



BELMOND

Me Time



A GOOD MORNING RITUAL

Waking with vim and vigour doesn't come easy to all, but here's how you can fill your day with positivity in one easy sitting

WORDS: NADIA NARAIN AND KATIA NARAIN-PHILLIPS

Nothing is so enriching, so rewarding or so elevating as pausing to experience the sensations that fill your mind and body. Perhaps that's divining the music of your surroundings, or something as simple as counting the spaces between your breaths. Wherever you find yourself waking on this good Earth, know that you can begin your time with an enriching sense of optimism. A feeling of peace and connectedness that will doubtlessly follow you throughout the day.

Good Living is Belmond's new concept in wellbeing and a celebration of *art de vivre*. It seeks to blend guilt-free indulgences with heady adventures and cultural experiences, all designed to enrich the mind and nourish the soul.

The following exercise is designed by Good Living Experience Makers Katia and Nadia, authors of *Self-Care for the Real World* and *Rituals for Every Day*. "One thing that makes us feel great is to ensure we have time in the morning and really set the tone of our day. Here is a plan for you to start your waking hours with a deepening sense of gratitude and joy."

We invite you to take five minutes of your morning to set your intentions, focus on your perspective and awaken your senses. Sit up on the edge of the bed with your spine straight and your feet flat on the ground. Keep your hands resting on your lap, your eyes closed and feel your breath as it moves in and out of your body.

- | | |
|------------------|--|
| Listen | Inhale and then, as you exhale, notice all the sounds around you. Continue this for a few breaths. |
| Smell | Breathe in and exhale deeply, noticing the scents around you. Take a few breaths with your attention on what you can smell. |
| See | On your next breath inhale and, as you exhale, open your eyes softly and take note of your surroundings. Take a few breaths and become aware of the colours and the light. |
| Taste | On your next breath become aware of your lips, your tongue and the whole of the mouth. Notice any tastes as you swallow. |
| Feel | Finally be aware of your feet on the ground, your hands on your lap and your seat on the bed. Continue for a few breaths. |
| Awareness | As you begin to feel more present, look forward to the new experiences and adventures that await you. Every morning is an entirely new beginning. Breathe deeply, smile and enjoy what today brings. |
| Be | Then close your eyes. |

THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING IDLE

It's time we retreated from the distractions of our always-on culture – and followed the example of history's most languorous characters – to rediscover this much-needed and welcome pursuit

WORDS: TOM HODGKINSON





*“We were not made just to work, like machines.
We were made to think and to dream”*

Idling doesn't get a good press. Idlers are routinely categorised as scrounging layabouts and no-good parasites. If you want to benefit from society's offerings, then you had better get up early and spend most of your time suffering. The theory goes that if you're good – if you work really, really hard – then you shalt be rewarded with some money and a two-week holiday each year.

But idling as an approach to life has plenty of philosophers to recommend it. The original, inspirational do-nothing of them all must be Socrates. Here is a man so lazy that he never bothered to write anything down. He didn't charge for his teaching because, we imagine, chasing his students for fees would be too much trouble. Instead the bearded sage just sat around contemplating and asking questions in the marketplace. He would tilt his head quizzically and say, “Really?” when in conversation. He also enjoyed drinking wine all night

SUPINE SERENITY

THIS RUSTIC VIEW OF LIO PICCOLO NEAR VENICE IS THE PERFECT PLACE TO SET UP A RELAXING APERITIVO FOR TWO IN THE COUNTRYSIDE

RELAX WELL

TRY TO FIND THE ODD FIVE OR TEN MINUTES DURING THE DAY TO TAKE A SHORT NAP AND REVEL IN DRIFTING OUT OF CONSCIOUSNESS

with his pals. And in so doing, he invented a new science of living called philosophy, meaning the “love of wisdom”. That was thanks to his pupil Plato, who was so entranced by this outstanding gentleman that he wrote down everything he said.

Elon Musk has said that no one changed the world on 40 hours a week. Well, Socrates changed it on zero hours a week. If one person exerted so much influence over the world in such a supine fashion, than perhaps we should follow his example.

Another philosophical idler was Lao Tzu, the great Chinese sage of ancient times. He was a contemporary of Confucius, and while Confucius went around telling everyone to polish their manners and behave well, Lao Tzu invented an opposing philosophy called Taoism. Tao means “the way”, and its main idea was “do nothing”, an idea expressed in the two words *wu wei*. Instead of forcing things in the wrong direction, you go with the flow.

USING YOUR RELIGION

The Industrial Revolution, for all the marvellous machinery it brought to Britain, meant that the working day actually grew longer and the new factory hands would toil 14 hours a day. Work became simply a means of earning money. In our spare time, if we had any, we were expected to spend this money on buying stuff. Our creative impulses were instead channelled into shopping.

So the enjoyment of idling got lost somehow. A simple way to escape the work-and-consume cycle is simply to do nothing. There is a lovely activity called “daydreaming”. It is perfectly natural and it is healing. We were not made just to work, like machines. We were made to think and to dream.

There are all sorts of ways to bring idling back into our lives. One simple strategy is to indulge in the siesta. An afternoon nap does wonders for your energy levels, and it is also a huge pleasure in itself. Dozing off after lunch is a wonderful way not only to catch up on lost sleep but to glimpse a rich inner world during the day. And even better if you can find a partner to share your after-lunch retreat with for some languid daytime coupling!

Cafés, pubs and bars are temples of idleness (or at least they used to be, before the phone and laptop invaded them). They are places for sitting, either alone or in merry company. Perhaps the greatest luxury known to anyone is to spend an entire afternoon in a picture-perfect watering hole, with a steady supply of liquid libations, doing nothing in particular. Or even playing a board game round the table with those close to you.

Mindfulness is also a form of organised idling. But it seems like a lot of effort to me. Surely all you really have to do is sit in a chair, stare into space, listen to your breathing and set the timer on your phone to go off in five minutes?

Let me add here that the kind of idling I am recommending is not the same as mere laziness. In fact, idling can be very useful to your life. It is when we are relaxed that we get good ideas. Poets and philosophers need a lot of thinking time. Wordsworth and Coleridge used to go on epic long walks in the Lake District and around Exmoor to get their minds moving. Similarly, idling can encourage you to connect with your own inner artist or poet. Try going for a walk in a particular place that you enjoy and where you feel inspired. Take a sketch pad or a leather-bound notebook with you to collect any doodles, drawings, feelings or thoughts which you are moved to put down.

