

VOGUE

DEC

NICKI MINAJ'S NEW WORLD

"I LOOK IN
MY SON'S FACE,
AND MY WHOLE
SOUL LIGHTS UP"

LAUREN SÁNCHEZ ON HER HIGH-FLYING ROMANCE

WHEN ART
MET FASHION
THE SEASON
IN 10 WORKS

AN EDWARD
HOPPER FANTASY

A CABINET
OF CURIOSITIES
IN ROME















LOUIS VUITTON





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RALPH LAUREN





RALPH LAUREN





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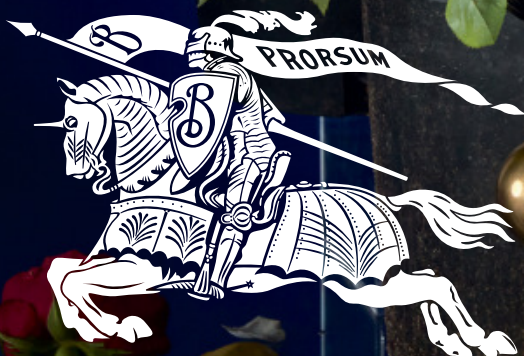


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VOGUE

December 2023



CLEARED FOR TAKEOFF

LAUREN SÁNCHEZ IN A STAUD + WRANGLER JUMPSUIT.
PHOTOGRAPHED BY ANNIE LEIBOVITZ.

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FENDI

ROMA





FENDI

ROMA





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The Cube.



DAVID YURMAN

SCULPTED CABLE

VOGUE

December 2023



LA DOLCE VITA

ALESSANDRO MICHELE IN THE DINING ROOM OF HIS APARTMENT IN ROME.
PHOTOGRAPHED BY FRANÇOIS HALARD.

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The work of legendary American painter Edward Hopper—so redolent of moody solitude and Cape Cod sunlight—sets the scene for fashion with a charmingly mid-century sense of modernity

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Cover Look All Hail the Queen

Nicki Minaj wears a Valentino Haute Couture dress. Irene Neuwirth earrings. To get this look, try: Studio Radiance Serum-Powered Foundation, Mineralize Skinfinish in Cheeky Bronze, Connect in Colour Eye Shadow Palette in Encrypted Kryptonite, Pro Longwear Fluid Eyeliner and Brow Gel in Black Track, Extended Play Gigablack Lash Mascara, Lip Pencil in Chicory, and Lipglass Clear. All by MAC Cosmetics. Hair, Lacy Redway and Dionte Gray; makeup, Raoul Alejandre. Details, see In This Issue.

Photographer: Norman Jean Roy.
Fashion Editor: Max Ortega.

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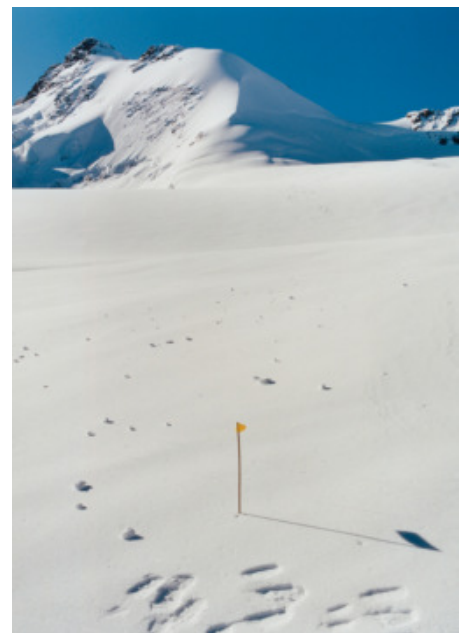
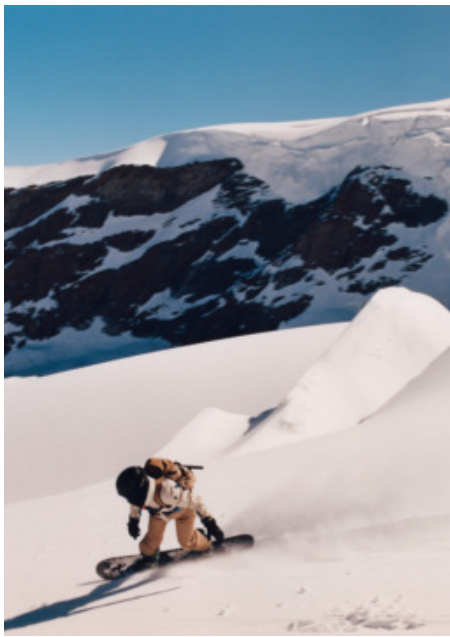
Beyond performance.



Richard Permin, Shaun White, Perrine Laffont and Xuetong Cai for Moncler Grenoble

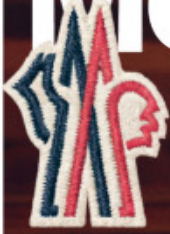








MONCLER GRENOBLE



Beyond performance.



Xuetong Cai for Moncler Grenoble

Letter From the Editor



View Finder

YOU CAN SCARCELY BELIEVE IT'S HER. A young woman sits in a coffee shop in 1973, hiding behind her Nikon. The snapshot at the top of this page is of Annie Leibovitz. She'd begun working for *Rolling Stone* at that time and she'd already had a couple of assignments from *Vogue*. So much was still to come: A remarkable half century of image-making.

When I think of all the fashion images, portraiture, and photojournalism Annie has created for *Vogue*, a body of work of incredible breadth—pictures of actors, models, designers, heads of state, and everything in between—I confess I'm a little astonished. Line these images up and they are the collection of one of our greatest living artists. How lucky *Vogue* is to have published so many. How lucky I've been to have Annie as a friend, one who comes by the office to tell me her latest ideas and let me share in her excitement. I think of her as our artist-in-residence,



who is utterly fearless and who makes photographs that become modern history.

And so when we had the thought to devote much of this issue to the connection between art and fashion, it was only natural to look to her. An idea had already come up; it started with *Vogue* contributing editor Grace Coddington, who had been captivated by the recent Edward Hopper retrospective at the Whitney Museum of American Art. Annie is an enormous Hopper fan as well, and they'd been talking about his stirring modern juxtapositions of urban life and offhand human drama. Hopper's partnership with his wife, Josephine, also a painter, provided a kind of

hidden history to explore, and the collections we'd recently seen on the runways in Europe were full of updated gestures to mid-century elegance and tailoring. *Vogue* contributing editor Alex Harrington would collaborate on the shoot too. So it would be Hopper plus fashion. I knew Annie was dedicated and would do what she always does—form the images carefully and meticulously in her mind.

I knew this because she shows me. How I love the text messages, emails, and phone calls. They're a measure of Annie's excitement, and a reminder—so moving to me—that these images matter passionately to her. Look at this drawing, or this storyboard, she'll say. Think about this location. What if we shot this person this way? *See what I'm seeing*. I always do.

I can't overstate how much delight the Hopper images gave me as they came in (perilously close to our print dates—Annie works harder than anyone I know, but every image *must* be perfect). They do nothing less than embody what I believe *Vogue* to be, which is a way of seeing culture through the lens of fashion, imbuing clothes with history and storytelling. She's done this kind of thing before, of course. Who can forget her Alice in Wonderland, her Edith Wharton? Like those other amazing pictorial narratives, this one is populated by incredible people, artists like Lorna Simpson and Harold Ancart, the exciting young actor Maya Hawke, and the settings are thoughtful and exact. Annie's re-creations of Hopper's paintings are uncanny, but they're more than reimaginings. They're creative acts all their own.

GET THE PICTURE?

LEFT: ANNIE LEIBOVITZ IN 1973. BELOW: EDWARD HOPPER'S *JO IN WYOMING*, 1946.

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REPUBLIC

Contributors



Na Kim

Artist Na Kim's usual subject is a female nude, head and shoulders only, so it was a bit of a departure for her to be asked to respond directly to a fashion house, in this case Bode, for "When Art Met Fashion" (page 156). But, as she points out, "fashion has been used throughout art history as a tool to convey mood, time, and place, especially within portraits to tell the story about who the subject is." Kim, who is also the art director for *The Paris Review* and Farrar, Straus and Giroux books, is currently having her debut solo show at White Columns gallery in Manhattan.—DODIE KAZANJIAN



Elizabeth Colomba

For Elizabeth Colomba, the French painter of Martinican heritage, "a serendipitous pairing with Christopher John Rogers felt destined." Last February at Bergdorf Goodman, she encountered a "breathtaking gown" made of madras, a fabric she often incorporates into her paintings because of its rich Caribbean heritage. It was five minutes before closing time, and the staff couldn't tell her who made the dress. Months later, when *Vogue* suggested she create a work inspired by Christopher John Rogers, she realized that he was the one who had designed the madras piece in question. Colomba is known for inserting Black figures into historical white spaces, playing with what we think of as the canon of art history. In the portfolio, an 18th-century-style woman is presented in an atypical way: "Historical records from that era would never capture such an unrestrained moment," Colomba points out.—D.K.



Paul Chan

Paul Chan, a Hong Kong-born artist who quit making art for six years and started up again in 2015, loved the idea of responding to Rick Owens. "When I began making work again," he says, "designers were real inspirations for me, because my new work involved designing garments, though not for human bodies." Chan, whose retrospective is currently on view at the Institute for Contemporary Art at Virginia Commonwealth University, is referring to his *Breathers*, cloth sculptures animated by wind from electric fans. "I sometimes think of the *Breathers* as 'clothing for spirits.' So I want them to fit in ways that the best of fashion offers for people. It just so happens that what I'm trying to fit is air." But can fashion be art? "When it strikes like an axe hitting the frozen sea within us," he says, "then yes."—D.K.

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N°5



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WITH

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AND CHLOE MALLE.
FOLLOW WHEREVER YOU GET
YOUR PODCASTS.

Contributors



Seaside Rendezvous

It all began simply enough: Not long after “Edward Hopper’s New York”—a blockbuster survey of the master American realist’s life and work in the city—opened at the Whitney Museum of American Art last year, contributing editor Grace Coddington suggested to Alex Harrington, a fellow *Vogue* contributor, that the show could form the basis for a fashion story. In time, that story became “People in the Sun” (page 144), which saw Coddington and Harrington join up with photographer Annie Leibovitz, artist Harold Ancart, and 25-year-old actor and musician Maya Hawke (pictured above in Louis Vuitton) for a glorious tribute not only to Hopper, but also to his wife, model, and would-be agent, Josephine, a painter herself. Together, the troupe traveled all over Massachusetts, from Northampton to Wellfleet, Provincetown, and Truro (where the Hoppers had a home), re-creating some of Hopper’s most famous paintings. For Hawke, who has made a habit of visiting the Metropolitan Museum of Art most weekends, the project was a dream. “I’m such a huge fan of Edward Hopper and his paintings, and so it was really cool to learn from Annie some more about the history of his marriage,” she says. “And it’s an honor that someone my age does not expect to get in their lifetime, to be photographed by Annie. I never thought that that would happen.” —MARLEY MARIUS



PAINTED LADIES

THE VISUAL REFERENCES FOR “PEOPLE IN THE SUN” INCLUDE, FROM TOP, EDWARD HOPPER’S *WESTERN MOTEL*, 1957; *HIGH NOON*, 1949; AND *JO SKETCHING AT GOOD HARBOR BEACH*, 1923–1924.

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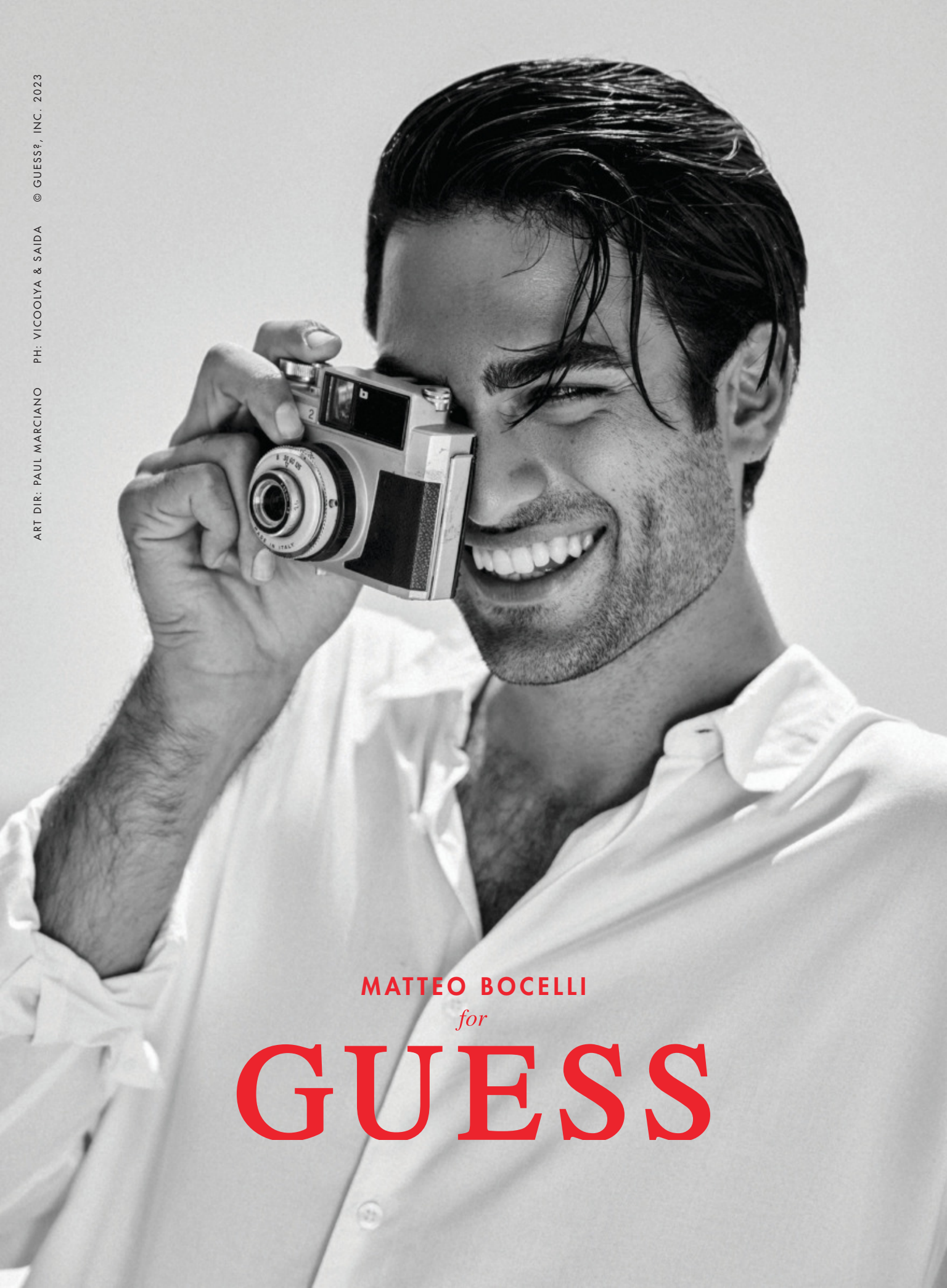
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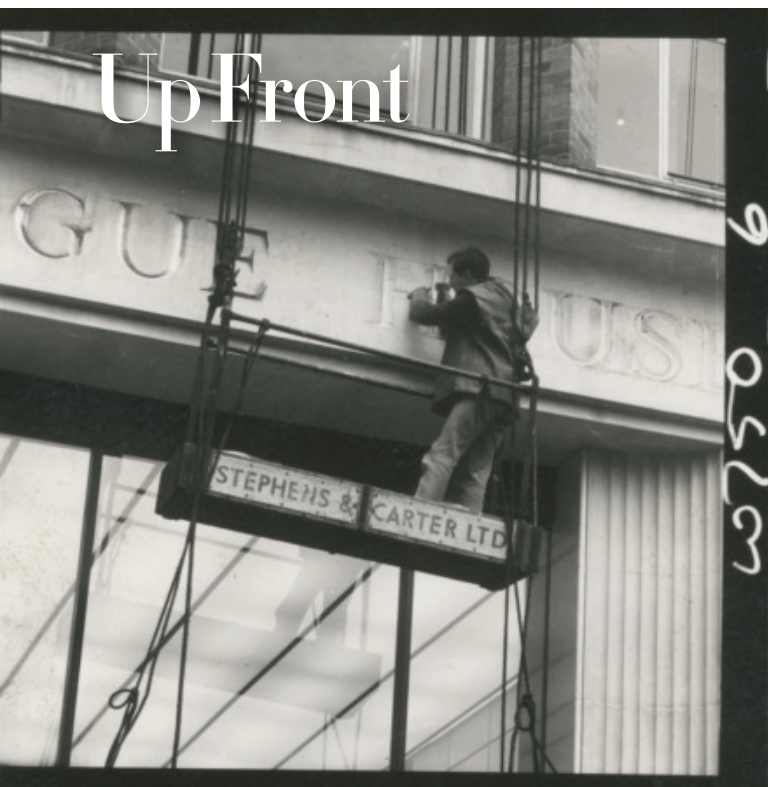


MATTEO BOCELLI

for

GUESS

Up Front



HOUSE RULES

CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: PUTTING THE FINISHING TOUCHES ON VOGUE HOUSE'S FAÇADE, CIRCA 1958; PHOTOGRAPHER DAVID BAILEY, SHOT BY TERRY O'NEILL IN 1965; MODELS SACHA QUENBY (IN SCHIAPARELLI HAUTE COUTURE), GISELLE NORMAN (IN DIOR HAUTE COUTURE), KAI NEWMAN (IN SCHIAPARELLI HAUTE COUTURE), NYAGUA RUEA (IN DIOR HAUTE COUTURE), AND AJOK DAING (IN FENDI COUTURE) WITH BRITISH VOGUE'S EDWARD ENNINFUL—AND HIS BOSTON TERRIER, RU.

Goodbye, Vogue House!

It's the end of an era in Mayfair. As our UK sibling relocates its headquarters, three former staffers recall office life, British *Vogue*-style.



GRACE CODDINGTON

I first visited Vogue House in 1959, when I was a finalist for that year's model contest. My prize was to be photographed by some of British *Vogue's* top photographers—Norman Parkinson, Don Honeyman, and Eugène Vernier. I met them all at a rather daunting tea party hosted by Audrey Withers, the then editor in chief, at the photography studios on the sixth floor (the *Vogue* offices were one floor below). In the same studios, by the early '60s you might see David Bailey, Saul Leiter, Frank Horvat, and Helmut Newton, while in the café opposite Vogue House, Bailey was often joined by his mates, the

photographers Terence Donovan and Brian Duffy—"The Terrible Three," as they were known—who watched the wannabe models carrying large portfolios and dragging heavy bags in and out of the building. I'd walk past them intentionally, as did so many of those girls.

I modeled for 10 years, and came to know *Vogue's* editors quite well. Beatrix Miller, who became editor in chief in 1964, was in her 40s but embraced all the young people of that era, from the Beatles and the Stones to Bailey, whom she adored, even though he was often quite risqué with her. Bea was remarkable—she'd come to work saying, "I had this idea in the bath this morning..."—and >72

TOP LEFT: THE CONDE NAST ARCHIVE. TOP RIGHT: PHOTOGRAPHED BY TERRY O'NEILL/ICONIC IMAGES. BOTTOM: PHOTOGRAPHED BY SEAN THOMAS.



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Up Front Magazine Making

then before we knew it, our next issue would be about “the Englishwoman and her garden,” or “breaking all the dusty rules of etiquette.” The extremely talented art director Barney Wan was her brilliant foil, even if he rarely spoke above a whisper. (Still, he managed to convince Georgia O’Keeffe to be shot by Bruce Weber by simply knocking on her door in Santa Fe and offering to cook her dinner.) Bea took great care of people: In my time at *Vogue* House, I went through two marriages and two divorces, and she was always there to support me.

