
marie claire
AUSTRALIA
298
AUTUMN FASHION IDEAS
The PLEASURE ISSUE
CLOSING THE ORGASM GAP
+
THE GREAT PORN DEBATE
Life after LOVE STORY
SARAH PIDGEON
Hollywood's new obsession
SMOOTH MOVES
Skin that feels as good as it looks
Plus! Carolyn Murphy, Amy Shark, Alexa Leary & Emma Grede


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ON THE COVER

Sarah Pidgeon wears **Chanel** shirt, $6950, and skirt, $6950, Bouton de Camélia Fine Jewellery earrings, $23,450, Les Infinis de Camélia Fine Jewellery transformable long necklace, $100,500, Comète Fine Jewellery ring (her left hand), $126,700, Coco Crush Fine Jewellery bracelets, $26,450, $26,450, and $18,100, and Bouton de Camélia Fine Jewellery ring, $12,450.

Photography OK McCausland. **Styling** Bailey Moon/Brigade Talent. **Hair** DJ Quintero/The Wall Group. **Makeup** Shayna Goldberg/The Wall Group. **Manicure** Jin Soon Choi/Home Agency. **Creative direction** Montse Tanús. **Location** The William Vale and Westlight, Brooklyn, NYC.

Photography OK McCausland.


JIMMY CHOO
I WANT CHOO
With love
JIMMY CHOO
INTRODUCING THE NEW FRAGRANCE

marie claire

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Inspired by the bow of the Dior Bow bag, the new Bow pouch can be worn crossbody, over the shoulder or held by hand, and comes in Blue Dior Oblique Jacquard or lambskin in Songe Pink, Tourmaline Blue, Camel, Buttercup, and Black.



Dior Bow pouch in Blue Dior Oblique jacquard, $3200.

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Image courtesy of Dior



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Amy Shark wears **Common Hours** dress, $1800; **Musson** rings (from left), $165,000 and $172,000.

I can never accuse my job of being boring. One day I'm working on a serious campaign advocating for the myriad women's issues we're up against (I'd need a whole magazine to write about those). The next, I'm reading about how a man once declared to his female friend that finding the G spot is like "searching for the lost city of Atlantis with an iPhone torch". You can read all about the pleasure gap on page 60. Equally depressing: in a study of more than 50,000 people, 95 per cent of heterosexual men reported usually or always reaching orgasm during sex, compared with just 65 per cent of heterosexual women. Sigh. Even when it comes to orgasms, women are still being left behind.

This month, you'll meet Hollywood's new obsession: the formidable actor Sarah Pidgeon. Right now, everyone I speak to is talking about *Love Story,* and Sarah, who takes on the role of Carolyn Bessette-Kennedy (It's not surprising she says, "I felt the responsibility of playing Carolyn every day"). In fact, Ryan Murphy's series about the ill-fated marriage between Bessette and JFK Jr. has become Disney+'s most-streamed drama ever. While Sarah tells *marie claire*, "I really like my life as it is," and insists she wants to be "an actress, not a celebrity," something tells me her life will never be quite the same. Get to know this new It-girl from page 108.

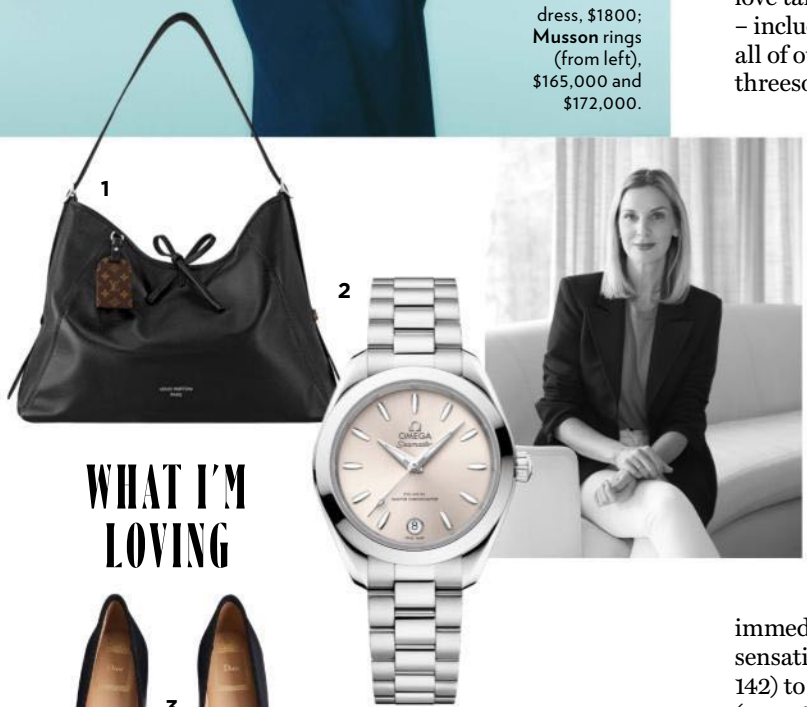
I have to say, this issue has been particularly fun to work on. As you might have guessed, it's the Pleasure Issue. We (jokingly) considered a sealed section, but the joy of pleasure right now lies in the fact that it's no longer something we hide. Women are brilliant over-sharers (if you're not ready to tell me your life story, I'm going to struggle to connect with you). We love talking about sex, and on page 68, four brilliant women – including Dr Esmé Louise James and Kathy Lette – answer all of our questions. The topics range from faking orgasms to threesomes and illicit affairs. You'll love what they have to say.

Of course, it's not all about sex (promise). Each month, *marie claire* spotlights the issues we most need to talk about, and the domestic violence crisis remains urgent. Each May, Domestic and Family Violence Prevention Month shines a light on the real impact of abuse and the support available to those who need it. In this issue, you'll meet three women who are fiercely advocating for change and working tirelessly to protect victims. Turn to page 44 and, if you can, please support their work – it's incredibly impactful. And don't miss the wrap-up of our phenomenal International Women's Day lunch, presented by L'Oréal Paris. Talk about a room full of powerhouses! See more on page 102.

Elsewhere, escape to Morocco on page 120. I visited this vibrant country in my twenties, and this heavenly fashion shoot made me want to go back immediately. This issue is also filled with insider secrets from sensational women, from supermodel Carolyn Murphy (page 142) to powerhouse Emma Grede, the co-founder of Skims (page 86). Plus, we talk to the wonderful Amy Shark about her new album. We've packed a lot into these pages. Enjoy!

Georgie

WHAT I'M LOVING



1 Louis Vuitton bag, $6450. **2 Omega** watch, $11,150. **3 Dior** shoes, $1590.

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GUESS


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CURATED BY

We've selected the best pieces, trends and events to light up your every day



IF WALLS COULD TALK

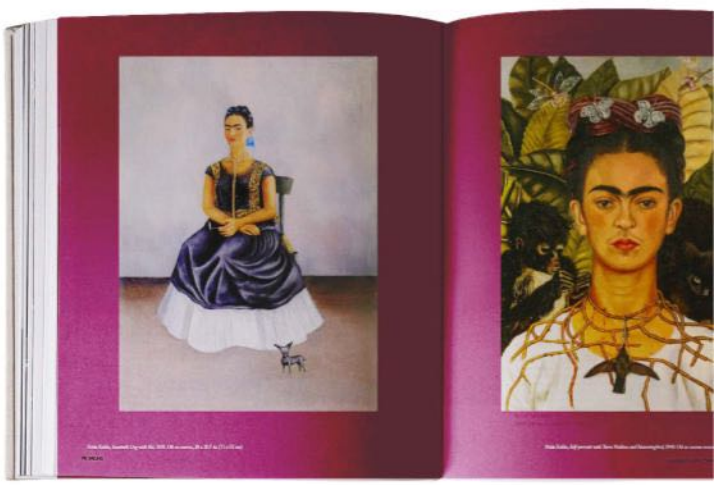
Fresh foliage isn't the only way to inject nature into your home. Southern Highlands-based designer Lucy Loneragan has unveiled a collection of ceramic wall sculptures that can also be wired as lighting pieces. Each is "handmade, organically shaped and inspired by nature", says Lucy.

Visit lucyloneragandesign.com.



Step inside the private Mexico City family home and studio of iconic artist Frida Kahlo, in this colourful and personal tome written by her great-nieces.

Casa Kahlo by Mara Romeo Kahlo, Mara de Anda Romeo and Frida Hentschel Romeo (Rizzoli International, $135) is out now.



Just like the ocean that inspired its design, all the magic happens beneath the surface of Omega's Seamaster Aqua Terra.

Omega Seamaster Aqua Terra 150m, 30mm, $19,250.



Christian Dior La Collection Privée candles in 30 Montaigne, Jardin d'Orangers and Ambre Nuit, $255 each, dior.com.

Inspired by Dior's iconic scents and historic locations and gardens, the 10 candles in La Collection Privée weave an olfactory story of the house and bring elegant woody, floral and gourmand notes into your home.



The Ngununggula gallery in the Southern Highlands of NSW has announced its 2026 exhibition program. Enjoy five major exhibitions that include new commissions, international loans and this nostalgic summer celebration of bush trips with family (above) by Betty Conway.

Visit ngununggula.com.



Atelier Des Ors Novae Vanilla EDP, 100ml, $475, at cityperfume.com.au.

Light and life

Based on the circle of life, this scent from luxury fragrance house Atelier Des Ors is a magnetic and addictive blend that opens like a crisp morning with notes of grapefruit and blackcurrant, then settles into noon when the sun is high in the sky thanks to violet and iris and sumptuous warming notes of patchouli, vetiver and musk.



COPY CAT

From ancient muses to modern style icons, cats have prowled through history, art, fashion and film. This tome captures the feline mystique, celebrating them as the ultimate arbiters of taste, independence and cool.

Chic Cats (Assouline, $205) is out now.



US designer Jenna Lyons with her cats.



Balmy luxe

After the success of Celine's lipsticks, we are swooning for the new line of eight matte-finish lip balms. Deeply hydrating with a natural, buildable finish and fresh rose fragrance, they come in an elegant Art Deco-inspired silver case, which can be refilled time and time again, making this a beauty buy worth the investment.

Celine Beauté Le Rouge Celine Collection matte lip balms, $110 each; celine.com.



The Chanel 25 bag made its debut last year, but after being immortalised by Kylie Minogue and Margot Robbie in a viral ad campaign, it has already become an icon.

Visit chanel.com.

"This season, skirts are the statement piece, not the supporting act"

– Naomi Smith, *marie claire* fashion director



DIOR S/S 2026

CHANEL S/S 2026

MAX MARA S/S 2026

Photography Julie Adams; courtesy Celine; copyright Chanel; Imaxtree/Snapper Images; Cass Bird Studios for Fancy Feast; Betty Conway *Ilara Creek, Tempe Downs*, acrylic on linen 90 x 176 x 2.5 cm, Art Gallery of New South Wales Gift of HM Horton and Dame Rosie Horton 2024, Betty Conway/Copyright Agency. Image © Art Gallery of New South Wales. **Words** Harriet Sim.

MICHAEL HILL



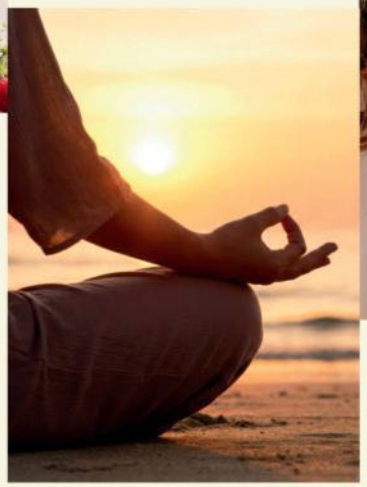
gift mum a year



This Mother's Day



give Mum a gift



that inspires her



week after week

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Industrial revolution



Inspired by pilots, posties, mechanics and more, new-season workwear will get the job done

PHOTOGRAPHY JEDD COONEY
STYLING JORDAN BOORMAN

1

Bring the apron out of the kitchen and pop it over layered shirting to replicate a look that recently appeared on countless runways. An aviation-inspired bomber jacket will keep your holiday dreams flying high, even if you're grounded.



Opposite: H&M Studio blazer, $299; **Bec + Bridge** pants (with belt), $320.

This page Lauren (left) wears **Benzer** apron, $39.95; **Zara** coat, $209; **Jac + Jack** shirt (underneath), $280; **Bec & Bridge** pants, $400; **H&M** shoes, $79.99. Lucia wears **Bec + Bridge** jacket, $450; **Henne** pants, $209; **Zara** shoes, $69.95.



2

A collar or necktie is the season's ultimate accessory. Further elevate your black-pants-white-shirt look by adding a cute waistcoat.

3

Channel the postie who delivers all your online shopping. But instead of high-vis, team a black minidress with a vintage helmet and – for the finishing touch – little black riding gloves.



Opposite: Stella McCartney H&M vest, $149, and pants, $199; **Friends with Frank** shirt, $299; **Nelson Made** shoes, $299.

This page: Ganni dress, $695; **Uyioyo** gloves, $6.99, at Amazon; stylist's helmet used throughout.



4

A hard-working drill jacket is the new barn jacket. It'll look cool while keeping you warm, and can be worn zipped, buttoned and belted over a pair of work pants for the full effect.

5

Top-to-toe brownish-grey is the ultimate in utilitarian chic.



Opposite: Zara jacket (with belt), $209.

This page: Wynn Hamlyn top, $425, and pants (with belt), $495; **Alias Mae** shoes, $249.95; **Oroton** bag, $449.

6

In the realm of utilitarian dressing, blue is considered a neutral. Offset a rigid cropped jacket with a voluminous skirt that plays with the bubble-hem trend.



Michael Kors jacket, $399; **Bianca Spender** skirt, $495; **Alias Mae** shoes, $239.95.

7

A cap with a multi-buttoned jacket is a little bit Lobby Boy from *The Grand Budapest Hotel*, but it's been made wearable for the fashion set in 2026.



Lioness jacket, $109;
Aje dress, $399;
Milana hat, $69.95.



Stella McCartney H&M coat (with belt), $449, and earrings, $99.99.

8

Chain-link earrings carry the industrial theme through your outfit, no matter what you're wearing.

9

A safari-style khaki shirt can work in the city when you add a fringed skirt, interesting tie and tabi loafers.



H&M Atelier coat, $199, and shirt, $119; **Zara** skirt, $119, and necklaces, $69.95 (sold as set); **Madre Natura** scarf, $200; **Alias Mae** shoes, $249.95



10

Shucking oysters, handling chemicals or simply going out for lunch, you can do it all in elbow-length gloves, a work shirt and apron dress.

Staud dress, $495, at Net-a-Porter; **Zara** shirt, $105; **High Heel Jungle** gloves, $195, at The Iconic.



Michael Kors jacket, $399.

Hair Darren Summors/ AP-Reps. **Makeup** Teneille Sorgiovanni/ AfterWinter Agency. **Models** Lucia Aviles, Lauren de Graaf, and Chloe Reyse/ Merci Management.

ONE BOOT FOUR WAYS



If you invest in one item this autumn, make it a great pair of boots you can wear with everything



A good rule of thumb when getting dressed is asking yourself: what would Kate Moss do? In this case, she wears a pair of eternally chic knee-high brown boots. Replicate her look with this $289 pair (above) from H&M, which offers a more practical heel height for everyday. Moss wears her boots over a pair of skinny jeans, but these are versatile enough for other cuts and occasions, too: the boardroom, the bar, park and the grocery run. Whatever you're up to, you can be sure your boots will be the hardest working item in your wardrobe this season. Here's how to make the most of them.



THE WEEKEND

Forget sneakers and jeans, it's time to elevate your out-of-office look. The pointed toe of these boots poking out under on-trend wide-leg jeans, and paired with a rugby jersey top and baseball cap is fashion-meets-sport done right.

1 Zara jacket, $149. **2 Jacquemus** hat, $320. **3 JW Pei** bag, $149. **4 Adidas** polo, $90. **5 The Frankie Shop** jeans, $236. **6 Zara** rings, $49.95 (sold as set). **7 H&M** belt, $44.99.



FASHION OBSESSIVE

A slip dress usually suggests the addition of a slinky sandal or heel, but what about if you added a boot and a shirt? You'll find that your outfit is immediately more interesting, and you'll be much warmer too.

1 Mango jacket, $139.95, at The Iconic. **2 Zara** dress, $209. **3 Reliqua** necklace, $159. **4 Camilla and Marc** shirt, $350. **5 Aeyde** socks, $73. **6 Coach** bag, $450.



CORPORATE COOL

Boots and a pencil skirt are a classic combo for a reason. Pair yours with the perfect white tee and a grey knit – it could be a cardigan or a half-button like this one. A brown bag helps the boots pop, while sleek sunnies add a touch of cool.

1 Camilla and Marc jumper, $380. **2 Saint Laurent** sunglasses, $485. **3 Khaite** top, $308. **4 Oroton** bag, $499. **5 Scanlan Theodore** skirt, $480. **6 Anine Bing** earrings, $200.



EVENING WEAR

As the nights get colder, you'll be reaching for these boots every time you leave the house. Wear them under a long-line dress and a (faux) fur coat. Add a touch of gold for dramatic effect and you are ready to make an entrance!

1 Morrison jacket, $499. **2 Kirstin Ash** ring, $179. **3 Totême** dress, $460, at Net-a-Porter. **4 Szade** sunglasses, $69.99. **5 AllSaints** bag, $249, at Farfetch.

Getty Images. **Compiled by** Jordan Boorman.



1



2



SAINT LAURENT BY ANTHONY VACCARELLO S/S 2026



DIOR S/S 2026

3





4



5



6



7



8

all TIED UP

The humble necktie. Who would have thought a single strip of fabric could be so transformative? Tie your own or opt for a detachable collar that's pre-tied and watch your sartorial points go from zero to 100

1 Julia Allert, $250. **2 Bottega Veneta**, $400. **3 Forte Forte**, $277, at Farfetch. **4 Bally**, $370, at Farfetch. **5 Maison Margiela**, $346, at Farfetch. **6 Scanlan Theodore**, $120. **7 Celine**, $385. **8 Chloé**, $360, at Net-a-Porter.

Imaxtree/Snapper Images. **Compiled by** Jordan Boorman.



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CHIC ON A BUDGET

UNDER $500

The strings might be tight but the purse can still be on point. Let us be your guide



STYLE Q&A

Alexandra English
Features editor,
marie claire

A self-confessed "lazy dresser" who never leaves enough time to get ready, Alex knows the power (and ease) of a nice suit.

How would you describe your style?
Minimal – at least for work. I like to try to keep my office clothes and my weekend clothes separate. It helps signal when it's time to concentrate and when it's time to chill. For work, I'm usually in black. On the weekend, I'm more experimental.

Is there one shopping rule you live by?
Can it be tailored? I'm tiny, which can be very frustrating. I love fashion but it doesn't love me back. If something can be altered, you can be sure I'll buy it. That means no patterns, intricate hems or even pleats, really. It adds to the budget, but for the right pieces, it's worth it.

Can you talk us through this look?
This is basically my autumn work uniform. A suit can be easily tailored, and it solves the problem of having to decide what to wear in the morning. Brown is so chic, and a cream turtleneck instead of a shirt is very 2026. Add a chunky loafer that goes with anything, a simple-but-stylish handbag and gold earrings, and you're good to go!

Are there any wardrobe essentials you believe everyone should own?
A suit! Or at the very least a blazer that you can wear with jeans or a skirt and feel put-together.

Who is your style inspiration?
Those tiny Olsen twins.



$4.99
Lovisa earrings.
Gold earrings will always be in style. They add a touch of polish to any outfit.

$44.99
H&M top.
Add a turtleneck base layer à la Celine autumn/winter 2026. Cream works better with brown than white.

$69.95
Peta + Jain bag.
A small bag slung over the shoulder says, "I'm chic and I have places to be."

$189.95
M.N.G blazer, at The Iconic.
A brown suit with a subtle check is perfect for the office in autumn.

$109.95
M.N.G pants, at The Iconic.
The brilliance of a suit is that you can also wear the items separately, maximising your options.

$79.95
Topshop shoes, at The Iconic.
A chunky loafer goes with anything.

OUTFIT TOTAL = $499.78

Compiled by Jordan Boorman.

THE NEW RETRO MOOD

Layered, lived-in, luxurious—opulence returns with a '70s edge, shaping both our wardrobes and the spaces we call home



MOLTEN CARAMEL
Supple leather in a rich caramel hue feels almost liquid, grounded by a sculptural form that nods to retro indulgence.

Bao leather 3 seater sofa in eno caramel leather, $6299; Newtown telescopic floor lamp in antique brass, $269; Kenton scatter cushion in chocolate, $49.95; Pearce floor rug in coffee, from $1099. All from **Freedom.com.au**

FREEDOM



CURVED RETREAT
A modular silhouette with cocooning curves and a velvety texture, designed to bring softness, scale and flexibility to modern living.

IN THE FASHION WORLD, the pendulum is swinging away from restraint into something far more evocative, and our interiors are following suit. Think deep plum with warm undertones, rich chocolate hues and the earthy heat of paprika—this season's colours bring the drama. Rooted in a '70s mood, the palette feels richer, glossier and more indulgent, echoing how we're layering textures and tones in what we wear as the temperature drops.

Dark woods in organic shapes and tactile textures ground the space while polished metals, curvaceous lines and a flash of electric chartreuse bring contrast and energy. The result is a curated interplay of colour, material and light—one that feels considered, not just decorated. A modern collection of curios, designed to be lived in.

This page from top Austin fabric modular 5 seater sofa in peyton caramel, $4599; Allyn floor rug in ivory, from $699; Santana side table, $299; Palle floor lamp in antique brass, $249; Dominoes set in white marble, $99.95; Santana coffee table, $699; Studio champagne flute, set of 4, $59.95; Clunes shallow bowl in marble, $179; Lapine scatter cushion in chocolate, $59.95. **Below** Pilbara trinket tray, $39.95. All from **Freedom.com.au**





SOFT SCULPTURE
An exercise in comfort and form, its sculpted curves and plush finish create a statement that feels as good as it looks.



GET THE LOOK

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BY WOMEN *FOR WOMEN*



Gender-based violence is not a woman's issue to solve, and yet they continue to try. To mark Domestic and Family Violence Prevention Month, we spotlight three women who empower victim-survivors and drive meaningful change

PHOTOGRAPHY PHILLIP CASTLETON
WORDS KATHRYN MADDEN



"I think someone else's belief in you can be transformational," says Sonia Casanova.

One woman "came out of the change room, looked at herself in the mirror and said, 'I remember her.'"

Sonia Casanova, CEO of Dress for Success NSW & ACT

As a little girl, Sonia Casanova was told that the world was her oyster. Her family, parents and ballet teacher taught her that no dream was out of reach, and in her early career she was lucky to be mentored by inspirational women. So as she progressed up the professional ladder, she was shocked to come up against invisible barriers, judgement and gender inequality.

Today, as the CEO of Dress for Success NSW & ACT, Casanova has come full circle as an advocate for women. "Our mission is simple but powerful," she says. "We exist to empower women to achieve economic mobility." The not-for-profit organisation, which has affiliates around the country and the world, provides career training and free professional attire for women who are re-entering the workforce and rebuilding their life after hardship. Notably, 44 per cent have experienced domestic violence.

"I remember one woman who came to Dress for Success with low self-esteem," remembers Casanova. "She went with one of our volunteer stylists and they gave her an outfit, and she came out of the change room, looked at herself in the mirror and said, 'I remember her.' She shared that her former partner had taken away her confidence, made her feel she wasn't worthy and told her she'd never amount to anything without him. But there she was, standing with so much courage and determination."

Last year, powered by 500 volunteers, the organisation styled 3100 women. They dressed them in tailored suits and smart shoes, equipping them with confidence for job interviews, court cases and other significant life events. "There's no single or typical story, but more than half the women we support here hold tertiary qualifications," notes Casanova. "People think that domestic violence and other challenges are contained to a certain subset of the community, but actually, women face those challenges in all corners of our community, and we need to remove those misconceptions."

The CEO speaks emotionally about a woman who came to Dress for Success three days after leaving jail. With no permanent place to live, she already had a job interview lined up. "She said, 'I'm determined I'm never going back there. I'm going to change my life,'" shares Casanova, who's now dedicated to passing on the sense of opportunity and self-worth that was instilled in her as a little girl. "I think someone else's belief in you can be transformational," she adds.

While planning this *marie claire* photo shoot, it emerged that the three women being profiled all knew one another. The not-for-profit organisations they lead – each dedicated to helping people rebuild after crises – are entwined in a network of support and solidarity. "We work extremely collaboratively," says Ren Fernando, co-founder of ReLove. "Our first project was helping five women from WAGEC [Women's & Girls' Emergency Centre] leave the refuge ... It feels like we're each contributing our own bit, and when we work together it doesn't feel futile."

The epidemic of domestic violence in Australia can indeed feel insurmountable. In 2024, PM Anthony Albanese declared a national crisis of violence against women. Two years later, at the time of writing, 15 women have already been killed in 2026. One in four women around the country are victim-survivors of intimate partner violence and one in three men have used intimate partner violence, a statistic that demands greater attention.

The women interviewed for this story agree that systems are broken, calling for urgent public funding and resources. But on a micro level – within their own work and organisations – they champion women supporting women. The phrase is often bandied about as a byword for friendship or mentorship, though it also reflects something deeper – the groups, leaders and volunteers helping victim-survivors recover and thrive, breaking the chains of intergenerational trauma. This drives change, demonstrating the power of collective action and goodwill. Here, they share their stories.

"I want them to know, 'You're not just a simple victim. You are strong, resilient, powerful and capable'"



Nicole Yade, CEO of Women's & Girls' Emergency Centre

When people find out that Nicole Yade, an accomplished and award-winning CEO, is a survivor of domestic violence, surprise flickers in their eyes. "They say, 'But you seem pretty together, Nic. How did you end up like that?'" Her response is loud and true: "Domestic violence can happen to any one of us."

Yade grew up around family violence, left home at 18 and got into a relationship that soon turned abusive. "I tried to leave so many times I lost count," she recalls. "The final time was when I was 23 or 24, and I had a baby daughter who was five or six months old ... She moved me to action because I was determined that I didn't want her to grow up in violence with the fear I'd had as a kid. I wanted better for her and that really spurred me on to make big, scary changes."

Today, Yade leads the Women's & Girls' Emergency Centre (WAGEC), the Sydney-based not-for-profit that every night provides support and shelter to 200 women and children impacted by domestic violence, homelessness and systemic disadvantage. "Often they come to us directly from the hospital or the police station," she says. "We're on the frontline, the first point of call for people when they're going through some of the hardest days of their life."

Those days and nights can be dark and emotionally heavy, but Yade feels privileged to do the work. "We have the great honour of serving some of the most courageous women in our community," she says. "You get to see people start to smile again, see their posture change and their confidence grow as they come towards the end of their journey with us. They're finding a home, rebuilding their lives and starting a new chapter free from violence."

Yade's lived experience, she believes, puts her in a unique position to empower and identify with victim-survivors on a deep level. "I want them to know, 'You're not just a simple victim. You are strong, resilient, powerful and capable ... In the future, you're going to become the CEO of WAGEC or do something else amazing. These experiences don't have to ruin your life. Who knows what's possible? Extraordinary things can happen.' If that's true for me, that's true for every victim-survivor going through tough times. I know there are great things ahead for all of them."

"Often they come to us directly from the hospital or the police station," says Nicole Yade. "We're on the frontline."

Hair & Makeup Cherry Cheung/Vivien's Creative. **Production** Robyn Fay-Perkins



"It's a monumental logistic challenge to actually leave a crisis situation," says Ren Fernando.

Ren Fernando, co-founder of ReLove

An architect by trade, Ren Fernando has a strong concept of home: it's a roof over your head; it's safety and shelter; it's well-designed spaces that balance function and form. But it's also what's inside. "A home requires everything you need to sleep well, to eat well, to cook, to study," she says. "It's basic things but also frivolous things: it's that nostalgic scented candle or the floral sofa that reminds you of your nanna."

In 2021, Fernando launched ReLove with co-founder Ben Stammer. The non-profit enterprise provides quality furniture and essentials for people rebuilding their homes and lives after crisis. As they embark on a fresh start, they can visit the Sydney warehouse and go "free shopping" for everything from dining tables to textiles and toasters, all donated by corporate partners and everyday people (while conveniently saving items from ending up in landfill).

So far, ReLove has supported 8500 people in need, 75 per cent of whom were impacted by domestic violence and homelessness. "It's a monumental logistic challenge to actually leave a crisis situation, and one of the big barriers is that even if you get into housing, there's nothing inside it," points out Fernando. "The wraparound programs and services for employment, education and recovery don't work if you come home at night and you're sleeping on the floor. That doesn't bring a sense of self-worth and dignity."

Heart-lifting moments at ReLove ground Fernando's purpose. "We had a 15-year-old boy whose family was starting over after domestic violence," she says. "He had to come in with the caseworker and do the shopping. He got a sofa, but he also picked up a little marble affirmation stone that said, 'Follow your dreams' and put it in his pocket."

Another young girl, a victim-survivor of abuse and an avid reader, came to ReLove with nothing but a bag of books. "She was so excited to get a bookshelf," remembers Fernando. "And then she got a desk, and two years later she's just enrolled in university."

Fernando acknowledges her army of volunteers, some of whom were originally supported by the organisation. "They give their time with such compassion and openness. And they get a lot out of being here – there's a whole other level of helping people through loneliness," she says. "The world is hard right now, but what happens under the roof of ReLove is people coming together to help those around us. We have love in our name because I believe in it. Love is at the heart of everything that we do."

"If you come home at night and you're sleeping on the floor, that doesn't bring a sense of self-worth and dignity"



INVISIBLE PRISONS

With the release of her second novel, *Shellybanks*, the investigative journalist turned author Louise Milligan reflects on Epstein, intergenerational abuse and the unseen but very real restraints that keep women from freedom

These past few weeks, I've been thinking a lot about the invisible prisons that we as women have found ourselves in, both historically and now. The conversation about invisible prisons has been inspired by two things: preparing to speak to a Sydney Opera House full of women about Virginia Giuffre, Prince Andrew and the Epstein files, and embarking on a book tour to speak about my new novel, *Shellybanks*.

What are invisible prisons? They're the places that we, often as young women, so often find ourselves in. Prisons that don't have high walls or razor wire or cells or bars, but prisons nonetheless. They were so poignantly captured by the late Virginia Giuffre in her memoir, *Nobody's Girl*, with her co-writer, Amy Wallace, with whom I spoke in Sydney at the Opera House.

How was it that so many young women fell into Epstein's clutches? The answer, Wallace told me, was so often about class. They were predated upon by a wealthy woman with an aristocratic-sounding voice, Ghislaine Maxwell, who targeted typically vulnerable and poor teenage girls with the promise of a glamorous lifestyle.

Virginia was one of those girls and she was the perfect target for Epstein and Maxwell: her family was poor and she had been the victim of horrible abuse by her father since she was a small child.

Virginia tells of how Epstein showed her a photograph of her little brother and made it clear that if she were to try to escape or to tell, the little boy would be in danger.

So Virginia stayed. And she did things she never wanted to do, things that left her traumatised and scarred and things that ultimately led to the ending of her life by suicide when, after years of fighting, she couldn't fight anymore.

Preparing for this session with Amy and also Emily Maitlis, whose interview with the Andrew formerly known as Prince was a masterclass in restraint and giving enough rope, was incredibly resonant for me because *Shellybanks* is about another type of invisible prison, this time set in 1970s Ireland, where my character Dolores Murphy finds herself enslaved.

Shellybanks is also an examination of another type of invisible prison – one that Virginia Giuffre and all the Epstein survivors have battled with all of their lives: trauma and what we do with it. The idea of not getting caught in the undertow of trauma.

The novel is set largely in my birth country of Ireland. *Shellybanks* is an unprepossessing beach in Dublin Bay. A place of grey sand and jellyfish and industrial smells and fierce tides that race in quickly and drown children who never learnt to swim. Protagonist Kate Delaney, whom we follow after my first novel, *Pheasants Nest*, was nearly one of those children as a girl and a dream about running for the sea wall at *Shellybanks* is a symbol for her of anxiety.

She has much to be anxious about. This book is about what happens after a huge trauma – a trauma that has struck fear into the hearts of every woman across a nation, and a trauma that is hidden and left



Getty Images

My mother and aunt were forced to leave school at 14, their opportunities blunted by poverty, church and state

to fester for decades. How a young woman and her middle-aged aunt bond over these terrible histories. It's about a secretive and scary cult-like group, about a stolen baby, a mother's search to find her and another mother's desperation to keep her. It's about secrets and lies in Irish culture, the vast changes in a generation in the experience of women.

Kate Delaney is recovering from a crime that is every woman's worst nightmare: being kidnapped and raped by a stranger and left for dead under a creepy bridge with only the ghosts of suicides to keep her company. She escapes her life as an investigative journalist in Melbourne and goes to a perfect Greek island with her boyfriend, Liam, who is trying to do his best to help her cope. But how can he? Where is the instruction manual for something so huge?

Just as they are settling into life on the island, Kate gets a phone call from Dublin, from her beloved favourite aunt, Dolores, whose fiancé has suddenly died. Kate and Liam go to Dublin for the funeral.

That's when, in a pea soup fog at *Shellybanks*, Kate discovers that Dolores had a secret life that she never spoke of to her family. As an often-neglected teenager in a typically large family with an absent father and stressed mother of 11 children, she was in the 1970s tricked into joining a cult-like group on the pretence of doing a cookery course.

She's groomed and enslaved by a shadowy organisation known only as The Group. Dolores and the other girls are under the instruction of an imperious woman known only as the Directress and two slyly abusive supervisors.

Reading about Ghislaine Maxwell in *Nobody's Girl* made me so often think back to these women, who seem worldly and glamorous to girls like Dolores but are in fact deeply sinister and controlled by men we never see nor hear from.

The Group, a fictional organisation, was in part inspired by research I did in Ireland for my 2023 *Four Corners* story, "Purity". All good fiction is grounded in some measure in truth.

Just like Virginia Giuffre, who wasn't imprisoned in an actual jail and women I met for my research for *Four Corners*, Dolores isn't locked up. But she has no keys, no money, no agency. And also like Virginia, Dolores is predated upon by women who are higher up in the class structure in Ireland of the time.

And finally, there's resonance with Virginia's story in that Dolores wants to escape poverty and is, by virtue of her lack of worldliness and vulnerability, perfect prey for people who should know better.

Many years later, when holding her past inside of her threatens to overcome her, as it does so many victims, Dolores enlists her niece Kate's help as an investigative journalist. Doing this for Dolores helps Kate come to terms with her own trauma. Now it's up to Kate, Dolores and a kindly Irish Garda, Inspector Christy Redmond, to investigate a seemingly impossible crime.

Shellybanks is a love song to my gritty birth city of Dublin and its people. It charts an almost miraculous transformation of a culture in the space of a generation and the experience of being a migrant who at once feels deeply part of the culture and always outside it. At the centre of this story is the experience of Irish women – let down for generations by church and state, but with unforgettable, endearing, funny and heartbreaking characters you don't want to leave behind. It charts how these women have moved out of a straitened and often dark place to a modernity that still holds the scars of the past but is imbued with hope and courage.

I wanted to write about these women because my mother and her sisters could so easily have been Dolores Murphy. They were forced to leave school at 14 and they had their opportunities blunted by poverty and by church and state.

My book is a tribute to and a reckoning for all women who have found themselves in an invisible prison, who have had the courage to escape and who want the world to know.

Shellybanks *by Louise Milligan (Allen & Unwin, $34.99) is out now.*



A MIND OF HER OWN

"I was unfazed"

"I took brutal honesty to a whole new level"

"If a guy was good looking, I would tell him so"

" If someone was rude to me, I would be rude right back"

"Hi, I'm Alexa. I have a serious Traumatic Brain Injury"

We know Alexa Leary as the bubbly, blonde dancing on the podium at the Paralympic Games, but life isn't all smiles for the gold medal swimmer. Here, Lex shares the truth about living with a traumatic brain injury

I was sitting at a cafe with my mum when I told a complete stranger that I didn't like her outfit. "Go change your clothes, baby," I said. "Go to White Fox and get a new look." My mum was mortified, but I was unfazed. I took brutal honesty to a whole new level. If a girl on the street had a blemish, I would point it out. If a guy was good looking, I would tell him so. If someone was rude to me, I would be rude right back.

My mind was a beast of its own. A few years ago, I had no filter, no inhibition and no self-control. I could be quite hurtful. I carried a stack of apology cards with me wherever I went. The cards said: "Hi, I'm Alexa. I have a serious Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI). It's known as an invisible disability and was caused by a sudden trauma which damaged large parts of my brain. This damage can affect my behaviour and verbal filter. I don't intentionally mean to insult or upset anyone, and I am truly sorry if this occurs."

That's the short story. This is the longer version. In 2021, I was a 19-year-old triathlete when I crashed my bike going 75 kilometres an hour down a hill in the Noosa hinterland. I landed on the right side of my head, then my helmet fell off and I hit the left side of my head. The damage was catastrophic. I had a severe TBI. I wasn't expected to live.

Somehow, I defied the odds and survived the emergency LifeFlight to the Intensive Care Unit (ICU) at the Royal Brisbane and Women's Hospital. I was rushed into surgery where part of my skull was removed to relieve some of the pressure from my swollen brain. After 14 days in the ICU, I was moved to the neurology ward, where I had to learn how to walk, talk and eat again – and how to use my new brain. As I said, I wasn't expected to survive the crash, and in many ways I didn't. The old Alexa died that day in 2021. When I woke up from my induced coma, I was a completely different person with a different brain.

I spent 111 days in hospital and a rehabilitation centre, working on my physical recovery. My mental recovery is an ongoing process. When I first returned to my family home in Noosa, I needed constant support and care. My TBI affected every part of my life. I had







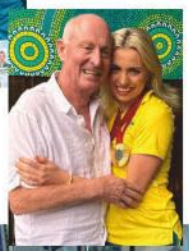














From top Alexa's family is "everything" to her"; living on the edge; forever the animal lover; sport, hard training and making the Olympics were Alexa's dream; holidaying in the Caribbean; on the long road to rehab; with her mum, Belinda, and dad, Russ; the 14 days spent in a coma in ICU were touch and go.

difficulty concentrating, learning, making decisions and performing everyday tasks. I struggled with poor short-term memory, sleep problems, mood swings, depression, anxiety and rage. There was so much rage. I was furious at the state of my life, and I became fixated on everything I had lost after my accident. My hair had been shaved for surgery, I could no longer drive and many of my friends had abandoned me. The way I saw it, I had no hair, no licence and no friends. I was consumed with anger. I punched walls, kicked chairs and hit my parents.

It's hard for me to talk about my outbursts, but I want to be honest about my behaviour because it's something that people with a TBI experience. When my brain felt overstimulated, I would blow up. I didn't know how to handle my bubbling emotions, so they spilled over and made a mess. My feelings felt too big for my body, and I had to learn how to control them.

