consoled one another when their own hearts were broken—by singing Italian love songs at the top of

their lungs as they pedaled bicycles home in the Milan night.

“Milan was like Disneyland,” he says. After living in a small town where his passions made him unusual—and where many looked at him askance for what he wore—he found a city where “I could love who I wanted to love; I could wear what I wanted to wear.”

But, at Prada, De Sarno wasn’t allowed to design, and so he left, and soon after jumped at an opportunity to join Dolce & Gabbana, where he worked on knitwear. A bad breakup prompted him to leave Milan at around the same time as he was approached about joining the design team at Valentino. He left the Golden Needle award in his ex’s place and, at age 26, moved to Rome.

Pierpaolo Piccioli, then one of the two creative directors at Valentino, saw in him a sharp intelligence softened by a lightness of being. He laughed as De Sarno broke the ice at meetings and appreciated the way he refused to wallow after a setback. Piccioli soon became the sole creative director of Valentino, as well as De Sarno’s mentor and friend, recognizing in his protégé the hunger of an outsider who, like him, grew up far from the fashion capitals.

“He slowly became my right-hand man,” Piccioli says in his spectacular office off the Spanish Steps—decorated, like De Sarno’s home, with a Sidival Fila canvas—only minutes after lunching with De Sarno at the nearby Gucci offices. Piccioli adds that he was delighted to see De Sarno realizing his own vision at the Ancora show, which made a crisp break with the ornate and over-the-top style of Michele’s Gucci. This new Gucci, he says, was “without tricks,” but also not banal, with a “minimalism that was, for me, a disruptive element.”

De Sarno’s rise to the throne was both sudden and unexpected. One Friday night in late 2022, he was venting to his husband about work as they drove to their vacation home a few hours east of Rome in Amandola when a message appeared on his phone from an official at Kering. He soon began the interview process—for just what job he wasn’t sure. At the end of November, when news broke of Michele’s departure, he overslept and woke to nearly a dozen missed calls and messages asking if he was interested in Gucci.

Both De Sarno and Pinault described a grueling gauntlet of tests, including producing a large-scale project involving sketches of silhouettes to convey a new vision for the brand, over what the CEO said was only eight days. (“Four days,” De Sarno clarified, holding his finger in the air. “Between Christmas and New Year’s.”) The final two candidates met with Pinault in Paris. “I was shaking,” De Sarno recalled, adding that even talking about it hiked his blood pressure. They spoke for hours, with Pinault wanting to know about De Sarno’s favorite books and movies, the Lucio Fontana paintings that he loved, the decoration of his home.

When he got the job, De Sarno broke the news to his boss and mentor in his Valentino office. The meeting—between two friends who had worked side by side and gotten to know each other’s families—was emotional. “We’re not at Miss Universe with the sashes,” Piccioli says, smiling, but they were both moved by De Sarno’s big break. “It was two people who have shared a journey and who will continue to share it in another way.” De Sarno also wrote a message to Michele, whom he knew professionally in the small world of Rome fashion, thanking him for leaving behind a company with values that he shared. When he returned to Cicciano for his 40th birthday, banners proclaimed him the pride of the town.

After a career spent behind the scenes, though, De Sarno learned quickly how lonely it can be out in front. At Gucci, no one dropped by his office—or even came to his floor. To break the ice, he organized a bash on the Tiber River, inviting everyone in the company, including the security guards. Far from being a recluse in the VIP section, he was found mostly out on the dance floor. “I was sweatier than them, drunker than them,” he tells me, adding that the staff seemed pleasantly surprised.

“He has the same energy now as he did 20 years ago,” says Ratnayake, who went on to work at Burberry and Victoria Beckham and Pangaia, and who has remained one of De Sarno’s best friends. “It’s fresh, it’s pure—it’s an inextinguishable fire for life.”

He soon started building his own team. In New York, he hit it off with the photographer Tyrell Hampton, who says De Sarno told him how he loved the intimate, stripped-down way he shot friends

and celebrities. “The new Gucci I want,” De Sarno told him, is about “freedom and exhilaration—I just want to have fun.” At the after-party of the September Ancora show, De Sarno sang along to Rihanna and danced with Gucci ambassadors Paul Mes-cal and Julia Garner.