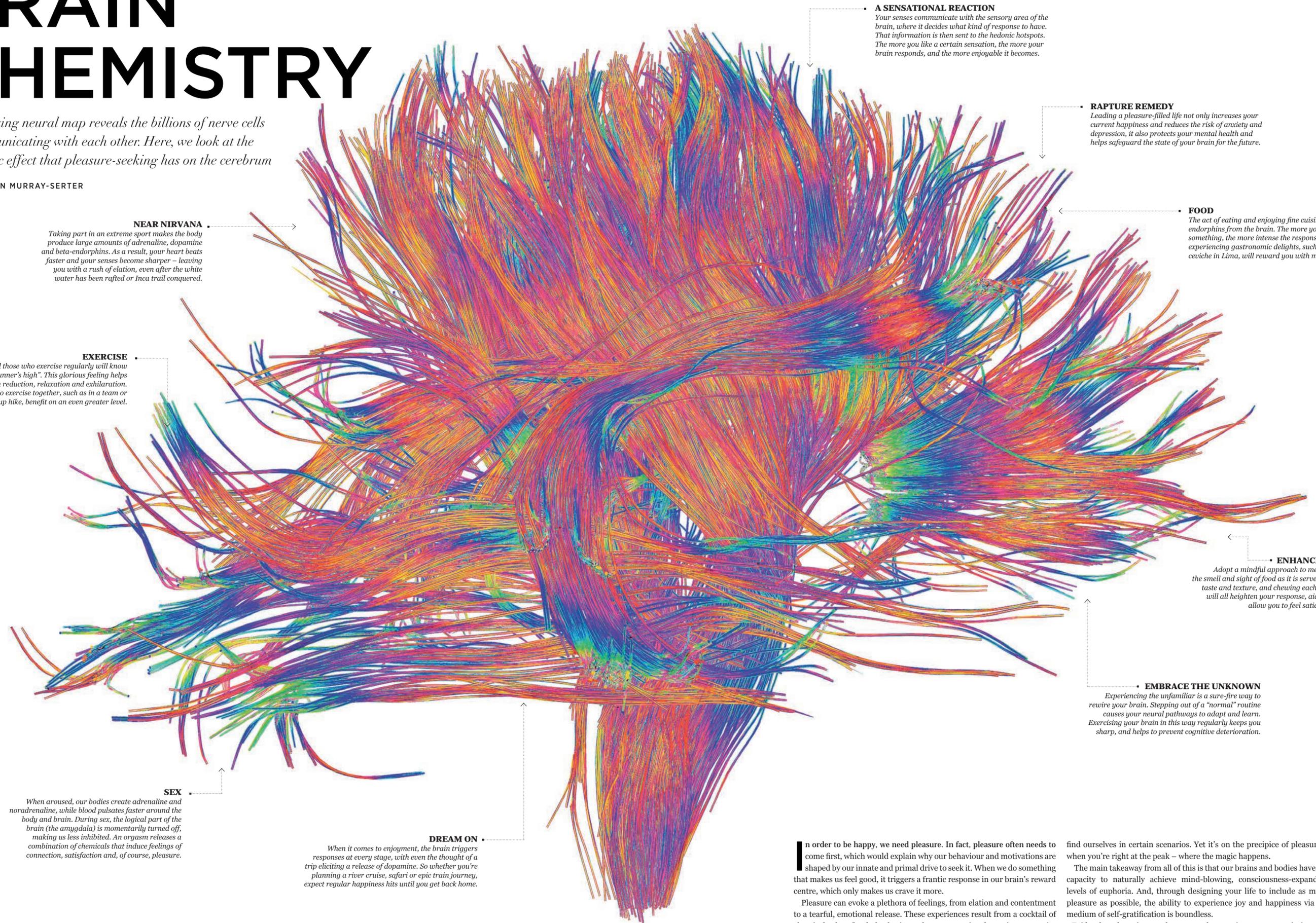
And if you can open a bottle of wine while recollecting your emotions, all the better.



BRAIN CHEMISTRY

This striking neural map reveals the billions of nerve cells all communicating with each other. Here, we look at the hedonistic effect that pleasure-seeking has on the cerebrum

WORDS: DAN MURRAY-SERTER



A SENSATIONAL REACTION
Your senses communicate with the sensory area of the brain, where it decides what kind of response to have. That information is then sent to the hedonic hotspots. The more you like a certain sensation, the more your brain responds, and the more enjoyable it becomes.

RAPTURE REMEDY
Leading a pleasure-filled life not only increases your current happiness and reduces the risk of anxiety and depression, it also protects your mental health and helps safeguard the state of your brain for the future.

FOOD
The act of eating and enjoying fine cuisine releases endorphins from the brain. The more you like something, the more intense the response. So, experiencing gastronomic delights, such as the freshest ceviche in Lima, will reward you with more pleasure.

ENHANCED EATING
Adopt a mindful approach to meals. Savouring the smell and sight of food as it is served, enjoying the taste and texture, and chewing each mouthful fully will all heighten your response, aid digestion and allow you to feel satiated for longer.

EMBRACE THE UNKNOWN
Experiencing the unfamiliar is a sure-fire way to rewire your brain. Stepping out of a "normal" routine causes your neural pathways to adapt and learn. Exercising your brain in this way regularly keeps you sharp, and helps to prevent cognitive deterioration.

NEAR NIRVANA
Taking part in an extreme sport makes the body produce large amounts of adrenaline, dopamine and beta-endorphins. As a result, your heart beats faster and your senses become sharper – leaving you with a rush of elation, even after the white water has been rafted or Inca trail conquered.

EXERCISE
Runners and those who exercise regularly will know about the "runner's high". This glorious feeling helps with pain reduction, relaxation and exhilaration. People who exercise together, such as in a team or on a group hike, benefit on an even greater level.

SEX
When aroused, our bodies create adrenaline and noradrenaline, while blood pulsates faster around the body and brain. During sex, the logical part of the brain (the amygdala) is momentarily turned off, making us less inhibited. An orgasm releases a combination of chemicals that induce feelings of connection, satisfaction and, of course, pleasure.

DREAM ON
When it comes to enjoyment, the brain triggers responses at every stage, with even the thought of a trip eliciting a release of dopamine. So whether you're planning a river cruise, safari or epic train journey, expect regular happiness hits until you get back home.

In order to be happy, we need pleasure. In fact, pleasure often needs to come first, which would explain why our behaviour and motivations are shaped by our innate and primal drive to seek it. When we do something that makes us feel good, it triggers a frantic response in our brain's reward centre, which only makes us crave it more.

Pleasure can evoke a plethora of feelings, from elation and contentment to a tearful, emotional release. These experiences result from a cocktail of chemicals that flood the brain such as serotonin, dopamine, oxytocin, endorphins and adrenaline, which the brain produces naturally when we

find ourselves in certain scenarios. Yet it's on the precipice of pleasure – when you're right at the peak – where the magic happens.