I started working with a behavioural therapist, a neuro occupational therapist and a psychiatrist. In 2022, I went to see Dr Charlie Teo at Cingulum Health clinic in Sydney to undergo Transcranial Magnetic Stimulation treatment (TMS). When Dr Charlie scanned my brain, he saw how severe my injury was. My frontal lobe was so damaged, Dr Charlie concluded that it would be very hard for me to function normally in society. He said he couldn't see me living independently.

During my first week at the clinic, I had five rounds of TMS every morning, and another five every afternoon. In between, I would do breathwork, hyperbaric oxygen therapy, neurocognitive therapy, photobiomodulation (when light is used on damaged tissues to accelerate healing) and meditation. Dr Charlie taught me how to tap myself to keep my hands busy. My hands had been getting me into trouble. At that time, I had a serious obsession with boobs. When I saw someone with big boobs, I simply had to touch them. Whenever I saw my grandma, I would squeeze her boobs and have a play. She didn't mind. It was kind of OK with family, but definitely not OK with strangers.

When I tell people about the boob thing, they usually laugh. I get it. We laugh at things out of the ordinary. But not being able to control myself from touching peoples' boobs was actually really hard for me. And – of course – for them. It must have been pretty alarming and uncomfortable being groped like that. For me, it was embarrassing and shameful.

Thanks to the team at Cingulum and my behavioural therapist, I've learnt strategies to help curb my compulsions. I have a list of code words to use instead of swearing. Winki pop = sex. Star = fuck. Bitties = boobs. I am not cured of my compulsions, but I know how to cope with them better now.

One of the biggest things that's helped has been getting back in the pool. I met Jon Bell at

"There was so much rage. I was furious at the state of my life, and I became fixated on everything I had lost after my accident"

a Para Swimming development camp in 2022 and convinced him to become my coach. I set my sights on the 2024 Paris Paralympics and threw myself into training. The routine was good for me and most days I enjoyed swimming. Most.

On a holiday in Bali at the end of 2022, I was invited to train at Finns Recreation Club with Olympic great Michael Klim, who runs a swimming squad there. My parents thought it was an amazing opportunity, but after a few laps, I was over it. I jumped out of the pool and said, "Fuck it, I've had enough." My dad was so embarrassed and apologised profusely to Michael. Thankfully, Michael was very empathetic, and after I calmed down we had a laugh and got a photo together.

Not everyone is as understanding as Michael, and that's something I want to help change. Raising awareness about TBIs is something that's very close to my heart. When I won gold at the Paris Paralympics, I gained a whole new platform to share my story. This month, I'm releasing my first book, *Sink or Swim*, and telling my truth. Finally, I'm putting my brutal honesty to good use!

Having a TBI can be a lonely experience, but I know I'm not alone in my struggles. According to Brain Injury Australia, an estimated 700,000 people nationally have a brain injury that means daily "activity limitations" and "participation restrictions" for them. That's a lot of people going through the same challenges that I've faced – and continue to face. If I can make one person feel less alone, that's a win.

It's been almost five years since my crash – and the start of my second life. I'm still getting used to my new brain, but I know so much more about my mind now. I'm proud to say I have more good days than bad days. With the support of my family and care workers, I live in an apartment with a roommate, and I go to work every day. My job is swimming, and my purpose is talking about TBIs.

I like to write inspirational quotes on my mirror at home, and I have an app that gives me a new one every day. One of the sayings that hit home for me was this: "I am making small improvements that lead to big results." I try to remind myself of that.

Sink or Swim: Defying the Odds *by Alexa Leary with Alley Pascoe (Penguin, $36.99) is out now.*



















From top On the first Move For Lex fundraising day, in 2022, Alexa ran onto the oval at the Noosa Tigers AFL club; receiving her OAM in 2025; ready to race; in Paris with Ben Hance and Brenden Hall; after winning gold in the 100-metres freestyle S9, when she broke her own world record; brother Jack with a cut-out; doctors Andrew Hughes and Andrew Paszkowski, who tended her post-crash; meeting DJ Fisher was a highlight.

Photography courtesy Alexa Leary; Getty Images. **As told to** Alley Pascoe



WORDS ALEXANDRA ENGLISH

A-Z of pleasure

Silly, simple or sexy: here are 26 of the best things life has to offer

A

ACT LIKE A NINE-YEAR-OLD

Laughing is one of the most pleasurable experiences you can have. In fact, studies show that laughter relieves muscle tension, produces the mood-boosting hormone serotonin and can lower the risk of infection and heart disease. Also, it feels bloody good.

And you know who loves to laugh? Kids. For an instant feel-good hit, simply ask yourself: what would a nine-year-old do? It works in any situation. Are you preparing dinner? Draw a smiley face with sauce. Have you mopped yourself into a corner? Instead of tiptoeing across the wet, pretend the floor is lava. Are you training for a half-marathon? Incorporate a few happy little skips into every kilometre. The sillier you feel, the better.



B

BATHS IN THE MORNING

Baths are often reserved for the evening, to soak away the stress of the day. But there's something so pleasurable about a bath early in the morning. Swap the wine for a coffee and spend 30 minutes reading your book (or scrolling – no judgement here, this is your moment of pleasure) submerged in bubbles. (For extra points, ask yourself how much bubble bath would a nine-year-old use.) And then go about your day.

C



COFFEE

Caffeine addicts know the immense pleasure derived from the first coffee of the day, but the greatest mood boost might be for those who indulge irregularly, because the brain grows immune to the effects of caffeine over time. "Infrequent drinkers typically experience more pronounced mood benefits because their neurochemistry hasn't adapted to regular caffeine exposure," says Professor Russell Keast, an expert in food and sensory sciences at Deakin University.

For daily drinkers the pleasure could simply be relief, because "the perceived 'boost' from coffee often reflects reversal of mild withdrawal symptoms such as tiredness or headache rather than a net enhancement beyond baseline," adds Keast. In other words, coffee works best when you're at your worst, fatigue-wise. But hey, a boost is a boost and we'll take one where we can get it.

D



DAYDREAM

Anyone who was once a teen in the throes of a crush will recall how thrilling daydreaming can be. As it turns out, there are scientific benefits to letting your mind wander: studies have found that when your daydream is personally meaningful and positive, it can increase creativity and inspiration, and fantastical daydreaming influences creative behaviour. It can improve problem-solving and reduce stress and anxiety, and also provide a brief reprieve from the hellfire of the current news cycle, acting like a balm for your brain.

E

ENDORPHINS AND ENDOCANNABINOIDS

While endorphins (the brain's natural pain-killing opioids) have been getting all the credit for "runner's high", "it's actually a cocktail of feel-good chemicals that make you feel euphoric after intense exercise", says Jack Pye, a personal trainer and owner of Edge Fit gym in Sydney's Stanmore. He's referring to research out of Virginia Tech that found that several neurochemicals work in tandem to give a natural high; they include serotonin, oxytocin, dopamine and endocannabinoids, which essentially mimic THC and bind to the same receptors in the brain.

The good news for the more sedentary among us is that even a single bout of exercise is enough to make you feel hopeful, calm and to boost your mood. "The key is to do at least 20 minutes daily of moderate aerobic activity, like a brisk walk, dancing around at home, even a bit of tough gardening, and stick with it for three weeks to give the chemicals a chance to kick in and get you hooked," says Pye.

There's definitely pleasure to be found in exercise – like when it's over







F
FIVE PER CENT

An easy one: the 5 per cent pleasure principle is about asking yourself how you can make any mundane task 5 per cent more pleasurable. If you're redoing your budget, do it with a glass of wine or your favourite snack; if you're stuck on your commute, have a playlist of your favourite songs ready to go (or see D for Daydream); if you're cleaning the house, use a detergent that smells really good. You get the idea.

G
GETTING AN UNEXPECTED DISCOUNT AT THE REGISTER

Less a hack and more like a gift from the universe, getting an unexpected (or extra) discount at the register is one of life's greatest pleasures. It's even more enjoyable when you're shopping in person, too.



H
HOBBIES THAT DON'T MAKE YOU MONEY

Free yourself from the shackles of capitalism and do something you enjoy and that – and this is key – *does not matter*. You're not doing it for money, you're not going to create an Instagram profile for it, and there's nothing "productive" about it; you're doing it simply to do it. Like buying air-dry clay and sculpting a tiny dog. Why would anyone do that? Just because.

Planning for little treats in advance can eliminate the guilt of "giving in". Reframe it: you've earned this



I
INDULGENCE

Delayed gratification is a thing of the past. It's been lauded as indicative of long-term success ever since the 1970s when those kids were told not to eat the marshmallow in front of them. But newer research has found those who deprive themselves are not happier or healthier than those who allow themselves little treats. In fact, it's more about knowing when to hold back and when to indulge that improves a person's wellbeing.

Think about this: those with high levels of self-control have been found to suffer the most regret, and can struggle to appreciate the present moment because they're focused on the sacrifices they've made. You're probably not going to be thinking about the dessert that got away in 40 years, but the point stands: intermittently giving into your desires is good for you.



J

JOYFUL MOVEMENT

Pump up the music while you're getting ready to leave the house. Music boosts dopamine, can help reduce anxiety and also improves cognitive functions like memory and attention; dance, meanwhile can flood your body with feel-good chemicals (see E for Endorphins and Endocannabinoids) that put you in the party spirit, even if you're just going to the grocery store.



K

KISSING

When's the last time you kissed like a horny teenager? If you're partnered, cuddle up on the couch for a good old-fashioned pash. Single? Then consider pashing a hot stranger on the dance floor. First base only.



L

LICKING THE SPOON

There's something about cake batter that takes you straight back to childhood.



M

MARIE CLAIRE

A cheeky suggestion, sure, but hear us out: with a print magazine, there's no algorithm dictating the content, no notifications pinging at you, no million tabs open and – importantly – no blue light shining into your eyes. A note: *marie claire* goes best with a glass of red or a cup of tea.

The algorithm can't get you when you're reading something in print!



N

NOVELTY

This is a good one for long-term partners looking to put the spark back in their relationship. Your body's reward system loves novelty: it boosts dopamine to enhance mood and motivation, while reducing stress and anxiety, all of which can lead to greater connection and more intimacy. There's no need to go bungee-jumping together; simply find something to shake up your routine. Your brain will start to associate those feelings of excitement with your partner.



O

ORGASM

During orgasm, your body releases the feel-good hormones dopamine and oxytocin, which counteract the stress hormone cortisol to help increase emotions like happiness. Everyone is responsible for their own orgasm, so if you're partnered and not having them, speak up. By yourself? Mix it up: dress sexy for yourself, try new toys or a new fantasy and see where it takes you.

P

PEELING THE PLASTIC OFF A NEW SCREEN

Enough said.



Q

QUITTING

Relief comes from no longer having to do what you don't want to do. It doesn't have to be as big as quitting a job – you can also quit a chore, a friendship, a relationship, an attempt to make an outfit with item of clothing that has never worked, a hobby that you don't *actually* like, a social media trend. The list is endless. Consider it the great micro-resignation.



R

REGRETTING SAYING YES TO PLANS AND THEN THEY'RE CANCELLED

Picture this: you've said yes to something out of guilt, obligation or too many martinis, and the calendar has been taunting you. The day arrives and you sift through excuses to bail. It feels icky to be the one to cancel, so you reluctantly get ready. But then, ping! Your inviter has texted they can no longer make it; "can we raincheck?" Knowing better this time, you say "of course!" without suggesting a new date. That's the last you hear from them.

S



SILK PILLOW CASES

They're good for your hair and your skin, and they stay cool throughout the night. They're also an easy way to elevate your bedroom aesthetic.

T



TV

Television has had a bad rap in the past, blamed for things like cognitive decline, brain rot and time wasting. But perhaps that's why it's so enjoyable. Whether you're bingeing your favourite new series, anticipating a weekly episode drop or hosting a *Real Housewives* watching party, sometimes there's truly nothing better than sitting in front of the medium screen. (Simultaneously scrolling on the small screen optional.)



U

USE THE GOOD DINNER SET/ SHEETS/SOAP/TOWELS/ CANDLE/WINE GLASSES

There's no point saving things for a special occasion. One, you don't know that it will ever come (morbid, sorry); and two, what's the point of owning that expensive perfume if you're afraid of using it and running out? You literally may as well not have it. Use the good stuff on yourself, any day.

V

VALIDATION

Is there any better feeling than being proven right? Aside from allowing you to bask in the smugness, validation is actually a powerful and important psychological and neurological reward, triggering dopamine and signalling acceptance and connection. It also reduces stress while reinforcing self-worth and affirming that we are valued and that we matter.

Getty Images



W
WINNING

We're not talking claiming gold at the Olympics or coming first in your marathon (although that would also feel amazing); we're talking low-stakes wins that require little to no hard work. The wins you haven't done anything to earn but own full bragging rights to: the meat raffle at the pub, $2 on a scratchie, a look-alike contest. As with most things on this list, winning releases dopamine, the chemical responsible for pleasure and motivation, and our monkey brains still believe that winning is an evolutionary instinct – if we win at bingo, it means we have a greater chance of survival.



Is there any better feeling than when your raffle number is called?

X
X-RATED PARTY

As a celebration of pleasure in all its forms, a sex or kink party is a sure-fire way to spice up your sex life whether you're single or partnered. Our Secret Spot, co-owned by 33-year-old mother-of-one Jess Cattelly, prioritises female pleasure, and even hosts matinee parties for those who need to get back to their kids for bedtime.

Y
YAPPING



It's official, yapping is a wellness practice. Well, seeing your friends is a wellness practice (we all know we're wired for connection while living through a loneliness epidemic), but yapping obviously comes with the territory. The beauty of yapping is that it doesn't go too deep, covers low-stakes topics and doesn't need to go on for hours. Chitchat, gossip, banter – whatever you want to call it – a lighthearted conversation that involves a lot of silliness and laughter (see A: Act Like a Nine-Year-Old) is crucial for improving connection and can be a gateway to deeper friendships longer term.

Z
ZERO EMAILS



Getting to Inbox Zero is a specific kind of thrill – one that is entirely fleeting because, as we know, as soon as you send one email, you get one back. Enjoy it while it lasts.


MIND
THE
(PLEASURE)
GAP



Women are just as capable of reaching orgasm as men, yet many in midlife experience less satisfying sex. Dilvin Yasa looks at why and, more importantly, how we can change course

An admission: I grew up with a mother who would randomly shout self-pleasure slogans the way other mums would bang on about the importance of "slip, slop, slap".

"Masturbation is essential!"

"Learn pleasure, then teach!"

And my favourite: "Reciprocation is everything!"

Once I grew old enough to engage her, the context was clear: how can you expect to communicate what you like in bed if you don't truly know yourself? Teenage Dilvin was mortified, but 47-year-old Dilvin is mostly sad that every other Australian woman didn't receive the same education. Because if the statistics are anything to go by, we're living through what researchers now call the pleasure gap: the stark disparity between how often heterosexual men and women reach orgasm during sex.

The numbers are not subtle: in a Chapman University study of more than 50,000 people, 95 per cent of heterosexual men reported usually or always reaching orgasm during sex, compared with just 65 per cent of heterosexual women. Meanwhile, a Monash University-led study reported that almost 50 per cent of middle-aged women had poor sexual wellbeing; in early perimenopausal women, that included a doubling of the likelihood of dysfunction in desire and arousal.

In other words, when it comes to sexual satisfaction, women are statistically being left behind.



PLEASURE, WHERE ART THOU?

Watch any movie or TV show and you'd be forgiven for thinking female orgasms arrive within seconds of penetration. We will, according to the words of the late author Henry Miller, come again and again, "like an accordion collapsing in a bag of milk". Real life, however, is rarely quite so … *cinematic*.

"Are you kidding me?" My fifty-something friend spat at me recently when I politely asked if she'd been getting off lately. (Yes, having writer friends can be creepy.) "Trying to reach orgasm just feels like one more job on my already long list of jobs. You know what I really want at the end of the day? Ten minutes to read my book in fucking peace without someone touching or talking to me."

We could conclude that women just aren't as interested in sex, but two minutes with Anna Grosman, founder of Her Confidant escort agency and staunch advocate for women's sensual empowerment, blows that theory out of the water. "That's such nonsense. While the majority of my clients are women in their forties, fifties and sixties – many of them married – I've got quite a few in their seventies who are enjoying the best sex of their lives," she says with a laugh. "What's more, the companions tell me that these women are more open, enthusiastic and orgasmic than our younger customers."

Christine Rafe, Lovehoney's sex and relationship expert, is quick to agree that women are not inherently less sexual than men. "Actually, we know that over 90 per cent of women reliably orgasm during masturbation," she explains. "That's only 4 per cent less than men, which tells us something very important: the problem isn't biological."

The issue clearly lies elsewhere.

THE PLEASURE REALITY CHECK

Forget baby fog, nothing can prepare a woman for the wilderness of pushing 50. Caught between a rock and a hard place (more commonly known as looking after both children and ageing parents), women of my generation are often balancing family responsibilities with demanding careers in an economy where the cost of living rises faster than our salaries.

There's little doubt we continue to do the lion's share of housework (2023 UN data reveals Australia and New Zealand is the third highest region for unpaid domestic and care work done by women). And the mental load? I can't even begin to touch on the constant weight of scheduling medical appointments, buying classmate gifts, calling Aged Care (*again*) and anticipating everyone's needs before they even arise. No wonder the idea of prioritising pleasure can feel less like indulgence and more like an impossible luxury.

"Modern women often live in a constant state of sympathetic dominance," Rafe explains, referring to the body's fight-or-flight response. "Our nervous system is essentially telling us we're in survival mode and that we shouldn't want sex – obviously we wouldn't want to be horny while trying to escape a tiger."

> "I've got clients in their seventies who are enjoying the best sex of their lives"
>
> – male escort agency founder Anna Grosman

Add perimenopause and menopause into the mix and things can become even more complicated. Declining oestrogen levels can lead to vaginal dryness and/or atrophy, decreased blood flow to the clitoris and painful sex. Desire may dip, sensitivity may change and suddenly the vibrator that once worked wonders now needs to be cranked to 11.

But even these physical shifts don't fully explain the pleasure gap. Because when you start asking deeper questions about how we've been taught to think about sex and pleasure, a much bigger issue emerges.

THE EDUCATION GAP

It was only recently that a male friend insisted that finding the G-spot (and presumably knowing what to do with it) is like "searching for the lost city of Atlantis with an iPhone torch". A joke, yes, but the comment revealed something deeper: a common belief that women's bodies are inherently mysterious, confusing and hard to please.

"From an early age, we're told that women's bodies are complicated and our orgasms are elusive," confirms Rafe. "At the same time, we're taught a penis-centric view of sex, where all activity should culminate in penetration." The problem with that narrative? Not only do fewer than 20 per cent of women reliably orgasm through penetration alone, less than 2 per cent rely solely on penetration while pleasuring themselves. This means that the way heterosexual sex is often framed prioritises the form of stimulation that benefits men the most while women are left chasing pleasure in a format that simply doesn't work for their bodies.

Grosman adds that archaic belief systems and a tradition of slut shaming – particularly aimed at women aged 40-plus who dare to want to be seen as desirable – also have a lot to answer for.

"Many of my clients are high-powered, high-functioning women who've endured decades of terrible sex with their husbands because they've believed that the kind of sex they've been having is what sex must be like for every woman, that to endure is all part of the marriage contract," she says, adding that this issue is particularly prevalent among those who married the first man they ever slept with. "They didn't realise they had a say in what they'd like sexually and now they're calling me up to say, 'I don't know what I want or what I like, but I want to start exploring.'" Better late than never.

REWIRING FOR PLEASURE

If it all sounds bleak, the good news is that the pleasure gap is not inevitable. In fact, solutions are often straightforward, and leaning into pleasure can also bring a world of health benefits. We know, for example, that research has found that orgasm may boost immune function by up to 30 per cent and that the release of endorphins during orgasm can reduce pain. Other studies have linked sexual satisfaction with improved sleep, lower stress and better cardiovascular health. But for Grosman the most profound shift she witnesses in women who rediscover pleasure is psychological.

"They suddenly feel sexy and cheeky," she says. "All the important stuff automatically rises to the surface when you allow a woman to just be herself and have fun."

Masturbation with sex toys reduced menopause symptoms by up to 36%

For women who are navigating perimenopause or menopause, practical solutions – such as oestrogen suppositories, hormone therapy, pelvic floor exercises and plenty of lubricant – can assist, as can the use of powerful clitorial stimulation toys. In fact, a recent study for Womanizer, part of the Lovehoney Group, found that masturbation with the use of sex toys reduced menopause symptoms by up to 36 per cent (interestingly, 91 per cent of women said they would be more likely to masturbate if they knew it would positively impact menopause symptoms). But perhaps the most powerful change comes from shifting how we think about pleasure itself.

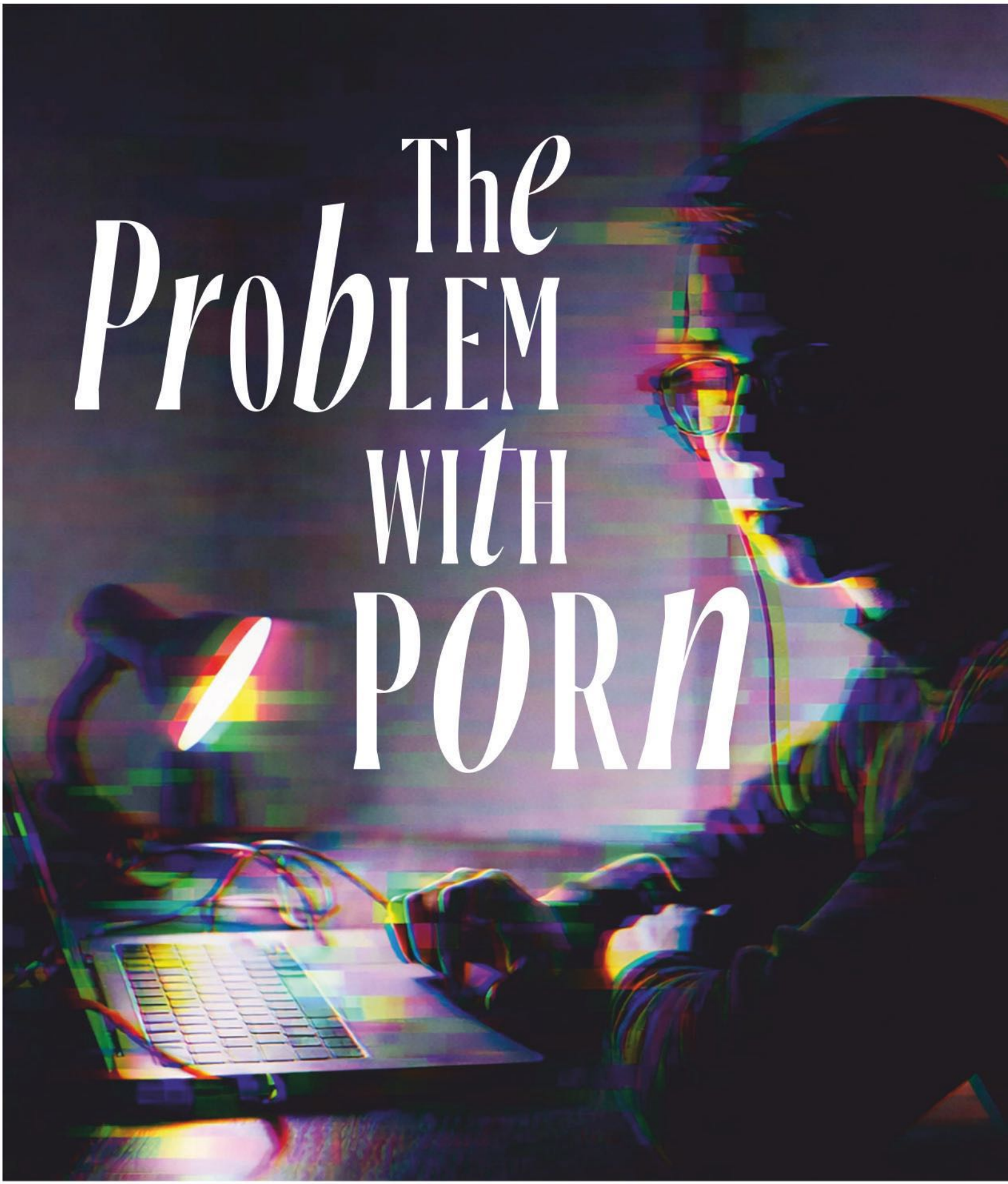
"Women stuck in our burnout culture have this constant feeling of being responsible for other people and that we don't ever believe self-pleasure can or should be prioritised," Grosman says. Her advice? Start by asking yourself what brings you joy outside of sex. Maybe it's walking in the sunshine, eating your favourite ice cream or, yes, sitting down with a book for 10 glorious, uninterrupted minutes. "Once we practise experiencing pleasure in everyday life, it becomes easier to ask ourselves what we want sexually."

Carving out time is essential, whether it be for play and distraction-free togetherness with your partner or even for solo masturbation sessions. So is taking stock of any underlying issues that might be derailing your plans to lead a full sexual life brimming with untapped orgasms. To that end, Grosman has recently launched The Reawakening, a guided, multi-stage intimacy program – delivered in partnership with leading sexologists and psychologists – designed to help women safely reconnect with touch and desire.

Ultimately, closing the pleasure gap begins with knowledge. Understanding our bodies. Communicating openly with partners. Rejecting outdated ideas that prioritise male satisfaction while treating female pleasure as optional, but never necessary.

For me, it also means teaching the next generation. Even though I'm sure my own teen daughters would prefer a mother who sticks to reminders about sunscreen, I too now rant about reciprocation, masturbation and pleasure. The sooner we begin treating it as something we're entitled to claim and communicate, the sooner the pleasure gap begins to close – promise.

Getty Images


The Problem with Porn



Australia's new age-verification laws are designed to prevent kids from seeing adult content online. However, sex industry workers are warning that the rules don't do enough to protect kids and are also stripping adult-content creators of income and safe working conditions

WORDS ALEXANDRA ENGLISH

You may have noticed on March 9, if you were so inclined, that Pornhub went dark. Or, rather, it went into Safe For Work mode. Gone was the nudity, the close-ups and the explicitly worded clip titles, and in their place thumbnails of content more suggestive in nature. A woman in a graduation gown with the title "That's One Way To Celebrate!"; two women in a yoga studio captioned "What Happens Next?"

The same happened on RedTube, YouPorn and Tube8 – some of the world's most popular porn sites, all owned by Canadian company Aylo. It wasn't just the landing pages that changed. Suddenly, only existing subscribers could access explicit content, and no new subscriptions were being accepted. Australia had entered a porn blackout.

It seemed sudden, but this was a long time coming. Aylo geoblocked Australian users in protest against a landmark online safety crackdown enforced by the eSafety Commissioner, the government's online regulatory body led by Julie Inman Grant. Talks about age-assurance measures began in 2021 and ramped up last year, with the rules coming into full effect in March.

Within a week of the rules' implementation, adult-content creators and sex workers began speaking out about how the restrictions were stripping them of income and pushing viewers to unregulated porn sites where women are being exploited. Given women and LGBTQIA+ people dominate the adult-content creator market, they felt that the new rules were a moral judgement on their work being passed under the guise of online safety.

Nikki Justice is a comedian, mother and OnlyFans star. She started creating adult content when she could no longer work. "I made all my income from comedy tours, but I can't go away now; I need to be present with my children, so [creating content] has become survival," she says. "It's the only job in the world that will pay me this kind of income. It's the one industry where women are valued more than men. The patriarchy has made it so that women get paid more for sex work than any other job we do, and they want to take that away."

A spokesperson for the eSafety Commissioner explained that the age-verification rules – which require platforms carrying adult content to take meaningful steps to prevent children from accessing it or face penalties of up to $49.5 million per breach – are aimed at stopping under-18s from stumbling across pornography online. "[It's] about protecting children from content they are not emotionally ready for," the spokesperson told *marie claire*. "These protections are intended to reduce children's exposure to age-restricted material online, particularly where it is accidental or unsolicited."

This is fair enough. Research shows that the age that people see porn for the first time is getting younger. One in three Australian children aged 10 to 17 have seen sexual images or videos online. A 2024-25 parliamentary inquiry heard the age



"We can protect our privacy and we can protect the children, and we should absolutely do both"

– Nikki Justice

of first exposure to pornography is 13, and that some six-year-olds had shown signs of exposure. Anti-porn activists including Maree Crabbe, co-founder and director of the Australian violence prevention initiative It's Time We Talked, and Teach Us Consent's Chanel Contos have spoken out about the potential for porn to influence sexual violence.

Pornhub itself faced major backlash in 2020 when an article in *The New York Times* titled "The Children of Pornhub" alleged the site was hosting child sexual abuse material, non-consensual content (such as assault videos and revenge porn), and videos uploaded without proper consent verification. As a part of major reforms, Aylo's sites stopped allowing unverified users to upload videos and made it easier for people to request content removal.

AI is a new concern. In February, a 19-year-old man became the first person in Australia to be prosecuted for creating deepfake pornography, which became a federal offence in 2024.

And so, clicking the "I am over 18" button is no longer sufficient. eSafety has left it to individual platforms to determine which age-verification method to use, as long as it is deemed an "appropriate age-assurance measure" such as photo ID, facial age estimation, credit card checks, digital ID wallets or AI age estimation based on a user's data. The mode of verification must comply with Australian privacy law, and companies must "minimise the collection of personal information".

On the surface, this sounds good. Protecting children from harmful content must be ensured by everyone in the online ecosystem, from Big Tech to content creators. Whether or not to protect kids from harmful content is not what is up for debate; what is being questioned by those in the sex industry, however, is the eSafety Commissioner's approach.

Justice says she unwaveringly supports the government's goal of protecting children, but believes the new restrictions are fundamentally flawed. "One hundred per cent I want to protect kids from seeing adult content online, but this is not the way it needed to be done," she says.

While age verification may reduce the chances of a young person stumbling onto adult content, a tech- savvy teen who wants to find porn will be able to get around restrictions. They might download a VPN, a virtual private network that hides their IP address so they can access Pornhub from a country that doesn't require age verification. (VPNs come with their own privacy concerns.) They might also find unregulated porn sites that are infested with non-compliant, unregulated, non-consensual and harmful content.

Adults, meanwhile, don't necessarily feel comfortable having to link their facial data or government-issued ID to their sexual viewing habits. Over-18s then take the same steps as the under-18s: a potentially dodgy VPN, or a potentially dodgy porn site where they may not realise that they could be watching content that's been stolen and hosted without its owner's consent or knowledge – and certainly without payment. These sites are less likely to check who is in the videos (their age or their consent), and are less likely to respond to takedown requests. "We can protect our privacy and we can protect the children, and we should absolutely do both," Justice says, "but whenever they create a black market for things, it just pushes people further underground and makes it more dangerous for the participants. If there are already concerns about content that's legal and mainstream, it's only going to be worse there."

Mish Pony, the CEO of Scarlet Alliance, the nation's peak body for sex workers, agrees. "Sex workers don't want children accessing our content," they say. "When you make it harder or impossible for people to use legal, regulated platforms, you push both workers and audiences towards more precarious, less regulated spaces."

For its part, the eSafety Commissioner says it will be keeping an eye on this. "Smaller providers are not getting a free pass. We will be watching for migration to their services." But Pony doesn't believe this goes far enough. "These sites don't really care if they get shut down. They can easily pop up with another domain name. It's like whack-a-mole."

The eSafety Commissioner tells *marie claire* that it held roundtable discussions with industry players, including the Scarlet Alliance, between November 2021 and July 2022. "These codes were drafted and written by the tech and adult industry themselves, subject to registration by eSafety," the spokesperson says. "They reflect what the online industry considers appropriate community safeguards to protect children from exposure to age-inappropriate material."

Pony, though, feels their recommendations were largely ignored. "We've been engaging with successive governments and eSafety Commissioner since the Online Safety Act of 2021 was being formulated," they say. "We essentially think both the Act and its regulations are not fit for purpose; they do not achieve the outcomes that they sought to achieve and infringe upon the rights of adults, including sex workers."

So what's the solution? Can we strike a balance between protecting children as well as viewers' privacy and creators' safety and livelihoods?

Justice says yes, pointing to a February article from the University of Queensland titled "Age verification online can be done safely and privately. Here's how." It involves "highly advanced cryptography that communicates to the platform



Getty Images

that a person possesses a digital document proving they're older than 18, but without revealing any further details," it says. "That means neither the government nor the platform can track a user's activities despite being able to accurately verify their age." Think of it like Apple Pay – your device stores your details; the company you're purchasing from doesn't get your information.

eSafety stands by its recommended age verification methods, explaining to *marie claire* that the government conducted a trial last year which "found that effective, accurate and privacy-protecting age assurance can be achieved and that the [adult] industry has matured to be able to achieve the dual imperatives of privacy and safety".

Critics of the legislation say that once suitable age assurances are in place to protect young people, the next step should be to increase sex education while decreasing the stigma associated with pornography. Ideally, a lack of shame about viewing preferences would mean adults wouldn't fear verification and so wouldn't pursue unregulated content.

"The issue isn't porn, the issue is that we do not talk openly and honestly about sex in the real world," says Cindy Gallop, a British-American entrepreneur and founder of MakeLoveNotPorn.tv, a user-generated and human-curated platform with the tagline: "pro-sex, pro-porn and pro-knowing the difference". "If porn is the Hollywood blockbuster movie, [our platform] is the badly needed documentary," she says.

Pony agrees. "Porn is often a fantasy, often a form of entertainment," they say. "I think people are often blaming porn for society's inability to have open, frank, honest discussions with young people about sex that should happen well before 18 – especially given the legal age [of consent] in Australia is 16."

"Ensuring young people have digital literacy skills is so important because once they turn 18 and can suddenly access pornography, it's not like a light switch goes on and all of a sudden they can critically navigate these things," says Dr Sarah Vrankovich, a researcher on the Partners in Prevention of Sexual Violence Project, the largest government-funded sexual violence research project. "We know young people are turning to pornography because they're missing sex education," she says. "If we're going to take porn off the table for them, we need to supplement their education, but there's been no discussion about that – they've just cut young people off from this source of information."

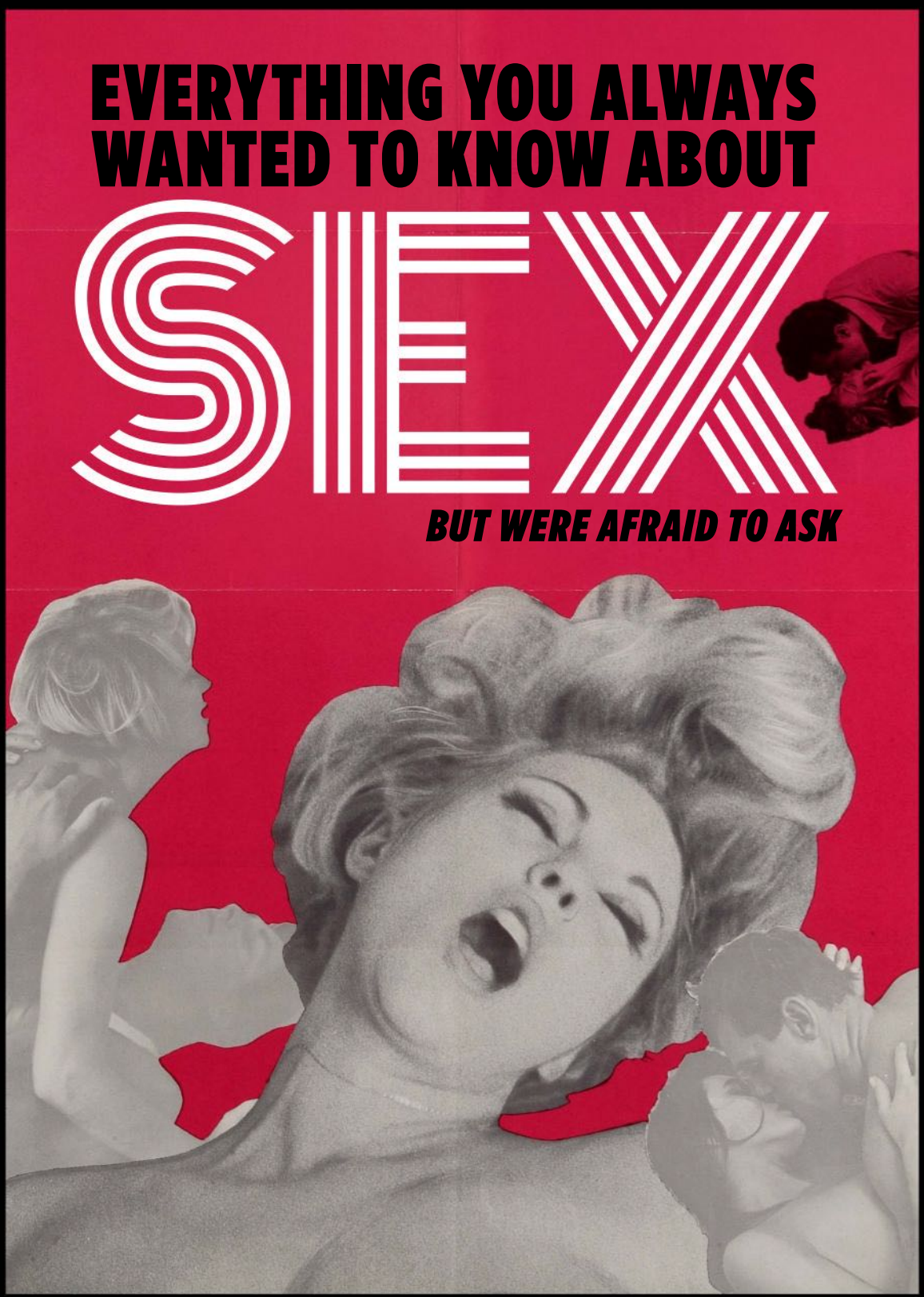
A NSW parliamentary inquiry into the impacts of pornography came to the same conclusion – that better education is needed. "We heard evidence that harmful pornography can distort perceptions of intimacy, reinforce gender stereotypes, and contribute to unhealthy relationship dynamics," it said. "Despite this, young people, particularly LGBTQIA+ individuals, may be turning to pornography for education about their sexuality and intimate relationships, highlighting gaps in our curriculum."

This is what Gallop is trying to do with the MakeLoveNotPorn Academy, an educational platform connected to the site. "Our mission at the academy is to organise the world's sex information to make it universally accessible and useful," Gallop says. "Google isn't doing that; the algorithm is censoring it. Parents and teachers tell me they cannot find resources online because of the stranglehold on the industry."

