
marie claire
AUSTRALIA
Young, female & FEARLESS
MEET THE NEXT GEN OF WAR REPORTERS
Raising brave girls
How to build confidence in an anxious world
Teresa PALMER
On celebrity girl gangs, self-criticism and raising five kids
fresh start
The fashion hits your wardrobe is waiting for
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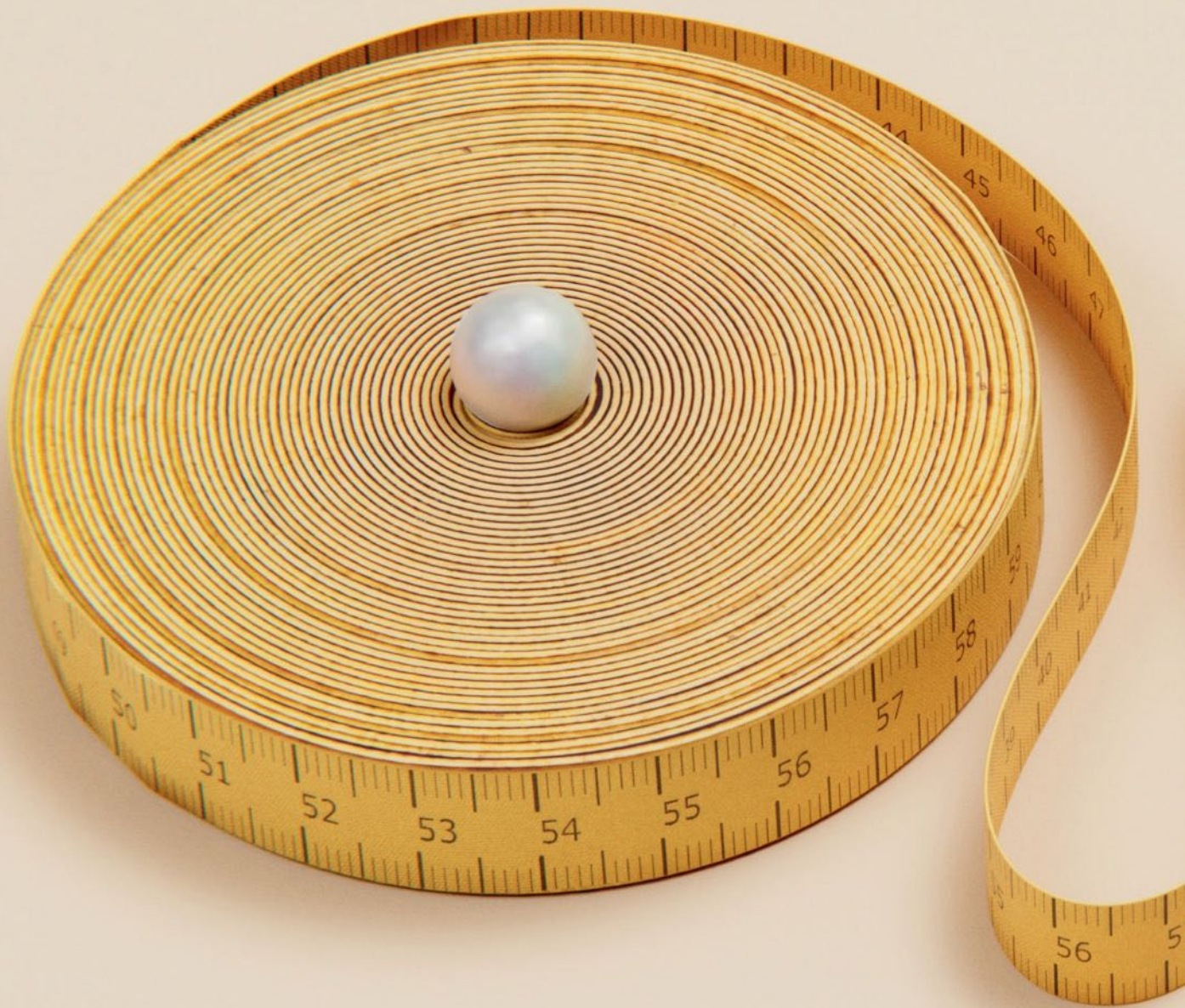

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^$55,990 driveaway applies to new EX30 Plus Single Extended models ordered and delivered between 1/05/26 and 31/10/26. Subject to stock availability. Overseas model shown with features not included in driveaway price. Australian specification may differ. Offer may change without notice.



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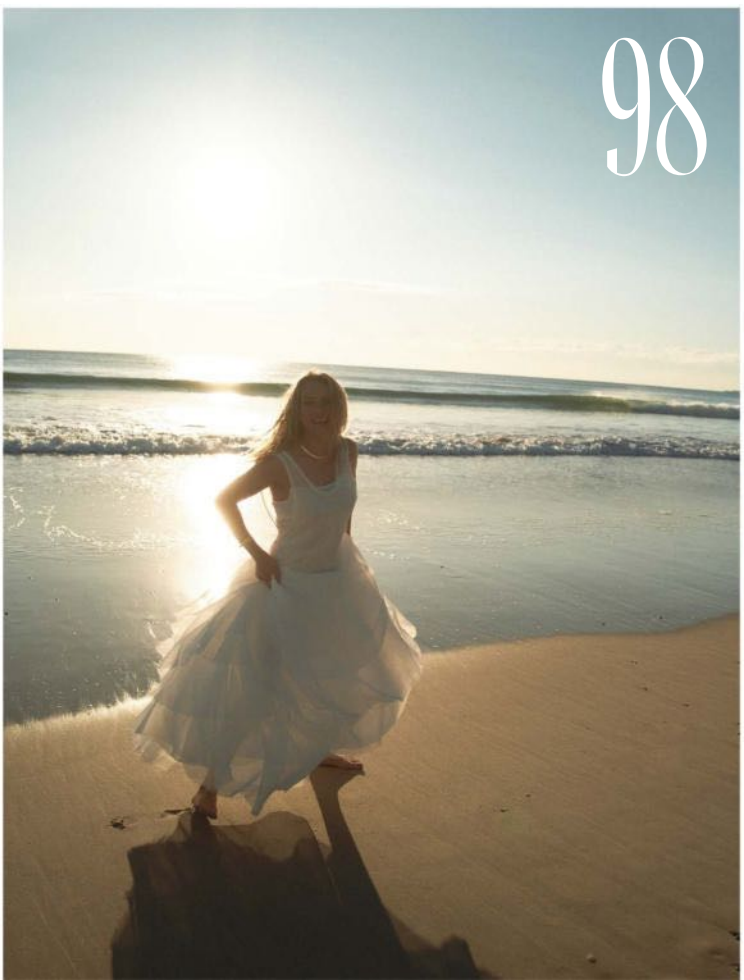
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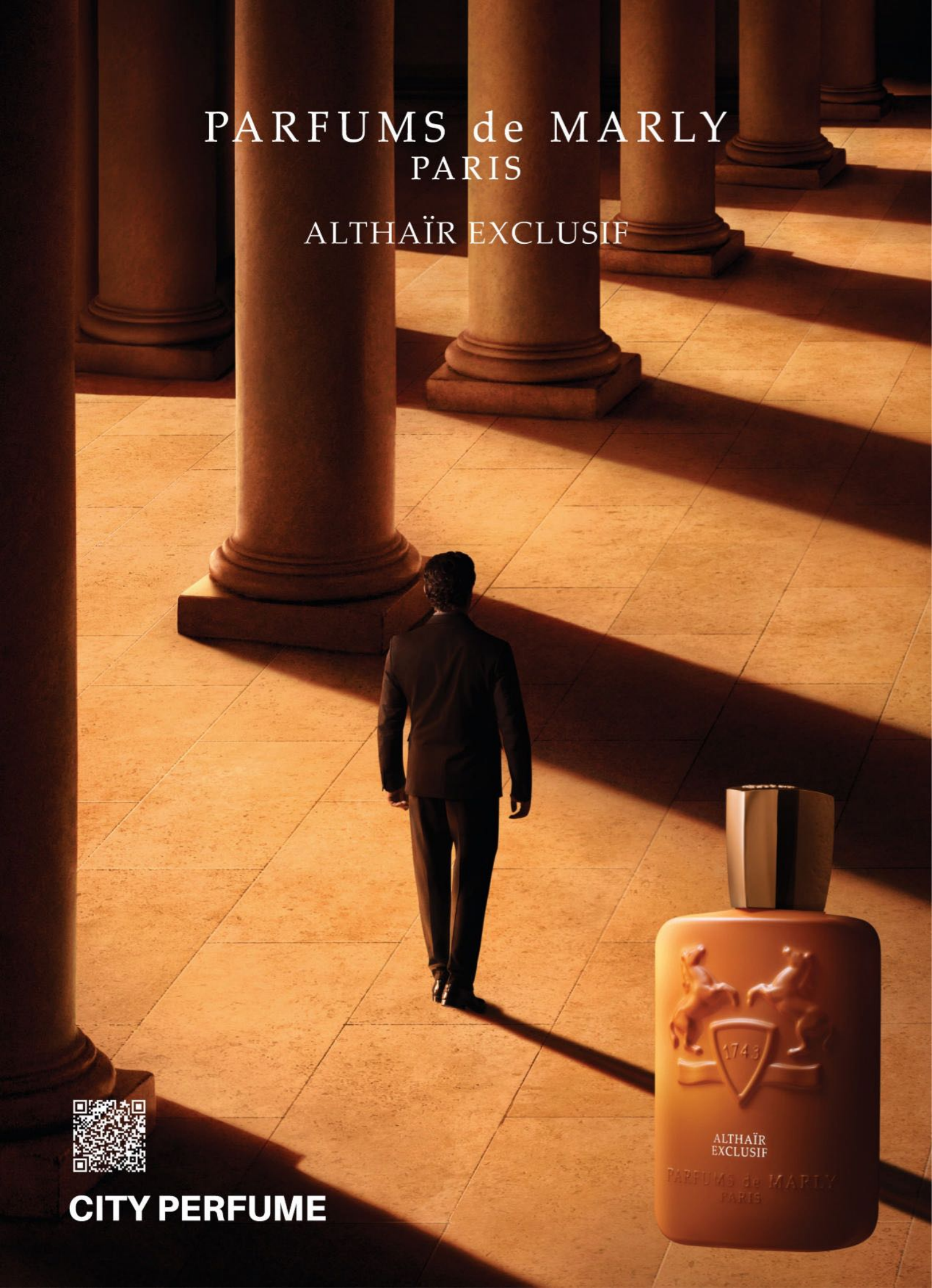
168 HOROSCOPES
It's Libra season



COVER LOOK

Teresa Palmer wears **Acler** top; **Cartier** earrings, necklace, bracelet and rings. **Photographer** Bec Parsons/Artist Group. **Stylist** Aileen Marr. **Hair** Chris Coonrod; Jessica London. **Makeup** Isabella Schimid. **Production** Robyn Fay-Perkins.

Photography Bec Parsons/Artist Group; Mario Sorrenti; Good Thanks Media; Blake Azar


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Cartier
Clash de Cartier bags (from top), $6250, $6750, and $7200.

THE CLASH

Taking inspiration from an envelope for its jewellery-style clasps, Cartier's Clash de Cartier fastening system "subtly defines the shape of the bag on either side of the handle". Leave it open for a casual look, or fasten with a twist of the stud for a more tailored, elegant fit.

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Photography courtesy Cartier



HARDY BROTHERS

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Above From page 98, see Teresa Palmer and her brood – (top, from left) Bodhi, 12, Forest, nine, Poet, seven, Prairie, five, and Lotus, 12 months – in their beautiful backyard: the beaches of Byron Bay.

There is something wonderfully fitting about Teresa Palmer being our October cover star. At 40, the Australian actor is in one of the most exciting chapters of her career, stepping into the epic world of the action-adventure game franchise *God of War* while juggling a household of five children, several creative projects and a life between Byron Bay and Vancouver. When she arrives for her interview with *marie claire* – clutching a big bucket of microwave popcorn – she is refreshingly unfiltered about the chaos.

But behind Teresa's warmth is a story of extraordinary resilience. Raised by a single mother who lived with bipolar and schizoaffective disorders, she spent periods of her childhood in public housing before moving to Los Angeles at 19 to pursue acting. Even after acclaimed performances and a career spanning two decades, Teresa admits impostor syndrome still follows her. "I pull myself down all the time," she tells us. "I don't want to be that way, especially as I have daughters."

It's a timely reflection, given this issue coincides with International Day of the Girl on October 11, a moment to celebrate the intelligence, ambition, individuality and immense potential of girls everywhere. As the mother of two daughters – a tween and a teen – I find myself increasingly thinking about the world they are inheriting, and the one we are helping to create for them. On the surface, girls today have more opportunities, more visible female role models and more language with which to challenge sexism and reject limiting gender roles. Yet, as we know, their reality is complicated. In her brilliant essay, from page 54, writer Dilvin Yasa explores the challenges confronting this generation of girls: artificial intelligence, deepfakes, online sexual abuse, toxic masculinity, climate anxiety and algorithms that can shape how they see their bodies and themselves before they fully understand what is happening. It's a lot.



Globally, the statistics remain devastating. An estimated one in five girls is married before she turns 18. Nearly one in four ever-married or partnered girls aged 15 to 19 has experienced intimate partner violence. Girls in this age group are also twice as likely as boys to not be in education, employment or training, and conflict, displacement and crisis only deepen these inequalities.

Celebrating girls must mean more than telling them they can be anything. It means protecting their right to an education, safety, bodily autonomy and a future of their own choosing. It means listening when they tell us what frightens them, taking their online lives seriously and giving them the tools to navigate a world evolving at dizzying speed. Above all, it means ensuring girls don't simply learn to survive systems that fail them, but feel empowered to change those systems entirely.

Elsewhere in the issue, Cleo Glyde takes a sharp and thought-provoking look at the booming longevity industry, from page 74, and asks whether women's entirely understandable desire to live well has been repackaged into yet another expensive obligation. And, in beauty, we declare that the bob isn't going anywhere; although, mercifully, in 2026 it has moved well beyond the one-size-fits-all "Rachel" cut.

There is joy, wit and escapism throughout these pages, but also a thread that feels especially important: women and girls should never be afraid to take up space, question what they are being sold or imagine something bigger for themselves. Teresa Palmer is the perfect example of what can happen when a girl refuses to place constraints on her own life. As her friend, producer Bruna Papandrea, so perfectly puts it, "Teresa is living proof: don't ever put limits on yourself."

It is a message worth passing on to every girl, don't you think?

Georgie

Georgie McCourt *Editor*

GEORGIE LOVES



1 Dior bag (medium), $6900, and **2** Dior Prestige La Crème, $710. **3 Louis Vuitton** beauty bag, $1470, lipstick pouch (above), $865, LV Rouge Lipstick, $320, and eyeshadow palette, $575.

Photography Julie Adams

BVLGARI

ROMA 1884



THE EAU PARFUMÉE COLLECTION

DAVID JONES



Wild West

From voluminous maxi dresses to signature vivid prints, sculptural jewellery and handwoven embellishments, the Alémais look is instantly recognisable. For autumn/winter 2026, the brand heads west, channelling an irresistible frontier spirit. Think cacti, patchwork, vintage Western typography and prairie florals, creating the perfect mix of pretty and rugged.

Visit alemais.com for more.

CURATED BY

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



Designed for effortless versatility, these South Sea pearl drop earrings in white gold can instantly transform into stunning diamond huggies. One design, two signatures.

Hardy Brothers earrings, $5590.

There's something satisfying about skincare that clocks in as you clock off. Augustinus Bader's new night cream pairs advanced TFC8 with hydrators, leaving skin looking smoother, fresher and better rested.



Augustinus Bader The Overnight Restorative Cream, $570.



SPILL THE TEA

Maison Balzac's breakfast table just got a playful makeover. The new Pomponette Breakfast Collection turns everyday rituals into objets d'art, with crowned teapots, sculptural handles and hand-applied porcelain pompons that echo the brand's beloved glassware. Made from vegan, cruelty-free fine china, it delivers across teacups, mugs, teapots, sugar bowls and milk jugs. Consider your morning tea dressed to impress.

Maison Balzac teacup (with saucer), $49, and mug, $39.



DOUBLE TAKE

Cult Design keeps living up to its name. Case in point: this covetable Bench for Two, which was designed by Nanna Ditzel in 1989 and brings sculptural elegance to shared living. Curved lines encourage connection, while beech, veneer, graphic detailing and red accents provide a pop of fun.

Cult Design bench, POA.

Lucky charms

Since 1968, Van Cleef & Arpels' iconic Alhambra design has evolved into an icon of luck, continually reinvented through exceptional materials. Today, pink enamel reimagines the timeless four-leaf clover motif across an exquisite collection of necklaces, pendants, bracelets and earrings.

Van Cleef & Arpels necklaces, from $16,600.

"The best wine bars in Paris have a sense of ease about them," says Nathan Sasi, chef and co-owner of the relaunched neighbourhood French wine bar, La Buvette. Located in the Paris end of Sydney's Potts Point, the tiny nine-seater bar is helping to breathe life back into Challis Avenue.

Visit labuvettesydney.com for more.





CHEF'S KISS

The cult of London super chef Yotam Ottolenghi continues with this follow-up to his worldwide hit, *Simple*. Boasting 135 new recipes that deliver flavourful, fuss-free creative concoctions, this is set to be just as big.

Simple Too by Yotam Ottolenghi (Ebury Press, $69.99).