The main takeaway from all of this is that our brains and bodies have the capacity to naturally achieve mind-blowing, consciousness-expanding levels of euphoria. And, through designing your life to include as much pleasure as possible, the ability to experience joy and happiness via the medium of self-gratification is boundless.

Evidently, what gives each person pleasure is never prescriptive, but being inspired to become creative is the key to living a more fulfilled life.

WAY OF THE LIBERTINE

*Anyhow,
Anyway,
Anywhere*

WORDS: TONY WRIGHTON

In 1807, Lord George Gordon Byron travelled to Cambridge at age 19 to become a student at Trinity College. This was well before he became a celebrated poet, legendary rake and one of the most notorious rule-breakers in England, but the signs were there. On arrival with his bulldog Smut, he was told that all dogs were banned. Byron was so irritated by this, he went out and bought a pet bear instead. There were, perhaps unsurprisingly, no rules against bears. He would walk his "new friend" around the grounds of the college, delighting in the horrified reactions of the residents. Lord Byron was already on his way to becoming the premier rebel of his day, and one of the world's best-known libertines.

History is littered with characters such as these – the bad boys and bad girls who pursue wild nights, prioritise physical pleasures, and exhibit a palpable disregard of the rules. From Mary Queen of Scots through to Marilyn Manson, these true rebels often achieve infamy by enjoying more champagne moments in one night than many of us do in a lifetime.

MODEL BEHAVIOUR

One of the most celebrated contemporary libertines is supermodel, party girl and mother Kate Moss. What a perfect example of a life lived to the full. When it comes to Kate, it's hard

to distinguish legend from myth, especially as she's followed the advice of her ex-boyfriend Johnny Depp to "never complain, never explain". But let's examine her rumoured libertine ledger: smuggling bottles of vodka onto planes (quite tame really), holding after-party orgies (less tame) and getting back on it soon after checking out of the Priory (very un-tame). However, even Kate has revealed that she has recently joined a gym, has a penchant for salads and – shock – juices. Amongst all these stories, the constant is that she never follows the rules, and doesn't seem much to care.

In these serious times, the pleasure-seeker is an ever-rarer species. Why? The theory is that in a hyper-connected world, we're all too busy worrying about global instability, climate change and perfecting the right angle on a social media post. We feel too time-poor to pursue the not-so-important business of enhancing some hardcore pleasure every once in a while.

In a sanitised, filtered Instagram era, we should rage against the dying of the libertine light. Serious times do not always require serious people. We can subscribe to 72 wellness accounts, read the latest Naomi Klein novel (or at least the Kindle sample), but we're surely also still capable of waking up in a foreign city with our shoes on after a 12-hour blowout, and still remember to offset our flight on the way home.



**MODERN LOVERS**

THE SECRET SHARED
MOMENTS COUPLES
AND LOVED ONES
EXPERIENCE WHEN
MAKING MEMORIES
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“Perhaps you’ll remember the pleasures of a midnight skinny dip, or sit by the fire ’til 3am exploring the meaning of life”

ENVIRONMENT IS EVERYTHING

For this new breed of party animal, the important thing is giving ourselves the space to switch off and simply play. Find your happy place where you can check-in and then check-out, leaving your Type-A self at reception. In a workaholic world, the perfect setting can help us find that most elusive of things, the off-switch.

And then... who knows what might happen? Perhaps you'll remember the pleasures of a midnight skinny dip, or sit by the fire 'til 3am exploring the meaning of life. Perhaps you'll eat breakfast at dinner and dinner at breakfast (or just go for 24/7 room service). Perhaps you'll simply rediscover the joy of wearing odd socks, and not care one jot about it. Jack Nicholson once said, "My motto is... more good times," and there's no doubt that to break some rules, Belmond-style, the surroundings certainly help.

WHO'S IN?

As well as the perfect environment, who are the characters that will help you create more of those champagne moments? Anyone of an intemperate disposition will know that the pursuit of pleasure is a journey best undertaken with others. Of course there can be benefits to flying solo, but there's nothing better than embarking on a memorable shared experience with your lover, friends or family, when you're too busy joy-seeking to realise that you're making memories at the same time. Think of the fun involved in keeping secrets between lovers, the group giggles amongst girlfriends in a public setting, or the in-jokes that nobody else gets.

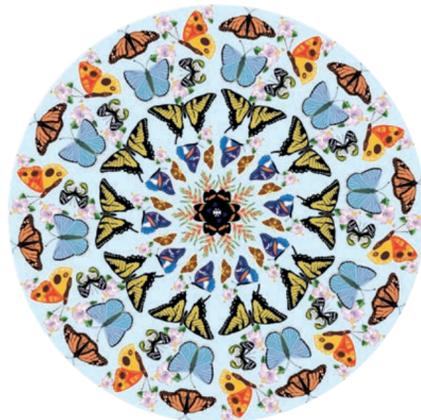
LEARNING FROM THE MASTERS

There is one debauchery buzzkill us modern bon viveurs need to be wary of: technology. Your smartphone is better off disinvited from the bender of the century. Nobody should be documenting what might happen on your next mega-session. If you are serious about things getting messy, leave it at home or in the hotel suite.

Would Lord Byron, a legendary fan of gin, be worrying about taking a perfectly framed picture of his 12th gin of the evening? No, he'd be firmly focused on drinking it, and moving on to the 13th. When he had an affair with the wife of a future Prime Minister, she described Byron as "mad, bad, and dangerous to know". Nobody with that description ever posted an Instagram story of a night out. So learn from one of the masters. The only memories of the true modern libertine will be the ones in your fuzzy head, but they'll be good ones.