"Porn is often a fantasy, often a form of entertainment" – Mish Pony

Gallop's mantra is: don't block porn, disrupt it; don't let it go dark, bring it into the light. "We are socialising, normalising and destigmatising the shame, guilt and embarrassment out of it, bringing [sex] out of the shadows into the sunlight to make it easier to talk about and therefore promote consent, communication, good sexual values and behaviour," Gallop says. "The solution is not to shut down, but to open up."

FOR MATURE ADULTS ONLY!



It wouldn't be the pleasure issue without talking about S-E-X. Here, four trusted advisers – an author, a sex historian, a sexologist and an OnlyFans creator – get honest about getting down and dirty

MEET THE SEXPERTS



KATHY LETTE
AUTHOR

Lovingly known as "the queen of clit lit", Kathy Lette is the prolific author behind many novels, including *Puberty Blues, How to Kill Your Husband* and the recently released *The Sisterhood Rules* (Bloomsbury, $42.99), which celebrates the sex lives of older women. "Women don't give up sex when they get old; they get old when they give up sex," she says. Kathy is mischievous and cheeky, like your favourite aunt whose first language is innuendo. Our advice? Take her advice.



DR ESMÉ LOUISE JAMES
SEX HISTORIAN

Esmé Louise James is a doctor of sex. A year after she published her 2023 debut novel, *Kinky History: The Stories of Our Intimate Lives, Past and Present*, she completed her PhD with a thesis on 18th-century erotica in literature. She's also a multi-award-winning digital content creator for her Instagram and TikTok posts where she educates the masses in all things sex in pop culture and throughout history. Her new book, *Becoming Venus* (Simon & Schuster, $34.99), is out in August.



BLUE-EYED KAYLA JADE
ONLYFANS STAR

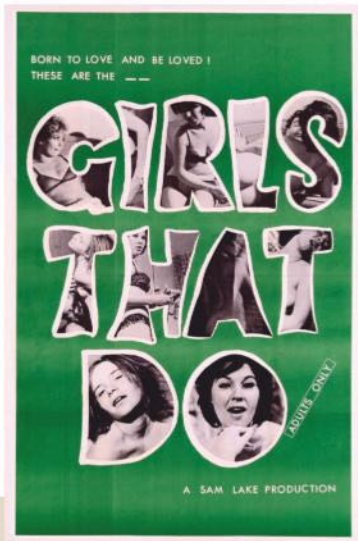
Blue-Eyed Kayla Jade is the ultimate multi-hyphenate: she's an OnlyFans star, porn creator, podcaster, entrepreneur, call girl, mother of two and the author of an upcoming memoir, *Call Girl Confidential* (Simon & Schuster, $36.99), out April 28. Whip-smart and funny, Kayla is like the older sister you wish you had: someone who can offer advice, share wild anecdotes and dare to do things first so you can follow in her footsteps (or learn from her mistakes).



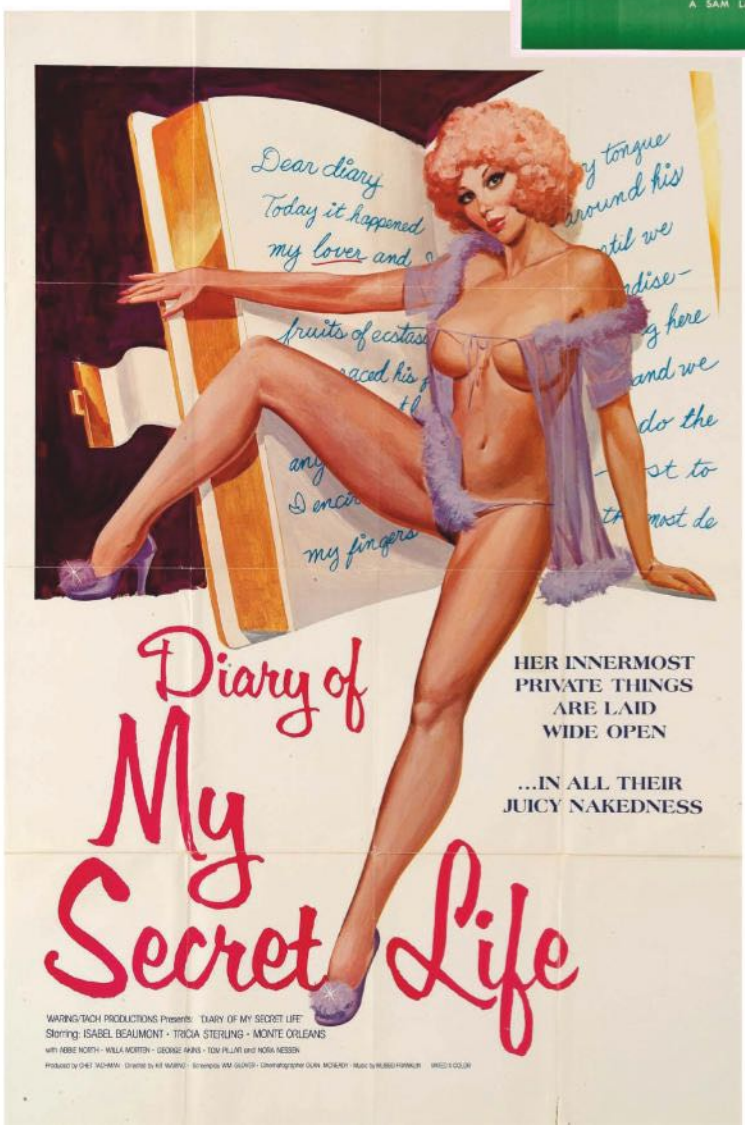
GEORGIA GRACE
CONTENT CREATOR

Known as @gspot._ on Insta, Georgia Grace is more than a sex-positive, trauma-informed and inclusive content creator, she's also a certified sex and relationships practitioner, somatic therapist and co-founder of the sexual wellness company Normal. As a podcaster and author of *The Modern Guide to Sex* (HarperCollins, $49.99), Georgia's main mission is to normalise conversations about sex and pleasure. You can sign up to her Substack for regular newsletters about sex: georgiagracesexology.substack.com.





This page and opposite
Posters for X-rated films from the '60s and '70s.



Are you for or against scheduling sex, and why?

KATHY It's always sex-o'clock in Lette Land. But if you're both at a busy time of life, it's imperative to book in for an R-rated rendezvous as it's good for your health. Orgasms improve cognitive ability... Wait, what was I saying again?

GEORGIA I'm pro scheduling sexual moments, not sex. I've found that when people schedule sex itself, it can create a lot of pressure and stress, so they end up avoiding it or it starts to feel overwhelming. Instead, I invite clients to schedule sensual moments: kissing with tongue, washing each other's bodies in the shower, sending flirty texts. They need to relearn how to bring sexual energy into everyday life and create the context for desire. People assume desire should be spontaneous, but in long-term relationships life gets busy and intimacy easily gets pushed aside. It's about prioritising pleasure and connection in the same way you'd prioritise a date or gym session.

KAYLA JADE I'm pro whatever gets people actually having sex. If your lives are busy, kids are screaming and you're half dead by the time you hit the pillow, spontaneity becomes a fantasy. Put it in the calendar. Anticipation is sexy too. Think of it less like a dentist appointment and more like a date that you know is going to end well.

Threesome in my fifties, yes or no? Asking for a friend...

KATHY There are quite a few overrated events in this world: water beds, weddings, oysters, tattoos and group gropes. I mean, how can you have a good time when you're desperately jealous that the others are having a better time than you? All feelings of mutual sharing and caring evaporate when you find yourself sleeping in the wet patch and then realising it's not your own.

ESMÉ LOUISE Age is just a number – and so is a threesome! For many people, this stage of life comes with a reinvigorated curiosity of what we enjoy in the bedroom. The only thing that matters is that everyone involved feels genuinely enthusiastic and comfortable. If you're exploring the idea with a partner, make sure you talk openly beforehand about boundaries, expectations and how you'll check in with each other afterwards.

KAYLA JADE Age isn't the issue, communication is. If both partners genuinely want it, go for it. If one person is secretly hoping it will fix something broken, it will absolutely do the opposite. Threesomes

amplify whatever dynamic already exists. If your relationship is solid, it can be fun. If it's shaky, it's like pouring petrol on the situation.

My partner wants to sext during the day but I feel so awkward! We usually only text about the grocery list or school pick up. Any prompts to help me get started?

ESMĒ LOUISE Change the app that you're using. If you usually text each other about everyday things, why not have a WhatsApp chat solely for sexy messages? Not only will this help you separate mundane communication from the more stimulating, but it will also get you excited every time you see that green icon pop up on your screen!

I'm freshly divorced and nervous to approach someone for a one-night stand. How do people do this? Help!

KATHY She who hesitates is celibate. There are some worse things than celibacy: like hepatitis and death. Forget your checkered past, what you need is a checkered present. Sex with the right man is a beautiful, moving and lovely thing. Sex with a stranger on a train in the dead of night is even better. Hips that pass in the night...

ESMĒ LOUISE Like trying anything for the first time after a long time, it's going to feel awkward at first. Don't let that put you off if this is something you want to explore! Keep the stakes low and focus on mutual interest rather than pressure. Apps can help because everyone is there with some level of openness to meeting people. Be clear about what you're looking for, stay safe and remember that confidence doesn't mean pretending you're fearless, often it just means being honest and curious.

KAYLA JADE Step one: remember everyone else is nervous too. Step two: confidence is mostly pretending you're not nervous. A simple, "Hey, I've had a great time talking tonight. Do you want to come back to mine?" [is perfectly fine]. You don't need a pickup-artist routine. Directness is wildly underrated.

We have teenagers in the house. How on earth are we meant to have sex?

KATHY Children are a contraceptive. Every time you go to make love, the toddler toddles in or the teen barges into the bedroom demanding money/a lift/to borrow your cashmere. My top tip? Vaseline – on the doorknobs. It sounds painful but they can't get in!

GEORGIA Many couples assume sex has to happen late at night in the bedroom, but that's often the least convenient time when you're parenting. Think creatively about timing: mornings, daytime when the house is empty, shorter intimate moments rather than long sessions, or go to bed earlier. Normalise alone time. Your kids are teenagers, they don't have to be a part of everything you do. And get a lock on your door. In fact, lock it regularly, even when you're just reading or having quiet time so your kids understand that adults need privacy too. Locking the door is underrated, and so is remembering that family life and adult intimacy can coexist. You're not just parents, you're partners.

How can I tell a new partner about my kink or fantasies?

GEORGIA Timing and tone will help you. Try not to tell them directly before, during or after sex the first time you bring it up. Frame it as sharing curiosity rather than making a demand. You might say something



"THERE ARE SOME WORSE THINGS THAN CELIBACY: LIKE HEPATITIS AND DEATH"

– Kathy Lette

like, “There’s something I find really exciting and I’d love to tell you about it.” The goal is to open a conversation, not present a checklist. You can also ask about their fantasies and see what they might be curious about. A partner who’s open to exploring will usually appreciate the honesty and vulnerability around desire often deepens intimacy. You never know, they may be into it too and weren't sure how to bring it up.

ESMĒ LOUISE Opening up about something so vulnerable can be scary, so make it a game! Find an evening when you can sit down with a bottle of wine and bring up a list of kinks/fantasies on the internet (there’s plenty around). Take turns answering whether that’s something that appeals to you, that you’d like to try, or that’s a no for you. This will make it easy to open up about your desires and, statistically, it’s likely they’ll have something to confess as well!

KAYLA JADE Start with curiosity, not confession: “Can I tell you something I’m into?” Frame it like sharing something fun rather than something shameful. If they’re into you, they’ll probably be intrigued. And if they’re not into it, at least you know early.

Should you ever fake an orgasm?

GEORGIA The word “should” is interesting. Many people fake orgasms to protect a partner’s feelings or to end sex when they’re tired, but over time it can create confusion about what actually brings you pleasure. I’m not here to tell people what they should or shouldn’t do – there’s already enough shame around sex – but communication is far more helpful in the long run. Guiding your partner, changing positions, slowing down or even saying you want to pause or stop can create much better experiences. Faking pleasure might solve a moment of awkwardness, but it can eventually lead to frustration, confusion or resentment.

Will a vibrator ruin real sex for me (like that episode of *Sex and the City* when Charlotte gets addicted to The Rabbit)?

KATHY A warren of rabbits is a girl's best friend, but a woman cannot live by vibrator alone. Your muff will be in a huff! I mean, a vibrator can’t take out the garbage or bring you a cup of tea in bed.

GEORGIA No, this is a myth. That scene scared an entire generation into thinking vibrators would somehow “ruin” partnered sex. In reality, vibrators simply provide a type of stimulation many bodies respond to really well. For many people, especially women, they can help you understand what kind of touch works best, which you can then share with a partner. Instead of replacing intimacy, toys can actually enhance it. If anything, vibrators help us become more aware of our bodies and what gives us pleasure.

Do you believe the saying: once a cheater always a cheater?

KATHY Many men go straight from puberty to adultery. They think monogamy is something you make dining room tables out of. The only cure? To swing off a chandelier with a toy boy between your teeth.

GEORGIA No, but context is important. People can and do change when they take genuine accountability for their actions. At the same time, it’s important to pay attention to patterns. Infidelity often reflects deeper issues in a relationship or within individual communication breakdowns, unmet needs or avoidance of conflict. What matters most after betrayal is whether the person takes responsibility, demonstrates real accountability and is willing to rebuild trust over time.

KAYLA JADE People can change, but patterns matter. One mistake in a messy moment is different from someone who treats cheating like a hobby. The real question is whether the person takes responsibility and does the work to rebuild trust.

Is it wrong to flirt while you’re in a relationship? I find it so thrilling even though I’d never cheat on my partner.

KATHY Flirting is the window shopping of sexuality. There are a few occasions where I’ve been known *not* to flirt – during labour, in a police line-up or when my house was on fire – otherwise there's no better pastime.

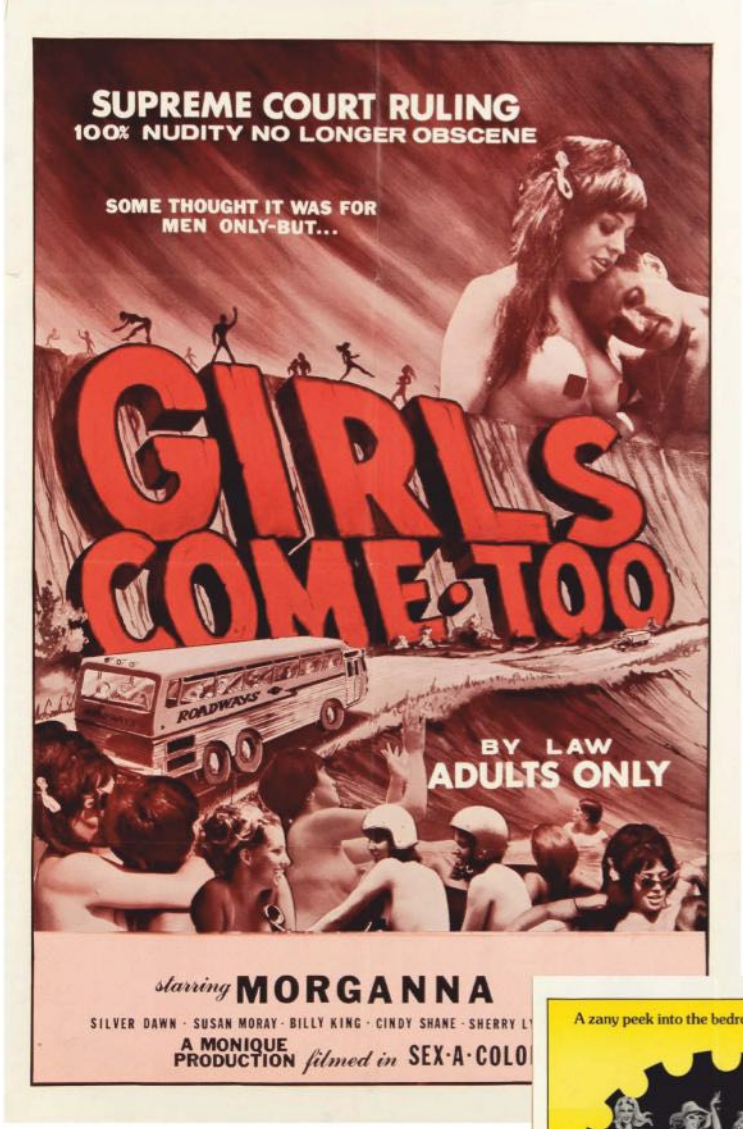
Is watching porn really that bad? As a feminist, I am against it, but as a human, I am turned on by it.

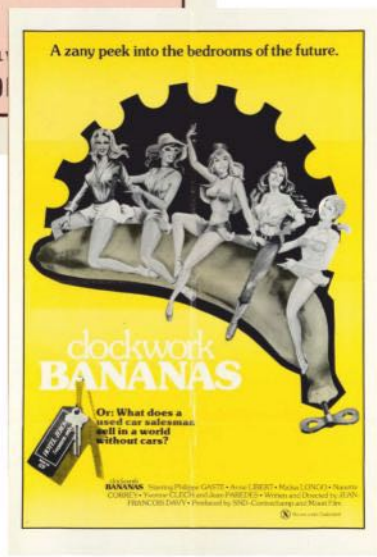
ESMĒ LOUISE Porn is a complex topic and this is such a good question to be asking. Like most things in life: if it’s free, someone else is probably paying the price. The good thing is that there are plenty of good ways to access pornography. Seeking out ethical or performer-led productions can help to ensure the people involved are working in safe, consensual environments. Check out websites such as MakeLoveNotPorn, or access erotic audio on apps like Quinn.

KAYLA JADE Porn is like junk food: sometimes fine, too much can get weird. The bigger issue is unrealistic expectations. If you treat it as fantasy entertainment rather than a training manual, it’s usually harmless.

My partner and I are in a dry spell. How can I bring the magic back to the bedroom?

KATHY For most married couples, being “creative in bed” means knitting while





watching TV. Ask any married woman the difference between a husband and a toy boy and she'll tell you the same thing: about three hours. I suggest you make a sexy move on your mate. Sex in a long-term relationship is like when your windscreen wipers are on intermittent. You've forgotten all about it and then *whoosh*!

ESMĒ LOUISE A number of factors can contribute to dry spells within long-term relationships. Rather than focusing immediately on sex itself, try reconnecting through intimacy more broadly [via] date nights, affectionate touch or sharing fantasies and memories of great moments together. When the pressure to "perform" disappears, desire often returns more naturally.

We've been together for decades and sex is like a choreographed routine. I'm getting bored. What can I do?

KAYLA JADE If you can predict every move like it's a dance recital, it's time to break the choreography. Change location, timing, the script. Go away for a night. Introduce a toy. Ask a question you've never asked before. Long-term sex only stays interesting if you keep treating your partner like someone you're still curious about.

I love my partner but I'm having an affair and don't want it to stop. Am I a terrible person or is it OK to think a lifetime of monogamy is unrealistic?

ESMĒ LOUISE Lifelong monogamy may not be for everyone, but it's incredibly important to communicate these feelings to all parties involved. The foundation of every healthy relationship is trust and communication. If you want to stay with your partner in the long-run, it's best to be honest about how you're feeling and what you want. You may even be surprised by what they have to say. There are many dynamics to explore: whether it's an open relationship structure, polyamory or something else, as long as everyone involved has the opportunity to consent to the relationship structure.

KAYLA JADE Desire doesn't magically disappear when you sign a monogamy agreement. But secrets have consequences. If you want multiple relationships, the honest route is renegotiating your relationship structure. Affairs feel exciting partly because they're hidden, but it usually explodes eventually. The real question isn't whether monogamy is realistic. It's whether you're willing to be honest about what you want.

"PORN IS LIKE JUNK FOOD: SOMETIMES FINE, TOO MUCH CAN GET WEIRD"

– Kayla Jade

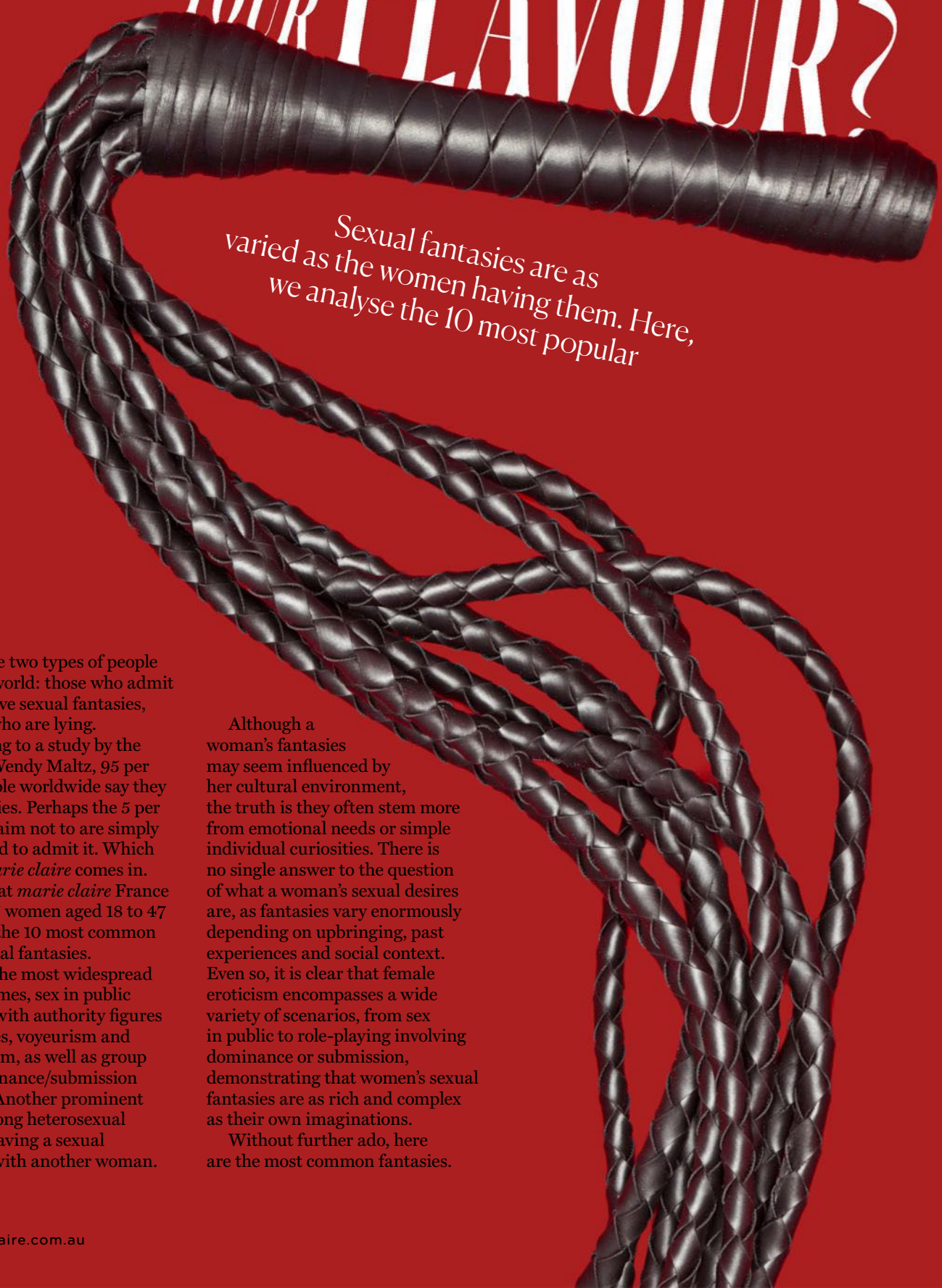




Getty Images

WHAT'S YOUR FLAVOUR?

Sexual fantasies are as varied as the women having them. Here, we analyse the 10 most popular



There are two types of people in the world: those who admit they have sexual fantasies, and those who are lying.

According to a study by the sexologist Wendy Maltz, 95 per cent of people worldwide say they have fantasies. Perhaps the 5 per cent who claim not to are simply too ashamed to admit it. Which is where *marie claire* comes in. Our sisters at *marie claire* France gathered 25 women aged 18 to 47 to uncover the 10 most common female sexual fantasies.

Among the most widespread are threesomes, sex in public places, sex with authority figures or celebrities, voyeurism and exhibitionism, as well as group sex or dominance/submission dynamics. Another prominent fantasy among heterosexual women is having a sexual encounter with another woman.

Although a woman's fantasies may seem influenced by her cultural environment, the truth is they often stem more from emotional needs or simple individual curiosities. There is no single answer to the question of what a woman's sexual desires are, as fantasies vary enormously depending on upbringing, past experiences and social context. Even so, it is clear that female eroticism encompasses a wide variety of scenarios, from sex in public to role-playing involving dominance or submission, demonstrating that women's sexual fantasies are as rich and complex as their own imaginations.

Without further ado, here are the most common fantasies.

1 DOMINATING OR BEING DOMINATED

It's no surprise that many women who carry the mental load in their careers and families just want someone else to make a decision for them. Fantasising about being dominated does not mean you want to be put in a dangerous situation; rather, it allows women the space to explore an idea from the safety of imagination. On the other hand, women who may feel they don't have much control in their waking lives may fantasise about being the dominatrix in the bedroom.

2 SEX WITH A CELEBRITY

Another common fantasy, and one of the most intriguing, is sex with a celeb. These figures, idealised by their media presence and the perfection they project, represent the unattainable and the exciting. The appeal of these fantasies lies in the combination of the unknown and the perfect. Celebrities can symbolise something that transcends the limitations of daily life, a desire not tied to immediate reality but to an idealised version of it. Imagined encounters with a celeb can be irresistible because of the chance to be desired or valued by someone seemingly "superior" in status. Or maybe the celebrity is just really hot.

3 THREESOMES

Threesomes or group sex is a scenario with an exciting and transgressive component that makes it attractive: the possibility of experiencing multiple stimuli at the same time and breaking with the monotony that can sometimes be associated with conventional sex. One of the reasons behind this fantasy is the symbolism of freedom and empowerment it carries. Being able to imagine oneself in a context where social rules are suspended, and where pleasure is the sole priority, offers mental liberation.

4 ROLE-PLAYING

Role-playing allows women to choose from millions of imaginary situations without real-life risks. It opens the door to frameworks where they can explore their desires without judgement or consequences, reinforcing the idea that sexual fantasies are a creative reflection rather than a literal desire.

5 AT THE MOVIES OR IN THE RESTAURANT TOILET

This common fantasy combines the element of transgression with the allure of the forbidden. Women who fantasise about these scenarios tend to focus on the pleasure of the moment, setting aside factors such as a fear of being discovered or potential negative consequences.

6 BEING WATCHED

Voyeurism, or the pleasure of watching or being watched, occupies a prominent place here; the act of being watched represents a mixture of risk and desire that can be highly stimulating. It's a fantasy that can be connected to a desire for validation and power, where the act of being observed is seen as a form of control over the situation. While it doesn't necessarily reflect a desire to act on it, the fantasy can allow women to transgress norms from a safe perspective, leaving out aspects of reality that could be uncomfortable or dangerous.

7 PUBLIC PLACES

Another fantasy that's linked to breaking social norms. While some women may prefer safe, imagined settings, the idea of "doing it in public" is one of the most popular fantasies, highlighting the power of context in sexual arousal.

8 WITH ANOTHER WOMAN

For a heterosexual woman to fantasise about another woman doesn't necessarily reflect a change in orientation but can be a symbolic game that allows her to connect with little-explored aspects of eroticism. This type of fantasy is associated with the search for new sensations, sharing intimacy with someone who can understand the female experience from a different perspective, and breaking with the norms imposed by a traditional upbringing. Even if the desire is not explicit or constant, many women turn to this ideal in their fantasies to explore pleasure from a different and safe perspective.

9 SMALL SPACES

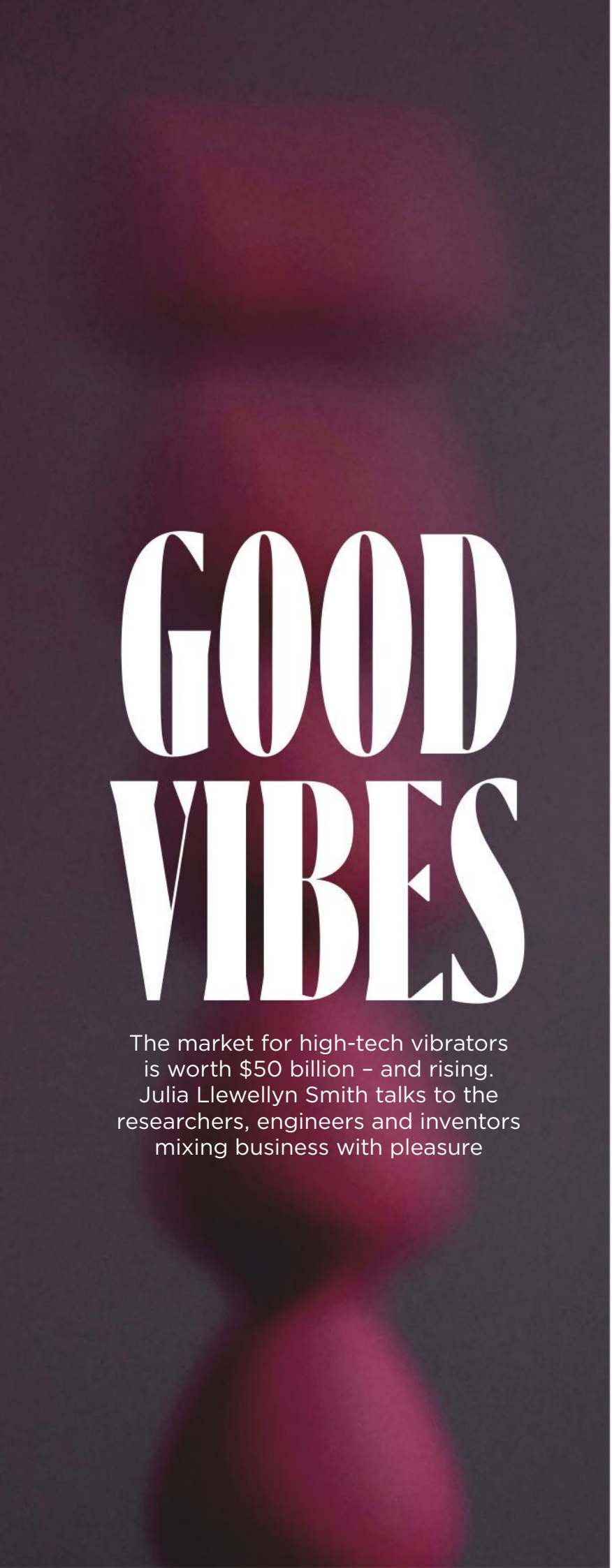
Sexual fantasies that take place in small spaces like photo booths, fitting rooms or elevators have captured the imaginations of many. These enclosed and intimate spaces generate a sense of urgency and adrenaline that is highly erotic. Having sex in a tight, close space is a recurring fantasies among women, as confined spaces offer an ideal compromise between privacy and risk.

10 SLEEPING WITH THE BOSS

Work environments provide a setting where tension gradually builds, intensifying desire. These kinds of fantasies often involve a figure of authority as an object of attraction.



Photography Getty Images. This story was initially published by Eva Schmidt on the *marie claire* France website.



GOOD VIBES

The market for high-tech vibrators is worth $50 billion – and rising. Julia Llewellyn Smith talks to the researchers, engineers and inventors mixing business with pleasure

It's a snowy morning in east Berlin. In a small workshop inside a warren of tasteful modern offices, between walls lined with pliers, screwdrivers and duct tape, Tobias Zegenhagen is bending over the open door of an innocuous-looking box. It's about 1.5 metres cubed and lined with thick, spiky white foam. Inside, a small microphone on a stand is pointing at a clamp that holds a throbbing pink vibrator.

"Noise is a very important issue for sex toys. People want them to be as silent as possible," explains Zegenhagen, the 45-year-old product director of the Lovehoney Group, the world's largest sex toy retailer. "There's a room at the Technical University of Berlin the size of a soccer pitch, where you can drive in a car to test the acoustics. We basically downsized that. Then we test. Does the toy make a high-frequency noise? Because squeaky is very unpleasurable."

The recordings help to isolate exactly which part of the toy is making the noise so that developers can try to eradicate it.

Zegenhagen has a PhD in engineering and used to work for Siemens designing wind turbines and submarines. Now he and his team are applying German precision engineering to orgasms. "It isn't what I initially envisioned for my career, to be honest, but from an engineering standpoint it's not all that different from working on other types of consumer electronics," he says.

Not long ago, sex toys were viewed as seedy products bought in sex shops, but they've since entered the mainstream and represent a large and rapidly growing market. This is partly due to celebrities such as Gwyneth Paltrow and Lily Allen talking about theirs, partly because internet shopping means they can now be delivered to our homes in discreet brown parcels and partly because rapidly evolving technology is delivering thrills as never before. Then there's the increased emphasis on female sexuality, especially the "orgasm gap" – figures from peer-reviewed studies and journals show that 85 to 90 per cent of men achieve orgasm during intercourse compared with only 32 to 65 per cent of women. Now women are reducing this discrepancy with an array of (very nearly) noiseless and often stylish USB-charged gadgets.

The Lovehoney Group was formed in 2021 in an estimated $1.8 billion merger of two sex-toy companies: the German "sexual wellness" brand Wow Tech and Britain's Lovehoney, founded in 2002 in Bath. Today the group employs 850 people around the world. Reported sales for 2024 were $500 million.

In the UK, the number of people buying sex toys rose by 64 per cent between 2017 and 2024. Research by Lovehoney in 2017 claimed

that 2.9 million people in the UK owned at least one sex toy – a figure likely to have spiked since a lockdown sales boom. Globally, the industry is valued at more than $50 billion annually, about six times greater than the electric toothbrush market, and is forecast to rise to about $90 billion by 2030. In Australia, the market is projected to generate revenue of $2.3 billion by 2030.

In some ways, Lovehoney's Berlin offices, where the company's research and development take place, are like many others I've been in. But dotted behind the staff tapping away at keyboards are giant plush costumes of what – to my untrained eyes – look like aliens. "They're clitoris costumes. They're for education, as most people don't know what one looks like," explains PR manager Verena Singmann, 39, who is showing me around. Some companies have a coffee room. Here, tucked between the toilets and a storeroom, there's a masturbation room, a narrow space with a chaise longue and a variety of vibrators displayed on the walls. There's no lock on the door, merely a sliding "occupied" sign. "It's to normalise the idea of masturbation," Singmann says, "but people can do whatever they like in there. We don't ask questions."

In the lobby there's another plush costume – this time in the form of a giant black vibrator. Glass cases and cabinets are packed with the company's bestsellers. There's a cute plastic pink rose, which looks like an ornament you might see in a chintzy B&B, but turns out to be a clitoris sucker. "There's a trend for more playful shapes like these. You could leave them lying around and no-one would know," Singmann explains.

She shows me a chrome showerhead designed with the upmarket bathroom fixtures manufacturer Hansgrohe. It was created in response to research that found 28 per cent of women use this attachment for purposes beside washing their hair. "It's always nice when a different industry isn't afraid to collaborate with us."

Next is a long purple stick with buckled collars at the base. Out of context I'd have guessed it was a dog-walking accessory, but I'm starting to know better. "It's a spreader bar, you put it between your legs," Singmann says. This is a product from the *Fifty Shades of Grey* brand with which the company has a licensing deal. "Those books and films allowed a lot more couples to explore their kinky side."

During the *Fifty Shades* mania of the early 2010s, it seemed as though everyone was reading about BDSM on their morning commute. The trilogy sold 165 million copies worldwide and is just one of the cultural moments that helped to popularise sex toys. Another was *Sex and the City* in 1998, when Charlotte rhapsodised over her new rabbit vibrator. Today Singmann shows me shelves laden with malformed dildos – some scarily huge, some tiny, ridged, contorted, in every colour, with names such as Creature Cocks Sea Monster – that cater to the "romantasy" fiction craze in which women often have sex with mythical creatures. "It's a huge trend."

Lovehoney's toys are manufactured in China, but development, rigorous quality control and testing take place in Germany. The products aren't cheap – the company's latest Womanizer clitoral suction stimulator costs $339 – but it can take five years and about a dozen iterations to perfect a toy. The team must ensure items can withstand being bent more than a million times in the case of a flexible rabbit, for example, or endure "stroking" more than 100,000 times for a male "sleeve" into which a penis is inserted. "The basic process is the same as for a cellphone, earbuds, a hairdryer, whatever," Zegenhagen says.

In one room, rows of 3D printers purr ready to churn out prototypes. Monitors display graphs tracking the varying pressure modes of a vibrator. One engineer in jeans and a baseball cap is examining data regarding

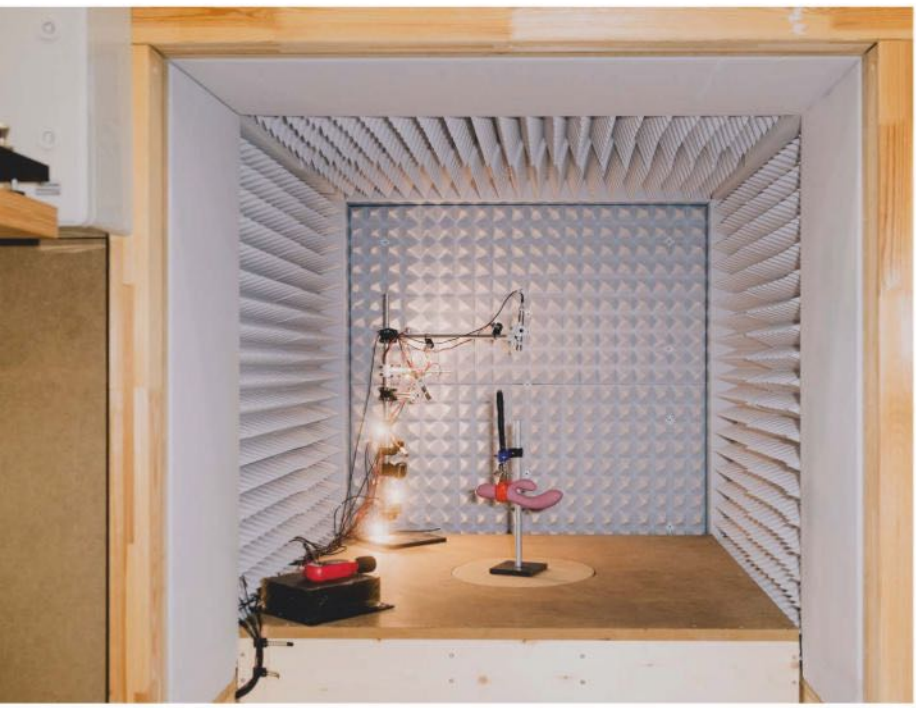
At $50 billion a year, the industry is six times the size of the electric toothbrush market



Below The "romantasy" fiction craze, in which women often have sex with mythical creatures, has spawned a range of dildos with names such as Creature Cocks Sea Monster.

