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FASHION'S BIG YEAR OF CHANGE

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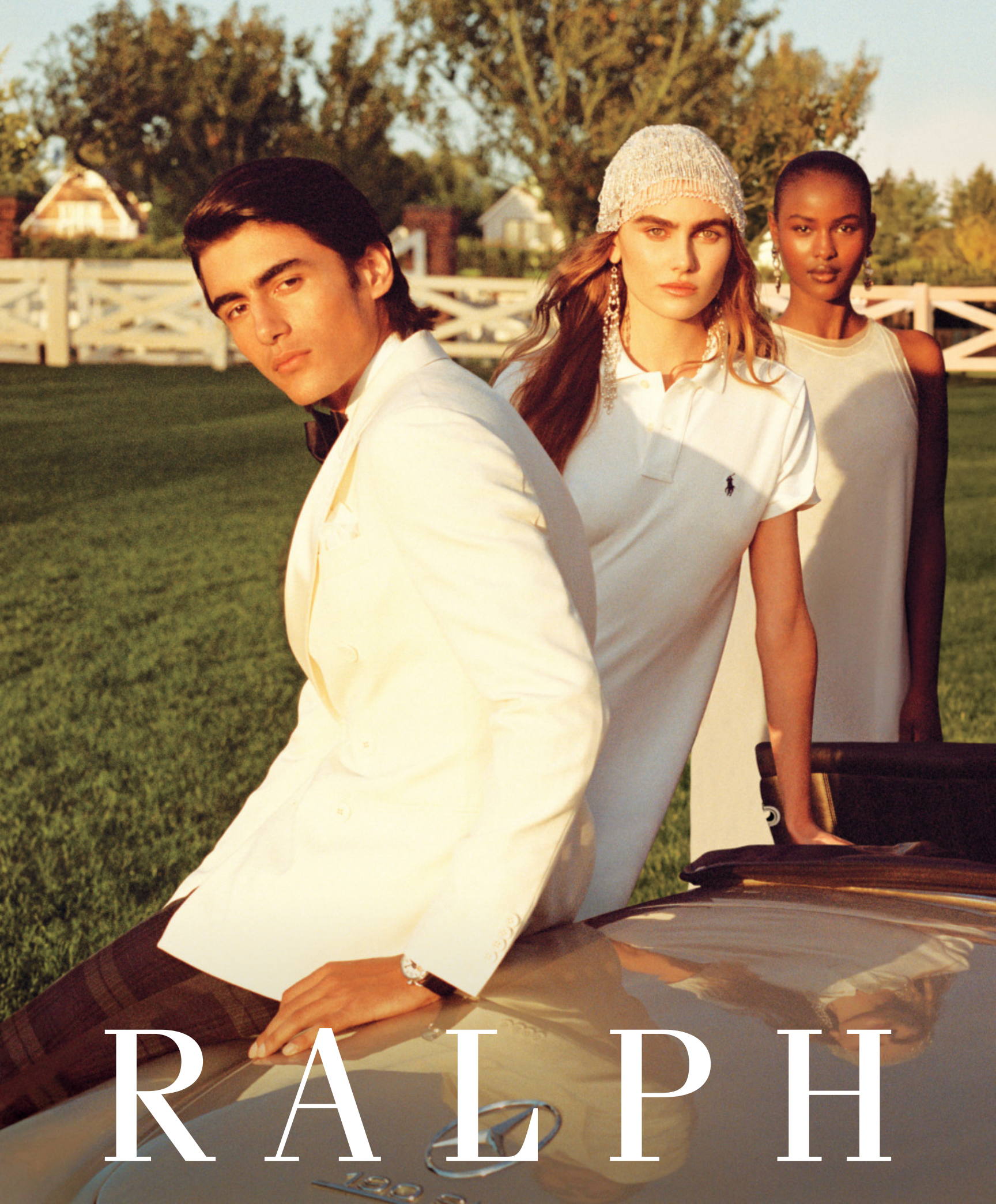
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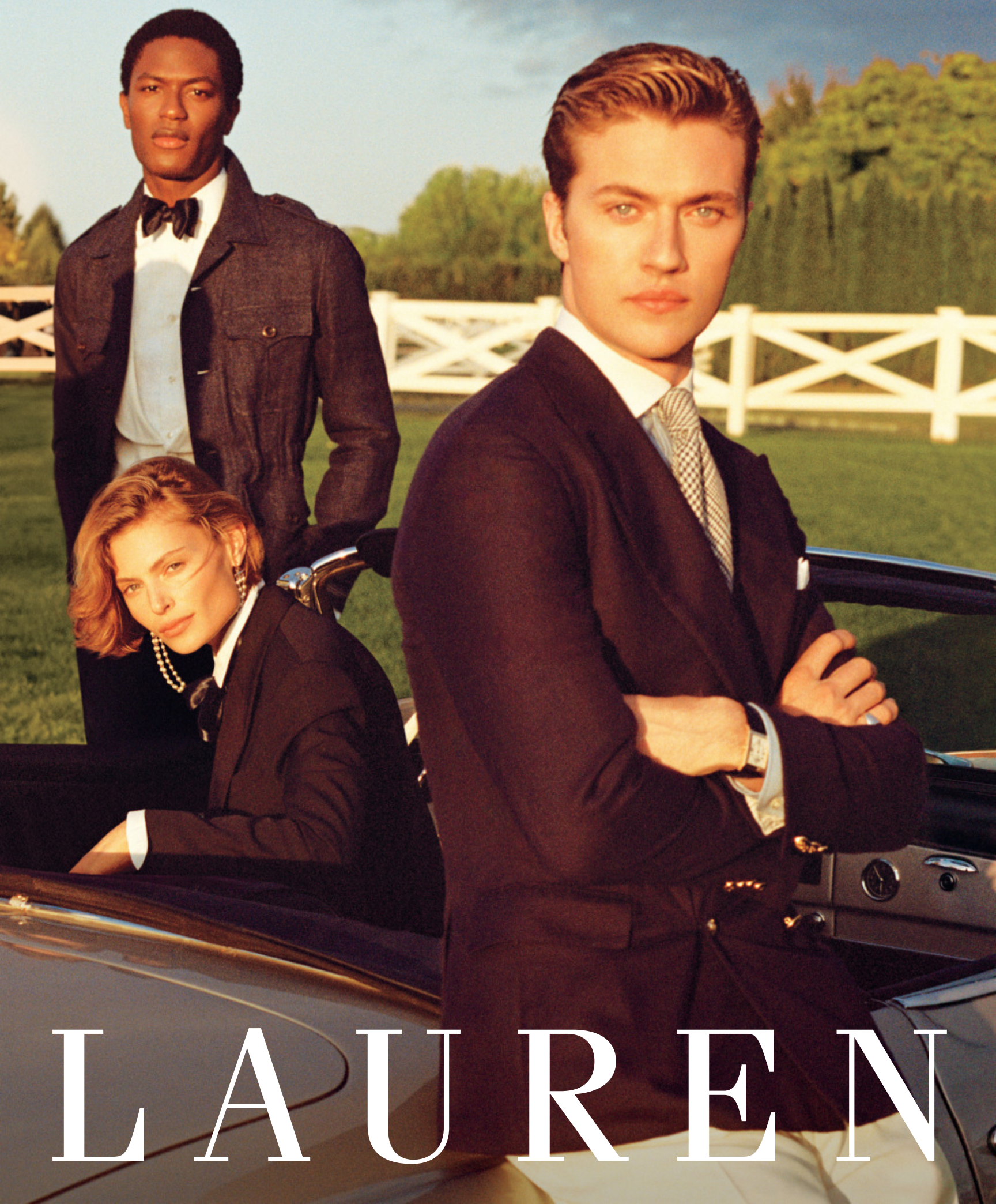
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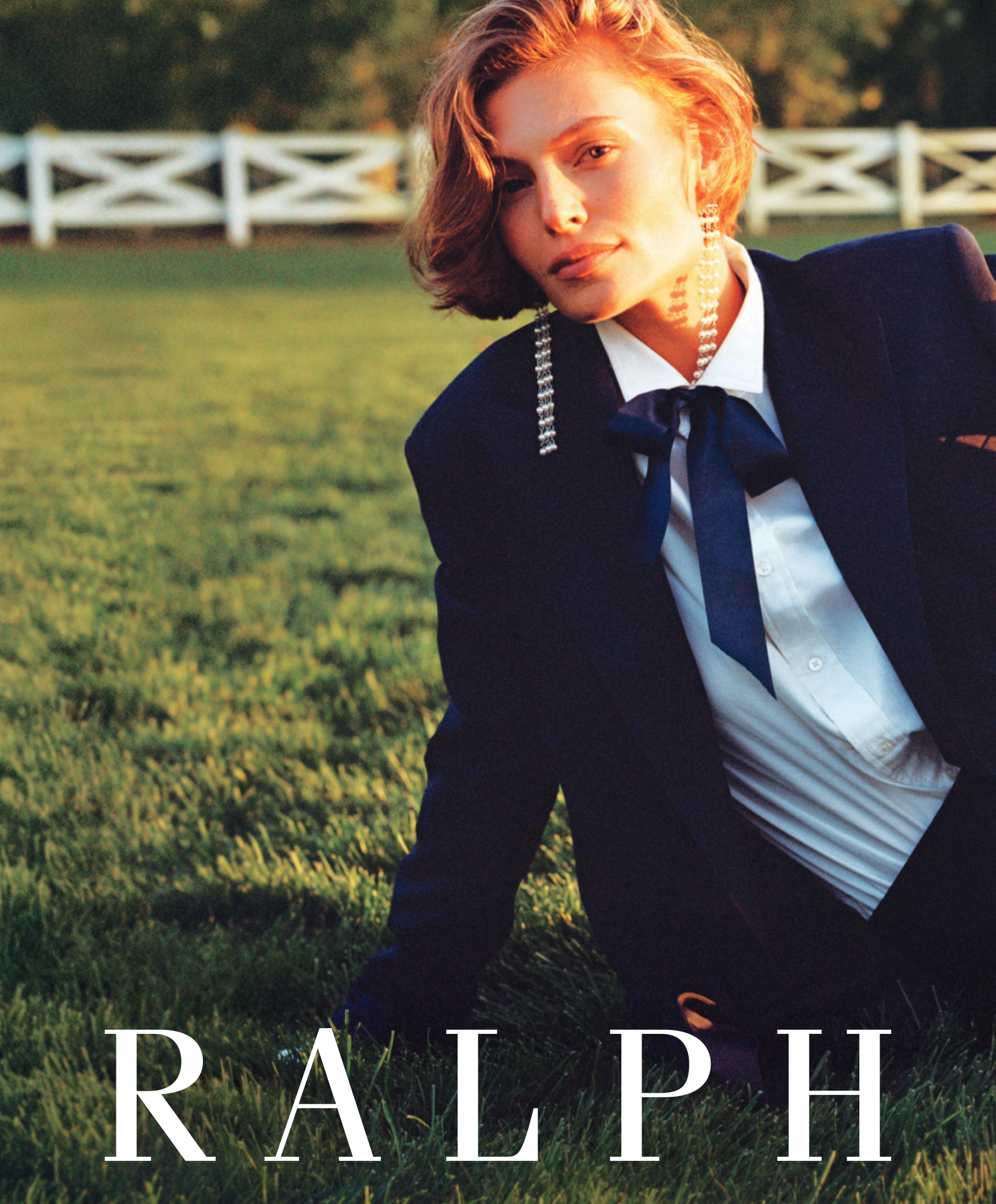
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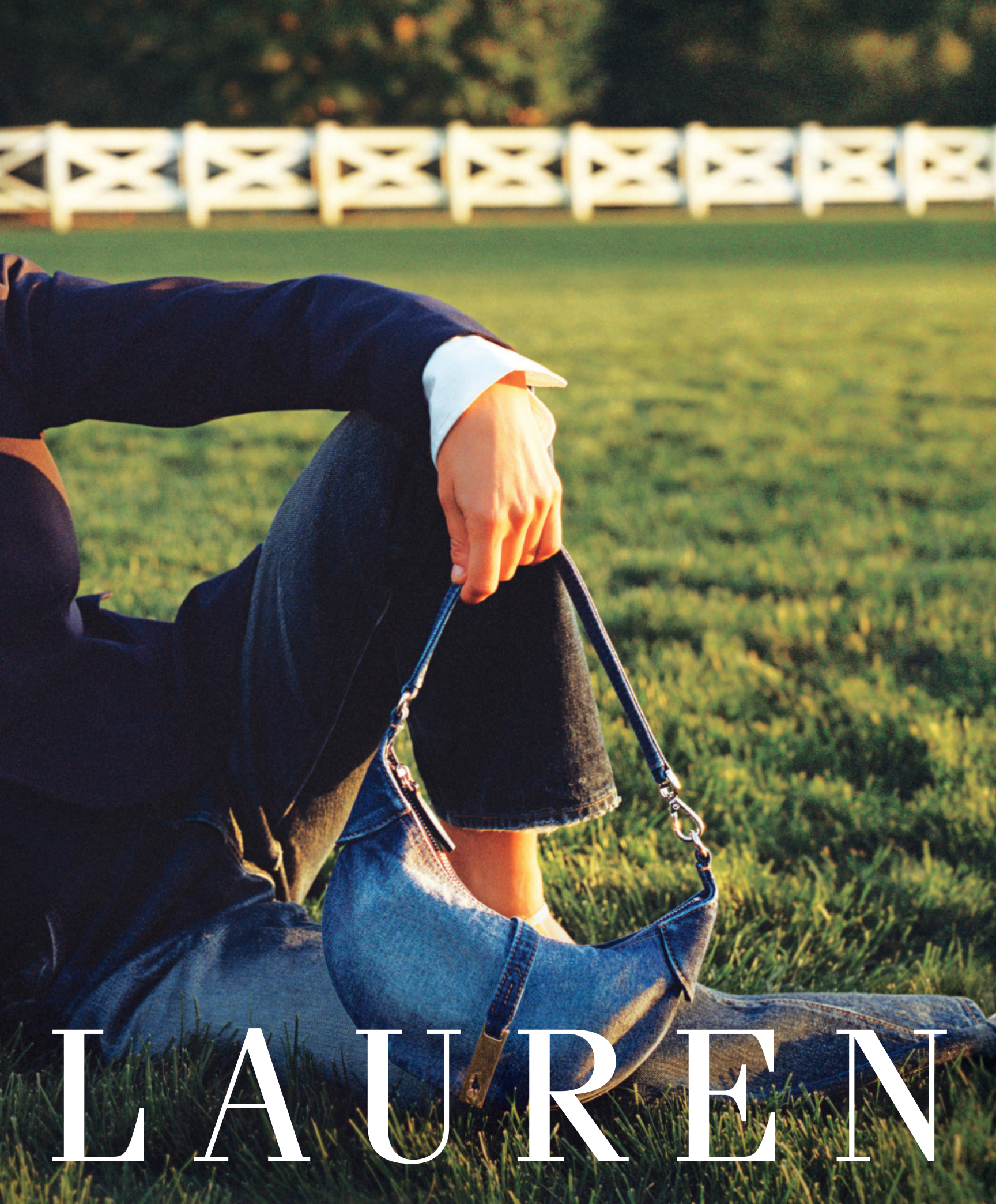
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HEAD IN THE CLOUDS
SOUTH AFRICAN POPIANO SENSATION TYLA IS READY FOR HER CLOSE-UP IN A TEXTURED STELLA McCARTNEY COAT. PHOTOGRAPHED BY RAFAEL PAVAROTTI.

76
Editor's Letter

92
Masthead

94
Contributors

98
Up Front
Amy Griffin's life appeared picture-perfect, but, in this excerpt from her memoir, *The Tell,* the initial signs of a childhood trauma begin to appear

110
Having Their Say
A trio of independent designers talk with Nicole Phelps about their processes, their challenges—and their triumphs

122
An Eye on Yves
Hamish Bowles's collection of Yves Saint Laurent's work goes on exhibit in the late designer's Marrakech museum

140
Out of the Jungle
Brazilian artist Beatriz Milhazes's retrospective opens at the Guggenheim

148
True Romance
Two lush new books look at the endless allure of the garden

154
Mop Tops
With its profusion of feathery layers, the shag is a distinct look, both retro and newly reinvented

158
Once Upon a Time in the West
With new hotels and resorts, Big Sky, Montana, opens up

160
All in the Family
New fiction examines the ties that bind

166
Playtime
How does Sabrina Carpenter manage to be modern and nostalgic, girly and glam, sweetly romantic and totally risqué all at the same time? Abby Aguirre meets an irresistible pop conundrum

176
State of Wonder
The surreal beauty of Jekyll Island, Georgia, proves an enchanting backdrop for fantastic silhouettes, playful textures, and a devil-may-care romantic flair

194
Free to Rome
Alessandro Michele's move to Valentino has been a homecoming of sorts. Rebecca Mead encounters him as he draws on his cherished freedom to create like never before

204
A Singular Man
Haider Ackermann took a call from Tom Ford, and everything changed: Now he's taking the helm of the brand Ford founded. By Mark Holgate

206
From the Ground Up
Sarah Burton's post-McQueen life has taken her to Paris and Givenchy, where she's rebuilding the house to imagine a glorious future. By Mark Holgate

CONTINUED>74

FASHION EDITOR: GEORGE KRAKOWIAK. HAIR, ZHOU XUE MING. MAKEUP, CHIAO LI HSU. PRODUCED BY RAGI DHOLAKIA PRODUCTIONS. SET DESIGN: IBBY NJOYA. DETAILS, SEE IN THIS ISSUE.


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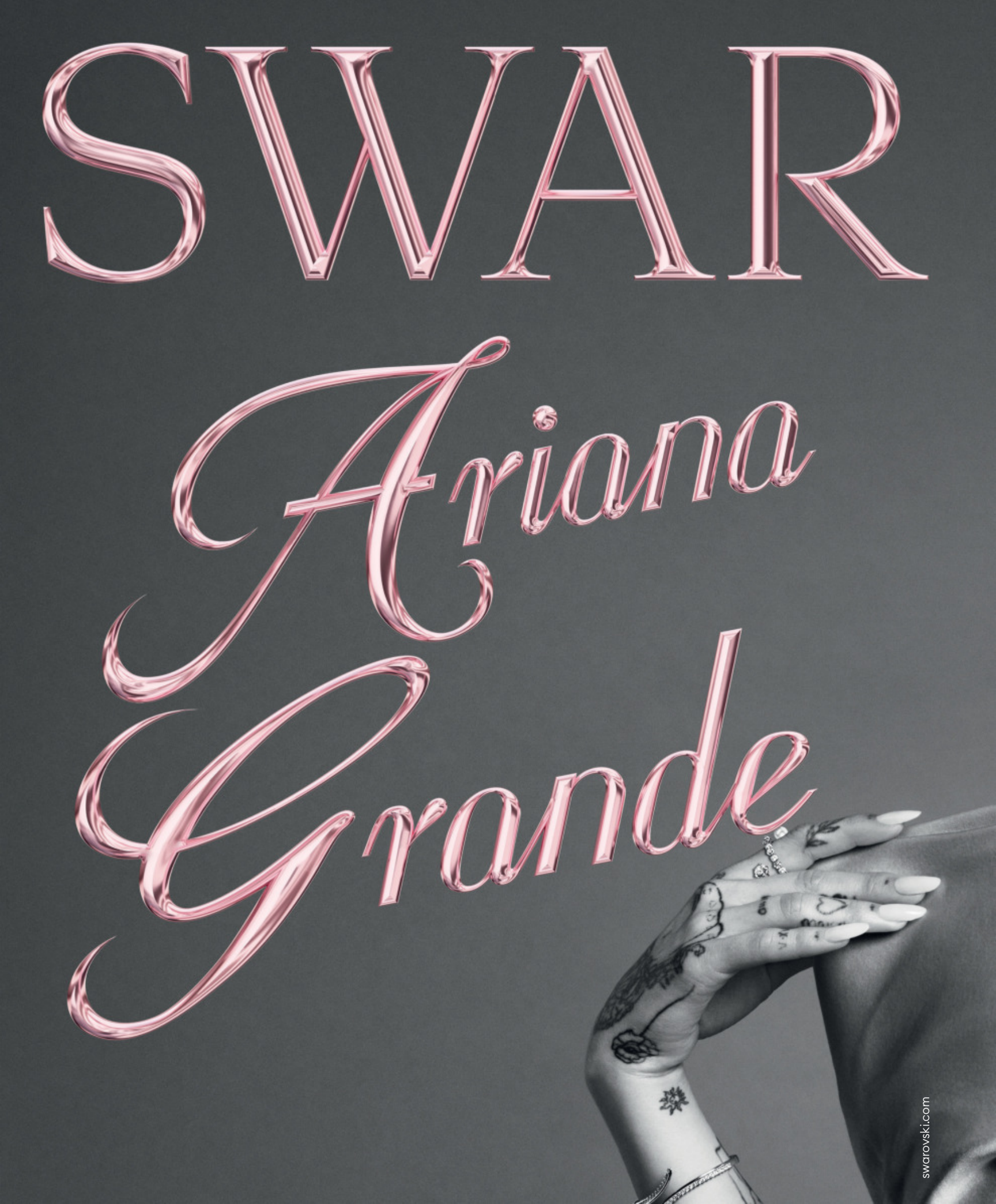

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THE CHALLENGER
BRITISH TENNIS STAR JACK DRAPER IN A BURBERRY COAT, BROOKS BROTHERS SHIRT, AND CARLO MANZI TROUSERS. PHOTOGRAPHED BY THEO WENNER.

208
Another World
Lorna Simpson unveils a monumental new show at The Metropolitan Museum of Art. By Dodie Kazanjian

214
Heat Wave
A seductive, feverishly celebrated revival of *A Streetcar Named Desire* arrives in Brooklyn with a blockbuster cast—including an antihero for the ages. By Kate Lloyd

218
Burning Bright
Tyla's rise—from South African newcomer to global sensation—is a reminder that dance music knows no boundaries. By Funmi Fetto

220
Two Princes
At a proving moment in men's tennis, England's Jack Draper and American Ben Shelton are stepping up

228
The End of the Affair
Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's new novel, *Dream Count*, is haunted by the idea of what could have been. Here, she tells the story of her own first love

232
Machines Like Us
A new musical on Broadway—imported from Seoul—asks age-old questions about romance, mortality, and living life to the fullest. The twist? Robots. By Lisa Wong Macabasco

236
The Darling Buds of March
Artichoke season is short and creates ardent feelings. In its honor, Tamar Adler dines around town, paying tribute to a delightful, poetic vegetable

238
Character Studies
The spring runways were characterized less by a singular motif or trend than by sheer abundance—a joyous cacophony of shapes, textures, attitudes, and points of view

252
Giant Steps
The shoes of the season don't just make a statement—they steal the whole glorious show

258
The Get
Spring's most playful and exuberant pieces evoke a childlike sense of glee

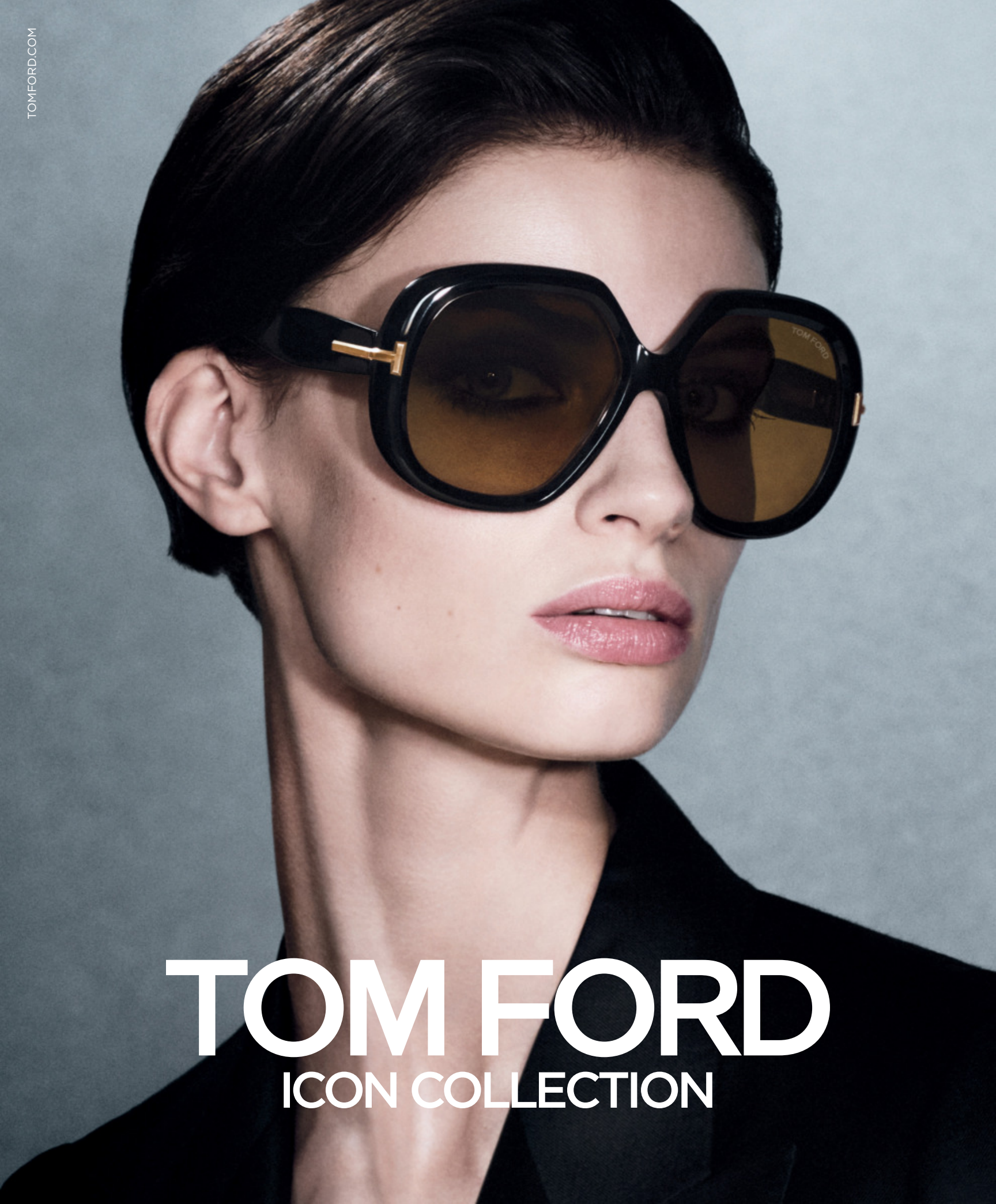
266
Last Look

Cover Look Ice Ice Baby

Sabrina Carpenter wears a custom Dolce & Gabbana dress. To get this look, try: Refine Blurring Extending Primer, Reveal Skin Optimizing Foundation, Reset Rebalancing Setting Powder, Dimensions Durable Multi-Effect Eye Palette in Poetry, Monochrome Hyper Matte Durable Weightless Lip Color in Fauve. All by Prada Beauty. For hair, try: Quick Blowout, Root Lifter Volumizing Spray, Brushable Hairspray. All by Redken. Hair, Guido Palau; makeup, Pat McGrath. Details, see In This Issue.

Photographer: Steven Meisel.
Fashion Editor: IB Kamara.

FASHION EDITOR: TOM GUINNESS. GROOMING, CHI WONG. PRODUCED BY PARTNER FILMS. SET DESIGN: MAX BELLHOUSE. DETAILS, SEE IN THIS ISSUE.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Letter From the Editor

The New Headliners

A WAVE OF CHANGE IS moving through fashion. It seems like every week there's another announcement, another shift in the landscape. Change can feel like this: a grand reordering, the past reverberating powerfully into the present. It's hard to pin down the beginning, but John Galliano's seismic, phantasmagoric couture show for Maison Margiela last winter comes to mind. The excitement for what he accomplished on that January evening in Paris speaks to just how much pent-up desire there has been for an established designer doing exactly what he wants (and Galliano's subsequent departure from Margiela suggests independence is still very much on his mind).

Another beloved designer, Alessandro Michele, arrived as creative director at Valentino a year ago, and the anticipation around his first ready-to-wear collection was overwhelming—and he will show again this month in Paris. Our profile of him in this issue details his first year at Valentino—and, no surprise, it finds him studying and taking inspiration from the past, history-obsessed as he is. Michele describes his new work as a kind of living-possession by Valentino Garavani: "This is him, *with* me," Michele says of an intricately built dress from his spring 2025 collection. (In fact, the new work is profoundly Michele's vision. But I love the way he puts it.)