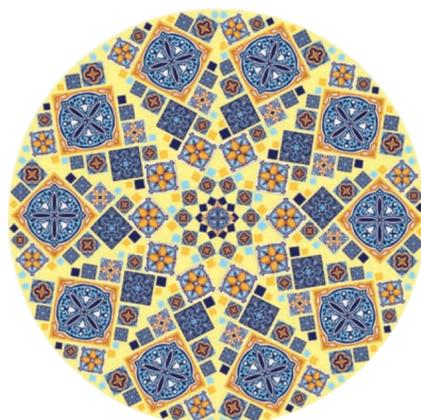
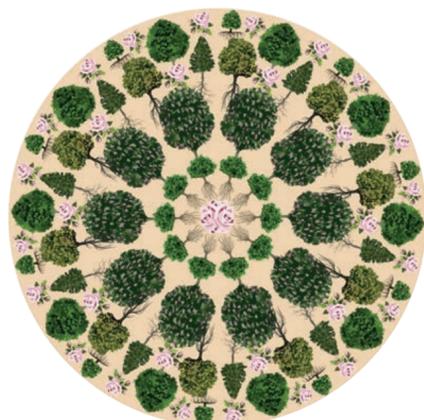
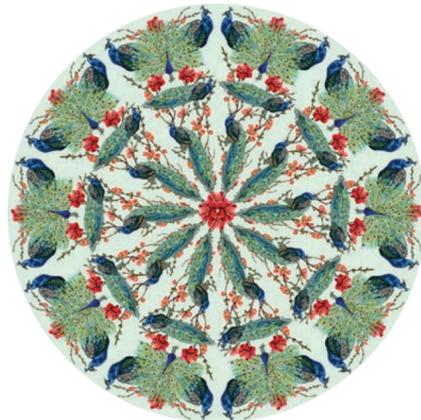
Finally, don't feel bad if after your night of abandon you secretly yearn for something a little healthier – mellow yin yoga recovery session with the in-house wellness consultant at La Résidence Phou Vao in Laos, perhaps? Healing salt spa treatment at the Cap Juluca resort in Anguilla? Or even an activity that celebrates a more wholesome form of hedonism? After all, what's more pleasurable than losing yourself in seeing the wonder on your children's faces as they take in the elephants, buffaloes, hippos and wild cats at the Savute Elephant Lodge?

If your time in the rarefied Belmond atmosphere inspires some voluptuary behaviour, you can wake up safe in the knowledge there will be somebody on hand to deliver you a juice by the pool, even if you're still in your tux or ballgown from the night before.



RARE BEAUTY

Appreciating the wonders of the world is more than being awestruck by the finest vistas, Royal Florist Simon Lycett says: it's about noticing details in the most unexpected of places



WORDS: SIMON LYCETT

ILLUSTRATION: NICK THACKRAY

SHAKE A TAIL FEATHER

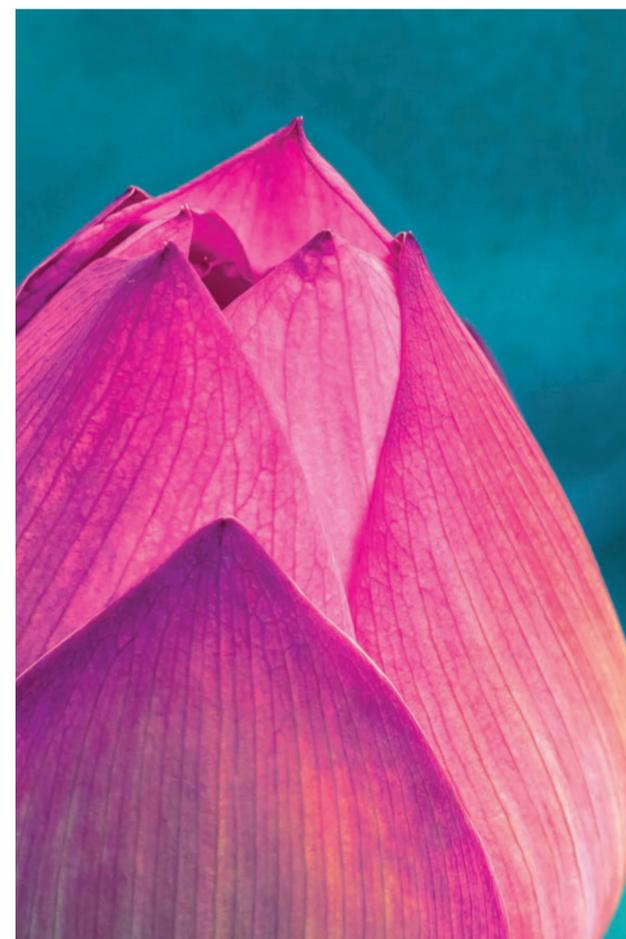
Of all the sights to behold, few can match the glory of the peacock. Caught with his train here in full display, the iridescent plumage is resplendent in metallic greens and blues. The vivid colours are an absolute feast for the eye, and seem caught in a unreal snapshot of time. This particular example has been snapped in the grounds of Belmond's Governor's Residence hotel in Yangon, Myanmar. Among the lush, verdant greenery, the resort features a resident pride of peacocks that strut regally among the hotel's vegetation. It really is a true representation of the exotic and extraordinary that these birds can weave in and out of the hotel grounds, make a sudden entrance, cast their visual spell and then languidly wander away to dazzle the next unsuspecting onlooker.



“We rarely stop to really appreciate the textures of trees and the way their exteriors act as ersatz camouflage jackets”

BARK

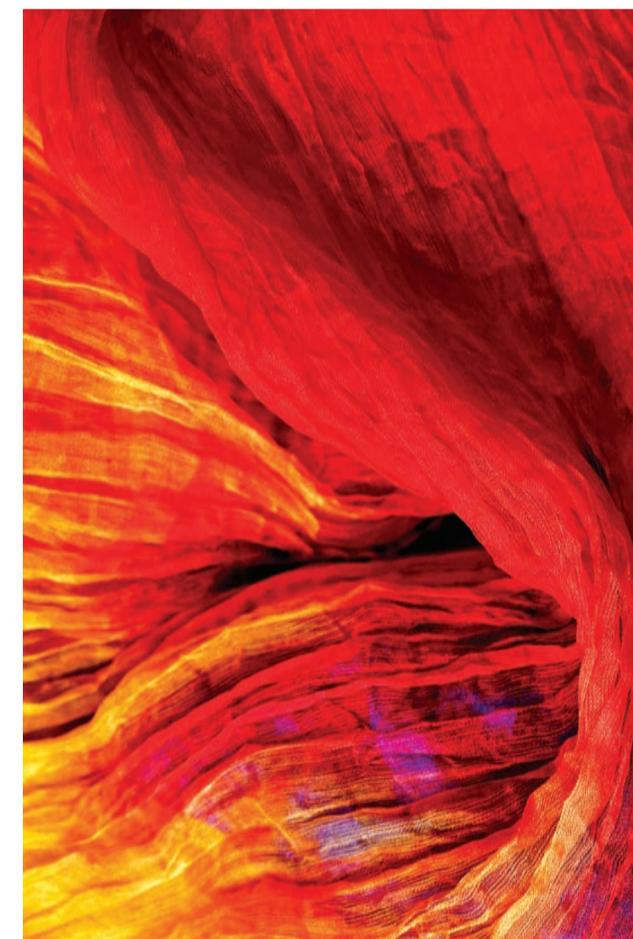
I'm a true subscriber to the belief that there is nothing quite like tree trunks, the bark of trees and how they behave. It's an admirable example of natural engineering that humans have never been capable of replicating. From these small structures come the most wondrous of thoughts: a leaf is not merely a leaf, but a signpost of the seasons. They change colour and burst into life in the spring, float elegantly down to earth again in the autumn, and are symbolic of renewal in the natural world. We might see trees every day, but rarely stop to truly appreciate their textures and the way their exteriors act as ersatz camouflage jackets. When one takes time to study the colourful and natural abstract patterns on this eucalyptus tree bark texture, one sees there's something so ancient and intriguing in their sandalwood browns, beige and greys. It's also amazing that they have evolved in such a way to absorb the chemicals from the air, and then release fresh, life-giving oxygen. Trees really are one of the most undervalued features of the natural world.