"Female pleasure is still something that is never talked about"

– Lucy Litwack



Above The wrong noises can dampen the buzz, so acoustic testing of sex toys is key. "People want them to be as quiet as possible," says Lovehoney's Tobias Zegenhagen. "Squeaky is very unpleasurable."

a rabbit's on-off switches: "We don't want the button to feel loose after just 100 switches."

Perfecting products requires extensive user testing, a unique challenge for the industry. "When you make a cell phone, for example, you give it to a user and observe them," Zegenhagen says. "We can't watch while people masturbate." Instead, extensive feedback is collected from 13,000 testers all over the world, aged between 18 and 70, recruited via Lovehoney's online forums. (There's no such thing as a full-time toy tester, although Lovehoney staff and their friends and family have first dibs.)

Volunteers test prototypes for two to three weeks before completing a questionnaire. These are analysed by Lovehoney's user research manager, the sexologist Elisabeth Neumann, 33, who will then probe further through focus groups and online interviews.

"We ask, 'How did you use it? What benefits did you experience? How did it influence your pleasure, your sexual arousal?'" Neumann says, sitting before me in sober black trousers and a pinstripe jacket. She has a master's in sexology and has worked at Lovehoney for eight years.

Neumann's questions don't always receive straight answers. People don't use sex toys in the same way they might use a dishwasher – results are far more dependent on testers' mood and temperament. Then there's language. "Anatomically, people's sex education is not that good. So when they say, 'I touch my clitoris,' they may actually be referring to some other part of their body," Neumann says. "And there are not many terms to describe the sexual experience. One common term is 'pleasant', but that can mean anything from 'nice' to 'deeply orgasmic'. So during interviews we really have to dig deeply to discover, 'No, how pleasant is this *really* for you?'"

For centuries, the specifics of female anatomy have been an overlooked area of research, Neumann says, which has led to ignorance and misinformation. "When one starts to study female pleasure, you might hear about different 'spots' that are to be discovered: G-spot, C-spot, A-spot, O-spot. It is now our understanding that anatomy is not determined by spots, but that each woman has her own unique composition of clitoral structure, nerve endings, pelvic floor muscles and other anatomy that influence personal preferences and pleasure zones. It's one of our challenges to develop products that bring pleasure to as many people as possible while acknowledging that everyone is unique." Discoveries that have surprised Neumann include research that, far from being used by lonely spinsters, about 50 per cent of sex toys are used in a twosome. A recent study in the *Journal of Sex Research* by three medical psychologists showed that, in Europe at least, couples of all sexualities who use sex toys have better relationships, more sex and enjoy sex more.

Female sex toys dominate the market: 65 per cent of buyers are women. The reasons aren't hard to fathom. "Men don't need as much stuff because it's pretty simple for them," says Lucy Litwack, 51, owner of the upmarket British lingerie and sex toy brand Coco de Mer. The company was started in 2014 by Sam Roddick, the daughter of The Body Shop founder Anita Roddick, but Litwack staged a management buyout in 2017.

"So often, women have no idea what turns them on," Litwack says. "Female pleasure is still something that is never talked about. Sex education in school is all about how not to get pregnant, how not to get a sexually transmitted disease. So many heterosexual women fake orgasms when they are with their partner because we're people-pleasers, we seem more concerned about hurting a man's ego than we do about our own satisfaction. Now it's changing – they're using toys to see what works for them and then expressing that to their partners. Some men are still scared of toys; they say, 'Are you saying I'm not good enough?' But now they're starting to realise a toy just gives them one less thing to have to worry about."

Litwack is trying to make sex toys as luxurious and female-friendly as possible. "I felt that so many out there were very rigid," she says. "I really wanted to do something where the toys were moulded to your body, rather than the other way round." With Coco de Mer's toy developer, Helen Zeal, 53, Litwack has spent the past decade ensuring her toys are as bendy as possible. They have also created toys using dual-density silicone. "It has a squishy feel. You don't hit metal at any point. That's important for a woman's pleasure."

All products must be in compliance with EU product safety regulations, which require materials to be free from carcinogens and lead. There are no specific guidelines for sex toys, so Zeal tends to abide by the rules for children's toys. "They're often electronic, made of plastic and silicone, and in that area the standard is very high," she explains.

Vivacious and glamorous, Litwack and Zeal are in a meeting room at Coco de Mer's offices in Primrose Hill, north London. Walls and ceilings are painted cocoa brown, the brand's signature colour, and we're surrounded by tailor's dummies draped in lingerie. On the boardroom table is a selection of toys the pair created together, with sleek, dark brown curved edges and rose-gold trimmings. Prices are top end. Its own clitoral sucker, the Stimulator, costs $350 but the products are more attractive, and discreet, than the many neon numbers I've by now encountered. "Our customers don't want hot pink, they want something they feel comfortable with in their homes and that they can travel with," Litwack says.

Where will the industry go next? Remote-controlled, Bluetooth-enabled toys are all the rage, to be used alone or on a partner. Sex dolls are being reimagined, incorporating AI technology to enable changing facial expressions and the ability to carry out conversations – yours for about $20,000. Other gadgets clip to relevant body parts and, via Bluetooth, move in time with the pornography of choice, with AI then refining the experience exactly to the user's liking. Yet within the industry there's scepticism around whether users will want their most intimate moments on the cloud.

"To personalise the experience, users have to share their data with us, and obviously how they use toys is very sensitive information," Zegenhagen says. "It will happen but it will take at least another five years. And I don't think robots will substitute human connection. We're certainly not seeing big demand for them right now."

Everyone I meet in the industry chats matter-of-factly about the most taboo subjects. Sometimes they have to be reminded that not everyone is so relaxed discussing bondage gear. Adam Lewis, the co-founder and CEO of Hot Octopuss (the company brought the world the Pulse, often known as the first "guybrator" – a male vibrator), says: "I remember once in LA we were having dinner after a trade show with a retired porn star, who was talking very knowledgeably about the different technologies, 'Oh yeah, I was in this gang bang using this and that.' The whole restaurant stopped talking, the waiter stopped pouring our water. But all of us were just nodding, 'Yeah, yeah, OK.'"

Lucy Litwack has put her 78-year-old mother, who used to work as a jeweller, to work in Coco de Mer's Knightsbridge boutique. "The worst experience of my life was the day I had to train my mum on how all the toys worked, the bondage stuff," Litwack says. "It was horrific for me, but she's amazing at the job. Now I get texts saying, 'Darling, we're running low on ball gags.'"

Despite the growing normalisation of such products, resistance remains. Meta, the owner of Facebook, WhatsApp and Instagram, won't allow sex toys to be advertised across its platforms. "It's very frustrating," Litwack says.

This apart, what unites everyone I meet is a sense that they're genuinely improving lives. Zegenhagen says: "When I worked at Siemens, I never had this feeling I was making a product that was making so many people happy. In contrast to what I did before, I really like it."

A-List Approved

With pleasure now more accepted as self-care, these celeb-backed toys are front and centre.



CARA DELEVINGNE
Lora DiCarlo Sway, $234.95.
Best for: Enhanced muscle relaxation



DAKOTA JOHNSON
Maude Vibe, $89.
Best for: Discrete use



GWYNETH PALTROW
Goop Double-sided wand vibrator, $145.
Best for: Deep vibrations



LILY ALLEN
Womanizer Liberty 2 Clitoral Suction Stimulator, $149.95.
Best for: Clitoral stimulation

Photography Gene Glover; Dominic Xavier. © The Times/News Licensing





"Spending nights in with friends."

– Jamie Richards, art director



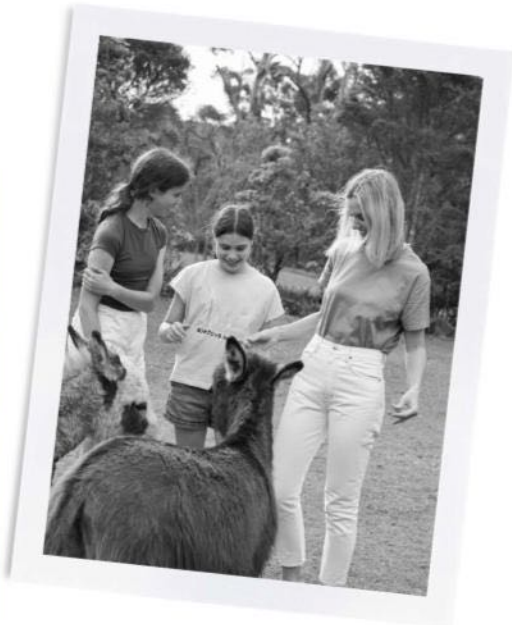
the little THINGS

The *marie claire* team share the micro-moments that bring them pleasure

"There's something about crawling into a freshly made bed and picking up my Kindle at an hour so early it's only socially acceptable for the elderly and toddlers – it never fails to soothe my soul. Maybe it's the guilty pleasure of an early bed time, the satisfaction of clean sheets or the escapism of a great book. But all three combined? Heaven!"

– Maddison Hockey, digital editor





"A weekend with no plans and nowhere to be – bliss! Sunday morning in bed with a coffee and a book – my fat labrador beside me. Long hikes through the Southern Highlands. An uninterrupted day, free to spend outside with my miniature donkeys. Also: a clean house, Whitney Houston on repeat in the car, live music, true crime podcasts, falling in love again, and the greatest pleasure of all: seeing my girls happy."

– Georgie McCourt, editor



"Quiet time with my cat."

– Naomi Smith, fashion director

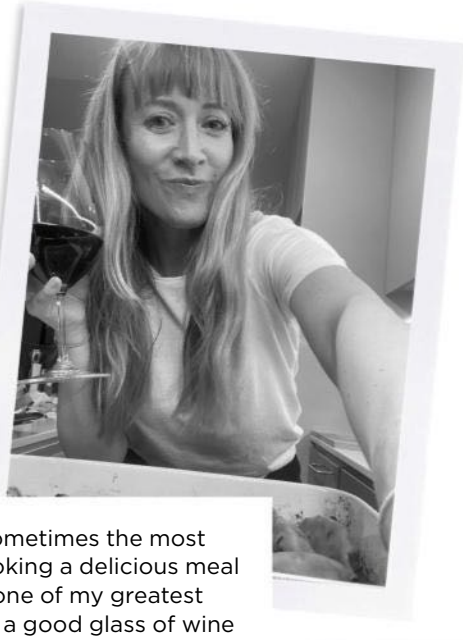




"I can give you 10 things:
1 Visiting an art gallery.
2 Buying a pastry and coffee at the end of a long walk.
3 Playing Animal Crossing.
4 Drinking a glass of chilled red on my balcony.
5 Calling my sister.
6 Seeing live music with friends.
7 Watching the sun set.
8 Buying flowers to spruce up my home.
9 Having a cuppa with my nan.
10 Patting a dog!"

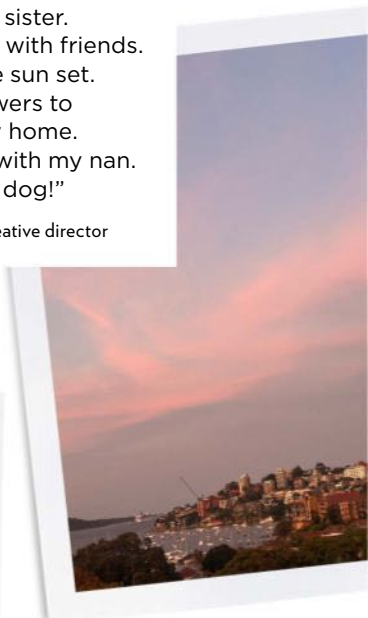
– Rebecca Rhodes, creative director





"I can find pleasure in sometimes the most mundane of things, but cooking a delicious meal for my family is maybe one of my greatest pleasures – especially with a good glass of wine and the music turned up! Trying new dishes I've never made before gives me a creative outlet that I find deeply satisfying."

– Robyn Fay-Perkins, photo director



"The glorious, joyous nonsense of stolen moments with lifelong GFs is the gift that just keeps on giving."

– Melissa Gaudron, deputy editor





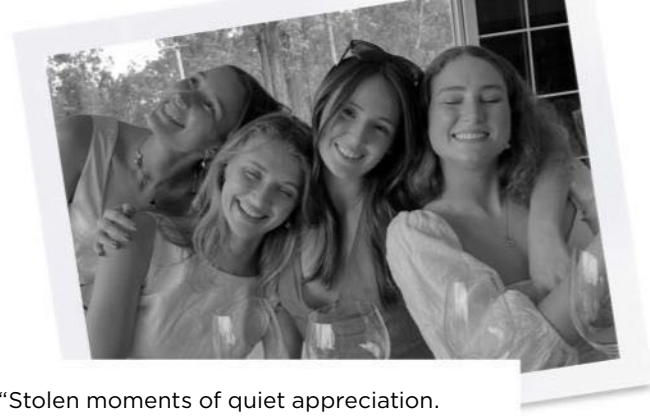
"Being with my two sons brings me so much pleasure. Especially in those moments when there is nowhere to really be and we can just be together. We laugh and they tell me (endless) funny stories and I just feel like there is no other place I'd rather be."

– Sally Hunwick, beauty director









"Stolen moments of quiet appreciation. Having moved to Australia without any family, my friends have become my adopted family. It's not simply the time spent with them that fills me up, but those seconds when I step back and really see it. Turning back to a dinner table to catch everyone mid-laugh, or watching friends play ring toss, I take a mental photograph and hold it for just a few seconds. In that pause, I feel an overwhelming gratitude."

– Kiera Sylvester, social media editor

"Getting into bed with freshly washed hair, new pyjamas, clean bed sheets and no alarm set for the next day."

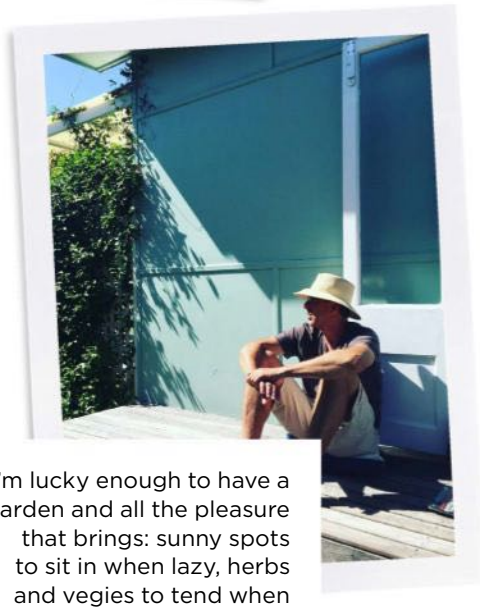
– Harriet Sim, deputy features editor





"Quiet Sundays with a clean house and listening to Sade on vinyl – it's very specific."

– Benji Luis, fashion assistant



"Spontaneous beach trips with my boys. Waking up to a gorgeous sunny day with no plans, and piling everyone in the car to spend time at the beach with the kids."

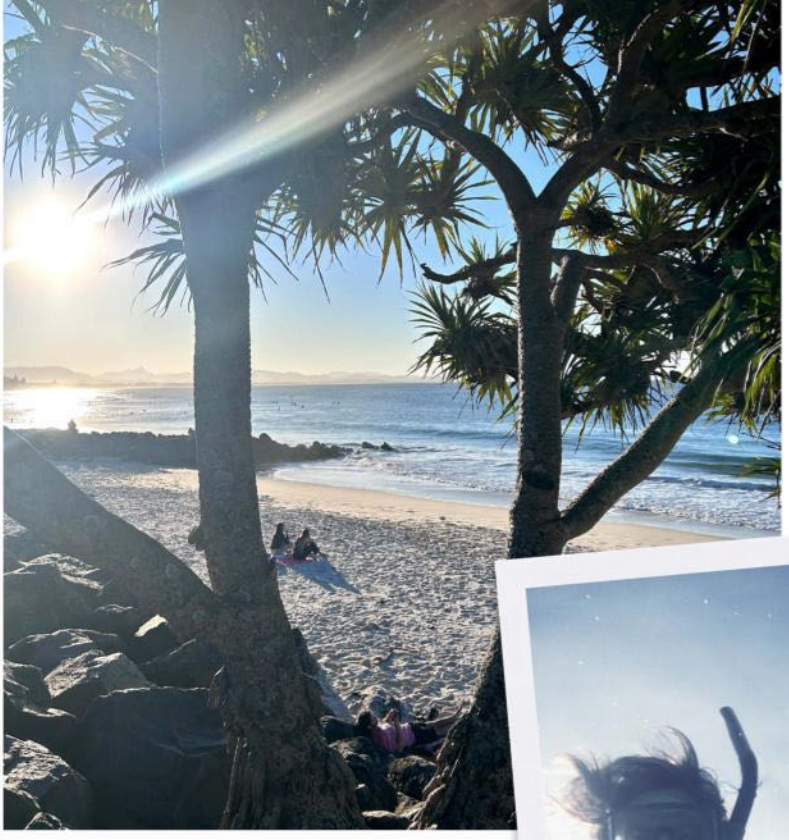
– Danielle Tarrant, senior designer





"I'm lucky enough to have a garden and all the pleasure that brings: sunny spots to sit in when lazy, herbs and vegies to tend when more energetic, frogs, birds and insects to see and hear (and to let me pretend for a moment that I'm not one of millions dwelling in a crowded city)."

– Daniel Moore, copy director



"Snorkelling. Being underwater with all the colourful fish and other sea creatures, you can't help but feel any worries disappear and your curiosity and delight take over as you observe and navigate their marine world."

– Hilary Board, senior copy editor



"A few things: lighting a candle while reading or watching TV, taking warm linen straight from the dryer, curating playlists for different moods or moments (work playlist, walk playlist, cooking playlist, driving playlist etc), and then actually listening to them when the moment arrives."

– Caitlin Napier, content producer



"It's the little things for me: a coffee, face mask and a really great song to listen and dance to before starting the day."

– Jordan Boorman, fashion editor

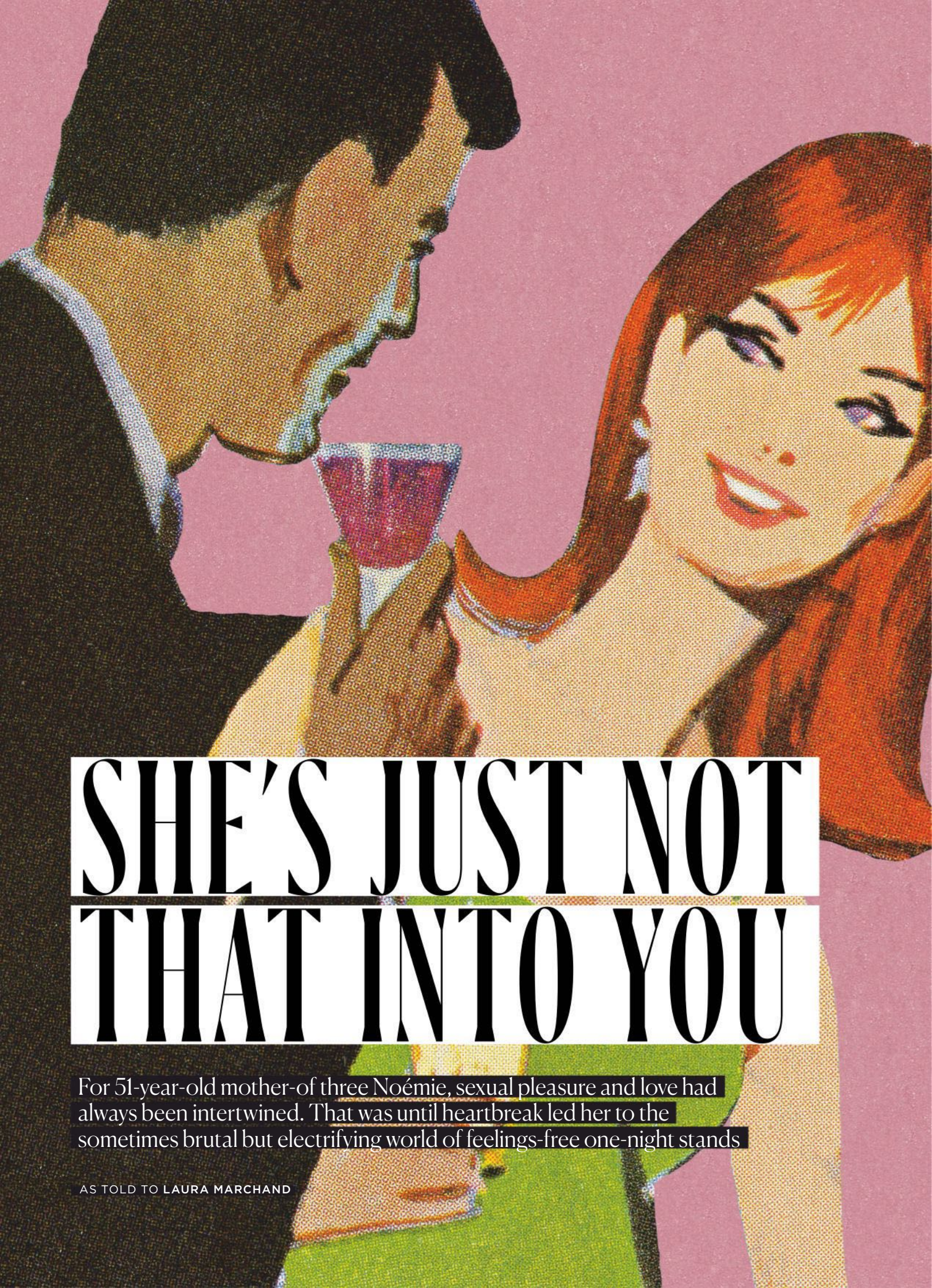






"I don't tend to believe in guilty pleasures: providing no-one is getting hurt, you shouldn't feel bad about something that makes you feel good – unless it's driving with the windows down and the aircon on. It's *so* bad but it feels *so* good!"

– Alexandra English, features editor



SHE'S JUST NOT THAT INTO YOU

For 51-year-old mother-of three Noémie, sexual pleasure and love had always been intertwined. That was until heartbreak led her to the sometimes brutal but electrifying world of feelings-free one-night stands

AS TOLD TO **LAURA MARCHAND**

I was convinced I was done with sex. I thought I'd finish my life surrounded by the tenderness of my three children, the purring of my old cat who leaves fur everywhere, and my little collection of vibrators. That perspective suited me just fine. Two years ago, a breakup caused me lot of pain; I never would have thought a broken heart could cause such a loss of self-confidence, both physically and psychologically. I entered what I refer to as a sentimental and sexual desert: I was deeply hurt; I swore I'd never fall in love again.

A boozy evening with friends changed my trajectory: they signed me up for a dating app. In that moment, I made a decision I had never made in my life: to sleep with a guy without caring about whether I had romantic feelings for him. Add to that, I figured that if I was going to go for it, age didn't matter anymore. I cast a wide scope, from ages 25 to 65.

As I started chatting with very young men and much older ones, a field of possibilities opened up. After a few days, I hit it off with a younger guy who had great energy over text (and no typos). Very quickly, he made his intentions clear: he wasn't looking for a serious relationship, just some casual sex. He said it simply, not crudely. It quickly turned into filthy talk. He sent photos, which I didn't exactly find hot, but he looked decent enough.

I said OK for a date in a bar on the ground floor of my building. When we met up early in the evening, I realised I wasn't particularly attracted to him physically, but we had a great time laughing. Clearly, he was a serial one-night-stander – very quickly, he tried to kiss me. I played hard to get, just for show.

After three glasses of wine, we went upstairs to my place. I knew I'd never see him again; it was strictly for sex. For the first time in my life, no stakes, no pressure. Was I making up for lost time? We had sex all night until the early morning – with breaks: a glass of wine, a herbal tea. We kissed, too. We did things I'd never even heard of. And I used all my toys. It was incredibly liberating. I discovered that I was still bursting with libido! I must admit, it was incredible for the ego. At 51, my life is built. My children are grown. Everything is lighter. That first one-night stand reassured me; it showed me that I could still be desirable even when I was convinced I wasn't.

These no-strings-attached flings weren't my thing when I was younger: ever since I was a teenager, I was waiting for my husband, Prince Charming. I lived for 24 years with the father of my three daughters. I never went elsewhere – not even a stray kiss. For the last few years of our marriage, we shared a bed, but nothing happened. I had no desire left. I accepted the situation, almost like fate.

After that wild night, I slept all day because I was exhausted. By the day after that, I was back on the apps. Since then, there have been other men. And there will be more!

Like it or not, the world keeps turning. I'm not going to get any younger. Getting old is a disaster, so let's have fun before it's too late. What's interesting is that the first date, which exceeded all my expectations, changed my behaviour. Detaching sex from feelings opened my mind. On the apps, I've expanded my criteria; I'm no longer ultra-selective. Musicians, lawyers, bakers, even an undertaker – I come across people I wouldn't have the chance to meet in my daily life.

Appearance has always been extremely important to me. Finally, I'm realising that even if a man doesn't fully appeal to me physically, if he doesn't "check all the boxes" as I would have said before, the sexual chemistry can be excellent. I've become more tolerant; I judge less. I'm even ready to accept spelling mistakes. Which is saying something, because before it was a dealbreaker. As long as the sex is good.

Last weekend, my eldest daughter was home. She's studying on the other side of the country and only comes back every two months. When she saw me, she thought I looked in great shape. My joyful energy made her happy. Since her father and I separated, she's been worried about me – if only she knew!

Fitting my lovers into my schedule poses some logistical problems. I work. My two youngest are teenagers and still live at home. I have primary custody, so I juggle. Going out to "console friends" is a great excuse. They would never guess what their mother is really up to. Once, I even left my daughters in the middle of dinner to go for a quick drink in my neighbourhood. That kind of behaviour is so unlike me. After 45 minutes on this date, I went back and helped one of my kids with their maths homework. I do have to remember to hide the condoms in my room, though. They're everywhere.

I'm spreading the good word to those about me, whether they're still coupled or separated; some friends are stuck in a rut just like I was. One of them, who is pretty, intelligent, kind and sexy, hadn't had sex in four years. She would say: "It's over for me." But then she listened to my advice and got on the apps. Since then, she's dating non-stop.

Against all expectations, that lover who "unlocked" me called me back to see if I was up for another round. I told him: "I thought you were a one-night-only guy." Very relaxed, he replied that he found me funny and that I was "super hot". I appreciated the compliment. We chatted like two old pals. However, I stuck to my original decision: one night only. Instead, I asked him if I could give his mobile number to my friends. Might as well let them enjoy this great catch. He laughed and replied, "Why not?"

I'm realising that even if a man doesn't fully appeal to me physically, the sexual chemistry can be excellent

Photography Getty Images. **Translation** Karim Benmour



BEST IN BUSINESS

Before Emma Grede was heading up billion-dollar businesses, she was a high school dropout living in a London council house

Where was Marcus? I was on the 10th floor of a very grey, very shitty apartment complex in East London. It was a concrete dump, but for me it was free. It's possible that on this day there was a Gucci diamante thong peeking out from the top of my jeans, as was the (questionable) style of the day, but what's for sure is that I looked fantastic. I've always known how to put myself together, even when everything else in my life is a mess. And on this particular day, everything was a disaster.

The apartment was small – I slept on the couch in the living room, and my friend Marcus was in the single bedroom – and so it didn't take me long to deduce that he wasn't there. And then the phone rang. "Emma," said Marcus, "I've been arrested. You need to go on a walk. My mate is coming over to get some of my things. Until he does, don't go home." I stayed away until well after dark. I'd known Marcus my whole life, and I trusted him like family. Marcus ended up spending 22 years in jail. Only much later did I surmise his mate must have come by to collect some contraband. I didn't want to know back then. And I still don't. For me, the main point then, and now, is simply that Marcus, on the edge of the abyss, was thinking of me, trying to keep me safe. That felt meaningful and symbolic. My future deserved his protection – and I carried, from that moment onwards, the knowledge of his faith in me, the belief that I was destined for more, and the realisation that I would need to cross a bridge from the world he and I came from to the world where I wanted to live. Marcus is not the only family member or friend who went to jail when I was a kid. This was part of my reality. My extended family and family-friend circle looks like a casting call for a Guy Ritchie movie: they're good-looking, they're fast-talking and they have nicknames like Bonsey and Mads. My mum, Jenny-Lee, is white and British and raised me on her own. My dad, Steve, who is Trinidadian, though born in England, is a good person and really fun, but he was completely absent during my childhood.

> "If a fortune-teller had seen my destiny when I was growing up, she would have predicted I'd marry a gangster"
>
> – Emma Grede

If a fortune-teller had looked at my destiny when I was growing up, she would have predicted I'd become a DJ's girlfriend or a footballer's sidepiece or marry a gangster. That seemed to be the predetermined path for all the women in my life, women who put everyone ahead of their own dreams and fell into rutted expectations that yielded mostly heartbreak and financial dead ends. My mum was a little different: she had a legitimate job at a bank for most of my childhood. My mum is very smart, though she was a tough role model at times, too. I didn't officially graduate from high school (I was asked to leave for being disruptive, only to learn as an adult that I'm dyslexic and struggled to keep up because they didn't know how to teach me), and I dropped out of the London College of Fashion after my first term because I couldn't afford to stay. I grew up in chaos, with occasional violence and very few means. And yet, here I am. Nobody would have predicted that I'd launch many, many successful businesses







From left Emma Grede with the Duchess of Sussex at an LA fundraiser in February; hanging with Kim Kardashian and rapper Latto in New York; with Anna Wintour.

and earn a spot on *Forbes*' list of "America's Richest Self-Made Women" by the age of 40. I always knew, though.

Rather than looking for people to blame for why my life was shaky and unstable, I decided to get on with it. I wedged my foot into any door that was even remotely cracked open. I pushed, I hustled and I showed up, keeping my word and doing what I said I would do. I get a lot of questions about how I've done what I've done. People find me on shows like *Shark Tank*. They slide into my DMs and pull me aside at conferences or on the street. They want guidance on when, if or how to start a family or a business – and ultimately how to balance the two. Explaining it so other women can do it too was the core impetus for writing my new book, *Start with Yourself*, along with my frustration that there's a lot of marketing for women in business that feels like it plays into the insidious programming that keeps us all small. People often talk about playbooks for success, and I'm here to tell you that there is no playbook, particularly for women. I've learnt that it's not really about actions, it's about the thinking that determines those actions.

My life isn't perfect, and I still work on myself every single day, but I live the life I always dreamt of and every day I get to do work that I enjoy. I can hear a lot of "buts" rising in peoples' throats: but what will I need to sacrifice to pursue my dreams? But nothing about this world is equitable or fair! I hear you. I'm not going to gaslight you. Yes, the world is typically more difficult for women, people of colour and poor people – and yes, I am and have been all three. There are very few factors that feel ideal for mothers to succeed. I understand that men have much less pressure to be all things to all people and that nobody asked Steve Jobs or Elon Musk how they balanced their parenting while they built Apple or Tesla. Instead, we've largely celebrated their single-minded focus on their goals, even when they've come at the detriment of society. We see the quirks and faults of powerful men through our fingers; I cannot name a single woman who has been afforded the same luxury. This is all true. And yet, we cannot wait for the world to meet our preferences in order to take action.

When I look around at the state of women, I'm impressed and also very disappointed. The halls of power don't reflect our exceptionality, nor do I meet a lot of women who feel fantastic about the balance of their lives. All women are exhausted. While it's very easy, and we see this all over our culture, to blame men and inequitable systems, that's not how I roll. Not because it's not sometimes valid, but because it's not how change happens. Nothing is fair, it's true. But I don't have time to wait for equity; I'd rather make it. Let my life be proof that our lives are unpredictable and that you can push against expectations and come out (way) on top.

This is an edited extract from Start with Yourself *by Emma Grede (Simon and Schuster, $34.99), out April 14.*

Photography Jamie Girdler; Getty Images

From rags to riches

Grede's journey to the top

1997	Drops out of London College of Fashion aged 17
1998	First fashion job, at a show production company
98/99	Joins Inca Productions; works on London Fashion Week
2008	Launches her first business, ITB Worldwide, an influencer/talent agency
2015	Meets Kris Jenner and begins Kardashian collaborations
2016	Launches inclusive clothing brand Good American with Khloé Kardashian
2019	Launches shapewear label Skims with Kim Kardashian; now valued at $US5 billion
2020	Founding board member of the 15 Percent Pledge, a nonprofit that encourages retailers to commit 15 per cent of shelf space (or purchasing power) to Black-owned businesses.
2021	Co-founds sustainable cleaning brand Safely with Kris Jenner
2022	Makes *Forbes* list of richest self-made women; valued at $US405 million (as of 2025); joins board of the Obama Foundation; first appears as guest investor on *Shark Tank* (US) and *Dragons' Den* (UK)
2025	Launches sports clothing brand Off Season
2026	Publishes her book, *Start with Yourself*

EDITOR HARRIET SIM



WHAT'S GOING ON WITH STRAIGHT WOMEN?



Dee Salmin can't help but wonder why women are fantasising about fairy smut and gay hockey players instead of the Hollywood hunks and gym bros of yore

Recently, I was eavesdropping on a group of friends having brunch. I overheard things like "love" and "soulmate" and "hottest sex" and "why can't they just be together?" Like a scene straight out of *Sex and The City*, these four women spent hours unpacking and dissecting the men in their lives. Except the men they were talking about weren't guys they were dating; they were Ilya Rozanov and Shane Hollander from *Heated Rivalry*, Benedict from *Bridgerton*, and Xaden from *Fourth Wing*.

That's right. Despite all the headlines about heterofatalism (the idea that heterosexual women wish they weren't attracted to men but can't help it), it turns out straight women are still extremely into men. They're just fictional, and not always straight.

As the host of Triple J's sex, dating and relationships podcast, *The Hook Up*, I can tell you that the brunch chat I overheard wasn't a one-off. In the past few years, I've spoken to many heterosexual women devouring romantasy and smut novels such as *A Court of Thorns and Roses* and *From Blood and Ash*. Others are getting hot and horny for Heathcliff in the new film adaption of *Wuthering Heights*. At the same time, many are deleting their dating apps and complaining that "all men are trash"! Research suggests more young women are choosing to be single than ever before. So, what's going on with straight women?

Until very recently, many women have been forced to explore desire and pleasure through media created largely by heterosexual men, aka the male gaze. Before I even knew what sex was, I was watching Britney Spears in a schoolgirl outfit singing about wanting to be hit one more time. Or Xtina getting dirty in her bra and leather chaps. Before I could even explore my sexuality, I was being told what it looked like. Women are constantly sexualised in ads, songs, movies, books, magazines and porn, but it's rarely a diverse representation of sexuality. It's a very specific, very male version. According to sexologist Lauren French, this has left many women feeling like sex and pleasure aren't for them. "She'll assume that she's just not a sexual person [if she doesn't identify with those tropes], which is just bullshit," says French.

Add to that the sexual dissatisfaction many straight women experience in their dating lives – research shows only 30 to 40 per cent of women reach orgasm during casual sex compared with 80 to 90 per cent of men – and it's not surprising that many of us are turning to fantasy and fictional characters instead.

"Finally, the female gaze has gone mainstream"

It's in these spaces away from the pressures of the male gaze, nonchalant dating culture and the traumatic reality of Epstein/male violence/the manosphere that we can explore our desires freely. We can lust after warriors, dragon riders and enemies who become lovers without dealing with the real-life consequences of dangerous or obsessive men. We can fantasise about being deeply known and desired – not just admired for our looks – by rich, brooding dukes. And get turned on by watching two men who are rivals (but equals) have hot, passionate and safe sex, without the objectification of *our* bodies.

Finally, the female gaze has gone mainstream. The latest season of *Bridgerton* – a period drama where sex scenes focus on female pleasure and male yearning – debuted with 39.7 million views in its first four days of streaming, with Netflix already locking in fifth and sixth seasons. Following Emerald Fennell's *Wuthering Heights*, starring Margot Robbie and Jacob Elordi, a TV series adaptation of Rebecca Yarros' *Fourth Wing* romantasy book is now underway courtesy of Amazon Prime. Meanwhile, Sarah J. Maas has announced two new instalments in the *A Court of Thorns and Roses* saga, and *Iron & Ember*s author Helen Scheuerer is releasing a new enemies-to-lovers romantasy, *The Shadow Prince*, in May.

Let's just say, years from now, women will still be swooning over fictional lovers at brunch, and next time I might even join in.

It's Not Love, Actually *by Dee Salmin (Macmillan Australia, $36.99) is out April 28.*



REBECCA F. KUANG

Between writing two manuscripts, completing her PhD and touring Australia, *Yellowface* author Rebecca F. Kuang tells Harriet Sim how she gets it done

They say if you need something done, call a busy person. Which is probably why Rebecca F. Kuang's phone won't stop ringing. At just 29, the American author has published six novels, including the best-selling *Poppy War* trilogy and *Babel*, while juggling degrees from Georgetown, Cambridge and Oxford universities.

In 2023, after the success of her award-winning satirical novel *Yellowface* – about a struggling white writer and her friend, a successful Asian author – HarperCollins snapped up a deal with Kuang for her seventh and eighth novels. As we speak, Kuang is about to submit the first of the two manuscripts, called *Taipei Story*, a literary fiction about a college freshman navigating grief while studying abroad, set to be released in September. The second manuscript, which she refers to as a "door stopper" due to its thickness, is an untitled fantasy novel dropping in 2027. Oh, and did we mention she is also in the final year of her dissertation fellowship at Yale?

As you can imagine, Kuang is a hard woman to pin down. In fact, when she dials into our call, she is in the middle of packing her suitcase for Mexico, where she will take the stage at the San Miguel Writers' Conference & Literary Festival, before flying to Australia to headline the Sydney and Melbourne writers' festivals in May. Despite spending a large portion of this year abroad, she refuses to let travel set back her writing. "If you get too particular about your writing setup, then the conditions are never going to be perfect," she says. "I've trained myself to write in uncomfortable situations, like crowded train stations and airport lounges."

Kuang was just 19 when she penned her debut novel, *The Poppy War*, a dark fantasy inspired by 20th-century Chinese history in which a war orphan discovers she has shamanic powers. Since then, Kuang might have gone on to critical acclaim, but the process behind each novel is the same as it was for those early drafts in her childhood bedroom. "The first thing I do every morning is sit down and write," she says. "Every book feels like I'm learning how to write for the first time. I try to go back to my mindset when I was a teenager ... figuring out how to write an epic fantasy novel. I would read fantasy authors I admired, and every time I read a literary technique I liked, I'd see how I could do that on my own."

For Kuang, the joy of writing is the opportunity to try something new. "I've never done a novel with multiple timelines and multiple character points of view," she says. "That's the challenge I've set myself for my next book. I try to push myself to read texts that have intimidated me in the past."