Among the editors working for Bea were the inspirational Marit Allen, who supervised the Young Ideas pages, and Sheila Wetton, who had been a model for designer Edward Molyneux but was now convinced she looked like Helmut Newton. (Totally untrue: She was very chic, with her hair in an immaculate chignon, dressed in her uniform of a cardigan, straight

“It wasn’t exactly a professional environment, but somehow we gained a reputation for being rather good, even though we had tiny budgets”

I had started at *Vogue* the year before Liz, in 1968. Another editor, Clare Rendlesham, was brilliant but quite harsh. She became a very good friend of mine, even though she once said to me, “Grace—you’re just too old to model.” I was 28! It was Marit, though, who suggested I meet Bea with a view to joining *Vogue* as a junior fashion editor. Bea and I had lunch at her favorite Italian restaurant in Soho. The interview was rather uncomfortable—she asked me about my favorite writers and which university I had gone to. (I don’t read and I hadn’t gone to any university.) Still, at the end of the lunch she told me I could start in January.

The work culture was pretty lax. Our days would start around 11 a.m., and if you had one shoot a month, well—that was a lot. We’d go off to China, Russia, Africa, or the Caribbean for two, three weeks at a time to produce a 10-page story. Every day, we’d go out for a three-course lunch and a glass of wine. It wasn’t exactly a

professional environment, but somehow we gained a reputation for being rather good, even though we had tiny budgets.

The fashion culture of the day centered around Queen Bea. She knew so many people—Princess Margaret and Lord Snowdon, Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton—who would just drop by her office. Sometimes they ended up at my desk. Vivienne Westwood suddenly appeared one day, unannounced (there was no security), standing there with her legs strapped together and rings through her nose and telling me aggressively: “I should be on the cover of *Vogue*.” Vivienne proceeded to pull these S&M-y things out of her small suitcase, one by one. I was scared to death.

We worked from a chaotic fashion room, with rows of hulking wood-and-leather desks, like how I imagined a Fleet Street newsroom to look. Nothing matched, and the carpet was worn through. By that time I was dating the restaurateur Michael Chow, and he came in one day and took one look at it all and said: “This is terrible.” Somehow, he talked *Vogue* into letting him redesign

the space, and in short order the floors were stripped to a pale blond wood, and we had new furniture—these fabulous Zeev Aram glass-and-steel tables, which everyone hated because you could see all the rubbish that accumulated underneath, and Cesca chairs, which everyone also hated because, due to their ’60s miniskirts, the rattan scratched their thighs or ruined their tights. Michael also declared: “You’re only allowed to put up one picture of your boyfriend.” Everybody was shattered.

Looking back, my time at *Vogue* House is like a vision of my childhood. Then I came to work in America, and I very quickly grew up.

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WORKING LUNCH

A STAFF LUNCH IN 1980 FOR SHEILA WETTON, AT LEFT IN GLASSES, IN THE FASHION EDITORS’ WORK ROOM. GRACE CODDINGTON IS SEATED TO HER RIGHT.

skirt, and shoes with tiny heels.) She had the most foul mouth, but she was divine. And of course there was my very dearest friend Liz Tilberis, who began working at *Vogue* in 1969 after being a runner-up in the magazine’s annual talent contest. We had so many of the same dreams for the magazine—which she would go on to edit in 1988—and while we were extremely competitive, it never got in the way of our friendship.



VICTORIA'S SECRET

CELEBRATES MARIAH SEASON



PACK AND PLAY

ABOVE: MODEL ALVA CLAIRE (IN EMILIA WICKSTEAD), ACTOR RIZ AHMED (IN PAUL SMITH), MODEL LULU WOOD (IN ERDEM), MODEL UGBAD ABDI (IN RICHARD QUINN), AND THE WORLD OF INTERIORS EDITOR IN CHIEF HAMISH BOWLES AT THE VOGUE HOUSE LOADING BAY.



PLUM SYKES

In the early 1990s I was in my early 20s, had recently left Oxford, and had started at British *Vogue* as the lowliest of the low—tidying the fashion closet, photocopying, filing, and making endless cups of tea for editors.

The so-called “work experience” person was usually only allowed to stay for three weeks, but I was desperate to remain. I had met the otherworldly stylist Isabella Blow in the corridor a few times, and one day summoned up my courage and, without asking anyone’s permission, asked her if I could become her assistant. We were standing in the middle of the open-plan fashion-and-features office, so everyone could hear everything, including what she replied: “Why would someone as conservative as *you* want to work for someone as extreme as *me*?”

I somehow persuaded the managing editor’s office that Issie needed my help with shoots, and spent a blissful six months working for her. I would arrive at 10, dressed in my uniform of black jeans and a black polo neck (all I could afford then), and sit in the dark corner Issie had been allocated in the spacious

CONTINUED ON PAGE 186

GANG’S ALL HERE

TOP LEFT: BRITISH *VOGUE* CONTRIBUTING EDITOR ROBIN MUIR, STELLA MCCARTNEY, AND MODEL VICTORIA FAWOLE (IN STELLA MCCARTNEY) GATHER IN THE LIBRARY. LEFT: FAWOLE (IN JW ANDERSON) AND MODEL DANA SMITH (IN LOEWE) WITH JONATHAN ANDERSON IN THE POST ROOM.

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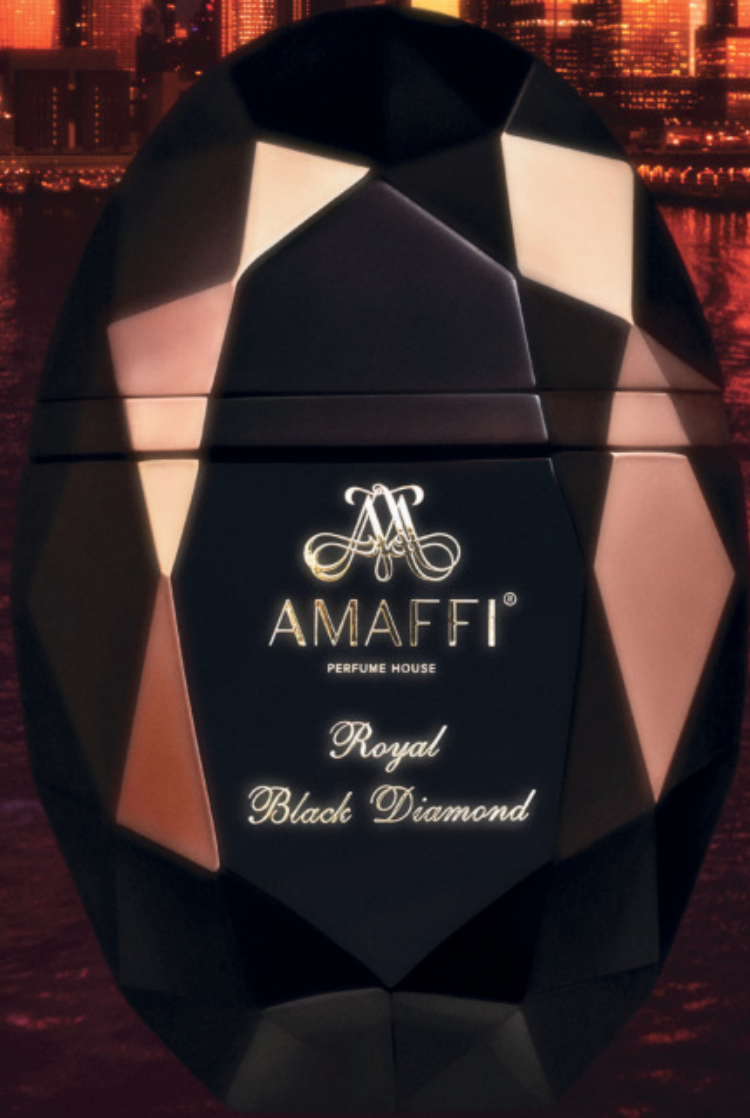
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PRODUCED BY ANDREA VAN BUREN JOHN BUCCARDO AND DEREK ESPLIN WRITTEN BY PAUL DALLAS DIRECTED BY LISA CORTÉS PRODUCED BY BETHANN HARDISON AND FRÉDÉRIC TCHENG

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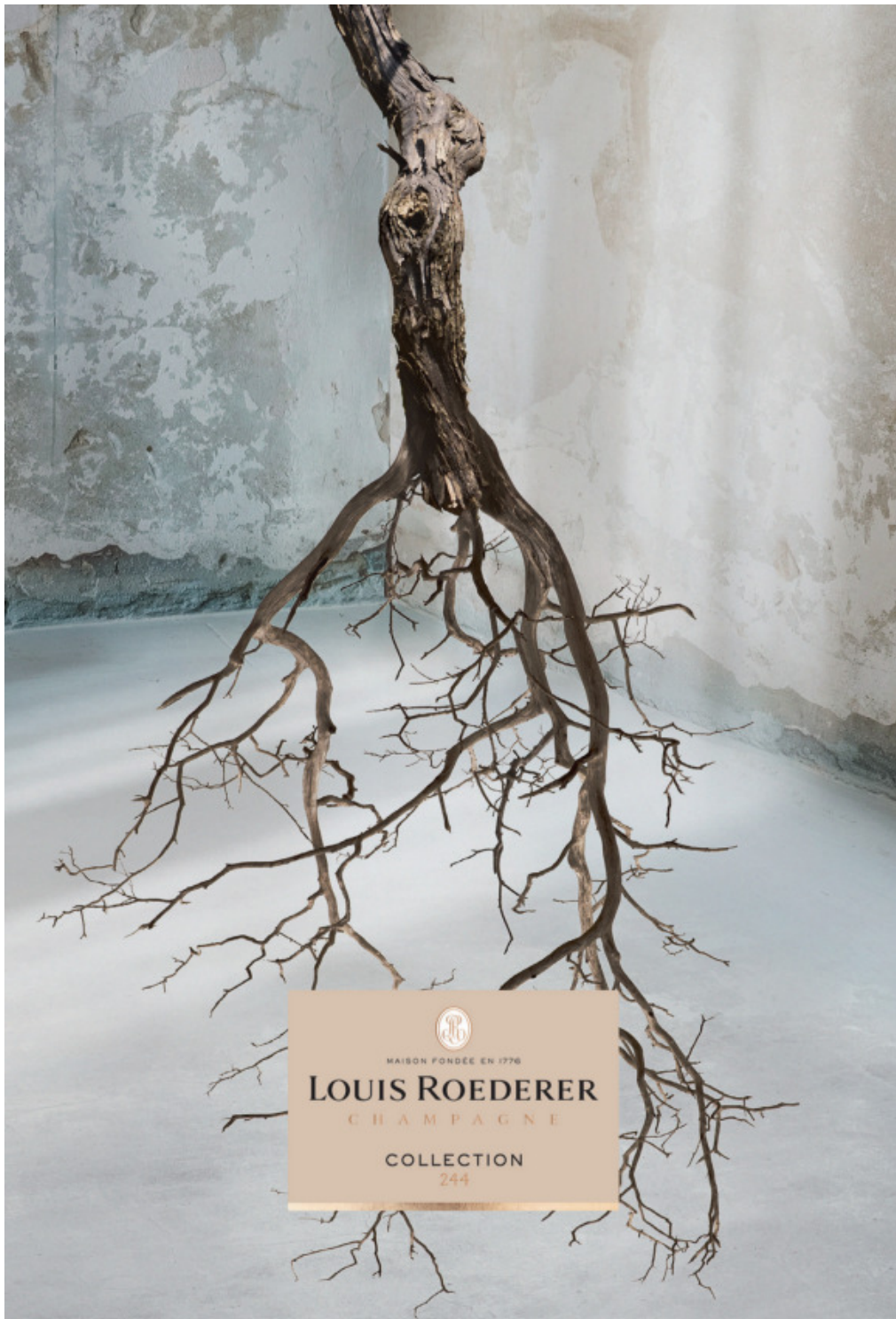
LADY IN RED
Paulson wears
a Proenza
Schouler dress.
Tiffany & Co. cuff.
Photographed
by Max Farago.

The Play's the Thing

For Sarah Paulson,
Branden Jacobs-Jenkins's
Appropriate proved an
irresistible lure back to Broadway.
By Alessandra Codinha.

On a cool, early fall day in Los Angeles, the actor Sarah Paulson, a person of palpable charm and sincerity, pauses over lunch to consider how she came to embody a series of unlikable, and occasionally truly awful, women. (Her CV includes roles like *12 Years a Slave*'s harrowing Mistress Epps, Linda Tripp, and *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*'s Nurse Ratched.) "I try not to judge them," she says finally. "I try not to think about how they're going to be perceived, because I don't think many people are thinking about how they're coming across in any given moment. People are, myself included, reactive and reacting to the environment around them."

If this sounds pretty elementary, you are probably not a Hollywood star, with all of the correlating concerns about likability and marketability that particular occupation >82



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HAND IN HAND WITH NATURE

entails. “There are a lot of incredible actresses out there who are stars because they play themselves,” the Obie Award-winning playwright Branden Jacobs-Jenkins tells me on a phone call a few days later. “Sarah’s not like that. She’s a legit actress.” He calls himself a Paulson “early adopter,” admiring her in New York stage productions like *The Gingerbread House* and *Crimes of the Heart* in the aughts. “And then of course she became the queen of Ryan Murphy land.” (In the Murphy-verse, Paulson is a central figure and fan favorite, having starred in nine out of 11 seasons of *American Horror Story* in roles as varied as Hypodermic Sally, Tuberculosis Karen, a villainous Mamie Eisenhower, and a pair of conjoined twins.)

Now Paulson is appearing in her first stage production in a decade, Jacobs-Jenkins’s 2013 play *Appropriate*, which begins previews November 29 and opens December 18. The play, which is directed by Lila Neugebauer, follows the dysfunctional Lafayette family’s return to their ancestral seat in Arkansas to settle the estate of their recently departed paterfamilias. There are grudges, and wounds, and a terrible racist secret in the attic, as there is in much of American life. The choice to acknowledge that rot—or not—forces the remaining family members to decide what kind of family, and what kind of people, they are. There are moments of levity, but the play is not a light lift—Paulson’s role, the eldest sister, Toni, furious and bitter in measures, perhaps especially. (Corey Stoll plays her brother Bo, and Elle Fanning is River, the fiancée of the youngest of the Lafayette siblings, Franz.) For Neugebauer, it made Paulson a dream casting. “She has an electrifying kind of command—a combination of technical virtuosity and an appetite for excavating the furthest reaches of the human capacity,” the director writes in an email. “She is one of the few actors that can push their limits and completely surprise us,” says Fanning. “I look up to how daring and adventurous she is in her choices. They are for herself and no one else.”

For Paulson, who is clad in a dove gray overcoat by The Row, a pale blue button-down shirt, wide-legged B Sides jeans, and loops of Irene Neuwirth and Jessica McCormack jewelry when we meet, relocating to New York will be something of a homecoming. She grew up there, attending Berkeley Carroll School in Brooklyn’s Park Slope before LaGuardia High School, and made her Broadway debut right after graduation in the 1994 play *The Sisters Rosensweig*. She has returned to the city about once every decade, she says, but still, everything about this time feels new. Her last stage run was Lanford Wilson’s Pulitzer Prize-winning comedy *Talley’s Folly*, a two-hander opposite Danny Burstein at the Roundabout theater in 2013, and during that time she says she lived “monastically,” on continuous vocal rest and with little social life to speak of. This time, her three rescue dogs will be with her; her partner, the actor Holland Taylor (herself making waves as a difficult woman on the ropes in this season of

The Morning Show), will go back and forth between New York and Los Angeles. The pair are famously low-key, preferring long walks through the hills and small dinners with friends to the scene-ier aspects of LA. (They’re also good at living apart: Paulson has partly credited the health of their eight-year relationship to keeping separate houses.) It may be that this production requires a glass of wine and a bath to decompress after the curtain falls or a Taylor Swift soundtrack for the way home. “I didn’t take my Eras Tour bracelet off for, like, a month and a half,” Paulson says. “I’ve never been 48. I’ve never been in New York doing a play



LEAN ON ME

Elle Fanning plays a supporting role in *Appropriate*.
Photographed by Annie Leibovitz, *Vogue*, June 2017.

with three dogs. You know how they say your cells all turn over every 10 years? I’m a whole new person since I last did a play. I’m interested to meet who I’ll be.”

When it came to who Toni Lafayette will be, the actor worked with Julia Crockett, the movement coach who helped her transform into Linda Tripp for *Impeachment: American Crime Story*. With a character based in history, there is footage to scour, diaries to read, material to build off of. For a fictional creation like Toni, Paulson’s been zeroing in on the character’s calcified, volatile nature and how that might register in her carriage and cadence. “I’ve been watching *Chimp Empire* and *Real Housewives of Salt Lake City*, and to me, somewhere in there lies a path to a creative process,” she says. “I know that sounds insane.” (It actually doesn’t: Both programs follow highly reactive, insular communities deeply concerned with social hierarchy and prone to sudden interclan bouts of violence. And *RHOSLC* has become must-see TV, we agree. She says she’s even got her good friend *The Last of Us* star >84



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Pedro Pascal tuning in: “He’s like, ‘I understand everything about you’ now that he’s seen it,” she says, “and I was like, ‘I don’t know how to take that. I *really* don’t.’”)

For Paulson, the return to Broadway means more than a change of scenery. It’s a head-spinning change of pace, living a heart-wrenching series of events on loop eight times a week, and without the screen actor’s option to stop and try it again. She came up in the theater working with small casts and is looking forward to a larger corps to share notes with when the curtain comes down. The collegial spirit extends to her castmates: “I have never done a play before, so knowing I would have Branden, Lila, and Sarah to lean on during my first production was a huge gift,” says Fanning.

“The beauty of doing a play is that you kind of strap in. You have a starting point and an arc, and every night you land at the end of the piece, and then you get to try it again the next day,” Paulson says. “I love the idea of buckling my seat belt and letting the play take me somewhere.” For Jacobs-Jenkins, Paulson is less the passenger than the vehicle itself. “Having her in the cast is like being able to drive some very expensive foreign car.”

“That moment that the curtain goes up or the lights dim...it’s the closest thing to church to me”

Paulson is not a religious person, she says, but “I think the truth is, at that moment that the curtain goes up or the lights dim, where those hundreds in the audience are together for that one night, it’s the closest thing to church to me.” People sometimes think that repetition must deaden something about a performance, she says. It doesn’t. Every production is different: a very beautiful, communal experience that only happens one time. And in an age when nearly everything is being disseminated on social media, theater requires the viewer to truly be present.

“It’s one of the few places I can think of in the world where you have a performing element and it’s not documented, and people aren’t just sitting there half-watching, half-scrolling. It’s a commitment you’re making. I think it’s really beautiful in a world where so much is happening behind screens,” she says, citing recent studies showing loneliness’s abbreviating effect on life span. “So here’s an opportunity for people to all gather into a room and put their collective attention on something. How beautiful,” she says, smiling, “and how *rare*.” She knows a thing or two about that. □

Sneak Peak

An under-the-radar new wellness destination.

If you were forced to dream up a list of the world’s most legendary spa destinations, it’s unlikely that Transylvania would be on it. But for those able to look beyond the regional stereotypes of vampires and werewolves, this blissfully bucolic corner of central Romania has served as a low profile destination for intrepid wellness pilgrims. And as of this November, those trekking through its picturesque mountains or soaking in its mineral-rich springs might spot a new—and thoughtfully designed—haven nestled in the peaks of the Carpathian Mountains: Matca, an independent spa hotel with a twist. The tasteful taupes and creams of its artfully rustic suites and villas are where the similarities to other wellness sanctuaries end. Here, you can immerse yourself in the local landscapes with more than just a brisk hike, whether by joining local Romanian Orthodox monks for a traditional musical ceremony or—for the more thrill-seeking visitor—venturing out with a



THE HILLS ARE ALIVE

ABOVE: The Bucegi and Piatra Craiului mountains near Matca. LEFT: A room at Matca, set in a traditional Transylvanian farmhouse.

local ranger for a bear safari. Along with the usual array of saunas and plunge pools in the spa complex, there is also “hay bathing”—essentially, immersing yourself in bundles of warmed grasses to soothe your aches and strains—or simply lay yourself out on the massage tables draped in locally embroidered linens. And before you ask: No, they don’t offer vampire facials.—LIAM HESS

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Meet Abrar Mohamed, *Vogue* Open Casting finalist and model of the moment, as she expresses her layered personality with Pandora.