Crucially, though, he also stays grounded. During the same show, Hanni, a member of the K-pop girl-group NewJeans and a Gucci global ambassador who grew up drawn to the youthfulness of the brand, admired the new direction. “I loved the way he toned it down,” she says. “It makes the brand look even more sophisticated than it already is—it’s so simple.”

Backstage, Hanni watched as De Sarno excused himself from taking pictures with celebrities to embrace his family. “They were all hugging him and congratulating him—it made me feel very, very happy that he has that kind of comfort around him.” (Soon after taking charge of Gucci, De Sarno learned that his taciturn father, who rarely asked about his work and was uneasy about attending his wedding celebration in Rome, boasted about his son’s exploits at the local café. “Your father,” the barista there confided to him, “only talks about you.”)

The company’s impending move, De Sarno says, seems even more important after Renne, the longtime Gucci designer, died at age 46 only days into his new job as the creative director of Moschino. (When I saw De Sarno walking with Luce at the airport in Brussels in November, rushing back for Renne’s funeral, his eyes were reddened. “Brutal,” he said. “I didn’t know him as Gucci—I knew him as Davide.”) Renne’s death, he says, put things in perspective, and the move to Milan, an hour-and-a-half flight from Brussels and half an hour away from his family in Como, would provide “a reset.” As it is now, he sees his husband on weekends in Brussels, in Milan, or at their home in Amandola. But he wanted to be closer to him, and to his family, he says, adding that he has started thinking of building a family of his own—even if it meant moving to another country to avoid strong opposition to surrogacy by Italy’s hard-right government. “I would like children.”

For now, he is the paterfamilias of an Italian empire. In the airy rotunda of the Gucci palace at the beginning of Novem-

ber, De Sarno sits next to Macco, the studio design director, in a chair set before the mosaic of a Roman god, and tilts his head at the models walking toward him in platform loafers, red micro miniskirts, black skorts, and trim jackets as he puts together the pre-fall collection.

“Super nice,” he says, in English, when he likes something a lot. “Molto Sabato,” he says with a self-deprecating chuckle when one of the crystal fringes he sewed on to a faux-fur coat fell onto the black carpet. It shimmered next to tables of Gucci purses, necklaces, belts, sunglasses, and a row of pink, yellow, green, and orange shoes lined up like Starbursts. The handle of one of the new alligator bags, he says, grabbing it, “will be gold, and cost as much as my house in Milan.”

On the other side of the room, a selection of sparkling embroidery drips from ski sweaters, as if they had been hit by a blingy hailstorm, as De Sarno stitches blue patches of interlocking GG monogram fabrics on to the black collar of a jacket (“Picture,” he says, by way of approval), draping another in a brocaded lime-green print and reaching for matching shoes that glisten with tassels. “Stupenda.” Another outfit is amended to make it “a little more bourgeois,” another more “lady.” He kneels on the mosaic face of Mercury to tie a strap to another model’s brown sandal. “I find it a little more sexy like this,” he says, spinning back to his seat and interlacing his hands behind his head. “I want,” he says, “to do only this.” ○

## THE LOOK

*Photographs by* JOSEPH BERMÚDEZ  
*Styling by* NEIL DE GUZMAN

### PAGE 26 TEAM CREDITS:

Makeup: Sabrina Alora and Tyrone Madriaga of Estée Lauder Philippines. Hair: Miggy Carbonilla. Models: Noel Hein of New Monarq Manila, Sophia Guillar of Luminary Models. Art Direction: Tinkerbell Poblete. Production Design: Paul Jatayna. Producer: Bianca Zaragoza. Stylist’s Assistants: Jilliane Santos, Kyla Uy. Hair Assistant: Frankhlin A. Gayondato. Production Design Assistants: Albert Dalit, Bruce Venida, Marlon Sosa.

## SHADOW PLAY

*Photographs by* OSMAN ÖZEL  
*Styling by* PENINAH AMANDA



### PAGE 44 TEAM CREDITS:

Makeup: Naomzz. Hair: Kosuke Ikeuchi. Model: J Moon of Select Model Management. Production Design: Leonardo Papini. Creative Producer: Eugenia Vicari. Casting Director: Mira Raynow. Photographer’s Assistant: Alex Dyak, Arseniy Derehynskyy. Stylist’s Assistants: Sophia Bogner, Wirat Tengchiang. Retoucher: Alex Dyak.