Completing a novel may come with its own challenges but promoting her work, she explains, is a complicated beast. "Touring a new release is always bizarre because by the time a book is out on shelves, I haven't worked on it for nearly a year. It feels like taking credit for an exam you didn't sit ... It is strange having to account for my previous self, but it's also very gratifying. You spend so much time alone with the project, so, getting to hear how people interpreted and reacted to it can lead to lovely moments of connection."

During the press tour for *Yellowface*, which dissected cultural appropriation and the politics of who gets to tell certain stories, there was a particular thread of questioning. "I always get asked: 'I am not of this ethnicity, is it OK for me to write about it?' I thought that was a strange question, because why are you asking me for permission?" she says. "*Yellowface* doesn't give an easy answer to cultural appropriation; if anything, it lands on the side of demystifying these claims towards cultural authority and gatekeeping. The point is that nobody can give you permission. These are artistic and technical questions you have to answer for yourself."

As for what Kuang is working on next? Check her bathroom. "I always have a book next to the toilet. Currently, it's *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy* by John le Carré, so now I really want to do a Cold War-era spy novel. I want to do everything."

Kuang appears at the Melbourne Writers Festival from May 7 to 10, mwf.com.au, and Sydney Writers' Festival from May 17 to 24, swf.org.au.

FULLY BOOKED

Before ascending the stage at the Melbourne and Sydney writers' festivals, your favourite authors share their current book recommendations with us

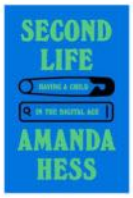


MADISON GRIFFITHS

Author of *Sweet Nothings*

Second Life is a morbidly comical take on pregnancy, childbirth and parenting in a world where "bumpfluencers" and prenatal apps reign.

***Second Life* by Amanda Hess (Little Brown, $34.99) is out now.**





MARIA REVA

Author of *Good Citizens Need Not Fear*

In *Eradication*, a schoolteacher who has never held a gun in his life signs up to cull 40,000 invasive goats on a remote island.

***Eradication* by Jonathan Miles (Hachette, $34.99) is out now.**





YANN MARTEL

Author of *Life of Pi*

Is That a Fish in Your Ear? is a rich discussion by a translator on how we turn one language into another so a book looks different but is the same creature.

***Is That a Fish in Your Ear* by David Bellos (Penguin, $24.99) is out now.**





NIKITA GILL

Author of *Wild Embers*

This Immortal Heart is a powerful retelling about the goddess Aphrodite and her dangerous and glorious love affair with Ares, God of War.

***This Immortal Heart* by Jennifer Saint (Penguin, $34.99) is out June 9.**



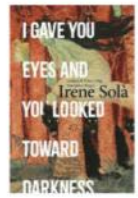


DŽENANA VUCIC

Author of *After War*

I Gave You Eyes ... is an eerie, visceral book. Set over one day, it encompasses 400 bitter years and generations of women.

***I Gave You Eyes and You Looked Toward Darkness* by Irene Solá' (Allen & Unwin, $29.99) is out now.**



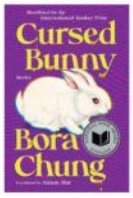


OMAR MUSA

Author of *Here Come the Dogs*

I couldn't put down *Cursed Bunny*. It was mythic, moving, horrifying and absolutely addictive.

***Cursed Bunny* by Bora Chung (Scribe Publications, $29.99) is out now.**



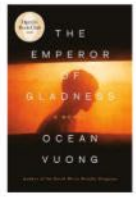


MICHAEL PEDERSEN

Author of *Boy Friends*

The Emperor of Gladness. The characters come caked in quirks and complexities that are fiercely lovable, and the language is a thrill.

***The Emperor of Gladness* by Ocean Vuong (Penguin, $34.99) is out now.**





EMMA HARDY

Author of *Periodic Bitch*

Endling. It's rare to find a book that contains so many instances of perfect symmetry, while remaining delightfully surprising.

***Endling* by Maria Reva (Hachette, $32.99) is out now.**





ANTOUN ISSA

Author of *Rebirth*

The Ibis Trilogy is an incredible work of historical fiction, based on the circumstances surrounding the First Opium War in the 1830s.

***Sea of Poppies*: Ibis Trilogy 1 by Amitav Ghosh (Hachette, $24.99) is out now.**





JM FIELD

Author of *The Eagle and the Crow*

Grace Paley's short stories are funny, witty and a masterclass in dialogue. Start with "An Interest in Life".

***The Collected Stories of Grace Paley* by Grace Paley (Hachette, $22.99) is out now.**



Photography John Packman; João Sousa; Anya Chibis; Alex Cameron.



AFFORDABLE ART FAIR

With prices starting as low as $100 for original artworks, Affordable Art Fair Brisbane is the perfect spot to snag some one-of-a-kind pieces for your home or simply browse the live art activations and artist talks.

From May 7 to 10 at the Brisbane Showgrounds; affordableartfair.com.

WHAT'S ON



Indulge your eyes, ears and soul in this month's culture-defining moments

AN EVENING WITH FRAN LEBOWITZ

Acclaimed American author and cynical social commentator Fran Lebowitz will take to the stage at the Sydney Opera House for one entertaining night of razor-sharp commentary and unapologetic observations on politicians, billionaires, AI and people who walk too slowly.

May 19 at Sydney Opera House; sydneyoperahouse.com.



MEL C

Former Spice Girl Melanie C invites us onto the dance floor with her new high-energy, electronic-pop album, *Sweat.* : With a sample of Diana Ross' 1981 single "Work That Body", we're expecting nostalgic, sweat-filled nights ahead.

Stream it from May 1.



THE DEVIL WEARS PRADA 2

Grab your girlfriends: Meryl Streep, Anne Hathaway, Emily Blunt and Stanley Tucci have reunited for the highly anticipated sequel to *The Devil Wears Prada*. Two decades on from the original, the film follows editor-in-chief Miranda Priestly (Streep) as she faces off against her former assistant Emily (Blunt).

In cinemas from April 30.



THE MADISON

From the creator of *Yellowstone* comes a new neo-Western drama series, *The Madison*. In it, Michelle Pfeiffer plays Stacy Clyburn, a matriarch who must guide her family after immense loss.

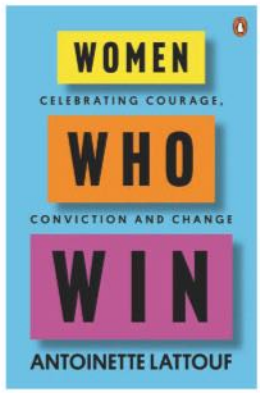
Stream it now on Paramount+.



A PRIVATE LIFE

In this French-language thriller, Jodie Foster plays Lilian, a psychologist who doesn't believe her client's death was a suicide. She searches for the truth via a hypnotist whose sessions conjure eerie visions. Is she unravelling, or has she found the answer?

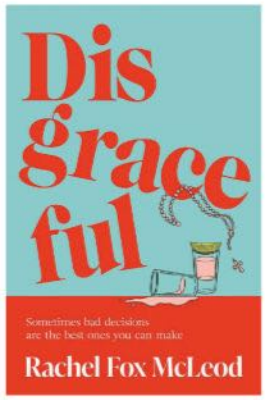
In cinemas May 14.



WOMEN WHO WIN

Two good things came out of Antoinette Lattouf's high-profile unlawful termination case against the ABC: she won, and she channelled the experience into a book about the disruptive women throughout history who refused to stay silent.

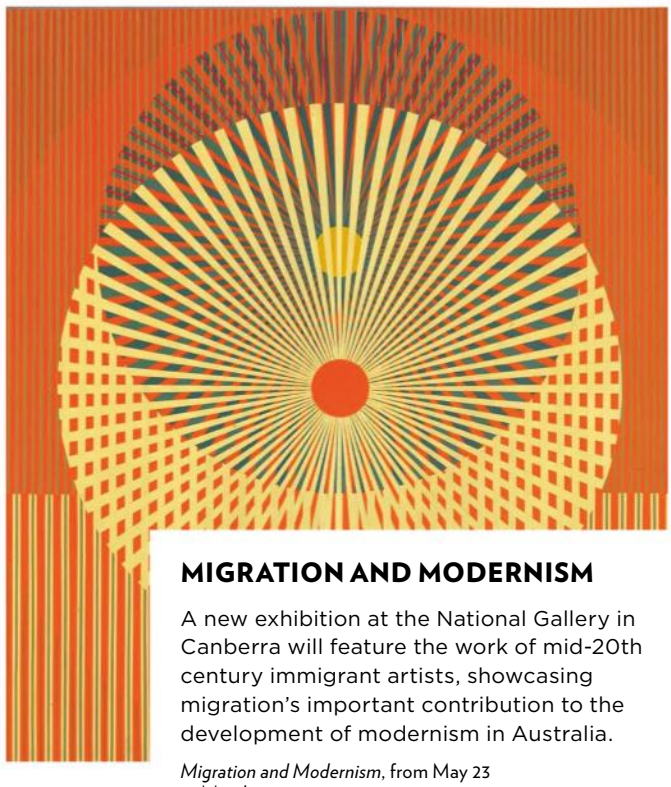
Women Who Win by Antoinette Lattouf (Penguin, $36.99) is out April 28.



DISGRACEFUL

Fans of Marian Keyes and Kathy Lette will love this hilarious novel by Rachel Fox McLeod about a woman who writes a "fuck it" list after her marriage unexpectedly falls apart. A cathartic read for anyone who has been described as a "good girl".

Disgraceful by Rachel Fox McLeod (Simon & Schuster, $34.99) is out April 28.



MIGRATION AND MODERNISM

A new exhibition at the National Gallery in Canberra will feature the work of mid-20th century immigrant artists, showcasing migration's important contribution to the development of modernism in Australia.

Migration and Modernism, from May 23 to March 2027; nga.gov.au.

Photography Samee Lapham; Brigitte Lacombe.

THE YEAR OF THE SHARK



PHOTOGRAPHY OLIVER BEGG
STYLING PATRICK ZACZKIEWICZ
WORDS ALEXANDRA ENGLISH

A new album, a new sound, a new look, two new films and a new decade: this is Amy Shark like you've never seen her before

The Year of the Fire Horse has barely begun when *marie claire* meets with Amy Shark, but the singer has already hit the ground running. Or, shall we say, galloping. As the Lunar Year of the Wood Snake wound up on February 16 – ending a period of reflection, shedding and transformation (you might have felt it) – Shark was getting ready to say goodbye to the version of herself that had been in the public domain for a decade. When the world woke up on the morning of February 17, a new year had begun.

While a Fire Horse sounds like a harbinger for the apocalypse, it's actually a rare zodiac sign that kicks off a period of energy, creativity, intensity and independence. Yee-haw! Giddy-up! Etcetera, etcetera.

Energy, creativity, intensity and independence is exactly how you could describe Shark's mode of operation in 2026. There's a new album, two new films, and an appearance on the soundtrack of Lena Dunham's upcoming Netflix romcom film, *Good Sex*, for which Dunham personally requested Shark. "I'm also turning 40!" she adds to the end of the list she's been counting on one hand. "We're galloping, we're swimming – it's the Year of the Fire Shark!"

For now, Shark is saddled and pawing at the starting gates, ready to bolt, but the starting pistol hasn't fired just yet. In reality, she's in a room on Sydney's Oxford Street, sitting cross-legged in an armchair, wearing a cream tee, cream jeans and Prada's Monolith leather boots with the little pouch on the side. Her signature half-up top-knot is undone, so her dark wavy hair falls over her shoulders beneath a baseball cap. The morning sun is reflecting off the windows scattered across the skyline and Sydney Harbour is glittering in the distance. It's a beautiful day, the type of weather that lifts spirits after a stretch of ugly grey skies and suffocating humidity. Suffice to say, vibes are high, even more so because it's the day before Shark is going to announce her fourth album – her first in two years – *Soft Pop*.

Her excitement is palpable. That's because this album is unlike anything she's done before. Literally everything is different, right down to the tuning of her guitar. Where Shark would normally work with a team of co-writers (Ed Sheeran and Blink-182's Mark Hoppus, Tom DeLonge and Travis Barker among them) while bouncing between studios and hotels in the US, she decided she would fly solo when it came to writing *Soft Pop*. "I wrote alone in my apartment [on the Gold Coast], and it was torture at the start," she says with a laugh, resting one ankle on top of her other knee and leaning back: confident, focused, in control.



Opposite Amy Shark wears **Polo Ralph Lauren** jacket, $1399; **Lee Mathews** dress, $469; **Misha** pants, $1200; **Musson** rings (from left), $165,000, and $172,000; Shark wears her own wedding ring throughout; stylist's hat.

This page: Misha jacket, $4550; **Oroton** cardigan, $349; **Friends with Frank** top, $299; **Kourh** shorts, $130; **Polo Ralph Lauren** belt, $479; **Miu Miu** boots, $3500.

"I'd have really terrible days when I was just over it, but I was so disciplined. I was determined to get on that plane [to Wales] with strong songs to record."

In her other life – pre-2026 Amy Shark – she would have written 50 songs, which she would have struggled to cut down to a 12-song album. This time, she wrote far fewer. She wasn't diving into old notebooks for lyrics discarded from previous albums; she was starting entirely from scratch. And then, suddenly, she wasn't. "For some reason I stopped writing. I was in a bit of a funk," Shark says. But what she had was gold: 15 options, which she then edited down to 11 for the album.

Hermès jacket, and skirt, both POA; **Christian Louboutin** shoes, $6945; **Musson** ring, $165,000.

Opposite: Misha top, $880, and skirt, $980; **Musson** rings (from left), $172,000, and $165,000.



At Hymn Studios, in the seaside town of Barry, she worked with just one producer: Dann Hume, her long-time collaborator, who has also worked with Matt Corby and Troye Sivan. "I just stayed in one place for a month and really focused on the album," she recalls. "I had really disciplined guidelines: no beats, no old sounds."

Soft Pop proves that sometimes there's freedom to be found in restraint. Or, to flog the metaphor, in having your blinders on. "Those guidelines were my superpower with this album," Shark says. Like a kid frozen in the toy aisle of Kmart, "when there's every sound in the world available to you in a studio, it's really hard". Instead, she focused on one thing at a time.

"Everything just worked," she adds, with an undertone of amazement. "Even the vocal takes that I was going for, sometimes it was like, 'Is that the best note I could have hit? No,' but it was about the vibe. I don't care if it's not sung correctly or if someone can't figure out what that line is – I don't give a shit. The mood was what was really important to me.

"I don't want people to think, 'Oh this is just another Amy Shark record.' It's so different"

"These songs are *good*," she continues. "I want people to be excited again. I don't want people to think, 'Oh this is just another Amy Shark record.' It's so different." The desire to reinvent is one that every creative experiences. It's an instinct and a necessity. "It's really important to have a different sound to stand out again," she adds. You only have to bring to mind one of Shark's heroes – Taylor Swift – to understand the power of reinvention.

Something different is what Shark has been craving. Australia has known her for a decade now, since the release of her first single, "Adore", in 2016. "Ten years feels like ages, but then there have been so many Australian artists who've been around for much longer – your Guy Sebastians, your Delta Goodrems – so it also feels like a minute," she says. "But I feel like I've covered a lot of ground. I've pumped out a lot of albums. I feel like I've had about six different lives just from like 16 on, through relationships, friendships, jobs, family dramas. It's so crazy to think back on."

Shark may have had multiple lives, but her indie-pop-slash-punk-pop-slash-diary-girl sound has remained relatively consistent from the moment *Love Monster* – her debut





Esse dress, $855;
Gucci glasses, $895.

Photography Oliver Begg/Saunders & Co. **Stylist** Patrick Zaczkiewicz/DLM. **Hair** Madison Voloshin/Assembly Agency. **Makeup** Sarah Tammer/Vivien's Creative. **Manicure** Oli Antunes. **Production** Robyn Fay-Perkins.

album that features "Adore" alongside other fan favourites "I Said Hi" and "Mess Her Up" – hit the charts in 2018. She followed it up in 2021 with *Cry Forever*, and then *Sunday Sadness* in 2024.

But in 2026, Shark's music is different, and you get the sense that she is different, too. There's the lack of her signature hairstyle, for one. It wasn't there when she spoke at *marie claire*'s International Women's Day lunch; it wasn't there during our shoot and it wasn't there during our interview. It's also not there in the video clip for her lead single, "The Biggest Dick", which sees her biking around town in a fluffy baby-blue bikini. It's like the pop-punk girl has given way to the Gold Coast chick who's always lived inside her but never fully taken over.

This is also a side of Shark we haven't seen – all muscle and abs in a bikini. To put it simply: she's shredded. Like, mixed-martial-arts-fighter shredded? Funny you should ask. In April, Shark will make her feature film debut in the MMA fight movie *Beast* alongside Russell Crowe and Daniel MacPherson. The latter plays Patton James, a former fight champion on his redemption tour. Crowe plays Sammy, his former coach, and Shark plays Rose, Sammy's daughter and Patton's new coach.

A thing to know about Shark and acting is that she's *good*. Despite being on a first-name basis with "Russell" and having him hand the script to her personally, she worked hard to earn the role of Rose. She trained, she auditioned, she was the casting team's top choice. "I would always say to Russell, 'When are you gonna get me in a movie?' and I don't think he believed me at the start," she says. In fact, acting was Shark's first love. "I always wanted to be an actress. I love scary movies. I always wanted to be Neve Campbell," she adds with a self-deprecating laugh. "And then Russell called me on my bluff and gave me a script. He said, 'I think this would be great for you, but I can't promise anything.'"

Knowing the role wasn't guaranteed lit a fire (sorry) under Shark. "I've never been given a leg up in my life [so] it would feel really wrong and uncomfortable to have been handed the part," she says. "I wanted to know I could do it for myself." She wasn't coming into the audition well-rested and clear-of-mind, either. It was the morning after the 2024 ARIA Awards, when Shark sang "The Special Two" with Missy Higgins for the latter's introduction into the Hall of Fame. "I was so stressed that night," she says, laughing at the absurdity of getting through such a massive 24 hours. "I had so much on my mind: singing and doing interviews and trying to remember this dialogue for tomorrow. It was just so funny."

Once she got the call saying she would be playing Rose, Shark was required to be on set and ready to go within the month. "I had just a few weeks to get myself into shape and look the part," she explains. "I had a trainer named Igor [Breakenback], who was also showing me how he trains his fighters, because Rose has to train Patton for reasons you'll find out. I had to take real hits and get in there and swear at him and push him and look like I'm not terrified."

Among the singing and punching, Shark also found time to return to *Australian Idol* as a judge alongside Marcia Hines and Kyle Sandilands. (By the time you're reading this, the winner will have been announced, but at the time of writing, the series is only a few weeks in.) It's her third season of judging singing hopefuls on the reality show, and Shark has carved out a reputation for being supportive while also having a strong radar for inauthenticity. She knows from her time playing gigs on sticky pub floors that being authentic is what cuts through the noise – both of the crowd and the industry.

Shark will also get to live out her horror movie star dreams towards the end of the year in *Zombie Plane*. She can't say much at the moment other than it also stars Sophie Monk, Vanilla Ice, Natalie Bassingthwaighte and the late Chuck Norris. It's a comedy-action flick about the government's use of celebrities to prevent a zombie outbreak. "It's terribly amazing," she says, laughing.

"I always wanted to be an actress. I love scary movies. I always wanted to be Neve Campbell"

So, with a new sound, an MMA fight movie, mentoring and judging a new generation of Australian pop stars, a 40th birthday in May and then fighting zombies (presumably on a plane), what's next? "Next year I'm just going to go and, like, live in Hawaii and chill," she says, laughing again.

Given 2027 is the Year of the Goat, which suggests gentleness, compassion and romance, an off-grid escape to Hawaii may be on the cards. But if there's one thing we know about sharks, it's that they never stop moving.

Listen to Soft Pop *from July 31.*
Beast *is in cinemas April 23.*

In Her Name

Over his career, journalist Antoun Issa has told many stories. Now, in his debut book, he writes about his most personal subject: his mother

"I didn't move to Australia so I could lose you in Lebanon," Mum said frantically over the phone. It was 2014, I'd been living in Beirut for several years, and the Syrian civil war threatened to ensnare Lebanon. Car bombs and skirmishes were a haunting feature of life, and news of gunfire in a Beirut suburb reached Mum a planet away.

Her voice shook with a desperation I knew well. From panicking in the passenger seat each time I tapped the brakes to stern warnings when I ventured out in Melbourne's night scene, Mum's default reaction was to fear the worst.

For years I had been confused and frustrated by the immovability of her dark outlook. I would scour my mind for ways to help her break free, searching for a mother who was more hopeful than fatalistic. It only recently became clear to me, over the course of writing *Rebirth*, that trauma was to blame for Mum's perpetual worry. As a child, I'd had no name for it.

Mum had fled a war. Conflict and political struggle surrounded my upbringing, as the wounds of the Lebanese Civil War of 1975 to 1990 festered among the diaspora in Australian suburbs. While school in Craigieburn was a predominantly Anglo setting, I'd spend my weekends with a close-knit portion of the Lebanese community in Brunswick. New arrivals, like my family, retained the sectarian and factional fractures of their homeland.



Antoun Issa with his mother, Laila.

The long hours of motherhood and work conveniently deprived her of a waking minute to confront the torment she carried

For those bearing personal scars, a new land offered a route to forget. Within a decade of arriving in Australia, Mum was filling her hours with parenting four children who were growing up to speak a language not her own. Between feeding mouths, she sat with other migrant women in front of sewing machines in the sweatshops of Brunswick. The taxing, long hours of motherhood and work, combined with the peculiarity of this foreign place, conveniently deprived her of a waking minute to confront the torment she carried. Lebanon's ashes remained buried beneath her busy days.

But for all her assiduously sought distractions, there was no masking her sorrow. She wore it daily, unknowingly, in her eyes, visible to those who could see.

Over the years, Mum offered glimpses into the suffering she had experienced during the war – the odd remark to a relative, a quip in the middle of a movie. I remember as a teenager watching a particularly grotesque scene in Deepa Mehta's 1998 film, *Earth*, about the partition of India and Pakistan. In it, a man was tied to two vehicles that drove in opposite directions and tore his limbs to shreds. My stomach immediately turned, and I could not bring myself to finish the film, only to hear Mum nonchalantly remark, "Oh yeah, I saw that in the war."

The Lebanese Civil War brutally shattered my mother's youth and her country.

On a trip back to Australia in 2018, I sat with Mum on our verandah and asked her about her horrific experiences of that war. "Over 40 years have passed, and I remember it as if it were yesterday," Mum said on that grey afternoon. Her fingers jittered as she fumbled with a cigarette. Our verandah had, over time, become the setting for mutual introspection and bonding. And a fitting setting it was, paved with concrete and evergreen reminders of the homeland: citrus, olive and, my father's favourite, loquat trees.

Lebanon has always elicited a deeply personal affection from me. When in doubt, I offered myself the reassurance of doing whatever small amount I could to improve the hell that has befallen the entire Levant over the past century. But even that failed to convince my internal cynicism. Why could I not simply forgo Lebanon and the Levant?

Perhaps it is reckless of the migrant child to thrust themselves into the world that so crudely expelled their parents. Perhaps it is foolish, even offensive, to turn away from peace won through hardship. For years I did not fully understand why I had devoted my entire professional life to this tiny corner of the Mediterranean. Until that Melbourne afternoon, listening for the first time to my mother recount vivid scenes of the civil war and a love story bound by violence.

My extensive journey has all along been a quest for an answer to my mother's sorrow, a sorrow that very early in my life became my own. In the misery of Lebanon, and the wider Levant, is a lost future, stolen by wars and geopolitical schemes careless of the human stories ended and rewritten.

A version of my mother's story ended in 1976 Beirut. Her years in Australia have been ones of mourning for the world lost, the dreams destroyed, the joyful child she'd once been.

History is rarely told from the perspective of the poor, those crushed by abuses of power. My book is not a journalistic endeavour, but a human one – to revisit the Lebanese Civil War through the eyes of its victims. It is my attempt to bring Mum's story to life, to rescue fading memories, and to remember those forgotten.

Rebirth: A Love Story From the Depths of War *by Antoun Issa (Hachette, $34.99) is out April 28.*

Courtesy Antoun Issa


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Supporting the mental health of
expectant, new and potential parents.
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marie claire INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

PRESENTED BY L'ORÉAL PARIS

The *marie claire* International Women's Day lunch, presented by L'Oréal Paris and supported by Figur, was filled with the kind of women who make you want to be braver: advocates, athletes, survivors, founders and storytellers who understand that speaking up is not just a choice, but a responsibility



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1 *marie claire* editor Georgie McCourt opened the event. **2** Yvonne Weldon, the first Aboriginal councillor in the City of Sydney's 180-year history. **3** You could hear a pin drop as femicide reporter Sherele Moody shared her story. **4** Model Samantha Harris (whose gorgeous baby Bella also made an appearance). **5** Guests dined on sugar-cured salmon with celeriac remoulade, and chicken with roasted cauliflower cream. **6** Lawyer Jennifer Robinson and Grace Tame. **7** The dynamic gathering was powered by clever, creative and agenda-setting women. **8** Guests dined at the Sydney Theatre Company's pier while listening to the game-changing speakers. **9** Singer-songwriter Amy Shark announced new music.



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10 Noor Azizah, a survivor of persecution in Myanmar and co-founder of the Rohingya Maìyafuìnor Collaborative Network. **11** Tread Softly wines were the perfect pairing to the menu. **12** The room was filled with laughter, tears and applause.



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13 Some of the star-studded line-up pose for a photo. **14** Jules Robinson, founder of shapeware brand Figur. **15** Author and presenter Melissa Leong. **16** Actor Krew Boylan. **17** Glasses of Bollinger were poured throughout the event. **18** Sherele Moody in the outfit of the day. **19** Advocates Brittany Higgins and Saxon Mullins.

FORCES FOR CHANGE

Our toughest IWD task was to choose four speakers from a roomful of exceptional candidates

With Sydney's iconic harbour as a backdrop, four inspiring women took to the stage for conversations spanning survival and advocacy, femicide and remembrance, what it means to be one of the greatest athletes of your generation, and the kind of radical honesty that turns a bedroom musical recording into a global phenomenon.

First to take the stage was Amy Shark, one of Australia's most distinctive musical voices. Amy turned vulnerability into a superpower with her breakthrough hit "Adore" and has never looked back. Now she has a new single ("The Biggest Dick"), a forthcoming album, a hosting role on *Australian Idol*, and a debut film appearance alongside Russell Crowe.

Next came Noor Azizah, a proud Rohingya woman and survivor of persecution in Myanmar. She is the co-founder of the Rohingya Maìyafuìnor Collaborative Network and a fierce advocate for human rights, education and justice for Rohingya communities worldwide.

Following Noor was Sherele Moody, a journalist, activist and founder of The Red Heart Movement and Australian Femicide Watch. Sherele has spent more than a decade documenting every known Australian woman and child killed by violence – more than 3,000 to date – ensuring they are never forgotten.

Rounding out the speakers was Jess Fox, the most successful paddler in canoe slalom history. The L'Oréal Paris brand partner claimed double gold at the Paris Olympics and remains a testament to what discipline, determination and an absolute refusal to accept limits can achieve.



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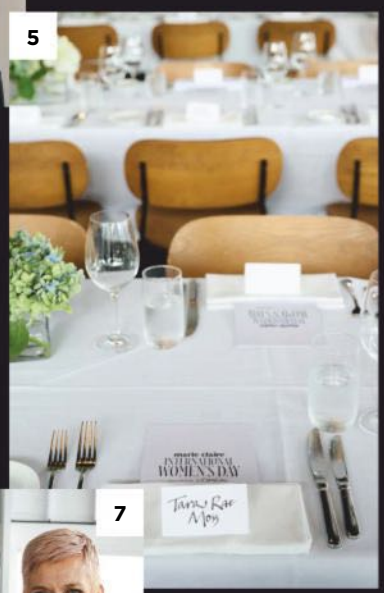




1 Olympic champion Jessica Fox. **2** Guests were also treated to a L'Oréal Paris glam bar, offering makeup touch-ups throughout the afternoon. **3** Grace Toombs, founder of June Health. **4** Guests were pampered courtesy of L'Oréal Paris.











5 The beautifully decorated tabletops. **6** Game-changing women filled the room at The Sydney Theatre Company venue. **7** Nadine Bush, Natasha Young and Jessica Rowe.

JESSICA FOX'S SECRET TO SUCCESS

At *marie claire*'s International Women's Day lunch, the Olympian let us in on the Three-Minute Power Cry

The world's most decorated Olympic slalom paddler, Jessica Fox – who has three gold, one silver and two bronze medals under her belt (or rather, life jacket) – credits many things to her success: a family in the biz, visualisation, and friendly sibling rivalry with her little sis and fellow Olympic medallist, Noémie Fox.

But the one piece of advice that resonated most with guests at *marie claire*'s International Women's Day lunch was her endorsement of the Three-Minute Power Cry.

The 31-year-old L'Oréal Paris brand partner was speaking on stage to *marie claire* editor Georgie McCourt at the lunch, which was presented by L'Oréal Paris and supported by Figur, with drinks courtesy of Tread Softly and Bollinger. Jess, like many of the powerhouse guests, was fresh from enjoying a primping session at L'Oréal Paris' hair and makeup station. (After all, it wouldn't be IWD with *marie claire* without style *and* substance.)

Jess and Georgie were on the topic of the Tokyo 2020 Olympics when Jess brought up her technique for moving past disappointment. She had been competing in the K1 class and was on track for gold when she touched two gates and was given a four-second penalty, which placed her third.

"I was the favourite to win … so when I crossed the finish line [in third], I was so frustrated, devastated, and I felt ashamed," she said. "There were so many people who supported me to get there; I was, on paper, meant to win, but that's not how sport works. So there was regret, frustration and anger.

"The media were like, 'Oh, she's won the silver [in London]. She won the bronze. There's only one colour missing,'" she continued. "It was meant to be my moment, and it devastated me. I remember getting my medal and just choking back the tears and trying to smile through the moment, and then getting the car and driving back to the [athlete's] village and crying the whole way, [as well as] the whole time on the physio table and that whole night."

Photography Paul McMillan. **Words** Alexandra English; Maddison Hockey



8 *marie claire* editor and host Georgie McCourt. 9 The L'Oréal Paris glam bar. 10 Inspiring and empowering talks captivated the room.



Jess needed to get back on the horse (in the canoe) two days later for another race. "I had to pivot in those 48 hours to try to get back to the start line for the canoe and give everything I had in that new opportunity to race for gold," she said. "I would start to time myself [crying], and give myself only the three minutes. It was getting draining! And I was like, 'I need to let the emotion out and feel it.' That's important."

It turns out Jess' instinct was right: crying is, in fact, really good for you. Crying is an evolutionary function that is designed to help us process and express emotions. Rather than seeing it as a sign of weakness or a lack of inner strength, consider this: emotional crying is exclusive to humans, so you may as well not waste the ability. Think of all those animals and birds who can't let it all out.

Research has found that tears relieve the psychological pressure that accumulates in the sympathetic nervous system when distressed. In the seconds before you burst into tears, your fight-or-flight instinct is at its peak, so having a good sob eventually brings you back to equilibrium.

Crying also releases the feel-good chemical oxytocin and natural painkillers. But, Jess says, you've got to keep it short and sweet. "You've got to have a Power Cry," she said. "You're allowed three minutes, and I recommend it because you feel it and get the emotion out."

Given how many women in the room turned to one another at the mention of the Three Minute Power Cry, it's clear she's onto something. The room hummed with whispers between guests: "That's a good idea!" "I do that" "I used to run to the bathroom during meetings to do that!"

Forty-eight hours after scoring bronze (and yes, we say scoring because coming third is no easy feat), Jess won gold.

Adding to her sporting achievements, Jess became a L'Oréal Paris brand partner in late 2024. It's a fitting collaboration, given the beauty brand is on a mission to empower women to take charge of their lives and believe in themselves; its iconic "Worth It" campaign has been championing exactly that for 50 years. Like *marie claire*, L'Oréal Paris believes that the most staunch women's rights activist can have a favourite lipstick that makes her feel powerful, that being feminine and feminist are not mutually exclusive, and that taking a moment for yourself to have your hair and makeup done does not detract from your ability to climb the ranks in a male-dominated world.

A woman's place is at the top of the podium, holding a gold medal – no matter their industry. And that's all the evidence we need that a good (short) cry = success. Pass the tissues.





11 Tanya Hennessy, Noor Azizah and Jess Fox. 12 L'Oréal Paris Lumi Glotion glow-enhancing moisturisers. 13 Jess Fox takes a seat in the L'Oréal Paris makeup chair. 14 Style curator Tash Sefton.








ART DIR: PAUL MARCIANO PH: TATIANA GERUSOVA © GUESS?, LLC 2026
GUESS

FASHION

This month, get ready to spice up your style courtesy of our Moroccan sojourn, and join us in Manhattan as we meet *Love Story*'s Sarah Pidgeon, shimmering in Chanel's latest fine jewellery



Fendi top, $4780, bra and shorts, both POA; **Hermès** earrings, $1785; **Chanel** watch, $10,550.

Photography Gleeson Paulino/11th House Agency. **Styling** Jeanne Le Bault.

LIFE AFTER LOVE STORY

When Sarah Pidgeon signed on for Ryan Murphy's series *Love Story* to play the reluctant '90s It-girl Carolyn Bessette as she meets and falls in love with JFK Jnr, she never could have guessed how much her life was about to change. Halie Lesavage meets her on the cusp of cultural domination

PHOTOGRAPHY OK McCAUSLAND **STYLING** BAILEY MOON



Francesco Murano top, $697, and skirt, $1029; **Giuseppe Zanotti** shoes, POA; **Chanel** Bouton de Camélia Fine Jewellery earrings, $23,450, Comète Fine Jewellery Couture ring, $185,900, and Bouton de Camélia Fine Jewellery ring, $12,450.



Chanel trench coat, $34,390, Bouton de Camélia Fine Jewellery earrings, $21,900, and Première Iconic Chain Double Row watch, $12,200.

Opposite: Chanel shoes, $2650, sunglasses, $1100, Coco Crush Fine Jewellery ring, $5550.

"I think anonymity is wonderful because you can get lost in a role"







No-one really knows her name just yet, or recognises her face, so Sarah Pidgeon and I walk like two friends recording a "Spend a Day in New York City's West Village With Me" TikTok. We duck into a basement-level crafts store where she holds up to her face different colours of yarn for a scarf she hopes to make. I offer suggestions that seem to match her bright-blue eyes. When two shopkeepers chime in, she goes with their advice and lands on a steely grey.

We continue our easy stroll up picturesque Hudson Street, where November leaves fall in slow motion like paid extras, and we eventually sit down at Anton's, a wine bar and cafe where the head waiter does know Sarah by name (she's a regular) and who interrupts our meal three times with reminders to eat the bread. Pidgeon and I chit-chat about where she grew up (a suburb of Detroit); her first adult pet (Tinky-Winky, a kitten that now lives with her mother in Ann Arbor because filming got too busy); her recommendations as an Anton's aficionado (one of the pastas). It's all so normal that I almost don't want to draw attention to why we're really here: the project that's about to blow Pidgeon's anonymity.

We're meeting five days after she's wrapped *Love Story*, the Ryan Murphy-helmed FX series chronicling the romance between John F. Kennedy Jnr and Carolyn Bessette-Kennedy before their untimely deaths in a 1999 plane crash. It's only because I've been studying Pidgeon ahead of our sit-down that I recognise she's still halfway in CBK mode. Her hair is dyed light blonde, with the faintest hint of her chocolate roots creeping into view. Her tiny black sunglasses match the slim frames her character wore in the same neighbourhood 30 years ago. (Later, she'll admit that she took a pair home from the *Love Story* wardrobe department.) Even the black turtleneck and bootcut jeans she wears are reminiscent of her character's closet.

By the series' pre-Valentine's Day premiere, Pidgeon's chances of going unnoticed in the West Village, or outside her apartment in Brooklyn, are slim – something she's already had a glimpse of. The show's attempt to chronicle "American royalty" as they met, fell in love, and died before their time generated viral backlash the moment Pidgeon's first in-costume photo appeared online mid-last year. The styling was all wrong. The



Max Mara top, POA; **Chanel** Camélia Précieux Fine Jewellery necklace, $27,850, and Comète Géode Fine Jewellery necklace, $18,000.



casting was not quite right. It's a topic she faces with equal parts steely determination to show how much she poured into her performance, and shrug-emoji resignation that she can't control what anyone has to say anyway. "It was just a question of what I could do," she says. "And that was focusing on making this [situation] what I needed – to do my job as well as possible."

Pidgeon, 29, tells me she'd never been part of a project with so much immediate public interest, and ironically, that gave her a deeper understanding not only of CBK, whom *Vanity Fair* and other outlets frequently referred to as the "private princess", but of herself. "I really like my life as it is," she says with a half smile. "I think anonymity is wonderful because you can get lost in a role." She wants to be an actor, not a celebrity.

Pidgeon has been training more than half her life for a challenge like playing a beloved cultural figure. She acted in Detroit-area community theatre productions of *Beauty and the Beast* and *Willy Wonka* alongside fellow star-on-the-rise Chase Sui Wonders. Her parents first enrolled her in summer camp at Interlochen, a prestigious Michigan school for the performing arts, around the same time. By her second year of high school, she'd transferred from her local public school to attend the academy's term-time program.

Somewhere in between studying movies like *Legally Blonde* and *My Big Fat Greek Wedding* and spending hours with "really serious" kids in musical and theatre training, she decided acting was her only possible career path. In her version, the epiphany didn't come with begging her family to move from Michigan to Hollywood. She finished high school and then matriculated to Carnegie Mellon, where she graduated in 2018 with a BA in acting.

Her breaks have become successively bigger each year since. First there was the survivalist Amazon Prime Video series *The Wilds*, in which she played one of several teen girls in a staged plane crash turned social experiment; then came a sombre character study as a young Kathryn Hahn in the Hulu series *Tiny Beautiful Things*. Her first Broadway role, portraying a Stevie Nicks-inspired band leader on the brink in *Stereophonic*, also landed her her first Tony nomination, for Best Featured Actress, in 2024.

Whether she was belting it out in a faux recording studio six days a week or executing underwater stunts, Pidgeon approached each of her past roles with an academic dedication to the craft. "In a lot of what I've done, I've pushed this emotional endurance," Pidgeon says. "I have no real limits. I just want it to be a challenge." She even taught herself to crochet for *Stereophonic*, so her alter ego could have a believably 1970s distraction during tense group scenes.

Along the way, she's caught the attention of designer labels like Chanel (she's becoming a front-row regular)

"I remember running to my assistant and saying, 'Oh my God, this girl is incredible.' There was an immediate spark – she felt like a livewire"

– Naomi Watts

and industry veterans like Naomi Watts, her co-star in the 2024 drama *The Friend*. After their first scene together, Watts sensed Pidgeon had that something everybody in show business wants but can't always define: the It-factor. On set, "I remember running over to my assistant between takes and saying, 'Oh my God, this girl is incredible,'" Watts tells me in an email. "There was an immediate spark – she felt like a livewire."