Coach
Gold Parfum, 90ml, $214.

This fragrance gives vanilla a polished spin, with airy almond blossom and a hit of pink pepper for spiced warmth.

The reset

Luxury in travel isn't about OTT excess anymore – it's about places that feel rare, restorative and connected to something real. The design-led Temple Hangars in the Northern Rivers region of New South Wales nails the brief. Four architecturally crafted private hangars – each with its own distinct personality – are designed for deep immersion, while a cedar hot tub and sauna in the surrounding native gardens offer plenty of opportunity to switch off, slow down and breathe.

Visit templefarmhouse.com.au/temple-hangars for more.



STAYING POWER

Originally created for Bvlgari Hotels & Resorts, this elegant blend of Italian citrus, black tea and musk brings five-star freshness home.

Bvlgari Eau Parfumée Thé Impérial EDT, 75ml, $246.



Carry on

Meet your new summer sidekick. Antler's raffia carry-all is made for life on the move: from long-haul departures to weekend detours and city days. Consider it your chicest excess baggage.

Antler bag, $250.





SIMONE ROCHA A/W 2026



ERDEM A/W 2026



FERRAGAMO A/W 2026



SIMONE ROCHA A/W 2026

Trend alert
COMING UNDONE

"Ties and ribbons are the perfect finishing touch this season. Whether trailing in single strands from tops and dresses (as seen at Erdem) or structurally gathered (like at Simone Rocha), ribbons tie looks altogether."

– Naomi Smith, *marie claire* fashion director



SIMONE ROCHA A/W 2026



DIOR A/W 2026



ERDEM A/W 2026



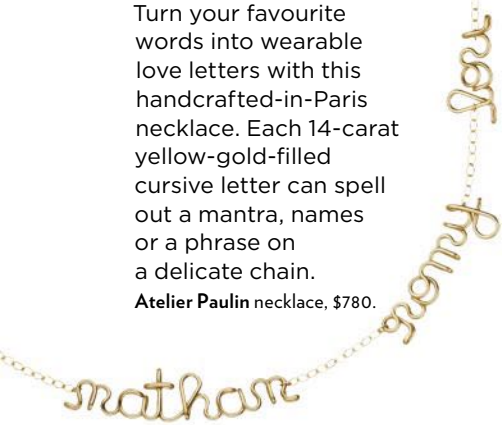
DIOR A/W 2026


GUESS
ART DIR: PAUL MARCIANO PH: JOSH RYAN
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Spell it out

Turn your favourite words into wearable love letters with this handcrafted-in-Paris necklace. Each 14-carat yellow-gold-filled cursive letter can spell out a mantra, names or a phrase on a delicate chain.

Atelier Paulin necklace, $780.









As if London doesn't have enough extraordinary design history to draw from, international fabric house Kirkby has launched a distinct collection of rich velvet upholsteries – all based on archive designs that were used across London public transport for the past 100 years.

Visit kirkbydesign.com for more.

Toni Maticevski is the king of wearable art. With his devotion to craftsmanship and architectural shaping and draping, his latest collection is a tactile masterclass in refinement and experiment, structure and softness.

Visit maticevski.com for more.



THE NEW NATURAL

When the popular Orchard St. cafes in Sydney closed a few years ago, fans were inconsolable. But the revered wellness brand has now pivoted to an online hub selling nature-led products across beauty, wellness and lifestyle spaces. Its commitment to sustainable living gives it major kudos. Goop without the woo-woo.

Visit orchardstreet.com.au, or turn to page 84 for our chat with its new CEO.

Photography Alicia Dubuis; Launchmetrics Spotlight. **Words** Melissa Gaudron; Delaney Loane


ART DIR: PAUL MARCIANO PH: JOSH RYAN © GUESS?, LLC 2026
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the LUXE LIST

Introducing this month's must-have accessories. All the best bags, sunglasses and jewellery, as chosen by the *marie claire* team



Dior Small Toujours Hobo bag, $5700.

Soft side

Dior's Toujours receives the hobo bag treatment under the watchful eye of creative director Jonathan Anderson. The suede iteration in a perfect mossy green has plenty of space for everyday use, while the removable strap allows you to wear it over the shoulder or hold it by hand.

1



2



3



4





FERRAGAMO A/W 2026

5



6



7



Liquid gold

Gold has never and will never go out of style, but it is particularly prevalent this season across sunglasses, jewellery, fragrance bottles and even key chains. Dedicate your whole look to the precious metal, or use it sparingly.

1 Bvlgari earrings, POA. **2 Dior** pouch, $4500. **3 Cushla Whiting** ring, $18,000. **4 Fendi** sunglasses, $620. **5 Cartier** Must de Cartier parfum, 50ml, $285. **6 Bottega Veneta** boots, $3720. **7 Gucci** bag charm, $575.

1



2

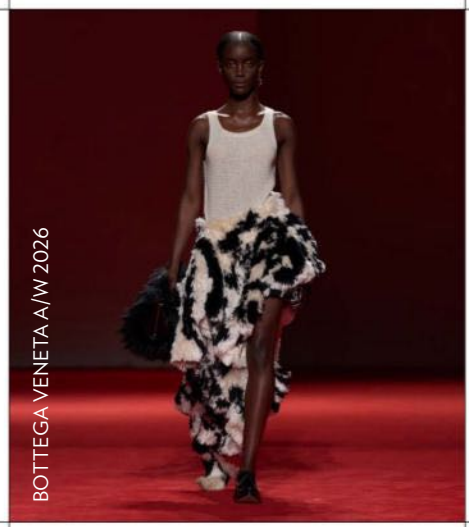


3



4





5



6



7



Bold rush

For those who like a little more flourish, red lace on a silky cami, intricate gold-and-diamond rings and patterned compact mirrors will add a certain something to your ensemble. Top it all off with an interestingly heeled shoe and a sparkly watch for a look that's extra but not OTT.

1 Olivia Bond rings, both POA. **2 Dries Van Noten** mirror, $385, at Mecca. **3 Van Cleef & Arpels** watch, $14,600. **4 Loewe** Orange Blossom candle, $460 (medium). **5 Saint Laurent by Anthony Vaccarello** top, $3605. **6 Louis Vuitton** shoes, $2080. **7 Hardy Brothers** necklace, $2290.

Photography Phillip Castleton; Launchmetrics Spotlight. **Compiled by** Sophia Stamellos



Louis Vuitton
Multipass Mini bag, $3950.

Chain reaction

Louis Vuitton's Multipass is technically a "slouchy" bag, but it doesn't veer into casual territory. Rendered in grained leather with a monogram canvas trim and braided removable chain, the Multipass has become a new signature accessory. Prepare to see it everywhere.



CHECK YOURSELF

Plaid, gingham, check or tartan – it's important to show your stripes and know how to wear them

PHOTOGRAPHY BLAKE AZAR **STYLING** SOPHIA STAMELLOS

1

Double the fun with double the plaid. Go for patterns of different sizes in similar hues, and add contrast through your accessories. Earthy browns work beautifully with calming blues.

R.M.Williams shirts, $169 and $199 (underneath); **Christopher Esber** pants, $695; **Gentle Monster** glasses, $345; **Charles & Keith** bag, $259.



2

Get more bang for your buck with a set that can be worn together or separately. Break it up with a belt and a pop of colour in your bag.

Bassike shirt, $495, and skirt, $395; **Zara** belt, $65.95; **Calvin Klein** bag, $179; **Mimco** earrings, $99.95.



3

Not ready to commit to full plaid? Test the waters with an accessory first, like a patterned scarf around your neck or tied to your bag.

Left: Calvin Klein jacket and jeans, both POA; **Longchamp** belt, $505; **Zara** scarf (around bag), $55.95; **Senso** bag, $325; **Mimco** earrings, $99.95.

4

Gingham capris with a frilled hem, worn with a scoop-neck frilled top and a crisp cotton shirt, gives preppy spring-picnic vibes. A backless loafer keeps the look easy-breezy.

Right: Lee Mathews top, $299; **H&M** shirt, $129; **Nany Blouses** pants, $180 (sold with top), at Primary Lingerette; **Gentle Monster** glasses, $385; **Scanlan Theodore** shoes, $800; **Mimco** ring, $89.95.



5

A dark plaid shirt is the perfect anchor for a floaty summery dress. Wear it open or tied around your waist.

Dissh dress, $189.99; **Bassike** shirt, $395; **Gentle Monster** glasses, $550; **Senso** shoes, $199; **Zafino** earrings, $29.99, and bracelet, $59.95.



6

Carry the trend into your corporate life with an office-appropriate version of the plaid shirt. Add interest by throwing a second one over your shoulders, tied at the front like a jumper. A midi skirt and heels keep it grown up.

Uniqlo x JW Anderson shirt (around neck), $49.90; **H&M Atelier** shirt, $149; **Lee Mathews** skirt, $649; **Zara** belt, $65.95; **Alias Mae** shoes, $239.95; **Mimco** bag, $499.95, and watch, $229.95; **Brie Leon** earrings, $159.



7

A tattersall-check trench can be your whole look. Add an element of surprise with a patterned scarf in a different colour around the waist.

Zara coat, $269; **Moochi** scarf (around waist), $129.95; **Kate Spade** bag, $499; **Mimco** earrings, $79.95.



8

Embrace your inner Kurt Cobain (or Marc Jacobs for Perry Ellis, IYKYK) and go full grunge with a shirt layered under a handkerchief dress.

Right: Zara dress, $139; **Elka Collective** shirt, $229; **Zafino** earrings, $29.95, and ring, $39.95.





9

DIY your look by buttoning two plaid shirts into one skirt. Pair with a baby tee and thong sandals for a simple yet effective look.

Left: Dissh singlet, $59.99; **Matteau** T-shirt, $280, and shirts (worn as a skirt), $520 each; **Le Specs** sunglasses, $90; **Senso** shoes, $199; **Studio Amelia** bag, $610.



10

Plaid can be for evenings, too. Add sparkle with diamantés and a silver clutch bag, pop on slinky heels and a blazer, and you're good to go.

H&M Studio blazer, $379, and skirt, $249; **Maje** shirt, $510; **Studio Amelia** shoes, $550; **Longchamp** bag, $505; **Zafino** earrings, $49.95; **Swatch** watch, $255.

Hair Stephanie Dell/Hart & Co.
Makeup Sean Brady/AP–Reps.
Model Eve Valentine/ Kult Australia.

Words Alexandra English





COS T-shirt, $65.

ONE SHIRT FOUR WAYS

Hunting for the perfect white tee can feel like a lifelong commitment – which is why, when you find one, you should wear it as often as you can. Here are four ways to style yours



THE MINIMALIST

Name a more iconic duo than jeans and a white tee. We'll wait. The key to keeping the combo fresh is through your accessories: a sleek pair of pumps, a coloured clutch and gold earrings make it easy.

1 Arms of Eve earrings, $99. **2 Decjuba** coat, $199.95. **3 Charles & Keith** bag charm, $46. **4 Forever New** bag, $59.99. **5 Henne** jeans, $229. **6 Tony Bianco** shoes, $219.95.



THE CORPORATE

Next time you're putting on a suit, chuck a white tee under your button-up and wear it open for a more casual-corporate look. If company policy allows, add a fancy flip-flop.

1 Meshki shirt, $169. **2 Swarovski** sunglasses, $389. **3 Dior** bag, $7200. **4 Camilla and Marc** blazer, $800. **5 Camilla and Marc** pants, $550. **6 Kirstin Ash** ring, $169. **7 Senso** shoes, $199.



THE BOHO

Flared jeans, a crochet top and suede jacket scream '70s. Wear your white T-shirt underneath it all, and then pile on the accessories: oversized sunglasses, a bucket bag and boots with a cowboy heel.

1 Temple of the Sun earrings, $199. **2 Zara** jacket, $79.95. **3 Posse** top, $370. **4 Quay** sunglasses, $69. **5 H&M** jeans, $49.99. **6 Pandora** bracelet, $119. **7 Louis Vuitton** bag, $5800. **8 A.Emery** shoes, $790.



THE CREATIVE

The only more iconic pairing than jeans and a white tee is a slip dress with a white tee. Pops of gold accessories and perfectly on-trend silky red ballet flats bring the '90s-inspired look into 2026.

1 Bondi Born dress, $113. **2 Paris Mode** hair clip, $69. **3 Rylan** bracelet, $449. **4 St. Agni** bag, $429. **5 Seed** watch, $119.25. **6 Marina Rinaldi** shoes, $665.

Photography Launchmetrics Spotlight. **Compiled by** Sophia Stamellos. **Words** Alexandra English

FIND YOUR COLOUR

"Getting your colours done" is the new fad, but what if your assigned palette doesn't suit your vibe? We say forget the rules, dress in the hues you love



Autumn-core

A warm palette of deep plums, burnt reds and earthy browns appeals to anyone emerging from an all-black wardrobe. It's still dark and chic, but with room for a little more fun.

1 The Frankie Shop shirt, $277. **2 The Horse** bag, $249.95. **3 Bianca Spender** pants, $495. **4 Camilla and Marc** belt, $220. **5 Sportsgirl** sunglasses, $20. **6 Oroton** blazer, $649. **7 Nelson Made** shoes, $329.

Spring forward

Somewhere between the richness of autumn and the vibrancy of summer lies the spring colour palette. Look for golden undertones and airy fabrications in blues, greens and oranges.



1 Chanel glasses, POA. **2 Louis Vuitton** shoes, $1770. **3 Charles & Keith** bag, $109, at David Jones. **4 Posse** skirt, $330. **5 Aje Studio** jacket, $299. **6 Posse** top, $270. **7 Zara** necklace, $49.95.

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Summer lovin'

Pretty pastels needn't be reserved for the warmer months. In fact, a hit of sunshine yellow can brighten even the dreariest of days. Keep pinks, whites and creams within easy reach, too.



1 Agolde jeans, $490, at Net-a-Porter. **2 Porter James** jumper, $249. **3 Alémais x Le Specs** sunglasses, $220. **4 Essen** earrings, $225. **5 COS** shirt, $139. **6 Nakedvice** belt, $89.95. **7 One Mile** shoes, $170. **8 Kate Spade** bag, $439.



Winter blues

Keep the tones cool and bright, playing with blues and purples contrasted with white or black. Icy silver accessories offer the perfect finishing touch.



1 Avant Studio earrings, $169. **2 Flore Flore** scarf, $150. **3 Ksubi** jeans, $219.95. **4 Porter James** jacket, $389. **5 Dior** bag, $7400. **6 The Frankie Shop** jumper, $285. **7 Tkees** shoes, $70. **8 Tommy Hilfiger** watch, $299.

CARVEN A/W 2026

Photography Launchmetrics Spotlight. **Compiled by** Sophia Stamellos

LOAF ABOUT

On any given day, most of the *marie claire* team can be found in loafers. Why? They go with everything, they're as comfy as slippers and there are many, many styles to choose from



Zara, $109.



Senso, $249.



Tony Bianco, $219.95.



COS socks, $35.



H&M, $129.



Eos, $199.95.



Zara, $149.



Uniqlo socks, $4.90.



Bared, $299.



Boody socks, $16.



Nude Lucy, $180.



Jo Mercer, $239.95.



COS, $255.



St. Agni, $429.



Senso, $239.

THE ART of THE SPIN

Piaget reworks its iconic jewellery line in new shades of blue



Piaget global ambassador Gianna Jun wears the new collection.

Below, from left: **Piaget** earrings, $36,600, bracelet, $24,200, and ring, $16,200.





Clockwise from top left: Piaget ring, $16,200, and necklaces, $24,200 and $154,000.



The stones catch the light as the elements turn, so the colours shift with the movement

There is something oddly satisfying about a piece of jewellery that asks you to do something. For decades, this has been the secret appeal of Piaget's tactile Possession range. Since the launch of its first ring collection in 1990, the range has been built around a small, almost absent-minded gesture: turning the ring. The outer band moves independently, rotating around the finger with a smoothness that makes it hard not to do it again. And again.

Over the years, the collection has grown to take in necklaces, bracelets, earrings and detailed sculptural pieces. But each piece offers the same magic: a tiny interruption in the day through mechanical movement, whether it's rotating a ring, spinning a stone or turning a trinket.

The rotational movement is meditative. You turn it and, for a few seconds, there is nothing else to do. The gesture is repetitive but not mindless; it gives your attention somewhere to land. It is jewellery with a built-in pause button. And now the iconic range has a new look – served in mesmerising shades of blue.

Piaget's Possession Vibrant Palace jewellery collection has added turquoise, sodalite and dumortierite gemstones to the line's familiar combination of gold and movement. The three stones bring different shades and saturation to the pieces, from the brightness of turquoise to the deeper blues of sodalite and dumortierite. The result is less a departure from Possession than a change in emphasis. The collection retains the gold, circular forms and rotating elements that have defined it for more than three decades, while the saturated blue stones give the jewellery a more graphic character.

The natural variation of the stones is part of the appeal of the pieces. Changes in colour and texture mean that each piece has a slightly different appearance, rather than reproducing a completely uniform pattern.

The collection is further enhanced by the delicate lines of Piaget's Decor Palace engraving. It combines with rose gold, polished surfaces, diamonds and the coloured stones to create a mosaic effect, with square and oval cuts arranged in asymmetrical patterns.

It's not the first time the iconic house has invested its visual language in the hue of blue. The colour has appeared throughout Piaget's history, from its jewellery and watches to its advertising and retail spaces. It became closely associated with the house during the 1960s and 1970s – a period when Piaget was experimenting with vivid colour and more unconventional forms of jewellery.