Stacks of *Charm*



"I think it's a misconception in society to think hijabi women can't be fashionable," Abrar Mohamed says on set in Shoreditch, London. "Fashion is a big part of my identity; it allows me to express myself and really show who I am." Discovered through Open Casting, *Vogue's* global model search, and supported by Pandora, Mohamed has a personality as bright as her smile. Chatting with elegance and ease, she considers how styling allows her to express different elements of herself. "I feel like there's not just one side of me," she says, adorning her fingers with Pandora's Lab-Grown Diamond rings "I love the contrast of wearing denim or something more relaxed, and then personalizing it, dressing it up with jewelry."

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Fashionable Figures

Marley Marius investigates the rich history of artists working with clothes—in their lives and, more urgently, in their work.



DRESS CODES

ABOVE: Rute Merk's *Balenciaga*, SS20, Look 89, 2019. LEFT: Jiab Prachakul's *Girlfriends*, 2022.



Georgia O'Keeffe, who loved clothes—she owned some 100 dresses, by her caretaker's estimate, "all alike, except that some are black instead of white"—once likened painting to "a thread that runs through all the reasons for all the other things that make one's life." It's an elegant quote, though nearly as tricky to interpret as O'Keeffe's heady florals and sweeping desertscapes. Was she

positing art as the sinew of...ideas? As an undergirding for the stuff of life?

Or did she have a different kind of thread work in mind? O'Keeffe owned several pairs of low suede heels from Saks Fifth Avenue, rigorously simple but for the raised seams running down their centers and branching off the sides like the boughs of a tree. If art can do *that* to the fabric of existence—transform the banal (and bourgeois) into the beguiling—then

what can clothes do to art? While her fondness for dresses (and for skirt suits and jeans and chambray shirts) didn't quite show up on O'Keeffe's canvases, a taste for dreamy, creamy pastels certainly did.

Where other painters may lack O'Keeffe's abundant wardrobe, they *can* afford to have more fun with fashion in their work. (See "When Art Met Fashion," on page 156, for some notable recent examples.) This is especially true of portraitists. As the overlapping tides of Abstract Expressionism, minimalism, and conceptual art receded with the turn of the 21st century, a new generation of figurative artists emerged, keen to reimagine the form. About 100 years after John Singer Sargent became the most important portrait painter of his generation, capturing captains of industry (and their wives and daughters) across the northeast and Europe, Kerry James Marshall, Peter Doig, and others leveled their gazes on the triumphs and trials of more ordinary people—and in doing so, gave clothing, once *the* marker of a sitter's social status, more to say.

Born in 1900, Alice Neel, who—along with the likes of Francis >116



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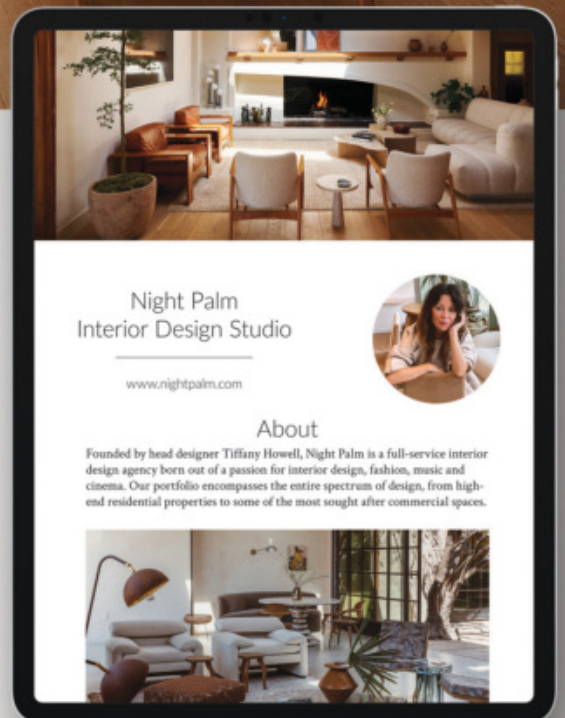
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Bacon, Lucian Freud, and Barkley L. Hendricks—leaned headlong into portrait painting decades before it became *au courant* again, set a compelling standard, approaching her figures' dress as both a trait (signaling "something of a person's unique character," as the curator Eleanor Nairne has put it) and a useful sign of the times. "One of the reasons I painted was to catch life as it goes by, right hot off the griddle," Neel remarked in 1978. In her pictures of family, friends, and her neighbors in Spanish Harlem, the clothes, when present (Neel was partial to an unsparing nude), are keenly observed, from the micro-miniskirts and square-toe shoes on Kiki Djos and Nancy Selvege in the winkingly titled *Wellesley Girls* (1967) to the slouchy top and bell-bottom jeans in *Robbie Tillotson* (1973) or the louche unbuttoned flannel and dorky green crewneck in *Geoffrey Hendricks and Brian* (1978). Neel once followed a perfect stranger down Madison Avenue and into a bank, so dazzled was she by the woman's brilliant orange hat. (After the portrait, they went for sundaes at Schrafft's.)

Many since have taken a similar tack. While the Thai-born, Britanny-based artist Jiab Prachakul, 44, points to Marshall, Toyin Ojih Odutola, and David Hockney as her primary influences (it was a Hockney show in 2006 that first inspired her to paint), gestures to personal style are as readily apparent in her work as in Neel's. Instead of telling people what to wear when they sit for her, Prachakul explains, "I ask them, 'What have you liked to wear lately? What do you feel like yourself in?'" She finds it important that the clothes feel "authentic"—to the era as well as the person. "I'm from Generation X," she says, "so I'm trying to [establish] in the paintings that *this* is our aesthetic." (Prachakul's sensibility is informed, in part, by what she did before committing to art full-time: For years she worked as a casting director and coordinator for an advertising company and then, in Berlin, as a clothing designer.) "Rendezvous in Time," a recent exhibition of hers at Timothy Taylor in New York,

teemed with the tactile textures of baggy shirting, high-waisted denim, technical outerwear, slick swimwear, and glossy leather boots. (All of that said: In her own life, Prachakul tends to stick with spare, white separates.)

As a counterpoint, the celebrated British Ghanaian painter Lynette Yiadom-Boakye, whose portraits are based on found photographs, literature, memory, and the history of art itself, does things quite differently. The flouncy skirts, patterned dresses, lordly coats, and Jacobean collars



Clothing, once *the* marker of a sitter's social status, has had more and more to say lately

that have featured in her work are functionally "quite ambiguous," she's said, beholden to neither a particular period nor specific tastes. (This tracks with Yiadom-Boakye's characterization of the people *in* those clothes: "They don't share our concerns or anxieties," she once said. "They are somewhere else altogether.") Far more important are her figures' "expressions," the artist told *The Guardian*. "In the last few years, I've become

OLD SCHOOL

Alice Neel's miniskirt-clad *Wellesley Girls*, from 1967.

obsessed with color, too. My pictures used to be very dark, but now I'm putting in vivid reds and greens." In other words, the looks are chiefly a formal exercise—though that hasn't stopped Solange Knowles, or Yiadom-Boakye's friend Duro Olowu, from mining their shapes and tones for creative inspiration.

And then there's an artist like Rute Merk, 32, who is *very* specific about her fashion touch points. While the settings (such as they are) for her figurative works often share the abstract indeterminacy of Yiadom-Boakye's, her canvases have made explicit reference to Balenciaga—in 2019, Demna tapped her to create a series of paintings based on the house's spring 2020 collection, rooted in wild fantasies of "power dressing"—and the outerwear brand Arc'teryx. Of the Balenciaga commission, Merk recalls, "They saw a connection between what they were trying to achieve with their clothes, their silhouettes, and my practice, which was—I remember this phrasing: 'Trying to look for a relationship between humanity and technology.'" (Indeed, you'd be forgiven for mistaking Merk's bleary-faced figures for video game avatars, when in fact she works strictly in oils.) Besides, she and Demna both came from Eastern Europe—he from Georgia, she from Lithuania—and she recognized some of his signature jeans and shoes from her post-Soviet childhood.

Like Prachakul, Merk, who is based in Berlin, wants to make art that reflects how we see and experience the world right now. Figurative painting has been around forever; what makes a 21st-century portrait identifiably of its moment? That's where nods to fashion and modern beauty standards can come in—hyperreal depictions of extravagantly long hair extensions also feature in Merk's paintings—but really, the key to her uncanny visual style is working from digital photographs. "Spending a lot of time in virtual space, and experiencing many things digitally—I want to bring it back to painting," she says. "I want my aesthetic to have the fabric of our time." □



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True Tone

A new generation is experimenting with the idea that your “season” determines your most flattering shades. Lynn Yaeger, a devotee of the muted palette, spins the color wheel.

I want to be a Moonlit Winter! It makes me think of crunchy snowdrifts and hot toddies and bur-nished rosy cheeks and cherry red lips. Alas, this is not to be. Jeannie Stith, the founder and CEO of Color Guru, tells me that I am only half right—due to unsuspected greenish tints in my eyes and a yellow undertone lurking in my otherwise ghostly face, I am actually a Vivid Winter. Which means that, in addition to my usual funereal-gray-and-black palette, I can allegedly add chartreuse, shamrock green, and one specific shade of lemon

yellow to my repertoire. This comes as quite a shock to me, since a lifetime of shopping has perhaps once or twice found me attempting to don char-treuse or shamrock and then running screaming back to 50 shades of gray.

I am having my “colors” done by Stith because, as it turns out, color theory is suddenly back, mesmer-izing a whole generation of rabidly

enthusiastic TikTokers—people far too young to remember the previous incarnation of this craze. The appeal remains the same—carefully analyze your skin tone, hair, and eye color, figure out what your “season” is, and pretty soon you will be able to rush out and buy the perfect makeup, and also build a capsule wardrobe com-posed entirely of things that will actu-ally look good on you, as opposed to the heap of rejects that are currently overflowing your closet.

If you are of a certain age and have a long memory, you may recall >120

DIBS AND DABS

Kendall Jenner in a Fendi coat.
Photographed by Larissa Hofmann,
Vogue, March 2022.

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that back in the 1980s, a book called *Color Me Beautiful* was a hit with women all over America, eager to find out their respective seasons. A perusal of the book now provides a harrowing time capsule with unintentionally hilarious anecdotes of autumn moms forcing summer daughters into fall colors; allegedly real-life tales of women like Kathy, who lost 30 pounds in 12 weeks—yikes!—had her colors done, and became a therapist. And there are even celebrity shout-outs to people like Farrah Fawcett, a summer; Zsa Zsa and Eva Gabor, both springs; and Diana Ross, a winter.

If the advice here regarding how to build your wardrobe has thankfully been consigned to the dustbin of history—pantyhose!—the essential questions the book seeks to answer—the simple and heartfelt, “Why do I feel like crying when I am confronted with 30,000 shades of lipstick and eye shadow?” and “What colors actually look good on me?”—ring as true today as they did four decades ago.

Only now, we have the ability to share our faces and our potential ensembles with untold thousands of people over sites like Instagram. Just search TikTok for “color theory” and you will find multitudes eagerly sharing their adventures, a phenomenon our predecessors over at *Color Me Beautiful* could never have imagined. Contemporary DIY instructions on how to discern your colors are everywhere on the internet, but they are not for the faint of heart. One particularly terrifying site gives stern edicts on lighting and camera exposures, offers dictates on how to discover your skin undertones, and teaches you how to drape what seems like thousands of different colored remnants on your shoulders while you take an endless stream of selfies.

Daunted and frankly exhausted by the mere prospect of this project, I am beyond grateful when I find Color Guru, which offers to do the hard work for me. The site only requires that you send over at least seven photos—including one sans makeup, which I assented to in the name of scientific research for this article and which is still giving me,

nightmares—and a few days later they will send you your 15-page custom “Color Radiance Report.”

The site counsels upward of 800 devotees a month, and for VIP clients, Stith herself—a Calm Summer, if you are wondering—will do an analysis over Zoom, which is how I find myself hunched over my laptop as she explains to me that “there used to be only four categories, one for each season, but as soon as you start looking at people and their coloring you see this wide variety.”

We scroll through pics of my hideously unmade-up face surrounded by color wheels: “Your skin tone leans cool, so cool colors will look better on you. This gold is making your skin orangey, the silver is brightening you!” And as for muted shades, “It looks like there’s dust on your face!” I am contemplating

Clients at Seklab range from young professionals to prospective brides who need an answer to the burning question: Am I a pure or creamy white?

my dusty visage as Stith promises to send me my personalized digital color card and a laminated version to arrive shortly in the mail. “We’ve sent color cards to 28 countries—we have a huge following in Canada, the UK, Australia, and Scandinavia.”

This color theory renaissance is indeed an international phenomenon, sweeping the Far East in particular. Elise Hu, the author of *Flawless: Lessons in Looks and Culture from the K-Beauty Capital*, tells me she believes that “color theory in Korea benefits from the conflation of old and new, ancient and current, that works so well in selling K-beauty trends generally.... It’s based on the five main colors you see in traditional Korean costuming—on one hand you have these symbolic colors passed down from many generations, on the other you have high-tech diagnostic devices that analyze your colors...projecting an aura of what’s new and next.” Among these diagnostic devices, she informs me,

are mall kiosks where you can input information about your skin, hair, and eyes, and get an instant readout on whether you are a Warm Summer or a Cool Winter.

When I phone up Lily and Lizzie Heo, Korean sisters who own Seklab, a color analysis studio in Manhattan, they confirm that indeed, they are swamped with clients, everyone from young professionals who want a consult before they buy expensive outfits to prospective brides who, as if they don’t have enough to worry about, need a fast answer to the burning question: Am I a pure white or a creamy white? “The Japanese first took color analysis seriously, and Koreans made it popular. Koreans are very mindful of how they look, and not just the women, and not just young women,” Lizzie Heo tells me. “A lot of the makeup in Korea

is divided into seasonal colors. Stores have separate departments for warm and cool tones.”

Seklab offers an in-person service and relies on those infernal drapes to unlock the secrets of your season. “Once we put the drapes on people, they might see they are a spring as opposed to their usual colors. A lot of them are really surprised.” I feel like she is talking directly to me when she says, “People get very excited, especially if they only wear black and white. They say they would never have picked out a bright color, but they might try it as a vacation piece.”

I am not going on vacation any time soon, and even if I were, would I pack a canary frock or a lime cardigan? Okay, maybe not. But perhaps I could gear up the courage to try, say, the teal eye shadow that unexpectedly showed up on my custom palette? And one thing is certain—it is a lot more fun to visit a boutique brandishing your laminated card than it is to stand half naked in a fitting room, a pile of colors you really shouldn’t ever wear puddled at your feet. Instead of bemoaning your droopy physique, you could be singing and dancing your way through the racks, searching only for candy apple red and deep sea blue, secure in the knowledge that there isn’t another Vivid Winter out there exactly like you. □

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Put a Bow on It

Preppy, princess, or punk—the humble hair ribbon is once more flying high. By Alice Robb.

The last time I wore ribbons in my hair, I was also wearing a leotard and tights: As a kid at the School of American Ballet, I would often decorate my slicked-back bun with elaborate satin bows. They matched the ribbons I crisscrossed along my ankles, binding my pointe shoes to my feet, and the stretchy belts my classmates and I wrapped around our waists. My tendus may have been insufficiently turned out—but when I pinned on my favorite pale blue ribbons, at least I could be confident that the back of my head looked pretty.

Now in my 30s, I've largely relegated ribbons to the realm of little-girlhood. But clearly, it's time to reevaluate: They dominated the runways this year, from Sandy Liang's tidy pastels and floor-skimming streamers to the cheery, print-on-print chaos at Collina Strada, where raw-edged ribbons swung haphazardly from models' heads. On TikTok, Gen Z'ers are swapping out shoelaces for decorative strips of all shades and taping long bows to the sides of their eyes, as if crying preppy tears. The trend has spilled over into interior design, jewelry, tattoos, and even baked goods. (Artist Lina Sun Park weaves ribbons into the laminations of croissants.) No surprise, ex-bunheads are at the forefront of the trend: Hailey Bieber, who studied ballet into her teens, has worn them everywhere from the couch to the Met Gala; and Margaret Qualley went to Cannes with a head-size organza bow affixed to her ponytail.

But my ballet dreams have long since been laid to rest; could I pull off a style that reminded me more of being 11 than 31? On a drizzly day in London, I met with Leonie Tobierre at her tranquil salon Onyx to survey some of the styles she's lately been recruited to create—mini bows clipped along the diagonal, ribbons knotted through loose waves. We decided on a pulled-back style with narrow black satin, then she parted my hair down the middle, twisted it into two French braids, and wove the ribbon in



between them, as though she were lacing up a corset, finishing it off with a lightweight hairspray like Session Spray Flex from the brand Kevin Murphy to keep the whole thing in place. From the front, it appeared as though I were wearing a headband; from behind, the look was less Alice in Wonderland, more dominatrix. A barista's approval boosted my confidence as I made my way to the London Library, where my friend Jessie greeted me by promptly saying I looked like I "belonged in the hills, yodeling." Oh, well. My boyfriend told me, diplomatically, that I looked like a Tudor queen. Anne Boleyn—he qualified—objectively the sexiest of Henry VIII's ill-fated six.

Whether the vibe was more farm girl or monarch, ostentatious ribbons clearly aren't the look to go for if you're feeling shy. For street-style standout Kristen Bateman, who recently wore an enormous, sparkly red bow across her stomach at Paris Fashion Week, that's the point. "If you're wearing a big bow as you're walking past someone, it might hit them in the face," she explains. Bateman says bows are about "reclaiming being super-girly in a >126

ALL TIED UP

No flyaways here. Photographed by Sean Thomas for *Vogue*, March 2023.



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way that's really empowering." Not for nothing do many of Sandy Liang's fiercely devoted employees get tiny bow tattoos proclaiming their dedication.

Bows, in fact, have been used for centuries as a kind of nonverbal language. French revolutionaries pinned cockades to their clothes; suffragettes slung purple-and-green sashlike ribbons across their chests. Renaissance men would drape a lock of hair over their heart and tie a ribbon around the end to signify they had been claimed, explains fashion historian Serena Dyer. In 1944, *Life* magazine published a girl's guide to communicating through ribbons: A bow on top of the head meant that the wearer was "out to get herself a man," whereas yellow was the province of man-haters.

It's only relatively recently that ribbons and bows became a symbol of girlhood. They have been around since the Middle Ages, says Dyer, but "prior to the 18th century, ribbons were primarily a part of menswear"—used to tie doublets to men's hose and fasten sleeves to their shirts. With the invention of the power loom in the 1700s, ribbons became "far more easy to produce, far more widely used," she says. Meanwhile, men's clothing was increasingly associated with tailoring and muted colors and women's with ornamentation. Upper-class women might buy expensive, sculptural bows, but "even a working girl could get a new ribbon and change it on her hair or on her dress," says textile historian Natalie Nudell. "You didn't need to be elite to participate."

That's true today, too, of course, explaining part of the revived appeal: You can buy a \$128 Jennifer Behr velvet bow barrette—or you can recycle a ribbon from a floral arrangement. Even celebrity stylists sometimes source their bows for free. On one recent photo shoot, hairstylist Evanie Frausto wanted to create "something big, sexy, and '60s" for pop star Kim Petras. He wasn't sure what to do—but then he spotted a Celine shopping bag on the floor. He cut off the handle and tied a bow in Petras's hair. "It was perfect," he says. □

RECITAL READY

Models backstage at Sandy Liang evoke their inner ballerina.



Home Is Where the Art Is

Online design retailer Abask expands.

Tom Chapman, the cheerful cofounder of MatchesFashion, has a friend who throws what he deems the best pizza parties in America. So when that friend's birthday came around, Chapman bought him a hand-forged Ben Bodman pizza wheel made with Damascus steel and a beautiful burl handle. This is Chapman's philosophy on gifting—you have to think hard about what will make the person supremely happy. But finding the thing shouldn't be so hard. Sources for those items that are essential to turn a house into a home can be maddeningly decentralized.