We also checked in with two more designers this month, Sarah Burton and Haider Ackermann, who have moved to storied houses, Givenchy and Tom Ford, respectively. In Paris, we found Burton with Hubert de Givenchy's look books from 1952 spread out in front of her, inspiring her to focus on craftsmanship, on simplicity and beauty. Ackermann told us he'd spent time with the Tom Ford archives in New York—absorbing his sexy, seductive designs from the 1990s and '00s, and had come away with big ideas of his own.

What do all these shifts mean? A dose of drama, which is the fuel that fashion coverage runs on. But these designers with their new jobs also remind us of something ineffable: that experience and history matter. That steady hands can mark new beginnings. How exciting to have familiar faces commanding our attention. We'll have to wait a few more months to see what Matthieu Blazy is up to at Chanel, where he will arrive soon. In the meantime I am sure there will be more moves—more earthquakes—to come.

HIGH EXPECTATIONS
ESTABLISHED DESIGNERS WITH NEW JOBS (CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT): ALESSANDRO MICHELE, PHOTOGRAPHED BY FRANÇOIS HALARD, *VOGUE*, 2023; HAIDER ACKERMANN AND SARAH BURTON, BOTH PHOTOGRAPHED BY ANNIE LEIBOVITZ.

ACKERMANN: FASHION EDITOR: TABITHA SIMMONS. HAIR: TATSU YAMANAKA; MAKEUP: LIZ TAW. ACKERMANN AND BURTON: AL STUDIO AND FARAGO PROJECTS. DETAILS, SEE IN THIS ISSUE.


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High Drama

For "Heat Wave" (page 214), writer Kate Lloyd met Paul Mescal in London, where Rebecca Frecknall's searing production of *A Streetcar Named Desire*—starring Mescal as the brooding and brutish Stanley Kowalski—played at the Almeida and the Phoenix Theatre before landing, this February, at the Brooklyn Academy of Music in New York. For the arresting accompanying images of the 29-year-old Irishman (ABOVE) and his costars, Patsy Ferran and Anjana Vasan, photographer Andrew Jacobs worked with the stylist Harry Lambert. "I went into the shoot focusing on keeping him in character for the portraits," Jacobs says of Mescal. "He came straight from rehearsal, so it was easy for him to portray the strong mood we'd hoped for."

Great Beauty

"It was such an honor to shoot Alessandro's beautiful Valentino collection—especially in the museum where he played when he was a child." So says *Vogue* contributing fashion editor Tabitha Simmons (AT FAR RIGHT), who joined up with photographer Annie Leibovitz (SECOND FROM RIGHT, alongside models Jiahui Zhang and Colin Jones) to capture a few of the most splendid looks from Alessandro Michele's Valentino debut at the Museo Nazionale Etrusco di Villa Giulia in Rome, where Michele was born and raised. (See Rebecca Mead's story "Free to Rome," on page 194, for more.) "Even though it rained and rained all day long, we managed not to get *too* wet and soggy," Simmons adds.

Day at the Museum

In "Another World" (page 208), *Vogue* contributing editor Dodie Kazanjian profiles Lorna Simpson, whose large-scale paintings—a relatively recent addition to her decades-spanning practice, long rooted in conceptual photography and multimedia work—are the subject of an exciting new exhibition at The Metropolitan Museum of Art this spring. ("Lorna Simpson: Source Notes" opens on May 19.) It seemed fitting, then, that The Met's august American Wing should provide the backdrop for Simpson's portrait—and no less an authority than Tina Barney took the picture. For *Vogue* contributing fashion editor Max Ortega, the sitting represented a powerful meeting of two great creative minds. "I just felt immensely privileged, working with these two icons at The Met," he says. "It really felt like one of those 'only at *Vogue*' moments. Tina wanted Lorna to feel like they were collaborating, and in turn, Lorna was very trusting of Tina's instincts. It was very beautiful to see that."

MESCAL: PHOTOGRAPHED BY ANDREW JACOBS. FASHION EDITOR: HARRY LAMBERT. HAIR: MARI OHASHI; MAKEUP: NIAMH QUINN; GROOMING: VICTORIA BOND. PRODUCED BY HOLMES PRODUCTION. SET DESIGN: SAMUEL PIDGEN. LEIBOVITZ: KATHRYN MACLEOD. SIMPSON: MINTY MELLON. DETAILS, SEE IN THIS ISSUE.


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Twisted Up

From the outside, Amy Griffin's life appeared picture-perfect. But she knew, deep down, that all was not right. In this excerpt from her memoir, *The Tell,* the initial signs of a childhood trauma begin to appear.

Life was busier than ever as a parent of four small children living in Manhattan. But that was good, wasn't it? Even the governor of Texas when I was growing up, Ann Richards, who had a quick tongue and a beehive hairdo, said so: "If we rest, we rust," she'd famously quipped. It was advice I'd taken to heart.

For the better part of a decade, I was nursing a baby, carrying one toddler, and trying to ready another for admission to a preschool that would, as it had been explained to me by other moms on the playground, determine their fate. I dragged strollers out of the backs of taxis, sat in ballet classes, and juggled nap-time schedules. I sourced Halloween costumes, elaborate Easter baskets, and thoughtful Christmas gifts. Anytime there was an opportunity to demonstrate my commitment to being an exceptional mom, I wanted to be the best at it: There was no end to committees and benefits and end-of-school picnics, birthday parties requiring elaborate cupcakes, and athletic events in need of juice boxes. I was fortunate that we could afford childcare, but with no family in New York to help me, I felt that the health and happiness of my family rested solely on my shoulders. I wanted people to see me as a good mother by the way my children behaved and appeared; after all, they were a reflection of me. It did feel, at times, that I was doing >100

THE HUSTLE
"IT WAS LIKE MY BODY KNEW SOMETHING THAT I DIDN'T," GRIFFIN WRITES. "IT KEPT TELLING ME TO SLOW DOWN."

TIED-UP NARCISSUS, 2019, OIL ON CANVAS. SHANNON CARTIER LUCY.

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LONGINES

more things *for* my children than *with* my children—things that had no bearing on my relationship to them, that they would never know I'd done—but such were the rarefied problems of a New York City mom. And for the most part, from the outside, it looked glamorous: I loved bringing my family from Texas to New York so I could share this fast, exciting life I'd built with them. It felt like another achievement, to run them through my New York City paces, and I wanted to be seen for it.

Yet as life marched on, I felt my anxieties begin to calcify. I had always been tightly wound, but I found that, increasingly, my nerves could be triggered unexpectedly. My husband, John, was patient and understanding, and yet the source of my panic often seemed to bewilder both of us. I had long been claustrophobic; ahead of a long flight, I would seize with dread anticipating the lack of control I'd feel flying through the air in a confined space. John would hold my hand, gauging my stress level by how sweaty my palm was. I reasoned that it was probably because my mother's brother had died in a plane crash when he was 21, but the fear was paralyzing.

RACING FORWARD
THE AUTHOR, IN 1986, AT HOME IN TEXAS, AND IN NEW YORK CITY IN 2020.

At a routine dentist appointment, I tried to tell the dentist that I was in pain while he was filling a tooth, but he wouldn't stop. Instead, he pressed the palm of his hand down on my left shoulder. "You need to be still," he said. "I'm almost finished." I obeyed, tightening my hands into fists and willing myself to stay still as tears ran down my cheeks. The second he set down the drill, I ripped off the paper bib and bolted from the room and past the front desk, sobbing. The receptionist stared at me, jaw agape, unable to understand why I was so distraught. Out on the street, I couldn't catch my breath. I hunched over, gasping, with my hands on my knees.

Once, John found me stretching on a yoga mat at home. "I like what I see here," he said playfully. "You in those tight pants."

"Oh, you're funny," I said.

"What if I took this," he said, picking up a yoga strap, "and kept you here in this room with me?" He reached for my hands and fastened the strap around them. He was being playful, but I felt my body tense. As he began to pull the strap tighter, I felt the sudden, urgent need to escape. I pulled my wrists from the strap. "Stop," I said. "I don't like it." I could feel that I was in fight-or-flight, but I didn't want to embarrass him. I left him standing in the room alone, still holding the strap, looking confused.

He came to find me a few minutes later. "Are you okay?" he asked. "Do you want to talk about what happened?"

"It's fine," I said. "I'm not sure what that was."

"I want to make sure I didn't do something wrong," he said. "I would never want to make you uncomfortable."

"No, you didn't do anything wrong," I said. "I just had to get out. But I'm not sure why." We dropped the subject.

It was like my body knew something that I didn't. Over the years, I had thrown out my back many times; whenever it happened, I couldn't identify the source of the pain, only that it seemed to occur in times of particular stress. When my daughter Grace was an infant, my back went out while I was walking down the hallway. I collapsed, landing on my stomach, somehow managing to catch her in my arms as I fell to the floor. I would need surgery, but the thought of being put under anesthesia terrified me—a particularly unlucky phobia, given the toll that all the running I'd done in my life had taken on my body. Eventually, I had to have a piece of disc removed from my lower back, a place where I'd had chronic pain on the left-hand side. Years later, I had my right labrum reattached to my hip; seven weeks later, the same thing on the left. All in all, I was on crutches for over three months.

Sinus infections came and went for over a decade, but every time I went to the doctor, he assured me that every mom of young children was sick as frequently as I was. "Once they're all in kindergarten, you'll be home free," he said. It felt like he wasn't listening to me, but who was I to argue? He wrote me a prescription for yet another antibiotic and sent me on my way.

As the years ticked forward, my body kept telling me to slow down, but I just couldn't. I had two gears: fast and faster. I threw myself into physical activity, which had always been my escape, and spent months training for a triathlon. Swim, bike, run, repeat. In low moments I slapped felt bee stickers, like the ones my grandmother had always given me, on my helmet and shoes and bike; her memory kept me going. I would be at the YMCA pool at five thirty in the morning, then home in time to take the kids to school, leaving enough time to bike or run for an hour or two before officially starting the day. "What if you don't complete the race?" a friend asked. But the thought had never crossed my mind. Giving up was not an option.

With the triathlon, I had hoped to recapture the glory of my youth—all the volleyball matches I'd won, the tennis victories that had made my father so proud. But when I crossed the finish line into the arms of my children, surrounded by family and friends, I felt nothing. I waited for a wave of euphoria that never came. I woke up the next morning sunburned and dehydrated, aware only of an emptiness within me.

>104

YOUNG AMY GRIFFIN: COURTESY OF AMY GRIFFIN. PORTRAIT: PAMELA HANSON/TRUNK ARCHIVE.

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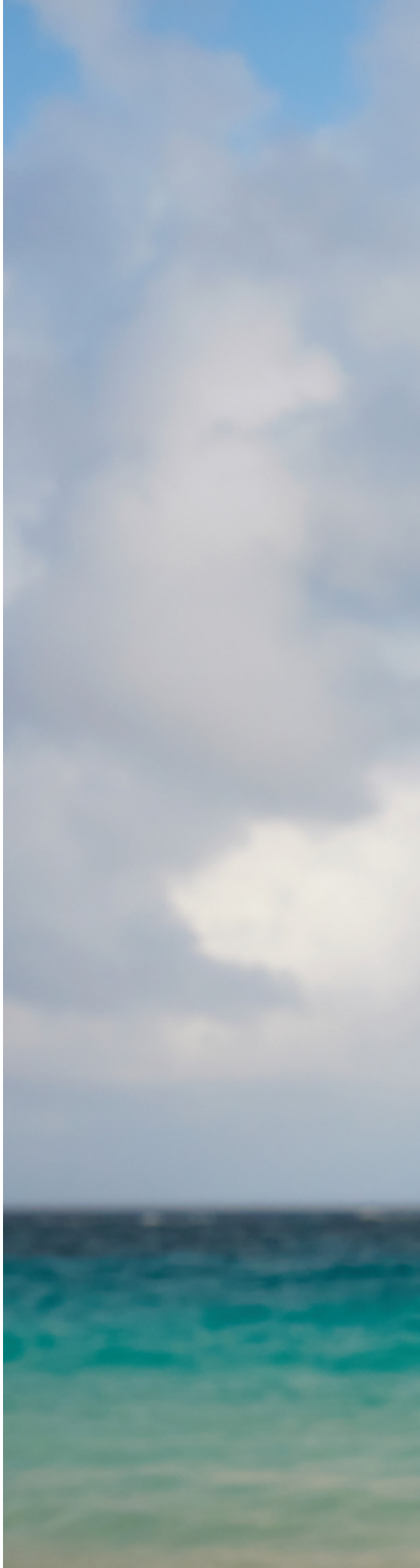


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I needed a new mountain to climb. I had been away from the workforce for nearly a decade, and now that my kids were all in school, I felt ready to go back to work. Over the years, I had been John's partner as he'd built his investment firm, watching from the sidelines but taking notes and honing my own instincts; now I wanted my own foothold. I started small, making personal investments in founders of early-stage businesses, most of them female. Soon my days were filled with conference calls and board meetings; within a few years, I started my own firm. I made sure my team knew that they could reach me anytime, day or night. I had always been sensitive about gender inequality: I remembered my conviction that I'd be a better class president than my grade school classmate Bradley but also my certainty that he'd win only because he was a boy. Supporting female founders was a tangible way to empower women as they built businesses. Yet more than that, the time spent focusing on others allowed me to avoid looking at myself. With my kids growing up, it was nice to feel needed anew.

Yet at home, I was occasionally thrown by my own reactions to my children's behavior. I had never tested my parents' boundaries the way my kids seemed determined to test mine. One night, my teenage son Jack brought home a girlfriend to our apartment, disappearing into his bedroom and closing the door. This would have been a cardinal sin in my childhood home. I stormed down the hall and flung his door open.

"Mom," Jack asked incredulously, looking up from the floor, where he and his girlfriend were crouched over his computer, watching a movie, "what are you doing?" He had grown into a charismatic, confident young man, rational like his father. I must have seemed unhinged to him in that moment, but I couldn't explain why I felt like his being behind a closed door had seemed like an emergency.

Later that week, when I was having dinner with a therapist friend, I admitted that I had done this to my son. "You have to stop doing that," she said. "Where do you want him to be intimate with girls—the park? You're modeling shame." I thought back to how my father had talked to me about sex: "Your mother was a virgin when I married her, and I expect you to be the same." There had been no further discussion.

That's just the way it was in West Texas. Even though I had become much more progressive since moving to New York City, some vestige of those conservative Southern values ran deep. One night, when I saw my daughter Gracie bolting stealthily for the front door, I called her back so I could once-over her outfit. She was wearing ripped jeans, which back home would have been considered disrespectful or provocative. "Grace—" I started.

"I know you weren't allowed to wear them growing up, but it's not the '80s anymore!" she protested. "It's not a big deal."

"Can you please just wear something else?" I asked. Gracie's friends, gathered at the front door, looking at the ground, pretended not to listen. But I knew they must have whispered about my ridiculous rules as soon as they got in the elevator.

One night, Gracie came to my bedroom. "Mom, have you talked to Gigi tonight?" she asked. "She seems a little sad."

"About what?" I asked.

"I don't know," she said. "It has something to do with you."

At 10, Gigi was already verbally dexterous and loved to question authority; I suspected she'd grow up to be a lawyer. I went into her room and asked if everything was okay. Her demeanor was solemn as she collected herself, sitting on the edge of the bed with her older sister next to her. I suddenly felt as if I were on trial.

"Mom," Gigi said, "I don't know how to say this, but I feel like I don't know you."

"Know me?" I said. "What do you mean?"

"I don't know," Gigi said. "I feel so disconnected from you."

"Really?" I said. "After all that I do for you? My life revolves around trying to keep you safe and taking care of you."

"Mom, she's trying to tell you something," Gracie interjected. She was 13 and reminded me of myself at that age: serious, driven, and focused. "We know you do everything for us."

"But we don't feel like we know who you are," Gigi said. "You're nice, but you're not real. Do you have any idea how hard it is to have you as a mother? You do everything perfectly. You make everything look so easy. How are we supposed to relate to you?"

"Perfect is not my goal," I said. "I don't know what perfect even means." Yet I knew this wasn't true. Perfect had always been my expectation for myself. But hearing my daughter say it aloud bothered me, the way it always had when strangers told me I had the perfect life. I had indeed been raised to be perfect, but also not to draw attention to the quest for perfection. Perfection must look effortless. Had I passed that on to my daughters? The thought disturbed me.

"I'm just trying to be there for you," I said.

"You're here, but you're not here," Gigi cried. "Where are you, Mom?"

> "You're here, but you're not here," my daughter cried. "Where are you, Mom?"

What could I say? My daughters were asking me to participate in life, and in our relationship, in a way that I could not. There was a distance between us, and I was angry that I did not know how to bridge it.

I left the room, slamming the door behind me. In our bedroom, John was reading the newspaper in his sweats and a T-shirt. "What just happened?" he asked.

"I don't know," I said. "Gigi accused me of not being present. But everything I do I do for them. How can she not see that? I don't know what to do differently."

John took a long pause. "I know this is hard, but you're the adult. She's the child. I think you're the one who's going to have to do the work."

I threw my hands up and stomped into the bathroom. I didn't know what that meant. People often talked about this—"the work"—in a vague, wellness-minded way, usually without being specific about what it entailed. Therapy? I'd tried therapy. I wasn't sure what else to do. Now my own children were trying to hold a mirror up to me, but I could not bring myself to look.

So I kept running. I ran and I worked and I raised my children and ensured that I was too busy to feel much of anything. But sometimes, when I dove back into the swimming pool early in the morning to wear myself out in the chlorinated depths, I would scream at the top of my lungs, down at the very bottom of the pool, where I knew nobody could hear me. □

Adapted from *The Tell* by Amy Griffin, published in March by The Dial Press, an imprint of Random House, a division of Penguin Random House LLC.


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HAVING THEIR SAY

A trio of independent designers—each of whom has launched their brand since the pandemic—talk with Nicole Phelps about their processes, their challenges, and their triumphs.

The 2024 fashion year was bookended by Sarah Burton's swan song at Alexander McQueen and Louise Trotter landing the creative director job at Bottega Veneta. In between, the state of women in the fashion industry—specifically, how few of them there are in top design roles—became the talk of the internet. Burton was replaced by Seán McGirr at McQueen and Trotter followed Matthieu Blazy at Bottega—men who, a popular meme pointed out, bear a striking resemblance to each other and to at least a handful of other on-the-rise white male designers. Another guy getting another great job: The throw-up-your-hands inevitability of it all could be one of the reasons, alongside price resistance, why women with money to spend are trading high-fashion purchases for wellness experiences and exotic travel. Personally, though, I find more satisfaction in seeking out and shopping smaller independent women-owned brands—and as a writer and editor, I find that these stories are the ones I take the most joy in telling.

There's certainly no shortage of female talent in the industry, as young and not-so-young women designers have been establishing brands that are resonating far beyond their small footprints. Take, for example, Rachel Scott of Diotima, who made the giant leap from the Council of Fashion Designers of America's Emerging Designer of the Year in 2023 to its Womenswear Designer of the Year a year later—and whose crochet tops, handmade by women artisans in her native Jamaica, have become synonymous with in-the-know chic. (It helps when Angel Reese, WNBA phenom and *Vogue* cover >112

INDIE DARLINGS

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Julie Kegels, Rachel Scott, and Colleen Allen are each forging their own way at what seems like a turning point for fashion.

KEGELS: COURTESY OF JULIE KEGELS/PHOTO BY TOM DÉLAISSÉ
SCOTT: DEIRDRE LEWIS. ALLEN: © ALDO BUSCALFERRI - MATTO STUDIO, PARIS.


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star, wears your dress on the red carpet.) Or take Scott's Brooklyn neighbor Colleen Allen, who left The Row, where she helped get menswear off the ground, to create a collection of feminine suiting—much of it is made with colorful Polartec fleece—brimming with mystique. (Charli XCX has taken a particular liking to Allen's work, wearing it onstage for her Sweat tour.) Or the Belgian Julie Kegels, who charmed Paris at her second-ever show last September with surf-inspired, city-ready pieces infused with a sly wit.

Not long after Trotter landed that coveted Bottega gig, we gathered these three women together—each of them independent designers who have launched brands since the pandemic—for an honest discussion about the challenges of operating in what can still feel like a man's world. When, a decade ago, I wrote about the lack of female design stars in New York, the crux of the issue was that women founder-designers had it harder for all the reasons that women do in most fields: the pressures of balancing full-time work and full-time motherhood, along with the predisposition, on the part of the media and marketers, toward presumably less-encumbered men. It's a phenomenon as old as the industry, as the Costume Institute's recent exhibition "Women Dressing Women," which surveyed the work of women designers from the turn of the 20th century to today, made efforts to redress. (At the very least, the show dispelled any lingering beliefs that women designers are strictly problem-solvers—and that only male designers can make creations worthy of the spotlight.) As it turns out, what comes around goes around (and around).

"There are so many incredible women designers that are just not considered or never get to that point," says Scott of the competition for today's top creative director gigs. That this is much to the industry's detriment was reinforced by the collective thrill the long-awaited launch of Phoebe Philo's eponymous brand produced—to say nothing of all the Bombé sunglasses, Gig bags, and expertly cut trousers from her collections that we've been seeing at the shows.

POP LIKE THIS

South African singer Tyla (see page 218) in one of Rachel Scott's intricately crocheted Diotima dresses. Photographed by Justin French.

It took nearly six years for Philo to reemerge after exiting Celine. If going solo is risky, launching your own label as an unknown requires an even bigger leap of faith—along with either a willing suspension of disbelief or an amazing amount of true grit. Maybe both. Scott, who launched her label in 2021, is still the only full-time employee at her brand.

"I say this a lot," she says, "but I started my career in Italy, and I don't think I would have been able to open a brand as a Black woman immigrant if I had still lived in Milan." (Scott studied at the Istituto Marangoni and worked at Costume National.) "That was only possible in New York—in America—where there's more openness." Allen, though her clothes have been picked up by Ssense and Moda Operandi, still consults as a designer for a New York men's streetwear label in order to support her brand and herself. "It's a great relief to be able to do that," she says, "because it takes away a lot of the pressure, and I can work from a place of creativity rather than sort of a place of anxiety," she says. Allen's creativity is sparked by female Surrealist painters including Dorothea Tanning, Remedios Varo, and Leonora Carrington—in fact, her debut collection, for fall 2024, was inspired by a tarot deck Carrington created in the 1950s. (You can make connections between Allen's ruby red Victorian polar fleece jacket with hook and eye closures and the artist's high priestess card.)

Anxiety comes with the job of an emerging designer, of course. The three women all agree that the biggest hurdle they face is cash flow. "To be able to work with the levels of raw materials and fabrics and to work with factories that are at a level of quality—as a young brand—is a big investment," says Allen. So much of being independent is working with limitations. "Any profits go back into building the business," adds Scott, who is hoping that 2025 is the year her brand finally becomes profitable. Juggling creativity with commercial pressures, especially at a time in which traditional retail and e-tail models are faltering, makes for tough going—until that magic moment when you notice someone out and about in your clothes.

Kegels—whose work is sold at H. Lorenzo in LA and Modern Appealing Clothing in San Francisco, in addition to Nordstrom stores, lights up as she recalls the first time it happened: "It's quite amazing to see how they communicate their world and their personality.… It's like you created this piece, but it becomes something else." Even better is communicating with these women one-on-one. "Who we dreamed our customer would be actually is who they are: incredible gallery owners, filmmakers, artists, businesswomen," Scott says. "I met a plastic surgeon from Switzerland the other day who got my number and now she's texting me, like, 'I want that skirt.'"

What else keeps them forging ahead? Just how big their goals are. The Chanel-ish verve of Kegels's spring 2025 skirt suit is entirely intentional—Coco Chanel has been an icon of hers since she was a young girl. "I still love her history, her authenticity; how she could empower women by making silhouettes," she says. Allen learned on the job from Ashley and Mary-Kate Olsen at The Row, who have always been resolute about doing things their own way. "Seeing them as women CEOs who started their own brand and worked almost outside of the traditional industry trajectory was such a big inspiration," she says. "I hope there's sort of a generational shift as the world evolves and that, if we just keep making the work, people will see it."

Scott says she can imagine taking a corporate job one day. "I have dreams of brands—maybe ones that don't exist [yet]—that I would love for a conglomerate to buy up and then call me to run." Large design teams and big budgets of the kind Trotter is inheriting at Bottega, for example, are no doubt tempting. Scott also claims Miuccia Prada and the late Vivienne Westwood as role models: Prada because she was nearing 40, about the age Scott is now, when she designed her first womenswear collection, and because she has made such a globe-spanning success of the business since ("longevity is the dream," she says); and Westwood for her radical politics and outspokenness. "People might not recognize that it's there, but my whole project is to subvert the idea of value. I'm saying [that] craft is the true meaning of luxury—not place or, let's say, pedigree." Success, Scott adds, would be "adding something in a meaningful way that didn't exist before to the industry." □

PHOTOGRAPHED FOR *VOGUE*, APRIL 2024.

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MOROCCO AS MUSE

CLOCKWISE FROM FAR LEFT: An evening ensemble from 1969; Saint Laurent at work in his bedroom in Marrakech, 1980; Saint Laurent's Masquerade evening dress for Christian Dior, 1958; jacket, 1966; the designer's Villa Oasis home.

AN EYE ON YVES

Hamish Bowles spent decades collecting the groundbreaking work of Yves Saint Laurent. Now, he writes, it's going on exhibit in the late designer's Marrakech museum.

In July of 1984, as a tender 20-year-old correspondent for Australian *Harper's Bazaar*, I was summoned to attend Yves Saint Laurent's haute couture show. The great designer, it should be said, was rather befuddled by this time: While it wasn't so much his age (he was only 47—younger, after all, than I am now), he simply seemed lost in his own world. However, he was still razor-sharp when it came to his work—and in any case Pierre Bergé, Yves Saint Laurent's onetime romantic partner and the company's defender of the gate, snarled at anyone who got in his way, and made sure the show ran like clockwork.

The fall show had come at the end of the week dedicated to the Parisian haute couture houses—Karl Lagerfeld, then newly arrived at Chanel, was making a splash; there were also Emanuel Ungaro, Madame Grès, Hubert de Givenchy, and on it went. Yves's show, however, was eclipsing, his clothes perfection—of cut and drape and color and form—as they drifted very slowly through the grand 1880s ballroom of the Hotel Intercontinental.

Some 40 years later, I was asked by the esteemed garden designer Madison Cox, who, after the passing of both Yves, in 2008, and Pierre, in 2017, inherited >127

EVENING ENSEMBLE: PHOTOGRAPHED BY PERNILLE LOOF AND THOMAS LOOF. SAINT LAURENT AND VILLA: PHOTOGRAPHED BY HORST P. HORST. *VOGUE*, AUGUST 1980. MASQUERADE DRESS AND JACKET: PHOTOGRAPHED BY PERNILLE LOOF AND THOMAS LOOF.


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their mantel—Madison is president of the Fondation Pierre Bergé–Yves Saint Laurent, which oversees the extraordinary Jacques Majorelle house, Villa Oasis, and its surrounding gardens in Marrakech—if I might show my own collection of Yves's work at the Yves Saint Laurent Museum there. (After Yves died, Pierre and Madison were longtime partners and eventually married.) Stunningly designed by Karl Fournier and Olivier Marty of Studio KO, the museum, along with the foundation, has changed the look and feel of Marrakech since its opening in 2017. This would be the first time that someone other than Yves would have their collection shown at the museum and, naturally, I was both thrilled and intimidated by the concept.

After Yves and Pierre discovered Marrakech in 1966, Yves's whole world changed: The color and energy of that magical place informed his palette, and his clothes became richer as a result. For me, too, Morocco has always been an otherworldly place, with the people I meet there—English, French, and, above all, Moroccan—mixing things up in a glorious way to create something new.

While the collection that Yves put together for the museum, largely in the final stages of his career, is exquisite—and includes almost all the spectacular end-of-show pieces from those later collections—mine is more understated and concerns his fashioning of his customer. And while Yves is justifiably renowned for summoning wonders, his lower-key pieces are also remarkable, and his relevance and influence on the world of the fashionably dressed are undeniable.