With Possession Vibrant Palace, Piaget has turned the instinct of touch and that ritual of the circular motion into something more noticeable. The new stones catch the light as the elements turn, so the colours shift with the movement. The result is jewellery that changes subtly depending on how you wear it – and how often you reach for it.

Balancing bold hues with refined craftsmanship, the collection brings fresh energy to the Possession universe while remaining true to Piaget's spirit of joy and effortless elegance.



Left: Piaget earrings, $6300.

Below (from left) **Piaget** rings, $7150, $14,000 and $16,200.



Photography Chris Colls; Brigitte Niedermair; Clément Rousset; courtesy Piaget. **Words** Melissa Gaudron

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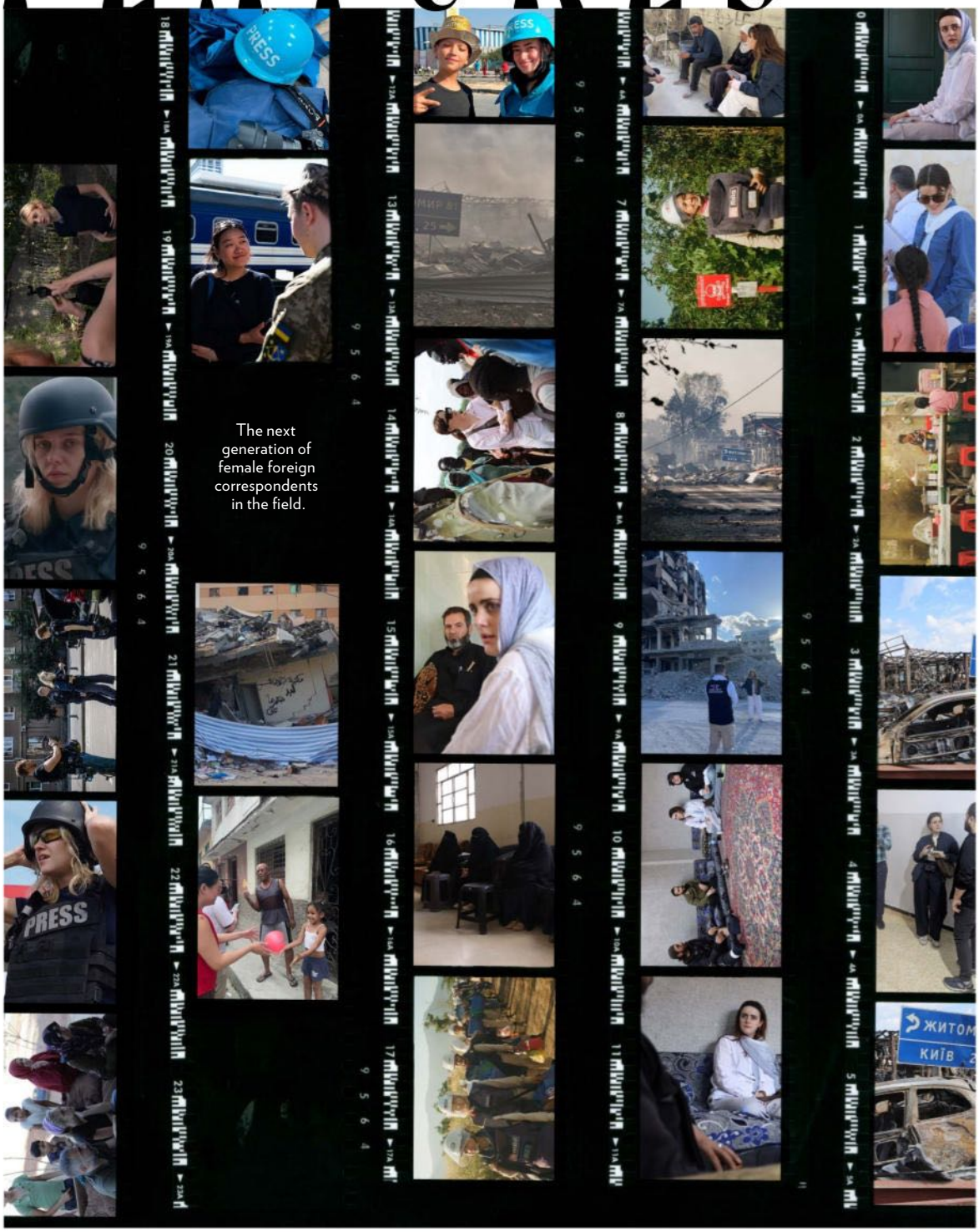
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FEATURES



The next generation of female foreign correspondents in the field.

We discover the young female journalists changing war reporting; investigate what it's really like to be a girl in 2026, and ask the *marie claire* family for the messages to their younger selves; then meet the men making gendered violence *their* problem to solve

Photography Orwh Al-ebrahim; Caitlin Kelly; Charles Lawley; Linda Nylind; Getty Images; courtesy Plestia Alaqad, Anna Conkling and Frances Mao

IN THE WARS

A new generation of foreign correspondents is here. They're young, they're female and they're as familiar with the sounds of air raids as they are TikTok POVs. Meet the women redefining war reporting

WORDS ALEXANDRA ENGLISH



ANNA CONKLING

Anna Conkling logs into our video call from a hotel room in Kyiv, Ukraine, where she arrived just a few hours earlier, warning me that she's very tired but has plenty of coffee. "I go from Berlin to Warsaw, about five hours, then I take an hour to get a cocktail and go to Burger King," she pauses to laugh, "then I get a train for another three hours to the other Polish border, then the night train to Kyiv." I've seen this journey – the night before we speak, she's posted a bedtime GRWM titled: "Getting ready for bed on night train from Poland to Ukraine", in which she does her skincare routine and makes her bed before climbing in, only to still be wide awake come morning. "I've been doing this every other month for about a year since I moved out of Kyiv last year," she says.

Conkling, who grew up in Texas but is now based in Berlin, was living in New York and sitting at a Brooklyn bar with



a friend when news came out that Russia had invaded Ukraine in February 2022. "Something came over me and I told my friend, 'I have to go home right now.' The next morning, I got up early and went to the East Village, which is the Ukrainian village, and I was the first journalist there, asking people about what was happening."

Until then, she'd been working for local city publications but began spending so much time pitching stories about Ukraine that it soon became her specialty. Her first major byline was for *Rolling Stone* in a story about a transgender woman who had fled the country. Ukraine bars people with male documents aged between 23 and 60 from leaving the country in case of military mobilisation. "I was just thinking about how hard that must be for transgender women," she says. That story set the tone of Conkling's reporting: it's not breaking news or in-the-trenches pieces to camera (though she has been in the frontline trenches: "not the most dangerous situation I've been in," she says). "[At the time], everyone was focused on breaking news, and I was one of the first journalists to take a step back and think about the culture of war, the environmental impacts of war, what people my age are going through," she says.

Since then, she's written about the strength of the beauty industry in Ukraine, Russia's use of rape as a war weapon and women who are undergoing cosmetic surgery during the war, as well as a story about body repatriation that saw her become a finalist for the Livingston Award. Conkling has also reported from Armenia during Azerbaijan's invasion in 2023, as well as the site of an Israeli attack in southern Lebanon, where Syrian refugees had also fled to escape the Assad regime. She's recently been promoted to international correspondent for Noosphere, a new journalism platform that connects news readers with international reporters, launched by former war reporter Jane Ferguson. She's also working on a documentary, details of which are currently under wraps. Social media is a huge part of Conkling's reporting: she posts BTS and GRWM videos as well as on-the-ground reports and interviews from attack sites to her thousands of followers on Instagram (@annaconkling) and TikTok (@annathejournalist).

"The first time I went to Ukraine, I was trying to assess the risk and so I went to Lviv, which was supposed to be the safest city," she says. "But on my second day there, it was hit with the worst attack since the early days of the war. I was in a parking garage while there were explosions. I was thinking, 'Well, I don't think I'm going to die, but if I do, I signed up for this.'" Conkling has since been at the site of huge attacks, and regularly posts videos of herself in her bed or garage bunkers with the sounds of drones striking all around.

She tells me a story of her fixer, Sergey, picking her up one day and asking if she wanted to go to Donbas, "the most dangerous place". "It's literally the frontlines, so at first I was like, 'No, I don't think so.' And five minutes later, 'I'll think about it.' Then, 'Actually, probably.' Then two minutes later, 'OK, yeah, let's go.'" They travelled to a rear position of the frontlines, about 10 kilometres from the Russians, with "explosions in the distance and the military just chilling". But then a drone came, and they had to run. She fell in the mud and couldn't get back up under the weight of her helmet and vest, so Sergey scooped her up and set her back on her feet.

"I was one of the first journalists to think about the culture of war"

Conkling doesn't tell her family when she's going on assignment. She'll "maybe" tell them once she's safe back at home, but not always. Her "emotional support person" is her Ukrainian boyfriend, who she met and lived with in Kyiv and now lives with in Berlin. "We're trauma bonded; he's my best friend," she says.

"I've seen a lot of suffering, and all before 30," Conkling adds. "I received a therapy grant, I work out, I get massages, I journal, but the main thing is that I love doing this – I'm happiest when I'm in the field and telling the stories of people who are impacted. I feel privileged that people are willing to speak to me; they don't know me, they don't know what my motivations are, but they trust me to listen to the worst parts of their lives.

"I think because I'm a woman, people feel less threatened by me," she adds. "More women should be war correspondents because they see you as a mother, a friend, a sister, and they feel comfortable, they invite you into their homes. Men want to be in the trenches, but I want to be in the homes drinking tea with the women and hearing their stories."



Opposite Anna Conkling in Ukraine.

This page, from top The journalist in Lebanon; widespread destruction following a deadly Russian strike outside Kyiv.



Rachel Hagan meets a group of women in Idlib, Syria.

Left Talking to locals in Syria.

"If you're not scared, you're not going to relate to the people who are living there"





Covering the crisis in South Sudan in 2025.

Above Hagan has reported from all over Syria.

RACHEL HAGAN

After we get off our Zoom call, an email from Rachel Hagan pops into my inbox. "I totally forgot to tell you the wild story of when our tiny propeller plane in South Sudan nearly crashed with an unmarked Russian jet lol …"

That "lol" at the end tells you everything you need to know about 29-year-old Hagan: a foreign correspondent who regularly finds herself in precarious – if not downright dangerous – situations, and has a remarkable ability to shake it off. That's because it's all for a greater purpose; it comes with the territory when your job is to highlight the suffering regular people are facing in their everyday lives, and making sure the world doesn't forget about them. If that puts her in the line of danger, her attitude is more "whoopsie daisy" than "I'm never doing that again".

Hagan had started out wanting to be a fashion journalist, but an internship at *ELLE* UK with the award-winning journalist Louise Donovan ("I glued myself to her a bit"), who has reported from countries in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Middle East, showed her a different side of reporting. "I'm not very academic, so I didn't feel I was clever enough to be able to do [that kind of journalism]," she says. But as she discovered more female reporters and filmmakers, she realised she could tell stories in a different way: from the heart. She regularly reports on war and conflict for glossy women's titles like *ELLE*, *marie claire* and *Stylist*. "People can easily pooh-pooh women's magazines but, actually, they highlight such important issues," she says. "It's amazing to be writing about such important issues for titles that are close to my heart."

Growing up in Bristol, England, Hagan's parents had a rotating door of international students living with them from when she was in her early teens. "They'd stay with us for up to six months and they became part of the family, so it opened my eyes and ears to different cultures and how to interact with people over the dinner table," she says. That's a quality she tries to bring into her reporting: the intimacy





of a conversation over the dinner table. "I always try to bring it back to the people – tell the politics through the people," she explains.

After moving to London for university, Hagan's first major commission was a piece for *Vice* about the Yazidi genocide. In 2014, ISIS invaded the Sinjar region of Iraq, killing as many as 5000 Yazidis for refusing to convert to Islam. More than 400,000 people were displaced. ISIS kidnapped young boys for radicalisation and enslaved and sexually abused women and girls.

When Hagan started working at the left-wing UK tabloid *The Mirror*, she kept covering the plight of the Yazidis. "I'd been reporting remotely on any legal updates about the genocide, and I was also covering breaking news in Syria and other global events – earthquakes, elections, assassinations, all of it. But there was never any budget to send me to those places." She took the plunge and went freelance in 2024. "It was the 10th anniversary of the genocide, so I thought, given my body of work, it would be an amazing opportunity to go to Iraq and report from the IDP [internally displaced people] camps." She teamed up with an NGO, and off she went. "It's crazy that for my first-ever trip I went to Iraq," she says, laughing.

"When I look back on that trip now, I see how unprepared I was, and it's just wild to think about. Ultimately, I was safe because I was with an NGO, but I spent a few days by myself at the end because I thought I'd explore Erbil, the capital of Iraqi Kurdistan, and maybe write some other stories, but I was so terrified that I didn't end up leaving the hotel." She now considers fear a positive thing: "If you're not scared, you're not going to relate to the people who are living there; you're not going to tell a good story."

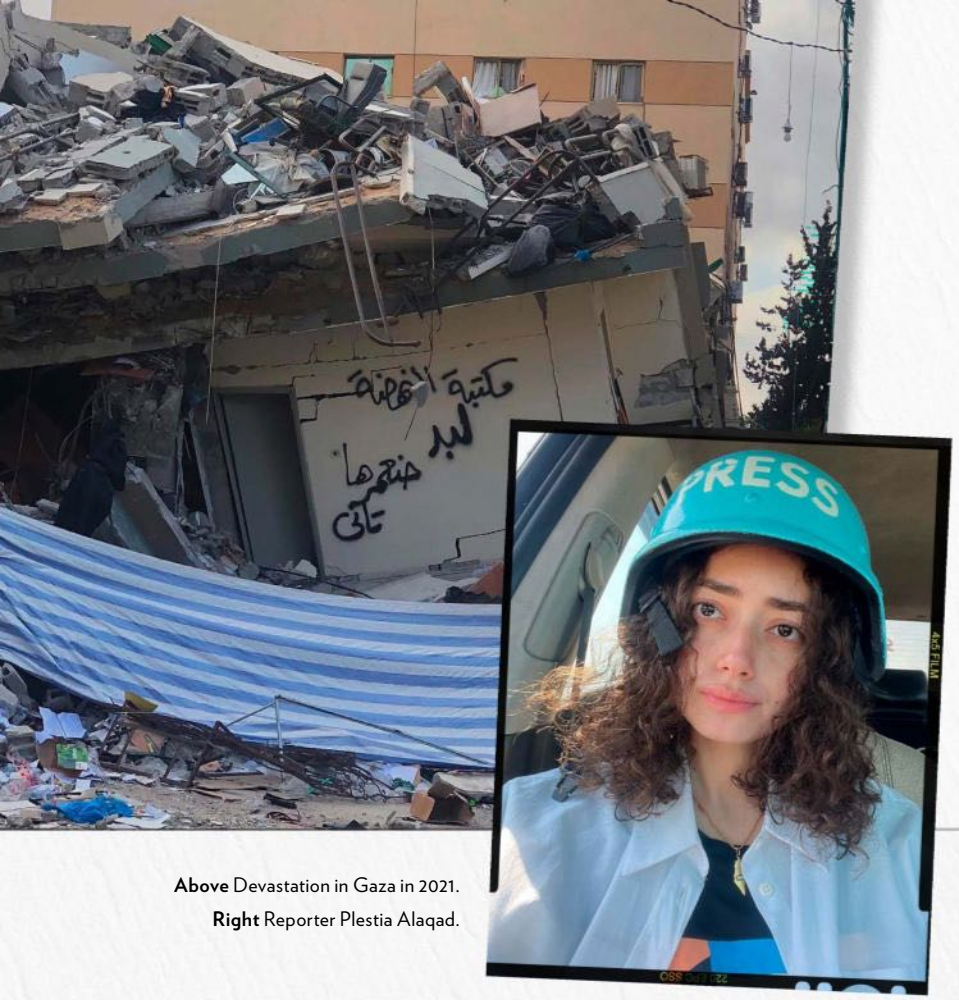
Hagan's parents, though, didn't sleep much while she was on that first trip. "They were so worried, but they trust me and they know I'm doing everything in a safe way, so it's getting easier for them."

Earlier this year, Hagan and her fiancé, who she's been with since they were at university, moved from London to Istanbul, Turkey, so she could be closer to the areas she reports from. "I could never have anticipated that the Iran War would happen," she says. She was able to report from the Iran-Turkey border, as well as Iraq and Syria, within the space of a month. "It's a testament to his amazing character that he supports me through it, and I'm just so blessed that he's so proud of me," she says. "He jokes that it's quite nice that he gets the bed to himself for a week."

Asked for one of her most memorable moments, Hagan recalls a trip to Syria after the fall of the Assad regime. "We went into a house to interview two men who'd been amputated by bombs, and after we finished, one of them said, 'My family in the kitchen want to speak to you.' So we went in, and it's his wife and daughters, and they didn't have their hijabs on and they wanted to meet me and wanted me to sit with them." Another time, she was interviewing women at a community centre. "They weren't really offering up much information, but once the male photographer left the room, they took off their niqabs and it was the most amazing conversation." That's the power of women journalists. "It's so easy for a situation to be disarmed when it's just women in the room."



On the ground in South Sudan.



Above Devastation in Gaza in 2021.
Right Reporter Plestia Alaqad.