In the short year since it launched in November 2022, Abask (the name comes from the idea of luxuriating in the sun) has become one of the most delightful and efficient—delivery takes two days—places to find home-ware. "It's creating the fashion experience that everyone is used to, and doing it with design," says Chapman. This November, Chapman and his Abask cofounder, Nicolas Pickaerts, ventured into a more tangible space at Manhattan's Salon Art + Design fair, which also served as the launchpad for 60 new products, available online after the event. These range from a one-of-a-kind Alexander Kirkeby handblown candelabra to a jewelry box from Brazilian artist Silvia Furmanovich to crystal stemware from the Bavarian glassmaker Theresienthal. With all his delight in colors and texture and material, does Chapman desire to set up a more permanent IRL space? He demurs, but doesn't reject the possibility: "Retail is in my blood." —**CHLOE SCHAMA**

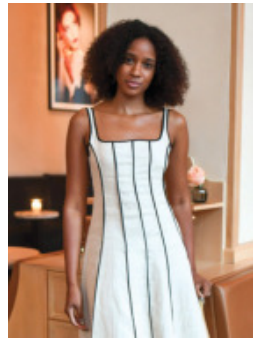


STRONG STEMS

ABOVE: Silvia Furmanovich's inlay jewelry box. RIGHT: A glass from Theresienthal.

BOTTOM LEFT: SANDY LIANG/PHOENIX JOHNSON. TOP AND BOTTOM RIGHT: COURTESY OF ABASK.

PRODUCED BY *VOGUE* WITH GOLDMAN SACHS



Clockwise from top: Rosie Assoulin, Naomi Elizée, Jacques Agbobby, Carly Cushnie.

Design Access

Inside a chic celebration of American designers and their beginnings.

In the golden glow of the elegant restaurant Verōnika, *Vogue* and Goldman Sachs Private Wealth Management gathered three pioneering designers for an engaging conversation that recognized the importance of community and mentorship early in one's career. The stories of Rosie Assoulin, Carly Cushnie, and Jacques Agbobby each reflect the strength and tenacity that can be found within the American fashion design community. Agbobby grew his eponymous label from an independent knitwear project forged in the pandemic. Buyers immediately took note of Cushnie's namesake label thanks to its refined debut collection.

And Assoulin transformed roles she had at iconic design houses into her now decade-old womenswear brand.

Vogue Market Editor Naomi Elizée led all three designers in the insightful exchange. Throughout their influential careers, each benefitted from industry counsel and the support of peers—and all of them underscored the value of open dialogue across the entire fashion design community. "Speak to as many people as you can," Assoulin said to the fashion audience. "Filter their guidance through your vision, but don't be tight with anything. Share it." It was powerful advice from an impactful evening.

"I started to see myself reflected in the industry; then I started to make a space for myself."

—Jacques Agbobby

Goldman Sachs Private Wealth Management



Picture Perfect

Books by (and about) creatives light a festive spark.

Spanning fashion, music, painting, sculpture, dance, and photography, this season's most elegant nonfiction is perfectly primed for holiday gifting. While Phillip Ziegler's **Queen Elizabeth II: A Photographic Portrait** (Thames & Hudson) gathers more than 200 sumptuous studies of the late British monarch, supermodel Linda Evangelista's endlessly inventive collaborations with Steven Meisel make up the aptly titled **Linda Evangelista Photographed by Steven Meisel** (Phaidon), and **Vanity Fair: Oscar Night Sessions** (Abrams), by Mark Seliger, extends a privileged glimpse inside the world's most glamorous after-party. Twenty-four years after her death, **CBK: Carolyn Bessette Kennedy** (Abrams), by Sunita Kumar Nair, examines Bessette Kennedy's legacy as a fashion icon; the darkly compelling vision of a singular fashion photographer animates **Deborah Turbeville: Photocollage** (Thames & Hudson) by Nathalie Herschdorfer; **Simone Leigh** (DelMonico Books/Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston), edited by Eva Respini, is the first major monograph on that celebrated American artist; and the inimitable Barbra Streisand has written a memoir, **My Name Is Barbra** (Viking), tracing the arc of her 60-year career.

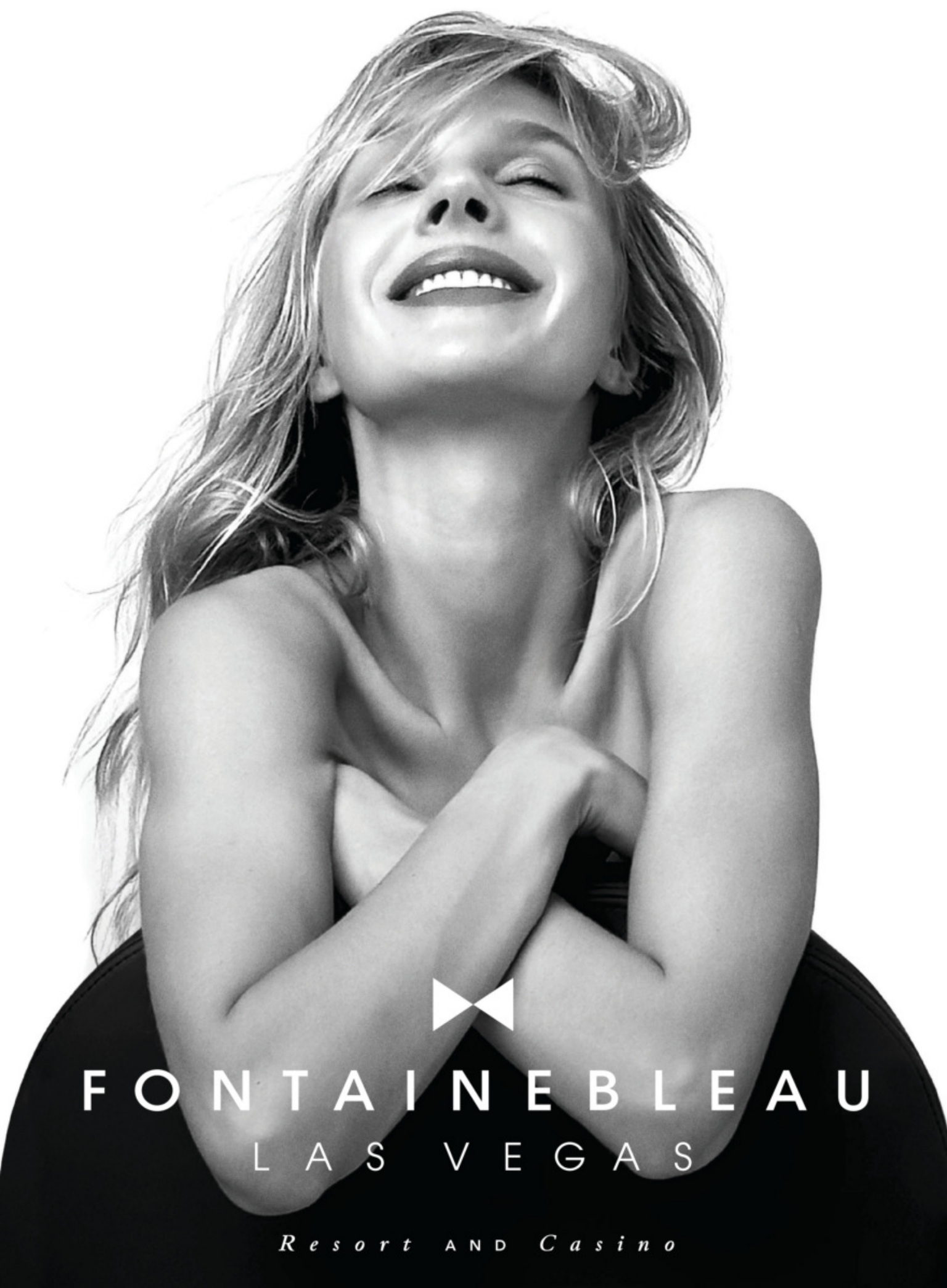
On the topic of personal histories: **Peru** (Rizzoli) is photographer Mariano Vivanco's vivid tour through his homeland and its folklore; Hanna Hanra's **Punk Perfect Awful:**

TAKE IT OUTSIDE

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: From *Linda Evangelista Photographed by Steven Meisel*; Serena Williams in *Vanity Fair: Oscar Night Sessions*; from *Queen Elizabeth II*.

Beat: The Little Magazine that Could ...and Did (Rizzoli) shares the unlikely story behind *Beat*, the beloved London music magazine; and Marina Harss's **The Boy from Kyiv: Alexei Ratmansky's Life in Ballet** (Farrar, Straus and Giroux) offers a riveting portrait of one of the premier figures in contemporary dance. In fact, its arrival coincides with the 75th anniversary of the New York City Ballet, where Ratmansky now serves as artist in residence, a milestone celebrated in Marc Happel's **New York City Ballet: Choreography & Couture** (Rizzoli).

More books promise new ways to engage with some of fashion's greatest tastemakers: **Ralph Lauren: A Way of Living** (Rizzoli) throws open the doors to Lauren's five gorgeous homes across New York, Colorado, and Jamaica; and **Grace Wales Bonner: Dream in the Rhythm** (The Museum of Modern Art, New York) catalogs some 80 rangy works from MoMA's collection—by David Hammons, Lorna Simpson, and others—selected by the London-born Wales Bonner for a show there this fall. Other superb art books include a monograph on the brilliant **Rashid Johnson** (Phaidon), and **Barkley L. Hendricks: Portraits at The Frick** (Rizzoli Electa), which accompanies the historic (and wonderful) exhibition of the same name. You may well want to keep one—or more!—of these for yourself.—MARLEY MARIUS



FONTAINEBLEAU

LAS VEGAS

Resort AND Casino





BALENCIAGA



BALENCIAGA



SUITS HER

Nicki Minaj wears
a Marc Jacobs
blazer and pants.
Tory Burch
earrings.

Fashion Editor:
Max Ortega.



RAISING

A black and white full-body photograph of Nicki Minaj. She is wearing a pinstriped, oversized suit with a wide collar and matching trousers. She has her hair pulled back and is wearing large hoop earrings. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

HER GAME

On the eve of releasing a new album, Nicki Minaj is in a contemplative mood, thinking about marriage, motherhood, alter egos, creativity, and confidence. By Rob Haskell. Photographed by Norman Jean Roy.

On an evening in late August, just as Donald Trump is getting booked on 13 felony charges at the Fulton County Jail in Atlanta, a sherbet sunset in the western sky casts Santa Monica Boulevard in a Nicki Minaj-pink blush. But Minaj has no time on this day for politics, nor for the soft summer tints gathering outside the windowless sound booth of a Los Angeles recording studio. She is under pressure to hand over a mastered version of “Last Time I Saw You,” a teaser release from her upcoming fifth studio album, and she is nitpicking.

The verses sounded a bit muffled to her ear, so the team sent the track to a mixer, who brightened up the whole thing. But now it’s ping-y and “radio-ish,” she feels, and she swears she hears an ever-so-slight buzz underneath the beat, though no one else is picking up on it. A scholar of her genre and a rigorous wordsmith, she is also a painstaking listener of her own music; she combs through her recordings, rewrites verses, changes up her tone, adds drums, subtracts them. (There were 27 versions of “Anaconda,” her 2014 hit, before she blessed the single.) She presses her engineers to punch up certain words and ensure that every syllable of her raps is clear and comprehensible. Nicki Minaj wants to be understood. “I’m a bit...particular,” she concedes. “Sometimes things that the best engineer in the world wouldn’t hear, I hear. And you know what? I am always right.”

“Last Time I Saw You” is a strikingly melancholic track for an artist for whom bombast and humor have been the most conspicuous modes. It’s a song about losing someone—a rare layover in the irony-free zone that her fans will remember from “Moment 4 Life,” the breakout love song from 2010’s *Pink Friday*, her debut studio album. “So the hook is”—she starts singing, softly, her eyes closed—“I wish I’d hugged you tighter the last time I saw you / I wish I didn’t waste precious time the night when I called you / I wish I remembered to say I’d do anything for you / Maybe I pushed you away because I thought that I’d bore you.”



HEAD OF THE CLASS

A yearbook picture of then Onika Tanya Maraj, age 17, at LaGuardia High School in New York.

Here is a song steeped in two new, rather adult flavors: regret and uncertainty. “It’s a song about guilt,” she explains. “And I don’t think people make a lot of music about the experience of guilt. But if you talk to any human being on earth about it, they would know exactly what you mean. That ‘I wish I had’ feeling. Once I wrote the hook, I started to think of people that I love and see every day and still take for granted. You know what I’m saying? So I hope the song does a good thing. It’s like, remember how you wish you could have? Well, you can’t. You can’t go back in time. So try to make sure you have different experiences with people that you love. All the grudges, even just being busy and caught up, like when you’re chasing and working and being an adult.” She pauses, and her eyes spin slightly upward, as they often do when she is considering the best way to explain herself. “I’m not saying I want this to be a sad song. Actually I want people to feel happy when they hear it. Happy-sad. Then again, look at Adele. That woman has made me cry a million times, yet I want more.”

Is this the same Nicki Minaj who has so often come in guns blazing, whose catalog of beefs has sometimes

cast a lurid shadow over her musical bona fides? Is this the Nicki Minaj who stormed into the mainstream more than a decade ago with a verse promising to eat your brains? Swagger is an essential surface effect in hip-hop, and Minaj, the best-selling female rapper of all time, has worn her crown with especial pomp. (Consider the title of her last album, 2018’s *Queen*.) As a rapper, she has never allowed for the possibility of a boys’ club, her sexual candor emboldening a generation of women rappers to talk about their body parts with the same vulgar glee as their male peers.

Nicki Minaj—as the Barbz, her fierce fan army, know well—contains multitudes, and it would be facile to suggest that the 40-year-old rapper, who gave birth to a son amid the isolative unease of the pandemic, has retired that old pugilist. She had to fight for everything growing up: for her father’s attention, for her mother’s approval, for material comforts, for the feeling of safety inside the four walls of her home but also in her adopted home country. *Pink Friday 2*, her new album out this month, was written from the vantage point of a woman who has gotten so many of the things she dreamed about. And yet the past still tugs. The new album asserts in its very title the wish to return to the days when she wrote every track top to bottom and laid her verses over rhythms she plucked off the beat CDs that you could buy on Sutphin Boulevard in Queens. In hip-hop, when you’re as famous as Minaj became after *Pink Friday*, the other rappers and producers assemble like magi, bearing beats and choruses. Just add a verse and call it your own. (And make no mistake, Minaj has *never* recorded a rap that she did not author.) “When I look back at a lot of my music, I’m like, Oh, my God, where was the me in it?” she says. “So for this album, I went back to the old game plan.”

Aubry “Big Juice” Delaine, Minaj’s longtime mix engineer, sees an artist more in control of all aspects of the creative process. The lyrics and melodies feel different, somehow, even while they build on the DNA of the records that came before. “Imagine a Nicki Minaj greatest hits album, but all the songs are new,” he says.

THEN AND NOW

"I had adult burdens way too early," Minaj says. Ferragamo sweater, briefs, and earrings.



“I think of ‘Nicki Minaj’ more like the Superman suit—who you change into when you go into the telephone booth”

More than in the method of music making, Minaj has been interested in tapping into what she recognizes as a hopefulness that lit up the original *Pink Friday*, a sensibility that somehow got muddled by the pressures of stardom and the presence of so many cooks with their hands in the sonic stew. She was pleased, recently, to see a retweet of something that Kim Kardashian posted years ago, when that first album was released. It was a line from “I’m the Best,” the intro track to *Pink Friday*, that went, “I’m fighting for the girls who never thought they could win.” “The idea that saying something like that could give hope to people—that optimistic outlook is something I think I got away from,” Minaj explains.

Fame, success, money, motherhood, the crossroads of middle age—these things may make life complicated, but Minaj would like to be clear that they cannot compare to the challenges she faced before *Pink Friday*. The three years leading up to her breakout album were, she believes, the most stressful in her life. “Not knowing if you’re going to be broke, not knowing if you’re going to be a failure,” she says, “there’s nothing more complicated than that.”

The sound booth is dark, candlelit, bathed in pinkish light. It’s the vibe Minaj favors for long sessions in the studio. She wears a sheer pink shirt crawling with sequined Chanel logos, blue jeans, and pink Chanel tweed sandals. A Chanel purse with pink PVC windows, a souvenir from the video for “Barbie World,” sits beside her. Her pink nails, with little rhinestone icebergs congregating at the cuticles, are so long that she uses the knuckle of her right thumb to





**HOT IN THE
SHADE**

Bottega Veneta
trench coat and
shirt. Albertus
Swanepoel hat.

BEAUTY NOTE

Build the mystery.
Tom Ford Gloss
Luxe in Disclosure
blends chamomilla
flower oils for
a hydrating wash
of color.

PINK DREAM

Minaj wears a Vetements jacket, hoodie, and pants. Her son, whom she publicly calls Papa Bear, in Gucci. OPPOSITE: Dolce & Gabbana Alta Moda dress. Tiffany & Co. pendant.



compose text messages. Minaj has a reputation for being protective, even prickly, around journalists, but in fact she is warm, relaxed, open, reflective.

“I think a lot of creators will understand this,” she ventures. “There’s a freeness that you have around you when you’re at your best, when you’re doing your thing at your peak. There’s like this lightness in the air. You’re happy even if you’re writing a sad song. But once you start knowing that you’re being judged, there’s no longer that free spirit. People who excel at something make it look easy, but they also deal with a lot of fear of letting people down and of letting themselves down. Once you make it, it’s like anything you say can be used against you. It’s like when you get arrested—that’s literally what being famous feels like. You go from having this fun, curious nature, laughing and joking, to realizing not everyone gets your sense of humor, not everyone likes you. And they will figure out how to put a negative spin on anything you do. It hurts.”

In September 2019, Minaj posted a tweet that seemed to convey the toll of her success, suggesting that she had had it with the industry and with her detractors: “I’ve decided to retire & have my family. I know you guys are happy now.” The Barbz, momentarily betrayed, went into a frenzy, and the tweet disappeared. But it was obvious that she had soured, for a time, on the business of music. That same year, surprising fans who may have expected one of her rumored liaisons with famous rappers (Drake? Eminem?) to prove true, she married Kenneth Petty, a high school flame with a checkered past who had grown up a few blocks from her in Queens and was part of a big group of teenagers who gathered at the same pizza place after school. He has always and only called her Onika (Nicki was born Onika Tanya Maraj, in Trinidad, and Minaj was a stage name that she was pushed by a manager to adopt). He was, importantly, unimpressed by the

hard, dazzling shell of her fame, and he offered a tether to the old days.

“Because I’ve known my husband for so long, there’s an ease we have with each other,” she explains. “We make each other laugh. We’re silly. And we’re always reminiscing about some old story. If it was a guy that I met as Nicki Minaj, I think I’d feel like they liked me because I’m Nicki Minaj, and what if I don’t look like Nicki Minaj every day? And that, combined with pregnancy, would probably have made me crazy.”

Marriage and motherhood promised to be escapes, after all, from Nicki Minaj the brand. “I think that



deep down inside, I believed that once I had a family, I would just lose the desire to make music,” she says. “I would always tell people, ‘Watch, when I have a child I’m going to cook every meal for him and bake cookies every day.’ Maybe subconsciously I hoped my focus would just be on being a mother, and I looked forward to that idea. It felt like a relief. But what happens is that you find out you have to work.”

Minaj has not publicly revealed the name of her son, whom she prefers to call Papa Bear. She and Petty navigated his infancy with no help

whatsoever save for an occasional brief visit from a grandparent. She never felt so exhausted in her life, even on her three world tours. She remembers the atmosphere of commiseration that pervaded her marriage at the time. “I’m not going to lie, things got testy between us,” she recalls. “Because of our history, I think we knew we’d get past it. But there’s no such thing as confidence in parenthood. I kind of wish that someone had told me—although I’m sure I wouldn’t have been able to understand it—that there’s a level of anxiety, and you think it’s going to go away, but in fact it gets scarier.

So often you think: I don’t know how to do this!”