My own collection, assembled over 50 years, begins with his earliest designs for Christian Dior. (While Dior had been dazzled by the young Yves and acknowledged that he would one day, in the very distant future, inherit his crown, Dior's sudden death at the age of 52 in 1957 handed the baton to Saint Laurent, then barely 21—and the rest, as they say, is history.) I was compelled at first to buy whatever I could afford, deftly finding things that dealers had overlooked, but as the collection grew, so did my ambitions. (I was, of course, acquiring the work of other designers too—Charles Frederick Worth, Poiret, Chanel, Mainbocher, Madame Grès, Balmain, Dior, Galliano, McQueen, and on and on, along with the exceptional work of lesser-known couturiers; I now have some 4,000 pieces.)

I found myself drawn to the clothes worn by the exceptionally stylish women who had ordered Saint Laurent: the so-called Shiny Set ladies such as Nan Kempner, Lynn Wyatt, Lily Safra, and Gabriele Henkel; publishing doyenne Eunice Johnson; stars like Carol Channing; the art dealer Lady Jane Abdy; Lady Agota Sekers, the wife of a Hungarian textile baron; and the stylish Françoise Picoli, who worked for Saint Laurent designing shoes. Generally, these women—striking-looking themselves—wanted clothes that would accentuate their good looks rather than eclipse them. Abdy chose a fall 1959 Saint Laurent for Dior short evening dress of black faille astonishingly trimmed with knitted black wool; Channing, an audacious pinstripe mannish suit from Yves's 1967 couture collection (which I tracked down at a celebrity auction house in LA, far from the vintage-couture hunters). Kempner chose Yves's most chic and quietly impactful pieces, such as the 1987 black crepe dinner dress with a fichu collar of red satin I found at the annual Posh charity sale in Manhattan. Picoli, meanwhile, selected a garnet velvet evening dress and shell-brocaded vest à la Schiaparelli from the fall 1978 runway as a rare treat.

GARDEN LEAVE

FROM TOP: Betty Catroux (in a Rive Gauche jumpsuit featured in the exhibition) and Lynn Wyatt at the 1976 Yves Saint Laurent couture show; Hamish Bowles amid the Jardin Majorelle.

Other wonderful things I came by, sadly, without knowing who had worn them: A miraculous smorgasbord of dresses and suits I found at Christie's included a 1966 skirt of glorious Brossin de Méré patchwork, a Chanel-inspired 1981 white embroidered evening dress and black spangled-lace jacket, and a black embroidered dress from the Russian Moroccan collection of 1976. On and on and on they went. (The Yves Saint Laurent defenders of the flame refused to give me the client's name, which they had, of course, gleaned—all couture clothes are numbered—as her family did not want it revealed, but they can rest assured: Her astonishing taste will be abundantly present in the show.)

When it was time to put my thoughts into practice, I leaned on the considerable help of the brilliant Patrick Kinmonth and his associate Raphaé Memon, who created some mesmerizing mise-en-scènes on their computer screens. The show begins with Christian Dior, followed by the Yves Saint Laurent couture years, and, finally, the Rive Gauche—though I've placed the first Yves dress that I ever bought at the start of the show, before one walks into the Dior salon, to set the scene: From his 1969 fall collection, it is a masterwork of textile designer Madame Brossin—a patchwork of flame reds worked into a cross-laced hippie dress. I got it at a charity shop for nothing, having spotted it in the window on my way to art school in London. Alas, I was late arriving to my class that Monday morning…but I now owned this sensational dress! □

"Yves Saint Laurent: The Hamish Bowles Collection" runs through next January 4 at the Yves Saint Laurent Museum in Marrakech.

1976 YVES SAINT LAURENT COUTURE SHOW: GUY MARINEAU/WWD/PENSKE MEDIA/GETTY IMAGES. BOWLES: PHOTOGRAPH BY GEORGINA GODLEY. COURTESY OF HAMISH BOWLES.

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OUT OF THE JUNGLE

A retrospective of Brazilian artist Beatriz Milhazes opens at New York's Guggenheim.

When I visited Rio de Janeiro recently, I spent an afternoon at the Botanical Garden—home to orchids and bromeliads, giant monsteras, and the grandest canopy of palms you'll ever see. It had just rained, and everything was slick and extra green, like a magical paradise. For decades the 65-year-old Brazilian artist Beatriz Milhazes has maintained a studio near the gardens. With this tropical flora as her backdrop, and with Brazil's complex past in mind, Milhazes builds up her canvases layer by layer. Embedded in her designs are flowers, fruits, and intricate patterns inspired by traditional textiles and 19th-century costumes. "I think that art, this practice—it's always kind of a mystery," Milhazes says.

This March, 15 of her spellbinding works go on view in one of the tower galleries at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York. Spanning 1995 to 2023, the exhibition, "Beatriz Milhazes: Rigor and Beauty," represents the artist's movement from ornamental arabesques to more geometric abstraction. Throughout, "color remains of the essence: vibrant, bold, her own chromatic universes," says Guggenheim curator Geaninne Gutiérrez-Guimarães, who organized the show. Perhaps no other artist has better succeeded at capturing Rio's exuberant blend of maximalism and grit.

Milhazes was born to an art historian mother and a lawyer father. Originally she studied journalism, but later, at her mother's suggestion, tried art school. "I felt completely that's where I was to stay," Milhazes remembers. Her heroes were the European modernists like Matisse and Mondrian, along with the North Star of Brazilian modernism, Tarsila do Amaral. She filters all of these influences through the lens of abstraction. "And then," says Gutiérrez-Guimarães, "you add her unique technique."

A few years out of art school, Milhazes started painting with acrylics on sheets of plastic; once the paint dries, she adheres it to her canvas. Finally, she peels away the plastic, leaving a reverse of the painted image. "This was an enormous opening for me," Milhazes says. With this method, she has more control over the shape and placement of her motifs; the works are still painterly, but at a remove. Detail from a brush—a string of pearl-like dots, say—might be later applied, but the artist's hand is elided by design.

Not long after this breakthrough in technique, Milhazes was exhibited at the influential Carnegie International in 1995. From there her global career took off, with appearances at the São Paulo Biennial (1998 and 2004) and the Venice Biennale (2003 and 2024). She has branched out to other art forms as well: sculptures and stage sets for her sister Marcia Milhazes's dance company.

"When she started as an artist in the early '90s, traditional craftwork, like tapestries, weaving, they were considered women's work, especially in Brazil, where everyone was looking to European modernism," says Jessie Washburne-Harris of Pace, the gallery that has represented Milhazes since 2020. "Now, of course, craft has been embraced by the art world, and I love that that's always been a part of what she does." Steadfast and enchanting, like the city that made her.—**GRACE EDQUIST**

LAYER BY LAYER
Beatriz Milhazes, *Santa Cruz,* 1995.

ARIEL IONE WILLIAMS. © BEATRIZ MILHAZES.


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SKY'S THE LIMIT For Jana Craig, Addison Justis, and Allie Ross, there are no boundaries on what can be innovated or achieved. In their everyday lives, these creators shape trends and push boundaries to connect with audiences worldwide, bringing a sense of daydreaming confidence to any project. **(FROM LEFT)** Craig wears Revealer Concealer in shades 9.1 and 10.5; Justis wears Blush Is Life in Swoon; Ross wears DreamBeam in Sunlit.

Kosas

STAY BALANCED Happiness isn't found in the rush; it's in the stillness–just ask Erica and Evelyn Ha. While the sisters share their fast-paced lives on social media, their real secret to success is staying balanced through reflection and self-care. **(FROM LEFT)** Erica and Evelyn wear Cloud Set Loose Powder in Candy.

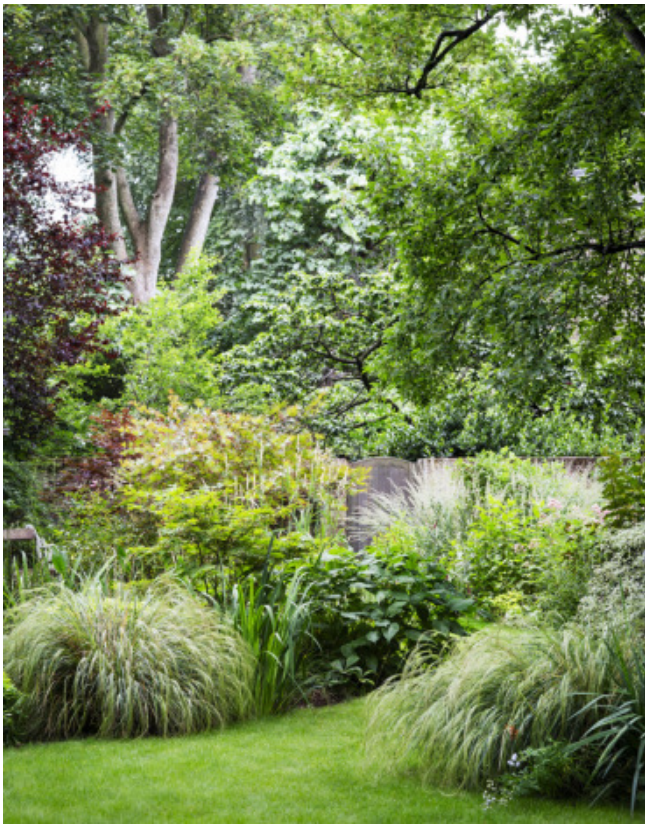
CARVING YOUR PATH
In beauty, brilliance comes from carving your own path, and Stephanie Valentine and Amaya Crichton are no strangers to taking the road less traveled. The duo is a testament to what happens when you find your niche and create something real and shine. **(FROM LEFT)** Valentine wears Wet Stick Lip in Baby Rose and Crichton wears Weightless Lip Color in Deep Talks.

Kosas

POWER OF COMMUNITY Beauty at its best brings people together. Take note of creators Abby Baffoe, Mikayla Nogueira, and Darcei Giles, who are shaping the future of beauty by sharing expertise and celebrating products that bring people together. **(FROM LEFT)** Giles wears Wet Lip Oil Gloss in Dip, Baffoe wears Blush Is Life in Swoon, and Nogueira wears Revealer Concealer in shade 3.6.

Shot at the 1 Hotel Hanalei Bay, creators are wearing clothing from Cult Gaia, Aritzia, Blackbough Swim, and talent's own. Makeup by Marlaine Reiner, Hair by Alexis De La Isla

Kosas



TRUE ROMANCE

Two lush new books look at the endless allure of the garden.

In design school, they teach you to identify the "Big Idea," writes the British landscape designer and award-winning gardener Jo Thompson in her just-published **The New Romantic Garden (Rizzoli).** But isn't the big idea of any garden one of transformation? A bare patch of earth, a scrubby urban yard, an empty pot. The possibility of what might be is always the initial thought—and so it was for Thompson, who planted her first retreat on the roof of her West London apartment with the "idea that this space would change the quality of life lived in cramped quarters below," as she recalls.

In the 30 years since she set out to turn that scrap of tarmac into a place her friends might visit and "get their fresh-air fix and nature's vitamin shot," Thompson has become an internationally esteemed gardener, and in *The New Romantic Garden* she lays out the philosophy underpinning it all, looking back at a selection of her favorite projects. "I've never been one for tightly manicured, controlled gardens," she tells me. "It feels an offense to nature somehow to try and wrestle a garden into a statement." Indeed, her latest book defines the idea of horticultural romance by its lack of rigidity or formality, presenting the garden as, most importantly, a place that is able to form "the backdrop for life's moments and…memories." >150

FULL BLOOM

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: A Roman bridge, dripping with wisteria, at Ninfa in Italy; a wall of inspiration from Ngoc Minh Ngo's *Roses in the Garden;* a London garden designed by Jo Thompson.

ROMAN BRIDGE AND INSPIRATION WALL: © 2025 NGOC MINH NGO. LONDON GARDEN: © 2025 RACHEL WARNE. *THE NEW ROMANTIC GARDEN:* COURTESY OF RIZZOLI.

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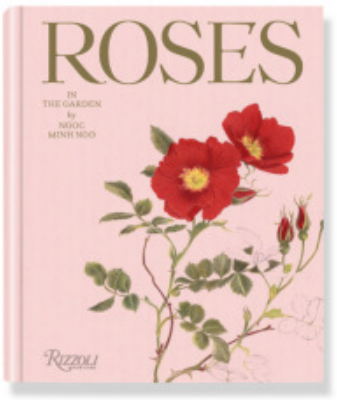
Memory and history are at the center of the photographer Ngoc Minh Ngo's **Roses in the Garden (Rizzoli)**, an effusive and elegant book with a genesis in loss. The author's father, a onetime colonel in the Vietnamese army who settled in California in the 1970s, was dying, and as Ngo sat with him in his final days, she also looked after the garden he had carefully cultivated since moving to America, hoping that he would be able to see his roses bloom one final time. Back in New York City, where Ngo lives, she volunteered at the Brooklyn Botanic Garden, where the rosarian would send her home with cuttings to photograph and meditate upon. From there a long-running obsession with the thorny flowers began to take shape: First conceived as an account of their cultural and historical significance—its references ranging from Sappho to Shakespeare to Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's Little Prince with his red flower—the book eventually became a study of famous gardens in which the rose plays a prominent role.



RAMBLE ON

BELOW: One of the gardens in Ngo's book is the Garden of Rose History at Sakura Kusabue-no-oka in Japan, where some 1,250 varieties are cultivated and allowed to blend into the landscape.

There is Ninfa in central Italy, the centuries-old garden, tended by the noble Caetani family, "poised between past and present, chaos and harmony," Ngo writes, where hundred-year-old plantings climb the stone walls of even older ruins, draping them in veils of green. Across an ocean and a continent, there is the Pacific Northwest farm Floret, where Erin Benzakein has dedicated herself to preserving Europe's heritage roses. At British landscape designer Dan Pearson's Bath retreat, Hillside, his touch is so light as to be barely discernible. There, he and his partner, Huw Morgan, cultivate 24 varieties of rose (selected for scent, color, resistance), some raised from seeds collected from sand dunes at the beaches where Morgan holidayed as a child. The many species, Ngo writes, "tell the story of Huw and Dan's enduring love in gentle whispers, like a secret code written into the landscape"—memory and romance, eternally entwined.—**CHLOE SCHAMA**

ROSES OF THE GARDEN: COURTESY OF RIZZOLI. GARDEN OF ROSE HISTORY: © 2025 NGOC MINH NGO.

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MOP TOPS

With its profusion of feathery layers, the shag is a distinct *look*, both retro and newly reinvented. By Kate Guadagnino.

Some know what works well for them, hair-wise, and stick sensibly to it. Then there are those who eschew trims and other subtleties so as to look—post-haircut—conspicuously different. This logic works well in New York City, the kind of place where people embrace the promise of transformation. I'm generally in the latter camp, cycling between long hair and a bob.

Before I found myself in Lizzy Weinberg's chair at HairThrone on the Lower East Side, however, I'd never had a proper shag, a cut that is characterized by a profusion of feathery layers and has lately reentered the zeitgeist. At Louis Vuitton's spring show, short locks around the crown sat atop shoulder-grazing curls. At Stella McCartney, the shags were shorter and more angled—almost diamond-shaped as they tapered to a near point at the back of the neck. Shaggy bangs cascaded down the sides of the face at Loewe and, at Miu Miu, swept across the forehead as if they'd been blown out of place by the wind. Models for Bottega Veneta, meanwhile, wore shag wigs made of strands of leather.

These shags, of course, owe a debt to those that came before. It was the 1971 thriller *Klute,* starring Jane Fonda—with ample fringe and face-framing pieces—that popularized the look. In this movie, Fonda's hair moves when she moves, catches the moody light, and lends her character, a sex worker embroiled in a missing person's case, some much-needed toughness. A bit of shag lore: The actor didn't actually get the cut for *Klute;* five months before filming, she had what she's called a hair epiphany and made her way to the East Village to see the longshoreman turned celebrity stylist Paul McGregor (who some say inspired the movie *Shampoo*). After that, the shag, at once meticulous and messy, became associated with '70s rockers such as Stevie Nicks and Mick Jagger, and there's been a more or less steady stream of revivers ever since, from Tina Turner to Meg Ryan to Julian Casablancas to Zendaya to Natasha Lyonne to Greta Lee. (My personal favorite will always be the troubled loner played by Ally Sheedy in *The Breakfast Club.*)

HEAD TO TOE

Modern shags owe a debt to those who have come before, and, sometimes, to underfoot inspiration. David Hockney, *Mr and Mrs Clark and Percy,* 1970–71.

I'd been feeling a bit '70s myself, having recently seen *Stereophonic,* David Adjmi's play partly based on the making of Fleetwood Mac's *Rumours.* And yet, I feared the shag was maybe one of those cuts better suited for people who have either perfect bone structure or deep reserves of cool and can therefore afford to take risks in other departments. When I told some friends about my plan, one called me brave and another said it was ideal that the hair appointment was my last engagement in New York. That way, I could retreat to St. Louis, where I'm currently teaching and where my social circle is rather small, to grow it out in relative isolation, like a scandalously pregnant 19th-century French heroine banished to the country to have her baby.

Weinberg assuaged my concerns. Not only was she clearly a pro, one who specializes in retro-inspired cuts, she steered me away from shaggy mullet (or shullet) territory, explaining that the shag can just as easily be a bombshell haircut—less Ziggy >158

VIEW OF WORK DURING A PHOTOCALL TO PROMOTE A RETROSPECTIVE OF HOCKNEY'S WORK AT THE TATE BRITAIN IN LONDON ON FEBRUARY 6, 2017. PHOTO BY DANIEL LEAL/AFP/GETTY IMAGES.

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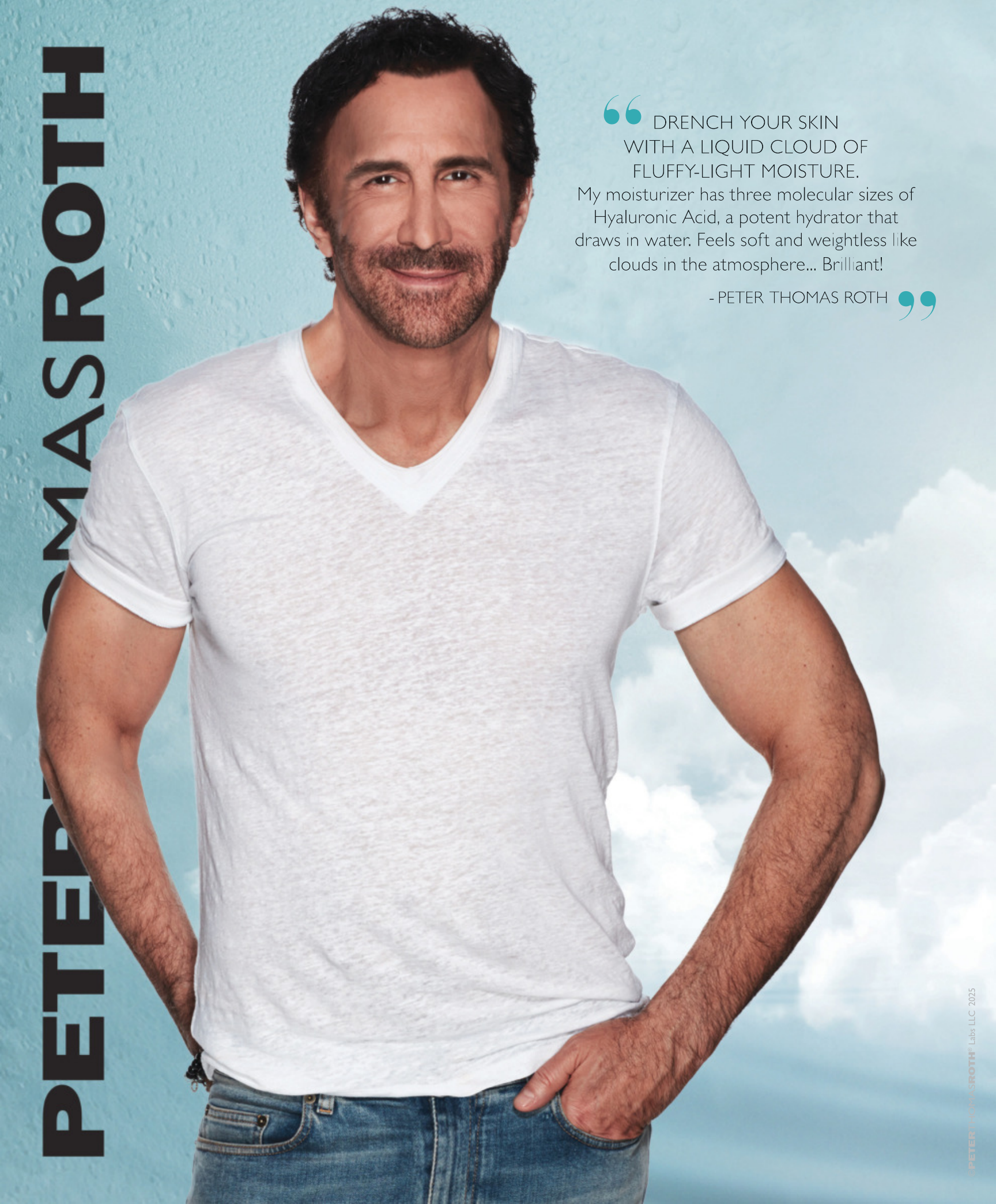
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Stardust and more Farrah Fawcett—if still a defiant one. Travis Speck, a senior stylist at the Manhattan salon Suite Caroline, agreed. "To me, shags are always a reflection of women still wanting to have something that feels attractive, but also kind of breaking away from what feels traditionally pretty," he said. If the '60s were about growing out your mother's bouffant, he added, the shag took that statement and "made it louder." The shag, then, would seem to offer a less polite path to bohemianism than the long- and wavy-haired Chloé girl we've seen so much of lately—and a timely one too. Speck has noted an uptick in requests for shags since the election, and while the revolution will probably not start at the salon, it's nice to remember that style is one small way to telegraph resistance.

Also comforting: In addition to being versatile, the shag turns out to be low-maintenance. I had visions of wrestling with a blow-dryer to try to make the layers flip in the same direction and the bangs land somewhere other than on my eyeballs, but Weinberg said all I'd really have to do in the way of styling was enhance the texture at the roots (I like Kérastase's dry shampoo) and add extra hydration (try Aveda's Nutri-Plenish treatment or Bumble and Bumble's hair oil) at the ends—the suggestion being that a person with a shag has better, more urgent things to do than their hair. I like to add a quick spritz of Dior's Oud Rosewood hair perfume for an extra dose of vintage vibes.

Had I not had a flight to catch, I would have gladly shown off my cut all around town, but I still had to face a crowd potentially more withering than my New York media–type friends: my Gen Z students, whom, I'd been advised, by someone who had learned the hard way, I should under no circumstances try to impress. Imagine my delight when one after-class lingerer complimented my look.

"Oh, really?" I said, self-consciously touching my bangs. "I'm still getting used to it."

It was very *me,* she said—"edgy-cool."

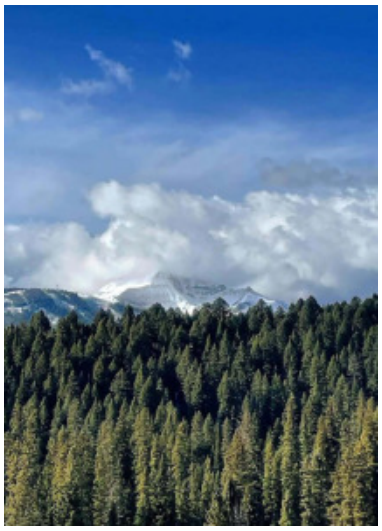
Maybe the haircut had tricked her, I thought, and I should trade my High Sports for leather pants to shore up the illusion. Or maybe I'd opened up a realm of authentic possibilities, and not all of them aesthetic. As Fonda wrote in her autobiography, "I knew right away that I could do life differently with this hair." □

ONCE UPON A TIME IN THE WEST

With new hotels and resorts, Big Sky, Montana, opens up.

After several straight months in New York City, I felt an urge great minds have described as the call of the wild, but I described as the urge to *get the hell out*—to a place with fresh air, no traffic, and landscapes that John Muir might have written about. So that's how I found myself flying into Bozeman, Montana, in a pair of Levi's and cowboy boots, and then driving 45 miles south to the region known as Big Sky. The area has an Indigenous history dating back thousands of years, and transcontinental railroads in the late 19th century brought homesteaders. They were slow to settle; according to 1940 census data, only 40 people lived in the area. However, in the early 1970s, Big Sky was suddenly on the map when NBC newscaster Chet Huntley opened a ski resort in the Madison Range and called it "Big Sky"—a play on the state's nickname. It soon came to describe the surrounding region.

For decades it remained a relatively under-the-radar destination: Aspen and Sun Valley attracted the lion's share of Hollywood stars and multimillionaires. Word of mouth began to spread after the opening of the private Yellowstone Club in 1997, and the rugged region is now fast becoming a popular getaway. The five-star Montage Big Sky arrived in 2021. This year, the One&Only Moonlight Basin will welcome its first guests.



FOREST BATHING
A cabin at Lone Mountain Ranch (TOP) and the view of Lone Peak.

"I think that Montana was a very well-kept secret for a very long time," says Randy Hall, a naturalist and guide at Lone Mountain Ranch, a former homestead turned 25-cabin dude ranch. The property was bought 10 years ago by new owners who transformed and updated it. A born-and-raised Montanan, Hall has witnessed the rapid changes firsthand; some good, some bad. Like in many mountain resort towns, affordable housing is now a problem. Yet he understands the appeal of this corner of southwest Montana, which borders Yellowstone National Park. "In Native American tradition it was considered the most beautiful place on earth," he says.

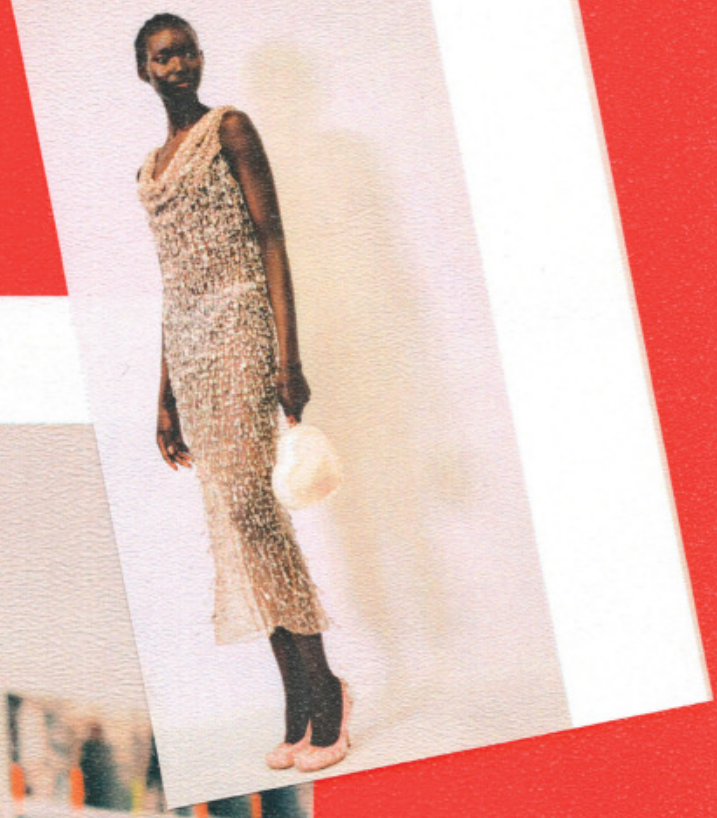
When I walked into the members-only restaurant at Lone Mountain Ranch on a Tuesday night, the hostess swiftly whisked away my phone—why fly all the way to Montana if you're going to spend the whole time sucked into a screen? A tug of a heavy curtain revealed a room full of cowboy noir: cowhide-print booths, black velvet barstools, oil paintings. Eric Cheong, the interior designer, says he was inspired by 1960s Westerns. "It has a cinematic feel," he says.

The next morning, I went for a hike—a scramble that left me out of breath, or perhaps it was the view: a glacial cirque, complete with an icy blue lake at its center. I sat there for an hour or so. My phone never left my backpack.

—ELISE TAYLOR

CABIN: COURTESY OF LONE MOUNTAIN RANCH. LONE PEAK: TAMMY CZAPP.