Pidgeon tells me she's still sometimes stunned that this passion can pay her bills. She's also wondering where to draw the line between work Sarah and everything-else Sarah. "Now I'm getting to this point in my life when I'm asking, 'Who am I outside of this thing that was very much how I formed my identity when I was a child, before it ever became a career?'"

She looks at her empty pasta plate as if an answer might materialise in the smears of sauce. When it doesn't, she quickly presses on. "I think it can be really difficult when that form of self-expression, whether it be writing or acting, becomes something that's not just for your own self-fulfilment; when its reception is tied to your livelihood, you can start looking at it in a different way," Pidgeon says.

Toward the tail end of shooting the '90s horror remake *I Know What You Did Last Summer* in early 2025, Pidgeon received an email that would change everything. It was an invitation to self-tape an audition for a series inspired by the biography *Once Upon a Time: The Captivating Life of Carolyn Bessette-Kennedy*, which would track Bessette-Kennedy's ascent from Calvin Klein sales associate to publicist and, eventually, wife of America's most eligible bachelor (JFK Jnr). Pidgeon was reading for Carolyn's half of what would become the titular *Love Story*.

Of all the roles that had come her way, this one would be Pidgeon's most daunting. First, because of the scant source material: only 18 seconds of speaking footage exist of CBK online, and Pidgeon couldn't consult her subject on her performance. Then there was the fandom. Nearly 30 years after her untimely death, CBK is revered as an ultimate It-girl. Whoever got the part out of the hundreds auditioning would be put under a microscope. "It isn't lost on me what a challenge that is, emotionally, physically and psychologically, to embody something that everyone has projected so much onto," says *Love Story* executive producer Brad Simpson.

Pidgeon, however, seemed primed for the part. Her uncanny resemblance to Bessette-Kennedy got her noticed, but it was the depth she brought to a reading of a first-date scene – clever but withholding, clear that she wasn't waiting around to be swept off her feet, wide, expressive eyes – that made her casting "undeniable". Showrunners could see she respected the material, the person, in the ways that would make the playing of a beloved figure a success. "She was scared of it in the right way," Simpson says. "She knew what she was taking on."

The weeks before filming were Pidgeon's master's-level course in crafting her version of CBK. She worked with a movement coach to pick up gestures she brings with her to our lunch: running her hands through her hair, giving a touch on the shoulder when she's making a point. (When there wasn't video, still photographs were sometimes enough of a starting point for her scenes, Pidgeon says.) She read every biography she could get her hands on. Where history didn't leave enough details behind, Pidgeon's research empowered her to fill in the blanks. "What was so exciting in taking on this role was this freedom I had in learning about this person and then creating this character," she says. "[I wasn't] necessarily limited by something so literal, because there wasn't a ton to go off."

Some things weren't negotiable – like a stitch-for-stitch recreation of CBK's Narciso Rodriguez wedding dress or her signature shade of blonde hair. And so, Pidgeon dyed her brunette hair in what she calls her first major beauty transformation since an "unfortunate" summer-camp bob when she was 12. "I credit my ambivalence to changing my hair in my personal life to that," she says with a laugh, "but for this [part], I didn't have any real hesitation in changing it. Not that hair



Thom Browne jacket, $2400, and pants, $1460; **Chanel** Coco Crush Fine Jewellery ring, $5550, Camélia Fine Jewellery Bloom ring, $67,450, and Ruban Fine Jewellery Crawling earrings, $18,250.



"What was so exciting in taking on this role was this freedom I had in ... creating this character"

Stella McCartney top, $1695, and skirt, $1125; **Chanel** Première Ceramic watch, $14,950.



Chanel shirt, $6950, and skirt, $6950; Bouton de Camélia Fine Jewellery earrings, $23,450, Comète Fine Jewellery ring, $126,700, Coco Crush Fine Jewellery bracelets, $26,450, $26,450 and $18,100, Première Iconic Chain Double Row watch, $12,200, and Les Infinis de Camélia Fine Jewellery necklace, $100,500.

colour necessarily alters your personality, but it felt much easier to become her."

While she studied for her part, she also practised reading with dozens of potential JFK Jnrs. Paul Anthony Kelly, a former model, landed the role. Once his part was confirmed, they'd get lunch at the Odeon, a New York staple frequented by their on-screen counterparts.

On a typical set, Pidgeon's interpretation would be largely out of sight until a series trailer dropped. *Love Story* filmed on location in New York, where set-crashers are an occupational hazard. Ryan Murphy tried to get ahead of the tabloid headlines by sharing early camera test shots of Pidgeon and Kelly in costume on Instagram. Instead, a firestorm lit up the comments section. Everyone from established fashion editors to armchair commentators picked apart the styling. Their tone insinuated Murphy had danced on the late couple's graves by, say, handing Pidgeon an Hermès Birkin 40 when CBK always carried a 35 (obviously). Bessette-Kennedy's former colourist, Brad Johns, spent a *Vogue* interview bashing the "totally wrong" shade of Pidgeon's hair. Even members of the Kennedy family disavowed the project.

Matters didn't improve when paparazzi caught on to the shoot dates. Images spread online, and commenters lobbed critiques like "cheap" and "lazy" and "wrong" at Pidgeon's look – and, by extension, her performance. Never mind that no-one had actually seen it yet.

"I wouldn't say I'm necessarily glad for it," Pidgeon says of the controversy. "I don't think it was super-shocking that people were invested in Carolyn Bessette-Kennedy and had strong opinions on what we were doing. But it was a real opportunity to understand what it might have been like for her, and that's always helpful." CBK, after all, was relentlessly hounded by photographers and scrutinised by the media in her own lifetime. Pidgeon decided to turn any hurt or frustration into fuel for her performance.

"It wasn't lost on me that there were so many parallels," Pidgeon says. "Granted, I'm playing a character and acting. Carolyn and JFK Jnr were trying to live their lives. But it did give me a sense of what her lived experience was, and it wakes up the things happening physically in your body – what it feels like in your chest, what's going through your mind."

What Pidgeon hints the public may be missing is that she cares, too. This isn't a project she took just to boost her own résumé; she wanted to honour the woman she's portraying. "She's become so incredibly important to me, and I revere her and everything that I've learnt about her and her legacy," she says. "I understand people also have that affinity and care and investment in her, and I think that's true of anyone who plays a real person. I certainly felt the responsibility of playing Carolyn Bessette-Kennedy and I carried that every day."

In Hollywood, the burn of success is short, and already there are thoughts of what could come next. Pidgeon's open. She could try another period piece; alternatively, she'd love to "get really buff" for an action movie. One thing's for sure: she won't make her decisions based on *Love Story*'s eventual IMDb rating. "I think people see your career sometimes based on the reception of the projects that you did," she says, "and I think something that's motivating me is just following things that feel inspiring and exciting."

> "Now I'm getting to this point in my life when I'm asking, 'Who am I outside of this thing?'"

Right now, that's not even working, necessarily. "I remember when actors would come to my school and ... would be asked: 'How do you become a good actor?' They would always say go travel, have experiences, you'd draw on all of that." To dive just as deep into the next role that comes her way, "I really need to live a little bit."

Our call ends, and I set a "Sarah Pidgeon" Google Alert to keep tabs on what might come next. She goes on a solo holiday to Australia. She pops up at a fashion party in Los Angeles and in pre-premiere interviews for *Love Story*; otherwise, she's off the grid.

All I know is that she's touched up her roots, staying CBK blonde in the photos that surface from her few appearances. Of all the ways that this project could alter her life, a previously hard-left hair change is the one she's fine embracing in public. If there's anything else, she knows now that keeping it to herself is a right worth protecting.

Love Story *is streaming now on Disney+.*



"Something that's motivating me is just following *things that feel inspiring and exciting*"

Marina Moscone dress, $1450, and camisole, $990; **Giuseppe Zanotti** shoes, POA; **Chanel** Bouton de Camélia Fine Jewellery earrings, $23,450.

Styling Bailey Moon/Brigade Talent. **Hair** DJ Quintero/The Wall Group. **Makeup** Shayna Goldberg/The Wall Group. **Manicure** Jin Soon Choi/Home Agency. **Creative direction** Montse Tanus. **Location** The William Vale and Westlight.



PHOTOGRAPHY
GLEESON PAULINO
STYLING
JEANNE LE BAULT

High SEASON

Explore exotic colour combinations and diverse textures as you inject some Moroccan magic into the style mix



Opposite: Celine top, POA, pants, $2700, scarf, $940, and belt, POA; **Zag Bijoux** earrings and ring (left), both POA; **Histoire d'Or** ring (middle), POA; **Thomas Sabo** ring, $349.

This page: Chanel jacket, $27,050, skirt, $9330, and earrings, POA.



Loewe jacket, $4550, top, $3450, shirt, POA, skirt, $2300, and shoes, POA; **Victoria Beckham** sunglasses, $384; **Zag Bijoux** ring, POA (left); **Histoire d'Or** ring, POA.

Opposite: Dior dress, $86,000, and hat, $15,500.





Max Mara jumper and shorts, both POA; **Givenchy by Sarah Burton** shoes, $4450, and earrings, POA; **Valentino Garavani** sunglasses, POA.

Opposite: Tod's top, $6550, and skirt, $11,030; **Acne Studios** shoes, POA.

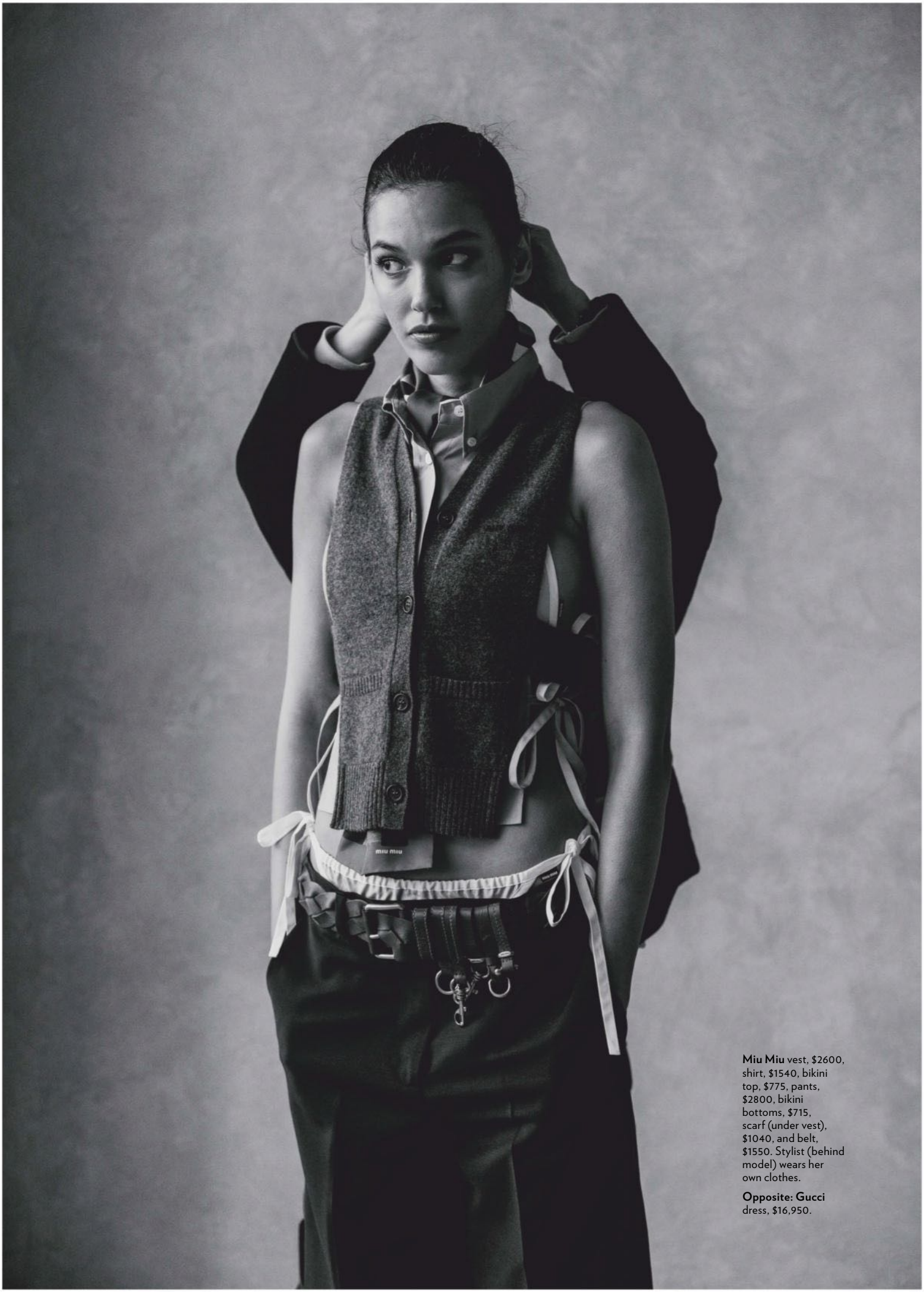




Balenciaga top and skirt, both POA.

Opposite: Prada top, $1390, skirt, $6900, and shoes, $1950.


ORANGE JUICE
LEMON JUICE
LEMON GINGER
Juice



Miu Miu vest, $2600, shirt, $1540, bikini top, $775, pants, $2800, bikini bottoms, $715, scarf (under vest), $1040, and belt, $1550. Stylist (behind model) wears her own clothes.

Opposite: Gucci dress, $16,950.





Louis Vuitton jacket, $8850, shirt, POA, and jumpsuit, $4500.



Isabel Marant jacket, $1770, shirt, $1115, top, $500, pants, $1295, belt, $550, boots, $1385, and bag, $2580.

Photography Gleeson Paulino/11th House Agency. **Hair** Kazue Deki/Calliste Agency. **Makeup** Mickael Noiselet/Calliste Agency. **Model** Iza Dantas De Melo/Premium Models. **Production** Nadia Abderahim Sahib and Hajar Madad. **Shot on location** at Fairmont Taghazout Bay, Morocco.

marie claire

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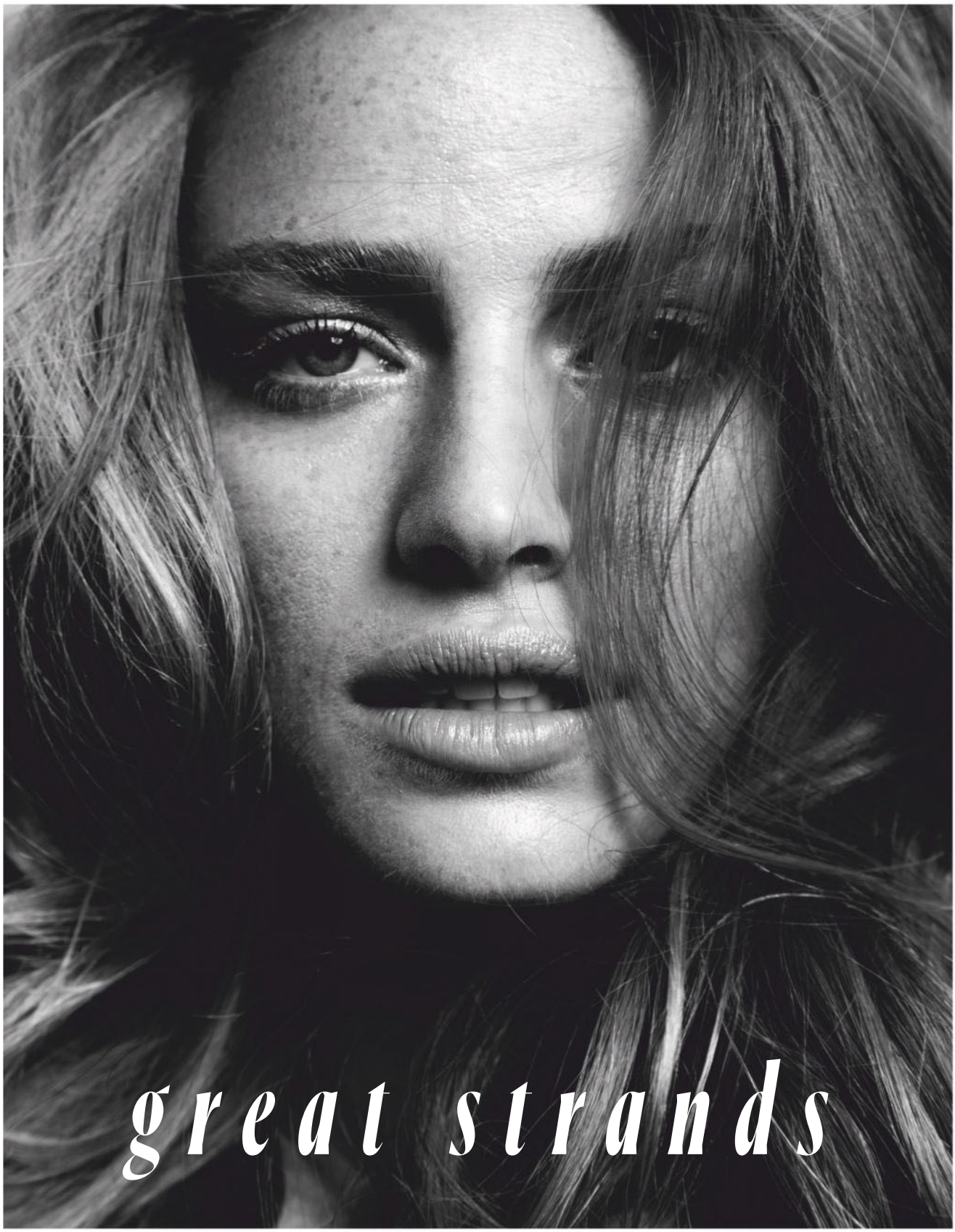


All Chanel Beauty Rouge Allure Velvet limited-edition lipsticks, $83 each; Le Crayon Lèvres lip pencils, $55 each.

Courtesy Chanel Beauty

Chanel's iconic click lipstick has been reimagined in the Rouge Allure Velvet Rendezvous collection, pairing perfectly with the house's Le Crayon Lèvres lip pencils. Also this month: keeping hair healthy long term, why bedtime matters, the love of lipstick and how Estée Lauder ambassador Carolyn Murphy stays grounded

WORDS SALLY HUNWICK



great strands

Longevity is a topic usually discussed along with skin or inner-health issues, but it also applies to hair. Here, professionals explain how to keep hair looking good long term

We talk about longevity in terms of skin, supplements and what's happening beneath the surface, but what about our hair? The truth is, our strands are ageing right alongside the rest of us, quietly reflecting every late night, colour appointment and blast of (unprotected) heat styling. And just like with skin, the signs can creep in gradually before suddenly becoming hard to ignore. Shine dulls, ends split, texture shifts and what once felt effortless begins to require more work.

The good news is that hair longevity is no longer an afterthought; grounded in scalp health, preventative care and smarter styling habits that support strength over time, it's become a category in its own right. From understanding the subtle signals of hair fatigue to rethinking how we treat our lengths day to day, the future of great hair is less about quick fixes and more about long-term investment. Because truly great hair isn't about a single good day, it's about consistency, care and the cumulative effect of how you treat it.



Shark FlexStyle Air Styling & Drying System Red Ruby Diamond Limited Edition, $499.99.

Premature ageing

Skin can age prematurely, but can hair? Without proper care, the answer is yes, says Sydney-based pro cutter and Goldwell ambassador Nathan Yazbek. "While we might blame it on having a bad hair day, we forget that hair cops UV damage, heat, stress, chemicals and life in general, much like our skin," he explains. "Over time, our hair loses its shine, strength and bounce and it starts behaving like it's just tired."

Signs of hair fatigue

Signs that your hair is not as healthy as it could be are dryness, dullness or breakage. "Frizzy hair that is hard to control. Split ends. Hair that doesn't move and colour that fades quickly – these are all signs of ageing hair," says Yazbek. "As for the scalp, we know that's not healthy when your scalp is itchy, flaky or has excess oil or sensitivity. Healthy hair always starts with a healthy scalp. If your scalp is itchy, flaky or oily for no reason, that's your hair asking for help."

Hair stressors

Heat styling is a more obvious stressor on the health of hair, and Yazbek warns against spending too much time using overly hot hair straighteners. But there are other things that you might not think about. "Colouring hair, sun exposure, salt and chlorine, pollution in the air as well as hormonal changes, emotional stress, poor sleep and bad nutrition all stress hair. Your hair is very much a sponge for whatever is happening in your life."

TRY THIS

This Red Ruby Diamond edition of Shark's much loved FlexStyle comes packed with multiple styling options designed to be gentle on hair. With its no-heat-damage hair dryer and an ultra-versatile multi-styler that transforms with one twist, it's able to curl, volumise, smooth and dry. This multi-device will tame any hair type, no matter what your skill set.

The no-nos

There are some things that can damage hair without us being aware. "Over-washing, using wrong products (or none at all), skipping a heat protection product, brushing too aggressively, tight ponytails, big colour changes … all these things affect the quality of your hair," says Yazbek.

Long-term maintenance

Start with your scalp. "Maintain your hair health long term by treating your scalp like you would your skin," says Yazbek. "Use professional masks and treatments that suit your hair type, and protect your hair from heat and the sun." He also recommends regular trims with your hairdresser, and to avoid over-colouring. "Healthy hair is maintenance, not panic-fixed the week before an event."

The issue of thinning

While genetics play a part in whether your hair will thin as you age, there are steps you can take to minimise the risk. "Scalp health is everything," says Yazbek. "Healthy follicles grow better hair, while the right haircut, colour placement and styling tricks can instantly create fullness. There are also great professional scalp treatments and serums that support hair density and hair fullness."

"Healthy hair is maintenance, not panic-fixed the week before an event. Maintain your hair health long term by treating your scalp like you would your skin"

– professional hairdresser Nathan Yazbek



Colour Care

Celebrity colourist and hair-health expert Simon Bright gives his five top tips to getting your colour fresh – and keeping it that way – without any damage.

Wash strategically "Wash your hair less, and when you do, use lukewarm water and a colour-safe shampoo. Over-washing fades tone."

Seal the cuticle "Condition every time. Smooth, sealed hair holds colour and reflects light."

Heat Control "Lower the heat on your tools. High heat shifts tones, which means that blondes become warm and brunette tones can flatten."

Gloss before it dulls "Refresh your colour with your colourist every 6-8 weeks. A gloss keeps colour clean, balanced and luminous."

Protect from fade "Sun, salt and chlorine strips colour so use UV protection and mineral detoxifying sprays to boost your colour's vibrancy and protect it from fade."

Photography Kate Szatmari/August





Turn around lacklustre hair

If you want to get shine, you need to keep hair at its peak. Here's how.

CLARIFY

Clarifying products are like a spring clean for your hair. Able to cleanse away styling-product residue, oils, dirt and pool chlorine, they help revive the scalp. Try these:

1 Best for scalp revive Goldwell Dualsenses Scalp Specialist Deep Cleansing Shampoo, $36.

2 Best for coloured hair K18 Peptide Prep Detox Shampoo, $59.95.

3 Best for sensitive R+Co Lost Treasure Apple Cider Vinegar Cleansing Rinse, $52.

4 Best for thick hair Moroccanoil Clarifying Shampoo, $49.

HYDRATE

Just as it is for skin, hydration is key to long-term hair health. Try these:

5 Best for strengthening Typebea G.3 Strength + Length Conditioner, $40.

6 Best for frizz-prone hair Kérastase Gloss Absolu Crème Hydra-Glaze Mask, $99.

GLOSSING

Both in-salon and at-home glosses give your hair shine and softness quickly for healthy looking hair.

7 Best for lasting gloss L'Oréal Paris Elvive Glycolic Gloss Leave-In Serum, $25.99.

8 Best for humidity proofing Colour Wow Dream Coat Supernatural Spray, $58.

9 Best for a luxury hit Oribe Mirror Rinse Glass Hair Treatment, $94.

BOND REPAIR

The new category of bonding products makes it easy to strengthen hair from within the shaft.

10 Best for speedy results Goldwell Dualsenses Bond Pro 60sec treatment, $37.

11 Best for adding softness Olaplex No.3 Plus Complete Repair Treatment, 250ml, $120.

12 Best for breakage Redken Acidic Bonding Concentrate Intensive Treatment, $58.















beauty before bed



Forget morning routines, we're all (pillow) talking about our sunset habits, and the focus is hyper-optimised pleasure

WORDS AMY MOLLOY

When 27-year-old Milly Rose Bannister, from Sydney, catches up with friends, one topic dominates: their bedtime routines. "We talk about it all the time, especially because so many of us have anxious brains," she says. "It's not just beauty, it's also about 'how are you sleeping?' and 'what are you doing when you wake up at 3am?' There's something bonding about comparing weird wind-down habits."

A proud gen Zer, Bannister's routine is shaped by social media, even as she resists it. Her latest buy? A Kmart touch lamp trending on TikTok. "I don't shower with the overhead lights on anymore," she says. "I use the Kmart touch lamp so the bathroom feels softer, partly because harsh lighting makes me hyper-fixate on my skin and start picking at it, and partly because it genuinely helps me relax. I've even been thinking about hanging eucalyptus in there to lean into the whole spa vibe."

Afterwards, she slips into a plush cotton robe and stretches out on a foam roller. "I lie on the floor on a foam roller to undo my neck tension," Bannister explains. "While I'm doing that, I use my TheraFace LED mask because I'm getting married this year, and I would love some glowy skin."

As an "endo girl" (living with endometriosis), she also follows her pelvic physiotherapist's advice: lower body stretches and slow breathing. "Then I get into bed without my phone," she says. "I write in my gratitude journal, nestle into my pillows and read my Kindle with an eye mask nearby for when I'm ready to pass out. It feels like an exhale at the end of the day."

As the founder of youth mental health charity Allknd, Bannister is acutely aware of the pitfalls of "performative self-care". "Suddenly you're meant to have a 15-step routine before bed and … I love looking after myself but I don't want to crack the whip every night," she says.

As hustle culture obsesses over "hyper-optimised" morning routines, a quiet rebellion is unfolding online. Instead of boasting about 4am alarms and habit-stacking like a wellness bro (think ice baths, bulletproof coffee, crypto podcasts) women are turning their attention to the other end of the day. The focus isn't on squeezing out more productivity, but on pleasure, softness and genuine nourishment.




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1 Oura Ring 4 in gold, $799. **2 Biotyspa** Calm Tea, $35 for 20. **3 Epzen** Bath Milk, $18. **4 Raeso** Cocoon Ceramide Cream, $145. **5 Loops** Double Take Glow Hydrogel Face Mask, $10 for one. **6 Circa** Lavender & Geramium Room & Linen Spray, $26.95. **7 Tatcha** Indigo Overnight Repair Cream, $159.

Getty Images

For Brisbane-based Olympia Kwitowski, bedtime beauty helps her cope with the "always on" nature of her job as a radio announcer and master of ceremonies. Her favourite products? WaterWipes for removing stage makeup, Bioderma Atoderm Shower Oil, Tatcha The Dewy Milk Moisturizer, and "the best sheet mask" – the Loops Double Take face mask.

"My bedtime routine signals to my brain that the workday is officially over," says Kwitowski. With a 4.30am start, it's also a next-day time saver. "My skin is prepped so my morning makeup goes on smoothly," she says. "I have zero time in the mornings because I like to prioritise sleep – I want every extra second I can get."

The shift towards PM rituals is grounded in psychology and biology. Isabella Loneragan is a skin and dermal therapist from Brisbane with a Bachelor of Behavioural Health Science & Psychology. She says the new bedtime trends blend pleasure and performance. "Women rightly still want results," she says. "We want pigmentation addressed, lines softened and skin strengthened. This desire has not changed but what has shifted is how we approach it. We want a routine that nourishes our nervous system."

"Bedtime routines should feel like a gift to yourself, not another task on the to-do list"

There is a reason a bedtime routine feels more pleasurable than a morning one driven by deadlines and alarms. "In the evening, the nervous system naturally begins moving towards rest. Cortisol drops, the body softens and we become more receptive to slower, intentional rituals," Loneragan explains. As a bonus, it can also be a better time to do corrective treatment because, biologically, night-time is when the body shifts into "repair mode". "The difference between a chore and a ritual isn't time but attention," she says. "Personally, I put on classical music while doing my bedtime routine and really lean into the quiet. I'm a mum and a business owner, so it's something I cherish."

It's a sentiment shared by proud Wiradjuri Gamilaraay woman Ngaire East. With a toddler and another baby on the way, a full-time job working as an Aboriginal education officer, and a jewellery brand, By The Bila, life is busy but bedtime beauty is a ball she won't drop. "In a way, my routine improved when I became pregnant with my first [child] because I was forced to take really good care of my body for the first time," says the 32-year-old from Sydney. "I got into a good habit of cleansing and moisturising daily and getting to bed at a decent time. Once my son came along that all went out the window. As time has gone on, I've found a way to care for myself again."

To up the pleasure factor, East chooses products that are "strong in native smells", such as Eco by Sonya's Super Citrus Cleanser and Bush Medijina's Detoxifying Body Scrub. Non-negotiables include a shower – sometimes shared with a toddler – and half an hour of "me time". Extras, like meditating and weaving jewellery before bed, are "subject to availability".

When her new baby arrives, East still plans to fit in her beauty basics – even if it means staying up until midnight. "When my toddler was a newborn, [my partner] would always encourage me to get to sleep as soon as the baby was down," she says. "But it is just so important for my wellbeing to have that little bit of alone time."

Julie Sweet is a clinical psychotherapist at Seaway Counselling and Psychotherapy in Sydney. She believes bedtime routines deserve the same time, energy and intention as our morning routines. "The benefits extend far beyond that single evening," she says. "When we allow space for rest, recovery and letting the day gently settle, we often wake feeling more grounded and resourced for the next day too."

In her experience, the key is consistency: find your rituals then rinse and repeat. "When our nervous system knows what to expect, it can relax," she says. "Over time, the body doesn't need to work as hard to settle – it knows what's coming."

Her top advice? A bedtime routine must replenish rather than overwhelm. "Overly complex rituals can become another source of pressure," she says. "It should feel like a gift to yourself, not another task on the to-do list."

At 56 years old, leadership strategist Mel Kettle, from Queensland's Sunshine Coast, feels as though she's finally found a bedtime routine that works for her, and it's all based on data. "I bought an Oura ring when I decided to get serious about my bedtime habits," she says. "Now I can track my sleep quality and duration, and heart rate, and see how my bedtime rituals impact them."

Kettle's pre-bed formula, which includes a walk on the beach, an oil-cleansing routine and herbal tea, focuses on maximum shuteye. "At my age, we're overwhelmed by messaging on social media telling us what we 'must' do for our skin," she says. "While there are some pieces of anti-ageing content that resonate, I know that what I'm doing works for me, and I'm happy with that."



WORDS CLEO GLYDE

The lipstick effect

When the economy's down, we pucker up

Recessions are strange beasts. Stock markets wobble, headlines darken, and housing affordability spirals sky-high (saving a deposit is now officially laughable for under-30s). Yet, while we cancel streaming plans and restaurant bookings, lipstick sales climb. The market segment was valued at $US18.59 billion ($28 billion) in 2025 and is projected to reach just over $US28.25 billion by 2034, according to Fortune Business Insights.

This curious phenomenon has a nickname: the "lipstick effect." The term was popularised by Estée Lauder heir Leonard Lauder, when lipstick sales spiked after the September 11, 2001, attacks in New York. This was nothing new: during the Great Depression of the 1930s, cosmetic purchases persisted while larger luxuries stalled. When belts tighten, hemlines may fall but lips get more red.

I totally get it. This is lipstick we're talking about: the original affordable luxury. It is cheaper than a handbag, less permanent than a haircut and instantly glamorous. It delivers a jolt of transformation that feels wildly disproportionate to its price, whether part of a more "done" look or as a slick of colour with fresh, nude skin. Hollywood goddess and man-eater Elizabeth Taylor famously advised women on the verge of a meltdown to: "Pour yourself a drink, put on some lipstick and pull yourself together."

With me, lipstick is a lifelong love affair. Nothing turbocharges my visual identity or ability to face the world faster. As a redhead, I usually obsess over one red and one neutral shade at the same time, alternating, for example, between Nu Muse by YSL and Rouge Casaque by Hermès. Clearly, in times of economic uncertainty, when no-one's buying a new car, choosing your shade is even more soothing. Psychologists suggest these "micro-luxuries" restore a sense of control. When markets are chaotic and plans are postponed, choosing a lipstick – coral or crimson, matte or gloss – is an act of decision-making in a difficult world. It's retail therapy that sits at the intersection of visibility and power. It says something about you.

And why not some other beauty item? The mouth is not neutral real estate: it's the ultimate billboard. It is where we speak, kiss, argue, eat, laugh and – crucially – are heard. To paint it is to frame the instrument of our voice. Throughout history, colouring the lips has been associated with status and seduction. A red lip signals glamour, dissent, sexuality, authority. When the economy dips, the symbolic potency of the mouth intensifies. We may have less spending power, but we still have speech and presence. Lipstick says: I am here, I am visible. In eras when voices feel diminished, emphasising the lips carries symbolic weight. The mouth is where dissent begins. It is where "no" forms. There's a reason performers and politicians often favour a strong lip: it communicates clarity – even from a distance.

There's also the evolutionary intrigue. Zoologist Desmond Morris argued in the '60s that red lipstick exaggerates natural signs of arousal: mimicking the flushing and swelling of lips when blood flow increases. The colour red enhances the contrast between lips and skin – a cue historically associated with youth and vitality. Fuller-looking lips – achieved with a touch of gloss or the subtle art of overlining – signal health and fertility. In other words, a swipe of ruby is not just cosmetic, it's primal theatre.

And yet lipstick's power is not solely about attracting others. Increasingly, it is about attracting oneself. There is something almost sacred about the act of applying lipstick. The click of the tube. The soft drag across the lip. The purse

and press of the lips. It is a ritual of containment. Within that minute or two, the outside world recedes. In recessions, rituals matter. They structure time and offer predictability. Morning coffee. Evening walks. Accentuating your cupid's bow before getting out the door. Lipstick is a portable ceremony.

And it requires no elaborate toolkit, just a mirror and a steady hand. It is makeup distilled to its most theatrical essence. You can be slumming it in tracky dacks and still feel improbably composed once your lips are done. That psychological lift becomes a constant companion. Studies consistently show that wearing red increases perceptions of confidence, encouraging the wearer to act more assertively. It becomes a feedback loop: you feel powerful, so you behave powerfully and you are perceived as powerful.

When uncertainty rises, we also look for anchors of identity. A familiar shade can feel like continuity, such as the same Clinique Black Honey tone worn to job interviews, first dates and Zoom meetings. I have always been a beauty girl, attached to product, colour and transformation. I can identify entire periods where I wore the same lipstick hue. What may seem like small, frivolous pleasures are actually adaptive.



"The mouth is not neutral real estate: it's the ultimate billboard"

There is also a communal element. During downturns, beauty trends often lean bold. Think of the glamorous defiance of 1940s red lips among the rubble of bombed cities, or the high-drama cosmetics that surfaced in London's 1979 recession with the "Blitz Kids", who pushed back against their drab, working-class fates, adopting avant-garde makeup inspired by cabaret theatre. When circumstances contract, style expands.

And lippie is democratic. It doesn't require a certain body type, income bracket or occasion. It works at the office, at a protest, at a grocery store. It fits in a pocket. It waits patiently, ready to be reapplied. A bright lip can be armour, flirtation or camouflage on days when you feel anything but luminous.

Economists may chart lipstick sales as a quirky data point, but culturally the phenomenon reveals something profound: when situations shrink, desire recalibrates. We may rethink that holiday, swapping out the Greek islands for "the Goldie". But we will allow ourselves the small thrill of pigment – that instant transformation – the pleasure of catching our reflection and thinking, despite it all, yes.

In a downturn, buying lipstick is practical because it is affordable, and also poetic because it insists on beauty when beauty feels unnecessary. And perhaps that is the real magic of the lipstick effect. It's not about vanity; it's about vitality. When the world trembles, we steady our hands and choose an intimate splash of colour. Not because it solves anything, but because it reminds us that – even in lean times – unapologetic pleasure still fits in the palm of our hand.



My Top Five

RED ARMOUR

I can't live without a vivid, bright red. My favourite Hermès red veers slightly cool, away from orange red, which doesn't suit my pale skin. The packaging feels like a beautiful object in itself, a pleasure to keep in your purse. Guerlain also has ultra-luxe gold packaging. Le Rouge Rubis is a classic, vibrant ruby red, when you want to feel like a Hollywood movie star. The velvet matte formula is a dramatic texture that holds brilliantly.

1 Hermès Rouge Hermès Satin Lipstick in Rouge Casaque, $120.
2 Guerlain Rouge G Velvet Lip in Le Rouge Rubis, $66.

VERY BERRY

Clinique's Black Honey is a cult classic that I'll always have in my beauty arsenal. The Almost Lipstick formulation has a sheer stain effect that's really sexy, as if you just ate glossy blackberries rather than applied heavy colour. Your own lip tone shines through and adds warmth. It's great with fresh skin when you want to define your lips but still look undone.

3 Clinique Almost Lipstick in Black Honey, $48.

CLEAN AND GREEN

I love supporting natural "no nasties" brands that ditch the parabens or mineral oils. I have been using NZ brand Karen Murrell for more than a decade. The lipsticks are 100 per cent natural, cruelty-free and toxic-free, with avocado oil and shea butter to nourish lips. Coral Dawn and Fuchsia Shock are great summer colours that really pop, while Blushing Rose is a more subtle nude-pink rose.

4 Karen Murrell Natural Lipstick in Coral Dawn, $32.95.



IN THE PINK

I love Haus Labs high-shine lip colour when you want fresh, sheer-to-medium coverage. Macaron is a beautiful soft pink that looks so natural. It's perfectly anchored by Haus Labs' Le Monster Lip Crayon in Mauve Matte – a dusty rose – as a base. Soft pink hues are universally flattering because they don't clash with cool or warm undertones.

5 Haus Labs Le Monster Lip Crayon in Mauve Matte, $40, and **6** PhD Hybrid Lip Glaze in Macaron, $43.

SOFTLY, SOFTLY

Dolce & Gabbana's My Sculpt Satin has an amazingly luxurious formulation, due to hyaluronic acid, which softens and conditions lips. A great earthy, tawny neutral is 30.7.

7 Dolce & Gabbana My Sculpt Satin in 30.07, $71.





Getty Images



1 Estée Lauder Advanced Night Repair, 75ml, $259, and **2** Double Wear Stay-In-Place Makeup, $83, and **3** Advanced Night Repair Eye Lift + Sculpt, $175.