At times, the public-facing Minaj has seemed like a land mine of emotions ready to detonate all over the Twitter-verse. Motherhood has tested her patience, and she finds that she is passing. She tells me a story about meeting a woman who thought of herself as the world’s best homemaker. Her house was immaculate, the food was perfect, the children had no hair out of place. But little by little the woman noticed that her self-esteem derived solely from her children’s accomplishments, or from a sense of superiority to other mothers. She started to feel guilty about not working, and, defying a chorus of skeptics, she put herself through nursing school.

And then, as a nurse, she started to feel guilty *for* working, for missing precious moments in her children’s lives. “I was like, OMFG,” Minaj recalls. “She felt guilt when she was doing the perfect homemaker thing, and guilt as a working mom when she missed a moment in their lives. Maybe God let that lady say that to me because it made me think, Well, if I’m going to have mom guilt regardless, I might as well continue doing the only thing I know how to freaking do, which is make music.”

It is well known that Minaj had a difficult childhood. When she was three years old, her parents left

Trinidad for New York, leaving her under the care of her grandmother, in a house crowded with aunts, uncles, and cousins. Two years later, settled in South Jamaica, Queens, her parents collected her and her older brother. The family was poor, and she felt it keenly. “You figure out the value of money when you come from a different country, and then you don’t have what the other kids have,” she recalls. “Children know a lot more than you think regarding poverty.” She remembers a time in fourth grade when every girl suddenly had a certain pair of \$50 Fila boots. “A girl I considered a friend of mine—in front of all these people—looks at me and says, ‘You think your mother could afford that?’ When you hear things like that, you put them somewhere in your subconscious, and you make yourself a promise.”

Minaj, who grew up attending a Pentecostal church with her mother, remembers a prayer that she delivered as a young child, one of her earliest memories. She believes she was just five years old, months after she had moved to the US. Her mother had embraced the prevailing soap operas of the day, and *Days of Our Lives* was flickering through the static of her parents’ bedroom television, though no parents were around. She remembers understanding that the show was being acted, that people like her, who enjoyed pretending and being silly, were playing the parts, and that maybe she could play a part and change her life. She got down on her knees and said, “God, please make me rich so I can buy my mother another house and take care of my family.”

In the 1980s, crack cocaine ravaged families, especially Black families, across America’s big cities. Minaj’s late father moved from weed to adding crack to his weed, and then to crack on its own. He drank a lot and was sometimes violent, once setting his own house ablaze with his wife inside. Minaj feels that her mother never understood his addiction at a time when drug users were experiencing peak Reagan-era stigma. “I think about watching my father go back and forth, and I just wish that at the time I understood that he wasn’t doing it because he wanted to,” she says. “I thought that he was making

“I’ve had a lot of
time to figure
myself out. The idea
of accepting what
you can’t change—
it just never clicked
with me before.
Now I understand”

a conscious effort to be addicted to a drug that would have him steal his children’s video games and sell them for money. Think about that—who would make a conscious effort to do that? Now I realize, those people weren’t making those choices because they wanted to hurt their family. Addiction took over their bodies and their lives. They were victims too.”

By the time she was 11, possessed of that special confidence that sometimes bubbles up from chaos, Minaj felt that she could run the house better than the grown-ups. “I had adult burdens way too early,” she recalls, “but I had tunnel fucking vision.” She knew she wanted to be an actress and attended the LaGuardia performing arts high school. She remembers feeling so impatient to get out there and audition, certain that she would be a success. “I literally told everybody that by the time I turned 19, I would be just as famous as Halle Berry and Jada Pinkett, and no one could tell me any different. So when I went to auditions and didn’t get parts, I was shocked. I would sit by the phone thinking, I know they’re gonna call; everybody’s gonna love me and see how great I am. I didn’t get one callback. But at the same time I was like, Eff this shit, I need money.”

She waited tables, famously getting fired from three separate Red Lobsters for discourteous treatment of customers. She worked as an office manager. And she began writing raps and performing with local musicians. In her early 20s she was uploading

those performances to Myspace, which got her some attention from industry executives. This led to a collaboration with the rapper Lil Wayne, who worked with her on several mix-tapes, essentially homemade albums that she used to sell out of a little white BMW she had saved up for. She became a sensation in the underground hip-hop world, and in 2009 Wayne signed her to his label, Young Money. With the original *Pink Friday* a year later, she became a star.

Minaj never went in for partying, and because of her father’s difficulties, as a very young woman she was apt to wag a finger at her girlfriends for smoking marijuana. They used to tease her in turn at nightclubs for nursing a single cocktail and swearing she was drunk. But she takes care to say that she does not place herself above her old friends. “I feel like I will always consider myself to be just like my father,” she says. Years ago, while briefly living in Atlanta to advance her music career, she was prescribed Percocet for painful menstrual cramping. It was enormously helpful, until she found that she was taking the medication even when she wasn’t in pain. “No one told me that this was a narcotic and this was addictive. Luckily I was able to ground myself. But—once an addict, always an addict. I feel like if you’ve ever experienced addiction to anything, which I have, you always have to think twice and three times about the choices that you make.” She believes that the risk of substance abuse is especially high among those who live under a microscope. “Look at some of our biggest celebrities. They eventually either get laughed out of wanting to go outside anymore, like Michael Jackson, or criticized, like Whitney Houston, or they fight silent battles, like Prince. These are some of the greatest of all time. And one day they decided, ‘You know what? I’d rather self-medicate and be in my own world.’” Minaj seems to be accounting for the scar tissue amassed around her relationship with the press. “Should you keep on doing interviews and pouring out your heart so people can laugh? No.”

Minaj was taken with *The Last Dance*, the 2020 Michael Jordan documentary, in which the basketball great spoke

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BUCKLE UP

Alexander McQueen gown, earring, and cuff. In this story: hair, Lacy Redway and Dionte Gray; makeup, Raoul Alejandro. Details, see In This Issue.

HOUSE STYLE

In a nod to Hopper's starkly beautiful *High Noon*, 1949, actor and musician Maya Hawke steps out in a Miu Miu dress; miumiu.com. Fashion Editors: Grace Coddington and Alex Harrington.



A photograph of a two-story white house with a woman in a blue dress standing in the doorway at sunset. The house has a dark roof with a brick chimney. The sky is a mix of orange and blue, suggesting dusk. The woman is wearing a long, strapless, blue dress and is looking towards the camera. The house has several windows, some with white curtains. The overall mood is serene and nostalgic.

People in the Sun

The work of legendary American painter Edward Hopper—so redolent of moody solitude and Cape Cod sunlight—sets the scene for fashion with a charmingly mid-century sense of modernity. Photographed by Annie Leibovitz.

WHAT A CIRCUS

A group of artists including (FROM LEFT) Rashid Johnson (in a suit from J. Mueser; jmueser.com), Chase Hall, Phoebe Derlee (in a shimmering Erdem dress; erdem.com), Cindy Sherman, Lorna Simpson (in Dior; Dior boutiques), and Hadi Falapishi riff on Hopper's ragtag cast of characters in *Soir Bleu*, 1914.





**SEEMS LIKE
OLD TIMES**

Channeling the colorful quiet of *Western Motel*, 1957, Hawke leans into the elegant restraint of a mid-length, blush-colored Prada dress; prada.com. At rear, artist Harold Ancart wears a J. Mueser vest and pants; jmueser.com. The Row shirt; therow.com.







WATER COLORS

Hopper—played in this portfolio by the Belgian-born, New York-based Ancart—once dashed off a sketch of his wife, Josephine, during a visit to Gloucester, Massachusetts, early in their relationship.

Hawke is similarly inspiring in a Louis Vuitton gown; select Louis Vuitton boutiques.





GOING NOWHERE FAST

Just as Jo seized her chance to capture the mountains in Wyoming during a 1946 trip there, Hawke surrenders to the siren call of Cape Cod Bay—and the playful island print of a breezy **Miu Miu** shirt; miumiu.com. **Prada** ring.

Edward and Josephine Hopper made a funny pair. He was from a small village on the Hudson River, while she was born and raised in New York City. Where he tended toward brooding introversion, she signed her letters, regardless of their content, “Cheerily, Jo.” They fought bitterly, yet they stayed together for more than 40 years—from 1924 until his death in 1967 (she died in 1968)—dividing much of that time between a walk-up in downtown Manhattan and a house on Cape Cod. They were also both artists: Jo, like Ed, studied at the New York School of Art, and in 1923, when they were both in their early 40s, she helped him sell a painting, *The Mansard Roof*, to the Brooklyn Museum, where she was showing a suite of watercolors. (At the time, he was chiefly making his living as an illustrator.) And so began the rest of their lives.

After they married, Jo became Ed’s primary model—endlessly gazing through windows, or seated on beds, or standing in the sun—as well as his bookkeeper and liaison with dealers. But while she delighted in her husband’s success—his mounting recognition as a crack observer of urban and small-town life was, after all, keeping the lights on, with the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Whitney Museum of American Art, the Museum of Modern Art, and other major institutions buying and showing Ed’s work by the early 1930s—Jo was pained at how her own creative practice, mostly characterized by jaunty floral still lifes, suffered as a result. “I do need some kind of expression—need it badly—& not a larger dishpan at that,” she grumbled in her diary in 1935. And then, two years later: “What has become of my world—it’s evaporated—I just trudge around in Eddie’s.”



INSIDE INFORMATION

Hopper's powers of observation weren't limited to figurative work; interior studies like *Rooms by the Sea*, 1951, and *Sun in an Empty Room*, 1963, feel just as dynamic. Here, Hawke slips into the light in a **Marco Zanini** dress.

Yet in this portfolio, photographed by Annie Leibovitz, the Hoppers' decades-long creative and personal partnership comes to vivid, windswept life. Playing the parts are two very fine New York-based artists in their own right: Harold Ancart, a Belgian-born painter and sculptor, and the 25-year-old actor and musician Maya Hawke.

Hawke has lately been wrapped up in the longings and frustrations of another mid-century creative: the writer Flannery O'Connor, whom she plays in *Wildcat*, a film directed by her father, Ethan. (Currently seeking distribution, *Wildcat* was one of several productions to secure a SAG-AFTRA interim agreement.) The idea behind it was Maya's: As a high schooler, she'd been drawn to *A Prayer Journal*, written when O'Connor was in her early 20s. "She had so much self-doubt and so much ambition when she was young, in this journal, and I really connected to that," she

says. "I had a really hard time at school academically, so creativity and art classes and stories and non-narrative thinking became a real refuge for me to feel capable and expressive."

A decade or so later, Hawke—better known to some as Robin Buckley in *Stranger Things*—is coming off of a banner year, with appearances in Wes Anderson's *Asteroid City*; opposite her mother, Uma Thurman, in the dark comedy-thriller *The Kill Room*; and as Leonard Bernstein's eldest daughter, Jamie, in Bradley Cooper's *Maestro*—to say nothing of the string of singles she's released. (Hawke's second full-length album, *Moss*, came out last year.)

Yet the searching, restless tone of O'Connor's work continues to resonate. "She just insisted on being herself," Hawke says. "She was a prickly person and nobody's hero—but she's my anti-hero." One senses Jo Hopper would have felt just the same.—MARLEY MARIUS



STAGE CRAFT

The Academy of Music in Northampton, Massachusetts, plays the part of the nondescript theater in Hopper's *New York Movie*, 1939—and Hawke, one very glamorous ticket-holder in her Altuzarra coat and shoes; altuzarra.com. Jason Wu Collection dress; jasonwustudio.com. In this story: hair, Julien d'Ys; makeup, Francelle Daly. Details, see In This Issue.

WHEN ART

Fashion loves art, and designers love to pay tribute to artists—Yves Saint Laurent put Piet Mondrian on his graphic mini, Miu Miu collaborated with John Wesley, Dior's Kim Jones has worked with Peter Doig, and Louis Vuitton handbags brandish Yayoi Kusama's dots, to name just a few. But what if an artist was directly asked to make something that was inspired by a designer? For this portfolio, that's exactly what happened. We asked 10 artists from different parts of the world if they would respond to recent collections. *Vogue* paired each one with a particular designer, and the artist had complete freedom to do whatever they wanted. By Dodie Kazanjian.

MIET FASHION

ELIZABETH COLOMBA ON
CHRISTOPHER JOHN ROGERS,
NONCHALOIR

"Here, time takes on an almost fictional quality. Her presence seems to traverse the boundaries of conventional chronology, existing in a parallel reality—an era that only exists within the realms of imagination, a time that never truly was."







**BEATRIZ MILHAZES
ON DURO OLOWU,
BAOBÁ**

"Fashion design has been one of the references in my work since the '90s. Some of my motifs were inspired by Emilio Pucci's designs from the '60s. These are the poetry of a time."

**PAUL CHAN ON
RICK OWENS,
VIDEO STILLS FROM
FIFTH SEASON
TREER 3**

"Thinking about what 'fits' us, not only physically but *metaphysically*, is interesting. Because if our ideas and beliefs are treated less like immaterial substances that somehow underwrite the unchanging essence of who we are, and more like garments, then we may be more apt to try on new ideas and concepts, the same way we try on a new piece of clothing."

"Fashion insists on galloping along, transient and ever mutating, while art, and I as an artist, pursue longevity."

—WANGECHI MUTU



**WANGECHI
MUTU ON DIOR,
MY BELLY FLOWER
SUCKING BIRD**

"Fashion or clothing—embellishments, body art, anything we place upon the naked body—is a very special and personalized form of expression and communication, either subliminal or overt.... I think that art and fashion are always dancing around one another, and often stepping on each other's feet. I create in search of meaning; with fashion, we search for ways to mean something to one another, in how we appear."

“There’s something really magical about a person getting dressed and being able to convey: This is the mood I’m in, this is how I want to be seen. To me, that’s art.”—NA KIM

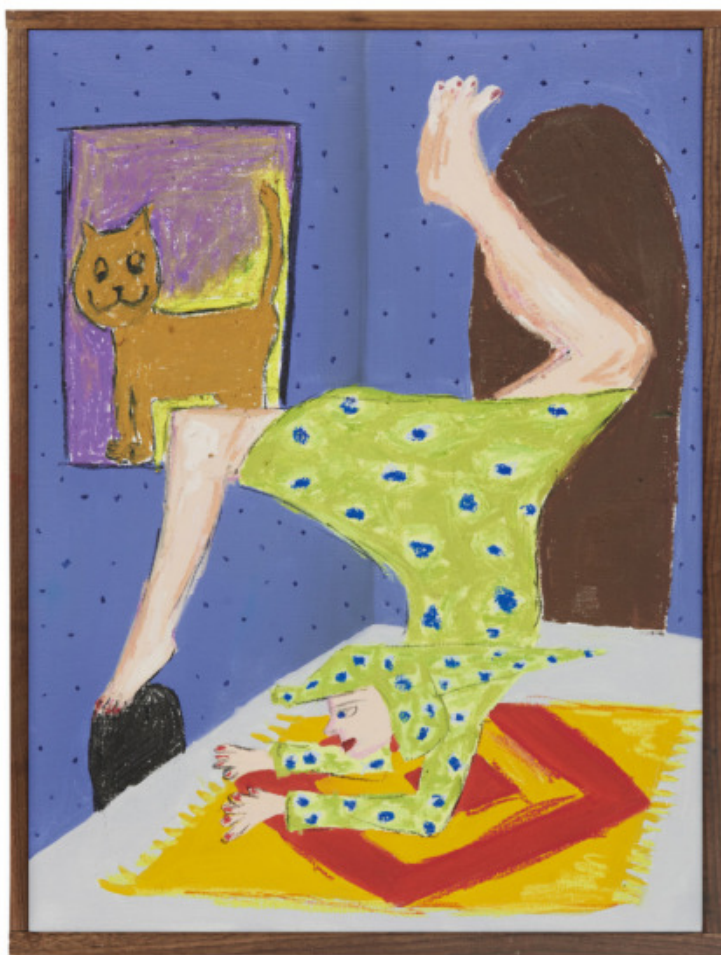
NA KIM ON BODE,
HIGH NOON

“The line that delineates art from non-art is so interesting to me. So many things make art art, and I think it often boils down to having a point of view, or evoking a specific feeling or mood, which I think fashion often does.”



HADI FALAPISHI ON MARNI,
MOUSEHOLE #18

“My response for Marni was the idea of the dress being upside down, and it developed into the idea of a figure wearing the dress and looking at a mousehole (the world) in a surprising position, and the world (a cat) looking back at her from the window.”

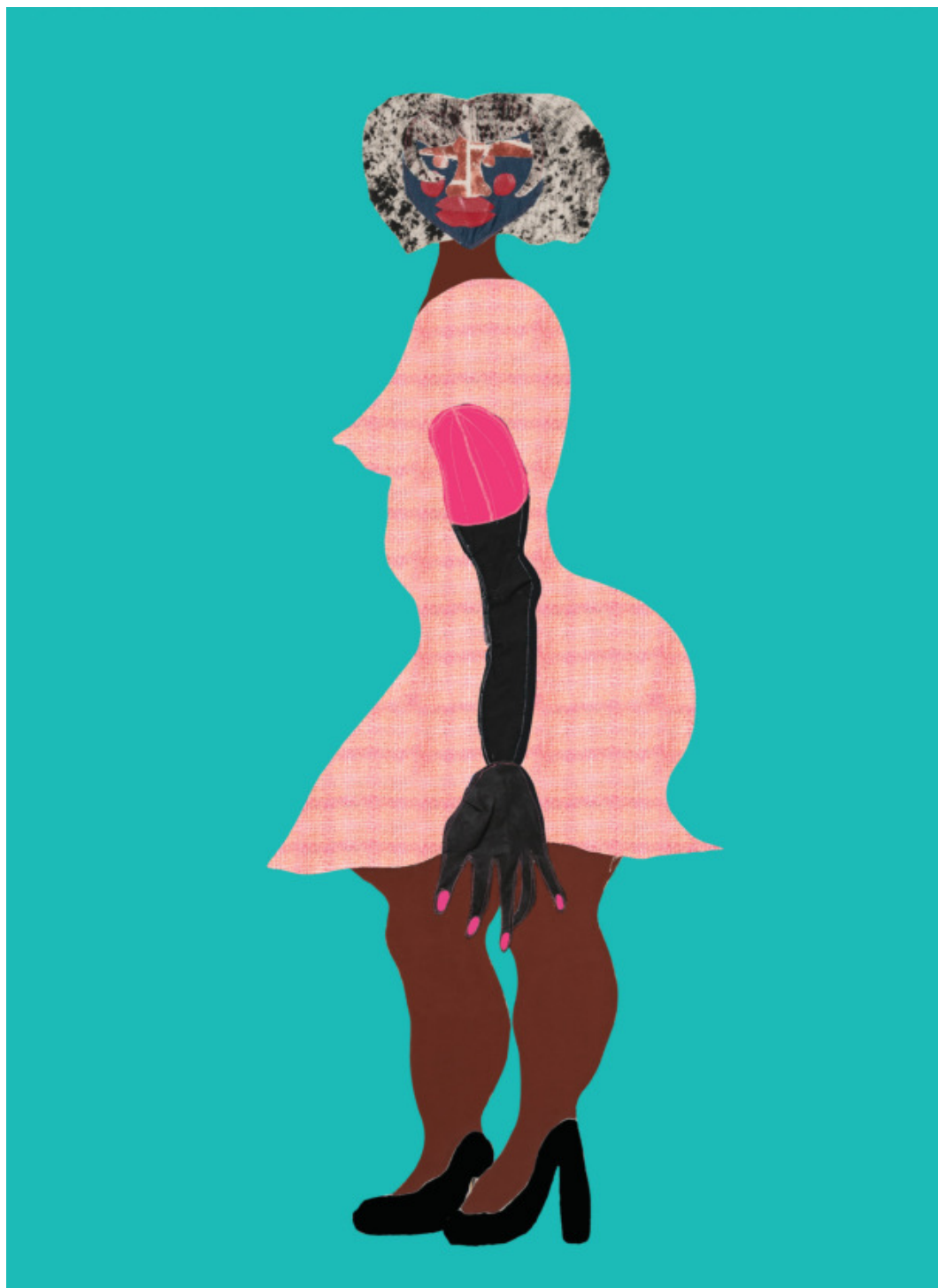


**TSCHABALALA SELF
ON CHANEL,
FROM AFAR IN
CHANEL**

"I always enjoy melding the boundaries between art and fashion. In reality I think there is a false dichotomy between the two disciplines. Fashion is functional, and often the functional creative disciplines get relegated to 'design'—which I believe is a bit of an antiquated idea. It is all art—art is life, and living well is an art form."