LOTUS FLOWER

There's something so deep about wandering mindfully around a garden, or travelling at speed and capturing the briefest glimpse of a field in full bloom. One of the best experiences I've ever had was crossing the River Kwai on the Belmond Eastern & Oriental Express, and then travelling up the river among the most vivid and abundant of lotus flowers – it made me physically catch my breath.

Sights such as these flowers are so evocative and spark all sorts of memories and emotions. They also connect us with our hunter-gatherer instinct of using smell as a primal tool. Whenever I walk into a garden or flower market, I let my nose be my guide before my eyes, and really dwell in the combination of the various perfumes. I'm a bit like a truffle pig, smelling out the treasures of the earth. Flowers don't even have to smell good sometimes – I love the more earthy fragrances of English sweet peas, jasmine and artichokes.



FABRIC

Few things capture the magic of colours like fabric. It can be imbued with such vivid tones, and even change as the clothes are worn more. From the intensity of the woven sheets hanging from balconies in Brazil, to the clothes I see people wearing in Africa, there's a real beauty in seeing any combination of colours together. I particularly like the way one side of a fabric will become bleached by the sun over a period of time, but when you turn it over, the vibrancy is still retained.

I also adore walking through many of Belmond's residences and seeing the ways they have decided to employ a variety of colours and fabrics among the various rooms and settings. It's seldom uniform or orthodox; always unexpected but never outré. Some of the time there is also a subtle narrative or theme running throughout the various rooms, which acts as an invitation for guests to pick up on or decipher.



OLD BOOKS

For me, ageing books are a joy to behold – there's something so irresistible and great about them. They also pose so many questions: who did they belong to? Which shelves have they been sitting on? Which houses have they been through? Who has touched them before you? They're exceptionally romantic and they all differ in various ways from the binding, the cover, the elaborate decoration of the pages and the care that has been taken to write and produce them. There's a fabulous bookshop on the west coast of Scotland, and its shelves are festooned with rare, old publications that I'd love to fill my house with.

As well as treasuring and admiring them, I also find myself using the pages of old books to fashion elaborate rose petals with. I've also used them as supports for table legs for a Mad Hatter's tea party!



TILED FLOORS

I do find that there's real value in looking at the unusual or the unfamiliar and trying to discern a kind of meaning. For instance, I could lose myself for hours just looking at unusual rock formations and trying to see patterns of images in nature that aren't necessarily there. Similarly, I have a real thing for tiled floors, especially the one at Belmont's Cadogan Hotel. It's so intricate and detailed with delicate flowers. To think that some never give it a second thought, it's simply a floor... but there's a real craftsmanship in its execution. I love the way the changing light of the day means that the shadows from the window are cast upon the ground or thrown around the room in a slow, dramatic fashion.