SHOP THE BEST OF THE SEASON



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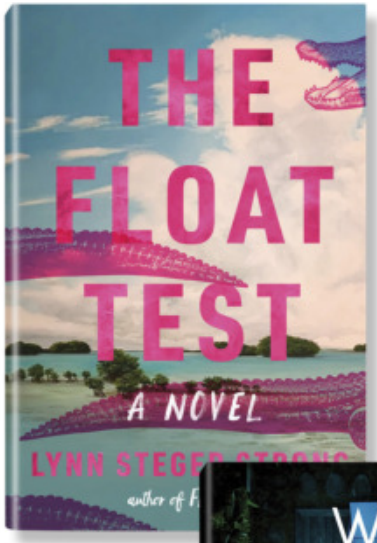
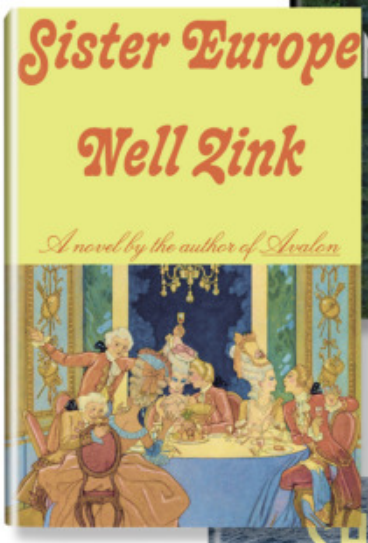
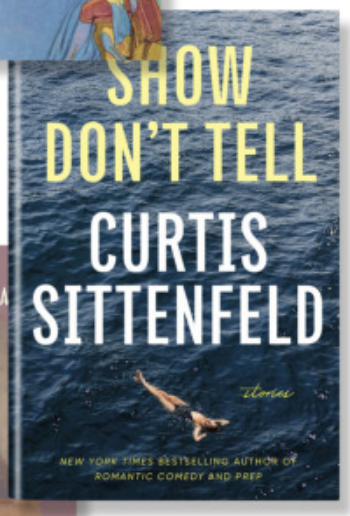
ALL IN THE FAMILY

New fiction looks at the ties that bind.







You can never go home again, as the saying has it, and yet nothing offers a richer literary backdrop than the site of one's upbringing. In Lynn Steger Strong's **The Float Test (Mariner)**, the narrator returns to Florida, where she was raised by busy parents who directed their attention toward their careers rather than their four spirited children. Now adults, those children have descended on their childhood home, toting weighty emotional baggage (as well as memories of nighttime drives with the sea and salt on their skin), to commemorate the death of their mother. They are all uncovering something in the process—a gun in their mother's closet is the Chekhovian catalyst for this emotional mystery. Strong's characters are deeply interior, but hers are not static, solipsistic books; they have an engrossing momentum, this one included.

Another family drama set in the Sunshine State plays out in Tova Mirvis's **We Would Never (Avid Reader)**, a literary thriller with a true-crime bent. The well-to-do Gelman clan lives a supremely comfortable, insulated life, presided over by the matriarch, whose breezy demeanor belies a commitment to family as strong as steel. The mysterious death of her son-in-law dramatically rends that illusion. A further complication: That son-in-law was in the middle of a bitter divorce from her daughter, making him enemy number one in the Gelman household. But the family would *never* be involved in anything nefarious, would they? Told with the kind of sociographic specificity that characterizes the writing of an author like Tom Perrotta, *We Would Never* is a gripping, engaging novel. —CHLOE SCHAMA

Nell Zink's sophisticated, rambunctiously comic novels have ranged ambitiously across time and space, from 1960s rural Virginia (*Mislaid*) to 1980s downtown New York (*Doxology*) to present-day Berlin—the setting of her new one, **Sister Europe (Knopf)**. A literary dinner hosted by an absentee royal is being held, and a loose gang of Berliners has been invited: a writer, Demian; his American publisher, Toto; and his glamorous friend Livia. In tow are Demian's trans teenage daughter and Toto's unlikely hookup, nicknamed the Flake. There's a hugely wealthy prince on hand, too, who makes a poorly received pass at Demian's daughter, but then the whole multigenerational gang spills out into late-night Berlin in search of adventure. Picaresque, amusing, and brisk, this is a worldly hangout novel of 21st-century manners.

Good as Curtis Sittenfeld's novels are (among them *Prep, American Wife, Romantic Comedy*), fans of hers had reason to think, upon the arrival of her first collection in 2018, that her short stories were even better. These were topical, witty, and subversively sexy stories about jealousy, desire, and domestic and professional turmoil. And now comes her new collection, **Show Don't Tell (Random House)**, an entertaining and formidably intelligent tour through the psyche of mostly middle-aged mothers (and a few fathers), moderately content and successful, and still yearning for more. Sittenfeld's prose has astonishing ease, and her fleet, brisk dialogue sparkles with humor and mischief, taking agile inspiration from the here and now (a story about a babysitter to early-stage tech titans, another about an artist who sets lunch dates with married men to test the so-called Mike Pence rule). The collection ends with a sweet and stirring sequel to *Prep,* featuring a return to her fictional boarding school for an alumni reunion—fan service of a kind, but also sheer delight.

The Anglo-Australian writer Evie Wyld has shown a talent for unnerving tales of intergenerational hauntings. Her fourth novel, **The Echoes (Knopf)**, shows her in good, ghostly form. We begin in a London flat where Hannah's boyfriend, Max, is a spectral presence, having died in veiled circumstances. In short chapters, Wyld skips us forward and backward in time, to Hannah's alarming Australian childhood and to the unraveling days of Hannah and Max's relationship (domestic squabbles, much drunkenness). The novel is pointillist and virtuosic, gradually revealing the secrets in Hannah's past and showing the way they reverberate, shudderingly, into the present.—TAYLOR ANTRIM

THE FLOAT TEST: COURTESY OF MARINER BOOKS. *WE WOULD NEVER:* COURTESY OF AVID READER PRESS/SIMON & SCHUSTER. *SISTER EUROPE:* COURTESY OF KNOPF. *SHOW DON'T TELL:* COURTESY OF RANDOM HOUSE. *THE ECHOES:* COURTESY OF KNOPF, PENGUIN RANDOM HOUSE.

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BALENCIAGA


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BALENCIAGA

Play

How does Sabrina Carpenter manage to be modern and nostalgic, girly and glam, sweetly romantic and totally

BED CHEM
Gucci dress and bracelet. Paris Texas heels. Tiffany & Co. earrings.
Fashion Editor: IB Kamara.

time

risqué all at the same time? Abby Aguirre meets an irresistible pop conundrum. Photographed by Steven Meisel.

To fully appreciate the global phenomenon that is Sabrina Carpenter, you have to go to one of her shows. You have to hear with your own ears a sold-out arena chanting the very sexual and ungrammatical lyrics of her nu-disco earworm "Espresso"—"Say you can't sleep, baby I know / that's that me espresso"—which has 1.8 billion streams on Spotify and is still omnipresent nearly a year after it came out. You have to see her fans, known as Carpenters, squeal when she performs her indie-pop anthem "Juno," especially when she gets to this line: "Wanna try out my fuzzy pink handcuffs?"

You need to behold the dress code at scale. Need to witness thousands of Carpenters decked out in "Brinacore," which tends to involve slinky dresses and miniskirts and short shorts and fishnet stockings and those stacked platform boots called Pleasers. There's a lot of baby blue, a lot of pale pink. Sequins and hearts are encouraged. So are kiss marks. Extra points if they've got one of Carpenter's temporary kiss-mark tattoos, available at the merch booth, stuck to a shoulder or thigh. The look is both exuberantly girly and unapologetically provocative—a cousin of the capital-R romantic trend known as coquettecore, but a lot cheekier.

Carpenter's fan base wasn't built in a day. The former Disney star, now 25, put out five albums between 2015 and 2022. But her sixth, *Short n' Sweet,* which debuted at No. 1 on the Billboard 200 chart in September and quickly went platinum, has struck a different cultural chord. It's a fluent romp through genres—disco, country, R&B, folk—fused with a droll writing style that seems perfectly calibrated for this moment. With the new album, Carpenter, formerly something of a teen-pop confection, also took an aesthetic turn. In her music videos and on tour, she's been embodying ultrafeminine archetypes, all of them a little retro yet glossed in high sheen.

I saw Carpenter perform in November, in San Diego, at the Pechanga Arena, where gaggles of Carpenters were taking selfies outside and art-directing group shots. I met Carpenter's rep near a fleet of tour buses covered in kisses, and he took me down to her dressing room to say hello before the show.

Pechanga is an aging venue, a big concrete circle built in 1966 that's known to generations of locals by its former name, the Sports Arena. Its heyday was the '70s, and it stands as a monument to the arena rock of that era—Led Zeppelin, David Bowie, Queen, Kiss. The backstage area, open and bare-bones, felt a little like a YMCA locker room. But Carpenter's dressing room was intimate and warm, with couches, a kitchenette stocked with snacks, and a candle burning on the coffee table. She greeted us at the door and then returned to a vanity mirror in the corner to finish doing her own makeup.

Carpenter is five feet tall—*Short n' Sweet* is partly a reference to her height—and even more doll-like in person than she is onscreen. Her hair had been transformed into a surge of blonde curls. (Curls so full and bouncy, they've sparked speculation that she wears a wig onstage.) Her cheeks were glowing with the inimitable rosy flush that launched a thousand makeup tutorials. From the neck down, though, Carpenter was still in civilian mode. She had on a Phillies T-shirt and sweatpants.

BLONDE AMBITION

Carpenter, a former Disney star, has recorded six albums—the latest being her platinum hit *Short n' Sweet.* Tiffany & Co. earrings.

BEAUTY NOTE

Soft focus, soft skin. Plant-derived squalane in Prada Beauty Reset Rebalancing Setting Powder infuses moisture into its matte finish.

CAN'T SLEEP
Carpenter's *Short n' Sweet* tour travels to the UK and Europe this spring. Burberry dress. Christian Louboutin heels. Swarovski earrings and necklace.

"*Short n' Sweet* is absolutely me," she said. "There's no, like, alter ego. But it's definitely a more emphasized version of me"

With Carpenter were three others: Sarah, her sister and creative partner; Sarah's boyfriend, George; and her close friend Paloma. They were holding and petting Carpenter's Cavapoo, Louie, and another little dog, Goodwin, a Maltese–Lhasa apso–Chihuahua–Yorkie she got as a birthday gift when she turned 13. Conversation turned to the fans outside. Carpenter said she'd just realized that her shows were now occasions to dress up, especially in cities that aren't New York or Los Angeles. Often, when she spots her fans before a concert, she is wearing the equivalent of gym clothes. "I dress like a little boy for most of the day, if I'm trying to hide," she said. "They don't even know it's me and I'll be standing right behind them."

The quality of being several things at once pervades Carpenter's music, and in her presence it seemed to multiply. The contrast between her outfit and her glammed-up countenance was heightened by her speaking voice, which is significantly lower than her singing voice. But the person speaking was very much the one I'd come to know through her songs: candid and blunt. "He's obsessed with humping people's legs today," she warned about Louie. (She wasn't wrong. Louie humped my leg later.) She was also a quick wit. When the group noted that Louie and Goodwin had backstage passes hanging from their collars, she said, "Stray dogs try to break in here all the time."

After a while Carpenter's parents, David and Elizabeth, came in. They live in Palmdale but had driven in the night before from Arizona, in their RV, which was now parked at a resort nearby. (David works for an X-ray servicing company; Elizabeth is a chiropractor, and she had given Carpenter an adjustment earlier that day.) As Carpenter went into an adjacent room to change, they relayed that their drive had gone less than smoothly. "A lot of issues," David said. "Yeah, we hit a tree," Elizabeth said. "It's all good. The tree is fine."

Carpenter's Grammy nominations had been announced two days earlier—she's up for album of the year and five other awards. I asked Elizabeth where they were when they learned the news. Before she could answer, Carpenter reemerged, now wearing a glittering crimson red corseted bodysuit, a matching garter belt, white fishnet stockings, and white satin Mary Jane dance heels. It was bombshell burlesque with a slight musical-theater bent, as though a glamorous bump-and-grind performer had swung by Capezio for some character shoes. Everyone in the room let out some sort of loud noise. (Louie barked his head off.) "This is *tonight's* color," Carpenter said of the red, in a faux-melodramatic diva tone.

When the commotion died down, Elizabeth picked up where she'd left off. They were at an RV lot in Bullhead City, Arizona. "We were packing up and I really lost track of time, so I really wasn't focused," she said. That's when Carpenter called from a tour bus on the outskirts of San Francisco. "She's like, *Mommy*—" Elizabeth's voice cracked and trailed off.

In a voice so direct and assertive I couldn't imagine it ever uttering the word *mommy,* Carpenter chimed in from the corner. "And then immediately the first thing she texted me after 20 minutes is a picture of her tire that had fallen off her RV. And it just says: *Fuck.*" Big laughs all around the room. "Not even like: *Still thinking about that. So proud of you, baby girl.*"

Carpenter added that, later that day, she and Sarah went out for a celebratory meal at her favorite breakfast place in San Francisco. "We get there two minutes after they closed. And they were like, 'We won't let you order anything off the menu, but we will bring the scraps from the kitchen.'" Did she explain the circumstances? The six Grammy nominations? "Absolutely, and they *did not care,*" Carpenter said, visibly amused. "It was so funny because it was just like: You know what? This is so humbling. Life just really does go on. I'm so excited. But wow, no one gives a *fuck.*"

The Short n' Sweet Show is a pop musical in three acts. Think Cher's 1970s variety show crossed with *Playboy After Dark,* with twists. It begins with video of Carpenter in a bubble bath. Then the real Carpenter runs out onstage, wearing only a bath towel—or so it seems, until she peels the towel open to reveal the sparkly corset underneath. In San Diego this incited Beatlemania-volume screaming.

The set is designed to look like a penthouse apartment in Manhattan, and as Carpenter jumps from song to song and genre to genre, she moves from room to room. She performs her country ballad "Slim Pickins" in front of a mid-century fireplace, wearing a sheer babydoll nightie. Her silhouette calls to mind Brigitte Bardot but her lyrics do not: "Jesus, what's a girl to do? / This boy doesn't even know the difference between there, their, and they are / Yet he's naked in my room." "Bed Chem," her R&B ode to desire, unfolds in a bedroom bathed in red light, with the audience belting out this spoken-word part: "Where art thou? Why not upon-eth me? / See it in my mind, let's fulfill the prophecy." When she sings the folkie song "Coincidence"—"What a surprise, your phone just died / Your car drove itself from LA to her thighs"—she's in an upholstered conversation pit, wearing a Marilyn-esque lace catsuit.

GOOD GRACES

Prada dress and heels. LaPointe feathered jacket. Graff earrings, necklace, bracelet, and ring.

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SET DESIGN, MARY HOWARD.

On tour, "Juno" has taken on a life of its own. The title refers to the 2007 teen-pregnancy movie of the same name, and so does this line in the chorus: "I might let you make me Juno." Carpenter performs it in a shimmering ABBA-inspired halter top and miniskirt, and when she gets to the bridge—"Adore me, hold me and explore me / I'm so fuckin' horny"—the word "HORNY" flashes behind her in girly pink lights. Before the song begins, she brandishes a pair of fuzzy pink handcuffs and "arrests" someone in the audience. Near the end, she makes her way to a heart-shaped secondary stage on the arena floor, speaks the lyric "Have you ever tried this one?" and then debuts a new position. (Yes, that kind.)

These "Juno" moments, along with some explicit choreography in the "Bed Chem" sequence, have turned Carpenter's tour into a traveling meme factory. Videos of the various positions—missionary in New York City, cowgirl in Nashville—immediately go viral online. (If you google "every Juno position" and watch the video montage that comes up, what you really get a sense of is just how hard this girl is working.) On TikTok her fans have been contributing increasingly acrobatic and outlandish positions of their own. Over audio of Carpenter's lead-in—"Have you ever tried this one?"—someone might be twirling upside down on an office chair, hanging seductively off a piece of gym equipment, or doing standing splits underwater.

A core faction of Carpenter's audience has followed her every move from the beginning. This is apparent during a section of the show when Carpenter banters back and forth with the audience, something she started doing on previous tours. The woman sitting to my left, Mariah Santos, 27, seemed to know every lyric of all of Carpenter's songs, the old ones and the new ones. She was in town from Tacoma, Washington, to inspect Navy ships—"the best way I can describe what I do for a living is Rosie the Riveter," she told me—and had been a fan of Carpenter's since she starred on the Disney Channel show *Girl Meets World.* Santos said that Carpenter has never put on a mask: "She's a normie at heart."

When I saw Carpenter again, the first week of December, she had just wrapped the American leg of the tour. (Her European dates begin in early March.) We met at the Cara Hotel in Los Feliz. She arrived at noon, wearing a red sleeveless turtleneck sweater, black capri pants, and black kitten heels. Her blonde hair—unambiguously her own—was pulled back in a velvet claw clip, and her cheeks gleamed with a dialed-down, daytime version of that signature blush. We sat at an outdoor table in a courtyard encircled by tall hedges.

Carpenter's last three American shows, all in Los Angeles, had spurred a good deal of discussion online, much of it driven by concertgoers who hadn't fully grasped what show they were going to see. "I'm a fan of it," she told me. "Growing up, those were the kinds of shows I would want to go to. Ones where I thought I knew what I was getting, but I got something completely different."

Still, there was something illustrative about all the confusion and the way Carpenter's act became a kind of Rorschach test. Some felt that her show was inappropriate for children. Others wondered how anyone could be surprised at the racy segments considering the content of her songs. Still others thought it strange that anyone found Carpenter risqué, given her mid-century look.

These dissonant elements have been in the DNA of *Short n' Sweet* from the start. In the music video for "Espresso," she's a vintage pinup come to life, bopping around a CONTINUED ON PAGE 260

SOME LIKE IT HOT

Chanel top and skirt. Jimmy Choo shoes.
Chanel High Jewelry bracelet. In this story: hair, Guido Palau;
makeup, Pat McGrath. Details, see In This Issue.

SHORE THING
Models Anok Yai (LEFT) and Awar Odhiang are like figures from a dream in their great lengths of **Loewe**; loewe.com for similar styles.
Fashion Editor: Camilla Nickerson.

State of Wonder

The surreal beauty of Jekyll Island, Georgia, proves an enchanting backdrop for fantastic silhouettes, playful textures, and a devil-may-care romantic flair. Photographed by Tyler Mitchell.

LADY OF GRACE
Model Mona Tougaard walks in beauty in a **Carolina Herrera** dress and sweeping overskirt; carolina herrera.com. **New York Vintage** parasol.

HEADSTRONG
Odhiang tops off her **Marni** mini (marni.com) with an over-the-top hat trick, courtesy of **J.R. Malpere**; jrmalpere.com for requests.

CAST AWAY
Aglow in the gloaming, Yai wears a **Christopher John Rogers** top and skirt; net-a-porter.com. Odhiang wears a **Christopher John Rogers** skirt; christopherjohnrogers.com.

HIGH AND MIGHTY
Yai is a sunny vision in **Erdem** amid the landscape of gnarled pine and live oaks; erdem.com.

BEAUTY NOTE
Zero gravity texture—with zero static. Miss Jessie's Pillow Soft Curls Cream uses fabric-care technology to both define and fluff curls.

PAST PERFECT
Yai wears a **Vivienne Westwood Couture** dress; vivienne westwood.com for inquiries. Odhiang in **Dolce & Gabbana**; select Dolce & Gabbana boutiques.

JEUX D'EAU
Odhiang gets her feet wet in a **Miu Miu** knit (miumiu.com) and **Max Mara** shorts; maxmara.com. Tougaard wears a **Chanel** bathing suit and shorts; select Chanel boutiques. Yai in **Dior**; Dior boutiques.

NEVER TOO MUCH
Yai dons a ruffled floral jacket and graphic jumpsuit from **Louis Vuitton**; select Louis Vuitton boutiques.

HORSE GIRL
Yai answers the call of the wild on Driftwood Beach in a **Chloé** dress; chloe.com.

SEA CALM
Odhiang wears a brilliant **Schiaparelli** dress that seems to limn the twin terrains of land and sea; Maison Schiaparelli, Place Vendôme.

UP FOR ANYTHING
Tougaard is all bark—and a little bite too—in dramatic, diaphanous **Valentino**; Valentino boutiques for similar styles.

SEE ATTACHED
Tougaard wears a fancifully festooned **Bottega Veneta** dress; bottegaveneta.com.

BEAUTY NOTE
The contoured eye gets cozy. Diorshow 5 Couleurs Eye Makeup Palette in Soft Cashmere has a new formula with cornflower floral water and pine oil for comfy layering.

TRUNK SONG
Odhiang shows her layers in a **Miu Miu** dress and bathing suit; miumiu.com.

PRODUCED BY CONNECT THE DOTS INC.

BRANCHING OUT
Yai and Odhiang both wear **Alaïa** skirts; maison-alaia.com. Tougaard wears a **Victoria Beckham** dress; victoriabeckham.com for similar styles. In this story: hair, Jawara; makeup, Fara Homidi. Details, see In This Issue.

FREE TO ROME

Alessandro Michele's move to Valentino, the Roman fashion house steeped in glamour and romanticism, has been a homecoming of sorts. Rebecca Mead meets him as he draws on his cherished freedom to create like never before. Photographed by Annie Leibovitz.

VERY VALENTINO

The house codes—ornate, opulent, deeply romantic—are there in Michele's designs, but so, too, is a cool, street-tinged energy that is all his own, and which sings of 2025. Model Luiza Perote in Valentino (here and throughout); Valentino boutiques.

Fashion Editor: Tabitha Simmons.

When Alessandro Michele was growing up in Rome in the 1970s, one of his favorite pastimes was to rummage through his mother's closet and to run his hands over the rustling taffeta, glinting sequins, and other adornments of time past. Michele's mother worked as an assistant to an executive at a film-production company, a career that called for a glamorous self-presentation, and one gown particularly captured the young Michele's imagination. Fashioned from crepe de chine in the style of Valentino, it was full-length and high-necked, falling straight down in a manner that reminded Michele of a candle. The front of the dress was entirely black, which Michele's mother considered reliably chic. Embroidered on its reverse, however, was an enormous pink and lilac butterfly—an elegant yet subversive gesture, suggesting metamorphosis and transient beauty. Michele's mother explained that she had bought the gown for a premiere; it seemed to him, he later recollected, "like she was telling me: 'I wore it in a world that now no longer exists.'"

Four decades after those closet explorations, Michele last year came into possession of another sartorial treasure trove: the archive of the house of Valentino, to which he was appointed creative director in the spring of 2024. On his first day at the Valentino offices, in a late-Renaissance palazzo on the Piazza Mignanelli in Rome, Michele immersed himself in an extraordinary storehouse of garments, shoes, and other objects, all of them constructed with an exquisite lightness that belied an almost architectural rigor. In his former role as creative director

PROFONDO ROSSO

Red is cardinal in the Valentino universe, but in the view of Alessandro Michele, seen here in his office at the house's Rome HQ with model Ali Dansky, not everything has to be so bright. "I like this dust around the brand. The dust is precious."

of Gucci, a position he held for almost eight years until late 2022, Michele had established himself as a consummate curator, reshaping that brand with his magpie taste for the vintage and the bohemian and dressing his aficionados in garments that looked like they'd been found in English church-hall sales, or had been sourced from the cast-off wardrobes of Italian nobility. Being loosed into the Valentino archive—and being granted access to the skilled technicians whose know-how underpinned its remarkable contents—gave Michele an unprecedented opportunity: to feed his own imagination by handling, weighing, and reconceiving the material legacy of his vaunted predecessor.

On a late Saturday afternoon in September, just under six months after that first day in the archive, Michele was in Paris, at the Valentino offices on the Place Vendôme, where he was putting the finishing touches on what would be his first ready-to-wear runway presentation for the label, to be shown the following afternoon. A few decisions remained to be made about accessories and footwear, and last-minute adjustments to hem lengths or necklines. Michele sat on a chair at one end of what had once been a grand reception room, with high ceilings and gilded plasterwork. Long tables were laden with accessories: turbans, eyeglasses, and bags, including a selection of clutches that looked like porcelain ornaments in the shape of a kitten. Members of his team sat alongside him; his partner, Giovanni Attili, hovered in the background. At the far end of the room, positioned in front of a huge, framed mirror, was an even more enormous mirror. As each model walked toward him, Michele could simultaneously see the outfit from the front and the back, so as to survey its internal consistency and subversiveness—the dialogue between, as it were, high black neckline and vivid embroidered butterfly.

The atmosphere was calm. "It's a mess," Michele joked, when I first joined him and his team. "We can relax a little, because it's almost done." Michele, who turned 52 in November, was dressed in blue jeans, a Black Watch plaid shirt, and a pair of red-and-white Vans. His hair tumbled about his shoulders, like Christ as painted by Caravaggio, restrained only by a loose braid on each side. His wrists were so heavy with bracelets—linked cameos, glittering diamanté, multiple bangles—that he jingled every time he made an adjustment. The models, too, were adorned according to Michele's aesthetic of quirky abundance. "Try to walk with the hands in the pockets," he instructed one, dressed in a nut brown, calf-length skirt, high-neck blouse, and fur-trimmed jacket, all made from the same patterned silk-cloque fabric from the Valentino archive; she also wore a pair of John Lennon sunglasses from which dangled gold sequins, and a weighty gold chain necklace with a glittering pendant, like a rapper's trophy combined with the prized heirloom of a dowager duchess. "Is it difficult to stand up straight?" Michele asked another model, who teetered in black-and-gold strappy shoes worn with white lacy tights, a sequined teddy, and a ruffled georgette-crepon negligee—the kind of outfit suitable for ordering late-afternoon room service of caviar and oysters from the Beverly Hills Hotel. "Better to keep walking," Michele told her, sympathetically.

> "The things that look old and démodé are, like, the best," Michele says. "Also, in a month, they are going to be super fashionable"

Another model emerged wearing an outfit that flirted with conservatism: high-waist, tailored gray pants with a boxy cream-colored polka-dot jacket. The jacket was fastened with a satin bow in the shade of red that Valentino Garavani, who designed the clothes that bore his name for 45 years before retiring in 2008, made his own decades ago; it was accessorized with gloves constructed with delicate black netting punctuated by embroidered white dots. The straitlaced cosplay was, however, undermined by punkish jewelry: a substantial diamanté nose ring, as if fashioned for an imperial bull, as well as a jeweled crescent shape suspended from the lower lip—S&M for the visage. There was a hubbub and a flurry of googling around the model when someone pointed out that, with her heart-shaped face and her long brown hair, she resembled Isabelle Adjani. The girl blushed at the comparison, and smiled so much that her lip jewelry fell off.

For several hours, the team worked steadily, Michele sustained by an early-evening plate of thin slices of prosciutto. "Are you tired?" he asked a woman wearing a yellow Valentino sweater with a tape measure strung around her neck—the head of the seamstresses, who were toiling on adjustments one floor up. The quality of the work Valentino Garavani had commanded, Michele told me, had been a revelation. He showed me a strapless, floor-length, silk-chiffon dress in a cerulean blue patterned with polka dots; it had a bodice ruched horizontally, with a burst of ruffles at the dropped waist, below which fell a columnar skirt of narrow pleats, with more cascading ruffles swirling below the knee. "They are *so* complicated," Michele said, of the varying pleats. "It's like an origami. It's unbelievable. He had this very specific way of being an engineer." I was puzzled as to why Michele was using the third person: Was the dress a close reproduction of something from the archive, or something new? Was this Valentino Garavani, or Alessandro Michele?

"This is him, *with* me," Michele replied. "It's *almost* him. I tried to make it a little bit different. Sometimes I try to replicate the same, because it's so fascinating. But I think that we are both in the same dress." The gown looked like nothing I'd seen anyone wearing for decades; it could have come from the early-'80s wardrobe of Princess Diana. "I like it because it seems very démodé now, but the things that look old and démodé are, like, the best," Michele said. "Also, in a month, they are going to be super fashionable."

That metamorphosis—from démodé to utterly of-the-moment—began the next afternoon, when the collection was shown, not in a chic central-Paris location, as had been Valentino's practice, but out on the Périphérique, in a martial arts venue that had been reconceived for the occasion. Guests and friends of Michele including Elton John, Harry Styles, and Hari Nef entered on cracked-mirror flooring and sat on armchairs and chaises swathed in dust sheets, as in a dilapidated mansion awaiting renovation, haunted by elegant ghosts. The cavalcade of models walked a snaking path between the onlookers, offering an intimate display of rich brocades, draping furs, billowing chiffon, delicate lace, glittering sequins, and tumbling ruffles over a mournful soundtrack of the 17th-century song "Passacaglia della Vita," about the transience of life. When the blue dress appeared,

about two thirds of the way through, its wearer was uncharacteristically unencumbered, bare-headed and virtually makeup-free—like a child who has just stepped into a gown from her mother's dressing-up box. As she walked upright, the long column of the dress fell straight; mirrored in the fragmented floor, the skirt's swirling complications of chiffon shimmered and fluttered, alive like a pure blue flame.