**RAGNAR
KJARTANSSON ON
RALPH LAUREN,
DAWN OR SUNSET,
WHO CARES?**

"I just found the idea fun, that a man with glasses taped together by a Band-Aid, living in Reykjavík, should respond artistically to Ralph Lauren in *Vogue*. Irresistible absurdity."



"What I like about art and fashion together is that they both aspire to beauty, and sometimes seek to provoke. I also believe that both thrive on the element of surprise."—HADI FALAPISHI




JILL MULLEADY ON PRADA,
THE LAST DAYS OF THE WINTER

"I wasn't sure how to collaborate with this collection, so I just used the model and the clothes as what they are here, for my watercolor."

NICOLAS PARTY ON ALEXANDER McQUEEN, **PORTRAIT**

"The fabric in my painting is taken from Raphael's *The Alba Madonna*, at the National Gallery of Art in Washington. It's a good example of how fabric and fashion were always big subjects for painters. It also points out that the history of color is often more linked to fashion and dyeing fabric than to painting."



A woman with dark hair, wearing a red sequined dress, stands on a metal ladder within a complex, industrial-looking environment. The scene is dominated by large, dark metal gears and mechanical components, creating a sense of scale and complexity. The lighting is dramatic, with strong highlights and deep shadows, emphasizing the textures of the machinery and the woman's dress. The overall mood is futuristic and mysterious.

The future is on
Lauren Sánchez's
mind—from wedding
planning to an all-female
trip to outer space.
There's the fate of the
planet to consider too.

By Chloe Malle.
Photographed by
Annie Leibovitz.

Out of This World



TIME AFTER TIME

Inside the 10,000 Year Clock, a subterranean project in West Texas backed by Lauren Sánchez's fiancé, Jeff Bezos. She wears a Dolce & Gabbana dress.

Fashion Editor:
Tabitha Simmons.



It's a little early, ladies," says Jeff Bezos, and he erupts with his signature machine-gun laugh. His fiancée, the newscaster turned helicopter pilot turned philanthropist Lauren Sánchez, has just asked Bezos to make us margaritas. It is 2 p.m. "We've had a long day!" she says, with a coy smile. Indeed, Sánchez has already taken me on a helicopter tour of the vast West Texas ranch where Bezos spends holidays and launches rockets from his Blue Origin space facility. We have also descended 500 feet to the base of the so-called 10,000 Year Clock, a subterranean engineering feat envisioned by Bezos with next generations in mind. "It represents thinking about the future," Sánchez says.

Sánchez, 53, and Bezos, 59, have their eyes trained on their own future. In May, Bezos proposed to Sánchez with a pink diamond, possibly viewable from space and definitely viewable through a paparazzo's long lens aimed at the prow of *Koru*, Bezos's three-masted sailing yacht, the largest in the world, which kicked off her maiden voyage with a newly engaged couple unabashed in their deckside canoodling. Portmanteau pending (BezChez?), the couple were seemingly everywhere this summer. You couldn't open a tabloid without a new snap (courtesy of paparazzi or Sánchez's Instagram) of them blissfully bobbing around Europe: Bezos emerging from the water like a Mediterranean He-Man in palm-print swim trunks, his fiancée



LONE STAR

Sánchez on Bezos's West Texas ranch. Polo Ralph Lauren jacket and Ralph Lauren Collection jeans. Skims top. Thomas Coriz cuffs.

captioning the photo “Is it just me, or is it hot outside?”; the couple flanked by security and a group of *Koru* guests, including Usher and Katy Perry, strolling the old city streets of Dubrovnik; the at-sea engagement party where Leonardo DiCaprio, Bill Gates, and Queen Rania of Jordan all fêted Bezos and Sánchez, the latter presiding in a glittering silver miniskirt and crop top.

Today, Sánchez is also wearing a crop top: a ribbed white T-shirt with a black Fendi logo obscured by a jumble of jewels—diamonds and good-luck charms—around her neck. Our first meeting was midmorning on this 102-degree day, when she popped out of a Blue Origin Rivian truck at Astronaut Village, the cluster of Airstream

trailers where the photographer Annie Leibovitz, fashion editor Tabitha Simmons, and crew had been put up after yesterday’s sweeping photo shoot across the vast Texas property. Security was tight but unobtrusive. The vibe was *Oppenheimer* meets Amangiri.

At Astronaut Village, Sánchez hugged everyone in her path, including me. “Chloe! I feel like I know you!” she said, continuing to hold my arms. She was cleanly made-up, practically photo-shoot-ready all over again, in Staud + Wrangler jeans and Alexander McQueen sneakers, pristine white despite the dust. “We’re flying, otherwise I’d be in cowboy boots,” she said, before adding conspiratorially, “though I *have* flown in heels before.”

With that, she led me toward a Bell 429 helicopter: “There’s my baby, and it’s not Jeff!” Over a decade ago, Sánchez earned her fixed-wing pilot’s license and then trained to become certified as a helicopter pilot. Following a successful run as a TV newscaster, she formed an aerial production company that has consulted on films such as *Dunkirk* and now shoots all of Blue Origin’s launches. She’s also inspired Bezos to get his pilot’s license, and she talks about helicopters the way teenage equestriennes talk about their horses: “Isn’t she gorgeous?”

Once settled in the cockpit, she and a copilot, Zeus—“Yes! That’s his real name!” said Sánchez—gave me an aerial tour of the property, reported to be over 400,000 acres, a ranch near the New Mexico–Mexico border that Bezos purchased in 2004, as it reminded him of boyhood summers spent on his grandfather’s land in Cotulla, Texas. We hovered 500 feet over the mesquite- and prickly-pear-dotted desert, and through her headset Sánchez eagerly recounted the shoot the day before. “Epic is an understatement!” she said. The group moved from location to location by helicopter—Sánchez flew for most of the day—with clothing ferried ahead by pickup. She showed me the salt flats where winds had whipped up to 70 mph and blew away her changing tent. (Sánchez, unfazed, had shrugged and said, “Boys, turn around!”)

Indeed, Sánchez is not shy about her physique. The prow of *Koru*—Maori for “new beginnings”—is adorned with a voluptuous figurehead, one that has been gleefully suggested in the press to be carved in Sánchez’s image. “I’m very flattered, but it’s not,” said Sánchez. In fact, the figurehead is one of Bezos’s favorite mythological figures, Freyja, Norse goddess of love, fertility, war, and gold. “If it *was* me...” Sánchez joked, and made a gesture of having larger breasts.

Much has been made of Bezos’s evolution from round-shouldered online bookseller to Tony Stark titan of industry and the third richest man in the world. Once insular and press-shy, he formed a tight cocoon around Amazon, his then wife, MacKenzie, and their four children in Seattle. Now it’s as if he’s emerged from his chrysalis, a swole monarch, no longer Amazon CEO (a role he ceded in 2021) but an empty nester who is venturing not only into the Adriatic but into outer space. Sánchez, by all accounts, is the perfect partner for all of it—unbridled in her enthusiasm (seven people I spoke to described her as a “force”) but also socially adept, attentive, a diplomat of a kind. “Lauren has amazing intuition, almost witchy powers in that regard,” says Bezos. “She sees things that other people don’t see. She’s really very sensitive to other people and what they’re thinking.”

“She’s a sparkler in Jeff’s life,” says Barry Diller, who with his wife, Diane von Furstenberg, are two of Bezos’s closest friends and will host a second engagement party for the couple at their home in Beverly Hills. “They’re very in love with each other—they’re demonstrably in love,” he adds. “She’s lit him up in the nicest ways. She’s a great stimulant.”

“Since she’s been with Jeff, she is more peaceful and more calm. She appears more herself,” says her sister, Elena Sánchez Blair, sounding a note I heard often: that Sánchez is delighted by her new life but resolutely the person she’s always been—trained on her family and those she loves. “You see her, this beautiful force all done up in ball gowns, but the truth is most of the time we are on the couch in sweats and yoga pants, playing Sloppy Dice or Heads Up on our phones,” Sánchez Blair tells me.

Bezos seems the one who has changed—and that’s by his own account. “She has really helped me put more energy into my relationships,” he says. “She’s always encouraging me: ‘Call your kids. Call your dad. Call your mom.’ And she’s also just a very good role model. She keeps in touch with people. I’ve never seen her put makeup on without calling somebody. Usually her sister.”

Sánchez clearly adores the more extroverted Bezos. “He’s the life of the party,” she says happily. “He’s just extremely enthusiastic, and extremely funny. He can be really goofy. I mean, you’ve heard him laugh, right?”

I hear this laugh often, in fact. Bezos guffaws when I ask if he will get involved with wedding planning: “Oh, God, no. Do I look that dumb?”

“We’re still thinking about the wedding,” says Sánchez, “what it’s going to be. Is it going to be big? Is it going to be overseas? We don’t know yet. We’ve only been engaged five months!” He proposed at the start of their summer at sea, hiding the ring under her pillow after a starlit dinner à deux. She found it at bedtime, her makeup off. “When he opened the box, I think I blacked out a bit,” she tells me.

Will she be taking his name? She looks at me like I am insane. “Uh, yes, one hundred percent. I am looking forward to being Mrs. Bezos.”

As to the responsibilities that come with being married to one of the richest men in the world? She pauses, careful: “I think there are a lot of opportunities that come with that, and I take those opportunities very seriously. We always look at each other and go, ‘We’re the team.’ So everything’s shared.”

And the dress? “There’s so many incredible designers!” She names Christian Dior, Dolce & Gabbana, and Valentino as favorites. “Once I get a minute, I’ll slow down.” Up first, though, is Bezos’s 60th birthday party in January. “It’s a huge birthday,” she says. “There is no slowing *him* down. He works all the time.”

Bezos has begun scooping ice for our margaritas—“This is my backup career,” he says of his dexterity behind the bar—though he won’t be having one himself. “I have a couple more meetings.” (The day before, the FTC sued Amazon for allegedly violating antitrust laws.) The cocktail

TRUE ROMANCE

“I am looking forward to being Mrs. Bezos.” Sánchez, here with Bezos, wears a Levi’s tank top.









BLUE MOOD

Inside a test capsule for New Shepard, Blue Origin's reusable rocket. Sánchez is planning an all-female expedition for next year. Ferragamo dress.

She found the ring
at bedtime, her makeup
off. “When Jeff
opened the box,
I think I blacked out
a bit,” she tells me

shakers are rocket-ship-shaped; Sánchez found them on eBay. Our glasses are modeled after the Blue Origin rocket capsule, complete with porthole-shaped etchings. Bezos is meticulous—slow, frankly—in his bartending, exactly measuring the amount of Milagro tequila and triple sec and slicing the limes into perfect crescents. He wears a black T-shirt, jeans, and cowboy boots, and tiger’s-eye and silver-chain bracelets. “I don’t think we have salt. I was going to give you a salted rim,” he says. “It’s a very important part of the margarita.” Within minutes an eight-ounce deli container of salt is magically supplied by one of the Astronaut Village team members. “Wow, there’s like a salt genie out there!” marvels Bezos.

Sánchez notes that the Kármán Line Bar, this low-slung ranch building turned space-themed bar named for the boundary between Earth and space, was all Bezos’s idea. The walls are decorated with space memorabilia, some from Bezos’s personal collection, such as a poster of cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin, the first man in space, and a letter from Buzz Aldrin. There are front pages of newspapers marking historic moments in space travel.

In January 2019, Sánchez and Bezos themselves made front-page news when their love affair was made public in a *National Enquirer* imbroglio, prompting Bezos to post a call to arms decrying the tabloid. Since then, both Bezos and Sánchez finalized their divorces and have looked only forward, and upward, to space.

Sánchez tells me she was present for Blue Origin’s first crewed flight to space in 2021, with Bezos aboard. “They were cracking jokes in the capsule,” says Sánchez, with mock incredulity. “While I’m literally crying, holding his mother.” Bezos notes the power of seeing his entire family come out to wish him, and his brother who joined the launch, goodbye at 4:30 a.m. “It’s profound,” he says. “You get to see how loved you are by so many people.”

Sánchez had silver feather necklaces made for the whole crew, with “Gradatim Ferociter”—step by step, ferociously, Blue Origin’s Latin motto—engraved on the back. There were custom baseball caps with a white feather on the front and, over the ponytail hole, the phrase “Love you to space and back,” a favorite saying between Sánchez and Bezos, embroidered in her lilting cursive.

Sánchez herself plans to venture into space next year, filling the capsule of the New Shepard (the name of Blue Origin’s reusable 60-foot suborbital rocket) with five other women, about whom she will say only that they will be remarkable, and are “paving the way for women.” She also has a forthcoming children’s book, *The Fly Who Flew to Space*, about Flynn, an insectile astronaut turned environmentalist. What does she say to people who think the



THE ROAD AHEAD

Victoria Beckham dress. In this story: hair, Chris McMillan; makeup, Buster Knight. Details, see In This Issue.

launches are just adrenaline adventures for the wealthy? “Jeff always says, ‘Building the road to space so that our children can build the future. And that’s what it’s about. Launch, land, repeat, over and over so that we can figure out how to have reusable rockets.’ She references the Wright brothers’ barnstorming flights that allowed paying patrons joy rides in planes so that they could practice their invention.

On our aerial tour she showed me the Bezos family compound—a series of sharp-cornered ranch buildings in Corten steel clustered around a two-story residence with wide floor-to-ceiling windows, built next to a swimming pool made to appear like a pond with rocky banks. This is where everyone gathers for Thanksgiving—30-plus



family and friends. There's Bezos's kids and relatives, and last year Sánchez invited her ex, former NFL tight end Tony Gonzalez, father to her eldest, Nikko, 22 (she also has two children, Evan, 17, and Ella, 15, from her marriage to Endeavor executive chairman Patrick Whitesell), and Gonzalez's wife, October (Tobie), and their kids. All are close; Sánchez describes Gonzalez and Tobie as two of her best friends. "We know how to modern family," says Sánchez Blair, her sister, who also came with her three children.

Sánchez had chaps and Western jackets made for everyone for a horseback camping trip, and evenings were filled with games of Catan and chess. "It's hard to beat Jeff at chess," says Nikko, when I speak to him by phone. He is

finishing his last semester at Boulder remotely while living with his girlfriend in Manhattan's Lower East Side and working at social club Zero Bond. "Everyone really just gets along," he adds. "There's no real alliances. It's kind of boring in that way."

"Our lives are pretty normal," is how Sánchez puts it. "Daily life mostly revolves around our kids." Her arrangement with Whitesell means she and Bezos spend alternating weeks with Evan and Ella in LA, where both are in school, and then at Bezos's Tudor mansion on Lake Washington. Bezos's kids, four in all, are now at college, so there are university visits layered in too. Wherever they are, there's the same agreement: CONTINUED ON PAGE 188



PAST LIVES

A love of all things romantically faded and careworn inspired Alessandro Michele to turn a grand Roman apartment into his home, one teeming with centuries of history. By Chiara Barzini. Photographed by François Halard.

FORMAL STUDIES

An elaborate oak-branch-shaped chandelier hangs in the second living room of Alessandro Michele's sprawling Roman apartment. OPPOSITE PAGE: A mantelpiece crowded with pottery warms up an entryway. Sitings Editor: Gianluca Longo.







WORK IN PROGRESS

Michele in front of a cabinet filled with some of his collected objets, including old pharmacy bottles and antique Italian porcelain. OPPOSITE: A late-18th-century portrait and two late-19th-century chairs in petit point.



Alessandro Michele looks for a home in every city he visits, entertaining romantic visions for himself, and often following up on them. He has a particular love for faded beauties, run-down places brimming with history and lost grandeur—and this is why he has embarked on the quixotic endeavor of renovating one of the most iconic and mysterious buildings in Rome: Palazzo Scapucci.

As a teenager in the early '90s, Alessandro strolled the Eternal City with a solitary, focused look. Bright green hair held up in a mohawk, he was the only punk kid in his neighborhood. Merely standing at the bus stop was an adventure. He attended a conservative high school in the bourgeois and old-fashioned Quartiere Trieste—and nevertheless fell in with a group

of anarchist friends before moving on. Rome has always been the backdrop for his adventures, for walks to the center, to Babylonia and Dakota, two long-lost avant-garde warehouses that blasted deafening techno and sold refurbished or painted Converse All Stars, Palladium sneakers, as well as Indian silk scarves, heavy-metal jewelry, fishnets, and industrial punk clothing. Outsiders from all parts of Rome flocked to these safe havens, gathering to shop, listen to music, and share ideas.

Alessandro's uncle had a studio restoring antique furniture tucked in the gardens of Via Margutta, and there Alessandro would smell the glue and mastic and dream of the past lives of tables and armchairs. He also spent hours in the Villa Giulia, the Renaissance palace that houses the National Etruscan Museum, immersing himself in its gardens, exploring



MAGNIFICENT OBSESSIONS

CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: A 16th-century portrait by the Master of the Countess of Warwick; the Delft tile-clad kitchen; Michele's stately, art-filled dining room.

pre-Roman antiquity and terra-cotta funerary monuments. While his peers were out late at raves, and gathering in the central piazzas for the infamous aperitivo tradition, Alessandro was looking up at roofs and domes, waiting for buildings to speak to him. "Rome," he says, "bewitches you. It welcomes everyone in a disheveled way." That fascination transferred to

objects, art, books—and obviously clothes. So much of the way in which he revolutionized Gucci over his nearly eight-year run as creative director had to do with a guileless disposition toward untold stories, incursions into the past lives of ancient artifacts, monuments, and people.

"I am a doctor for injured, dilapidated homes," he tells me. "I buy places I think might need me, that have either been defaced or abandoned." Alessandro and I are sitting in the renovated piano nobile apartment of the palazzo, he on a petroleum blue Tudor-era velvet armchair, lush dark braids framing his face. Some eight months after his exit from Gucci he has the calm, collected expression of someone who had seen it all and done it all and is happy to take a breather—though I am not sure working with a

restoration team on an 800-year-old home counts as a break.

Palazzo Scapucci is one of the few buildings in Rome with its very own medieval tower (where, in the 11th century, Saint Ottone Frangipane was supposedly born). In the 1400s, the surrounding structures functioned as a convent belonging to Pope Sixtus IV (during the restoration, Alessandro found original papal coats of arms from the late 1400s engraved in the high beams). More than a century later the entire property passed on to the wealthy Scapucci family who are linked to a legend told by Nathaniel Hawthorne in his *Passages from the French and Italian Notebooks*, from 1871. As the legend goes, the Scapuccis had a beloved pet monkey who became unbearably jealous when their first child was born—so much so that



“The 800 years of these walls are *right now* to me,” says Michele. “For this reason I am not nostalgic. Everyone leaves strong traces behind”



OBJECTS OF WONDER

ABOVE: A side table with—among other things—Attic, Apulian, Etruscan, and Delft vases, Staffordshire porcelain dogs, and a terra-cotta ox. LEFT: Michele’s handsomely appointed wardrobe.

she snatched the baby from the crib and escaped to the top of the tower, refusing to come back down. The father panicked and, as we tend to do in Italy during any moment of crisis, invoked the Virgin Mary, promising that if the baby were saved, he would keep an oil lamp perpetually lit in the tower in her honor. The miracle

happened: The monkey returned the baby and the light at the top of the tower has been burning since.

As Alessandro tells me this story, he moves his hands in the air, flashing his array of antique gold rings in space. To him such history is constantly with us. “I’m not convinced time passes as the calendar or the clock describes it,” he says. “The 800 years of these walls are *right now* to me. For this reason I am not nostalgic. I’m never really convinced that people who are no longer alive are gone. Everyone leaves strong traces behind.”