PLESTIA ALAQAD

You might remember the moment you were introduced to Plestia Alaqad. The then-21-year-old was filming inside a house in Gaza on October 10, 2023, three days after the start of the Israel-Hamas war, when she flipped the camera around into selfie mode. Suddenly there's an explosion, and a rush of wind blows around her face. She barely flinches. This was her daily reality that she'd been trying to get the world to notice. They did.

"At the time, it gave me hope that if a global audience could see what was happening in Gaza, this madness would stop," she says now from her new base in Lebanon. "But it turns out it doesn't work like that; the problem isn't visibility."

Alaqad is, of course, referring to the genocide that Israel has been raging in Gaza for almost three years now in response to Hamas' attacks in Israel, during which 1200 people were killed and 251 taken hostage. The current death toll in Gaza is reported to have exceeded 75,000, according to *Al Jazeera*.

While Alaqad had studied journalism at EMU in Cyprus, she didn't think her first assignment would be reporting on the genocide of her own people. "When I was in Cyprus, I realised people from different countries knew very little about Palestine," she says. She found that the little information people did have was coming from external sources, rather than from Palestinian people themselves. "So I returned home to Gaza after graduating", intending to share her own stories. "And the rest is history."

When the attacks began, she grabbed a press helmet and bulletproof vest and travelled with two male colleagues, Mohamed and Hatem, who were heading off to gather footage across the region, reporting to international news outlets from makeshift camps, bombed-out homes, hospital shelters

"I realised people from different countries knew very little about Palestine"

and evacuation relocations. All the while, Alaqad was posting to Instagram. "Social media plays a huge role in the coverage of the Israeli genocide in Gaza," she says. "[It] allows a global audience to see and learn about it from people who are living through it. And because international journalists weren't allowed in, we were the ones reporting on what was happening to us."

For her reporting on Gaza, Alaqad was named one of the BBC's 100 Women in 2024, and won the One Young World Journalist of the Year Award, the Lyra McKee Award for Bravery and a Human Rights Defender Award. Her work has appeared in *Al Jazeera*, *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*. She also delivered her first TEDx Talk virtually in 2024. In 2025, Alaqad published her diaries from the first 45 days of the war, called *The Eyes of Gaza*.

"My friends and family were terrified that Israel might kill me for reporting, yet they were proud of me for having the courage to tell our stories in the midst of a genocide," she says.

Alaqad still frequently posts about the journalists being killed in Gaza. "It only took a matter of weeks reporting on the ground and wearing a press helmet that I took them off because they put you at greater risk instead of protecting you," she says. "It's not supposed to be dangerous to be a journalist in a war zone: it's a job, not a crime."

Photography Orwh Al-ebrahim; Caitlin Kelly; Charles Lawley; Linda Nylind; Getty Images; courtesy Plestia Alaqad, Anna Conkling and Frances Mao

Below Alaqad with Waleed, a boy who was offering biscuits to displaced people in Gaza.





FRANCES MAO

Frances Mao gets frustrated with how "othering" traditional conflict reporting can be. "You read something and you're like, 'Oh, *that* country is in strife,' but because you've never experienced it, it's easy to think it's just foreign," she says. "But if you read something that's like, 'Oh, there's a guy my age, literally in a trench, and he's listening to Drake and watching TikToks to pass the time,' it changes your perspective." Mao gives the example of a young soldier she met in Ukraine. "He was a total hipster, such a coffee nerd, and he brought two different ways of making coffee with him to the frontlines," she says, laughing. "He pulled his fancy coffee maker into the diesel electricity generator, and then had his cold-drip set up, too. It's those details – they're wearing Air Jordans on the frontline – that make a war report human."

Now based in London as *Newsweek*'s world editor, Mao has spent her career on major news desks: *The Guardian*, *BBC News*, the Australian Associated Press (AAP) and *Sky News*. She's reported from Asia, Brazil, Ukraine and, recently, Cuba.

But it all started at home, specifically, in Sydney during the Lindt Café siege in December 2014 in which three people died after a lone gunman took 18 people hostage. Mao was working for AAP as an editorial assistant and remembers it as her first significant breaking-news event.

One of the first foreign conflicts she reported on happened by accident. Mao was on a family holiday in Brazil in January 2023 when thousands of far-right protesters broke into the National Congress, Supreme Court and Palácio do Planalto in an event mirroring the January 6 attacks on the US Capitol in 2021. "We were just doing what tourists do, going around the galleries, and we knew there was a political rally happening, but then thousands and thousands of people started pouring off buses and streaming into the city," she recalls. "It was surreal. And because I happened to be there, I covered it for the BBC."

Earlier this year, Mao and her team were invited by the communist Cuban government to interview the president – the first time a US news outlet had been offered an interview in three years. "It's a massive deal, but we knew they wanted our coverage for a certain reason, and we would be monitored closely, but we accepted their deal to get the access, and then when we were on the ground I really pushed us to get out and away from their itinerary sometimes and talk to people living under this authoritarian communist state," she says. "It was incredible access to Cuba at a time when the country is truly on its knees." Some areas experience blackouts for up to 22 hours a day, there are severe food and water shortages, and soaring inflation and a sharply devalued currency have made basic necessities increasingly unaffordable. "We went to the neighbourhoods to talk to regular people playing cards on the street, into the poorer neighbourhoods, talking to doctors," she says, "because if we didn't, then we weren't doing our job properly; we were just on a PR trip."

One thing Mao struggles with in her job is the ability to leave. "You go in to talk to people about their hardship and suffering, then you leave; you have a way out. That's something I really battle with. I try to address it with good reporting and I make sure that if I go somewhere, I'm going with a purpose and that I come back with something meaningful or helpful."

"It's those details – they're wearing Air Jordans on the frontline – that make a war report human"



Journalist Frances Mao.

Above At work in Ukraine.

IT'S SO CONFUSING SOMETIMES TO BE A

girl

Artificial intelligence, diagnosis-by-algorithm and toxic masculinity – our daughters are up against challenges we never could have imagined, but Dilvin Yasa is not without hope

While it was meant to be light-hearted banter, it quickly became something much darker. "You girls today don't know the struggle," I told my 17-year-old daughter. "When I was your age, we had to rewind cassettes with pencils and wait for our favourite songs to play on the radio so we could record them."

"That's really cute, Mum, but we have real problems, like AI taking our dream careers, deep fakes, revenge porn and a dating pool influenced by Andrew freaking Tate," she responded with considerable venom. "Oh, and women's reproductive rights are going backwards, and women in Australia keep being killed by their partners. How am I ever supposed to date when I know that, statistically, the guy I marry is the one most likely to murder me? But sure, tell me some more about tapes."

She could have gone on but it was clear that I had, to use her phrase, "been schooled". The problem? This isn't an education any mother really wants to receive.

There's an idea that our girls *should* be having an easier time than ever. After all, they have more comforts, more rights, more female role models in positions of power and far more permission to reject the narrow gender roles that shaped generations before them. Our girls have the language (and increasingly, the confidence), to talk about consent, sexism, identity and boundaries, and forget keeping pace with boys, they now surpass their male counterparts in academic and professional achievements. In the United States, girls are so dominant in higher education that universities have begun practicing affirmative action for boys, with some admitting male applicants with lower academic credentials to boost numbers.

At surface level, it's enough to make your heart soar, until you consider studies that show one in four Australian girls (26.3 per cent) have experienced online sexual solicitation by an adult before they turn 18, or surveys that report that 71 per cent of UK men aged 18 to 39 have "slapped", "choked", "gagged" or "spat on" their partner during consensual sex. (Apparently among 16- to 21-year-olds in the UK, 47 per cent now believe that girls "expect" sex to involve physical aggression like airway restriction.)

One in four girls has experienced online sexual solicitation by an adult before they turn 18

What should we make of the revelation that TikTok's video recommendation algorithm suggests eating disorder and self-harm content to new teen accounts within minutes of activation? Or Facebook whistleblower Sarah Wynn-Williams' testimony last year that the company tracked when teenage girls deleted selfies so they could serve beauty ads at that exact moment?

That's something the 26-year-old writer Freya India was thinking about when she wrote her book *GIRLS®: Generation Z and the Commodification of Everything*, which came out earlier this year. In it, she argues the issues girls are facing are amplified by tech, but they're unfolding against a backdrop that is unbelievably normal. "We were the first generation to learn to flirt on Instagram, to try to find teenage love by swiping," she writes. "We were the first to have our faces and bodies ranked and reviewed on social media before we had even reached puberty, the first to document our adolescence for an online audience. Our problems were painfully familiar and, yes, agonisingly different. I realised that the same adults telling me this was nothing new had no advice to give. Our world was moving too fast for them to know where to begin."

It's true, I don't understand the fury and despair of being left on "read", why anyone would bother with Facetune, or what it means if your partner doesn't post about you on Instagram. I try to understand but explaining it to me is like showing a german shepherd a card trick.

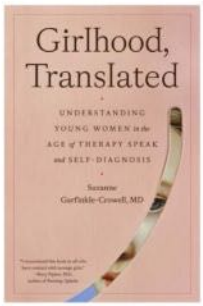
When I ask my daughters' friends what worries them most, I expect body image and friendship dramas, but what I hear instead is "the rise of the far right", "that I'll never be able to afford a house" and "climate change and the death of our planet".

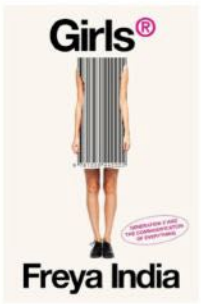
Clinical psychologist Anissa Mouti is not surprised. She says girls are increasingly bringing to therapy the anxieties of an adult world, with only the emotional tools of adolescence. Some arrive with the anxiety of missing out on whatever their friends are up to, or AI already playing the role of confidant, while others are trapped in the comparison economy of social media.

"Some young girls tell me they know that ... those filtered images and AI-generated images are fake but they still wish they looked like that, even though no-one actually does," she explains. Then there is diagnosis-by-algorithm, she adds. "Long before I give my clinical opinion, I'll ask 'What did TikTok say you have?' because it gives me a sense of what the young person is seeking and the void they're trying to fill."

Psychiatrist Suzanne Garfinkle-Crowell sees the same pattern. In her new book about girls (there's a trend here) *Girlhood, Translated*, she details how internet self-diagnosis culture and the rise of therapy speak is reshaping our girls' identities in adolescence. "Girls have learnt over time that society may not value them very much but it does value medical language, and while they may not be doing it intentionally, inherently, these things get attention and validation," she says. "Of course, another thing self-labelling accomplishes is that it connects you with a group of people you feel you have something in common with." The issue is that our daughters have started leaning so far into blanket labels that they stop getting to know themselves as people.

Nearly a third of gen Zers in the UK deleted a social app in the past year





Girlhood, Translated by Suzanne Garfinkle-Crowell, MD (Simon & Schuster, $36.99) and *Girls®: Generation Z and the Commodification of Everything* by Freya India (Allen & Unwin, $34.99) are both out now.

The good news is that there's change afoot. Recent data show young people are increasingly embracing "offline" lifestyles, with nearly a third of gen Zers in the UK deleting a social app in the past year, and 18 to 24s in the US driving a massive spike in the sales of dumb phones.

Gen Z girls are widely recognised as the most socially and politically conscious to date, with more than 50 per cent participating in protests and using their digital presence to speak up about climate action, racial and gender equality and mental health awareness. In my household, it's not unusual to hear something like, "Why is it called FIFA Women's World Cup but they don't call it FIFA Men's World Cup?" before a flurry of angry emails are sent off to the powers behind the "beautiful game". Unlike my own generation, they won't just sit back and let it be.

Mouti sees it too. "Girls today may be facing a lot of challenges, but they are also more independent, more neuro-affirming and far more likely to stand up for friends and strive for a sense of justice," she confirms.

That doesn't mean we should leave them out there on their own, and Mouti says the best way to offer support is open and honest communication at their level. "Keep yourself educated on everything from the lingo they're using to what [different] emojis mean and don't tiptoe around tough conversations. If you need guidance, it's OK to seek professional support."

Garfinkle-Crowell says it's vital to stay engaged and translate what your daughter is actually saying. "If she's saying, 'I have depression,' it's easy to panic, but she's telling you she's sad and maybe there's loneliness and maybe there's despair. Asking yourself what's causing the sadness helps you show up in a calmer way in the face of this language."

I'm still thinking about Garfinkle-Crowell's words when my younger daughter comes home flushed with outrage. An "old man" on the train, she tells me, had licked his lips at her in a suggestive fashion. "So I screamed, 'I'm 13 you paedo!' and, Mum, he had to run to another carriage because everyone was suddenly staring at him like they wanted to kill him."

I can't put my translation of the event into print, but I get the feeling that, despite all of the challenges our girls are facing, they're actually going to be more than OK.

Little women

To celebrate International Day of the Girl on October 11, we asked our *marie claire* community to share their message to the girl within them



"I believe you. You didn't do anything wrong. You deserve to be safe and happy. Don't change your big heart – it will take you places you never thought were possible. Don't forget to have fun along the way! Stay true to yourself – that truth is a compass that will always help you find the right path and the right people to love and be loved by."
– NICOLE YADE, CEO OF WOMEN'S AND GIRLS' EMERGENCY CENTRE

"You can do hard things."
– Allegra Spender, federal member for Wentworth

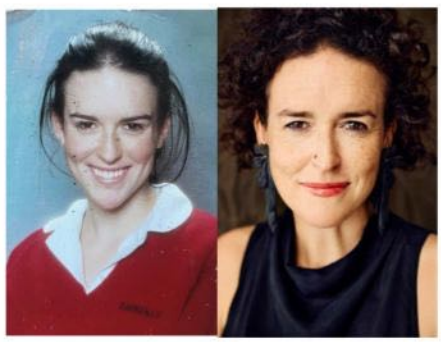




"Continue listening to that feeling in your stomach when something feels unjust or needs challenging. Society sends overt and sometimes more subtle signals that limit the space girls and women can take up – follow your gut and ignore the boundaries set by others."
– ANTOINETTE LATTOUF, CO-FOUNDER OF ETTE MEDIA



"You're pretty good at finding solutions to adult problems, and those skills will end up shaping your professional life. But right now, you don't need to spend so much time trying to fix the adults you love. It's on them to figure it out – and they will, in their own way. Go and live your life."
– JESS HILL, JOURNALIST



"You'll go through times that are hard, scary and confusing. But you're strong and brave and you will find a beautiful community to hold you."
– Anna Coutts-Trotter, co-founder of The Survivor Hub





"Use your voice – you're probably right more often than you think. Stop worrying about what everyone else thinks and back yourself. Your voice matters, and you'll be amazed where trusting yourself can take you."
– CLAIRE GREAVES, CO-FOUNDER OF P.E NATION AND BOOIE BEAUTY

"Don't be afraid to take up space and to trust your instincts – they will take you much further than other people's opinions."
– Sally Obermeder, co-founder of Swiish





"Know that you are capable of far more than what society tells you is possible."
– JENNIFER ROBINSON, HUMAN RIGHTS LAWYER

"Trust yourself and the timing of your life."
– Victoria Lee, model

"Think big. You no longer want a man's seat on the bus; you want his seat on the board. Don't wait to be rescued by some knight in shining Armani; stand on your own two thongs. And lean into the sisterhood; stick to your female friends like a nylon dress in a heatwave."
– KATHY LETTE, AUTHOR

"Take the risk. Say yes before you're sure. You will spend so long wishing you were made of harder stuff, and then one day you'll realise your tender, feeling-everything spirit was the whole plan. It knows the way. Let it lead."
– Grace Toombs, founder of June Health







"Trust your inner knowing. Trust that gut instinct of yours. It's there for a reason, and it can and will one day save your life. That uncanny inner knowing was there from the start, you were born with it, but somewhere along the way it became downgraded, overridden, gaslit into confusion. Now, in my fifties, I fully believe in and reclaim my knowing, but I want that for little Tara Rae, too. Believe yourself, believe what you know and don't let anything or anyone override it."
– TARA RAE MOSS, AUTHOR

"Don't try to please people by being who they want you to be. Be yourself and be kind."
– Heather Mitchell, actor









"You are strong, you are powerful and you have the capacity to change lives for the better – so go out and do it!"
– RONNI KAHN, FOUNDER OF OZHARVEST





"Don't confuse the world as it is with the world as it has to be. You will grow up watching borders, politics and power decide whose lives matter. Don't let it teach you that change is impossible. Stay soft, but also stay angry. Never stop believing that the world can be different because you are brave enough to imagine it."
– ZAHRA AL HILALY, GENDER EQUALITY AND YOUTH ADVOCATE



"You're allowed to have fun. Actually, that's the whole point."
– Milly Bannister, founder of ALLKND



"Your time will come. You're not meant to peak in high school! You'll bloom when the time is right for you so follow your own path and trust the process."
– Melissa Doyle, TV and radio host

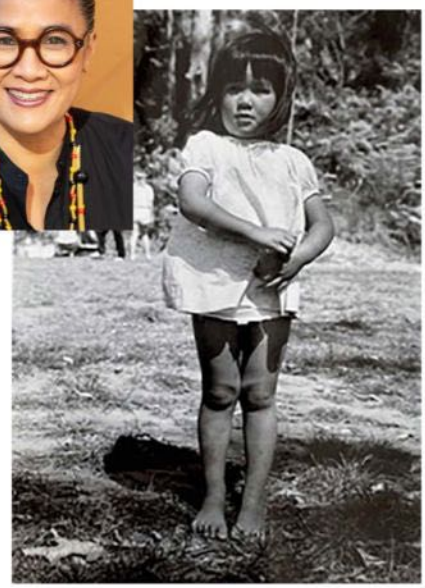

MaxMara
Le Parfum
The New Fragrance



"You're OK just the way you are. You don't have to be the loudest in the room but you'll later discover the power of being in the room. You'll also come to realise success is measured by the quality of people around you – and you're surrounded by the best!"
– NARELDA JACOBS, JOURNALIST AND TV PRESENTER