Almost two months later, I caught up with Michele at his office in Rome. Furnished with Michele's own 19th-century double desk and 18th-century daybed with yellow satin cushions, the room was a palimpsest of its earlier occupants: from the late-16th-century coffered ceiling to the 19th-century murals to the faux boiserie wallpaper installed by Valentino Garavani in the 1980s and now wrinkling with age. "It's a kind of creepy conversation with the beautiful ceiling," Michele said. "I like the mess." He was eager, he added, to explore what relics of past centuries had been covered over by Valentino's now vintage wallpaper.

I first met Michele in Rome in the spring of 2016, a little over a year after he had been named creative director of Gucci. On this morning, he appeared little-changed, with the same luxuriant beard and enviably thick, dark, center-parted locks, though on this occasion he wore his hair in a pair of tight braids. The only difference I noticed lay in the jewelry that heavily bedecked his fingers; rather than rings of silver, as he had been wearing eight years earlier, Michele had upgraded to warmly gleaming antique gold. He wore a burgundy-colored cashmere sweater and baggy pants made from wide-wale brown corduroy. Around his neck was a swath of necklaces: a bib of 18th-century neoclassical cameos; a string of wild seed pearls; and a long rope of turquoise ceramic beads with dangling floral decorations which dated to the late-Ptolemaic era. It was not, he acknowledged, a piece for everyday wear: One missed mouthful at the lunch table might inflict damage that had been avoided for 2,000 years.

Michele's personal charisma is considerable: He is open, engaging, and intellectually curious. "You can spend a second with him and it's like spending three days with someone else," his close friend Elton John told me in an email. (John also noted another of Michele's seductive attributes, undetectable in photographs: his penchant for a fragrance first manufactured almost 200 years ago by the Florentine apothecary Santa Maria Novella.) In his years at the helm of Gucci, Michele looked entirely at home alongside Jared Leto or Harry Styles on the red carpet. But before his elevation, Michele, who had worked at the company for 13 years, had been an unknown. Having worked as second-in-command to Frida Giannini, his immediate predecessor as creative director, but also under Tom Ford, who in the 1990s had made Gucci synonymous with sensual, '70s-style sleekness, Michele had an encyclopedic knowledge of the brand. In the top job, he added to that his own idiosyncratic aesthetic sense, which merged a fascination with Renaissance ornamentation, Baroque drama, 20th-century punk, and dozens of other influences.

> "I'm always fighting with the boundaries. I am always trying to be like water, going through the little space to destroy the things in the boundaries"

At first, Michele's reenvisioned Gucci was greeted with wariness, but before long his vision was enthusiastically embraced by both critics and consumers. Michele's madcap creativity was, though, married to a solid work ethic. "The great secret with Alessandro is that he's really someone it's fun to be around—there's always time for a joke—but there's always seriousness," Michela Tafuri, who has worked with Michele for much of the past two decades, told me. Ginevra Elkann, a filmmaker and friend and neighbor of Michele's in Rome, told me, "He looks very exuberant, which he is, for sure. But there's something quite tidy that you wouldn't expect—something organized, and precise. He's *not* all over the place."

Michele's organization and hard work paid off for Kering, the parent company that owns Gucci; the brand's revenues grew during his tenure from just under 4 billion euros to around 10 billion by the time he and the company parted ways, in late 2022. "I left the company because there was something that was not working anymore," Michele told me. The growth was on a scale that was no longer human. "It's impossible—it's not natural," he said. "The best growth is that you grow slow—you must care about the way you grow. It's like a body. It needs time." The pace was unsustainable for Michele, personally and even creatively. "I was risking being a prisoner of that place—always with the same people in the plane, in the hotel. I was inside a bubble a little bit," he told me. Valentino, on the other hand, reported revenues around a tenth the size of Gucci: a boutique operation by comparison.

Stilled by a yearlong noncompete agreement, Michele devoted himself to other passions: He has restored an apartment in a celebrated Roman palazzo distinguished by its own medieval tower; it is now filled with objects from Michele's collections, which include Renaissance paintings and delft glazed tiles. He has set about the restoration of a castle on his country estate in Lazio, north of Rome, where he has bought up a swath of countryside to save it from the encroachment of industrial pig farming. Michele's real estate portfolio does not yet rival that of Valentino, who circulated between his Roman villa; a château outside Paris; bolt-holes in New York, London, Capri, and Gstaad; and his yacht. Michele has, though, acquired an apartment on one floor of a 15th-century Venetian palazzo, showing me in a photo on his phone how it is bordered on two sides by canals. "I like beautiful places," he said, helplessly. "I don't care about cars, or nothing like this—the only thing I really care about is historical places. I like the places where people died, people lived."

When Pierpaolo Piccioli, who spent 25 years at Valentino, departed the role of creative director in 2024, Michele was the obvious choice, Jacopo Venturini, the company's CEO, told me. "I knew that he loved working on an archive, and at Valentino, we have a very big archive," Venturini said. "Valentino is not an empty box. It's not a brand where you can do whatever you want, because we have a past."

Valentino Garavani and the label that he, along with his business partner and former lover, Giancarlo Giammetti, established, was a part of Roman history. Having set out in

1960 to create an haute couture house equivalent to those in Paris, Valentino dressed princesses and the wives of presidents, and those who aspired to look like them. As a teenager growing up in Rome, Michele had been more influenced by music, and the concomitant innovations of a designer like Vivienne Westwood, than by haute couture of the sort that Valentino created. But Valentino himself was a grand personage about town. "He was familiar, like the pope," Michele told me. "Sometimes the pope was going through in a car, and so was Valentino. In Rome, you have such an easy connection with power—you are in touch with the Roman Empire, and a long human story. I like to put Valentino together with the pope, because Rome is about God, but it's also about decadence and beauty and richness and love affairs." Michele has only met Valentino, now 92, in passing, years ago, though the elder man texted the younger when he was first appointed. "I didn't really talk with Mr. Valentino, but it's like I spoke with him, staying in his house—you can get many things from the relics, the pieces of his life," Michele said. "They can also tell you a very different story. They can tell you things that maybe he would never be saying in front of you—about his delicate soul, and his idea of freedom."

While Valentino's customers were often establishment figures, Valentino himself was far from conventional or conservative, Michele noted. "We think of him as a very classical man, but that's so wrong," he said. Like Yves Saint Laurent, Valentino only became considered the standard of elegance because of his innovation. "With all the change they built in the culture, they *became* the culture," Michele said. "So we approach them as classical. When you see a lady with a fuchsia color shirt and a black velvet skirt you say, 'She's chic, she looks so classical, so Saint Laurent.' Or when you see a lady with a chic ruffled dress, we say, 'She's so Valentino.' But they did many revolutions. We forgot. Valentino, he lived his life as a gay man in the '70s. *Nobody* did, in the fashion world. He did it in a way without regrets."

In Paris, Michele's collection, and the atmospheric setting in which it was shown, had been greeted with delight and excitement by critics and fans who appreciated the way in which Michele had combined

ANTIQUITY AND MODERNITY

A gleaming red bow offsets a gilded confection of ruffles, transparency, and golden embroidery like ancient scrolls worn by model Jiahui Zhang—seen here at Rome's Museo Nazionale Etrusco di Villa Giulia.

PRODUCED BY AL STUDIO AND KITTEN PRODUCTION. SET DESIGN: LEE FLUDE.

his own aesthetic of maximalist richness with Valentino's legacy of refined craftsmanship. Michele was mostly pleased by the reception, though when I met him there two days after the show, he had been scrolling through some less laudatory takes on social media, where some observers complained, with considerable vitriol, that he was simply replaying what he had done at Gucci. "It's a very interesting thing about our time—that people are so violent against people that are free to do what they want to do," he noted. One commenter had been railing against Michele's playful accessories: "She's just screaming for a lady with a kitten bag!" he said. He suspected that his critics were motivated by their own sense of being disempowered. "The more free you are, the more people go crazy," he went on. "I think people feel themselves to be *not* free. And if you are managing your freedom, they are like, 'Why are you doing what you want, and I can't do what I want?' That's interesting."

During his sabbatical, Michele completed a book, *La Vita delle Forme (The Life of Forms),* with Emanuele Coccia, a professor of philosophy. Michele has always offered a critical, theoretical lens upon his creative output, influenced in part by the intellectual work of Attili, his partner, a professor of urban planning. During his time out from working, Michele sometimes snuck into Attili's lectures at the university in Rome. "In my next life, I want to study all my life," he told me. Attili encouraged him to take his time after leaving Gucci. "He was the one who said, 'We can change our life. You can change your life. I'm fine.'"

In the book, the English-language publication of which is forthcoming, Michele gives an account of the ideas that underlay what, in the past few years, he has sought to explore on the runway. These include his then innovative embrace of nonbinary gender identities and their expression—a gesture that has in the years since become almost commonplace. In each of his collections, he writes, "I pursued an ideal of beauty and ambiguity that revives in bodies forgotten identities.... From the beginning...I hybridized everything I encountered: as a way to include diversity within each single form." CONTINUED ON PAGE 262

ANSWERED PRAYERS

Michele's unfettered approach to designing Valentino is being fed by Rome. "It is about God," he says of his hometown, "but it's also about decadence and beauty and richness and love affairs." The result? Otherworldly clothes. In this story: hair, Shiori Takahashi; makeup, Yadim. Details, see In This Issue.

A Singular Man

Haider Ackermann took a call from Tom Ford, and everything changed: Now he's taking the helm of the brand Ford founded. By Mark Holgate. Photographed by Annie Leibovitz.

It started with a call. "I was in a meeting, and my phone was ringing, and I saw it was Tom Ford," says Haider Ackermann. "My heart was beating, and I couldn't wait to get out of the meeting to listen to that tremendously attractive voice of his, because that's what he has. It's so strange: The minute you see his name, you have so many flashbacks—the design, the sensuality, the movies—[but] I knew what it was about."

Ackermann is relating this while sitting in a black chair in a white office at the Tom Ford headquarters in London. If everything here is monochromatic, the world for Ackermann has quite recently exploded into color. What the call was about was Ford asking the 53-year-old Colombian-born French designer to become creative director of the house Ford founded in 2005. "It wasn't much of a surprise," Ackermann says. "He wrote me a long, beautiful letter to congratulate me when I was at Berluti, so I knew he liked my work. All the same, I was nervous. You can go through a lot of emotions in one minute."

In March, Ackermann will debut his vision of Tom Ford with a coed show in—a first for the house—Paris. (Ackermann lives there, and the plan is to have the brand reside there, too—plus, he says, "there's a kind of CONTINUED ON PAGE 263

PICTURE THIS
Ackermann at work—with mood boards of inspiration—at the Tom Ford offices in London. Hair, Tatsu Yamanaka; grooming, Liz Taw. Details, see In This Issue.
Sittings Editor: Tabitha Simmons.

From the Ground Up

Sarah Burton's post-McQueen life has taken her to Paris and Givenchy, where she's rebuilding the house to imagine a whole new glorious future. By Mark Holgate. Photographed by Annie Leibovitz.

Resting on a table in the corner of Sarah Burton's Avenue George V office in Paris are the beginnings of her Givenchy. To wit: a series of look books from house founder Hubert de Givenchy's first collection in 1952, which contain black-and-white, front-side-back images of each outfit—rigorously architectural, yet also with a controlled curvaceousness, the rare whimsy coming from a leopard handbag worn in the crook of the arm—shot with the near-forensic directness you associate with Collier Schorr. Beside these books lies a pile of calico patterns from de Givenchy's first and second collections—artifacts which had been, inexplicably, bricked up in a wall at his old atelier and discovered during its renovation.

The symbolism is almost too delicious for words, as it's precisely what Burton, who arrived at Givenchy in September of last year and will make her debut during the Paris fall 2025 shows in March, is doing: unearthing the past to lean into the future. "There have been so many Givenchy narratives," she says of a house that has been led over the last few decades by, among others, John Galliano, Clare Waight Keller, Riccardo Tisci, and her former boss and mentor, Alexander "Lee" McQueen (with Burton, of course, magically leading McQueen's own brand from his CONTINUED ON PAGE 263

PRODUCED BY AL STUDIO AND FARAGO PROJECTS.

TERRA FIRMA
When she's not in Paris, Burton is back home in London or, as seen here, in the wilds of the English countryside. But the City of Light is delighting her—and surprising her.

Another World

A decade ago the artist Lorna Simpson took up painting for the first time. A monumental new show at The Metropolitan Museum of Art reveals all she's accomplished. By Dodie Kazanjian. Photographed by Tina Barney.

Not many artists have found their way forward during an earthquake. Lorna Simpson, whose pioneering conceptual photographs and multimedia work over more than three decades had already established her as a major voice for Black feminist art, was in a residency program in Sonoma, California, on August 24, 2014, when the area was hit by a 6.0 tremor that killed two people and injured 300 others. "It made me a bit fearless," she tells me. Lorna had been doing drawings and collages for the last few years. Recently she had started to feel the urge to move into something bigger and more ambitious—specifically, painting—but she hadn't painted since her first years in college, and she didn't know how to go about it. "You're just worried about making some

SHOWSTOPPER

"I've had to disengage with labels of what kind of artist I am or what I do," says Simpson, in Saint Laurent by Anthony Vaccarello, photographed in the Engelhard Court at New York's Metropolitan Museum, where her paintings will be exhibited in May.

Sittings Editor: Max Ortega.

paintings, and the earth is moving beneath you like a freight train?" she thought to herself. "Just make some paintings! Don't be so precious about it. There's this thing with me of taking risks and working blind and not being completely certain of what I'm doing. It's like, just try it and see what happens." A year later, the much-admired curator Okwui Enwezor showed Lorna's first paintings at the Venice Biennale. And this May, the full range of her paintings over the past decade will be featured in an exhibition of their own at The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

"For me, Lorna Simpson is a hero," says David Breslin, The Met's curator in charge of the department of modern and contemporary art. "She is a conceptual artist who made us rethink what conceptual art was—what *art* was—at a particular moment. I see Lorna as one of those artists, with Barbara Kruger and Jenny Holzer and Louise Lawler, and also David Hammons, who uses every tool at their disposal to get their point across. I love the confidence of an artist who is willing to suggest that, 'I need to reinvent what you think of me, but I'm not reinventing myself. I've always been this way.'"

Growing up in New York—first Brooklyn, then Queens—Lorna was the only child of culture-loving parents (Cuban Jamaican father, African American mother) who took her to concerts and theater and ballet as well as to art museums. (Lorna would do the same with her daughter, Zora Simpson Casebere, now an actor and writer living in Los Angeles, where Lorna has a house and visits often.) "I spent my childhood and young adulthood going to The Met," she says. This continued throughout her years at Manhattan's High School of Art and Design and later at the School of Visual Arts. "In my first year of college, I went to see The Met's Zurbaráns, which are religious and very intense—out of the tradition of self-mutilation, adoration-for-God kind of paintings. And to this day, I remember looking at his painting of a woman, standing in a red cloak. It's a very tall painting and she's holding two breasts on a plate." (The woman is Saint Agatha and the breasts are hers.) "The bodily mutilation and the calm, calm presentation—I thought it was crazy and also very powerful. That was a huge lesson for me, a demonstration of the power of imagery and subject matter and also of scale—not being big for big's sake, but when all of those things come together."

DAY TO NIGHT

ABOVE: Two works in dialogue: *In Furs,* a photo collage Simpson created in 2010, and *True Value,* from 2015, which portrays the same subject in a different medium—ink and acrylic on gessoed wood. OPPOSITE: *Mind Reader,* 2019.

Her first painting, *True Value,* did just that. Nine feet tall, larger than life, it shows a woman in a leopard-print dress and jacket, walking her pet cheetah on a leash. But something's off. The cheetah has the face of its owner, whose face is now the cheetah's. The image is taken from *In Furs,* a collage she made five years earlier, using a photograph from *Jet* magazine. *Jet* and *Ebony* are frequent sources for Lorna, who often mines her own work. In the painting she shifted the light from day to night: a dark, purple-blue, midnight sky. "There's such surrealness and absurdity in [the *Jet*] image itself," she says. "I just reversed things, switching the head of the cheetah with the head of the woman. When I think of what it took to put that shoot together—they were out of their minds in a very beautiful and surreal way."

When Lorna wanted to start painting in 2015, she called her friend the artist Glenn Ligon. "Not sure what I said to Lorna back then," Glenn tells CONTINUED ON PAGE 263


462
463

COLOR THEORY

Two painted works by Simpson. ABOVE: *Vanish,* 2019, ink and screenprint on gessoed fiberglass. OPPOSITE: *Three Figures,* 2014, ink and screenprint on Claybord panels. In this story: hair, E Williams; makeup, Romy Soleimani. Details, see In This Issue.

HEAT WAVE

A seductive, feverishly celebrated revival of *A Streetcar Named Desire* arrives in Brooklyn with a blockbuster cast—including an antihero for the ages. By Kate Lloyd. Photographed by Andrew Jacobs.

STANLEY MUG
Paul Mescal leads the classic Tennessee Williams revival, opening February 28 at the Brooklyn Academy of Music. Connor McKnight shirt.
Fashion Editor: Harry Lambert.

It's a bitter afternoon in January, so early in the year that London hasn't quite shaken off its New Year's hangover. But in a tiny casting room in the far corner of a bare-bones rehearsal studio, lethargy has been left at the door.

The Oscar-nominated actor Paul Mescal is leaning toward me with quiet intensity. "There was definitely a feeling of unfinished business," the Irish 29-year-old says, his blue eyes locked with mine.

Mescal is talking about the role he's most proud of. Not the sensitive working-class student Connell in *Normal People,* the Sally Rooney adaptation that, in 2020, turned him into a heartthrob. Or vengeful Lucius in the recent Hollywood spectacle *Gladiator II.* But his turn as Stanley Kowalski in one of the most frenzy-inducing productions of *A Streetcar Named Desire* to ever hit UK stages.

Created by Rebecca Frecknall, an award-winning director known for the Eddie Redmayne–led revival of *Cabaret* and her talent for injecting new (often feminist) energy into classics, this adaptation of the Tennessee Williams play—published in 1947 and said to be inspired in part by the playwright's sister's struggle with her mental health—opened in 2022 at London's Almeida Theatre. Costarring stage stalwart Patsy Ferran as Blanche DuBois and *Killing Eve* star Anjana Vasan as sister Stella, it was, as Mescal puts it, "an old-school sellout." Angelina Jolie came to see it. Nicole Kidman loved it so much she visited Mescal backstage. ("I was in my underwear for that entire exchange," he says, cringing.)

When the production, just weeks later, transferred to the West End's Phoenix Theatre, resale tickets were trading for three times their value, with throngs of fans swarming the stage door nightly. "I was like, Oh, fuck, that's the first time that's happened!" Mescal says. Still, the experience felt like it was missing something; "playing an American classic and not taking it to the lion's den…."

WAISTED YOUTH

"You can't hide," says Mescal of *Streetcar*'s intimate staging. "It's cathartic." Saint Laurent by Anthony Vaccarello pants and shirt.

Now, it's on. The London production, which won three Olivier Awards, including acting honors for Mescal and Vasan, is preparing for a limited run at the Brooklyn Academy of Music. Mescal, when I speak to him, is clearly delighted to be in rehearsals. "I love the characters. I find it dangerous. I think it's sexy," he says.

Streetcar is one of a trilogy of stripped-back Williams plays Frecknall has developed. First, there was her Almeida production of *Summer and Smoke,* for which Ferran won an Olivier. Most recently Frecknall took on *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof,* led by Mescal's former costar Daisy Edgar-Jones. (Mescal was "jealous" when he saw it.)

With *Streetcar,* Frecknall wanted to overturn tropes that have dominated productions of the New Orleans–set show since the movie, starring Marlon Brando, came out in 1951. Yes, her take follows the unraveling of DuBois, an aging Southern belle, as she moves in with her younger sister, Stella, and her rough-edged brother-in-law, Stanley. Yes, Stanley's needs for truth and respect bristle against the fragile delusion and snobbery Blanche protects herself with. But this production feels more intimate, more empathetic—fairer to its antiheroine.

"This is not about watching the demise of someone with mental illness," Frecknall tells me. "This is about watching someone who has survived great trauma since childhood." The cast are in their 20s and 30s, as Williams wrote them. "Blanche is often done with actors further into their career. And I loved the idea of reclaiming her youth," says Frecknall. An onstage drummer provides an increasingly frenetic soundscape, while the ensemble surrounds an industrial set, passing props in when needed; it's all a claustrophobic island upon which Blanche, Stanley, and Stella are stranded.

"You can't hide," Mescal says. "You're totally exposed in a way that's both frightening and exciting. And the audience feels that."

Perhaps it's from this pressure that Mescal's terrifying Stanley grew. "It's cathartic," he says of the role which sees him yell, howl, and prowl the stage. "I think we've all got rage in us. And I think sometimes mine can be pretty close to the surface." Frecknall recalls a workshop where Mescal got down on all fours like a dog, snarling at Blanche. "I remember going, 'That's the scariest thing I've ever seen,'" she says. "'We *have* to do that.'"

Still, it's Mescal's vulnerability that led her to cast him. ("I don't feel like I'm playing a villain," he says. "He's as hurt as Connell.") "People think of *Streetcar* as a play about Blanche and Stanley," Frecknall explains. "But when Williams first pitched it to his agent, he said, 'I'm writing a play about two sisters.'" As one of three herself, Frecknall, 38, is obsessed with sororal ties—and Ferran and Vasan are the dream actors, she thinks, to draw viewers into their relationship before it explodes, tragically. "They have a history together as actors and as friends, and you feel that."

I meet them in Ottolenghi, a bourgeois deli a few miles up the road, which on weekdays smells of baking pastries and Le Labo. Frecknall's right: They're so close they finish each other's sentences, sometimes gently correcting each other's modesty. ("She had a record!" insists Ferran, when her costar tries to downplay a folk music side project.)

Valencia-born, and raised in England and the Netherlands, the 35-year-old Ferran is jittery and angular, wringing her hands and playing with the zipper on her shearling gilet. She was a reluctant Blanche. When called up just days before the Almeida run opened—after original cast member Lydia Wilson got injured—she was unsure what to do. Frecknall was determined though. (The director tells me: "I felt like, If Patsy doesn't want to do this, that's the end of the show.") Eventually she relented.

"I was allowed to fail by coming in so late. That was liberating," says Ferran, twiddling an unruly curl of her tangle of brown ringlets back into shape. The risks she took have allowed Blanche to feel like no other: less flighty, less flirty, more desperate, more witty.

SISTER ACT

Anjana Vasan (in an Andreas Kronthaler for Vivienne Westwood dress) and Patsy Ferran (in Prada) play the siblings Stella and Blanche DuBois. "When you're in it, you feel alive," Vasan says of the play. In this story: hair, Mari Ohashi; makeup, Niamh Quinn; grooming, Victoria Bond. Details, see In This Issue.

If Ferran's Blanche is more sympathetic than most, Vasan's Stella has more fight. The actor, who grew up in Singapore and went to drama school in Cardiff, has a fierceness about her. "We'd do interviews, and people would be like, 'So Stella, she's just really passive, right?'" She tucks her bob behind her ears as if she needs to concentrate for a minute. "I'm like, *Where* in the play? Just because she's a victim of [domestic violence] or that she's pregnant, doesn't mean that she doesn't give back."

In rehearsal, Mescal pauses to tug a Duff's Famous Wings logo hoodie, which I last saw on rumored girlfriend Gracie Abrams, over his head. ("It's a friend's that I stole," he tells me, with a giveaway grin.) The *Streetcar* transfer's come at what, from the outside, looks like a crux point his career. What about feral reactions from fans at the stage door? Is he ready for that attention in Brooklyn? "I forget about it until it's happening. It's an amazing privilege," he says, fiddling with his gold chain. "People *have* taken it too far," he adds. Like the woman who touched him inappropriately outside the Almeida during the first run. Back then he felt nervous about complaining; now he's better at setting boundaries. "If somebody touches you inappropriately, you're totally within your right to be like, 'Stop fucking doing that.'"

But in general he finds doing theater settling, he says. He suspects it's because his parents—formerly a teacher and a policewoman—met doing a production of *Pirates of Penzance,* "but that's kind of woo-woo." Whatever the case, "It's a fantastic escape," he says. He likes the routine, you see, that every evening for the next few weeks looks the same: Come home, read the script, watch *Severance.* ("It's weird and uncomfortable and brilliant.") The structure's useful too, as he's trying to drink less. "When I'm going for my runs, my times aren't that good," he gives as his reason, then adds more seriously: "I don't want to get to the point where I might have abused it and it's a hard no."

It's trickier to keep a routine up on a film set, he says—though he's excited about what he's been working on. Last year he came to New York to shoot the historical queer romance *The History of Sound* alongside Josh O'Connor. "The film is tragic but beautiful." Upcoming, too, is the screen adaptation of *Hamnet* where he'll star as William Shakespeare alongside the "fearless" Jessie Buckley. "If I could make films that felt like this for the rest of my life, I would be unbelievably lucky."

Vasan's and Ferran's careers are cranking up as well. The former is now beloved in TV's *We Are Lady Parts,* a comedy about an all-female Muslim punk band. The latter will appear as Jane Austen in *Miss Austen,* a BBC miniseries of the Gill Hornby novel.

In the meantime, the trio are excited to be reunited onstage again. "Not many people get a chance to do Tennessee Williams," says Vasan. "I think there's a thing that Williams can achieve," she adds. "When you're in it, you feel more alive. That's how I want people to leave." □

PRODUCED BY HOLMES PRODUCTION. SET DESIGN: SAMUEL PIDGEN.

BURNING BRIGHT

Tyla's rise, from South African newcomer to a global popiano sensation, is a reminder that dance music knows no boundaries. By Funmi Fetto. Photographed by Rafael Pavarotti.

In the back of a Mercedes-Benz van that is spiriting her through London, Tyla—full name Tyla Laura Seethal—is attempting to make sense of her extraordinary catapult to world fame. For the journey across the city, where she's been for barely 72 hours, she's cocooned in a fluffy white dressing gown with matching slippers, sprawled across three seats. It's not quite a horizontal stance, but definitely a half-lying situation. Tyla is literally, unapologetically, taking up space.

She could be forgiven for being a little on the tired side. We are meeting at the tail end of a year that saw her mash-up of pop, R&B, Afrobeats, and the South African style of amapiano turn her into music's most powerful new mononym, dubbed the "Queen of Popiano." If 2023 was her breakout, 2024 was the year she became a fully fledged superstar: At the 2024 Grammys, Tyla, just 22, took home the gong for best African music performance; her eponymous debut album (more than 1.5 billion streams and counting) came out; and in October she performed on the Victoria's Secret runway.

Tyla may have seemed to some to explode out of nowhere, but that's not how she sees it. "Since I was little, I always said, 'I'm going to become a singer,'" she tells me. Michael Jackson, Aaliyah, Beyoncé, and Britney Spears provided the soundtrack to her childhood in Johannesburg, where she grew up the second of four siblings. But it was Rihanna—to whom she is often compared—who made the greatest impression: "I used to think you're only going to become famous if you're born in America. She made me realize there is another way."

In 2019 she was spotted on Instagram by photographer and music producer Garth von Glehn, who would introduce her to the British-born Jamaican manager Colin Gayle, known for taking many African musicians global. By her final year of high school, she was bouncing between school and the studio; it was hectic, but she was focused: "I knew this is what I wanted to do." In 2021 the video for her first single, "Getting Late," blew up, convincing both her parents (who had hoped she would become an engineer) and Epic Records that she had a future in the music industry.

Unsurprisingly (the face! the body!), the fashion world has flocked to Tyla. Last summer, Louis Vuitton's men's creative director, Pharrell Williams, personally invited her to perform at Fondation Louis Vuitton before the Olympics. "My mom kept calling me, saying, 'Don't forget to tell him I said hello!'" she says, laughing. For her inaugural Met Gala, in May 2024, Balmain's Olivier Rousteing designed a dress made of sand—dramatically shortening the hem with a pair of scissors after the red carpet. "Tyla pushes the boundaries of music in a similar way that I push the boundaries of fashion," Rousteing has said. "I am always pleasantly surprised at how she takes my collections and completely twists, tucks, cuts, and transforms them," says Thebe Magugu, the South African, Johannesburg-based designer who won the LVMH prize in 2019 and works with the singer. "Tyla represents South Africa's cultural renaissance," Magugu adds. "She unapologetically showcases about our culture. It's a beautiful reminder to use where you are from as fuel to push you further."