## NEW DAWN

*By* MARIANE PEREZ  
*Photographs by* ZANTZHAN  
*Fashion Director* PAM QUIÑONES

### PAGE 72 TEAM CREDITS:

Stylists: Bryan Ho, Jasmine Ashvinkumar. Makeup: Lai Weeming for Chau Bui, Mickey See for Liza Soberano. Hair: Ken Hong for Chau Bui, Renz Pangilinan for Liza Soberano. Talents: Chau Bui, Liza Soberano. Producers: Anz Hizon, David Bay. Nails: Belicia Gwee of Risual Nails, Zi of Auuum. Photographer’s Assistants: Alexander Titus Ng, Sin Yean Yam. Stylist’s Assistant: Sri Angreni.





## ELEMENTAL

By **BIANCA CUSTODIO**

Photographs by **ERWIN CANLAS & LAWRENCE DE LEON**

Product Styling by **RIZA ROSAL**

Beauty Editor: **JOYCE OREÑA**

### PAGE 88 TEAM CREDITS:

Makeup: Zidjian Paul Floro. Hair: Noel Muncada, Lindsay Agapito, Gerelyn Valentino, Renz Reputa of Toni&Guy Philippines. Stylist: Neil De Guzman. Art Director: Jann Pascua. Nails: Jeneve Aldave and Maritess Dela Paz of Extraordinail. Producer: Bianca Zaragoza. Multimedia Artist: Tinkerbell Poblete. Photography Assistant: Christian Manlunas. Makeup Assistant: Kim Roy Opog. Stylist's Assistants: Jilliane Santos, Kyla Uy.

**New York Team:** Photographer's Assistant: Alejandro Suárez Escobar. Set Design: Rahim Timbo. Shot on location at Vagabond Studios.

## FIRST OF SPRING

Photographs by **AGA WOTJUN**

Makeup by **OLGA WOLSKA-JERZAK**

Beauty Editor: **JOYCE OREÑA**

### PAGE 106 TEAM CREDITS:

Hair: Magda Dukat of Hairmate. Models: Angela of Hype Models, Ola Kursa of X Management Warsaw. Photographer's Assistants: Kamil Ślaziński, Natalia Paklikowska. Production, Set Design, Postproduction: Green Carrot. Shot on location at Daylight Studio. Special thanks to Małgorzata Bula for the handmade backgrounds and to Anemony for the flowers.

## FORCES FOR CHANGE

Photographs by **ARTU NEPOMUCENO**

Fashion Director **PAM QUIÑONES**

Introduction by **AUDREY CARPIO**

### PAGE 118 TEAM CREDITS:

Beauty Editor: Joyce Oreña. Stylists: Renee de Guzman, Roko Arceo. Makeup: Angeline Dela Cruz. Hair: JA Feliciano, Mong Amado. Talents: Ann Dumaliang, Bella Tanjutco, Billie Dumaliang, Camille Rivera, Issa Barte, Nicola Sebastian, Tasha Tanjutco. Art Director: Jann Pascua. Producers: Anz Hizon, Bianca Zaragoza. Multimedia Artist: Gabbi Constantino. Production Assistant: Bianca Custodio, Patricia Co, Patricia Villoria, Tinkerbell Poblete. Photographer's Assistants: Aaron Carlos, Choi Narciso, Mark Tijano, Odan Juan, Sela Gonzales, Rojan Maguyon. Stylist's Assistants: Giselle Barnachea, Neil De Guzman, Ticia Almazan. Makeup Assistant: Jian Santos. Hair Assistants: Kyle Denzel Celis, Marjorie Caballos. Shot on location at Masungi Georeserve.

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*Cafe 1228, New World Makati*



*Marriott Café, Marriott Hotel Manila*

## MELTING POT

*Take a tour through some of Manila's global flavors and culinary destinations*

*THE CULINARY LANDSCAPE OF THE PHILIPPINES* is marked by a blend of styles throughout the country's rich history of food. The centuries have seen indigenous flavors being led in a dance between elements of Spanish, Asian, and Malay influences, culminating in a gastronomic identity that is distinct from other global delicacies. The local cuisine is often an infusion of various elements, similar to how the Lechon or Empanada take to our Spanish roots, or how the Lumpia is made through ingredients bartered from neighboring traders.