"Bringing your whole self to the table nourishes family and community."
– Kylie Kwong, chef and author





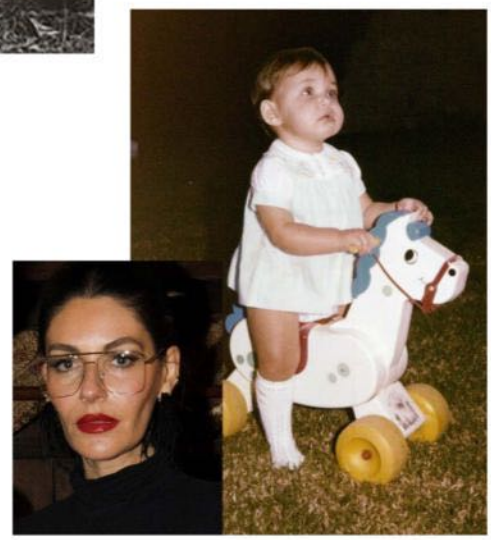


"Your light is far brighter than you can imagine, and it has the power to change things for the better. Never, under any circumstances, dim it for anyone."
– MELISSA LEONG, WRITER AND TV PRESENTER

"Have courage and be kind. And when there's no way around it, trust yourself enough to walk straight through."
– Brittany Higgins, women's safety advocate

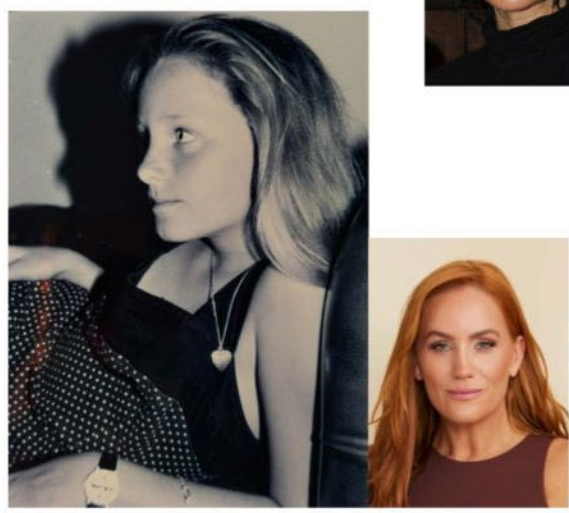


"Trust your intuition. When you learn to listen to it, it can become one of your most powerful guides."
– Camilla Freeman-Topper, creative director of Camilla and Marc



"Look about, see the girls who truly support you and offer kindness, the ones who you can laugh and be your honest self with – choose those to share your life and dreams with."
– SUZIE MILLER, PLAYWRIGHT





"Never make yourself smaller to make others comfortable. Your voice, your sensitivity and the way you care so deeply will become your greatest strengths. And trust the timings of your life, always."
– JULES ROBINSON, ENTREPRENEUR

Photography Michele Aboud; Alan Benson; Samuel Bisso; Neil Cooper; Jessica Lindsay; Matthew McDonald; R.A.D Blackstar; Hugh Stewart; Getty Images; courtesy the talent. **Compiled by** Harriet Sim; Robyn Fay-Perkins

marie claire

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CAN WOMEN REALLY STOP *DOING* INVISIBLE LABOUR?

I'm not entirely surprised that I come undone, only that it takes a sewing machine in need of repairs to take me down. Oh, I don't lose my marbles straight away; first I just fixate on the dusted-off machine, occasionally calling out for someone – my husband, my daughter – to fix it so that the school project can be commenced. When Day Three of inaction becomes Day Eight and nothing is yet done, it occurs to me that the household, once again, is just waiting for "Mum to take care of it" and my annoyance and frustration finally bubble over.

Like a lot of Australian women, I identify as the backbone of my household's invisible labour force. Unlike tangible household chores, which, yes, most of us dominate as well, I'm talking about the oft-unrecognised but invaluable work that keeps a household humming. It's the mental load of planning, organising and anticipating everybody's needs, the emotional support of keeping everyone calm and happy, and the day-to-day admin that prevents the wheels from falling off.

I know I'm far from alone in assuming this responsibility in the household; it's a role disproportionately performed by women (according to the UN, if unpaid care work were given a monetary value, it would exceed 40 per cent of some countries' GDPs), but I'm exhausted.

So what happens if you, a Type A worker bee, suddenly down tools, reach for your inner teen and say, "Yeah, I'm just gonna let someone else deal with everything?" Well, we're about to find out.

You book the appointments, you buy the presents, you know the shoe sizes. But what would happen if you didn't? Dilvin Yasa tries her best to find out

Photography Getty Images

WEEK ONE

Hmm, with my 17-year-old about to sit her HSC trials and my younger daughter planning her 13th birthday sleepover party, this is the worst possible time for me to adopt a mule-like refusal to play along but that's the thing about mental collapse: it does what it does.

My little one gives daily TEDx-style talks about specific presents, food and cakes for her party, and someone (i.e. me) needs to contact all the other parents with the details. I wait for someone else to pick up the thread, and when nothing happens after several days, I finally send a group message to at least lock in a date. It feels so good to action something that I forget all about the challenge and buy my daughter a birthday present that I hide in the back of the wardrobe. I'm mortified.

On the plus side, once I observe that the bulk of the "this needs to be done" conversations happen just after dinner, I begin an evening ritual of having very long, hot, Metallica-pounding baths and retreating to my room to watch documentaries about serial killers. "You look relaxed," says my husband. I don't think he's saying this as a compliment, but I could be projecting.

WEEK TWO

Like most gen Xers, I'm responsible for the care of my elderly parents, but this week I have no qualms about ignoring check-in calls from their aged care providers or flicking their invoices to my brothers to deal with.

The girls, I'm informed, are running out of uniforms and I just shrug and sing, "I got 99 problems but the laundry ain't one." My husband stares at me curiously before undertaking the task and later I overhear my elder daughter ask him if "Mum's having a mental health episode?"

I'm finding this whole experience more stressful than I'd anticipated. I can't help ruminating on all the things – the dental check-ups, the HSC workshop bookings, the party essentials – that need to be happening right now. My husband and I share the household chores, and I know he'd do more if I asked, but I can't help but be annoyed at his inability to just anticipate needs.

WEEK THREE

My anxiety, while silent, is now through the roof, but I can't deny that the brightest of blooms sprout from the most pungent of manure: my daughters have begun taking care of business themselves, exactly like '90s teenagers.

When her request that I make her hair appointment falls on deaf ears, my eldest not only makes her own appointment, but even begins calling around universities to find out about their early entry schemes. "Look at me using the phone!" she beams.

Meanwhile, my younger daughter has pressed ahead with party planning, having organised everything from snacks and activities to the air mattresses she has borrowed. First I marvel, then I ponder writing a parenting guide titled *You Do You Boo: the Joys of Sweet FA Parenting*. It's amazing what happens when you opt out.

"I know my husband would do more if I asked, but I can't help but be annoyed at his inability to just anticipate needs"

WEEK FOUR

It's the nibbled leaves of a toxic plant and a deathly ill cat that calls time on my experiment. I have no choice since no-one else notices that *all* of the leaves of the plant are now missing. "*How could you have missed it*?" I scream in the car on the way to the vet. The fact that they have proves that no-one plays goalie quite like I do and for all my fury over the broken sewing machine, I'm desperate to once again assume the role.

I don't just start picking up the slack, I fall off the wagon with gusto, scheduling appointments, calling schools and buying whitening products for the laundry. I know I'm not exactly setting a standard for womankind, but I'm so relieved to be back in control that I can't possibly care.

The result

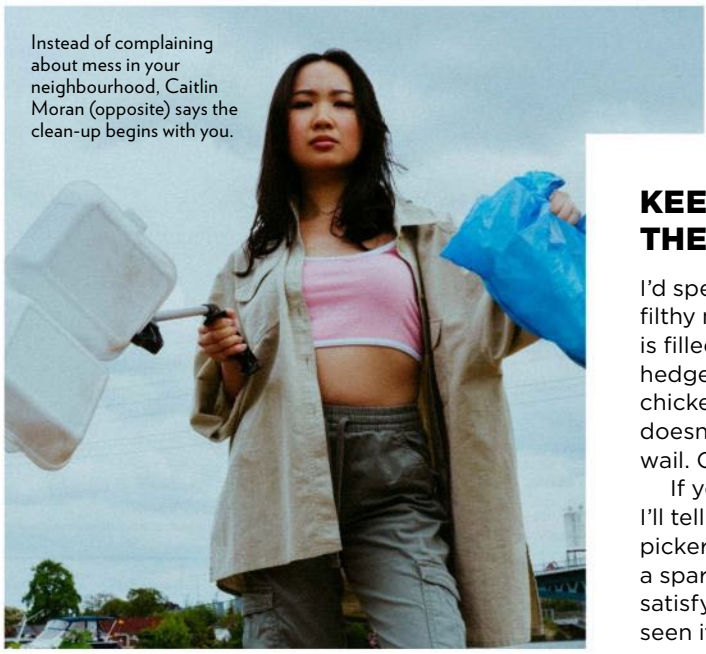
Once the fires are put out, the smoke clears enough to see that the best way to get on top of invisible labour without feeling resentful is to assign practical tasks to everyone else. My daughters are given roles – making school lunches or dinner, for example, or doing the laundry – while I opt out of non-essential communications.

Is it perfect? No. I rush out and buy a new sewing machine for a start; but I'm happier and that counts for an awful lot.

How to be HOPEFUL



One morning, Caitlin Moran lay in bed and realised she had finally reached peak despair. Here she documents her year-long quest to live more hopefully in hard times



Instead of complaining about mess in your neighbourhood, Caitlin Moran (opposite) says the clean-up begins with you.

KEEP YOUR SIDE OF THE STREET CLEAN

I'd spent the past 10 years moaning about how filthy my neighbourhood is: my front garden is filled with old vapes and Red Bull cans, the hedgerows in the park are all stuffed with fried chicken boxes and empty vodka bottles. "Why doesn't someone do something about it?" I would wail. One day I realised that person was me.

If you are of a generation that enjoyed *Pac-Man*, I'll tell you: walking down the street with a litter-picker (Amazon, $38), picking up trash and leaving a sparkling-clean street behind you is incredibly satisfying. "Empowering" is an overused word – I've seen it used to describe hair serums – but giving your own neighbourhood a makeover is empowering. Be the change you want to see, and all that.

Looking at the farmhouse, high in the beautiful Welsh mountains, for the first time in years, I felt optimistic. This was where I would escape from modern life. I could no longer handle watching the news, glass of wine in hand, murmuring, "When did things get so chaotic and weird?" I was done with observing friends and relatives on social media becoming obsessed with vaccines, immigration, Gaza or trans rights, and being so furious about it that they were in endless fights with everyone they knew. And I had to escape the litter-strewn streets of London, where I hadn't seen a single butterfly all summer, and which kept being described, by Donald Trump, as "on the verge of civil war".

Here, in the mountains, I would be safe. After all, this is what all the tech-bro billionaires are doing: buying Apocalypse Bunkers in Hawaii and New Zealand. They obviously know something we don't know. Follow the money!

Unfortunately, I quickly found out why it's only the billionaires buying Apocalypse Bunkers – they're expensive. When a renovation estimate came in for half a million pounds ($950,000), I realised I didn't have enough money to follow the money. I had to withdraw my offer and, instead, began a year-long experiment, which I chronicle in my new memoir. I drew up a list of small but powerful ideas for dealing with the pessimism and anxiety of the modern world, headed by a quote from Joan Didion: "Every day is all there is."

The full story is in the book – along with a lot of stuff about menopause, which definitely didn't help my mood, and my dog, which definitely did – but here, in brief, is how I changed my life in one year and, against all my own expectations, became truly hopeful again.

We are surrounded by miracles we just don't know about



DELETE TWITTER/X

Despite having a million followers on Twitter/X – and having my feed taught as part of "Modern Communication" in British GCSE exams – I finally quit the toxic platform. Within weeks, I felt happier than I had in years. The relief was like the feeling you get when you realise that you can leave this awful party/wedding reception and just go home.

It's weird; we all hate social media. We know that it makes us feel bad – we use the phrase "doomscrolling". But if we had something called "doom sandwiches" we wouldn't eat them, and we would never wear "doom knickers".

I understand that people worry they might "miss out" if they leave but, believe me, you miss nothing. If Taylor Swift does something, you do still know about it. Big news still gets through.



EXERCISE CAUTION WITH YOUR NEWS INTAKE

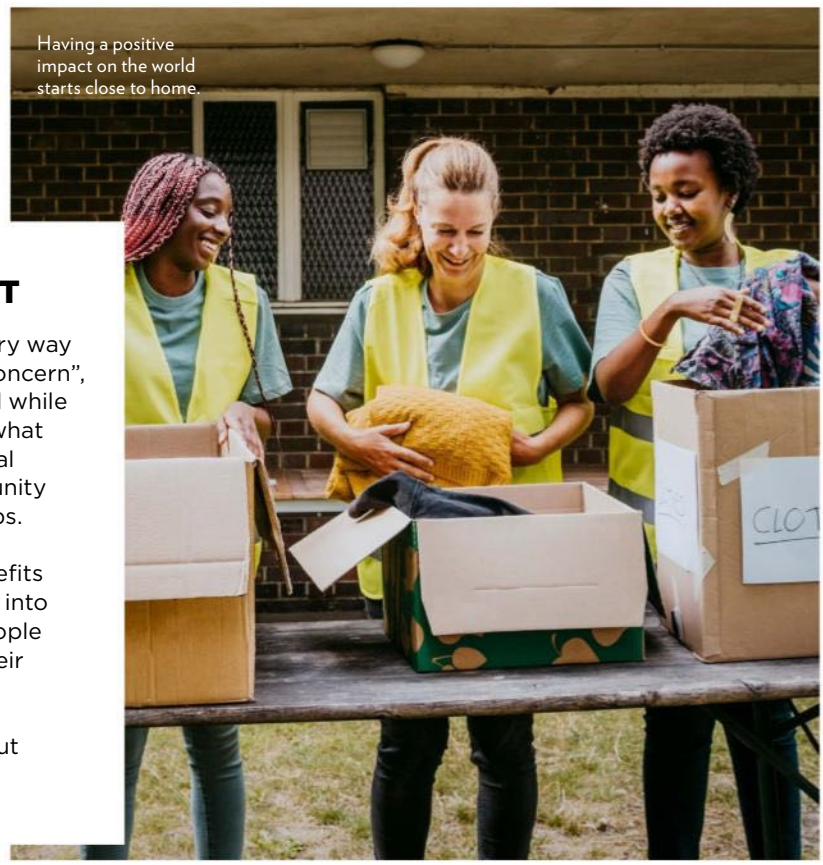
"If it bleeds, it leads" was the slogan in newsrooms, because "news" generally means bad news. Once you understand that, you start to understand just why the news makes you feel so terrible. We never hear the good stuff. But good stuff is happening all the time, and it almost always outweighs the bad.

For instance: if someone goes crazy with a gun in a hospital and kills 10 people, it would make worldwide headlines. However, if a surgeon in the same hospital had saved the lives of 20 people the day before, we would never hear about it. And yet, it happens every day, in every city in the world. We are surrounded by miracles we just don't know about, because "the news" is blind to them.

These days, I carefully limit my news input. The weekend papers are full of analysis, not breaking news, and local newspapers are incredibly soothing. A new bakery has opened! A local girl made it to university! The park has a new paddling pool!

If we're being honest, this is the news that – nine times out of 10 – will actually affect our lives. Allow me to deliver an important truth: you are not morally obliged to traumatise yourself reading updates of every war in the world on a 24/7 basis. Doing so changes nothing.