Her rapid ascent has not been without its challenges. She speaks of an encounter in an airport, when she was harassed by three middle-aged men. She now has constant security. "I just miss being able to walk," she says. "Or sit in the park." And then, of course, there are the online controversies. She was called "entitled" for asking her friend Lil Nas X to hold her MTV Video Music Award statue while she delivered an acceptance speech. In that speech she expressed disappointment with the overly broad category of "Afrobeats"—which also sparked a negative response; many interpreted her comments as a slight on the genre. "Afrobeats is the reason we are even getting recognized," she says now.

And then there was a resurfaced 2020 TikTok video in which she proudly described herself as "a colored South African"—a term with different valence in South Africa than in the US, where it is inextricably linked to Jim Crow. "In South Africa we had a lot of segregation.… And that just so happens to be the name that the white people called us. They chose to call people that were mixed 'colored'…. All my life, obviously I knew 'I'm Black' but also knew that 'I'm colored.' So when I went to America and people were like, 'You can't say that!' I was in a position where I was like, 'Oh, so what do I do? What am I then?'"

Today, her self-possession is at points disconcerting. She's unafraid in her responses, while remaining a no-is-a-complete-sentence kind of girl. "I don't even have time for myself," she says when I ask about a significant other, "so it's really difficult thinking of getting like a whole, you know, person." The van is now nearing Tyla's hotel, where she'll have about 15 minutes to shower and get dressed before heading off to Heathrow. She's flying back to Johannesburg, ahead of her South African tour. It's a grueling schedule, but she is showing no signs of fatigue. "I'm *so* excited to be performing in Africa again," she says. "While I'm on this earth, I just want to touch everything." □

PRODUCED BY RAGI DHOLAKIA PRODUCTIONS. SET DESIGN: IBBY NJOYA.

TYGER TYGER
Tyla wears Balenciaga. Hair, Zhou Xue Ming; makeup, Chiao Li Hsu. Details, see In This Issue.
Fashion Editor: George Krakowiak.

MADE IN ENGLAND
Draper, the UK's top-ranked men's tennis player, wears a Turnbull & Asser jacket and shirt. Dunhill scarf.
Fashion Editor: Tom Guinness.

TWO PRINCES

At a proving moment in men's tennis, a pair of young challengers on either side of the Atlantic are stepping up. Photographed by Theo Wenner.

JACK DRAPER

By Alexis Okeowo

It's the left-handed thing. When you're watching Jack Draper, the top-ranked tennis player in Britain and the 18th best in the world, it takes a minute to remember you're watching him in reverse. He lives his life right-handed—but then picks up a racket with his left, and has done so since he was a boy. It's an advantage he makes the most of, crossing his powerful forehand to his opponent's backhand. "I'm a bit odd," he says. "I throw right-handed, I write right-handed, golf right, everything. I don't know where that comes from." As if to emphasize this talent, he has a big lightning-bolt tattoo on his left arm: not related to his left-handed skill, he tells me, but representative of him being "bold." He got it when he was 19.

Draper is six foot four, with reddish-brown long hair and the face of a young Kennedy. We've met at London's National Tennis Centre two weeks after the end of the men's season in Paris, and Draper is in what he calls "putting-my-body-through-hell week," his first bout of training before the crucial Australian hard-court tournaments begin. This bright winter day he's hitting with British player Cameron Norrie, another lefty. Draper, gangly and all limbs, performs a little hop-skip after each successful stroke. The pair are working on returning serve under the eyes of their coaches and trainers, and, at one point, the head of British tennis. Up next will be forehand drills, backhand drills, then sprints, then weights, and later on Draper will blast rap music from a portable speaker: Central Cee, then 50 Cent and Eminem.

The eyes on Draper aren't surprising. This will be a proving year for him and for men's tennis, which is in transition after a series of high-profile retirements (Rafael Nadal, Roger Federer, Andy Murray), and fans are hungry for new champions, new rivalries and dramas. "It's exciting because it's a change, and there's time for new players like Jack to make a name for themselves," says his coach, James Trotman. "He's chasing the guys who are already winning Slams, like Alcaraz," adds Ben Draper, his brother and agent. Ben is a former tennis player himself, and now a fixture by his brother's side,

THE FIGHTER
"I know myself. I'm hungry, I'm willing to do whatever it takes." Burberry robe.

BEAUTY NOTE
Keep it clean. Dior Homme Aftershave Balm is designed to soothe skin after a shave with the same subtle, woody notes of the house's new fragrance.

OPEN BOOK
At 6'4", Draper is naturally right-handed, but plays lefty. Dunhill shirt. Grooming, Chi Wong.

PRODUCED BY PARTNER FILMS. SET DESIGN: MAX BELLHOUSE.

AMERICAN HERO
Tennis's Ben Shelton wears a Polo Ralph Lauren jacket and sweatshirt. Loewe trousers.
Fashion Editor: Max Ortega.

often traveling with him to tournaments, like their trip to the US Open in 2024 when Draper became the first British man to reach the quarterfinals since Murray in 2012 (he lost to Jannik Sinner in the semifinals). Draper's big triumph had been the month before, when he won the ATP 250 tournament in Stuttgart, Germany. "That was amazing," he says. "Before Stuttgart, I'd say I was knocking on the door of winning things—I'd lost two finals before—but then, to go there and win that one gave me a lot of confidence. This is a difficult sport because you can have a great career, and not a lot to show for it. You don't have a title or you don't have a good result in a Grand Slam. It felt good having something to my name."

Draper's grandmother, great-uncle, mother, dad, and brother all played tennis at serious levels. His mom, Nicky, was a coach at the Sutton Tennis and Squash Club, where young Jack first picked up a racket, and his dad, Roger, was once the chief executive officer of the Lawn Tennis Association (the governing body of UK tennis). Perhaps that legacy accounts for Draper's ease. At only 23, he has a confident, laid-back air—one that has formed over the last few heady years. When he first played Wimbledon as a wild card in 2021, Draper was still living at home, making lonely rounds of Challenger tournaments, struggling to win matches against more established players, and getting "injured a lot," he says. "You become very lost. Everyone else is going to university, everyone else is doing their thing." He didn't expect the scrutiny and emotional pressures. He questioned if his love for tennis was enough to carry him through. But when he drew Novak Djokovic at Wimbledon, the first live match in the UK after COVID restrictions, the roof was closed and the crowd was vibrating with excitement. He surprised everyone by taking the opening set; it was the first time Djokovic, who later won the tournament, had lost a set at Wimbledon in over a decade.

The next year Draper began his breakthrough, winning four Challenger titles. "We were playing a couple of the same tournaments, and he won back-to-back," says Paul Jubb, his friend since childhood and a fellow pro. "That was kind of when he made that jump." By 2023, Draper had broken into the top 40. He didn't know how to wash his own clothes or cook, and felt like he was "standing still" on his quest to become more mature. Draper suffers from anxiety, the kind that, along with the heat, made him throw up three times during the 2024 US Open. Now, before matches, he's training himself to relax, and only an hour before does he "lock in," putting on his headphones. "I couldn't live without music," he says. "You are what you listen to. If you listen to love songs, you're going to be in your feels. If you listen to country, you're going to be in your feels. If you listen to 50 Cent or Eminem, you're going to be more hyped up. And I love that. It's like a personality switch." He's learned to trust himself more. "If I do make an error, I can fix it. I have the mental tools and the talent and I'm more present with what I'm doing. Whereas before, I might make a mistake, get down on myself, and unravel."

After his Stuttgart win and his run to the semifinals at Flushing Meadows, Draper won again in Vienna and made the final 16 at the Rolex Paris Masters, beating number-four-ranked Taylor Fritz. "He ended the year really well," says Trotman. The two began working together after Draper's Wimbledon debut and now spend more time around each other than with anyone else in their lives. "He's very caring, very family-driven. Focused on his goals and what he's trying to achieve, but also good fun," Trotman says.

Draper recently bought his first flat, a three-bedroom apartment in southwest London he shares with his brother Ben and Jubb. During this brief preseason, the men have spent time shopping. On Draper's list weren't the clothes, shoes, or watches you might see other pros in, but simple housewares to CONTINUED ON PAGE 264

BEN SHELTON

By Corey Seymour

Ben Shelton didn't grow up with childhood dreams of being the next Roger Federer, or the next Rafael Nadal. He wanted to be the next Calvin Johnson.

"Arguably the greatest wide receiver of all time," Shelton says, tucked into the back seat of an Escalade crawling through midtown Manhattan. "His nickname was Megatron—he played for the Detroit Lions: six foot five, 240, ran a 4.3 40-yard dash, kind of a freak athlete. And he showed up for my birthday one year—I must have been seven—when my dad was a coach at Georgia Tech and he was playing football there. He signed a ball for me. I was a fan for life."

Some 15 years later, Shelton—six foot four, 195, 150 mph serve, kind of a freak athlete himself—is in New York to play a much-hyped exhibition match against Carlos Alcaraz at Madison Square Garden. Since turning pro a mere two years ago—having started playing tennis seriously only at the age of 12 (making him very much an arriviste among the pro ranks, where many players started at the age of three or four)—Shelton has reached the quarterfinals of the Australian Open and the semifinals of the US Open; he's beaten current world-number-one Jannik Sinner, along with a host of other top-10 and top-5 players; and he's ascended those rankings himself—from the stratospheric 1,829th best in 2021 to as high as 13th (he's currently 20th).

Former pro Brad Gilbert—now an ESPN commentator and sometime coach (Coco Gauff and Andy Murray are just two of the players he's worked with)—has been keeping an eye on Shelton. "Could he be top 10?" he asks. "Sure—I mean, he could be top five. I like his size, his movement; he's got a wicked serve, obviously; and I like his potential—he's also just really fun to watch. The big thing for him moving forward is improving his return game."

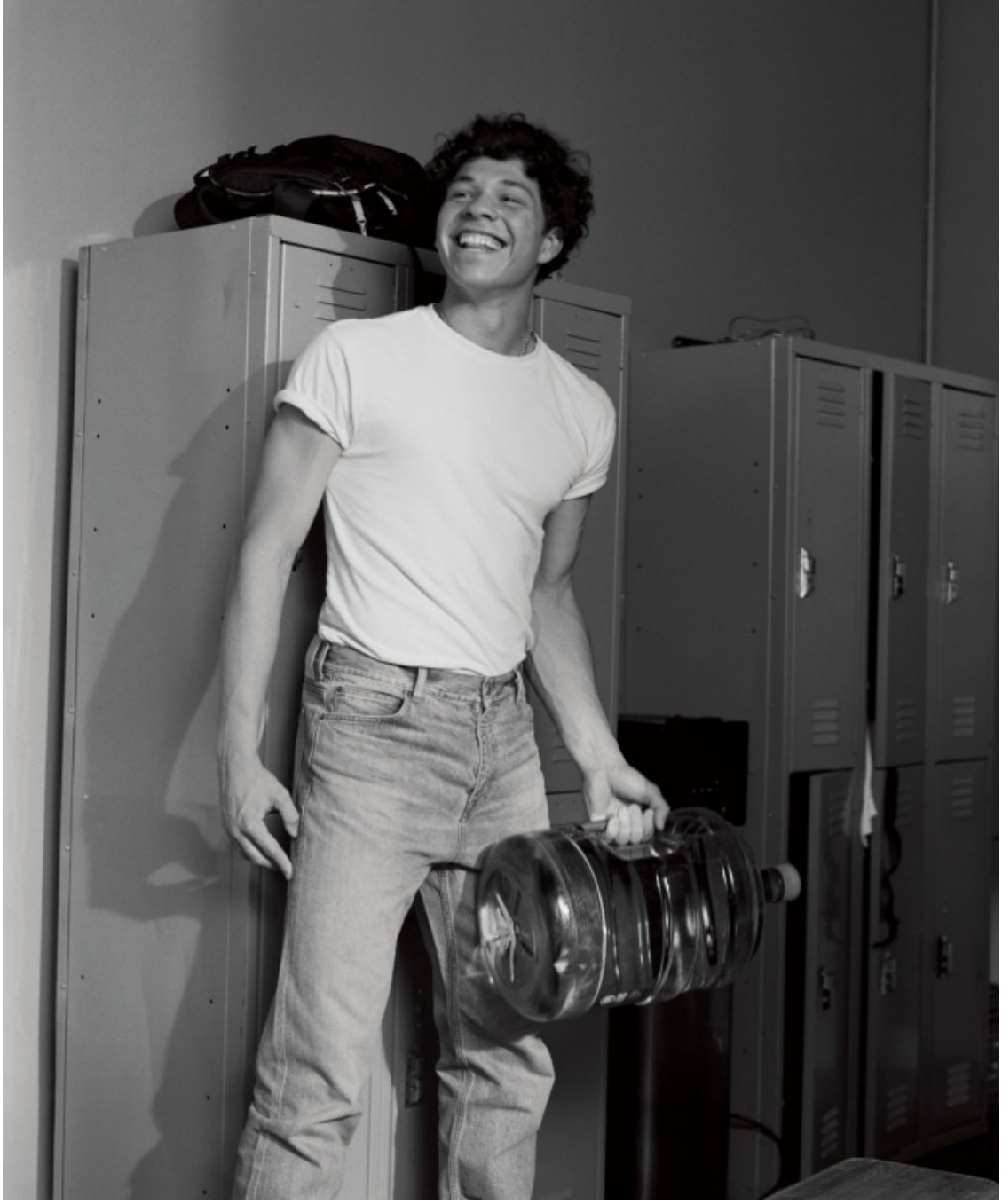
Given his family pedigree, the fact that Shelton waited as long as he did before committing to tennis is almost a miracle: Ben's dad, Bryan, spent eight years on the pro tour in the '80s and '90s before coaching tennis at Georgia Tech and the University of Florida; his sister, Emma, was a highly ranked juniors player and a standout college player; his mother, Lisa, also competed at the college level, and her brother, Todd Witsken, played both in college and the pros.

"Tennis was my dad's thing," Shelton says. "It was my sister's thing. And for me, growing up in American public schools"—he rubs his hands together, suddenly a bit uncharacteristically sheepish—"tennis wasn't really cool. Football is cool, basketball is cool—even baseball is cool. But playing quarterback—being on that field, hitting people—for me, that was the most fun you can have in athletics."

I ask him if he means hitting receivers—you know, pinpoint passes, fourth-and-long, the championship on the line.

"Oh, no, no, no—*hitting*," he clarifies. "Actually hitting them. I love contact. That's the one thing I regret about choosing tennis—not being able to play a contact sport."

"As a kid, Ben just liked doing things his own way," his father tells me from the family home in Gainesville, Florida. "Our family is very conservative, and everything he wore had to be neon. He wanted his hair to be long. He just wanted to do things differently. But somewhere along the way, a little switch went off."



Watching his sister dominate the juniors tour, Bryan thinks, might have helped flip that switch. "I think he saw Emma going to play on weekends and getting to travel and thought, *Man—that sounds like fun*."

While Shelton left the University of Florida early to go pro, he has every intention of completing his finance degree. ("I don't think my mom would be very happy if I didn't," he tells me.) He spends much of his downtime reading finance books—"right now I'm reading *When Genius Failed*"—and what he calls "books about bettering yourself.... I like to hear about how greatness comes along, how people make it happen." And he listens to a lot of music—especially Afrobeats: Ruger, Rema, Wizkid—though he's never been to a concert. "I don't like big crowds of people."

If he doesn't like big crowds, he does a bang-up job of galvanizing them. He plays with an admixture of ease and intensity, smiling, joking, grimacing, his emotions an open secret upon his face. He went viral for a spontaneous gesture during a breakout match against Frances Tiafoe at the US Open two years ago: After nailing down match point, Shelton turned to his box and pantomimed a kind of jubilant, ecstatic phone-hang-up move. And when Djokovic then beat Shelton in straight sets in the next match, he seemed to mock Shelton by imitating the same move.

After the sting of the loss faded, Shelton was besieged by flirty DMs: "They'd be like, 'Oh yeah? Are you going to hang up the phone on me too?'" (For the record, Shelton isn't dating anyone at the moment: "I have enough responsibilities on my plate right now," he says. "I'm just trying to figure out me.")

At that night's sold-out exhibition, both Shelton and Alcaraz walk out to raucous applause from the crowd. The atmosphere is loose, fun. When Shelton's first serve to Alcaraz goes wide, he makes a supplicating gesture toward the line judge, punctuated by a "C'mon, bro...." Shelton's smirking, the crowd is CONTINUED ON PAGE 264

PREP WORK
"I'm not a finished product," says Shelton, who wears an Armani Exchange T-shirt. Loewe jeans. Grooming, Inna Shats. Details, see In This Issue.

PRODUCED BY PARTNER FILMS. SET DESIGN: JULIA WAGNER.

WRITERS ROOM

Adichie at her home outside Baltimore, wearing a Dior suit and Dior High Jewelry necklace. Behind her hangs a photo she took of her family compound in Abba, Nigeria. Tiffany & Co. ring.

Sittings Editor: Eric McNeal.

The End of the Affair

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's new novel, *Dream Count,* is haunted by the idea of what could have been. Here, she tells the story of her own first love. Photographed by Annie Leibovitz.

My father was a professor, and we lived on the University of Nigeria campus in a house full of books; bougainvillea plants lined our driveway in splashes of purple. This was the small, gated world of my childhood: I went to the university primary school, the university children's library, the university chapel for Sunday Mass. Everyone was similar—safe and sedate academic people—our lives circumscribed by the tended campus hedges.

In my teenage years, I walked two streets to the university secondary school, whose reputation attracted people from out of town, especially the children of wealthy

traders from Onitsha, the location of the largest market in West Africa, that bastion of unsophisticated chaos. For the first time I knew people who were not like us. *Bush* was the word we used for their gaudy style, their mixed-up English tenses, their imported school sandals.

Echezona's sandals were orangey brown with wedge heels, and he walked in a comical strut. He was popular and brash, a ringleader of boys; he often missed school and got into trouble with teachers and loitered during class hours. I was utterly uninterested in Onitsha boys like him until one day, I was so aware of Echezona the air pulsed if he passed by. How strange that a feeling can grow unprompted, from nothing, surprising even your own heart. I began combing my short Afro more carefully, looking in the mirror to see not myself but myself as seen by him. I was 14 and he was 16. I was an academic star and he had abysmal grades. I wasn't sure he liked me—I was his junior after all—until his friends came to me to say, "Echezona wants to talk to you."

"Then he should come himself," I replied, falsely cool.

The first time he walked me home, he was quiet, almost solemn, his eyes trained ahead or downward, never once turning to me. I thought he was being superior until I realized with surprise that he was shy. To sense his shyness was to feel the intimacy of discovery, of seeing a different version of a person, suddenly known only to you. He took to walking me home. "I want us to be boyfriend and girlfriend," he would say, and I would reply, "I have to think about it," even though I wanted nothing more. One day I said yes. And so began a cracking open of my sheltered world. A rush of new bewildering air. My unlikely first boyfriend. His was an exquisite attentiveness, open and faltering, reaching but not quite holding my hand. Often, his skin brushed against mine. He treated me with care and a kind of fear, as though I might fall and break into pieces. (I thought of him when I overheard an aunt say in Igbo, "A man must hold you like an egg.") I was not to be rushed, and so it was months before the trembling deliciousness of my life's first kiss, standing near the quarters in our backyard where our house help lived.

"You are the finest and most intelligent girl I've ever seen," he told me.

I was held bound by his animation, his exaggerations. He believed in ghosts and blood betrothals. He wanted us to swear that no matter what happened we would wait for each other and get married. He said he would throw himself in the path of a car if I ever stopped talking to him. He made me laugh and laugh; he was serious but difficult to take seriously. He told obvious lies. He would miss school and, while walking normally, say he had broken his leg the day before. I was unimpressed with his indifference to school, but fascinated, nonetheless. He never read anything. In his sparse notebooks, his childish, unformed handwriting was endearing to me. The first time he gave me a love letter, I knew he had not written it himself; his friend had. The same friend who came to my class one morning during the harmattan season and held out Echezona's red sweater. "Echezona said you look cold." I slipped my arms, myself, into that woolen softness, and long after the morning cool had given way to a fierce sun, I still wore his sweater.

"What do you even talk about?" my university campus friends asked, their faces stricken, as if I had gone mad, and in their eyes the unspoken words *bush boy, rough boy, unsuitable boy.*

I don't remember, and what I remember I don't always trust. Memory fades but it also self-selects. Our memories try to protect us, and often what slips from our remembering is what is best left behind. I barely remember that I heard Echezona stole money from his father and tried to bribe a teacher for test questions. I remember how his face lit up each time he saw me, his grin impish and boyish and eager to please. I remember the ease of being with him, how sullen I was when he missed school, how bereft during vacations when I spent hours on the phone in my father's study trying to get through the crackling Onitsha lines. On my birthday he gave me a scented satin rose. The perfumy scent became overpowering if you shook the tall case in which it came. I hid it in a cupboard because I feared my mother would ask me to return such an expensive, inappropriate gift. It was shortly after my birthday that he told me he was leaving, his father was sending him to a tough boarding school, but we would remain together no matter what. I cried, as if I sensed how quickly we would lose touch, our letters and phone calls trailing away, and how soon I would have a new boyfriend from my world, a professor's son.

Echezona died in my first year of university. A friend walked up to me as a lecture hall emptied out to say that Echezona had been shot at a bank in Lagos; he was driving in to deposit a check when armed robbers ran in and started shooting. I stared blankly. I was used to stories of robbers who climbed through unlocked windows at night to steal televisions from campus homes. The extreme, random violence felt so far away as to be surreal. It couldn't be. I couldn't cry. For months I carried this news without looking at it until, in a horrific coincidence, I went to a newspaper office in Lagos for my first-ever interview as a writer after publishing a book of poems, and the journalist showed me a wall of award-winning photographs that stilled my body in shock. The journalist asked what was wrong, and I pointed at a photograph.

IN THE STACKS
Adichie at Maryland's Howard County library, where parts of *Dream Count* were written. Dries Van Noten coat. In this story: hair, Lacy Redway; makeup, Miguel Ramos. Details, see In This Issue.

PRODUCED BY AL STUDIO. SET DESIGN: MARY HOWARD. PRODUCTION COORDINATION BY BOOM PRODUCTIONS INC.

"You knew him? I'm sorry. It was a terrible robbery at the bank nearby."

Echezona's head was slumped against the car seat; his blood a deep gray in the black-and-white photo.

I will always remember the existential sagging of my spirit, as if something I longed for would now never be. And something I wished untrue was now forever true.

I kept trying to erase that image from my mind, to replace it with his walk, his laughter, his easy switch from shy to outrageous and back again. That photo forced an acceptance on me: He really was gone. I had not heard from him in three years, we were old enough to be separated by our interests, and I knew when he left my school that we were unlikely ever to be together again. Yet I mourned the future that would now never be. With the pain and sadness came a strange sensation of having been cheated. He was my first love, but in dying, he became an idealized future that I could have had. Maybe this is why my new novel, *Dream Count,* is haunted by the idea of the one who could have been, the one made perfect by loss. After I left the newspaper office, I began desperately searching through a pile of old things for the card he brought me when I was sick with malaria, the only piece of his handwriting I had. Inside the card, written in his uniquely shaky hand were the words: *To my one love Ngozi, from your own Echezona.* □

*M*achines Like Us

A new musical on Broadway—imported from Seoul—asks age-old questions about romance, mortality, and living life to the fullest. The twist? Robots. By Lisa Wong Macabasco. Photographed by Norman Jean Roy.

Nine years ago, writer Hue Park was sitting in a Brooklyn café when Damon Albarn's song "Everyday Robots" came on. "We are everyday robots on our phones / In the process of getting home," Albarn sings. Park and his writing partner Will Aronson had been reflecting on alienation exacerbated by technology, specifically hikikomori, a form of extreme protracted social withdrawal first identified in Japan that leaves young people unable to leave their homes. They'd observed a similar affliction among their peers. "It was a trend among people our age of becoming more withdrawn and living only in your own space, where you can control everything and get what you want digitally," recalls Aronson, 43.

What if, the duo thought, you could make a musical about the phenomenon? *Maybe Happy Ending*—which first opened in Seoul in 2016 and has been charming New York audiences since November—was the result: a show about solitary robots facing obsolescence that, paradoxically, has the most heart of anything on Broadway.

Set in near-future Seoul, it follows two discarded androids (dubbed Helperbots) on an odyssey across South Korea to track down one of their beloved owners. There are scenes of instant aversion that gradually becomes affection and screwball-comedy conversational sparring, but underneath it all are weightier themes: grief, loss, living and loving boldly in the face of our own finite shelf lives. "We wanted to write about being isolated but eventually taking the risk of leaving your little safe zone—and all the possible joys that come with that," Aronson says.

Maybe Happy Ending seemed poised for an English-language iteration, and came to the attention of the Tony-winning director Michael Arden. He was captivated by the score, which Park and Aronson describe as a stew of indie music, modern classical orchestration, jazz chords, film scores, and minimalist motor rhythms, with a few jazz-standard pastiche songs mixed in. "The score was so listenable, intricate, and complex," Arden remembers, "vacillating between Duke Ellington, Rodgers and Hammerstein, and Sufjan Stevens." But he admits being skeptical initially about the premise. "I thought, Robots? I'm interested in *human* stories. But this was one of the most human musicals I've ever encountered."

"It's about the truth that when you commit to loving someone, you commit to losing them too," Arden continues. "The show is life flashing before your eyes in 100 minutes—both a meet-cute and *On Golden Pond.* By the time I finished reading the script, tears were streaming down my face." He's observed Broadway audiences reacting similarly. "As with any new musical, they're coming in blind, and they're leaving exhilarated, devastated, and overwhelmed. They walk in thinking, *These robots are nothing like me,* and by the end, they feel like they've seen a musical about themselves."

Bringing the androids to life, as it were, are stage veteran Darren Criss and Broadway newcomer Helen J Shen. Backstage in his dressing room before curtain, Criss, 37, is bursting with chattiness, hazel eyes flashing and ring-laden fingers aflutter. He credits much of *Maybe Happy Ending*'s success to its extensive Korean incubation, comparing it to a nearly decade-long out-of-town tryout. "The level of nuance we focused on from the beginning is stuff that you don't typically get until months in the weeds," he says.

"The trial and error has been happening long before us," says Shen, who's 24 but could easily pass for far younger, sitting serenely in a Winnie-the-Pooh sweatshirt. A classically trained pianist who competed internationally before studying theater performance at the University of Michigan (where Criss is also an alum), Shen has had a busy 2024, starring off-Broadway in *The Lonely Few* and *Teeth.*

Meanwhile Criss is best known for the five seasons he spent as the endearingly charming, openly gay Blaine Anderson

DO ANDROIDS DREAM?

The leads of *Maybe Happy Ending:* Darren Criss, in Saint Laurent by Anthony Vaccarello, and Helen J Shen in Michael Kors Collection. Swarovski ring. Hair, Edward Lampley; makeup, Kuma. Fashion Editor: Edward Bowleg III.

PRODUCED BY BOOM PRODUCTIONS INC.

GROUP INTELLIGENCE
Shen and Criss are joined in the cast by Dez Duron (CENTER LEFT) and Marcus Choi (CENTER RIGHT). Costume design by Clint Ramos. Hair and wig design, Craig Franklin Miller; makeup, Suki Tsujimoto. Details, see In This Issue.

on Fox's *Glee*. For this performance as an android with creakier movements than Shen's, he drew on something he'd never put to use professionally: his college semester spent studying commedia dell'arte in Italy.

"Stereotypical modern acting is about what you *don't* see, and what I'm doing here is what you *do* see," Criss says. His robot had been programmed to display unsubtle emotions: happy face, sad face, surprised face. These expressions and Criss's faintly wooden physicality, inspired by the harlequin figure, "immediately make people more willing to connect to the show's nonrealness," he says. In rehearsals, he kept top of mind a note from Arden: "Just because it doesn't feel real doesn't make it not true."

Underscoring that feeling of unreality is the shape-shifting set, involving a rotating turntable, proscenium LED tiles, and hologram-like projections. "The backstage mechanics are so unbelievably intricate," Arden says. "My hope is that it's working so well the audience doesn't even notice."