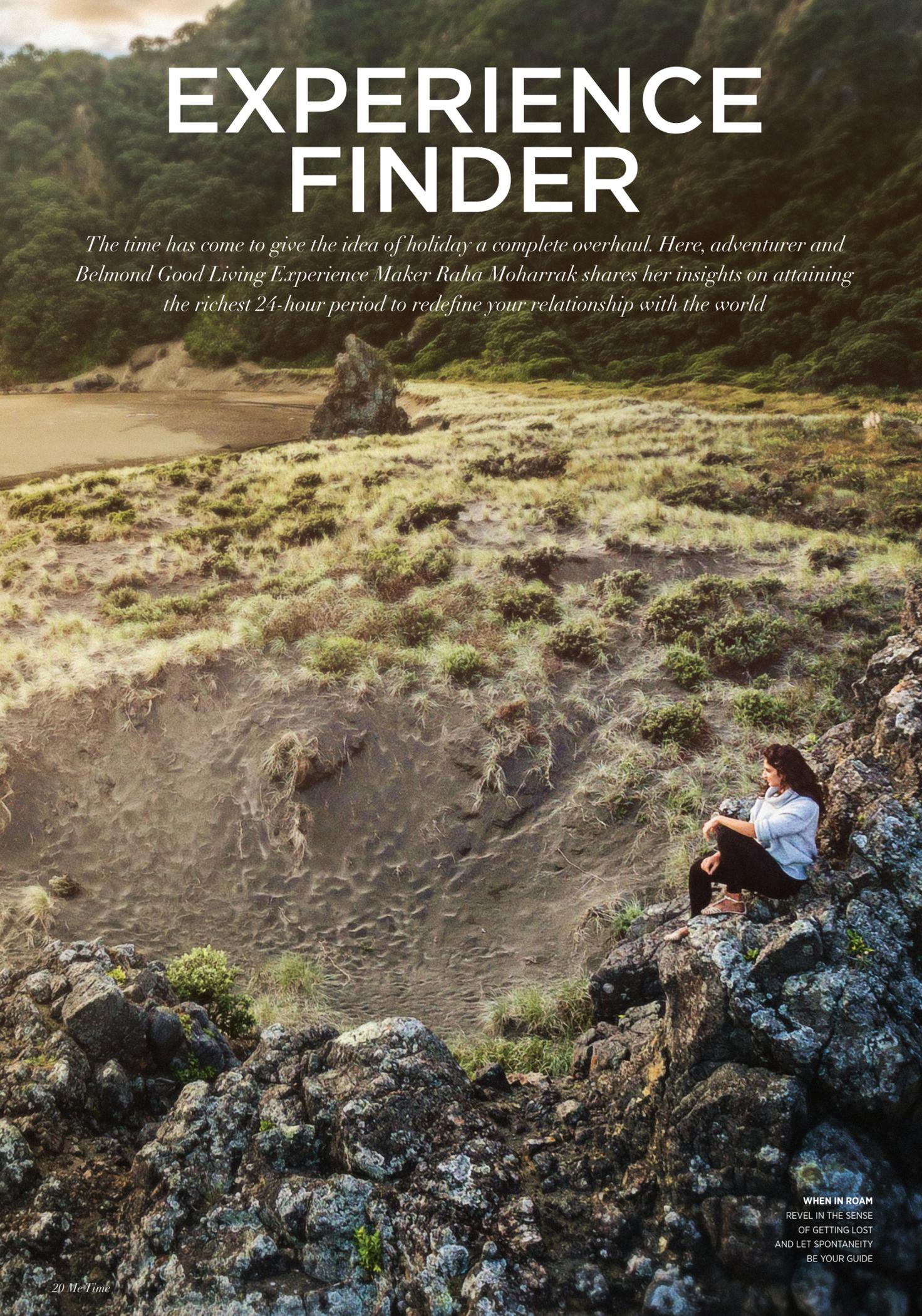
SUNRISE

As a florist, I'm aware of the vivid and varied assortment of foliage and flowers in almost every colour imaginable. Within the wider world though, I stand speechless before a serene sunrise. When experienced from the balcony of, say, the Belmont Reid's Palace in Portugal, it's an even greater joy to behold. I use it as a time to let my mind roam and I find myself musing on the wonders of life. It's especially piquant when a bright bird flits across my view or I spy a fish breaking through the water, and I let my eye and mind return to contemplating the warming blush of the sun on my skin.



EXPERIENCE FINDER

The time has come to give the idea of holiday a complete overhaul. Here, adventurer and Belmond Good Living Experience Maker Raha Moharrak shares her insights on attaining the richest 24-hour period to redefine your relationship with the world



WHEN IN ROAM
REVEL IN THE SENSE
OF GETTING LOST
AND LET SPONTANEITY
BE YOUR GUIDE

6AM →
FIRST LIGHT

Wake at the break of day as the sunlight begins to permeate into the last of the night sky. Dawn is a truly mesmerising time, and a great opportunity to listen to new sounds and the chorus of birdsong that fills the air. Take a moment to yourself and reflect on the feeling of stillness at this precious time before the whole world awakes.

7AM →
LOOK AROUND

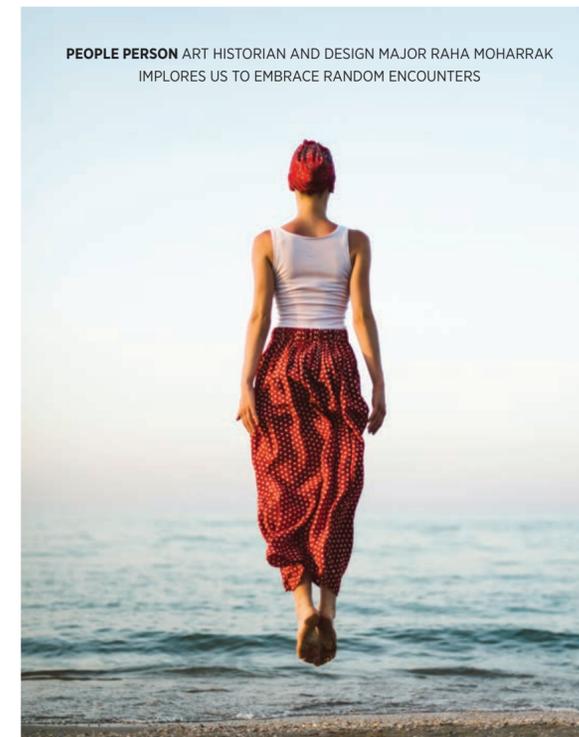
The best school in life is seeing the world, so challenge yourself today and start with the non-essentials. Unplug the mobile roaming on your phone and remove all sound notifications; it will help you forget about the real world for a bit. Come back not with pictures on your phone but memories in your heart.

10PM ↑
ENJOY THE NIGHT

Dance whenever you hear or feel good music because being moved to actually move is the most beautiful form of self-expression. And remember, sometimes a smile is the only language barrier you need to break. Let the night-time fill you with wonder – the only thing you should be afraid of is running out of time.

7PM ↑
WATCH A SUNSET

Take in the changing colours of twilight while having great conversations with awesome company. Sharing moments with the ones we love can deepen our sense of connection, and act as a soothing balm to our frazzled, peripatetic selves. Really drink in the dusk and yield to our sense of place in the world.



PEOPLE PERSON ART HISTORIAN AND DESIGN MAJOR RAHA MOHARRAK
IMPLORES US TO EMBRACE RANDOM ENCOUNTERS

9AM ↓
BREAK THE ICE

Venture out mid-morning and immerse yourself in the region's culture. Get to know a local and have a list of translated words to hand. "My name is Raha and I love your country" written down on colourful paper always puts a smile on people's faces. I love that I can sit in a place with strangers and then walk away with friends.

11AM ↓
CAUGHT BY CULTURE

With your head up, walk through the streets taking in the colours and facets of the architecture around you. Be moved to visit interesting exhibitions, galleries or museums. As an art historian, I find immersing myself in the creativity of another culture gives me joy and really helps me feel connected to wherever I am.

← 4PM
WANDER LONELY

The afternoon is a perfect time to get lost. Sometimes you need to do this in order to be found. Plan your trip, but always leave room for spontaneity. Being free of plans is enriching, so allow for fate to take you wherever you are meant to go – and I don't mean the actual destination. Magic happens outside your comfort zone.

← 1PM
TASTE THE WORLD

When lunchtime comes around, why not try a dish you have never experienced? Open yourself up to the national cuisine, handmade with love by a local chef using time-worn recipes. Explore how people dine, whether that's sat on the floor, eating communally in a bustling market square, or all together as a family.

SENSE OF OCCASION

Throwing the perfect get-together can involve a number of elements, but from table-settings to invite etiquette, there are many ways to ensure your celebration goes down as a visceral moment to remember

WORDS: TIBBS JENKINS





the night rearranging.

Table decorations don't have to be witty, though; flowers are perfect. At Dior's Tiepolo ball in 2019, the haute couture florist Eric Chauvin spent two days and one night perfecting his displays – a ravishing mixture of sweetpeas, peonies, orchids and citrus fruit. The only real rule is to make sure your decorations don't get in the way of guests chatting. You want to encourage lively debate, amusing conversation and innocent flirtation from all angles – the old-school convention of talking first to the left and then to the right is passé.

In terms of food, there's no need for a three-course dinner; people want to get up and start dancing, so there's no harm in serving just a main course – providing it's as delicious as *frutti di mare* or a perfect pasta. You could follow Nicky Haslam's 80th birthday party example and invite guests for dessert and drinks, with an elegant table full of puddings to hand. And for Christmas chic, it's hard to beat Lady Bamford's invitation to "carols and caviar".