As the country's culinary scene evolves, the combination of techniques, traditions, and ingredients from different cultures continues to pass down from one flavor profile to another. In mending local tastes to a more cosmopolitan palate, fusion and multi-cuisine restaurants have become common among the growing cityscape. This exploration of diverse flavors is among the many options accessible using the newly refreshed Metrobank World Mastercard, featuring a curated selection of restaurants for each card holder.

Positioned at the heart of the Marriott Hotel in Manila, the Marriott Café is a buffet that caters toward both the connoisseur and the casual diner. The all-day dining space features an open theater kitchen that prepares each dish live, with a spread of both Filipino and international, European cuisines. Until the 31st of March, members are entitled to fares at a reduced twenty percent when dining at the café.

A fusion of Western and Asian fare serve as the defining characteristic of Café 1228's dining experience. Nestled within the halls of New World Makati, the café offers a buffet that is highlighted by stations of cured meat, fresh seafood, and East Asian delicacies. Powered by the card, diners at Café 1228 are granted access to a reduced rate of up to fifty percent across its menu.

For more carnivorous cravings, Mgyuu is a steakhouse that prides itself on its tender, generously-portioned cuts of meat. Decorated in a rustic and industrial interior, the Taguig staple has established itself as a go-to destination for steak enthusiasts, providing them with a wide variety of steaks from across the world, with wagyu, tomahawk, and angus cuts. Card holders are also entitled toward a reduction of fifty percent when purchasing each of Mgyuu's wide selection of steak items.

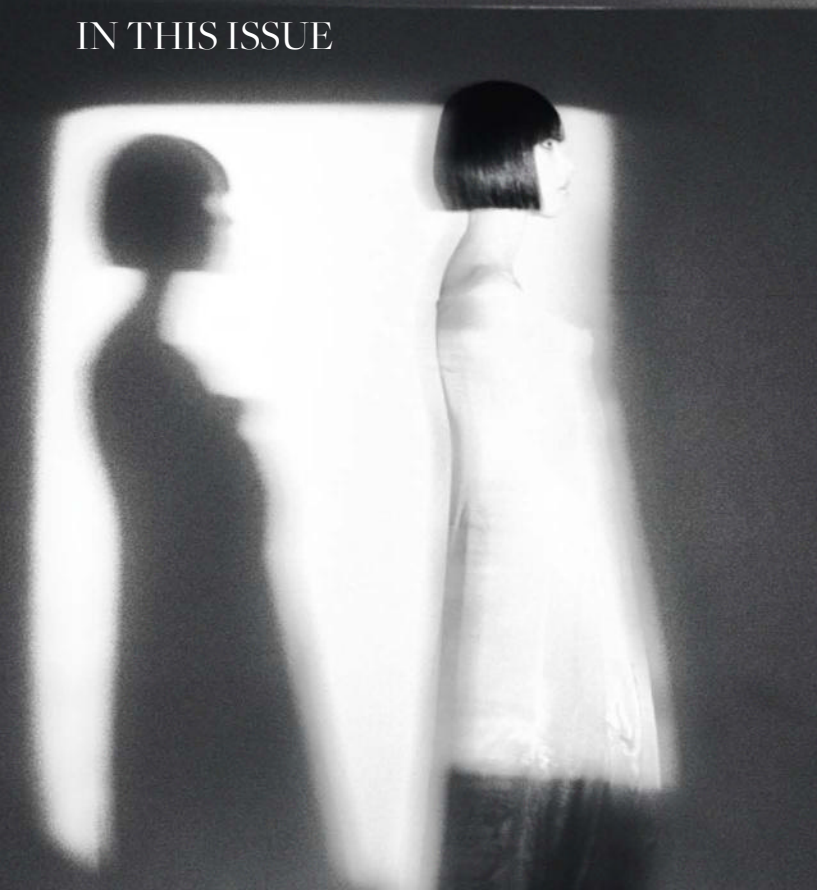
Each of these epicurean spaces are accessible through deals under Metrobank's newly relaunched Metrobank World Mastercard. Whether seeking local or global tastes, card holders open up new opportunities to explore Manila's culinary landscape, revealing a plethora of options to satisfy any craving.

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*Mgyuu Steaks, Taguig*

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