The set was inspired by how we consume media on our phones; Arden estimates that the show spends more time in a vertical orientation than horizontal. Likewise, switching between sliding rooms on tracks emulates the effect of swiping on a personal device, and simple theatrical techniques like irising, created with black panels and neon, mimic how we pinch and zoom.

Another influence was manga, which can tell big stories briskly, gracefully pushing readers from one image to another. The emphasis was on containing and focusing the audience's point of view, Arden explains. "I wanted to take the audience on an adventure, leaving more to their imagination rather than trying to show everything."

Within those silently whizzing frames is a comforting, retro future-scape that the director compares to *2001: A Space Odyssey*. "There's this mix of cold futurism with warm sentimentality that's also present in the score," Arden says of the set. "You're watching a classic Burt Bacharach musical, even though we're driving a flying car."

CONTINUED ON PAGE 264

The Darling Buds of March

Artichoke season is short and creates ardent feelings. In its honor, Tamar Adler dines around town, paying tribute to a delightful, poetic vegetable. Photographed by Fujio Emura.

Thank God, it's finally artichoke season! This happens fleetingly each March. Are you a lover of autumn, with its variegated foliage? Spring with its odoriferous aura of renewal? My favorite season is "artichoke," and I'm observing its start among the young and gorgeous at the Lower East Side's Le Dive, where fellow artichoke-lovers, at least a decade my junior, order them by the bushel. Le Dive's chef Nicole Gajadhar can't take them off her menu when they're available. "I've tried," she says. "People revolt."

The poet Joseph Hutchison describes the magic of artichokes perfectly in his one-line poem: "O heart weighed down by so many wings." Depending on how its wings are clipped, an artichoke can arrive in preparations ranging from crudely simple to haute. I've chosen Le Dive's innocent, simply steamed version to inaugurate the season, and as I settle in amid the glossy scarlet bar tables, near a Jeremy Allen White look-alike in an inscrutable, wrinkled (well-cut) tuxedo—very *chanmé*—I put on my reading glasses so that I can see through the room's eventide dark and properly consider my selection.

Who first ate artichokes? Where are they from? How do they manage to seem both rustic and refined? As: "Scale by scale / We strip off / The delicacy / And eat / The peaceful mush / Of its green heart," I resolve to do some research. That, by the way, was Pablo Neruda from his poem "Ode to the Artichoke." The "peaceful mush" part sounds better in the original Spanish. Poets love artichokes.

Artichokes are technically *Cynara cardunculus* var. *scolymus*—which, frankly, tells us nearly nothing. They're unbloomed flower buds in the thistle family—all of whose members are edible, if prickly. Only the cardoon (*Cynara cardunculus* var. *altilis*) and the root of burdock are consumed as food by people who aren't starving. (Cardoons look nearly identical to artichokes and also taste nearly identical—or at least only a little inferior. Italians love them, but they'll eat anything.) Artichokes may or may not have culinary roots in ancient Greece and Rome. I write "may" because the references, from Theophrastus (371–287 BC) and Pliny the Elder (AD 23–79), might have meant not artichokes, but cardoons. Both plants are descended from the wild cardoon (*Cynara cardunculus,* for anyone keeping track), with one of the two having been domesticated, near Sicily, in the first century AD. According to police records, the famed Renaissance painter Caravaggio once attacked a waiter with a casserole and tried to stab him with a sword for not disclosing which of his artichokes were cooked in olive oil and which in butter.

Le Dive's Gajadhar cooks hers in neither. I don't even consider attacking my waitress. Her crop top and sangfroid make her too intimidating. And what she brings me, a chilled massive globe served whole with its leaves splayed open and Dijon aioli for dipping, is perfect—poached, stem up, in white wine, lemon juice, salt, "an ungodly number of herbs," says Gajadhar, and water. It's a classic bistro preparation—the poaching liquid inspired by artichokes à la barigoule, Provençal in origin. Gajadhar serves Le Dive's nearly untrimmed: "I love watching people share it, navigating how to pick off the leaves," she says. "It affects service too. The server interacts with you, explaining how to eat it, clearing the leaf bowl."

Italy, where artichokes were domesticated, grows more than anywhere else in the world. (Egypt is a not-too-distant second.) One of the most alluring varieties is the romanesco—which any visitor to Rome's famous market, the Campo de'Fiori, has watched picturesque elders whittle down with a sort of ancient expertise and elegance. But just over the border in France, you can find the little purple Violets de Provence and the littler poivrades, as well as the Fiesole and the handbag-filling Lyon. Several years ago I bought a single two-kilo Lyon artichoke at the Biarritz market. It was the size of a small soccer ball. After ferrying it to and from a vacation house in the Dordogne in our rented Peugeot, I finally steamed it at an apartment in San Sebastián. It was the most delicious artichoke I'd eaten to date.

Speaking of dates, Catherine de'Medici, wed at 14 in 1533, brought artichokes to France in her wedding trousseau, inspiring her adopted country's adoption of artichokes. They migrated to the US with the French, who brought them to Louisiana, and the Spanish, who brought them to California. American artichokes—99.99 percent of them—are grown in California, where they're the official state vegetable. Marilyn Monroe was the state's very first Artichoke Queen.

There are six petite artichoke halves in the tart artichokes à la grecque I order at the bar of Le Veau d'Or, the recently refurbished Upper East Side bistro—and the oldest standing French restaurant in New York, once frequented by Hemingway, Marlene Dietrich, and Truman Capote. The rest of the dish is as glossy as the dining room's walnut paneling: little pickled carrots cut into florets, button mushrooms with fluted caps, a single poached tomato, all delicately adorned with chervil. It's a far cry from Gajadhar's rowdy preparation at Le Dive, a perfect showcase of the vegetable's versatility.

When I speak to Le Veau d'Or chef Lee Hanson, he reminisces about the whole artichoke vinaigrette he and his co-chef, Riad Nasr, used to make "back in the day at Pastis" (the chefs cooked together at the famed Meatpacking bistro). "Here, we CONTINUED ON PAGE 264

FROM THE HEART
An artichoke from California, the state where (nearly) all domestic versions are grown.

READY PLAYER
Like a figure from some especially modish video game, model Amelia Gray taps into boss mode wearing graphic **Marni**; marni.com.
Fashion Editor: Alex Harrington.

TALL ORDER
Generous in length and appealingly angular in silhouette, model Lulu Tenney's **Issey Miyake** dress (us.isseymiyake.com) shows off her layers.

character studies

The spring runways were characterized less by a singular motif or trend than by sheer abundance—a joyous cacophony of shapes, textures, attitudes, and points of view. Photographed by Mikael Jansson.

FORGET ME KNOT
Tenney gets the hang of showing a little skin again, dressed in a cropped **Loewe** sweater and fluttery trousers; loewe.com. **Louis Vuitton** shoes; louisvuitton.com.

FINE LINES
For those not yet ready to leave all things soft and slouchy behind: This **Prada** sweater and skirt (prada .com) come with fringe benefits.

FRAMING DEVICES
ABOVE: Tenney glows up in **Louis Vuitton**; louisvuitton.com. RIGHT: Model Vittoria Ceretti goes grunge in a **Dior** motorcycle jacket and pants; Dior boutiques. **Maison Margiela** combat boots.


CHRISTIAN

ROLL CALL

Ceretti stripes up in a **Bottega Veneta** dress (bottegaveneta.com) and shoes from **The Row.** OPPOSITE: Tenney wears a **Tory Burch** top and pants; toryburch.com.

BEAUTY NOTE

Light up a classic wing with Chanel Stylo Yeux Waterproof Long-Lasting Eyeliner in Rouge Fauve, a dimensional red that flatters all eye colors.

RED ALL OVER
Ceretti peers through a scarlet haze. OPPOSITE: Sporting a Peggy Moffitt fringe, Gray does double duty in a **Sportmax** red dress (sportmax.com) and **Duran Lantink** knit (Dover Street Market New York).

BEAUTY NOTE
For a hydrating veil, try N°1 De Chanel Rich Revitalizing Cream, which helps protect from oxidative stress, while camellia ceramides enhance the skin's natural moisture barrier.

PLEASE HOLD
Gray is all buttoned up in a **Hodakova** top; hodakova.com. **Hermès** trousers; Hermès boutiques. **Phoebe Philo** sandals; phoebe philo.com.

BANG ON
Evoking a next-gen member of the Mod Squad, Gray stands on ceremony in a shapely **Bally** coat dress; bally.com. **Maison Margiela** boots.

OH, SNAP!
An artful mélange of textures and prints is the making of Gray's look from **Prada**; prada.com. In this story: hair, Damien Boissinot; makeup, Mark Carrasquillo. Details, see In this Issue.

BEAUTY NOTE
A maximalist red lip goes with everything. MAC Cosmetics Retro Matte Lipstick in the brand's iconic Ruby Woo shade enhances all skin tones.


Photo Booth
PRODUCED BY DAY INTERNATIONAL.
SET DESIGN: JEAN-MICHEL BERTIN.
Effects

Giant Steps The shoes of the season don't just make a statement—they steal the whole glorious show. In miniature vignettes devised by Studio Giancarlo Valle, spring's best slingbacks, sandals, pumps, and mules claim the space that they deserve. Photographed by Andrew Jacobs.

SINGULAR SENSATIONS

Leave it to this electric **Gucci** wedge to keep you on your toes; gucci.com. OPPOSITE: A **Saint Laurent by Anthony Vaccarello** heel puts a whole new slant on "structural"; ysl.com.

RED ALERT
A jaunty **Bottega Veneta** mule; bottegaveneta.com. OPPOSITE: A bejeweled heel from **Dries Van Noten** really ties the room together; driesvannoten.com.

PRODUCED BY DEVON WELSTEAD.
SET DESIGN: MEGAN KIANTOS.

SMALL WORLD

A knockout **Miu Miu** sandal; miumiu.com.
OPPOSITE: From **Versace,** a pretty slingback with a fresh, ahem, *scents* of humor; versace.com. Details, see In This Issue.

The Get

1

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3

4

THE WONDER YEAR

Spring's most playful and exuberant pieces evoke a childlike sense of glee.

5

9

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11

12

1. LOEWE TOP, $1,150; LOEWE.COM. **2.** MIU MIU EARRINGS, $750; MIUMIU.COM FOR SIMILAR STYLES. **3.** S.S. DALEY SKIRT, $1,489; SSDALEY.COM. **4.** OMEGA WATCH; OMEGAWATCHES.COM. **5.** BOTTEGA VENETA ZANOTTA SACCO CHAIR; BOTTEGAVENETA.COM. **6.** LOUIS VUITTON X TAKASHI MURAKAMI MALLE PYRAMIDE; SELECT LOUIS VUITTON BOUTIQUES. **7.** ERDEM BAG, $1,995; ERDEM.COM. **8.** SOLUDOS MULE, $99; SOLUDOS.COM. **9.** COMME SI PANTS, $390; COMMESI.COM. **10.** ALTUZARRA DRESS, $2,295; ALTUZARRA.COM. **11.** HERMÈS COLORED PENCIL CASE, $2,250; HERMÈS BOUTIQUES. **12.** PROENZA SCHOULER SANDAL, $1,290; PROENZA SCHOULER.COM.

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PLAYTIME

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 175

color-saturated beach landscape. It's part *Barbie,* part *Beach Blanket Bingo.* But also not, because soon her lower half is getting rubbed down with suntan oil by one of the cabana boys. There's a satirical tone to it all, to the way she holds a teacup and saucer on the beach while singing, "I know I Mountain Dew it for ya." When she mouths one of her most memed lines—"I'm working late, 'cause I'm a singerrr"—she does so into an ice cream cone, with a faux-self-serious eye roll. It's tongue-in-cheek bubblegum, delivered so playfully that you could easily miss the innuendo.

Carpenter told me that her *Short n' Sweet* persona is not a created character, but rather a more theatrical version of herself. "*Short n' Sweet* is absolutely me," she said. "There's no, like, alter ego. But it's definitely a more emphasized version of me. It's interesting because I'm able to dress in this way where you would kind of expect to hear like a voice from the '60s. But then, when I'm speaking to the audience, I'm just myself."

In some ways the *Short n' Sweet* sensibility evolved out of her previous album, *Emails I Can't Send.* That was a heartbreak album, and she had wanted it to feel stripped-down and timeless. She took inspiration from old photos of Kate Moss: "That's why, on the cover of *Emails,* I'm just in this black slip dress. There's nothing too complicated about it. My hair's very natural." Then, on the *Emails* tour, something began to shift. "I started wearing outfits that felt more like myself. And then it sort of bled into, like, I was writing these songs that felt more and more like my personality."

By the time she was recording *Short n' Sweet,* Carpenter was in a different mood altogether—and gravitating toward more classic, carnal, sex-bomb silhouettes. "I remember feeling inspired by images of women that felt very strong and hyperfeminine. And then being like: *If only she said what she was actually thinking*."

Carpenter would prefer that you not look them up, but the most complete documentation of her musical range can be found in old videos on YouTube. She started posting them when she was nine, as her application to a Miley Cyrus–run singing contest.

Young Carpenter covers the usual suspects—Taylor Swift, Adele, Christina Aguilera, Pink—but also an array of older artists. In one video she does a convincing rendition of Sinéad O'Connor's "Nothing Compares 2 U." In another, she hits all the notes of "At Last" by Etta James. There's an interpretation of "Sweet Child O' Mine," complete with Axl Rose headband. And there's a whole Michael Jackson medley, in which she covers "Black or White" and "Ease on Down the Road," skipping along with a brace on her wrist. When she introduces her version of "Come Together," Carpenter's wearing a T-shirt with peace signs all over it and a glam rock scarf. "I really, really love this song, even though I wasn't around when the Beatles were big," she says.

This was in and around Quakertown, Pennsylvania, where Carpenter grew up the youngest of four girls. (The oldest, Cayla, a half sister from her dad's previous relationship, is a hairstylist. Her other sister, Shannon, is a dancer.) Asked to describe her hometown, she answered with one word: "*Desolate.*" She then added that it holds a record for the most fast-food restaurants in a square mile. "That's basically what we're known for. So I had a really big imagination, which was super necessary for me, I guess."

Carpenter was a precocious child—"a sarcastic, snarky kid from day one," she says—with serious singing chops. When her family would go out to eat at a local Irish pub called the Limeport Inn, a waitress named Patty would bring her around the tables and have her sing "Happy Birthday" to customers, sometimes for money. (Her mom would make Carpenter give the money back.) "That was a short-lived dream, but also kind of my first real audience." Starting in the fourth grade, Carpenter was homeschooled. "I don't know why, but I decided I wanted to focus on my career," she said. "I was like, *I want to audition for things.*" While her sisters were at school, she spent a lot of time alone. During that period, she told me, "I got to know my weird little head."

In the Miley contest, Carpenter made it to the final three. "After that contest ended—did not win, got to meet Miley, though, *big* perk—I kept doing it because I just loved it so much. I also felt like I was finding my voice through covering other people's songs." Her dad had turned a small closet into a recording space. "It was like a Harry Potter closet under the staircase," she said. "He painted it purple and put padding on the walls for me and my microphone in there. And I just felt super legit."

Carpenter refers to her tween years as her "fedora era," because she often wore that style of hat. "I was, like, a *child,* but I also was, like, a studious young man," she told me. "I got very artsy with my videos. Sometimes I would take it *outside.*" And because the whole operation was improvised, she learned to keep it tight. "We didn't know how to edit, you know what I mean? My dad didn't, like, know what he was doing. It was like: *Record. Take. Stop recording. You're done.*" Eventually she started working with a vocal coach. "I was constantly taking lessons and wanting to improve 'cause I was like: *I only have one take and it's live!*"

Carpenter signed a five-record deal with Disney's Hollywood Records when she was 12. By then she was also getting acting jobs. She was cast in an episode of *Law & Order: Special Victims Unit* in 2010 and, three years later, in an episode of *Orange Is the New Black.* When she was 13, the *Girl Meets World* pilot got picked up, and she and Elizabeth moved to LA. In some ways it's a fluke that Carpenter rose to fame as an actor first, but *Girl Meets World* was a fruitful playground. Carpenter was given a lot of rein to make her character, Maya Hart, her own. "Very witty, very quick," she said. "Kind of emotional and all over the place, which feels like me in a lot of ways."

The show ran for three years, during which time Carpenter put out *Eyes Wide Open* and *Evolution.* She released *Singular: Act I* and *Singular: Act II* while continuing to act on the side. (She had roles in the movies *The Hate U Give* and *Tall Girl.*) These early albums are a little unripe in places, but there are signs of the writer Carpenter would become. On *Singular: Act I* there's a song called "Sue Me," which she wrote when she was 16 or 17, because she was getting sued by her former music managers. The song doesn't get into her legal ordeal, but she did take inspiration from it. "I'm so happy that it exists because I think that when a lot of people try to figure out where maybe my personality and my music and the bluntness and the honesty come from, I do think it started in that chapter of my life."

In the end Carpenter made four albums with Hollywood Records, not five. ("I definitely didn't fulfill my contract, thank God.") She signed with Island Records in January 2021, and released her first single with the label before the new deal was even announced. Perhaps you are familiar with the circumstances: That's the month that Olivia Rodrigo released her hit "Driver's License," in which she sings to an unnamed guy believed to be their fellow Disney star Joshua Bassett, "You're probably with that blonde girl," and, "She's everything I'm insecure about." No one will confirm much of anything here, but Carpenter's rushed-out single "Skin," released after Rodrigo's, had lines like "Maybe we could've been friends," and "Maybe blonde was the only rhyme." "I wrote it not envisioning it coming out," Carpenter said. "It was a bit of a whirlwind."

Emails I Can't Send, released in 2022, was Carpenter's first album for Island and, as she often describes it, "my first big-girl album." In part because she had more creative control than ever before: "That was my first time really, really getting to sit and steer the whole thing." And also because the songs were deeply personal. "My biggest heartbreak to date," she said of the relationship that inspired *Emails.* "My first *real* one. I hate to say that. It definitely makes all my exes before that feel like shit. I don't mean to do that. I just think in a sense of really understanding the grieving-someone-that's-alive feeling. I never felt that until this one."

The title track, the heaviest of the emails she couldn't send, is addressed not to the ex in question but to her father. It's a pull-no-punches missive about infidelity—"You disgust me / Don't make me cuss you out"—and how, for a daughter, that sort of thing can become a gift that keeps on giving. "Thanks to you, I can't love right," she sings. "Why do we end up loving the people we love later in life? That song just really made a lot of things make sense for me," she said. I was curious how she handled this with her dad, how he learned of the song's existence. "Sure as hell did not play it for him in person," she said. "I sent it to my mother first. There were definitely *feelings* involved. But you birthed me, so you kind of have to deal with the repercussions."

Carpenter's *Emails* tour lasted almost a year. When it finished, in August 2023, she then performed at 25 of Taylor Swift's Eras shows, across Latin America, Asia, and Australia. "Her stadiums make my shows look like clubs," Carpenter said. "Watching her keep their attention as if she's playing in their living room, it was like—and I told her this—*Your tour enabled me to do mine.*"

On the *Emails* tour, Carpenter started doing a bit where, in each new city, she would deliver a new outro for "Nonsense," the one lighthearted song on *Emails.* "The whole album's a heartbreak album, and then 'Nonsense' is sort of like: *Maybe I can fall in love again.* It's a very funny, unserious song." The "Nonsense" outros got sillier and raunchier, and as they did, they went more viral, to the delight of Swifties on three continents. One night in Buenos Aires, she went out with: "When I'm in the bedroom looking sexy. He's having a ball, he call me 'Messi.' Argentina, will you be my bestie?" In Rio de Janeiro, it was: "Sipping on me like a caipirinha. How to turn me on, boy, I can teach ya. My new name is Ipanema 'Brina." And in Sydney: "Yeah, he's pretty cute but will our kids be? This country's so big, I hope it fit me. I Vegemite be in love with you, Sydney."

From a distance, the "Nonsense" outros look like a bridge to *Short n' Sweet.* "I think they taught me a little bit more wordplay and a couple more innuendos," Carpenter said. "That might have bled into the next album. But it wasn't *because* of that song. If anything I was kind of conscious of not doing 'Nonsense' 2.0. But I was happy that people felt they got an unfiltered version of me, and they weren't running from it."

Carpenter didn't set out to write *Short n' Sweet.* She didn't have a blueprint in mind. She did know that she wanted to make a point about crossing genres. "I had a lot of ideas musically, and for the one thing that pulls it all together to be my point of view. That was the one thing that I knew."

The impulse was an irreverent one, in part. "I'm such a stubborn little spit," she said. "I remembered growing up, and a lot of people telling me: *You have to stay in your lane and pick your genre, otherwise you're not a cohesive artist and you don't know who you are*. And that always bugged me."

She wrote "Espresso" first, in France, on a 10-day break from the *Emails* tour. She had rented a house in the small town of Chailland, about three hours outside of Paris, and invited the songwriters Amy Allen, John Ryan, and Julian Bunetta to join her. It was the middle of summer, in 2023, and Chailland was deserted. "When I tell you it was a ghost town—all there was was this house, an empty church, and then like five minutes up the road there was a creperie." They worked at a leisurely pace. "I would write for a bit, I would start something, and then I would go on a walk, and I would get an espresso from this creperie."

Compared to everything else Carpenter had been working on, "Espresso" was an outlier. "I was writing all these sad songs, and 'Espresso' was like the one breath of fresh air. In the midst of all of it, I was like, This is still such a huge part of me—this mentality and the sense of humor and the playfulness."

One of the next songs Carpenter wrote with the group, late one night in Chailland, was "Dumb & Poetic." It's a savage dressing-down of a certain kind of New Age guy—"You're running so fast from the hearts that you're breakin' / Save all your breath for your floor meditation"—delivered in the style of an earnest, singer-songwritery ballad. Carpenter had the concept, the title, and the line "I promise the mushrooms aren't changing your life," which she rhymed with "You're so empathetic, you'd make a great wife." Played live, the song elicits a passionate response. Many of Carpenter's lyrics acquire an extra layer of humor when screamed aloud by an arena full of fans, but a particular couplet from "Dumb & Poetic" might take the cake: "Try to come off like you're soft and well-spoken / Jack off to lyrics by Leonard Cohen." The song manages to be vulnerable and hilarious and also sort of meta. Writing it pointed the way forward: "That song is a reason why the album is the album," Carpenter said.

"Espresso" and "Dumb & Poetic" served as poles—"two massive goalposts," as Allen put it—between which Carpenter could carve out a vast territory. In making room for a range of genres, she made room for more sides of her personality. Ryan had worked on *Emails,* and he told me that he was often struck by a kind of tonal gap between the heavier songs on that album and the person writing them. "She's so brilliantly sharp and quick and funny," he said. "Most of the sessions, we're just laughing the whole time, even if we're writing a sad song." He would get into it with her sometimes. "I was sort of like: *When is this funny person gonna start coming through in the records?*"

Allen said that even Carpenter's language is more uniquely her own, more specific to her. "The way she talks and the way she is in person is exactly how she writes," she said. "I think that's really what made her music cut through this year. Because she says everything in her songs exactly the way she would say it in conversation."

Allen and Carpenter are close friends, and if you listen closely to *Short n' Sweet,* it shows. There's a shorthand to the writing, as though the lyrics were plucked from a private text thread. "There are so many inside jokes," Allen said. "We were really writing *just* for who was in the room, not thinking about the reaction that the world would have to it. I think that's what allowed it to be so personality-driven and so intimate."

"I remember very specifically when she walked in the room with the concept for 'Lie to Girls,'" Allen went on, referring to the penultimate track on the album. This was at a writing session at Electric Lady in New York, with Jack Antonoff. "I felt so taken aback at how emotional I felt at just that concept alone," she said. "I relate so wholeheartedly to the lyric 'You don't have to lie to girls. If they like you, they'll just lie to themselves.' Every woman I know can relate to that sentence. And it's said so cleanly."

With Allen and Antonoff, Carpenter wrote two other songs that same day, including "Please Please Please," the country-inflected disco-pop song that has Carpenter pleading: "Heartbreak is one thing. My ego's another / I beg you, don't embarrass me, motherfucker." (It's her second global No. 1 on Spotify and first No. 1 hit on the Billboard Hot 100.)

The rest of the songs were written in California. The seed for "Juno" came out of a long night at the Chumash Casino in Santa Ynez. Again, Carpenter had rented a house in the area, with Allen and Ryan. At some point, they needed a break. "We were like, We gotta get out of here and go play some blackjack and mess around," Ryan said. When they got back later that night, Ryan made a loop and they started writing melodies. "Sabrina said this lyric, 'Make me Juno.' Like, pregnant. We all sort of laughed, and that was it." The next day, they were playing around again. "Sabrina was like, *What about that Juno line?*" They planted the seed in an entirely different set of chords. By five o'clock, the new song was finished.

Island Records wanted the first single to be "Please Please Please." Carpenter felt strongly that it should be "Espresso."

She knew she would be debuting the single at Coachella. "There's something about this song that, if I'd never heard it before, and I heard it *live* for the first time, I would understand it," she said. "I was definitely being swayed in another direction, but I knew deep down that it was this song. I was afraid of disappointing people for, like, five minutes. And then I was like: *No*."

Carpenter's roadside billboard in the desert set the tone for the forthcoming album and did not go unnoticed: "She's gonna make you come…to her Coachella set!" She performed "Espresso" on the main stage, one day after the single and music video were released. The backdrop: "Sabrina's Motel," an ersatz inn with a neon sign and a vintage convertible Mercedes crashed into the front.

Carpenter had started wearing corsets during the *Emails* tour. Now she was adding more fantasy lingerie to her stage wardrobe. She wore her first babydoll nightie, red and sheer, on *Saturday Night Live* in May, the second time she performed "Espresso" live. In the opening shot, she held a prop tabloid newspaper on which was printed this headline: "SABRINA LOVES TO BE ON TOP!"

At the end of the "Espresso" video, Carpenter was arrested on the beach. In the new video for "Please Please Please," she'd be in jail—in a crystal open-back minidress and cross necklace, the first of several mob-wife looks. "Espresso" plays in the background as she's bailed out and another criminal is brought in, in handcuffs: Carpenter's then boyfriend, the Irish actor Barry Keoghan, he of the *Saltburn* nude dance scene. (After this interview, it was widely reported that she and Keoghan broke up, but Carpenter declined to discuss the matter.)

Three music videos rolled out this way—as an interconnected storyline, some sort of epic. The video for "Taste," released in August with the album, is an absurdly gory homage to *Death Becomes Her* in which Carpenter plays a spurned ex. She attacks the other woman (Jenna Ortega) with a butcher knife only to end up impaled on a white picket fence. Toward the end, Carpenter and Ortega find themselves kissing, in a play on the upbeat-sounding song's dark chorus: "I heard you're back together, and if that's true / You'll just have to taste me when he's kissin' you."

Then there was her turn at the MTV VMAs, where "Espresso" won song of the year in September. Remember the silver beaded Bob Mackie dress Madonna wore to the Oscars in 1991? Carpenter wore it on the red carpet. While performing "Taste" onstage, she reenacted the Madonna-Britney kiss of 2003, but instead of kissing today's version of Spears, whoever that is, she made out with a grayish-blue alien.

Back in San Diego, from a distance in the arena, Carpenter's red corset glittered and reflected light like a disco ball. This was achieved with a prodigious amount of Swarovski crystals, said Carpenter's stylist, Jared Ellner—30,000 per corset. "We had a dream of the sparkliest corset on the entire planet." Ellner also told me that there's another secret reason for all the baby-doll cuts: They're comfortable. "She has been snatched and exposed and all kinds of things onstage, so to have a little tent is a dream," he said.

Carpenter wanted the experience of watching the show to feel like flipping channels on a TV. The songs are meant to be different channels, as are the interludes and commercials between acts. The segue into the third act, and into "Dumb & Poetic," had Carpenter's audience particularly rapt. It's a clip from a 1966 interview that Leonard Cohen gave to the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. In it, Cohen tells the interviewer that the message of poetry comes through in the body, the eyes, and the voice. That, read correctly, the instructions from a shoe-polish can could have the same effect. "What's the point of writing poetry then?" the interviewer asks. Cohen responds: "If you want people to have shiny shoes, you want to write those kind of very good instructions, and if you want to polish other parts of yourself, you do it with poetry."