Alessandro's father was a subversive free spirit who frowned upon the idea of ownership. He was part of the occupation committee of Lotta Continua, the 1970s far-left political movement that fought to give housing to working families who couldn't afford rent. "He had strong political beliefs, but also loved nature," Alessandro says. "I'd say he was a pagan spirit, almost an animist. He would take us to the mountains and make us sit and listen. 'You talk too much, be quiet,' he'd say. 'Listen to the wind passing over the leaves. That is God.'" When Alessandro's family found they could no longer afford their house, they moved to squatted homes occupied by Lotta Continua in the northern end of Rome—a formative period for Alessandro.

But the stray life came at a high cost, especially for his mother, who had a less radical vision of the world. "We shared our space with families we didn't know," remembers Alessandro. "That's where I got my first big life training, where I learned the art of observation and developed a real interest in people." He watched strangers coming and going at odd hours of the night, and when adults spoke, he sat in a corner and listened. "There were prostitutes, drug dealers, poor mothers who had been kicked out of their prior homes. Extraordinary human beings with extraordinary faces. So I know how important it is when someone takes you in." It's no coincidence he has chosen to live across the street from the Baroque church of Sant'Antonio dei Portoghesi, which emerged out of a hospice for Portuguese pilgrims, a place for charity and restoration. He also plans to offer residencies for artists in his country home (in the magical Etruscan area of northern Lazio) and when he was at Gucci, his desk was a stopping point for many globe-trotting creatives who wanted to share ideas.

When Alessandro first came to see the apartment in the Palazzo Scapucci, it was a dark, illogical place, with low Styrofoam ceilings and no allure. "Every hall was filled with crammed rooms that opened onto more crammed rooms and small windows, but I kept coming back and observing from the sidewalk. When I fall in love, I don't court houses, I stalk them." He met the owners, three perfectly bizarre Roman characters: an uncle, a nephew, and an accountant who used the apartment as an office, and something of a hideaway

Alessandro spent hours on the scaffolds. "I became friends with every centimeter of that ceiling," he says, and laughs, "though I probably gave the restoration team a nervous breakdown too."

Lazy church bells ring in the distance. We have lost track of time talking about ghosts and discoveries, but now it is time for a tour. "Are you sure you're ready?" Alessandro asked with a grin. His dogs, Bosco and Orso, wag their tails.

In a second living room hang a pair of oak-branch-shaped chandeliers.

"I never light my chandeliers," he says. "I use them as furniture pieces. I like to see them in space." The luminous kitchen, the heart of any Italian home, is flooded with midday Roman sunlight, irradiating Alessandro's beautiful collection of Dutch Delft tiles and ancient wood-and-glass cabinets. A flight of marble steps brings us to a work studio and library, tucked in the iconic medieval monkey tower: "the most beautiful room in the house," Alessandro says. Lately he's been sneaking in here and pulling poetry books from the shelves. It's a kind of meditation as he ponders his next steps and his own suspended moment. "It's obvious I need oxygen now and it's ironic that in reading all these poetry collections, I became so interested in the white space on the page and what it reveals about the

words that inhabit it." He gives me a mischievous grin. "Look at this," he says and opens a hidden passageway in the bookcase, the kind of revolving library door kids dream about. The original building came equipped with many such vaults and portals, and Alessandro has taken advantage of them. Another vault, he explains, is hidden in his wardrobe (my favorite room as it features its own bathtub and a balustrade, and is filled with glass doors decorated with prints and textiles Alessandro designed himself).



THROUGH AND THROUGH

Ancient straw baskets and a late-18th-century Tuscan mirror. OPPOSITE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Another view of the kitchen; the largest living room; a collection of vases, painted copper plants, and figurines from the same space; a guest bathroom.

for friends. "It already had this karma of belonging to multiple people," he says. "It was a place for communal living." Alessandro knew buying the house would be a huge undertaking, but ultimately decided to go for it.

One of the many incredible things that happened in the work that followed was the discovery of the original roof beneath the suspended ceiling. It was filled with engravings, frescoes, those papal insignias, fleurs-de-lis of the kings of France, and a shield with the symbol of the Della Rovere family.





PATTERN RECOGNITION

ABOVE: A sidelong view of the second living room, with its matching chandeliers.

OPPOSITE: The bedroom, where an old Venetian door frame now functions as a splendid headboard. In this story: hair, Carmen Di Marco and Mimmo Laserra; makeup, Tanja Friscic. Details, see In This Issue.



We cross through the dining room, where the table is piled with pens and books, including a thick anthology by the late poet and musicologist Amelia Rosselli. Then to the bedroom, with a beautiful Venetian door frame he's reworked and adapted as a headboard. Next is Alessandro's studio, accessible via a series of corridors, which is a work in progress, populated by boxes and perfectly organized archives of things like old Indian glass paintings and marionettes. Alessandro lifts a ladle out of nowhere. "It's crazy, I started opening boxes the other day and found this ladle collection. I can't believe how many of them I have." We climb several stairs and past more rooms

than Alessandro can show me. "It's never-ending," he says as we make our way out to the terrace, and the Sant'Antonio dei Portoghesi's organ, the most ancient in Rome, fills the air. Through the leaves of the lush plants, rose bushes, and banana trees, we catch glimpses of passersby on the streets below.

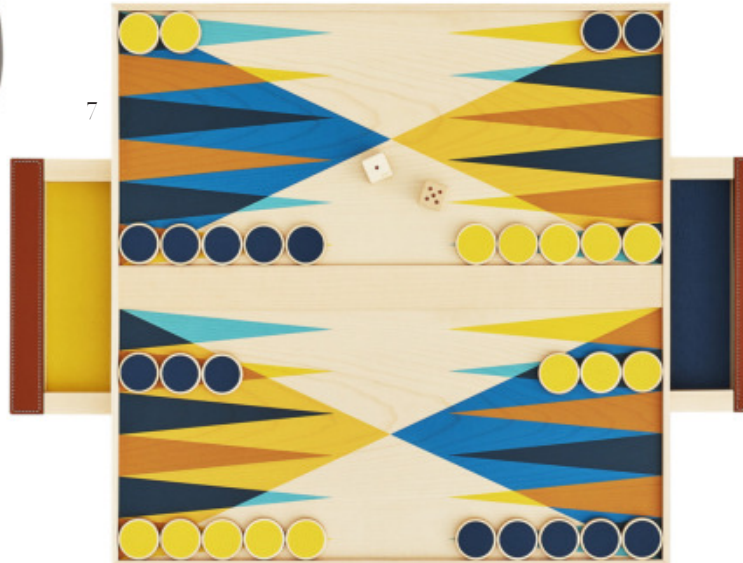
Alessandro is a nightwalker, a detail that I find incredibly romantic, but he also likes to get lost in the city during the day. It's just a little more complicated because he lives in a crowded neighborhood and people recognize him constantly. So he puts on a baseball cap and sunglasses as we go for a coffee at the iconic bar Sant'Eustachio, serving what

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The Get



Merry and Bright

Whether you're in the mood for giving or getting, big colors—and a little shimmer—go the distance this season.



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ADUT AKECH: PHOTOGRAPHED BY DANIEL JACKSON, VOGUE, 2018. PRODUCTS: COURTESY OF BRANDS / WEBSITES.

GOODBYE, VOGUE HOUSE!

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fashion editors' room (her ebullience distracted the other editors, who placed her as far away as possible). I would start organizing what we were going to do that day (I loved making lists, still do) and composing faxes for Issie to send to designers whom she wanted to meet or borrow clothes from. Invariably, the phone would ring about 11, with Issie on the line saying, "Darling—could you come round to Elizabeth Street? Had too much gin last night." I'd grab a black cab, head over to Belgravia, sit by Issie's narrow four-poster taking notes, and spend the rest of the day executing her wishes.

All the young talent came to see Issie in Vogue House—everyone from Hussein Chalayan to Bella Freud, Alexander McQueen to Stella Tennant, and Sophie Dahl to Tim Walker. One year, when I needed something to wear to the *Vogue* Christmas party at San Lorenzo, Alexander McQueen made me a black lace punky dress. He charged me 70 pounds cash (he didn't have a bank account yet) and brought it to the office. When I went to try it on in the bathroom, he followed me in with a pair of scissors and shredded the hem. I'll never forget Hussein arriving with a dress covered in soil: He'd buried his first collection before he showed it. But this was the sort of thing young designers did then, and it was a thrill to see their careers go stratospheric in a very few years.

I soon became a fashion writer, with a large desk by a window in the features room. There were just four of us in the department and my counterpart, Laura Campbell, sat opposite, and in between noodling over articles or shoots, we spent about three years laughing and chatting—about dresses, shoes, parties, and our (endlessly) broken hearts. Our desks were piled high with books, notes, and samples and only very occasionally were we ordered to tidy up. Otherwise, we drifted about in old silk nighties bought at Portobello market, or dresses from vintage shops worn with Manolos acquired at sample sales, and went round to each other's houses for supper at night, too poor to afford restaurants. We thought we worked hard, but in reality things were positively laissez-faire: In summer we would take long lunch breaks lying on the grass in the sunshine in Hanover Square; then there would be cups of tea at four o'clock, followed by the realization that it was already five o'clock—which, in England at the time, meant the day was over. And the day really *was* over: There were no phones to follow us home, no fashion shows to watch online, no email to deal with later.

Robin Muir

It's 1984, and I'm wheeling a trolley piled high with magazines and newspapers around the seven floors of Vogue House—from the warren of basement storage to the hidden rooftop garden where fashionistas would sunbathe in their underwear.

It was—and remains—a monolithic slab of a building, completed in 1958, its name chiseled in gold above the celebrated revolving doors. Back then, those who risked the unreliable lifts seldom ventured forth without hat, gloves, and hair that would withstand a nuclear blast. By 1988, it was wafer-thin girls dressed head-to-toe in black and teetering on vertiginous heels. At its zenith, Vogue House held nearly a thousand staffers—we couldn't keep up with their names as we scribbled them down on copies of obscure French hairdressing magazines. I was lucky to get in at all: "A very weak O," declared the personnel director, Miss Timms, holding up my application letter as if it were dusted in nerve agent. She'd been a cryptographer at Bletchley Park.

You never knew who you might glimpse: Linda! Naomi! Kate! (Or, more recently, Adwoa! Precious! Adut!) George Michael and Boy George, or Taylor Swift and Little Simz; Juliette Binoche, or Zendaya, or any number of royals. By some strange divination, the paparazzi outside always knew when Diana, Princess of Wales, would arrive. Those eyelashes batted wildly as she swept down the fifth-floor corridor, sparkling. Peak flirt was reached with Nicholas Coleridge, then the company's new-ish managing director: "Nicholas, please be frank, I want to know your real view: Are my breasts too small, do you think?"

Despite the ever-evolving newness of it all, reminders of the past were everywhere. Beatrix Miller, British *Vogue's* editor from the 1960s to the 1980s, had started out as a stenographer at the Nuremberg trials, while two floors below at *House & Garden*, editor Robert Harling, who worked in naval intelligence with Ian Fleming, was said to have been the inspiration for James Bond.

Inside, the basement archive was Bunny's fiefdom. She had been a model in the '50s before becoming *Vogue's* receptionist, and possessed enough residual hauteur to freeze the uninvited in their tracks. *Library* was too grand a term for what had been, until recently, a large cupboard into which random detritus had been thrown. Happily, this included magazines, photographs, and fashion illustrations, though nothing from before 1942—all of that had been pulped for the war effort. Still, Stellas McCartney and Tennant, Bella Freud, Philip Treacy, and Alber Elbaz all popped in to find inspiration

in the bound volumes; Julie Christie researched costumes; Jasper Conran made a purple moiré maquette of Cecil Beaton drawings; more recently, Kate Winslet studied for her new biopic about Lee Miller, *Vogue* heroine and war correspondent. We never quite knew what Terence Stamp was doing there, but he was charming.

And here we are. The library has already moved its valuable hoard to a new base in South London, and next spring Vogue House will close its revolving doors for the last time, the lifts will fall silent, and the caravan will move on to another Art Deco building, the Adelphi, on the Thames Embankment. It's been quite a run—and one hell of a party. □

RAISING HER GAME

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 142

candidly for the first time about some of his teammates and rivals—taking full advantage, it seemed to her, of the impunity that attends retirement. "I realized that Jordan made the right decision by biting his tongue earlier, when he was in the game," she says. "If I could go back and maybe save some of those things I said for later, like Jordan did, yes. Maybe I would have. Maybe I should have. I don't know." She pauses and rolls her head back. "Most people don't want to hear you talking all day anyway. People want the art you offer. Somehow now I look back, and I think about the things that I used to care about, the things that I used to ruin my day, and I can't believe I let those miscellaneous things stop me from focusing. For sure that's progress, right?"

A month later, Minaj has just returned to Los Angeles from New York, where she hosted the MTV Video Music Awards, and is stealing a few hours at home before heading back to the studio. The newly built house, modern and vast, which she bought last year, sits in a gated enclave in Hidden Hills. Papa Bear seems thrilled to be back; he is bouncing on the white sofa in the home theater or crawling through the hallway, and Minaj crawls after him, both of them laughing the whole way. She has little time at home these days, but a mini recording studio in the guesthouse helps. Minaj has become a better cook than she ever thought she would be, and she finds a kind of solace in making dinner for her family (Trinidadian stewed king fish or spicy sausage pasta for the grown-ups, yellow rice for her son, who is, for now, repulsed by his mother's more highly seasoned dishes). "Cooking actually makes me more calm," she says. Minaj is happier than she has been in the past, and she credits no magic pill or self-help book or guru but simply a shift in perspective.

“When you look around and try to keep yourself in a grateful frame of mind,” she explains, “the things that you can be thankful for seem to start adding up, and you realize that in the big scheme of things, most of the stuff you would have complained about is so trivial. It’s been a constant race. But then you stop and realize, there’s nothing to run around for. That’s the thing that’s changed in me. It’s not that I’ve taken these amazing steps. It’s just about finally being happy with *who* you are as opposed to *where* you are.”

Minaj has been thinking about how she might make the best use of a massive platform that has been a place for connecting with her fans and at times for engaging in public tussles. She has 28 million followers on X (formerly Twitter) and nearly 10 times that many on Instagram, and yet she has always insisted that social media is something she would swear off in a heartbeat if it weren’t a necessary feature of the business of being Nicki Minaj. She has consistently urged her fans to stay in school and is a huge believer in higher education. She has been an exponent of body positivity since the beginning of her career, vaunting her own curves and urging women of color, especially, to feel proud of theirs. She does not pretend that this has always been easy for her personally, by the way. “I just looked at a video that I posted on Instagram when I was 25, and I would fucking pay to look like that right now,” she says. “But today I can say that I’m at peace with who I am and how I look. I have to say this as a Black woman, though. I’ve made certain choices for my son, to not give him sweets and candy and juices, because of illnesses like diabetes that run in our community. I’m not in favor of body positivity if it means unhealthy bodies. That’s bull. It’s not believable, so let’s stop pretending. Recently I had to get a breast reduction, and actually I love it. I used to want a bigger butt, and now I look back and realize how silly that was. So—love your curves, and love your non-curves. There’s nothing wrong with any of it.”

She felt rushed, after her pregnancy, to snap back into shape, and she wishes she could take this pressure off future moms. Lately she has been wondering how to use social media to connect with more mothers, to exchange lessons and stories. “There are questions that you can’t just google,” Minaj explains. “Every day a mom has to wake up and be a supermom no matter what they’re faced with.” She would also like to bring more attention to mental illness and, especially, drug addiction. “It’s gotten so easy to be alone physically, where young people spend 12, 16 hours a day in their rooms on their phones, looking at these

false realities, comparing themselves,” she says. “I’ve seen artists gone way too soon, and I wonder if that could have been avoided if they’d just had the chance to talk about what they were going through.”

A foray into COVID policy has likely been Minaj’s greatest public misstep, though she may not view it that way. In a 2021 tweet she urged her fans to do research of their own into the vaccine after the friend of a cousin of hers in Trinidad allegedly became impotent following vaccination. She was swiftly criticized by fans, peers, and members of the media who felt that her circumspection was anti-scientific and might sow distrust in health and public policy experts. Not chastened, exactly, Minaj maintains a leery independence, though she is now less likely to shout it from the rafters. “I’m one of those people who doesn’t go with a crowd,” she says. “I like to make my own assessment of everything without help from everyone.” While she has spoken out against police abuses of power and in favor of universal health care, she has been reluctant to align herself with a political party. “Every time I talk about politics, people get mad. I’m sorry, but I am not going to be told who I should get on social media and campaign for. There’s a lot we don’t know that’s going on in the government, and I don’t think it changes whether you lean to the left or right.”

Of all the notions about her that have permeated the public consciousness and gone on to form a theory of Nicki Minaj, the one that rankles her most, she says, is that idea that she is not nice. Minaj has often had important messages to deliver—her indignation over what she perceived as MTV’s reluctance to celebrate videos that feature anything but slim women’s bodies, leading to a famous feud with Miley Cyrus, comes to mind—only to find herself policed for failing to deliver those messages in dulcet tones. “When I hear the word *mean*, I think about the core of who the person is,” she explains. “I always tell people that the difference between being mean and being a bitch is that bitch passes. Bitch comes and goes. Mean is who you are. I could be the biggest bitch, at the height of my bitch-ness, but if the person I may be cussing out at that time needs something from me, I’m going to give it to them. I have to be able to look in the mirror and be okay with myself.”

Throughout her music career, Minaj has played with alter egos, marshaling those old theater chops in the service of creating characters—the ingenue Harajuku Barbie; the hot-tempered, gay, and British Roman Zolanski, to name just two. It’s tempting to think of Nicki Minaj herself as the über-alter ego of Onika Maraj, though she regards it

differently. “I think of her more like the Superman suit, like who you change into when you go into the telephone booth,” she explains. “They’re completely different entities.” Recently she and her husband tried out a nanny for the first time, and Minaj remembers telling a couple of her girlfriends about an incident that occurred in which Papa Bear, who she says gets his dance moves from his father, had a fall. Minaj’s initial reaction was that the nanny ought to have been there to catch him. And she told her friends how the nanny, with the conviction of a seasoned surrogate parent, corrected her, explaining that kids fall, and it’s okay. “They all looked at me thinking that I was going to be out for blood!” she remembers. “I was like, Do you all think that Nicki Minaj is the same person I am with my child’s nanny? As a matter of fact, I didn’t say anything.”

Marc Jacobs, a fellow shape-shifter who has had Minaj in the front row of his shows over the years, appreciates the challenge of maintaining a self that is separate from one’s art. “It’s interesting to see how creative people and their creative output grow and evolve at different stages of their lives,” he says. “I’ve had the good fortune of meeting some incredible performers over the years, and a lot of them say that what you see onstage or in the press is not who they are. When someone like Nicki reveals a different side, it gives her a lot of depth. But it shouldn’t be a surprise when people mistake you for Nicki, if that’s all you’ve shown them.”

Minaj plays me another track from the new album called “Big Difference,” which she wrote several years ago but recently found herself falling back in love with. On the face of it, the song may seem like a familiar flex: The “big difference” is the gulf between Minaj and other rappers, in particular those who come casually into the game, get lucky with a hit on TikTok, and suddenly imagine that fame and clout are their right rather than the outcome of years of hard work. Minaj put in the work, and if she feels you haven’t, she is apt to let you know it. But it’s hard to imagine that the rapper, so deliberate with her pen, wasn’t hinting at other big differences as well.

“You know that feeling when you unlock one of the secrets of life?” she asks. “For me the idea of accepting what you can’t change—it just never clicked with me before. You want to have control over everything, but that’s the easiest way to be unhappy. So now, if I find myself trying to control it all, I try to remember what’s really important. I look in my son’s face, and my whole soul lights up. He has no clue how nerve-racking it’s been for me to be a mother and an artist.”



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At home, there's so much to fight for and so little to fight against. In the last few months, Papa Bear has started to make a strange new sound. Initially his mother couldn't figure out what it was, until she realized that he was learning to ape her laugh, with its big staccato yuk-yuks. Minaj has always had her imitators, but this one is a little different. □

OUT OF THIS WORLD

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 173

"Whoever gets up first, that person makes the other person coffee," she says. Bezos takes his black or with Laird Hamilton's superfood nondairy creamer, in a self-warming Ember mug. Sánchez uses a mug Bezos got her from Amazon, with the words "Woke up sexy as hell again" splashed across the side.