WORDS SALLY HUNWICK

Absolutely flaw

Carolyn Murphy has a beauty that seems to transcend trends and time. Here, the Estée Lauder ambassador talks rituals, remaining grounded and staying true to yourself at every stage of life



Carolyn Murphy embodies a rare kind of beauty – one that deepens rather than fades with time. Discovered as a teenager and propelled quickly onto the world's biggest runways and magazine covers, Murphy became synonymous with the luminous, all-American ease that defined modelling's '90s era. Yet it is her enduring partnership with Estée Lauder, which now spans an extraordinary 25 years, that has cemented her as one of beauty's most recognisable and trusted faces.

Few relationships in the industry have lasted so long. At a time when contracts are often fleeting, Murphy's connection with the American brand reflects something deeper: shared values in relation to authenticity, longevity and the idea that beauty evolves rather than diminishes.

A product Murphy has long credited as a cornerstone of her nightly ritual is Estée Lauder's iconic Advanced Night Repair serum – a top tip for anyone who might want to aim for luminosity like hers. For Murphy, it's clear that skincare isn't about chasing youth but instead supporting the complexion through every stage of life.

Now in her early fifties, Murphy speaks openly about the privilege of ageing: a perspective shaped by both personal experience and a decades-long career in front of the camera. Away from the flashbulbs, her life is anchored by family, motherhood and a deep connection to nature. The outdoors is where she recalibrates, taking small daily moments that keep her grounded in an industry that rarely slows down.



less

Here, Murphy speaks exclusively with *marie claire*.

You've been partnered with Estée Lauder since 2001. How does the brand's approach to beauty resonate with you? I grew up with Estée Lauder, so the brand feels almost interwoven into my understanding of beauty. What has always resonated with me is their belief that beauty comes from within and isn't fleeting or trend-driven. It's about confidence, care and honouring who you are at every stage of life. That philosophy transcends generations, and it's something I've personally experienced and deeply respect.

What conversations around beauty do you hope to help evolve through your Estée Lauder partnership? Over my 25-year relationship with the brand, the conversation has continually evolved and that's what excites me. From embracing the privilege of ageing, to expanding colour palettes for all skin tones, and celebrating products that are iconic – like the new Double Wear [makeup]. The most meaningful evolution is that we're still engaging, listening to one another and to the customer. Beauty isn't static and neither is the dialogue around it.

Your skin is beautiful. What is your skincare routine? Thank you, that means a lot. I keep my routine intentional and uncomplicated. In the morning, it's about hydration and protection: a gentle cleanse, a nourishing serum, moisturiser and SPF. In the evening, I focus on repair through cleansing, targeted serums and richer hydration. I believe consistency matters more than excess, and I listen closely to what my skin needs.

What does beauty mean to you now, and has it changed over time? Beauty now feels much quieter and much deeper. Earlier in my career, it was often external and aspirational. Today it's about health, presence and self-trust. Beauty is how grounded I feel … how aligned I am with myself, and how honestly I'm living. That shift has been one of the greatest gifts of time.

Is there a particular Estée Lauder product you regularly reach for? Advanced Night Repair has been a constant for me over the years. It's one of those products that simply works and continues to evolve without losing its integrity. I love products that earn their place.

What would you say is your personal style? Effortless, natural and rooted in simplicity. I'm drawn to pieces that feel timeless rather than trendy, and things that reflect ease, confidence and authenticity. I want to feel like myself, not styled into something.

What does confidence look like for you now? Confidence now is softness, not armour. It's being comfortable saying no, trusting my intuition and not feeling the need to prove anything. It's quieter but far more powerful.

Are there any beauty rituals or habits that make you feel grounded when life gets hectic? Simple rituals like taking a few extra moments with my skincare, dry brushing or being barefoot outdoors help me reconnect to my body … and bring me back to centre when things feel fast or overwhelming.

What have you learnt from makeup artists and skin experts that really changed how you care for your complexion? That less is more and skin comes first. The best artists and experts have always emphasised preparation, touch and restraint. Healthy skin is the foundation [and] everything else should enhance it, not mask.

Images courtesy of Estée Lauder

HIGH DRAMA



Dior delivers a new, even more impactful mascara for lashes that demand attention

WORDS SALLY HUNWICK

Dior has long understood the power of amplification. From the architectural sweep of the New Look in the late 1940s to today's language of makeup, volume is more than a technique at Dior, it's a signature. Now, that philosophy zooms in on our lashes with the latest evolution of Diorshow Overvolume.

For 2026, Peter Philips, creative and image director for Dior Makeup, pushes his original concept of extreme volume and definition coupled with long-lasting wear by adding a new waterproof iteration designed for modern life. This formula promises not only drama but lash discipline – holding curl, resisting humidity and staying in place for up to 48 hours. Waterproof, sweatproof, and smudge-proof, it's a mascara built to endure long days and late nights without losing intensity.

And the results are immediate. Dior says it gives a 220 per cent instant volume boost, but what feels most impressive is the balance: lashes appear fuller yet still defined. There's also none of the heaviness or clumpiness of some volumising mascaras. Instead, the formula, enriched with soft waxes and emollients, keeps lashes flexible and supple while building density from root to tip. Powder beads subtly thicken the texture, dialling up the volume without losing separation.

Central to this precision is the brush. With a reservoir at its core, it delivers just the right amount of product from the first sweep. No overloading, no clumping. Flexible petal-shaped spikes deposit pigment generously, while firmer bristles comb through and capture even the finest lashes. The tip allows for detail work, making it easy to reach corners and lower lashes.

Then there's the colour. While the classic black remains a standout – richly saturated thanks to Dior's finely calibrated pigment – this season introduces a more expressive approach, and a wardrobe of bold shades expands the possibilities.

"A vibrant blue for a sexy vintage eye, a wonderful brown for natural intensity, an elegant plum to enhance all eye colours and a stunning pink for a playful, head-turning result," notes Philips.

Housed in a soft silver case embossed with the house's iconic cannage motif, it leans into Dior's couture codes and is a tactile nod to its heritage.

To complement the launch, Dior introduces limited-edition Diorshow 5 Couleurs palettes. At the heart of each sits a luminous, iridescent shade of pink, blue, lilac or brown that catches the light, surrounded by satin, matte and shimmer finishes for a layered, bold look.

The faint of heart need not apply.

Diorshow Overvolume Waterproof mascara, $72.

Courtesy Dior

DESCRIPTION Clinically proven 100% natural scar and stretch mark oil. INDICATIONS Scars: Helps improve the appearance of new and old scars. Stretch marks: Helps improve the appearance of stretch marks. Uneven skin tone: Helps improve the appearance of uneven skin tone. Ageing skin: Helps improve the appearance of ageing skin on the face and body. Dehydrated skin: Helps reduce moisture loss and improve the appearance of dehydrated skin. PRESENTATION Light yellow oil. FORMULATION Mix of natural oils. INGREDIENTS Glycine Soja Oil, Helianthus Annuus Seed Oil, Carthamus Tinctorius Seed Oil, Simmondsia Chinensis Seed Oil, Salvia Hispanica Seed Oil, Punica Granatum Seed Oil, Plukenetia Volubilis Seed Oil, Triticum Vulgare Germ Oil, Rosa Canina Fruit Oil, Calendula Officinalis Extract, Lavandula Angustifolia Oil, Rosmarinus Officinalis Leaf Oil, Anthemis Nobilis Flower Oil, Pogostemon Cablin Leaf Oil, Bisabolol, Tocopherol. NATURAL CERTIFICATION Bio-Oil® Skincare Oil (Natural) is ISO 16128 certified that it is made with 100% natural content and 100% natural origin content. SCAR CLINICAL TRIAL Trial centre: proDERM Institute for Applied Dermatological Research, Hamburg, Germany. Objective: To assess the efficacy of Bio-Oil® Skincare Oil (Natural) in improving the appearance of scars. Sample: Subjects: 40 female participants of various Fitzpatrick skin types. Scar ages: newly formed to 3 years old. Scar locations: face or body due to major grazes, cuts or surgical scars. Age of participants: 18–65. Methodology: Evaluator blinded, randomised image assessment, open-labelled study. Subject inclusion was performed by a dermatologist using the Patient and Observer Scar Assessment Scale (POSAS). Product was applied twice daily for 8 wee aging in a circular motion on the assigned scar and surrounding skin. Application performed u in objective was to assess the effect of the product on the skin investigated by m er parameters investigated at the end of the study included image asse bjects themselves, and skin colour deviation of the scars to their s are Oil (Natural) is efficacious in improving the appearance of s th the objective and subjective assessments of OSAS and PS s 100% of subjects showed a noticeable improvement, with t us and significant improvement of POSAS over the duration of tute for Applied Dermatological Research, Hamburg, Germany. in improving the appearance of stretch marks. Sample: Subjec auses: various (post pregnancy, weight gain, weight training or s and hips. Age of participants: 18–65. Methodology: Evaluatc inclusion was performed by a physician according to the Ma ging in a circular motion on the assigned striae and surroundi main objective was to assess the effect of the product on th ent Scale (POSAS) at baseline, and at 2, 4 and 8 weeks. A furt ment of the aesthetic outcome by 6 trained assessors and su improving the appearance of stretch marks. A statistically s bjective assessments of OSAS and PSAS) after only 2 weeks, noticeable improvement, with the extent of the improvement nt of POSAS over the duration of the study. UNEVEN SKIN T hens & Associates, Inc., Texas, United States of America. Ob ing the appearance of uneven skin tone and mottled pigmer g) skin on the face and neck. Sample: Subjects: 64 female to moderate photodamage on the face and neck. Bio-Oil® S ted cell included 32 subjects. Age of participants: 30–70. M bjects participated in an initial screening evaluation followed neck twice daily for 16 weeks. Application performed under and 16 weeks. Subjects were clinically graded on the face a e also taken of each subject's face and neck, photo grading ral) is efficacious in improving the appearance of uneven ski reeks, a statistically significant result was achieved for both p ter 16 weeks, 61% of subjects showed a statistically signific GEING SKIN CLINICAL TRIAL Trial centre: Thomas J. Steph d neck. Objective: To evaluate the efficacy of Bio-Oil® Skinca aged (ageing) skin on the face and neck. Sample: Subjects: determined mild to moderate photodamage on the face an nd the untreated cell included 32 subjects. Age of particip tudy. Subjects participated in an initial screening evaluatio eck twice daily for 16 weeks. Application was performed u and 16 weeks. Subjects were clinically graded on the face a sual roughness / smoothness, tactile roughness / smoothne ss and global assessment of appearance. Digital images w ormed after study completion. The images taken at each tim ation, uneven skin tone, clarity (dullness) and global assessm roving the overall appearance of photodamaged (ageing) sk treatment group significantly outperformed the untreated c s was clinically observed from 4 weeks, except for mottled p latural) treatment cell showed a statistically significant impr e: To evaluate the efficacy of Bio-Oil® Skincare Oil (Natural to moderate photodamaged (ageing) skin. Sample: Subje determined mild to moderate photodamage on the face an nd the untreated cell included 32 subjects. Age of particip tudy. Subjects participated in an initial screening evaluation wer legs and arms twice daily for 16 weeks. Application was were conducted at 0, 2, 4 and 16 weeks. Subjects were cli llowing efficacy parameters: visual roughness / smoothne re and global assessment of appearance. Result: Bio-Oil® ing the overall appearance of photodamaged (ageing) skin significantly outperformed ...





Ever wondered where glow comes from and how to achieve it – no matter what your age? An international scientist and skin expert explains how to keep skin gleaming long term

the science of glow

WORDS SALLY HUNWICK



"Women want glow. That natural luminosity is complex. It's not shine, it's how light interacts with the skin"

– L'Oréal Paris International scientific director Elisabeth Bouhadana (above)

Few people understand skin like Elisabeth Bouhadana. As scientific director at L'Oréal Paris International, Bouhadana has spent three decades decoding how skin functions and how we can help it perform better for longer. As Bouhadana makes clear, great skin isn't about chasing perfection, it's about supporting it to function at its best every day. Here, she shares her insights on longevity, luminosity and why great skin is as much about consistency as it is science.

Tell us about your background. How did you get to where you are? I studied biochemistry, specialising in enzymology, which looks at all the biological and chemical reactions in the body, including the skin. I've always been passionate about science, and I was fortunate to begin my career in research before joining L'Oréal. What makes L'Oréal unique is the scale of its scientific community. We have 21 research centres globally, across fields from chemistry to biology to optics. Innovation comes from bringing all of those disciplines together, always starting from women's needs.

From your perspective, what do women want from their skin today? It has evolved. Thirty years ago, women wanted to fight wrinkles. Then it was firmness. Today, we are entering a new era: women want glow. That natural luminosity is complex. It's not shine, it's how light interacts with the skin. It depends on even skin tone, smooth texture and deep hydration. When the skin is well organised and hydrated, light can pass through and reflect beautifully. That's what creates that healthy, radiant look.

Can we achieve that "glassy skin" effect at any age? Yes, absolutely. Skin is constantly renewing itself. The challenge as we age is that this process slows down. I often use the analogy of bricks and mortar: over time, the structure becomes less efficient. But we can train the skin by giving it the components it needs to rebuild properly. There are two levels of action: an immediate effect, where you hydrate and smooth the skin's surface, and a long-term effect, where you stimulate the skin's cells to function better. Both are possible at any age, it just requires consistency.

What role does hyaluronic acid play? It's essential. Hyaluronic acid is naturally produced by the skin but declines over time. We use both macro and micro forms. The larger molecules stay on the surface to retain moisture, while the smaller ones penetrate deeper. This dual approach gives both instant plumping and long-term improvement. The key is also formulation, ensuring high performance without stickiness so people enjoy using the product and stay consistent.

How influential are global beauty trends, like Korean skincare? Korea is very inspiring because of the level of care and attention women give their skin, sometimes seven or eight steps. But our role is to translate that into something more accessible. We take inspiration from all over the world – Brazil, Japan, China, the US – and combine those insights into products that deliver results with fewer steps. The goal is to make something like glass skin achievable for every woman.

What are your non-negotiables for healthy, long-term skin? Keep it simple and consistent. Cleanse your skin morning and evening, even if you don't wear makeup. Stick to your routine for at least a week to see results. And always wear SPF; up to 80 per cent of skin ageing is caused by UV exposure and pollution. Protection is the most powerful anti-ageing step we have.

TRY THESE THREE GLASSY-SKIN MAKERS

Using new technology and top derm-loved actives, these products will give your complexion long-lasting glowing hydration.

1 L'Oréal Paris Revitalift Filler Glass Skin Liquid Cream, $59.99.

With a liquid cream formulation that delivers deep hydration without any weight or stickiness, this new-era formulation has added hyaluronic acid for skin plumpness and smoother-looking lines, vitamin CG and B3 to brighten the complexion, and vitamin B5 to help support the skin's protective layer.

2 L'Oréal Paris Revitalift Filler Glass Skin Hydrogel Glow Mask, $14.99.

This new hydrogel mask is deeply hydrating and can deliver glassy skin in half the time of many others on the market. Its hyaluronic acid, glycerin and centella asiatica extract offers dewy, plump skin in only 90 minutes.

3 L'Oréal Paris Revitalift Filler Hyaluronic Plumping Serum, $59.99.

This intensive hydrating serum contains macro and micro hyaluronic acid to help re-plump and smooth the appearance of wrinkles for true glow.



1 2 3

Getty Images; courtesy of L'Oréal Paris



WORDS SALLY HUNWICK

INTO *the* LIGHT

Shark Beauty delivers (again) with a new LED and cryo device

At-home LED masks have become one of beauty's most in-demand devices. And why not, when they offer dermatologist-developed treatments in the comfort of your home? The latest is Shark's CryoGlow Under-Eye Cooling + LED Mask. It takes LED a step further by combining multi-wavelength therapy with targeted cryo-inspired cooling designed specifically for the delicate under-eye area.



Shark CryoGlow Under-Eye Cooling + LED Face Mask, in Lilac Chill or Blue Frost, $699.99; sharkclean.com.au. Always read the label and follow the directions for use.

The benefits

"When developing the CryoGlow, our goal was to solve two key challenges in LED technology: coverage and comfort," says Chris Hedges, VP of design and engineering at SharkNinja. "The 160 tri-wick LED configuration ensures even distribution of light energy, while the integrated under-eye cooling system delivers support to a high-concern area." Developed with dermatologists, the device offers four treatment modes, each designed for different concerns, from improving fine lines to helping reduce breakouts and maintaining overall radiance.

The tech

Powered by iQLED Technology, each LED in the mask emits three wavelengths – blue light (≈415 nm), red light (≈630 nm) and infrared light (≈850 nm). This tri-wick sequencing allows the 160 LEDs to target different layers of skin in a single treatment. Blue light works on the surface to help reduce acne-causing bacteria, while red and infrared light go deeper to help stimulate collagen production. The tri-wick distributes light evenly across the face, helping ensure consistent coverage without gaps or hot spots.

Bonus cooling

One feature drawing attention is the integrated Cryo Under-Eye therapy. It offers three temperature-controlled cooling levels designed to refresh, tighten and reduce the appearance of puffiness. For Shark Beauty skin therapist Isabella Schimid, the multitasking device has become a staple both in her personal routine and on set.

What a skin expert says

"I love the fact that it brings all my favourite tools into one," says Schimid. "Red light, blue light and infrared therapy with the added bonus of Cryo Under-Eye treatment."

The device can easily slot into your daily routine at home. "It only takes six minutes a day – and who doesn't have six minutes?" she says. "You can also use the Cryo eye element after a huge day of work or after being in wind and sun all day shooting.

"Honestly I can't even explain how much my models and talent love the Shark CryoGlow mask," she says. "For eight minutes they close their eyes, relax, get a glowing light treatment and the Cryo element for under-eye puffiness."

Her biggest tip? Consistency. "Be consistent. Every day for six or eight minutes depending on the setting," Schimid says. "That's the only way you'll get the best results from your Shark CryoGlow Mask."

> "I can't even explain how much my models love the Shark CryoGlow Mask"
>
> – makeup artist Isabella Schimid



Photography Getty Images; supplied


GUESS
ICONIC SUBLIME
GUESS
ICONIC SUBLIME
THE NEW FRAGRANCE FOR HER



Ex Nihilo
Generation(s) EDP, 100ml, $510.

WORDS SALLY HUNWICK

Across generations

Parisian niche brand Ex Nihilo brings us a skin-benefiting fragrance intended to be shared

Founded in Paris with a philosophy rooted in freedom, innovation and radical creativity, Ex Nihilo keeps its approach to fragrance personal. Loved by Hailey Bieber, the perfume house is favoured by those who want an elevated scent that others don't have.

The brand's themes of luxury, craftsmanship and innovation has led to its first alcohol-free fragrance, Generation(s). Conceived for what it calls "modern tribes", Generation(s) is both a technical innovation and an emotional one, a fragrance inspired by connection, family and the invisible threads that bind generations together.

In our endless quest for a fragrance uniquely ours, this new offering puts forward the notion of commonality: a signature scent not just our own, but also belonging to those closest to us.

Created by perfumer Nadège Le Garlantezec, who is well known for her luminous, modern structures, this is an addictive and uplifting fragrance designed to be shared.

Le Garlantezec has built the scent around a trio of notes. Juicy pear opens the fragrance with a burst of freshness, while the creamy green sweetness of fig gives a sense of warmth and nostalgia. A base of sandalwood anchors the composition with a velvet softness that lingers. The result is a scent that feels intimate, uplifting and skin-like.

What makes Generation(s) particularly compelling may be the technology behind it. Instead of alcohol, the fragrance is formulated with a patented water-based micro-emulsion system. It allows for a high concentration of fragrance while maintaining impressive olfactory performance. According to the brand, 94 per cent of the scent's intensity remains after six hours, with 90 per cent still detectable after 24 hours.

> The scent is not just our own, but also belongs to those closest to us

Designed with sensitive skin in mind (it can be used during pregnancy), the water-based formula adds to the sensorial appeal. Light and silky, the mist settles onto skin (or clothing) with a refreshing, almost hydrating feel.

The bottle also reflects Ex Nihilo's commitment to craftsmanship. The signature squared-off flacon is reimagined with a wooden cap topped with monogrammed mother-of-pearl. Engineering has played its part too, with a pump developed specifically for the formula to ensure even application.

Generation(s) feels like a new vision of luxury, one that values not only innovation and artistry but also comfort, inclusivity and subtlety. In a world increasingly driven by individuality, Ex Nihilo reminds us that scent can also be something shared: a quiet expression of love that gets passed on across the ages.



WORDS SALLY HUNWICK

Glow & Tell

Our beauty director's top picks of the latest products

MAKEUP ARTIST APPROVED

If you're wondering what makeup artists are talking about in beauty right now, these three new releases (below) are coming up regularly.

No7 Pro Artist: Already a game changer for skin lovers, No7 has introduced a new makeup line that is causing makeup artists to take note. With good-looking packaging and pricing well under $50, we can put forward the tubing mascara, liquid blush and multi-use stick as strong contenders for high-rotation use.

1 No7 Pro Artist Lip & Cheek Multi Use Stick in Rose Pink/Pearl Glow, $29.99.

Estée Lauder Stay-In-Place Makeup: Makeup artists want their work to last well beyond the makeup chair, and many are gravitating to Estée Lauder's reimagined Double Wear foundation. With a new breathable, flawless-making polymer mesh matrix technology, this matte foundation offers 67 shades with 36-hour wear, oil-control and built-in hydration. Whether it's the red carpet, a wedding or an all-night party, this formula is virtually foolproof.

2 Estée Lauder Double Wear Stay-in-Place Makeup, $83.

Clarins Double Serum Foundation: With a luminous finish, this foundation fuses colour with deep hydration for a two-pronged approach to flawlessness. The formula offers skin 14 active ingredients to help give you a glow up, while the clever 40 per cent recycled-plastic dispenser offers weightless medium-to-full coverage.

3 Clarins Double Serum Foundation, $95.



LEVEL-UP

If you want to get results, look for the next generation of skincare. Dosed with high counts of actives, they're packed with capabilities.

Joining Elizabeth Arden's much-loved Retinol + HPR range, this next-generation retinoid eye cream helps to smooth, brighten and strengthen the eye area.

4 Elizabeth Arden Retinol + HPR Ceramide Rapid Skin Renewing Eye Cream, $125.

Created to address problem areas such as the upper face, nasolabial folds, cheeks, jawline and neck, Estée Lauder's biotech collagen and hexapeptide-dosed serum helps to rejuvenate skin across multiple layers.

5 Estée Lauder Revitalizing Supreme+ Sculpting Serum, $275.

Inspired by Korean beauty and its love of bouncy, glassy skin, L'Oréal Paris' new liquid cream releases both macro and micro hyaluronic acids into the skin to give super hydration and impressive glow immediately and into the future.

6 L'Oréal Paris Revitalift Filler Glass Skin Liquid Cream, $59.99.

LASH OUT

If you like to take things to the extreme, this new mascara from L'Oréal Paris will get you there. The revamped formula grips each lash to grant you impressive lift and curl and a lash-extension look without the appointment – so much so that lashes will extend up to half a centimetre closer to your brows.

7 L'Oréal Paris Telescopic Extensionist Mascara in Black, $32.99.

THE GOOD OIL

Whether it's scars, stretch marks or skin dullness you're keen to address, sometimes sticking with the original does the trick. Launched more than 20 years ago in Australia, Bio-Oil is still the go-to for delivering high levels of moisturisation to limbs and torso. Studies show that it can lessen the appearance of stretch marks and scaring so it's well worth having in your skincare arsenal.

8 Bio-Oil Skincare Oil, 60ml, $14.99.



Fragrance It-List

This modern, luminous fragrance from Jimmy Choo blends raspberry, orange flower and mandarin essence with rose infusion, hibiscus and freesia, and creamy base notes of vanilla and sandalwood. It feels perfect for pounding the pavement.

Jimmy Choo I Want Choo With Love EDP, 100ml, $256.

A vibrant, clean blend of sheer aldehydes, night-blooming jasmine and creamy white flowers, this scent from Narciso Rodriguez blends the brand's soft signature "musc" with a duo of cedar notes, white vanilla and amber for a fragrance that lingers on the skin.

Narciso Rodriguez For Her Pure Musc Blanc EDP Intense, 100ml, $264.

Inspired by light, this sensual new fragrance from Issey Miyake brings together green mandarin, neroli and a shimmering heart of orange blossom, freesia accord and white musk for a scent that feels like optimism in a (very beautiful) bottle.

Issey Miyake Lumière d'Issey EDP, 100ml, $251.



AJE S/S 2026



Cleanse in Style

Dior has reinvented its makeup removers with pH levels suitable for sensitive skin. Our faves? L'Huile Off/On, $82, which removes waterproof and transfer-proof products while nourishing skin, and Le Biphase Off/On, $75, which removes even long-wear makeup from eyes, lashes and lips. Team them with La Mousse Off/On Foaming Cleanser, $90.

TRY, BUY, LOVE.

WORDS SALLY HUNWICK



PROTECT THY SKIN

Here are two new sunscreen releases to love and use – rain, hail or shine!

Best for daily use: Ultra lightweight with a new UV filter, Mexoryl 400, this is La Roche-Posay's biggest innovation in UV in 20 years, so it's now even more capable at helping to protect skin.

La Roche-Posay Anthelios UVmune 400 Ultra Invisible Fluid SPF 50+, $42.99.

Best for pimple-prone skin: This oil-free, moisturiser with SPF 50+ from Natio has been formulated with aloe to help cool and hydrate blemish-prone skin and keep it shine-free.

Natio Clear Urban Defence Face Fluid SPF 50+, $19.95.

Always read the label and follow the directions for use.



ZIMMERMANN S/S 2026

ROOT OF THE ISSUE

Here are two hair products that will help nix root-related issues, no matter how much time you have:

Five minutes: You've had to push your colour appointment

A hair appointment missed and suddenly your part line looks flecked with greys or whites. Don't panic, this root touch-up spray from L'Oréal Paris will conceal them in seconds. With an accurate spray nozzle, the formula stays put until your next wash (no wonder it's the number one root disguiser on the planet).

L'Oréal Paris Magic Retouch Temporary Root Concealer Spray in Dark Brown, $18.99.

20 minutes: You want lift and bounce

If your hair looks lank, weak and dull, it often starts at the roots. This new release by R+Co is designed to lift clean, damp hair at its base and bring locks to life. Here, biotin helps to strengthen strands, while a keramatch vegan protein helps to hydrate and boost elasticity.

R+Co Bleu Root Booster Volume Spray, $68.



Imaxtree/Snapper Images



ASK SALLY

Our beauty director, Sally Hunwick, answers your questions

What do you think of dermaplaning?

Watching France's ice dance duo Laurence Fournier Beaudry and Guillaume Cizeron at the 2026 Winter Olympics was a mesmerising spectacle of smoothness. The pair move across the ice with a fluidity that takes your breath away. Their blades seemingly hardly touching the ice as they trace whisper-thin paths in perfect synchrony. As they glided to gold, everything looked seamless – bodies flowing through space as if friction simply did not exist. And it struck me how deeply we are drawn to smoothness.

Beauty has its own versions of that glide: the slip of a serum across bouncy freshly cleansed skin; the velvety sweep of moisturiser melting into the dermis; the quiet satisfaction of fingertips moving across a complexion that's soft, refined and polished like velvet.

Smoothness is one of beauty's most enduring obsessions. And often, it begins with hair – or rather, the removal of it. Our fascination with hair-free skin isn't only aesthetic; it's tactile, and there is something undeniably pleasing about skin that feels satin-like beneath fingertips.

Which perhaps explains the growing popularity of facial dermaplaning, the delicate act of removing the fine veil of peach fuzz that sits across most of our cheeks and jawline. When it's gone, the skin feels almost seal-like in its smoothness, light reflects differently across the surface, products seem to melt in better. That glassy look we all crave feels more attainable.

Loved by Gwenyth Paltrow, Miranda Kerr and Jessica Alba, the treatment is readily available these days. At Australian Skin Clinics, a dermaplaning session ($149) will create a smoother, more radiant skin texture because it not only removes that fuzzy, vellus hair but also sloughs away the very top layers of cells and debris from the skin surface. The exfoliation also doubles as a way to fight clogged pores.

At-home tools from brands like Revlon and Bondi Blades have brought the ritual into bathrooms, allowing women to re-create that just-treated glow. A few (careful) strokes and suddenly skincare glides differently, makeup sits more seamlessly, the complexion feels more refined. Tech brand Braun meanwhile has mechanised the route to smoothness with its glow-making FS1000 Hair Remover.

For me, though, the promise of ultra-smoothness is not enough to go down the dermaplane route. One thing I have tried? A professional enzyme treatment, which dissolves vellus hair instead of cutting it. DMK's cult Enzyme Therapy facial contains specialised enzymes to help gently remove dead cells while stimulating circulation. When the mask is removed, skin can feel almost otherworldly soft and luminous – and, yes, hair free. (Try it at Vaia Skin and Wellness in Sydney; from $350.)

If you're not inclined to remove hair, rest assured that smoothness also comes down to the texture of skin itself. At-home enzymes offer another route to skin refinement. Increasingly they appear in advanced skincare formulas designed to smooth and support skin renewal such as Dermalogica's new Phyto Nature e✲ Regenerating Daily Exosome Leave-On Treatment. It combines enzymes with exosomes to support cellular renewal. The result is skin that appears smoother, more radiant and polished day by day.

Technology, too, has entered the smoothness arena. Skin retexturising treatments such as Cutera's Laser Genesis offer a gentle form of resurfacing that builds over time. The glow-up can be done in a lunch break with no downtime, thanks to the device's high repetition micro-second pulses and controlled dermal heating to stimulate collagen. Over time, fine lines soften, texture improves and the skin becomes noticeably smoother. You can book in a Laser Genesis session at Skin Bottega in Melbourne, $349. *(Note: This treatment is available in-clinic only and the product is not available for sale to the general public.)*

Perhaps this is why the pursuit of smoothness endures. There is something so satisfying about the feeling of makeup slipping effortlessly across gleaming skin, or the glint of light bouncing tantalisingly off a cheekbone. The good news: there are many ways to get there.



From left: Dermalogica Phyto Nature e² Regenerating Daily Exosome Leave-On Treatment, $266; **Braun** Face Mini Hair Remover FS1000, $49.95; **Revlon** Face Defuzzer, $18.

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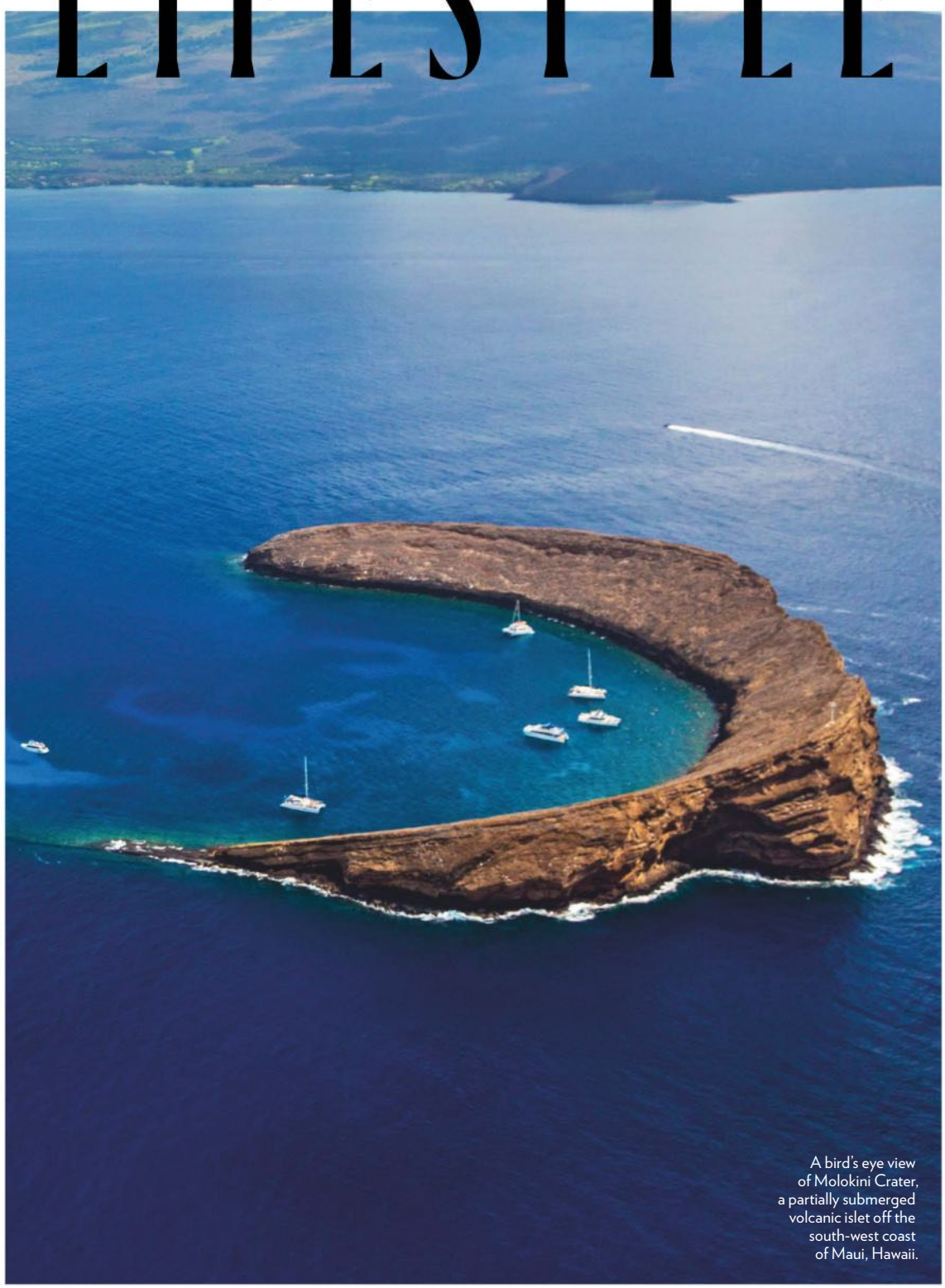
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LIFESTYLE



A bird's eye view of Molokini Crater, a partially submerged volcanic islet off the south-west coast of Maui, Hawaii.

This month we visit four of Hawaii's beautifully lush islands, take a look at the fresh, timeless interiors Tamsin Johnson created for a Gold Coast canal home, check into Pier One Sydney Harbour, and bring you the latest industry news

Photography Hawaii Tourism Authority (HTA)/Tor Johnson.

Coastal Calm



When a Sydney family swapped beachside Bronte for the Gold Coast's canals, their new home called for interiors that felt fresh and timeless

PHOTOGRAPHY ANSON SMART **WORDS** TAMSIN JOHNSON



Opposite The verandah features steel-blue and cream tumbled-marble flooring in a checkerboard pattern.

This page In the kitchen, glazed powder-blue backsplash tiles and Elba marble benchtops are standouts.



"There must always be a little discord in
a room to keep the observer on their toes
and ensure a space does not become stale"





Opposite The ceiling's timber panelling with strapping detail flows from the living and dining areas into the kitchen.

This page, from top The study hosts mid-century cane and rattan furniture; while archways soften the transition between rooms.

While I love a contemporary finish or accent – a sharp, clean line; modern art; the sleekness of concrete, marble, terrazzo – it's not often that I'm called in to work with a new build. How refreshing, then, to receive a call from a family who had decided to sell in Bronte, Sydney, and move to the canals of Mermaid Waters on the Gold Coast.

A spacious, contemporary render-and-weatherboard had gone up, and it was a bit Montauk, a bit Bermuda, a bit Australia. Understated, fresh, classic. I was there to soften the newness, to age it a little and ensure it would also age well. To me, the necessary ingredients of a design that endures include a balancing act between old and new, an emphasis on high-quality materials and finishes, and a tried-and-true colour scheme.

The notable features of this home were scale and a breezy continuity between living spaces. The ground level is completely open plan, with shuttered French doors onto a generous verandah that wraps around the entire house, giving the sense of indoor and outdoor as one. Australians are very attached to their verandahs, perhaps because they epitomise a nonchalant, outdoor way of life so valorised in our culture. I am glad the architect decided to celebrate their ongoing appeal, as it gave me the opportunity to run steel blue and cream tumbled-marble flooring in a checkerboard pattern through these areas.

On the terrace, I let the view of the pool and the canal beyond do the talking, while leaning on classic combinations to deliver what I came to think of as an East Coast American holiday-house aesthetic. Here, the clean lines of the barbecue and pale oak cabinetry interplay harmoniously with the Moroccan-tiled backsplash. Steel-blue shutters bring a texture and softness that a wall could not deliver – a simple, effective move.

Relaxed but sophisticated, the kitchen's timber-panelled ceiling with strapping detail speaks to the routed joinery. The glazed powder-blue tiles of the backsplash and Elba marble benchtops are standouts. And a bifold window opens to the outside breakfast bar, effortlessly incorporating the outdoors.

In the study, mid-century cane and rattan in various iterations, inherently coastal,



anchor the room. I adore the French cane desk – its ends reminiscent of a cresting wave. An Audoux Minet rope floor lamp implies the setting, but a 1980s Italian desk chair rebels against it. There must always be a little discord in a room to keep the observer on their toes and ensure a space does not become stale.

Whitewashed timber flooring connects all the downstairs rooms, but for upstairs, the rope-like texture of sisal was a natural choice. It sets the tone for a series of rooms in which texture is called on to keep things interesting. In the main bedroom, fringed bedding, the luscious velvet of the Pierre Frey upholstery on the sofa, and the rough alabaster of the bedside lamps are wonderfully tactile. I could not resist introducing a few elements of intrigue, such as a turquoise Ettore Sottsass-inspired vase and a Hollywood Regency–style, glass-topped coffee table sitting on what appears to be a sheaf of wheat (a talisman of good fortune made famous by Coco Chanel). While this room achieves an understated elegance, it is never staid or predictable.