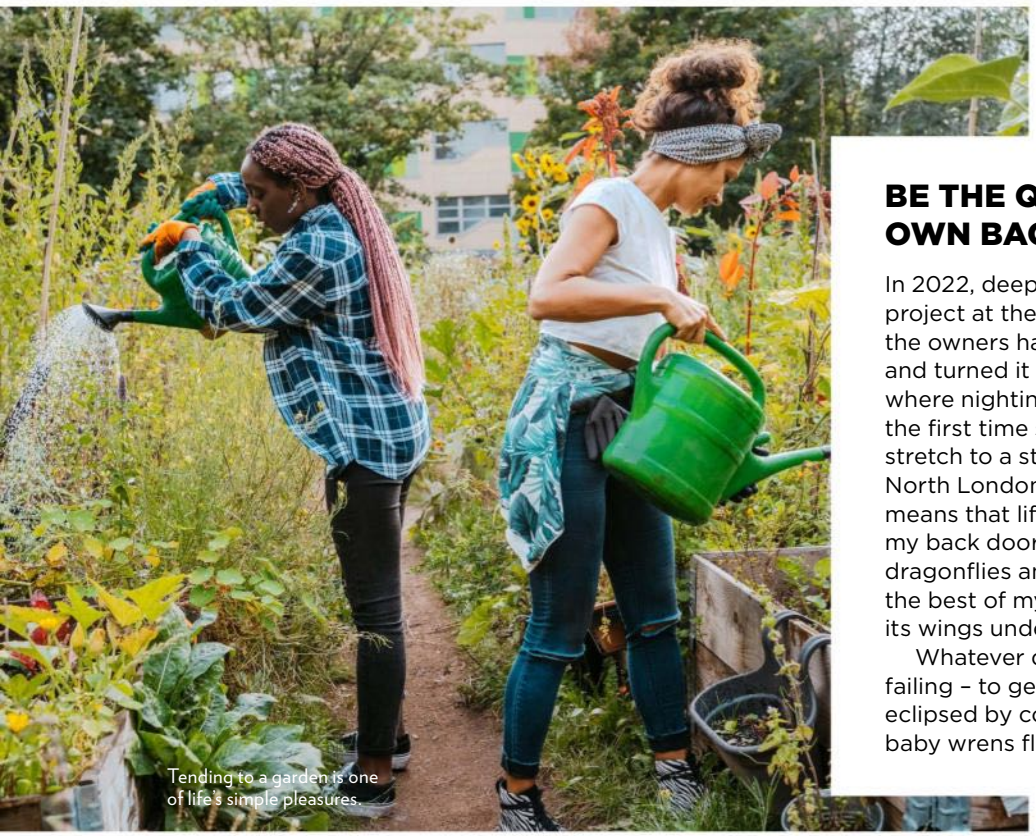
What really helps is doing something small and local. Donate blood. Volunteer. Raise funds


Having a positive impact on the world starts close to home.

DON'T BE AN ONLINE ACTIVIST

We've been led to believe that the 21st century way to make things better is to post about our "concern", "anger" or "heartbreak" on social media. And while it's OK to do that for, like, 20 minutes a day, what really helps is doing something small and local instead. Donate blood. Volunteer at a community centre. Drive a car-less neighbour to the shops. Raise funds for a project.

Most "online activism" ultimately only benefits social media platforms, who love you getting into traumatic, months-long online fights with people who oppose your cause, thus bumping up their "engagement" stats. But you are vanishingly unlikely to be told to "just die in a grease fire, you snowflake Antifa scum" while mucking out at a donkey sanctuary. It's actually quite an easy choice to make.



Tending to a garden is one of life's simple pleasures.

BE THE QUEEN OF YOUR OWN BACK GARDEN

In 2022, deep in "eco grief", I visited a rewilding project at the Knepp Estate in Sussex, where the owners have taken a barren, failing farm and turned it into a modern-day paradise. One where nightingales sing and storks now nest for the first time since 1522. And while I couldn't quite stretch to a stork, just putting a pond in my average North London garden and letting the grass grow means that life has simply exploded right outside my back door: frogs, toads, newts, butterflies, dragonflies and – on a day that might well be the best of my life – a peregrine falcon, washing its wings under my waterfall.

Whatever dopamine hit you were hoping – and failing – to get from doomscrolling at 1am is wildly eclipsed by coming down for breakfast and seeing baby wrens fledging right outside your window.

DITCH YOUR HEADPHONES

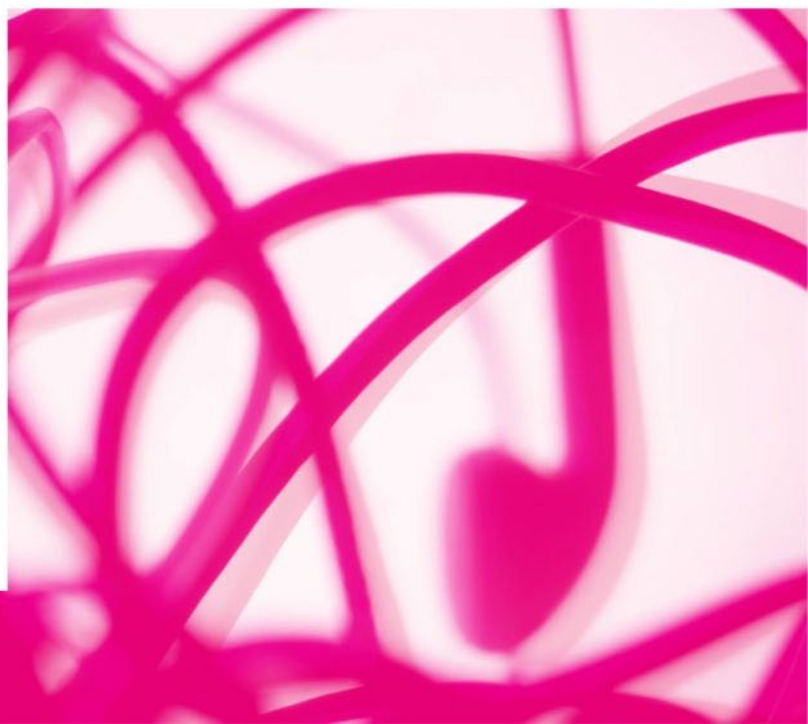
If you leave the house with your headphones clamped to your head, cut off from your surroundings, it's easy to believe in the worst of humanity. After all, when people talk to each other on social media, the tone is furious. However, when I lost my headphones, I was quickly reminded of an eternal fact: most people are just … lovely. Our cities aren't a hate-filled war zone. Our fellow citizens are merely on the phone to their mums; debating whether to have sausages or chicken for tea; or chatting to strangers' babies.

If you walk down the street with your ears "naked", you tune back into your town and fall back in love with one of the miracles of life: a perfectly normal day. Birdsong; the hum of distant lawnmowers; a reggae record floating from an open window; rain. This is the everyday, quiet magic that makes you feel sane again.

What I realised at the end of my experiment is that the world hasn't changed for the worse beyond all recognition in the past decade or so; it's just the way we interact with it that has changed. If you put your phone away, turn off the 24/7 news cycle, put out a bird feeder and chat to the neighbours, you will realise you don't need to run away to an Apocalypse Bunker on the side of a mountain to feel peace and hope. It was right outside your door all along.

How to Be Hopeful *by Caitlin Moran (Penguin, $36.99) is out now.*

I was quickly reminded of an eternal fact: most people are just … lovely



Photography Alex Lake; Getty Images

FORBIDDEN FRUIT

Adopted as a baby, Sophia Greenwood started an incestuous relationship with her birth father that was to have repercussions for years to come – including a warrant for her arrest

Standing barefoot in my kitchen, sipping my morning tea, I learnt that it was likely there was a warrant for my arrest in Australia. My eldest son had been living in Perth for 15 years – I desperately missed him – and, hoping to plan a visit, I called the Australian Federal Police to check whether a warning I had once received, many years before, had any validity.

After looking me up in their system, the officer was calm but direct. "If you're an Australian citizen, you can return," he said. "But if you come into contact with law enforcement, you may be detained." I gripped the kitchen counter as reality sunk in: seeing my son meant risking arrest – all because of my love for my own father.

My biological father was not my "dad" in the sense of the man who raised me; we first met when I was 24. I had been adopted as a baby and brought up lovingly in Yorkshire, England, by my adoptive parents.

When I was five weeks old, in 1965, my adoption was arranged by the birthing home where my mother had been sent in shame, at 18, for becoming pregnant out of wedlock by a man she loved. As her due date approached, she begged to be allowed to keep me, but was told she needed proof the father could support her financially. By then, my biological father had been sent to Australia by his parents for "work experience". My mother wrote to him, but the letter arrived too late.

My birth mother named me Emily. My adoptive parents renamed me Sophia*. For years I thought about tracing my birth parents, but feared the emotional consequences. Then, while training as a physiotherapist in my twenties, I witnessed a childbirth and something shifted inside me. I suddenly needed to know who my mother was. Had she wanted me? Had she been forced to let me go?

A colleague suggested I contact an adoption intermediary service. Within weeks, I was told my birth mother had registered her details years earlier in the hope I might one day search for her. I was handed her phone number after visiting the service's London office.

A few days later, sitting beside my best friend with my heart pounding, I dialled. A woman answered.



"Hello … is this Janet?" I asked quietly.

"Yes, it is. Who's calling?"

"My name's Sophia," I said. "I think I might be your daughter."

She was overjoyed. Over the following weeks we spent hours on the phone before arranging to meet in person. Meeting my birth mother was surreal – joyful, emotional and disorienting all at once. I remember staring at her hands because they looked like mine. There were tears, warmth and curiosity, but also grief for the huge stretch of lost time between us. At 23, I was utterly unprepared for the emotional intensity of the reunion.

My birth parents had not remained in contact over the years. In fact, they had not communicated for almost two decades. By coincidence, shortly before I traced my mother, she had managed to obtain contact details for my biological father, Michael, during a brief exchange with his family. That reconnection later allowed her to write to Michael in Australia with the news that the daughter they'd lost had been searching for them.

Over months of letters and phone calls, Michael and I formed an intense connection. We spoke about psychology, philosophy, art and life itself. I felt understood in a way I never had before.

About a year later, we arranged to meet in England. I picked him up from the airport feeling both apprehensive and excited. From the moment we met, it felt astonishingly easy between us, as though – rather than having never met until now – we had known each other forever.

After our first day together, having insisted he take my bed while I slept on the sofa, I lay awake disturbed by feelings I could barely admit to myself. What frightened me most was not that the connection felt wrong, but that it felt so natural. I realised with horror that what I was experiencing

We formed an intense connection. I felt understood in a way I never had before

resembled romantic attraction. I had spent much of my adult life thus far searching for this kind of effortless emotional connection with a man and now, impossibly, I felt it for the last person I should.

Years later, I learnt there was a term for what we experienced: genetic sexual attraction, or GSA, an intense bond sometimes reported between biological relatives reunited after being separated at birth. Though highly controversial, it is a recognised phenomenon, and adoption professionals estimate that elements of it occur in roughly 10 to 50 per cent of adult family reunions.

One explanation involves the absence of the "Westermarck effect", the natural psychological barrier that normally develops within families. Named after the Finnish anthropologist and philosopher Edvard Westermarck, based at the University of Helsinki in the late 19th and early 20th centuries – and also known as "reverse sexual imprinting" – the theory is that individuals who grow up in close domestic proximity during the first few years of their life develop a natural sexual aversion to one another. The hypothesis suggests the brain uses early co-residence and familiarity as a subconscious cue that an individual is "family", which turns off romantic or sexual attraction later in life and helps prevent incestuous relationships, which can have serious genetic and social consequences.

Because Michael and I had never known each other as parent and child, that boundary had never formed. At the time, we understood none of this.

Perhaps if I had received proper counselling before the reunion, things might have unfolded differently. I might not have let him stay in my flat. We might not have gone on holiday together in an attempt to make up for lost time. We might not have crossed the boundary with that first kiss on a sun-drenched beach. Instead, we entered a relationship that, for five years, felt emotionally overwhelming yet completely natural.

I moved to Australia. We lived together like any couple would. We worked, shared meals, went camping, swam in the sea, spent weekends exploring and talked endlessly about life, philosophy and psychology. To everyone around us, we appeared to be an ordinary couple. The age difference rarely attracted comment.

Michael was a deeply thoughtful man. He was of course aware of the biological reality of our relationship and wrestled with it intellectually, but emotionally we both experienced a profound sense of connection and belonging. We felt understood by the other in a way neither of us had experienced before, and for a long time we believed we would somehow find a way through the difficulties.

Very few people knew the truth about our biological connection. Managing the secret became exhausting and isolating. Deep down, Michael and I knew our relationship could not comfortably exist in the outside world. The confusion, guilt and fear of discovery gradually consumed me.

Eventually, I decided I had to leave and return to England. Then, on the eve of my departure, I discovered I was pregnant. I stared at the positive test in shock. As I cried, Michael held my hands and quietly said, "Whatever you decide to do, I'm behind you."

Given that my own life had begun with an unexpected pregnancy and adoption, termination did not feel emotionally possible. Still, I had no idea what I was going to do.

During the flight back to England, I began bleeding heavily and feared I was miscarrying. Straight from the airport I went to the hospital. After examining me, the doctor smiled gently. "You've got a fighter in there," he said.

A later scan, after further bleeding, confirmed it for me. Hearing the heartbeat, I knew my baby was here to stay. I returned to Australia because the thought of giving birth alone felt unbearable. Our son, James, was born in 1994, healthy and deeply loved.

During the pregnancy, we worried privately about genetic risks, aware there was an increased chance of inherited disorders in children born to close biological relatives. But James thrived.

Motherhood came naturally to me, but the secrecy surrounding James' origins was agonising. I invented a fictional ex-boyfriend to explain who his father was. Michael and I even installed

It never felt incestuous to us because, emotionally, we met as strangers

a separate phone line so my parents would never accidentally hear a man answering. Every ring filled me with anxiety.

Outwardly, our life often appeared idyllic. We camped beneath vast Australian skies, swam at deserted beaches and talked late into the night in our garden. Yet underneath it all was constant fear. Eventually, the strain became unbearable. The relationship itself was not what drove me away, it was the shadow hanging over it. We knew our biological connection would be judged harshly and our future could never feel entirely secure.

When James was 15 months old, I left Australia and returned permanently to England. Not long afterwards, my mother asked directly who James' father was. I confessed everything. She was horrified. To her, Michael was the older man who should have known better. News spread through both families and the years that followed were emotionally brutal. There were confrontations and relentless pressure for us to never see each other again.

At times, the sheer weight of everyone's condemnation made me question my own reality. In moments of confusion and despair, I accused Michael of ruining my life. I am ashamed to admit that at times I made it difficult for him to see his son, something I now regret.

I tried to build a more conventional life. I became engaged to a wonderful man, Andrew, and we had another son, Lucas. But the fallout

from my relationship with Michael never disappeared. James grew up moving between countries and missing his father when they were apart. When he was nine, I decided he deserved to know the truth about his origins. I braced myself for confusion and distress, but what mattered most to him was simply knowing he was loved. He has always accepted our story with remarkable maturity.

The greatest upheaval came in 2004 when a disgruntled former girlfriend of Michael's reported our relationship to the police in Australia. Michael was arrested and later received a suspended sentence for what was legally classified as incest, although because the relationship involved two consenting adults who had never known a family relationship, it was referred to during proceedings as "technical incest".

British police interviewed me at the request of Australian authorities but decided it was not in the public interest to pursue charges. Yet the possibility of an Australian warrant hung over me – something I tried not to think about.

My eldest son visited me regularly in England, which made it easier to avoid confronting the issue. But as time passed, I became increasingly anxious about what would happen if my son needed me urgently, became ill, married or started a family. The thought that I might be unable to board a plane and be there for him finally pushed me to seek answers.

When my sons said they wanted to live in Perth together, I found the courage to face the situation legally. With great trepidation I engaged legal assistance, instructing a criminal lawyer who reviewed the original file, submitted detailed representations explaining that more than three decades had passed, that I had voluntarily come forward, had lived as a law-abiding citizen and had returned to Australia specifically to resolve the situation and be close to my son. Following preliminary hearings, prosecutors discontinued the case and all charges were withdrawn. The joy we felt as a family was indescribable. The cloud that had hung over our lives for years dissipated. It was over.

Today, I live in Perth near both my sons. Michael remains a loving father to James and over time our relationship evolved into something more like extended family.

Family and friends closest to us know the truth. We do not hide it, but neither do we dwell on it. After decades of scrutiny, legal proceedings and emotional upheaval, what matters most to us now is peace, privacy and maintaining loving family relationships.

Do I regret what happened? That is not a simple question. Yes, because I would never knowingly choose the pain, secrecy and emotional fallout that followed. But also no, because the relationship brought deep love and connection at a time when neither of us understood the psychological forces involved. Looking back now, I believe much of what we experienced was shaped by reunion trauma, lost attachment and the absence of natural familial boundaries. It never felt incestuous to us because, emotionally, we met as strangers.