Carpenter's sister Sarah found the clip after doing a "deep dive" into all things Leonard Cohen. "I thought it was so poignant, because he's kind of snarky and snippy, and I feel like that's the essence of 'Dumb & Poetic,'" Sarah said. "And the Leonard Cohen estate just, like, let us have permission." Asked what other deep dives she did ahead of the tour, she said: "Honestly, so many *Playboy* magazines. We bought a shit ton. We already had a bunch. But we bought more."

Perhaps the one major thing that wasn't completely planned out ahead of time: all those "Juno" positions. "Well, initially I thought I'd just rotate between a couple, but I have this relationship with my fans where I know they want more from me," Carpenter said. "I don't want to let them down. So sometimes I go: *Oh, you know what? Fuck it. It's Thursday. Let me give them a new one.* And then it turned into: *I should look up the 500 positions on the internet.* And I realized: I'm in platform boots. There's one of me. There's only so many I can do by myself, with a microphone in my hand, and in two and a half seconds. So, um, bless me for Europe. I don't know what's gonna happen. I just try to have fun in the moment. That's where most of those ideas come from. It's really just like: *I'm in Chicago. What's Chicago gonna love?*"

Carpenter has a hobby that few people know about. She draws sketches—of people, animals, landscapes, whatever she's feeling. It's her way of keeping a journal. "My grandma, who sadly passed away last year, was an incredible artist," she told me when we spoke by phone in January. "I think she threw that gene to me, because I started drawing at a really young age. I do it a lot when I'm not writing, and when I'm lucky enough to be a little bit bored."

Carpenter was in London for another brief songwriting retreat. Her plan was to return to LA for the Grammys before beginning the European leg of her tour, in Dublin. (We spoke the week that the devastating fires exploded across LA. At press time, the Grammys were still scheduled to take place.) "I haven't left and picked up a tour at this production level, so it'll be interesting to see how I slip back into it," she said. "I start every year, just trying to go away and write. Because I feel like I have a lot to say at the end of a year. I'm just kind of tucked away right now. It's half writing and half relaxation, if that's something I can even accomplish." □

FREE TO ROME

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 203

Inevitably, Michele told me, his work at Valentino would continue the explorations he had undertaken at Gucci: His intellectual and aesthetic sensibility is constant, even if the material heritage within which he is working is a different one. "I think it's going to change a little bit—half and half," he told me. "I mean, keeping the soul, but making the brand more alive. But I like this dust around the brand. The dust is precious."

When Michele began to plan his first haute couture collection for Valentino, he could not stop thinking about a painting he bought a few years ago that hangs behind a dining table at his home in Rome. Painted by François Quesnel, who lived in Paris in the late 16th century, and whose works Michele collects, it shows a woman wearing a dark gown, narrow at the waist and cut very low on the bodice, her face and décolletage framed by a delicate white upright collar, her neck adorned with a pearl choker.

"She was a rich woman," Michele explained over a lunch of fried artichokes and Dover sole at Ristorante Nino, an old-school spot close to the Valentino office. "People think that the black dress is just about mourning, but it was about richness, because it was the most precious color ever. This is kind of a fake black—dark aubergine." What appealed to Michele was not just the color, but the symbolism encoded in the painting. On the wall behind her hangs a portrait of herself as a younger woman, and by her side stands her young daughter—to demonstrate her maternal role. From her waist, a gold chain suspends a locket that contains a portrait of her late husband. "She had this legacy of this big kingdom from him," Michele said. "It's a very interesting way to say, 'I am a powerful woman.'" He had sent an image of the painting to the head of the couture studio. "I said, 'Let's start from here. Maybe we will go far from this, but let's start."

Michele made gorgeous one-off gowns while at Gucci—like the pink, floor-length silk-chiffon dress with a deep ruffled neckline and appliqués of stars and moons that Florence Welch wore to the Grammys in 2016, of which she told me, "I felt so comfortable—and I felt so myself. Alessandro saw what was beautiful and exciting about how I wanted to dress." Even before his first couture collection, in January, Michele demonstrated his interpretation of Valentino virtuosity by dressing Apple Martin, the daughter of Gwyneth Paltrow and Chris Martin, for Le Bal des Débutantes in Paris in November, fashioning a strapless sky-blue gown with six tiers of silk plissé chiffon. (Paltrow and Chris Martin wore Valentino too.) January's couture show was, however, Michele's first opportunity to offer an entire collection of one-off, handmade gowns fashioned not for performing artists or their offspring, but for the wardrobes of ladies of means—the modern-day equivalent to the woman in the portrait over his table.

It required a cognitive shift to *not* think about how to replicate a design, as he would reflexively do for ready-to-wear, Michele explained; the technical prowess of the Valentino tailors challenges his imagination in a way that is almost metaphysical. Haute couture, he said, "is a dress that doesn't answer to the real life." He went on: "You can put into the dress whatever you want, with no boundaries. It's maybe hard, because I like to have boundaries. I'm always fighting with the boundaries. I am always trying to be like water, going through the little space to destroy the things in the boundaries. Here, there is no one against me." He went on, "Freedom is such a delicate thing, you know. It means…completely naked. It means…completely who you are." There was another meaningful difference in the process: With ready-to-wear collections, Michele's team presents him with a model fully dressed, as at the fitting in Paris. But for couture, he explained, the model stands before him almost naked, while the seamstresses build the dress upon her—clustering around the disrobed body in an atmosphere that Michele described in sacramental terms.

"Couture is the seed where everything started—it's an archaeological rite that we are keeping alive," he told me. "When I see the tailors surrounding that girl and the dress with me, keeping alive that rite, I am feeling like there's a spirit, a very strong and powerful spirit, that you must preserve. Like a religious thing." The seamstresses, he said, "know how to manage the thing, like nuns, like the vestali"—the priestesses of ancient Rome who tended to the sacred flame in the temple of the goddess Vesta, the ruins of which stand in the Forum, a short walk away from the Valentino palazzo. The comparison reminded Michele, once again, of the fleeting passage of life and the brevity of individual existence against thousands of years of history. More prosaically, it reminded him of the transitory nature of fashion. Of the culture that has become his inheritance at Valentino, he said, "They want to keep and preserve the flame forever, and I'm going to be one of the people that try to manage the flame. But I'm going to be just one. The flame is the thing that you must keep alive." □

A SINGULAR MAN

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 204

cinematography to the city.") Only then will we finally see the results of that conversation between him and Ford. "It's all about seduction, desire, provoking something," he says. "More than talking about fabrics or colors, that's what he and I both search for."

At a first glance, it might not seem like the two have so very much in common, but they do, not least an approach to tailoring—and to eveningwear—that inhabits a world of spectacle and sensuality. Ackermann, like Ford, is one of fashion's dramatists, deftly wielding strong shoulders, sinuous draping, and an audacious use of rich color in both his women's and men's work, an approach that garnered him the adoration of the likes of Tilda Swinton, Timothée Chalamet—and, clearly, Mr. Ford.

To prepare for his new role, Ackermann spent some time in the Tom Ford archive in New York, where he looked at not only Ford's collections for his own label, but also his Gucci-era work and his Saint Laurent period. "Three important different stories, and I absorbed them all," says Ackermann, "but I had to push it away too, because I also have to tell a new story. I've had so many conversations with Mr. Ford, but there's no advice to be taken from the one who chooses you: Everything is said in that."

Buoyed by his time in the Zegna factories in Italy (where Tom Ford clothing is made), seeing how exquisitely they can execute things, while also delving into tuxedo constructions and the like, Ackermann is seeking out "the kind of elegance Mr. Ford was searching for too: one with a kind of madness about it, a kind of eccentricity."

Ask him what one piece represents the women's Ford-verse, and he laughs and says a fur coat. But that's not happening. Instead, he mentions the tuxedo shirt. "I see her in a tux shirt, even though it's men's," he says. "When you think about Tom Ford, you think about the night, but perhaps I am more the morning after: still wearing the shirt, but with a cashmere coat and loafers."

Maybe that's what Ackermann will be wearing the day after his debut. In the meantime, he's contemplating something else: the mantle of leading a house indelibly created in Ford's image. Since shuttering his own label in 2020, Ackermann has guest-designed Gaultier couture for a season and taken on a role creatively directing Canada Goose, something he plans to continue. But this newest venture brings him firmly into the glare of the spotlight once more. It's a place he finds comfortable—especially with where we are now. "The fashion industry is returning to a moment where people are searching for clothes and for beauty, and less *Here is my product,*" Ackermann says. "I'm happy to be back. It feels like a massive embrace—and I want to honor it." □

FROM THE GROUND UP

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 206

passing in 2010 to her departure in 2023). "I always think that to go forward, you have to go back to the beginning—to understand what the essence of the house is."

She flicks through the look book. "It was quite Hitchcock in a way, this silhouette—it's all about form and construction," she says. "And he used pure, simple fabrics like cotton and silk. Maybe what I will do is not going to wind up like that, but I do like the idea of stripping away—and that you're making clothes for the human body, for people, not for Instagram," she continues. "It's about the humanity of how teams work together—these incredible people, these magicians who still make things with their hands. How do you take that and make somebody *feel* something in the clothes?"

If anyone can understand the emotion to be wrung out of fashion, it's Burton. Her McQueen was blessed with both a near-haute-couture level of craftsmanship and an ability to evoke feeling in just about everything she designed. No doubt that gift was on the mind of LVMH, Givenchy's owner, when Burton was hired. As a designer, her imagination is as powerful as her cutting and construction skills are masterful.

If you're looking for signs as to what she will do with her debut, her declarative "I love tailoring"—a channeling of the house's storied couture past into clothes beautifully made but denuded of any flashiness or theatricality, perhaps—is likely a good place to start. "I'm interested in evolving new silhouettes, which I hope will bring a fresh attitude to tailoring," Burton says. "At times it will be crisp and sharp, tailored with a menswear hand; at others sexier, from a woman's viewpoint. I want to build a wardrobe that encompasses all of that," she says. "And to get the bare bones, it's good to start with the skeleton. Givenchy is about silhouette—and it is as important how it looks from behind as it looks from the front."

She's certainly looking at the house from every vantage point. "Givenchy has a very beautiful history," she says. "It appeals to me because it's a small house, and it's in Paris. I love Hubert de Givenchy's relationship with the women he dressed—he had a lot of empathy." Burton is living between London and Paris, where she is looking for an apartment—and the city has been a revelation. "I love Paris; I've never really seen it before," she says. "For years I've been doing shows here, but I never went to all the amazing exhibitions and galleries, met all these amazing people."

This isn't Burton's first time working for Givenchy, though the last time was in a very nonofficial capacity: She joined the McQueen brand in 1997 as its founder was sending shock waves through Paris with his fantastical, sometimes sci-fi-inspired Givenchy collections and was often dispatched from London with the showpieces that McQueen had crafted in his Hoxton studio. "I'd be on the Eurostar," Burton says, laughing, "with a robot at my feet."

She arrived at Givenchy after a year-long break, during which she worked out of her own small central London studio, enjoying the idea of making simply for the sheer pleasure of it. "Having that minute to stop, you see everything a bit more clearly, and you connect with yourself," she says. It seems to have given her the clarity she needs to begin her new role—and create her debut. "How do you dress women today?" she asks—the same question Hubert de Givenchy must have asked himself some 70 years earlier as he launched his house. "How does she live in real life, not [wearing] a museum piece? It's not about super embellishment; it's about going back to basics—in some ways, it's about going back to pattern-cutting; to shape and cut. It's actually much harder to do something that's simple and beautiful." □

ANOTHER WORLD

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 210

me. "My joke with my artist friends is that when there is some hot new painter that everyone is talking about, I ask, 'What is the work about?' And often it's a question no one can answer. When Lorna started painting, her paintings were about what she had been asking in her photo-based work: gender, history, memory, power. The difference is that when she started painting, the images carried the meaning, whereas in her photo work, language carried the meaning. Also, she began to work at a commanding scale. She became a history painter in a way, linked up to a tradition of large-scale paintings that dealt with the pressing issues of our time."

Lorna's first painting show at Hauser & Wirth New York in 2019 was called "Darkening," and it was a stunner. Huge landscapes took viewers into timeless arctic regions where cobalt blue and turquoise icebergs rose from cloudlike, frigid waters, and images of Black women seemed to appear and disappear. Bold, politically coded, and confident flights of the imagination marked Lorna's passage into yet another medium. Screen-printing images on gessoed panels, she used inks and acrylic paint at large scale. She used brushes of all sizes and sometimes walked on the images with her bare feet to create pooling and iridescence and opacity. She accomplished something of her own—she called them "abstracted landscapes."

"Big, brooding landscapes…contain a cascade of connections to her earlier art-making that manifest once the elements of method appear, making this new phase more an evolution than a break," Siddhartha Mitter wrote in *The New York Times* about the show. "The tones and densities of ink merge land and water, cover horizon lines, streak and tumble across the frame."

Lorna, who was divorced in 2017, concedes she is "very evasive" about her private life. "I have a lover," she tells me, an artist whom she's known for a number of years, but they don't live together. "In all my relationships—with my daughter, close friends, and lover—intimacy and making space for it is key. My dear friend Robin Coste Lewis reminded me during the pandemic of this excerpt from a letter by Rainer Maria Rilke: 'I hold this to be the highest task for a bond between two people: that each protects the solitude of the other.'"

A year ago, when Lorna was invited to do the exhibition at The Met, she was in the middle of working on her second painting show at Hauser & Wirth New York. Her subject this time was meteorites. She had been fascinated by *Minerals From Earth and Sky,* a book published by the Smithsonian in 1929. It contained many

photographic plates of meteorites, but what caught her attention was one that fell on a farm near Baldwyn, Mississippi, in 1922, at the feet of a Black tenant farmer. Lorna delved into the records and was able to identify him as Ed Bush. "What really captivated me about the text was a relationship between a landowner who's also a judge and his Black tenant farmer who goes unnamed," she says. "And it was at a time when racial tension in the United States, particularly in Mississippi, was high and violent. But this was about Ed Bush's experience of having a meteorite fall at his feet." Particularly the sonic experience, she tells me: "It was all about the sound. He heard it before it landed." She struggled with the idea of how to paint meteorites—rocks that were not just ordinary rocks—and this story opened the door. She wrote a note to herself with three thoughts on it: "Black man. Mississippi. Meteorite."

She began experimenting with silver and black acrylic paint to create an atmosphere of depth and radiancy. The paintings she made were so tall that she had to paint them on the floor of her studio in the Brooklyn Navy Yard. When I saw all nine of them together at Hauser & Wirth, in a room with a soaringly high ceiling, I was overwhelmed. Surrounded by monumental, luminescent portraits of objects from another world, I felt a quiet awe that I hadn't experienced since my first visit to Mark Rothko's Chapel in Houston.

"Lorna has a gift for exceeding whatever medium she chooses to work in," says Naomi Beckwith, deputy director and chief curator of the Guggenheim Museum. "No surprise, then, that when she turns to painting her scale is large and her themes are larger than life—alpine landscapes, massive explosions, meteors from beyond our solar system. On the one hand, Lorna stays true to her longtime practice of appropriating vintage imagery, yet the scale and ambition of her paintings move into the realm of the sublime."

The Met museum bought *Did Time Elapse,* one of the meteorite paintings. In this one, the object seems to be hovering in midair, ready to fall on your foot. It's more luminous and maybe more friendly than the others.

"There's always this voice in your head, saying, 'Oh, but you can't do that,' or 'That's such a departure from what you did before,'" Lorna tells me. "There are all these different kinds of voices that can curtail creativity. I've had to disengage with labels of what kind of artist I am or what I do, because it's only confining. I can kind of do anything." □

TWO PRINCES: JACK DRAPER

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 225

decorate his new flat and pictures to make it home. "I wouldn't say it's a professional job," Jubb tells me of Draper's decorating. Nor is his car a status item; Draper still drives a second-hand 2013 Volkswagen Polo. He's single, and though he likes going on dates, he tells me, he doesn't really party, preferring to spend time with friends like Jubb, whom he's known since junior tournaments, and family. He wants to learn how to invest his money and do more in fashion. He's caught the eye of Burberry, who has made him an ambassador. He's also now represented by IMG, but claims he's "not a very good model at all." But he does care about style and has studied how players look and dress. Nadal's penchant for sleeveless shirts impressed him, as did the looks of mullet-and-headband-era Andre Agassi. Draper swears he's not thinking about it, but somewhere on his horizon may be a Grand Slam win. He's already beat two of the best current players, Jannik Sinner (in 2021) and Carlos Alcaraz (last year, at Queen's Club in London). "Sinner, Alcaraz…they're leading the way at the moment," he says. "But I know myself. I'm hungry, I'm willing to do whatever it takes to really improve and compete with them." □

TWO PRINCES: BEN SHELTON

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 226

chuckling. We're veering toward slapstick territory.

Then Shelton steps to the baseline to serve again. He tosses the ball in the air, corkscrews his lower body, and the rest, frankly, is a bit of a blur: The ball makes a cracking sound upon impact, travels at something in the realm of 150 mph, catches the corner of the serve box, and ricochets off the court and into the crowd behind Alcaraz. A kind of shocked hush of *Oooooohs* and a smattering of *Oh nos* from the crowd—did Shelton's serve just injure a spectator? A few beats later and it seems that the answer is no—nothing requiring medical attention, at least. But let's just say: The mood inside the Garden has changed.

On court after the match (2-1 to Alcaraz after a final-set tiebreaker), Shelton is prodded by the evening's compere to tell the crowd just when they can expect him to bring home his first Grand Slam trophy; instead, Shelton talks about the group of American men coming up in the pro ranks—most of them his good friends—mentioning Taylor Fritz and Tiafoe by name and shouting, "We're comin'! We're definitely comin'!"

He'd been effusive with me, too, about players like Sinner and Alcaraz. When I reminded him that he's been riding his own kind of rocket lately, Shelton nodded his head, took a deep breath, and hesitated for a moment. "Most of these guys who are at the top of the game right now, they were prodigies—five or six years old, racket in their hand, training every day. I wasn't really supposed to be this great player. And so to get to top 20 in the world within two years of playing college tennis? That's something that I don't take for granted. It's tough to be a finished product by 18 if you start at 12—but I'm not a finished product." □

MACHINES LIKE US

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 235

The team has been floored by the rabid army of fans. Dubbed Fireflies, after a magical moment in the show, they range from repeat viewers dressing up as their favorite characters to those creating art inspired by HwaBoon, the emotional-support potted plant that many find the production's low-key true star. (Arden calls her "a fabulous silent diva" who appeals to wallflowers in the audience.)

A significant portion of those waiting by the stage door to meet the cast are Asian American, and while nearly all the actors in this production are also of Asian American descent, Shen shies from labeling the show narrowly. "It's important to mark accomplishments, but whenever we put that pressure on to be a mouthpiece for any group of people that is multifaceted and contradictory and complicated, it's going to fail."

Although actors of various races and ethnicities have previously portrayed the robots, almost every production has been set in Seoul. Yet Criss maintains "the show is as distinctly Korean as *Romeo and Juliet* is distinctly Italian…. It's where we set our scene, and some aspects of the show might spring from the culture." (South Korea has the world's highest density of robot workers.) "But it's a story with universal themes: We all live, we all end, we all, hopefully, at some point, love or are loved."

The offbeat premise and ingenious staging prove that no algorithm can yet prescribe a hit Broadway musical. "As we enter into this world of AI, theater is one of the last completely human-made, -operated, -performed, and -received art forms," Arden notes. "And that's why we go to the theater—to learn something new about what it is to be alive." How delightful that it's possible in a musical about robots. □

THE DARLING BUDS OF MARCH

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 236

wanted to be true to Le Veau d'Or's original menus, which had always had mushrooms à la grecque or artichokes à la grecque." But artichokes, Hanson says, are "a chef favorite." What makes them a favorite? "Well, they're a pain in the ass. Chefs gravitate to them because the home cook might think: *I'm not dealing with that.* But when you know the reward, it's worth the hassle."

Hanson removes all but the artichokes' tender inner leaves and scoops out their fuzzy chokes. "We make a brine with lemon juice, lemon peels, garlic, fennel seed, coriander seed, toasted black peppercorns, white wine vinegar, water, and salt." The artichokes are cooked in the brine, each in its own pot, until tender. ("Sometimes we've got six pots going.") Hanson makes a vinaigrette from the cooking liquid, adding fresh lemon juice, olive oil, mint, shallots, herbs—a complicated preparation. But most of Le Veau's menu is unabashedly rich. A meal of the sharp, pickled artichokes followed by a lamb gigot with coco beans, especially if accompanied, as mine is, by a 2022 La Soeur Cadette Bourgogne, would suit a teenage de' Medici as well as a current-day food writer.

I leave Le Veau d'Or for my next artichoke. I'm trying to eat as many as I can, gathering my thistle buds while I may. My destination is the quarter mile of the West Village occupied by the restaurant dynasty of Rita Sodi and Jody Williams. The married chefs, one of whom is Italian, adore artichokes. "We love the ritual," Williams tells me. "And the complexity of the artichoke—both flavor and preparation. It isn't

always obvious what to do with them; it's something someone shows you." As a young cook in Reggio Emilia and Rome, Williams says, she must have cleaned the equivalent of fields of artichokes. Now Sodi and Williams's dominion includes Buvette, where one can order artichokes à la barigoule; I Sodi, where carciofi fritti appears on the menu; Bar Pisellino, where one can sip Cynar, the artichoke liqueur; and Via Carota, which has the distinction of offering the most artichokes in a single meal.

So, on the sun-dappled sidewalk of Grove Street, a friend and I begin our long Via Carota lunch with carciofi crudi—thinly sliced raw artichokes, amply dressed with lemon, smashed avocado, watercress, and Parmigiano—and carciofi alla griglia—artichokes poached in court bouillon, grilled, and then dressed in salmoriglio. (Just in case you, like me, have heard the rumor that artichokes are bad with wine, I recommend trying them with a Pugliese Petraluce before you believe it.) Next is a tortino di carciofi, a combination of olive-oil-fried artichoke slices and beaten egg, whipped together over high heat. It arrives, olive oil glistening over its top, snowcaps of Parmigiano slumping over a frothy nest of egg, wedges of tender artichoke suspended throughout. Tomorrow, there may be more artichokes yet at Via Carota. "The artichokes come and go," Williams tells me. "Soon, we'll switch to raw artichokes, oranges, mint, watercress, and Pecorino Romano. And we'll add carciofi to the pinzimonio and bagna cauda."

Having ordered a case from California, I now suffer an arresting case of anxiety of influence. Should I channel the louche denizens of Le Dive and serve mine poached and otherwise barely touched? Or attempt a complicated French rendition? I think back fondly on artichokes from my past: an artichoke pie and an artichoke stuffed with garlic and breadcrumbs, served on Christmas Eve by a Sicilian neighbor in Westchester, New York. I think of artichokes once served to me by Mona Talbott, proprietor of Talbott & Arding in Hudson and founder of the Rome Sustainable Food Project. "I love artichokes and potatoes," she tells me. "I trim the artichokes all the way down and stew them in white wine and olive oil, then combine them with potato wedges and add the cooking liquid for it to roast together."

"Oh! Artichokes and beans," I hear myself say out loud. I picture a heavy enamel casserole, like the one Caravaggio threw at the waiter. But in place of the potatoes—nubby swollen cranberry beans, which I managed to get fresh, then froze, over the summer. I'll poach the artichokes whole, like Sodi and Williams do, and then combine beans and artichoke at the end, letting them roast briefly under a lacquer of fresh olive oil.

I follow my plan, inviting neighbors who profess to love artichokes as much as I do. The ingredients roast together long enough for me to open Champagne and set out chicories, warm baguette, and salted butter. We try the artichokes. I'm reminded of a line from *The Princess Bride,* when the irascible Peter Falk describes history's famous kisses. "Since the invention of the kiss there have been five kisses that were rated the most passionate, the most pure. This one left them all behind." It is true of my artichokes. They left them all behind. □

In This Issue

Table of Contents: 64: Coat; stellamccartney.com. Manicurist: Simone Cummings. Tailor: Della George. **74:** Burberry coat and jacket; us.burberry.com. Shirt; brooksbrothers.com. Pants; carlomanzi.com. **Cover Look: 74:** Dress; dolce gabbana.com for requests. Jean Schlumberger by Tiffany & Co. bracelet and Tiffany & Co. by Elsa Peretti necklace; select Tiffany & Co. boutiques. **Editor's Letter: 76:** Top right image: Manicurist: Charly Avenell.

PLAYTIME

166–167: Dress and bracelet; gucci.com. Heels; paris texasbrand.com. Earrings; select Tiffany & Co. boutiques. **169:** Tiffany & Co. earrings and necklace; select Tiffany & Co. boutiques. **170–171:** Dress; us.burberry.com. Heels; us.christianlouboutin.com. Swarovski earrings and necklace; swarovski.com. **173:** Dress and heels; prada.com. Jacket; shoplapointe.com. Earrings, necklace, bracelet, and ring; graff.com. **174–175:** Top, skirt, and bracelet; select Chanel boutiques. Shoes; select Jimmy Choo boutiques. Manicurist: Jin Soon Choi. Tailor: Raul Zevallos. Hair Colorist: Lena Ott.

STATE OF WONDER

176–177: Loewe brogues; loewe.com. **178:** Parasol; 117 West 25th Street, New York. **180–181:** On Yai: Loewe brogues. **192–193:** On Yai: Alaïa top; maison-alaia.com. On Odhiang: Skims bandeau. Tailor: Ketch at Carol Ai Studio Tailors.

FREE TO ROME

200–201: On Zhang: Gown and shorts; Valentino boutiques for similar styles. Manicurist: Silvia Magliocco. Tailor: Viola Sangiorgio.

A SINGULAR MAN

204–205: Manicurist: Charly Avenell.

ANOTHER WORLD

208–209: Shirt, skirt, and necklace; ysl.com. Tailor: Carol Ai at Carol Ai Studio Tailors.

HEAT WAVE

214–215: Shirt; connormcknight.com. **216:** Shirt, pants, boxers, tie, and shoes; ysl.com. **217:** On Vasan: Dress; vivienne westwood.com for requests. Calzedonia tights; calzedonia.com. Jimmy Choo heels; jimmychoo.com. On Ferran: Prada knit, skirt, and socks; prada.com. Jimmy Choo shoes; jimmychoo.com.

BURNING BRIGHT

219: Top and pants: balenciaga.com. Manicurist: Simone Cummings. Tailor: Della George.

TWO PRINCES

220–221: Jacket and shirt; turnbullandasser.co.uk. Scarf; dunhill.com. **222:** Robe; us.burberry.com. **223:** Shirt; dunhill.com. **224:** Jacket and sweatshirt; ralphlauren.com. Trousers; loewe.com. **226–227:** T-shirt; armani.com. Jeans; loewe.com. For Shelton: Tailor: Carol Ai at Carol Ai Studio Tailors.

THE END OF THE AFFAIR

228–229: Jacket, pants, necklace, and belt; Dior boutiques. Tiffany & Co. by Elsa Peretti earrings and ring; select Tiffany & Co. boutiques. **230–231:** Coat; driesvannoten.com. Jimmy Choo shoes; select Jimmy Choo boutiques. Tailor: Christopher Ivory.

MACHINES LIKE US

233: On Criss: Jacket, shirt, pants, and belt; ysl.com. On Shen: Top and skirt; michaelkors.com. Gabriel & Co. bracelet; gabrielny.com. Swarovski ring; swarovski.com. Tailor: Jacqui Bennett at Carol Ai Studio Tailors.

CHARACTER STUDIES

241: Shoes; prada.com. **242–243:** Boots; maisonmargiela.com. **244:** Marni hat; marni.com. Maison Margiela hat; maisonmargiela.com. Prada sunglasses; prada.com. **245:** Sandals; therow.com. **247:** Miu Miu belt. **249:** Boots; maisonmargiela.com. Manicurist: Anatole Rainey. Tailor: Ellen Reesen.

THE GET

258–259: 4. Watch; $4,700. **5.** Chair; price upon request. **6.** Trunks; price upon request.

LAST LOOK

266: Bag; balenciaga.com.

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Last Look

Balenciaga bag

When Balenciaga launched its latest It bag, the Bel Air, last fall, it did so in irresistibly glamorous fashion, with a trio of movie stars—Naomi Watts, Michelle Yeoh, and Isabelle Huppert—fronting the klieg-lit campaign. Now along comes the Bel Air clutch, refining the style's mélange of pockets, belts, and flaps into a sleek (yet surprisingly spacious) pochette. Opt for the Granny Green colorway seen here—and prepare for a surge of main-character energy to follow.

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SET DESIGN: JORDAN MIXON.

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