"In the main bathroom, eye-catching Doga mosaic flooring is tonally in step with the fine matchstick roman blinds"

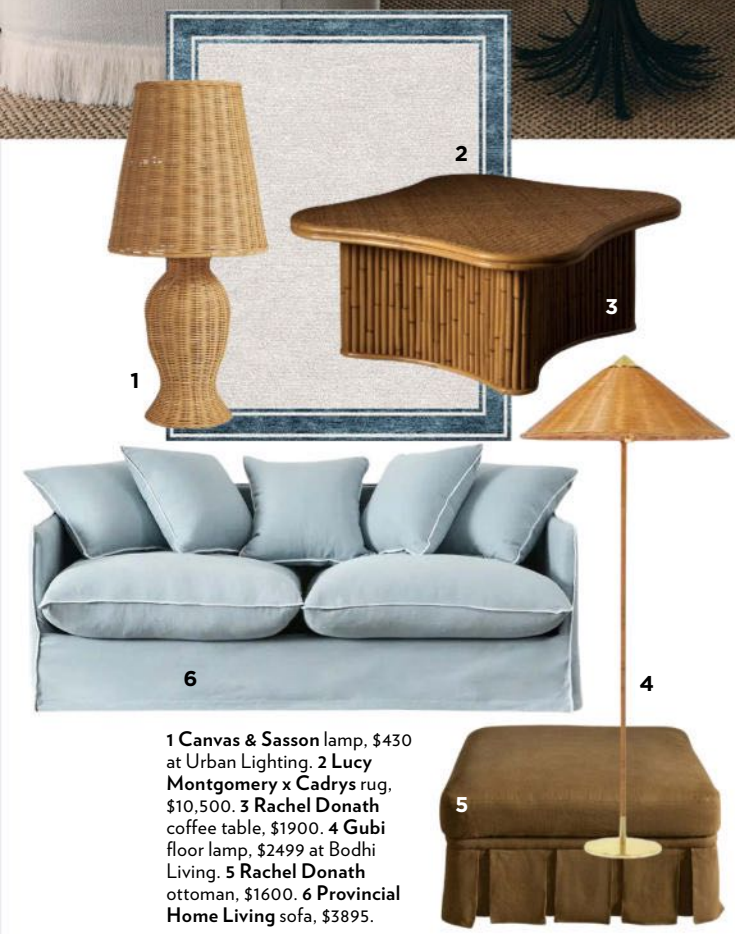




Clockwise from top Rose Uniacke plaster sconces hang above the traditional Victoria + Albert York bath; steel-blue shutters bring a texture and softness to the wall; and the blue pops against the exterior's predominantly white palette.

Opposite In the main bedroom, fringed bedding, velvet Pierre Frey upholstery on the sofa, and alabaster bedside table lamps are wonderfully tactile.

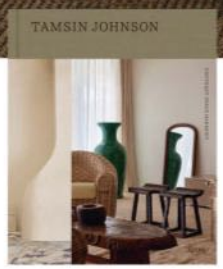




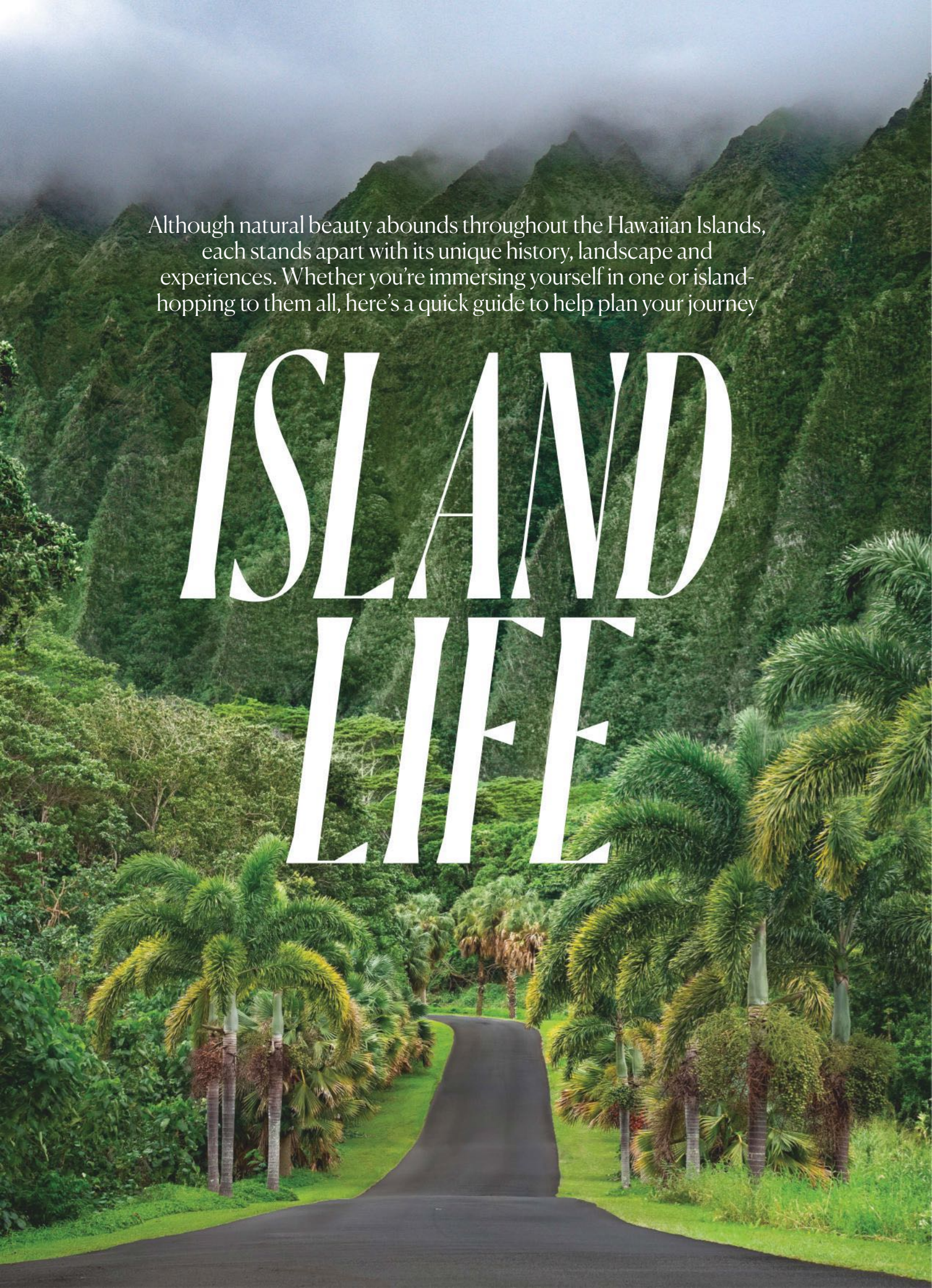
1 Canvas & Sasson lamp, $430 at Urban Lighting. **2 Lucy Montgomery x Cadrys** rug, $10,500. **3 Rachel Donath** coffee table, $1900. **4 Gubi** floor lamp, $2499 at Bodhi Living. **5 Rachel Donath** ottoman, $1600. **6 Provincial Home Living** sofa, $3895.

The bathrooms in this home continue the theme of quiet luxury, with a colour palette that is earthy yet refined. In the main bathroom, eye-catching Doga mosaic flooring is tonally in step with the fine matchstick roman blinds. The vanity, solid and naturally dyed concrete, lends a certain stoicism to the room, alongside a traditional Victoria + Albert York bath. Rose Uniacke plaster sconces in clamshell form help reintegrate a coastal ethos. In another bathroom, a whimsical curved stool made of solid American oak is a point of interest, right at home with an antique brass mirror by Gio Ponti and a tumbled-marble floor in chocolate and biscuit.

The interiors of this home whisper rather than shout. The property's position and size speak volumes, so a pared-back approach that focused on quality materials and the judicious use of special pieces was required. Happily, the result is a timeless home, fresh and graceful in its bearing, with a minimalism that subtly weaves its magic. Who says a simple design cannot leave a lasting impression?



This is an edited extract from *Tamsin Johnson: Contrast, Space, Harmony* by Tamsin Johnson and Stephanie Cornish (Rizzoli, $145), out now.



Although natural beauty abounds throughout the Hawaiian Islands, each stands apart with its unique history, landscape and experiences. Whether you're immersing yourself in one or island-hopping to them all, here's a quick guide to help plan your journey

ISLAND LIFE





From top Hawai'i's first resort, on Maui; the islands are a whale hotspot; ancient petroglyphs carved into lava rock.

O'AHU: THE GATHERING PLACE

O'ahu lives up to its name of "the Gathering Place" as it's the most populated and visited of the Hawaiian Islands. Home to the only urban city in Hawai'i, Honolulu, O'ahu blends high-rises and bustling streets with historical sites and scenic coastlines. You can enjoy a wide array of accommodation, shops and restaurants, with the faster pace and conveniences of a city. If the urban rhythm feels overwhelming, don't worry – you can easily escape to peaceful retreats outside of Honolulu, or what we call "town".

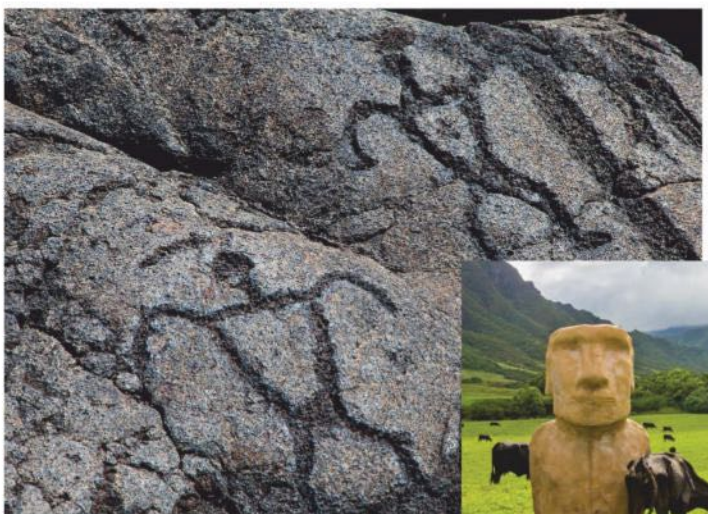
Maui is vibrant yet unhurried, with a lively metropolitan touch

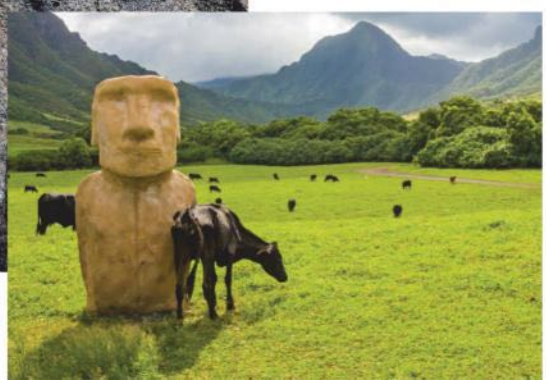
Keep in mind that with the island's popularity comes notorious traffic. Once it hits 3pm on a weekday, commuters take to the road to head back home, so be sure to add buffer time into your travel around O'ahu (and always drive with aloha). Try to visit the most popular attractions early so you can find parking, especially on weekends.

MAUI: THE VALLEY ISLE

Maui is vibrant yet unhurried, with charming towns throughout the island and enough of a metropolitan touch to feel lively. The south and west sides are renowned for their postcard-perfect coastlines and high-end resorts, with Kā'anapali and Wailea beaches considered some of the best in the world. In Upcountry, the cool slopes of Haleakalā foster a thriving agriculture sector and a strong connection to the land and sky above.

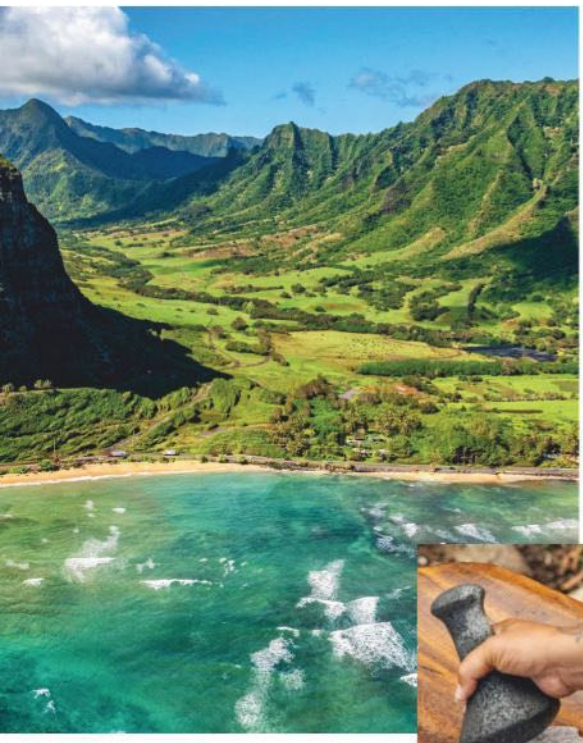
Although a trip to Maui is a good idea at any time of year, during winter (December to April), humpback whales grace the islands with their presence, and Maui's shallow waters are the best places to view them. As it's the second-largest island, driving between areas such as West Maui to Upcountry or the North Shore will take around an hour with typical traffic, and many attractions close at 4pm, so plan your days accordingly.





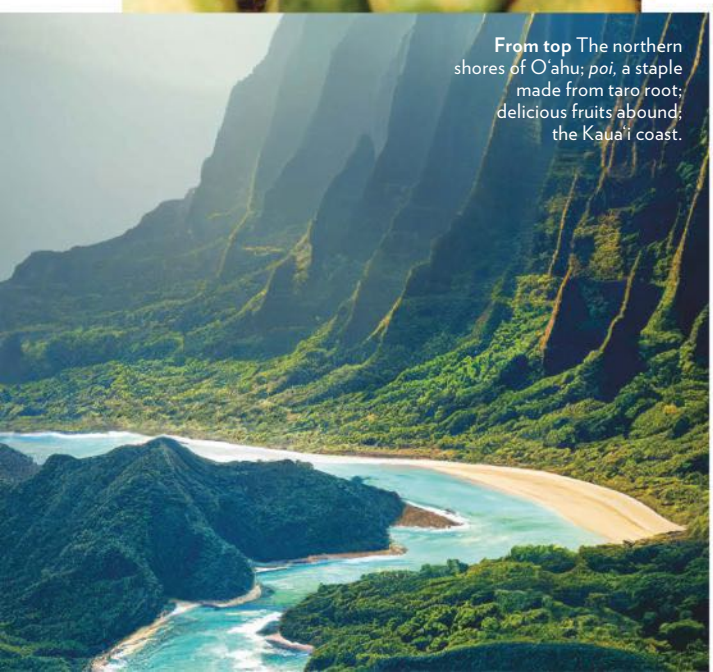
Opposite The dramatic (and Instagram magnet) road to the Ho'omaluhia Botanical Garden on Oahu. **Left** Kualoa Ranch on Oahu.

Photography Istock; Island of Hawai'i Visitors Bureau/Tor Johnson









From top The northern shores of O'ahu; *poi*, a staple made from taro root; delicious fruits abound; the Kaua'i coast.

At volcano summits – such as the colossal Maunakea – the temperature drops and snow is even possible

HAWAI'I ISLAND: THE BIG ISLAND

Not only is Hawai'i Island the youngest island, it is also the largest, with enough space to fit all the others inside it. Its vast expanse and active volcanic geography create strikingly contrasting landscapes. The eastern Hilo side is one of the rainiest regions in the US, incredibly lush and vibrantly green. On the other end, Kona is sun-drenched, with clear weather almost every day and seemingly endless lava fields. At volcano summits, such as the colossal 4205-metre Maunakea (which is actually a whopping 10,205 metres from the ocean floor), the temperature drops and snow is even possible.

Hawai'i Island's ambiance is relaxed, so take your time and meander. However, plan for long driving times to get between places as the island is 150 kilometres wide. I suggest exploring one region each day – such as focusing on Waimea, Kona or Hilo – so you're not spending most of your time in the car. Keep an eye out while driving, especially at night, for goats and sheep, both invasive species that wander onto the roads.

KAUA'I: THE GARDEN ISLE

The oldest Hawaiian island, at over five million years old, Kaua'i carries a deep ancestral spirit and brims with a dramatic natural beauty that has flourished for centuries. From the steep ridges of the Nāpali Coast to the lush Wailua River – the epicentre of Hawaiian culture as it's where ali'i (royals) once lived – Kaua'i surrounds you in verdant splendour.

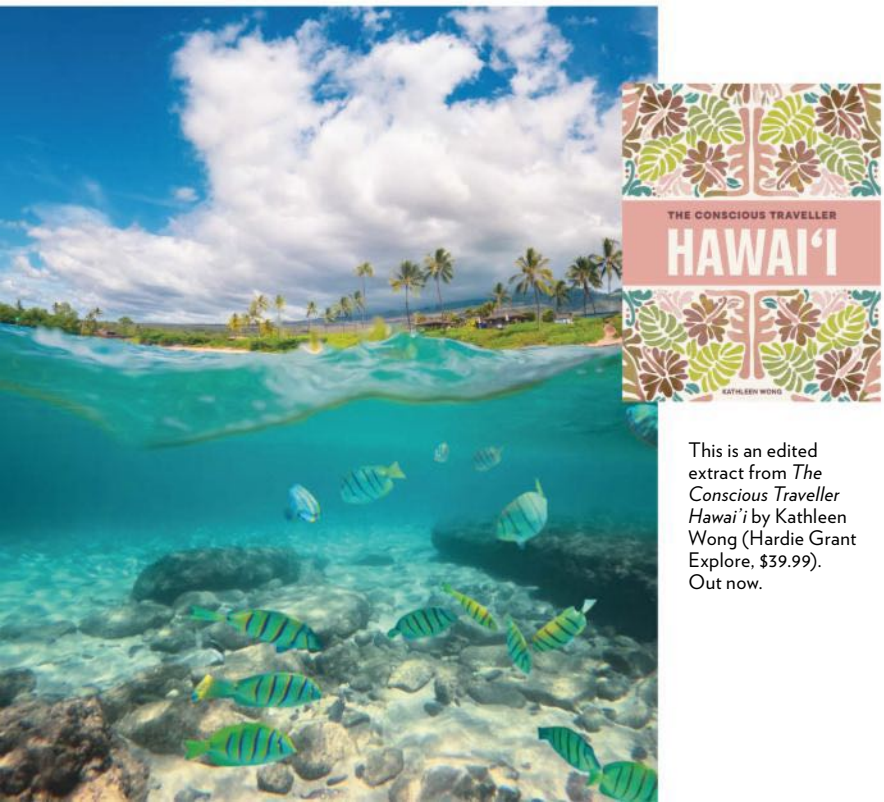
The island is also home to one of the wettest places on earth, the cloud-shrouded Mount Wai'ale'ale, so you can expect more rainy weather than on the other islands. Beyond its immersive landscapes, the island offers a profound sense of grounding from its historical churches, small towns and the only Hindu monastery in the state. Be patient as you're driving around Kaua'i as the island is connected by just one main road that hugs the shoreline (and no-one on Kaua'i is in a rush).

Photography Istock; Hawai'i Tourism Authority/Heather Goodman; Hawai'i Tourism Authority/Ben Ono; Island of Hawai'i Visitors Bureau/Tyler Schmitt



From top The Weeping Wall of waterfalls; *ki'i* statues; coral reefs in Maui's crystal-clear sea.

Kaua'i carries a deep ancestral spirit and a dramatic natural beauty



This is an edited extract from *The Conscious Traveller Hawai'i* by Kathleen Wong (Hardie Grant Explore, $39.99). Out now.

TRAVEL TIPS

Heading off to such a remote archipelago should fill you with anticipation, but it also requires some thoughtful preparation.

AGRICULTURAL DECLARATION FORM
Hawai'i's ecosystem is not only unique but fragile. Over the past few centuries, invasive species have wiped out native plants as well as animals and birds, including many species of honeycreepers. So upon entry to Hawai'i you must declare whether you're carrying any flowers, seafood, fruits, vegetables etc.

OCEAN SAFETY
Visitors should always be mindful of ocean conditions before venturing in. Go to a beach with a lifeguard station, which are situated at the more popular beaches, such as Waikīkī or Hanalei Bay. Never turn your back on the ocean, and if in doubt, don't go out. If the waves are big, keep a safe distance from the water.

MARINE LIFE
You're likely to encounter some of Hawai'i's most distinctive residents: sea turtles, monk seals, spinner dolphins, humpback whales and many birds. These moments feel magical, but it's important to view these creatures from a distance – for your safety and theirs. Familiarise yourself with distances you're required by law to keep, and never touch, chase or feed animals.

PROTECT THE REEFS
Hawai'i's oceans have around 23 per cent coral cover, and they are critical to supporting marine biodiversity. Always wear reef-safe sunscreen and never step on or touch the reef.

DRIVE WITH ALOHA
Driving in Hawai'i is both a joy and a frustration. The views can be incredible, but visitors often slow down, waving their phones out the window and creating a hazard for others. Instead, stop at one of the many lookouts to enjoy the view. Be extra careful on the winding, twisty roads and pull over if there's someone coming up behind youy thank you. And never blare the horn as you'll rarely hear it in Hawai'i. Only friendly honking is welcome.

THE GOOD LIFE



THE TABLE STRUGGLE IS REAL

Getting the table right is harder than it looks. Meet Me at the Table makes it effortless with their heritage-rooted, design-led style. From florals to graphics, every detail is considered so every setting is striking.

See meetmeatthetable.com.au



Invest in rest

If you are looking for a luxe offering in the bedroom, it would be hard to top a Tempur mattress. The premium brand, renowned for its NASA-developed pressure-relieving foam, also offers a removable, machine-washable cover for its Tempur Form mattress.

Tempur Form Plus 25cm Split King Medium mattress (pictured), $7598, from harveynorman.com.au

MINIMAL DRAMA, MAXIMUM IMPACT

Armadillo's new Linea collection takes classic Persian-inspired patterns and loosens them up. Handwoven and a little irregular, Linea is a new direction for the quiet-luxury brand, focusing more on the human element in design. Its five minimalist designs – Adagio, Allegra, Basilica, Minuet and Sonata – are about craftsmanship without the stiffness.

See armadillo-co.com







Keep it light

For wine lovers who like a naturally lighter-in-alcohol drop, the Tread Softly brand delivers. We also love the fact their sustainability credo promises to plant a native tree for every case sold. Prices start from $15.99 a bottle.

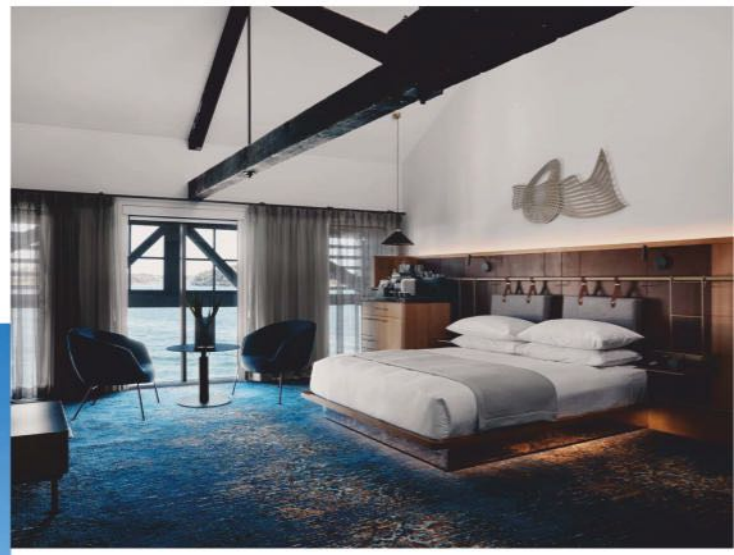
See treadsoftly.com

Photography Benjamin J Gooch.
Words Melissa Gaudron.

Pier *REVIEW*

Blending panoramic harbour views, curated design and hints of its storied past, this Walsh Bay retreat is a highly coveted gem





In the dog-friendly ground floor rooms, four-legged guests are catered to

Sydney is defined by its harbour. It shapes how the city moves, how it looks and, increasingly, how it is experienced. But for all the hotels that claim proximity to the water, very few feel truly immersed in it.

Pier One Sydney Harbour is one of the exceptions. Set along the timber wharf at Walsh Bay, the hotel occupies a position that feels at once central and distinctly removed. A short walk from Circular Quay, The Rocks and Barangaroo, it places you within reach of the city's most recognisable landmarks while retaining a sense of weekend-escape seclusion.

Rooms sit on and over the water, the harbour less a view than a constant presence. Light moves easily through the space, softened by a palette drawn from the bay itself: mineral tones, navy and soft grey. Contemporary art and subtle Federation-era references anchor the interiors, while furniture takes cues from high-end yacht design, with rounded edges, natural finishes and beds trimmed with inlaid lighting (so they appear to hover above the floor). Marble ensuites are generously sized and stocked with amenities from Sydney fragrance house Who Is Elijah.

Above, from left The exterior of Pier One Sydney Harbour; and an interior view of one of the suites.

Below Pool by Pier One offers sun loungers and umbrellas next to a swimmable netted harbour pool (open through summer).



While the hotel feels boutique, it houses nearly 200 rooms and suites across three levels, with layouts informed by the original pier's structure. There are also moments of personality throughout, most notably in the dog-friendly ground floor rooms, where four-legged guests are catered to – canine minibars included.

History is embedded in the building. Long before Walsh Bay became a cultural precinct of theatres, restaurants and harbourside apartments, it was a working port. The area was reshaped under engineer H. D. Walsh, with Pier One completed in 1913 as part of a more considered harbourfront. Though the original salt-marked timber pylons remain, a $15 million redevelopment in 2019 elevated the hotel to a truly memorable stay.

This is most obvious in the pontoon. Reimagined in collaboration with Business & Pleasure Co., it leans Riviera in tone. Here, a netted swimming enclosure is suspended in the harbour, flanked by sun loungers, umbrellas and uninterrupted views across the bay. (A bucket-list dip in the harbour alone is surely worth the price of admission.)

The design focus continues at Pier Bar. Set directly on the water, it's calibrated for long afternoons that slip into evening, with fresh seafood, seasonal salads and cocktails on offer. Next door, Pier Dining shifts the register slightly via a menu that brings a light French inflection to local produce such as oysters.

For all its considered design and curation, the appeal of Pier One resolves into something far simpler. In a harbour lined with chains and skyscrapers, it remains something of a rarity: a stay that feels entirely its own. *For more, see pieronesydney harbour.com.au/*

Photography Angie Silvy; courtesy of Pier One Sydney Harbour. **Words** Caitlin Napier.

TAURUS SEASON

WORDS NATASHA WEBER @astrotash



Taureans, get set for a bright and bullish new beginning, but first you'll need to get your house in order with some self-reflection. At work, keep your nose clean, your lips zipped and your hands busy

April 20–May 20

TAURUS

Pluto goes retrograde on May 7, and the office games begin. A boss or colleague could be scheming behind the scenes, so keep your eyes open and stay well above the fray. The new moon in your sign on May 17 ushers in fresh possibilities and a beautiful new beginning. This is your reset moment but you need to do the inner work first. Self-reflection now means you won't be repeating the same old cycles. On May 19, Mars blasts into your sign, cranking up your sex appeal. Singles, make sure that your date is curious about your mind, and not just angling for access to your body.

POWER DATES May 3, 17, 19

May 21–June 20

GEMINI

Your mind is your superpower this month, and when Mercury enters your sign on May 17 there's one idea in particular that has serious potential. Follow it properly. Flesh it out. On May 19, watch for creeping insecurity or for someone operating with motives that may be questionable. Keep your guard up around anyone whose flattery feels strategic rather than sincere. Then the mood changes. When the sun enters your sign on May 21, your luck begins to turn. After a long slog, you can finally see the light at the end of the tunnel. Keep your focus on your desires. Manifesting is really just daydreaming with direction.

POWER DATES May 17, 21, 23

June 21–July 22

CANCER

May has seduction written all over it. If you're single, the full moon on the 2nd could attract someone mysteriously private and hard to read, which only adds to the appeal. Couples, you might consider seeing a sex therapist or give an erotic fantasy proper airtime. From May 19, Venus enters your sign, turning your glow all the way up. If you've been thinking about a new look, try a smudgy kohl-rimmed eye, a frosty pink lip or the blunt bob that everyone's wearing. And if something was left unfinished earlier in the month, May's blue moon draws it back into your orbit. This time, you see it through.

POWER DATES May 12, 19, 29

July 23–August 22

LEO

Pluto's rewind from May 7 travels through your relationship zone, reopening an issue you thought was done and dusted. Annoying? Perhaps. Useful? Absolutely. This gives you another chance to clear the air and put the issue to bed for good. If you're job hunting, send out your résumé before the new moon on May 17, because doors are swinging open. Ambitious Lions could snare a promotion or be handed a golden opportunity to showcase their skills. From the 21st, your social life picks up. There's somewhere exciting to go, people to see and every reason to turn heads.
POWER DATES May 7, 11, 21

August 23–September 22

VIRGO

The full moon on May 2 makes you privy to a secret or a vital piece of information. It won't just land in your lap, however. You may need to dig deeper, ask uncomfortable questions or push past polite pleasantries to get to the truth. From the 17th, Mercury becomes your secret weapon in negotiations. For some, this brings a contract straight into your inbox. For others, it's the satisfying clink of glasses over a deal that you've worked hard to secure. If a family member missed out on something or if a home project fizzled out, the blue moon on May 31 rings in a second chance.
POWER DATES May 6, 13, 17

September 23–October 22

LIBRA

Mars whispers about quick money this month, but don't be seduced. Whether it's a side hustle promising fast returns, a friend's startup opportunity or a flashy investment scheme, slow down and crunch the numbers – twice. When Venus enters your corner at work from May 19, support arrives through a woman with a velvet manner and nerves of steel. She's a loyal ally. Around the 23rd, Uranus throws in a wildcard. You might dash off on a last-minute wellness retreat, book a sleeper train adventure, or enrol in an AI literacy course. Follow the impulse, as it could open an exciting new chapter.
POWER DATES May 18, 19, 29

October 23–November 21

SCORPIO

May's full moon in your sign says magic happens in partnership. Whether you're co-parenting, teaming up with a brilliant creative or sorting joint finances, you'll get further with a trusted plus one than going solo. Then on the 19th, Mars, your home planet, barrels into your relationship zone, turning up the temperature. The chemistry could be scorching, but so could the arguments. Keep the drama out of pointless back-and-forth and channel the heat more satisfyingly. From the 21st, the sun restores your faith in people. Trust grows when words and actions match, and then your nervous system can finally exhale.
POWER DATES May 2, 7, 26

November 22–December 21

SAGITTARIUS

May's full moon parts the veil between worlds. Your dreams may be unusually vivid, or a loved one who's crossed over could reach you through a familiar song or a feather in an unlikely place. From the 7th, Pluto's retrograde exposes the old narratives and mental loops that have been directing your decisions. Awareness is the turning point. Once you catch the pattern, you can rewrite your story. Then, on May 19, Venus tempts you to splurge on something obscenely luxurious. Spoil yourself stupid with the degustation menu, 1000 thread-count sheets or fresh peonies that make your home smell expensive.
POWER DATES May 5, 11, 31

December 22–January 19

CAPRICORN

When a friend's true motives come to light around May 2, you may be tempted to use what you know as leverage. Bad idea. The full moon asks you to keep your loyalties tight and your hands clean. If you are launching a project or building a platform, the new moon on May 17 favours digital ventures, from a podcast or Substack to an online course or content series. Around May 26, Mars clashes with Pluto, and money issues become awkward. Lending cash to a friend or blurring the line between generosity and obligation could leave you with a sour taste. Keep your wallet zipped and expectations tighter.
POWER DATES May 2, 23, 29

January 20–February 18

AQUARIUS

Pluto begins its retrograde through your sign on May 7, bringing a welcome pause. After months of relentless personal transformation, this is your cosmic breather. Take some time out in nature, try a silent retreat or just let your couch hold you for a while. Reflect on how far you've come, because you've been so busy evolving that you haven't paused to appreciate your progress. By the 21st, the sun enters your fun zone and pleasure takes priority. Whatever makes you lose track of time, give yourself permission to stay there longer. If you're buying or selling property, Mars brings the momentum you've been waiting for.
POWER DATES May 2, 7, 23

February 19–March 20

PISCES

Mars has your mouth running hot this month. The things you've held back come spilling out with more fire than finesse, so catch yourself before an honest conversation turns into a detonation. After May 19, Venus rides in like a storybook romance. Singles feel the butterflies they'd stopped believing in, and couples rediscover the version of each other they first fell for. The blue moon at month's end is your vindication. You've battered your self-belief and borderline sold your soul chasing this dream, but when it comes to fruition and the applause rolls in, your whole body remembers why you kept going.
POWER DATES May 6, 22, 25

March 21–April 19

ARIES

The full moon on May 2 rouses your green-eyed monster. But instead of envying a friend's success, treat it as proof of what's possible for you too. If they can do it, so can you. By mid-month, money moves like a revolving door, going out as quickly as it comes in. A proper budget review helps you regain balance. The blue moon on May 31 offers a second chance, and students may get another crack at marks they weren't happy with. For others, a family situation circles back, but this time you're wise to the pattern. What once rattled you now shows you how much you've grown.
POWER DATES May 5, 19, 26

Collage Inga Campbell. **Photography** Getty Images

BEFORE YOU GO



"Seeing or being part of strangers connecting feels like the entire point of being alive"

Ahead of his role in *The Devil Wears Prada 2*, comedian Caleb Hearon talks about fashion crimes and thanksgiving traditions – but will never share his signature scent

What will your future self thank you for? Hopefully he'll feel like I prioritised the right things: spent time with people I love and invested in my relationships. I'm pretty smart with my money, so maybe that too.

What's a project you feel most proud of? My upcoming film, *Trash Mountain*, which I wrote [with Ruby Caster] and co-starred in with Zooey Deschanel. It's a deeply personal film and we were lucky to make it with an incredible team of artists. I can't wait for everybody to see it!

Which is your favourite holiday? Thanksgiving every year. Mostly because of the origin and politics! No; I love the meal and the time of year. My family comes to my house and makes a huge meal, and then my friends drop by all night and we have pie, play games and catch up. It's the best!

Who is your style icon? I don't know, [actor] John Goodman?

Who was your childhood or teenage crush? I had it pretty bad for Usher. It didn't help that they always played his songs during the couples' skates at the skating rink. All the thin, cool boys with swoopy hair would skate with a girl and I'd just be vibing alone to Usher.

What's a phrase you overuse? Probably "Say that", which I use to describe truly anything at all. It's a useless disease I have. You're hungry? Say that. The weather sucks today? Sayyyy that! Your grandma passed unexpectedly, and you need to get home for her service? Say that!

The biggest fashion crime you've committed? I'm sure there have been plenty – and will be more, by technical standards – but I'm of the opinion that anything I do is cool if I say it is.

Name something that instantly inspires you: Witnessing strangers connect: somebody making faces at a baby in a grocery store, or complaining with the person behind you in a line that's taking too long, or turning to the person next to you at a concert and screaming the lyrics to a song you both love. Seeing that or being part of that feels like the entire point of being alive.

Do you have a signature scent? I'll never tell! But I've been wearing the same cologne for a very long time.

Which topic do you wish people would talk about more? How lucky we are to be alive at the same time as Queen Latifah; or what we're going to do about the billionaires who are destroying our lives and planet. We can discuss both, I think.

What's something that feels like a luxury to you? Unstructured free time. There's nothing more valuable to me.

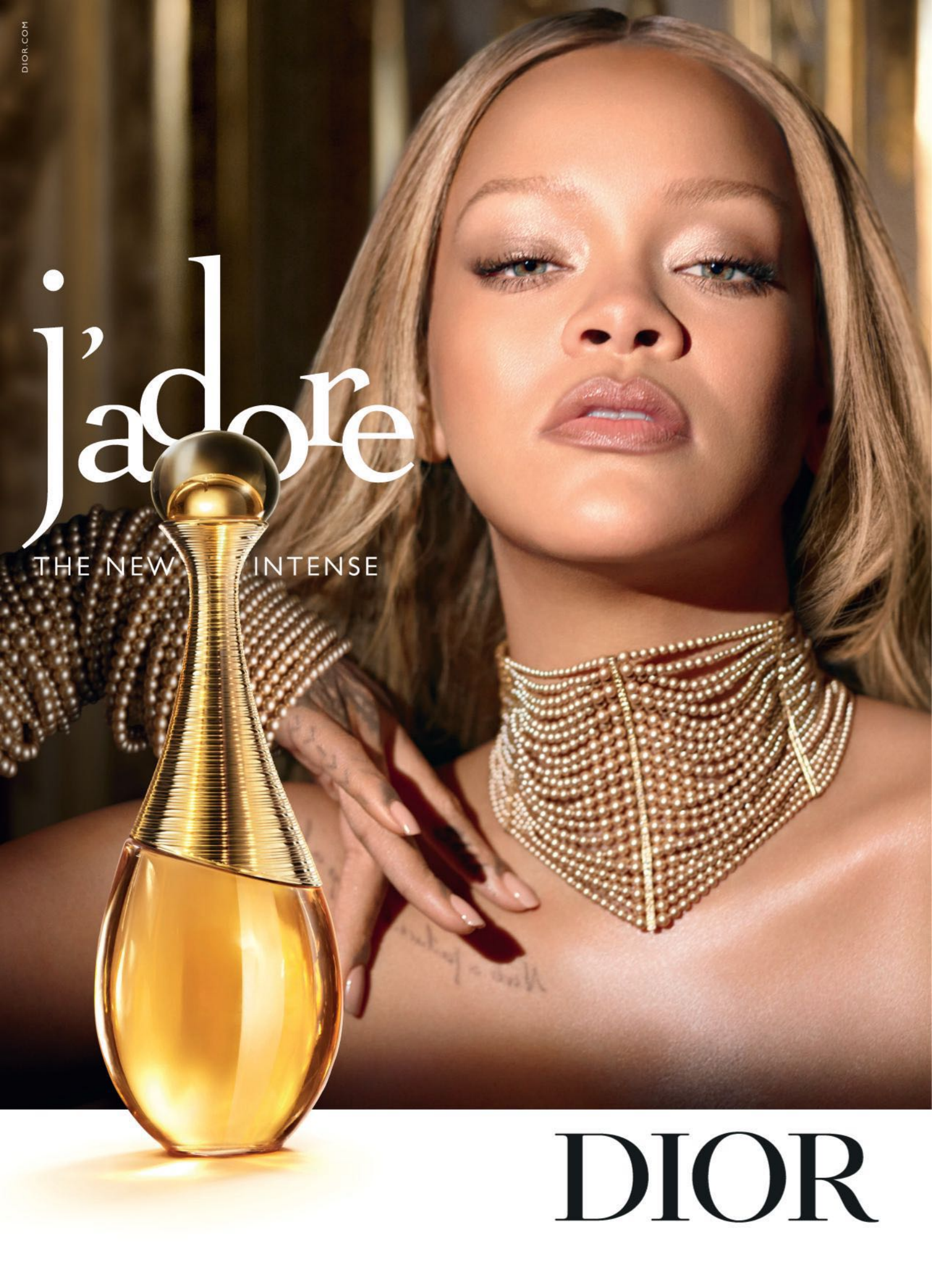
Who do you think holds the real power in fashion? Thin people, from the looks of it. Shout-out thin people! Y'all look like you're having a lot of fun with it.

What question do you hate being asked? Pretty much anything about my "viral moments" at this point. There's rarely ever anything more to say about it. Like … yes, people liked that video.

The Devil Wears Prada 2 *is in cinemas April 30.*

Photography Josh Telles. **As told to** Caitlin Napier.


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