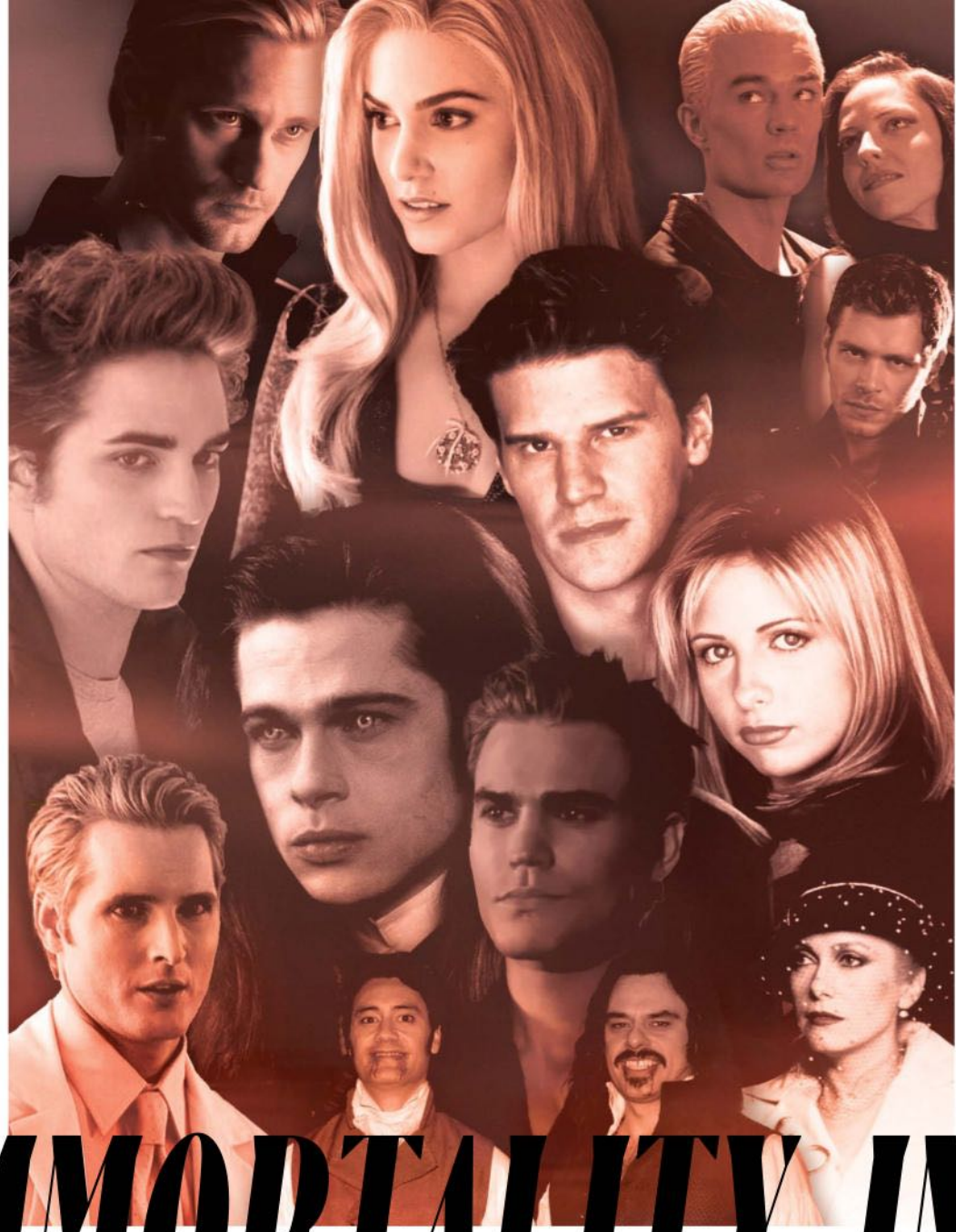
That does not erase the consequences, of course. Our relationship brought pain, instability and secrecy for many people around us. It has taken years of therapy and reflection for me to hold both truths at once: that the relationship felt deeply real to me, and that it also carried serious emotional consequences.

I speak about it now not to seek absolution, but because I believe greater understanding is needed around the psychological complexity of adoption reunions and genetic sexual attraction.

By the time we understood what was happening to us, our relationship had already taken root. Had we known earlier, we might have been able to make different choices and steer our newfound relationship in a different direction.



Photography Getty Images. Sophia Greenwood and Helen Croydon / *The Times* / News Licensing. *All names have been changed



IMMORTALITY, INC.

Wellness has had a rebrand. Enter longevity, a buzzy new word for the same concept. The human desire to live well and live long has been luxuriously packaged, made very expensive, marketed as empowerment and – most crucially – aimed at women. Cleo Glyde has a few thoughts

Once upon a time, women were told to pursue "wellness". Drink the green juice. Do the yoga. Stand in a room heated to roughly the same temperature as Venus. Now the wellness we so enthusiastically pursued has been shoved aside like a pair of dusty ankle weights, and in its place stands a shinier, much more intimidating buzzword: longevity.

Longevity is wellness with a spreadsheet. It's no longer enough to be calm, hydrated and vaguely centred. Now we must optimise, future-proof and biohack our way to a longer, better, smoother life – preferably one that looks good on Instagram and ends some time after 110 years. "It's about 'health span', not just life span," we're told gently, as if this is a soothing concept and not a low-level existential threat. You don't just want to live longer, you want

to live *better* for longer. Which somehow involves supplements, blood tests, red light helmets and knowing what NAD+ is without Googling it.

There is an old joke about the sprightly, 110-year-old woman being asked the secret to her longevity. "Simple," she replies. "The biggest cause of ageing is stress, and the biggest cause of stress is arguing with people. So I never argue with anyone." "That's ridiculous," the enquirer replies with a laugh. "That can't be the real reason." The old lady smiles and nods. "You're probably right." This woman should be running a $40,000-a-year longevity retreat.

Instead, the rest of us are being sold something far more complicated. Longevity has become capitalism's newest victim: a deeply human desire to live well for as long as possible wrapped in luxury branding and sold back to women as both empowerment *and* obligation.

Stem cells, vitamin IV therapy, epigenetic testing, hyperbaric oxygen therapy. This is wellness gone SpaceX

At a time when the world feels increasingly out of control (climate crisis! Cost of living! AI!), it makes sense that we'd turn inward, towards the ultimate form of personal mastery: our own mortality. If we can't control the future, perhaps we can at least control our cellular ageing. And so longevity arrives, armed with science-geek buzzwords and a credit-card facility.

The modern longevity starter pack includes foundational lifestyle changes – diet, exercise, sleep, stress management – which, annoyingly, are the same things your mum has been suggesting for decades. But layered on top is a glossy new world of emerging science: NAD+ precursors, omega-3s, creatine, GLP-1s, metformin, rapamycin. Then we escalate to the really fun stuff: stem cells, vitamin IV therapy, epigenetic testing, hyperbaric oxygen therapy. This is wellness gone SpaceX.

Luxury and lifestyle brands have leapt aboard. There are longevity hotels, longevity lounges, longevity creams costing more than my old Honda Prelude. La Prairie's superstar Life Matrix Haute Rejuvenation Cream (50ml, $2970) claims to reset "cellular information to a high-functioning younger state", overwriting the old blueprint of skincare.

We may not have a magic pill that promises guaranteed life span extension, but humble vitamin C is being overtaken by supplements that target youthful cellular energy, such as Urolithin A (UA), a gut metabolite from plant polyphenols that supports mitophagy: the cellular clean-up of old, damaged mitochondria to make room for newer, more efficient ones. I have FOMO just reading about it.

What's striking is how competitive it's all become. Longevity is no longer just personal – it's performative. American entrepreneur and venture capitalist Bryan Johnson's Rejuvenationolympics.com encourages people to upload their biological age to a public leaderboard, turning ageing into a sport you can lose at. Where we once bragged about holidays and designer bags, now we flex our Fitbit scores and chronological versus biological age.

Even ageing itself has been rebranded. Getting older isn't something that *happens* to you; it's something you either manage well or fail at. If you age badly, it's implied that you simply didn't invest enough in yourself.

This is where longevity starts to feel less like liberation and more like another stick to beat women with. We are told it's empowering to take control of our future selves, but also subtly warned that if we don't, we're being irresponsible. You didn't just forget sunscreen, you compromised your long-term cellular health.

And yet, there's a fascinating split in the longevity narrative. On one side: ultra-wealthy biohackers spending millions to shave fractions off their biological age. On the other: Blue Zones, where people live long lives by eating fresh, simple food, walking, socialising and not checking their glucose monitor before every meal. One path demands hyperbaric chambers and blood transfusions. The other requires friends and beans.

Guess which one is harder to monetise.

Longevity marketing loves to borrow the language of community and balance, but rarely suggests anything as radical as less hustle or fewer emails. Instead, we are sold individual solutions to collective problems. Feeling burnt out? Have you tried magnesium *and* an IV drip?

Of course, not all of this is nonsense. Many longevity ideas – sleep, movement, connection, reducing stress – are genuinely valuable. The problem isn't wanting to live well for longer. The problem is when longevity becomes another endless project of self-improvement, another way of telling women that their bodies are always slightly behind schedule.

Longevity promises control in an uncontrollable world. Suggesting that if you just optimise hard enough, you can outrun time itself. But maybe the real secret isn't in epigenetics or $12,000 plasma exchanges. Maybe it's closer to that old woman's advice: argue less, stress less, live your life. And if longevity really is about health span – not just how long we live, but how well – then perhaps the most radical act isn't buying another supplement, perhaps it's deciding that your future self doesn't need to be endlessly optimised.

After all, will our growing obsession with buying more time also have longevity? Or will it go the way of wellness: another beautiful word, slowly stretched so thin it can sell anything from pistachio milk to pickleball?

Either way, I'm off to not argue with anyone. For the sake of my cells.

Photography Getty Images. **Collage** Rebecca Rhodes



Feeling the HEAT

As climate change sends temperatures soaring, the women making our clothes are working in increasingly dangerous heat, often without adequate water, ventilation or even toilet breaks. Lucianne Tonti investigates the human cost of fashion's heat crisis



For garment workers in the dense industrial hub that surrounds Dhaka, the capital city of Bangladesh, a typical day begins at 5am. They make breakfast for their families and clean the house before walking to work – a journey that can take up to an hour. In Dhaka, the weather is both warm and humid – the temperature rarely drops below 26°C, and in the summer months it can reach as high as 45°C. During heatwaves, which are increasingly frequent and protracted as global warming's consequences land, inside the factories, where T-shirts and trousers are made for the world's biggest clothing companies, temperatures can be a sweltering 38°C.

And it's not just in Bangladesh – across China, India and Vietnam, where much of the world's clothing is produced, rising heat stress is threatening the lives and health of the people (mostly women) who work along the supply chain. Less than two per cent of them are paid a living wage to cut and assemble clothing under the immense pressure of volume-based production targets. The speed of their labour is the last price component that can be squeezed in fashion's seemingly bottomless search for the cheapest goods. Materials, electricity and logistic costs are relatively fixed, so when a fashion brand demands a lower price, labour is the only movable variable.

Now, ultra-fast-fashion brands and mass retailers, from Shein to Kmart, sell T-shirts for as little as $3. Before the retail mark-up is applied, the cost price might be just a third of this. And once fabric and overheads are accounted for, there are mere cents left for the people who construct and sew garments.

As heat adds another layer of stress and risk to jobs already fraught with zero-hour contracts (where there is no guarantee of minimum hours), no sick leave and hazardous working environments, the fashion industry is facing a reckoning over its treatment of workers.

"It feels like being locked inside a pressure cooker at high flame"

– A 36-year-old sewing machine operator from India

"We wear bras, blouses, sarees and aprons in 40°C heat. It feels like being locked inside a pressure cooker at high flame," says a 36-year-old sewing machine operator from India who spoke on the condition of anonymity. "Sometimes, I think I'm like a broiler chicken – just waiting to burst."

She has been working in the garment industry for nine years and has a number of strategies in place to meet her production targets, fearing scolding from line supervisors if she falls behind. She avoids drinking water to minimise toilet use and chews gum to suppress thirst. "I only pee at lunch or after I reach home," she says. "That's how I survive, by controlling my body."

Another 39-year-old woman from India works as a fusing operator – a physically demanding job using a heat press machine to attach brand labels onto garments. She has been in the industry for five years and works at a factory that produces clothes for major international brands where the production pressure to meet high volume targets is intense.

"If I go to the toilet, when I come back, my table is loaded with garment pieces and I'll be yelled at. So I control myself from peeing to avoid scolding. I hardly drink water – only when I feel like fainting will I drink a little," she says.

A 33-year-old tailor (also from India) who works six days a week to support her household describes the factory – which has no ventilation and only a few functioning fans – as a "furnace with no relief" in the summer months. She is on a day-pay contract with minimal security and no benefits and is expected to make 120 to 130 pieces per hour. "If I don't meet my piece count, I won't get paid," she says. "We don't even have time to wipe the sweat off our faces. If we stop, the pieces won't get done – and then the supervisor scolds us in front of everyone. That's very humiliating."

As we have seen across Europe this summer, extreme heat is no longer

Below A group of garment workers at a factory in Bangladesh.

Opposite Cramped working conditions inside a Dhaka factory.

"We don't have time to wipe the sweat off our faces. If we stop, the pieces won't get done"

– A 33-year-old tailor in India



a projected threat – it is already disrupting lives all over the world. Every one of the past 11 years has been one of the hottest on record. The World Meteorological Organization has confirmed that the global average surface temperature in 2025 was 1.44°C above the pre-industrial average. In the worst affected places, temperatures are also rising at night, limiting the ability of anyone without air conditioning to experience a reprieve.

But despite its prevalence, and the fact that it is the leading cause of weather-related deaths globally, heat is viewed differently to other extreme weather events. Because droughts, floods and bushfires are visually more dramatic, the threat they pose to human life is better understood. By contrast, extreme heat is viewed as an annoyance, and experts say we are unprepared for its catastrophic health impacts and how unevenly it affects different social groups.

Dr Harshita Umesh is the founder of Vaada Hope Foundation and a surgeon in training from Bengaluru, India. Garment workers present at the hospital where she is a resident with a range of health problems, many of them compounded by the heat and their precarious working conditions. These include dehydration, headaches, fainting, cardiovascular strain, an inability to concentrate which results in injury, gastrointestinal issues from food spoilage and insufficient water intake, urinary tract infections, kidney stones and irritability that can result in violence from their managers. To make matters worse for the women inside the factories, extreme heat's impact on menopause, pregnancy and fertility is under-researched.

"Garment workers usually drink very, very little water so that they don't have to use the restroom. The consequences of that ends up being a urinary tract infection, it ends up being sepsis, it ends up being kidney stones, it ends up being people in the hospital," Umesh says. Heat is "an underlying stress that exacerbates everything else around it", especially for female garment workers who may already be in "a chronic condition of starvation and are under a lot of stress already".

In two reports released at the end of 2025, human rights campaigners Amnesty International accused fashion brands, factory owners and the governments of Bangladesh, India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka of failing to ensure garment workers had the right to unionise and collectively bargain. The harsh reality of these workers' lives – powerless to demand better conditions and under such intense time pressure that bathroom breaks are out of reach – is just one part of the inhumanity in these jobs. Another is that they do not have paid sick leave, and Umesh recounts stories of women who present in hospital, needing treatment, but refuse it because they cannot afford to take the time off work.

"If you have a quota to meet, you might not go to the doctor on time," she says. Meaning something like a small injury to a finger can get infected and swollen. Usually, such an injury would be curable with medication and time, but if "you have to go back to work or your family will starve", you will refuse treatment. She recounts incidents of patients



returning when the infection becomes too bad to ignore – if it's spread to the bone, the only option to save their life is to amputate the finger.

"Every garment we wear tells a story and it shouldn't be one of blood, sweat and tears," Umesh says. "Workers must be paid a living wage, not because the world is watching but out of respect for human dignity and life."

To make an already difficult situation even worse, the solutions – air conditioning and extra fans – are compromised by how much they cost to install, old infrastructure that cannot physically support them and by pressure from the fashion industry to decarbonise the supply chain, which means using less electricity, not more. Solutions are further compromised by global instability impacting fuel sources. In May, due to energy shortages linked to the Iran war, Bangladesh manufacturers were forced to turn off fans and air conditioning to save power while temperatures peaked. Pivoting to renewable energy from solar panels seems like a logical solution, but infrastructure and who shoulders the expense of installation remains a barrier.

While the issues of the industry's environmental harms and contribution to global warming are entwined with the harm it perpetrates on workers in its supply chains – namely through over-production – there is an urgency missing from the industry's approach to the health impacts of heat stress. Grace Forrest, the founding director of the human rights organisation Walk Free, believes the fashion industry is too focused on innovation to lessen its environmental footprint. "Right now, harmful impact is far outpacing the delivery of effective and structural sustainability solutions," she says. "Many of the 'solutions' will not address the human harms stitched into the fashion industry."

Dr Hakan Karaosman is a supply chain expert and associate professor at Politecnico di Milano. He believes at least part of the solution is fashion brands changing their business models and accepting that they must pay a fair price. "We are seeing production as a commodity. We are seeing workers as a commodity. So we don't really humanise the workforce," he explains. "Let's ask the workers how we can help them improve their conditions so they can be more dignified."

The women who gave their voices to this article asked for urgent, basic interventions that are so simple it is heartbreaking to consider how difficult their working days are. "A glass of lime water – if [lime] is too expensive, then at least cold water. Something to make it bearable," the 33-year-old tailor says. Other requests include more frequent and unpenalised toilet breaks, air coolers or air conditioners during high-temperature periods, electrolyte water, better ventilation and roofs that are made of materials other than metal.

The 36-year-old sewing machine operator asks for something that would help the people at the top – those making the decisions that impact the workers' lives – have more empathy for them. "Let the directors of these fashion brands sit in our seats – just for one hour," she says. "Let them feel this heat, this sweat, this pain. Maybe then they'll realise that they are killing us for their profits."