CURATING THE ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS

As for guests, is exclusion a good thing? In general, no, though it depends on numbers. If you're going full Gatsby-esque, then open it up to all – as Gatsby's chum, Jordan Baker, says in the novel: "I like large parties. They're so intimate. At small parties there isn't any privacy." Moreover, having sworn enemies present can be just as entertaining. When the American authors Gore Vidal and Norman Mailer fought, physically, at a very smart New York party, the screaming hostess was told not to worry, as her event would become legendary. And it has. Vidal, by the way, got the better of it, verbally; as he crashed to the ground from Mailer's punch, he quipped, "Once again, Norman Mailer is lost for words."

Don't, then, be a mini dictator: you don't want to suck the fun out of your own gathering. Enforcing a little structure is your prerogative – though demanding that everyone play games could prove too much for some. Far more pleasurable to let the night follow its natural flow – which you can help to control with music. Just as Meghan Markle did for her wedding to Prince Harry, curating her own playlist for actor and DJ Idris Elba to play. The royal couple also asked Elton John to perform: live music is always a good cross-generational pleaser.

Lighting can manipulate the mood – warm hues and candle-lit crannies encourage frivolity. But pay heed to the tale of one guest at a notorious party at the Earl of Durham's Villa Cetinale in Italy: while sauntering up a dimly lit path to the dance-floor, he tripped and broke his leg. He was only found some hours later, his wails drowned out by the general revelry.

When it comes to making the party a destination, you can be sure no one minded skipping to Saint-Tropez for the post-wedding frolics hosted by property billionaire David Reuben's son, David Jr, and Colombian model Carolina Guerra this year. This three-day, celebratory belter (the actual wedding having taken place at US cultural jamboree, Burning Man) saw good friend and legendary house DJ Seth Troxler serenade the couple.

Parties, both abroad and at home, are excellent and wonderful affairs. Some funsponges may question whether it's fair to expect people to travel. Throughout time, though, from Roman bacchanals to The Met Ball, people have loved to party – and if you pull out the stops, the revellers will come.

PLAICE SETTING
PAMPER GUESTS
WITH STAND-OUT
DISHES PRESENTED IN
UNUSUAL WAYS, SUCH
AS THIS GORGEOUS
SEAFOOD PLATTER

DRESS DOWN
HAVE FUN WITH TABLE
SETTINGS: THEY DON'T
HAVE TO BE FORMAL,
BUT DON'T LET THEM
GET IN THE WAY OF
CONVERSATION...

“Live for today, plan for tomorrow, party tonight...” Motivational words, those, from the ever-philosophical r'n'b artist Drake. And it's definitely a terrific mantra for hedonists – but a serious party, the type that will go down in history, needs planning. Lots of it.

So what is the formula for the perfect ball, bash, beano, fiesta or plain party? Is it two canapés, seven cocktails and a host of uniformed staff per head to kick it off? Or is it that the third song played should have a particular BPM (that's beats per minute)? One proven to cause a sudden rush of dopamine to the brain? The truth is that it's an exquisitely blended concatenation of elements. From beautifully dressed guests to ravishing tables to a smattering of scandal, or at the very least some good post-party gossip, your party mixologist knows there are many ingredients to be thrown into the heady brew.

If you're cunning, you can set tongues wagging pre-party. Print the invitations backwards, much as Marie-Hélène de Rothschild did in 1972 for her celebrated Surrealist Ball – a mirror was needed to decipher them. Or you could let your dress code do the talking, though not every host can expect Dali to dress Dior and Dior to dress Dali, which transpired at Charles de Beistegui's 1951 ball of the century. But last year's "Halloween at the House", thrown at Goodwood House, saw more than 1,000 of London's cultural cognoscenti descend upon the Duke of Richmond's Sussex pile dressed in Cyber Regency garb. As for Jemima Goldsmith's appearance at 2016's Unicef Halloween Ball with a mannequin of President Trump on her back, controversially groping her breast...Well, that was a cause célèbre in itself.

As was the wonderful competitiveness seen between two English sisters, who shall remain anonymous, at their own joint birthday ball – just minutes before their circus-themed party kicked off, the elder suddenly announced that she would in fact be arriving naked on a horse! Not to be outdone, the younger sibling quickly fashioned an outfit out of balloons – popping them slowly as the night advanced.

GET THE PARTY STARTED

Fancy dress isn't for everyone. Black tie, cocktail dresses or indeed an all-white theme are just as much fun to wear and, let's face it, far more elegant. Besides, there are other ways to provide visual stimulation. "Tablescaping" is the latest trend, with English socialite and fashion muse Alice Naylor-Leyland regularly wowing her guests – an eclectic mix of rock'n'roll royalty and aristos – with her whimsical and unique table settings. Not that the concept is novel: at the premiere for Igor Stravinsky's ballet *Les Noces* in 1923, the host, Sara Murphy, created centrepieces out of toy cars, fire engines and clowns, which Pablo Picasso then spent

*“You want to
encourage lively debate,
amusing conversation
and innocent flirtation
from all angles”*



THE FOOD OF LOVE

Experiencing meaningful times around a table with loved ones can bookmark those enriching chapters of life, and nothing reinforces these connections more than the medium of food

WORDS: ALISTAIR MACQUEEN



When it comes to talking about the special moments that stem from creating gastronomic wonders, few people are more qualified to do so than Raymond Blanc OBE. As the Chef Patron of Belmond Le Manoir aux Quat'Saisons based in Great Milton, Oxfordshire, his direction has resulted in the restaurant being awarded two Michelin stars. Blanc's storied history as chef, restaurateur, presenter and author is unparalleled. For him, food is more than a collection of dishes to sate our epicurean desires, he believes it weaves through the very fabric of our souls and deftly encapsulates the big themes of life. Listening to him rhapsodise about such a communal experience touches on the pillars of what it is to be human, and how enjoying the moment with those who are close to us is essential to our sense of wellbeing.

A love of gourmet cuisine usually rides tandem with an urge to travel. By delving into the heart of gastronomy around the world, you can simultaneously sample the memorable tastes and aromas of regional dishes that use only the freshest seasonal produce. Culinary adventures like these are typified by such moments as witnessing the bubbles build in your glass from a serve of Ruinart Champagne or your first sip on an original peach Bellini, first conjured at the Belmond Hotel Cipriani. Or it might be beaming in wonder at the scent of Amalfi's finest unwaxed lemons or the fleshy texture of oyster mushrooms, freshly sautéed in garlic.

The idea of collecting experiences by eating and cooking with the ones you love underpins Blanc's whole philosophy on food. "Both my grandparents and parents were fantastic cooks and gardeners, and they taught me that food goes beyond growing and

eating it. Food is the heart of life! The table is the most powerful medium you can have in the family, the community and society. People, especially today, are under so much stress, and [preoccupied with] a deadline which is already dead. So that moment when we can sit down with a friend becomes even more important."