"We try not to get on our phones right away," Sánchez says. "That's what I'm working on." They're also trying to journal in the morning, per von Furstenberg's instruction. "We're not quite there," admits Sánchez. "We'll do it, like, three days a week."

Sánchez likes to drive her daughter to school. The ritual includes Bezos calling out to Ella before they leave, "Don't learn anything I wouldn't learn!"—a line that has become so dependable that the teenager now finishes it for him. "Sometimes we tussle," Sánchez says of the school runs. "Other times she really opens up, and other times she says nothing and I take it in." In the evening, after tutoring and piano lessons, the family eats dinner together. "Every night."

Sánchez and Bezos also work out together. "But we cannot do the same exercises. He's on a whole different level than I am. He is a monster in the gym." Bedtime is 9:30 p.m. with a bit of TV (recently *Black Bird*, about an incarcerated serial killer, as well as *Citadel*, *Jack Ryan*, and *Black Mirror*). Sánchez is also a big audiobook fan—she's deep into *Chop Wood Carry Water: How to Fall in Love with the Process of Becoming Great*. And both cook too. On the weekends Bezos makes churros in his deep fryer, a recipe passed down from his Cuban grandfather. "Abuelo made churros whenever we were with him," says Bezos.

"Okay, but who makes the best breakfast?" asks Sánchez.

"That's, like, a leading question," says Bezos with a laugh before dutifully answering that Sánchez does: fried eggs on flour tortillas with New Mexican green chile that Sánchez learned to make from her own grandmother.

Saturday family movie nights are a tradition. The week we meet they'd just enacted their own version of *Barbenheimer* with *Oppenheimer* screened Saturday night and *Barbie* on Sunday. "Of

course, Jeff's favorite movie was *Oppenheimer*, and I love *Barbie*. And there you have us summed up in two movies."

Like Barbie, Sánchez has no chill—as her teenagers might say. This suits her: She giddily points things out, calling everything magical then laughing at herself for doing so. "I say *magical* a lot, don't I?" she says with a big smile. "I think one of her greatest qualities is that no matter what situation I can look over and she's wide-eyed and like, *Can you believe where we are right now?*" says Tobie Gonzalez. "She's like a little girl, constant awe and giddiness."

"I don't know if you're supposed to cheer and applaud during a fashion show, but my mom was definitely doing that," says Nikko, who attended the recent Staud show at the Plaza with her and says it reminded him of his high school football games, where she decked herself out in self-made merch with his number on it and rang a cowbell. "There was not a single year she wasn't the team mom," says Nikko.

"I'm extremely enthusiastic," Sánchez admits with a shrug. Staud designer Sarah Staudinger, wife of Ari Emanuel, Whitesell's partner at Endeavor, is a friend who was one of the inner circle at her *Koru* engagement party. For the Fashion Week event, Sánchez wore a Staud black minidress to her show, embroidered with jet bugle beads and a silver constellation pattern (her fiancé's love of space shared across many mediums).

Does she dress for Jeff? "I always found it interesting that people say, 'Well, Lauren, you definitely dress more for men.' I actually dress for myself."

"But it works for Jeff," Bezos adds with a wry smile.

She cites Salma Hayek and Amal Clooney as style inspirations. "Why? Because they dress for who they are, and that authenticity, I think, comes through." A shimmering Dolce & Gabbana halter column she wore to a recent Caring for Women event felt exactly right: "I really think I am coming into who I am and I know what feels good," she says. Call her effect exuberant luxury—a reminder that not every wealthy woman need swaddle herself in The Row.

At that dinner, put on by the Kering Foundation during New York Fashion Week, Sánchez found herself bidding for Balenciaga couture against her friend Kim Kardashian. "I'm a big auction girl," says Kardashian, "and my strategy was to come in last minute." Realizing her rival was Sánchez, Kardashian called across the room—"We'll share it!"—meaning they could take turns with one dress. "I thought, you wear it once, I'll wear it once, it'll be so

cute!" says Kardashian. Instead, Kering offered to make two dresses, and both women paid \$200,000 and will travel to Paris together for the fitting. "Lauren and I are always sending DMs building each other up," Kardashian says. "Every time there's a look that we like, she'll say, 'WOW,' or, 'OMG you look amazing.' She's such a girl's girl."

Kardashian was one of the two dozen women at Sánchez's 53rd birthday luncheon hosted by philanthropist Laura Arrillaga-Andreessen in Malibu (complete with fondant helicopter cake). Bezos also threw Sánchez a surprise birthday dinner at Horses, the West Hollywood hot spot. In his speech, Bezos said, "One thing I learned about Lauren is if I'm in a bind, I can throw the gun to her."

"I think I can get him out of most situations," says Sánchez. "I'd fly him out!"

For his birthday, Sánchez gave Bezos a large-format photograph of the science fiction section at the tiny Cotulla, Texas, library. This is where Bezos spent his childhood summers reading Asimov and Heinlein—an experience that inspired his lifelong fascination with space. "She's a good gift giver," he says. "She puts a lot of thought into it."

Her giving has taken on new dimensions since she met Bezos. She's particularly focused on the environmental work of the Bezos Earth Fund, a \$10 billion commitment to climate solutions; the Bezos Academy, a network of tuition-free preschools; and the Courage & Civility Award, which donates \$100 million to an individual to disburse at their discretion. "Lauren wakes up thinking about how to help people," says Elsa Collins, cofounder of This Is About Humanity, an organization supporting separated and reunified families at the US-Mexico border, which recently received \$1 million from Sánchez. Collins counts Sánchez as a close friend (they have a pickleball crew) and describes how in "deep COVID" Sánchez called her at 6:20 a.m. wanting to help.

In August, Sánchez drove to Tijuana with her three kids to chop zucchini in the relief kitchen and hand out backpacks filled with toys and necessities labeled by age and gender. One five-year-old girl took out a toy purse and gave it back to Sánchez to thank her. The story makes Sánchez tear up. "I think when you give back it encourages someone else to give back. It's a really incredible loop." Later Nikko sent her a text: "Mom I just want you to know I'm proud of you."

Sánchez's kids are also invested in the Earth Fund. She says she recently got them excited by discussing the Earth Fund's investment in methane-free

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cows, as well as a \$400 million program that seeks to add green space to urban centers that have grown hotter due to lack of shade canopy.

"It's inspiring for our staff to see that level of interest," says Andrew Steer, the Earth Fund's president and CEO. "She's involved in the nitty-gritty." Sánchez and Bezos recently hosted a retreat for key staff at their Malibu home. "We really want to do the most we can with the dollars that we put into things," says Sánchez. "It's not about just giving the money away. It's about being involved." Of the 2024 recipient of the Courage & Civility Award (in the past it's gone to Dolly Parton, Van Jones, and José Andrés), Sánchez will only say, "It's really exciting, we're narrowing it down. We can't announce who it is yet, but this is something very close to our hearts."

Sánchez is undaunted by the question of how she reconciles her own carbon footprint with her environmental work. "I think Jeff and I really are focusing on the long-term commitment to climate, and we're extremely optimistic about it. Ten billion is just the beginning." She says they also use green aviation fuel when possible and that *Koru* can sail using only wind power. "We've done it and it is magical."

"This is the most important work I've ever done, ever," she adds about the philanthropic investments. She was honored for them at a This Is About Humanity gala at the end of the summer, an event that acted as a back-to-school mixer for Hollywood's social worlds and cemented Sánchez, in a clinging red knit dress, as a face of philanthropy in Los Angeles. "As a little girl I never thought I would be up here," Sánchez said in her speech. She went on to recount her childhood

in Albuquerque (she and Bezos each giddily tell me they were born at the same hospital six years apart). Sánchez recalls her grandmother, who worked two jobs, loading her into her Ford Marquis at 5 a.m. and driving to clean houses while young Sánchez slept in the backseat. Sánchez would then get dressed for school in the bathroom of the restaurant where her grandmother was the manager. Her parents separated when she was young. Her father is a pilot and mechanic who owned a flight school; her mother, who also had a pilot's license, worked for the city of Albuquerque. Sánchez says she "got lost in the school system" due to undiagnosed dyslexia, and her grandmother saw her struggling and taught her what she thought she needed to know: how to cook, how to clean a house, and how to sew. Unable to afford department store dresses, Sánchez made her own clothes, including her red puff-sleeve prom dress. "So fashion has always been a fun thing for me."

At 19, Sánchez enrolled in El Camino College, where her broadcast journalism professor, Lori Medigovich, helped her get a handle on her dyslexia. "I've taught thousands of students, but Lauren was memorable because she seemed so driven. Lauren knew exactly what she wanted to do," says Medigovich, who also helped Sánchez transfer to USC on a scholarship. "She literally changed the trajectory of my life," says Sánchez, tearing up again. "By the way, I never used to cry. This is him. I blame you."

"I made her vulnerable and soft," says Bezos with more than a hint of pride.

Sánchez's most high profile gig in her TV career was with *Good Day LA* on Fox 11, which she co-hosted for six years, waking up at 4:30 a.m. and being

home for school pickup. In the early years she would take Nikko to work with her, just as her grandmother did. "Growing up it did feel like it was me and her against the world," says Nikko.

Kris Jenner remembers Sánchez as the face of her news when she would have her coffee in the morning. She then met Sánchez when she and her then husband were peddling their "Superfit with Kris and Bruce Jenner" line of stair-climbers. They were reintroduced a few years ago by LA superconnector Michael Kives over dinner at Bezos's estate in Beverly Hills.

"We know they will be in our lives forever," says Jenner, who with partner Corey Gamble enjoys date nights with the soon-to-be Bezoses, such as attending Coachella last April and, more recently, the Beyoncé *Renaissance* World Tour birthday concert with their kids, including Kim and Khloé and North West, and Sánchez's teenagers. Jenner says Sánchez knew the words to every song.

"She'll make sure everyone is up to speed about what's happening in the world," says Jenner, noting Sánchez recently sent an article about the Maui wildfires to their group text (Jenner declined to name its members). Bezos and Sánchez, who also have a home on Maui, pledged \$100 million to rebuilding efforts. "She has more energy than I do, which is really annoying," says Jenner.

I witnessed this after Sánchez landed the helicopter on the side of the Sierra Diablo mountains and we descended into the mouth of a cliff to explore the 10,000 Year Clock. "I think we should go to the bottom, right?" she said. "We can handle it, but it's a workout." It took over a year to drill 500 feet into solid limestone and quartz and two years

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Goodbye, Vogue

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RAISING HER GAME

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for a diamond-cutting robot to slice stairs into the stone. Inside, enormous titanium and stainless gears looked like giant versions of the inside of my wristwatch and led down to a 10,000 pound bronze-cased concrete pendulum. "Wouldn't it be cool to have a Halloween party here?" Sánchez said.

Bezos later explains that there are five metal anniversary displays that will function like traditional cuckoo clocks chiming at one year, 10 years, 100 years, 1,000 years, and 10,000 years. "The whole point of the clock," explains Bezos, "is after a few hundred years, like all old things, it will take on a certain kind of respect."

"Is that why you respect me so much?" jokes Sánchez, and they both erupt in laughter.

"She's dyslexic. She thinks she's 35," says Bezos.

Does Sánchez have any secrets for aging gracefully? "It's really simple." She cites the MEDS acronym—meditation, exercise, diet, and sleep—personally adding sunscreen to the end of it. (She wears Summer Fridays.)

"I don't ever think, Wow, I'm going to be 54 in December and I'm getting married. It is all happening. We're excited about the future."

"I think there's an interesting thing to try and do," says Bezos thoughtfully, "which is to be excited about the future and to live in the present. All the future is built right here, in this moment."

Sánchez lifts off the bar stool. "Okay, shall we?"

"Let's do it," says Bezos, threading his hand in Sánchez's.

"But you have to fly us home," she says with a giggle.

Bezos leads her toward the helicopter outside. "I can do that." □

PAST LIVES

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 182

is widely known as the best espresso in the world, and talk about his love of film and theater. Alessandro watches only a few films a year, "but they are all extremely meaningful to me," he says. We stroll—at a slow pace, zoning out in front of bookshops and old theaters. "Look at this," he says, pointing to the Mannerist façade of the church of Sant'Andrea della Valle. "Rome is a city of safe little pockets right in the middle of chaos." As we cross the Corso Vittorio, a Roman driver honks violently and yells at us: "Annamo un po!" ("Get a move on!") Alessandro laughs. "My mother would always tell me that I live 'a mezz'aria,'" he says. "Mid-air." Inside the church the light filters through large tinted windows reflecting on a mirror in the center of the room, creating an all-pervasive golden hue. Alessandro comes here almost daily and still he's completely transfixed. "The church in Rome is the greatest stage in the world," he says. "I'm like a serial killer with this place. I always come back."

Another beloved place is the bustling Campo de' Fiori, with its market stands and fruit sellers, who all seem to know Alessandro by name. We manage to resist the siren call of the square's famous pizza bianca oven, cross through Piazza Farnese, and end up sitting down in a restaurant in the quaint Piazza della Quercia, with its brave, lonely oak tree at the center. Alessandro dreamily points to the old Roman mercantile area near the Tiber, and to Palazzo Spada, another place he likes to go to for inspiration. After lunch, still in dreamy mid-air mode, he leaves his wallet behind on the table and we are chased down the street by a kind tourist. "See how I am?"

he laughs. And this prompts another reverie as we wind our way back to the Palazzo Scapucci: "Rome has been here thousands of years," he says. "Soon we won't be here, but she will. Rome seduces you, and warns you: 'Being with me is tough. I may look beautiful, but I'm exhausting. I don't work and I will make your life impossible.' That gives me the right perspective." □

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Last Look



Works in Progress

Our portfolio of Last Looks sees clay, wire, and stick bricolage vignettes adorned with the season's most dazzling pieces. Photographed by Théo de Gueltzl.

Cartier watch

A sculpture-in-the-making wears a gem-filled Cartier High Jewelry watch like a necklace, with cabochon-cut rubies, sapphires, emeralds, and emerald-cut diamonds arranged like mere patchwork. On your wrist? It's time to shine.

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DRESS
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HOLIDAY

H&M

Last Look



Van Cleef & Arpels clips

The latest to bloom in the glorious Van Cleef & Arpels gem garden? A pair of clips fashioned after a cluster of primrose buds. In lieu of petals, you'll find rubies set in 18k gold. Wear them in concert or on their own, and fasten them to anything your heart desires, from gown to collar to lapel or beyond.



**BOW DETAIL
DRESS
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HOLIDAY

H&M

Last Look



Bulgari necklaces

This clay bust doesn't know how lucky it is—draped around its neck are two beguiling necklaces: On top, a Cuban-style chain adorned with diamonds and cabochon-cut rubellite and amethyst stones; on the bottom, another diamond-encrusted chain—but this time, branching off into pear-shaped stones that make quite the impression.



Dolce & Gabbana bag

At first glance, you may not realize that this fiery red satchel is entirely, fully, completely beaded—embellished from top to bottom with glossy beads that create the most marvelous tactile sensation. Shimmy it around, and you'll even get a bit of a tune.



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HOLIDAY

H&M



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\$26.99

HOLIDAY

H&M

Last Look



Tiffany & Co. rings

What a catch! This little red wax figurine is accessorized with a pair of fish-shaped rings from the Blue Book Collection that dazzle with hulking Sri Lankan padparadscha sapphires. The fish on top carries a sapphire of five carats; on bottom, the sapphire reaches just past six carats.



TUXEDO
SHIRT
\$26.99

HOLIDAY

H&M

Last Look



Chanel High Jewelry bracelet

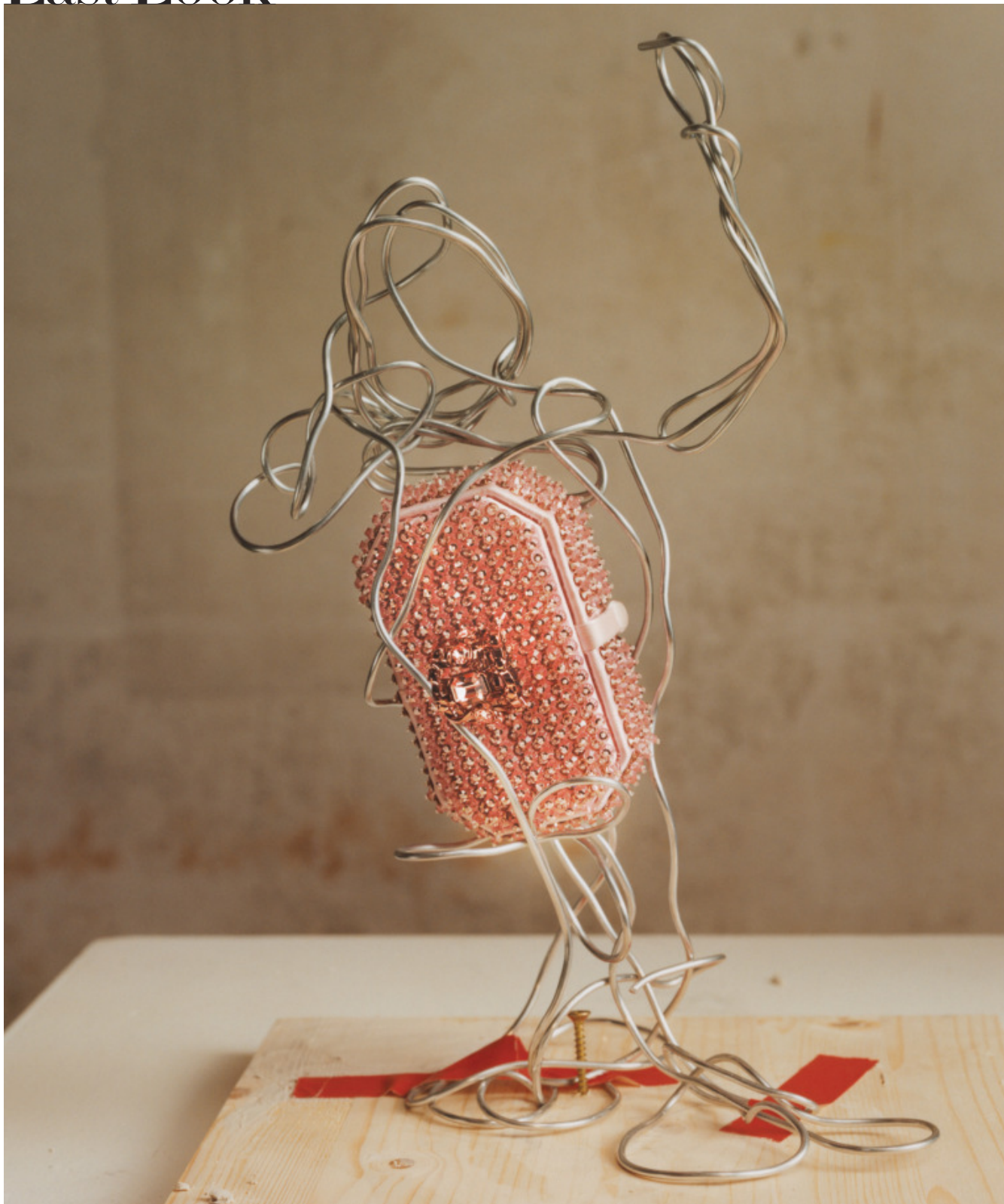
This fine jewelry piece is dubbed the Blushing Sillage bracelet and consists of a cuff of 18k pink gold with a collection of diamonds, rubies, spinels, garnets, and yellow sapphires arranged in a radial pattern. Striking in both detail and color palette, it's an accessory that doesn't *really* need to raise a hand to be noticed.



Louis Vuitton Men's slipper

The crown jewel of Louis Vuitton's latest men's collection may very well be these not-so-homey house slippers. Festooned with a glittering array of stones, they're enough to make the concept of being all dressed up with nowhere to go an actual goal.

Last Look



Fendi Couture clutch

When designing this sumptuous handbag, Fendi had both practicality and luxury in mind, encrusting a fully beaded ballet-slipper-pink clutch—for, you know, *essentials*—with a built-in ring for the kind of glitz perfect for anywhere from the red carpet to merely painting the town red.



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HOLIDAY

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