This expression of "moments" is what Blanc constantly returns to, whether it's when he's cultivating Le Manoir's garden, describing his travels or even the myriad influences that seep into his culinary execution. It's a theory that has sealed his reputation as a man who followed his passions to create the *ne plus ultra* of cuisine.

GARDENS OF DELIGHT

For Blanc, it's the quality of ingredients that sit firmly at the foundation. His emphasis on seasonality goes hand in hand with creating the most perfect of dishes. "The food we serve is not a fad, but part of big traditions. Gardens are part of my culture and upbringing. The canvas for me is seasonality – you will never find a raspberry on the menu in January. Why? Because the flavour is only the best when the berry is in season. We have 12 gardens at Le Manoir and they are at the heart of the restaurant. This is because they set up the whole guest experience."

These gardens also document Blanc's own personal discoveries. "Take the Southeast Asian garden: it was inspired by my travels to the Far East, where I had my mind blown when I first had mango with sticky rice and my first bang-bang chicken – all these new flavours and textures! Immediately I threaded them into my cooking – my food is very French, but it has been enriched by these influences."

What then are the regional foods he particularly enjoys? "It would have to be spaghetti vongole in Italy, somewhere close to Naples. They cook with the little white clams which are full of flavour and so extraordinary." His ardour for Italian cooking is clear, and Blanc ruminates on how the country's chefs can produce such beautiful dishes from the most rarefied of ingredients, a pattern that's been repeated the world over. After all, who on Earth thought octopus ink could be used to create this deliciously leaden variety of pasta?

"The table is the most powerful medium in the family; the community and society. So that moment when we can sit down with a friend becomes even more important"

RAYMOND BLANC OBE

WHAT LIES WITHIN

THE INTRICATE FOLDS OF AN OYSTER MUSHROOM'S INTERIOR TAKE ON AN OTHERWORLDLY APPEARANCE WHEN VIEWED UP CLOSE

DARK ARTS

THE MYSTERIOUS, FLUID NATURE OF OCTOPUS INK MAKES FOR A CAPTIVATING AND UNEXPECTED ADDITION TO DISHES SUCH AS PASTA



Or that agave plants could be cut and distilled to make tequila? Serendipitous discoveries such as these are part of what makes food so intriguing.

SMALL MOMENTS

As if to underscore how integral travelling and culture are to his food and the guest experience, Blanc says: "Let me tell you a story..." He pauses and takes a sip of jasmine tea before commencing his tale.

"I saw a Japanese woman performing opera in London's Covent Garden once. She sang with such a beautiful voice and had this wonderful lace veil over her face. Then, at the end, she stopped, and lifted the veil up to reveal her face and absolute beauty, and in that moment the interior theme of one of the rooms at Le Manoir was born: lace."

It is in anecdotes such as this where you gain real insight into how Blanc allows himself to be moved by transient visions. So much so in fact, that he uses them as inspiration for the most important of decisions. Meanwhile, he segues effortlessly back on to his favourite subject. "But the lace, while inspired by Japanese culture, is also something that is very

French, no?" he continues. "It is exactly like my grilled mackerel and watercress salad. The ginger and the delicate, fresh crunch of the watercress is all inspired by Japan, but it has all been cooked by a French chef, non?!"

This ability of gastronomy to take you to new heights in an unfamiliar fashion is a real occurrence to be savoured. Whether it's from that first bite of the most delicious *fritto misto* in Portofino, to sharing a piece of the softest, just-baked bread during your safari breakfast at the Khwai River Lodge in Botswana, these are the kind of opulent adventures that can connect you and your dining partners.

In the same way that Blanc allows food to be the compass for life's journey, so too can travellers surrender to the kind of soul-stirring revelations that are experienced communally around a table. And his view is no different: "It's all about creating totally new tastes and textures, so you can really smile. It's all about the joy when finishing a meal... it's a complete event. I don't see restaurants as just food, you see it's so much more. It's about the magic of people, their knowledge, their interests, their curiosity and having that ability to give a stranger the best experience."

“There are certain bars that naturally lend themselves to a spot of studied observation”



MEET THE ENSEMBLE

It may come naturally to all of us, but it takes great tenacity and skill to become a connoisseur of society; or a bona-fide voyeur

WORDS: JAMES GILL

ILLUSTRATION: JACK HUGHES

People-watching is such a beloved pastime for most of us that it's a wonder we don't put it on our CVs under "Hobbies & Interests".

There are certain places that naturally lend themselves to a spot of studied observation. Think of Belmond's Bar Room at '21' in New York. This is where you'll spy the Big Apple's legendary elite and fashionable packs. Or perhaps you're intrigued by the array of personalities that you'd find in the Bar Car aboard the Eastern & Oriental Express. Quite naturally, you've convinced yourself you're a documentarian of the stranger – like David Attenborough, but with people you don't know instead of wildebeest.

Why do you love people-watching so much? What is it about strangers that makes them so captivating? The lovers at the bar, for example, with a combined age of 46. You've been staring at them for more than 20 minutes now and you're still not sure who's prettier: her or him. They're as beautiful as they are in love. As you wonder what it is about this impossibly attractive, pre-Raphaelite-esque couple that makes them stand out, you realise it's because they actually *still* love each other.

And who's this settling in for a meal? It's Baroness Barbara Bonsea! She might not be more than 5ft tall – stilettos and all – but she's got megawatt charisma, and always manages to snag the most coveted corner table in the restaurant. With a silk headscarf crowning her head

and fingers decorated in the finest mid-century jewellery, those four weimarers lying beside her possibly have a certain sway, too.

It's much easier to stare at the "out-of-his-depth dad". He looks affable, harmless but utterly panic-stricken. That's because his other half has gone shopping, leaving him with the offspring. From any vantage point, it appears that all he has to do is feed two young children. What's this? One of his darlings has asked for a glass of water and Peter looks like he's 10 seconds from sobbing. He's now reaching into his bag for something... Ah, two tablets for the little ones. By the time he's plugged in their headphones, they'll be much more compliant. Now he's reaching for his own tablets, taken with a glass of water.

And, finally, there's the celebrity who definitely doesn't want to be seen. Why, it's that guy. From that thing. What's his name? You're not sure. But he really does not want to be seen. You can tell because he's wearing a baseball cap and impossibly large sunglasses that attract even more attention. And he keeps looking up to see if people are watching him.

If all the world really is a stage, and men and women merely players, then there's enough drama, comedy, characters, monologues and pregnant pauses in these bars to satisfy playwrights everywhere. People-watching really is the ultimate production... and you are the captive audience.

EDITORIAL

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