"Every garment we wear tells a story and it shouldn't be one of blood, sweat and tears"

– Dr Harshita Umesh, founder of Vaada Hope Foundation

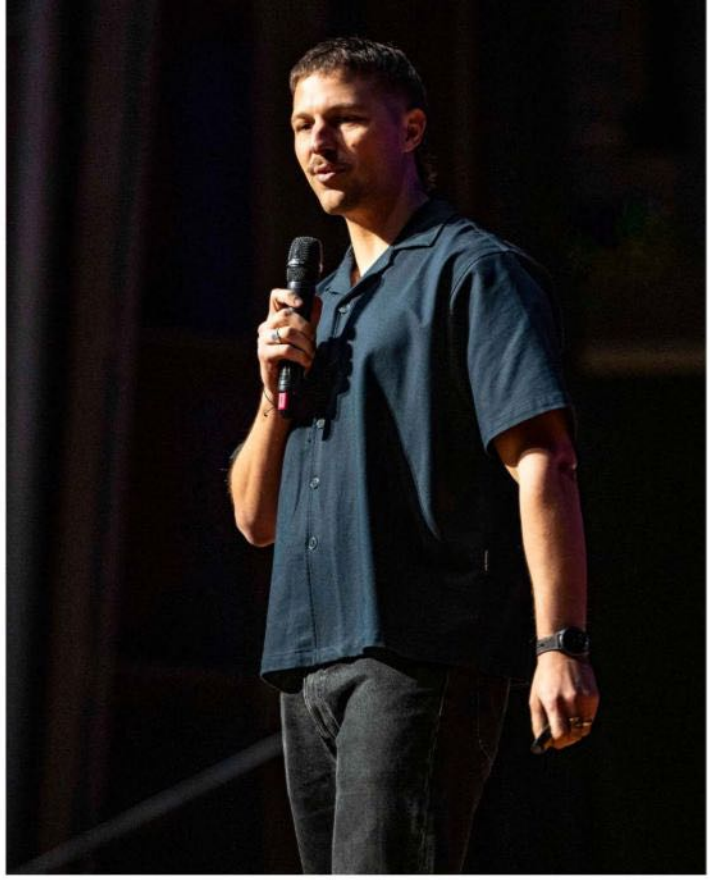
Photography Getty Images

IT ENDS with MEN

AS TOLD TO
HARRIET SIM



For too long, the burden of ending violence against women has fallen on women. Meet the men working to shift that responsibility, by calling on other men to challenge each other, take accountability and become part of the solution



DANIEL PRINCIPE *consent educator*

In the past decade, Daniel Principe has stepped into more than 3000 classrooms to talk to boys about masculinity, consent and their attitudes towards women. Here, he shares what those conversations have taught him about how to champion young boys to become good men.

I didn't receive a healthy sex education until I was in my early twenties. Up until then, it was pornography, the internet and asking my mates for advice, which, unsurprisingly, didn't set me up well. My female friends and mentors shaped me through my twenties, modelling different ways of being in the world and sharing their experiences. They gave me reading material, and I started on what became a bit of homework. Eventually, that led me to the work I do today as a youth advocate and consent educator.

Since starting this work a decade ago, I've engaged with more than 110,000 students, and 95 per cent of my sessions are with boys. Despite being a national consent ambassador, I've also been critical of the way we talk about consent because consent isn't the only ethical consideration. We need a more fulsome vision of what it means to know what you're consenting to and why, and to feel like you have agency in it. For boys, it shouldn't just be a desire to get consent, but a desire to care about the other person: their needs, their safety, their pleasure and their voice.

I'm not talking about the mechanics of sex. I'm talking about the *meaning* of sex. Sadly, heterosexual men and boys are often socialised – through broader social norms, pop culture and porn culture – to see sex as a conquest. I want to challenge that and invite boys into a far more equal, shared and pleasurable experience of sexuality that isn't centred on male dominance, control and conquest. That sounds simple. The difficult question is: how do you do it?

I spend a lot of time talking to boys about entitlement: what that looks like and how to tell if someone is uncomfortable. These are the kinds of social and emotional skills we need to cultivate: listening, respecting boundaries, emotionally regulating and having empathy. You're not born with or without empathy. You can grow that moral muscle.

There is cause for hope. But there is also cause for concern. I ask boys all the time to put their hands up if they are seeing horrific things said about women online. More than 90 per cent of them put their hands up every single day. That doesn't mean they believe [what they read], but we cannot have boys telling us every day that they're seeing misogynistic content and expect it not to have an impact. At the same time, some of the young men I meet today are light-years ahead of where I was at their age. They are thoughtful, kind and respectful. Yet, in the same room, I can encounter callousness and apathy. That's what makes this work difficult.

Schools have an important role to play, of course, but these attitudes are being shaped long before teenagers walk into a consent education session. Parents are raising children in uniquely difficult times, and I have enormous empathy for that. But we can't continuously outsource this work to schools. We need parents to feel equipped to help young people understand what safe, loving relationships feel like; that "no" can come in many forms; what it feels like to be rejected or have a disappointing day and manage the emotions that come with it. These conversations start when children are very little.

Right now, we have more information than ever and, in many ways, already know what we need to do. The question is whether we are willing to do it. But I remain hopeful because every day I get to work with communities and school leaders who live and breathe this work and want good for others. There are people already showing up massively in this space. We just have to keep at it.

TARANG CHAWLA
co-founder of Not One More Niki

In 2015, Tarang Chawla's 23-year-old sister, Nikita, was murdered by her partner. In the decade since, the former lawyer and academic has become one of Australia's most prominent voices on gendered violence, working across prevention, education and system reform. Now, he says, it's time for all men to step up and play their part.

My sister, Niki, was one of the kindest people I've ever known. She had a big heart and really cared about her family, her community and the world. In 2015, Niki was murdered by her partner. During the criminal trial of the man who took her life, my mum told the judge that although Niki only lived for 23 years, she gave enough love to last several lifetimes. I thought that was a beautiful way to describe her.

Shortly after Niki's death, I saw a footy player on national television who'd been imprisoned for assaulting his partner. His team welcomed him back and he was speaking about how he was "involved" in this incident of domestic violence. That didn't sit right with me because he spoke about his so-called involvement, when he caused all the horrific injuries to his partner. This man showed a clear lack of accountability, and I had to speak up.

I co-founded Not One More Niki, an Australian victim-survivor-led movement, to stop male violence against women and girls. My advocacy started from a place of rage, anger and grief and needing to do something. I feel I have a responsibility not only to my sister but to all women to do this work. Although male violence primarily harms women and girls, it's not their responsibility to solve it. Men have to change the cultures and behaviours that enable it, and invest in the solution. The goal is not to create more male advocates. The goal is for fewer women to be harmed. We have created a society over a very long period where men still hold social permission to make women and girls feel unsafe, and their fear of losing social currency prevents them from speaking out about this issue. You are seen to be "dogging the boys" or going against the boys' club or the culture of male peer relations where you don't "rat" on each other, especially in Australia.

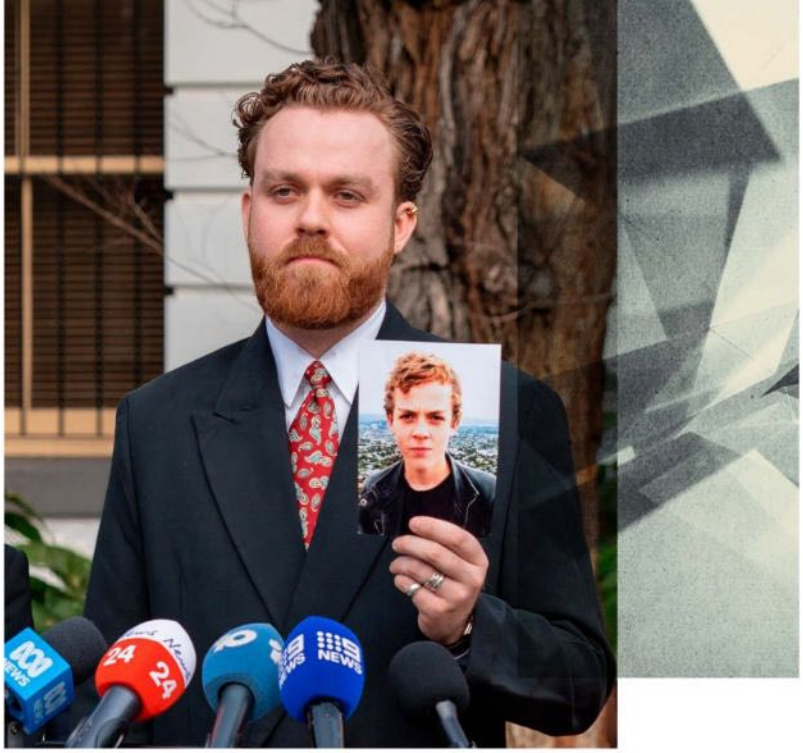
It's not just understanding the dictionary definition of consent. It's being able to understand: how do I recognise another person's humanity when that conflicts with my own desire? It's questioning your own attitudes towards entitlement and challenging the culture in the environments where you won't get recognition, when there is no reward for speaking out. When women and girls aren't in the space, and someone makes a sexist or demeaning or derogatory joke, do you choose to laugh along? Or do you choose to be the person who says, "Hey, I don't think that's the kind of culture that we're trying to set here"?

Effective male allyship, to me, is not about speaking for women. Instead, it means listening to them, backing their expertise and then influencing other men, and using that influence for good, including challenging sexism, entitlement and harmful behaviours in every setting all the time.

Grief prompted me to act publicly, but I am always learning more. You have to listen, learn and do the work. I've been doing that for more than a decade. This has taken me into governments, universities, schools, workplaces, sporting organisations and national conversations about reform. People will often tell me, "You're Niki's voice now," but I don't feel that I am Niki's voice, because her voice should still be here.



Photography Anthony Cox; Eugene Hyland; Getty Images



HARRISON JAMES

co-founder of Your Reference Ain't Relevant

Harrison James knows firsthand the power of speaking out. In 2022, he publicly shared his story of childhood sexual abuse to advocate for the abolition of good character references in sentencing sexual offenders. Here, he reflects on his experience and why men need to start speaking up, challenging misogyny and holding each other accountable.

Many of my earliest childhood memories are of violence. My father was physically violent towards my mother, and they divorced in 2010 when I was 10 years old. Just after the divorce, my father perpetrated quite severe domestic violence against my mother. That case went to court, and my father used character references against my mother [to discredit her statement and appeal to the judge for a more lenient sentence]. I saw the hope drain from my mother's face as glowing references about my father were read aloud in court. That early experience was what drove me to launch the Your Reference Ain't Relevant campaign in 2023, to abolish the use of "good character references" in sentencing perpetrators of sexual offences.

My father was ultimately found guilty of domestic violence, but when I turned 13, I was hopeful that he had changed, so I decided to move in with him. That's when I first met my stepmother. [Harrison has publicly alleged that his stepmother sexually abused him between the ages of 13 and 16 and, when he was 15, fell pregnant with their daughter, who he was forced to pretend was his sister.] When I was 19, my stepmother fled to her home country of the Philippines.

Being a male survivor has also shaped the way I think about masculinity. Men speaking honestly about the violence we've experienced matters enormously because silence around male victimhood doesn't protect men at all; it isolates us. We live in a world built around incredibly entrenched gender stereotypes and very established ideas about what a man is supposed to be. We're told masculinity means strength, control, sexual confidence and emotional stoicism. Then you experience something that makes you feel as though all of those things have been taken from you. Before I understood myself as someone who had experienced violence, I often tried to deal with what happened to me through ideas of masculinity that weren't helping me. Chasing feelings of control and validation, a sense of achievement. Chasing sex, alcohol, drugs and whatever makes you feel powerful enough to no longer feel vulnerable.

Men need permission to say, "Someone hurt me." Not because we are trying to compete with women's experiences of violence – we know violence disproportionately affects women and girls and is perpetrated by men – but shame and silence aren't keeping anyone safe. For me, that also means recognising my responsibility as a man. Women shouldn't have to spend their lives convincing men that violence against women is a problem. At some point, men have to turn to each other and say, "This is ours to fix."

Accountability means being explicit about the problem. People are scared to say "misogyny". Say misogyny. Say sexism. Say male entitlement. Say male violence. Be really clear. There is rightly an enormous emphasis on prevention. We absolutely need to be asking what attitudes we can change in young boys so women and girls are safer in 10 or 20 years. But prevention can't be an excuse to postpone action today. Women are experiencing violence, misogyny, and sexual harassment *today*. One in five women experiencing sexual violence in Australia should horrify us. Every woman killed by male violence should horrify us.

I hope eventually the term "male advocate against violence towards women" sounds like a ridiculous distinction. I hope we reach a point where men caring about women's safety is so normal that nobody thinks it's noteworthy enough to give us a special label. We're nowhere near that yet, but that's the culture I want boys growing up in and men contributing to.

WORDS MELISSA GAUDRON

Return to good health

Orchard St. is entering an exciting new business chapter, with the much-loved wellness brand setting its sights on cutting through the noise



Gemma Ward is the face of Orchard St.'s return campaign.

Two years ago, Claire Morris had no idea what she was going to do next. She had stepped away from Prezzee, the global digital gifting company she co-founded, leaving the board and the day-to-day running of the business. The plan, initially, was less about finding the next big thing than finding herself. "I just didn't know what I was going to do," she says. "I just thought, 'OK, I need to rest.'" She had burned out badly and was dealing with health issues. "There was just nothing left."

Then a friend called with some news that, under different circumstances, might have sounded like an opportunity. Orchard St. was closing. For Morris, a Bondi local and long-time customer, it felt more like a personal emergency.

Founded by naturopath Kirsten Shanks, Orchard St. had spent more than a decade building a cult following around a simple idea: that wellness is rooted in our relationship with nature, and that caring for the body should feel like caring for the earth. Its Sydney locations – in Bondi, Bronte, Manly and Paddington – combined wholefoods, herbal medicine, juices, broths, elixirs and practitioner-led therapies, but what people really returned for was something harder to define: a sense of belonging. Orchard St. became a place to connect, grow, learn and feel part of a community that shared a different approach to living well. Before every second cafe had a matcha menu and every beauty brand had a "clean" line, its pioneering Elixir Bar and adaptogenic smoothies helped make wellness feel less like a list of products to buy and more like a community to be a part of.

"When Kim called me, I was shocked. I was like, 'Oh, my God, that's a tragedy!'" Morris says. Her friend Kim Robinson was also a customer and local. Morris reached out to Shanks and offered to help. "It wasn't really a business conversation at first. It was one founder to another."

Morris says she was initially mentoring Shanks, who had received a number of offers as the original business wound down. But the relationship grew. Morris, her husband (and Prezzee co-founder) Matt Hoggett and Robinson then invested a small amount to help keep Orchard St. going online. Soon, they realised that keeping the brand alive was not enough. "If we're going to help Kirsten, we need to fully be there," Morris says. "We need to be working in the business and really look at the future of the brand."

That future is now Orchard St. 2.0.

The new Orchard St. launched online in August, two years after the original stores closed, but the website is really the first chapter of a much larger plan. A 500-square-metre flagship on Bondi Road is scheduled to open in February or March 2027,

> "We're living in an era of infinite choice but diminishing trust. Orchard St. is helping people navigate that with confidence"
>
> – Claire Morris, CEO of Orchard St.

Photography Steven Chee and Matt Hoggett, courtesy Orchard St.

bringing together a retail store, cafe, apothecary and adjoining wellness and events space. The ambition is to restore the thing customers missed most: the feeling of having somewhere to go.

The online store currently brings together more than 100 carefully vetted nature-led brands across beauty, wellness and lifestyle – including Lesse, Bodha and Par Olive – alongside Orchard St.'s own formulations. Products range from moisturisers and toothpastes to teas, elixirs and wellness tools. But the bigger proposition is not more stuff; it is less noise.

Australia's wellness economy is estimated at $218 billion, according to the supplied press material, while more than 70 per cent of Australians actively seek wellness products and services. The problem, Orchard St. argues, is that abundance has created its own form of exhaustion: too many products, too much conflicting advice and too little confidence about whom to trust.

"We're living in an era of infinite choice but diminishing trust," Morris says. "Orchard St. isn't simply selling wellness products; it's helping people navigate that complexity with confidence through curation they can trust."

Product selection is governed by what the business calls its "Natural Lore" framework, assessing products for quality, integrity, efficacy and transparency before they make the cut. The team is wary of greenwashing and says its standards extend to what it excludes, from certain chemicals to microplastics. Their aim is for Orchard St. to become Australia's most trusted curator of wellbeing, reconnecting people with nature's wisdom in ways they can feel, trust and return to.

That is also why the founder story matters. Shanks remains at the centre of the business, rather than being treated as the founder of a company that has now been acquired and repackaged by people with deeper pockets. "She's still very much the heart and soul of it," Morris says. "It's almost like there's a team that's come to support her to take it to the next level."





Left Claire Morris, CEO of Orchard St.

Below The business' founder, Kirsten Shanks.

For Morris, this is a different kind of second act. At Prezzee, she and Hoggett built and scaled a technology business internationally. Orchard St. requires a different set of muscles: retail, wellness, hospitality, community and physical space. But some fundamentals travel surprisingly well.

The team started by asking the same questions Morris says she has used throughout her career: what is our why? What are we doing? How are we going to do it? They researched the market, identified the gaps, assembled an initial product range and launched the online store as an MVP – minimum viable product – rather than waiting for every element of the grand vision to be perfect. "It's always evolving," Morris says.

There is a financial logic to the restraint, too. The business is self-funded by the founding team, and they have deliberately avoided outside investment so they can retain control.

Morris says the experience has also sharpened a more personal lesson: a successful business is not worth much if its founder is too depleted to enjoy it. Since leaving Prezzee, she's changed how she works. Meditation twice a day, a personal spiritual practice and a commitment to pacing herself are non-negotiables. "I actually think I have a responsibility to myself to do the right thing," she says. "All of us have daily rituals that we adhere to."

It is perhaps the most unexpected lesson in a story about a wellness business: the founder has to believe the product, too. Morris has already learnt what happens when she doesn't. "I kind of look back on old me and go, it's not very cool."

The return of Orchard St. is proof that some brands are more than businesses. Years after its doors closed, the community that loved it never stopped believing it had an important role to play. The strongest validation isn't the new website or the future flagship, but the customers, practitioners and community who have rallied behind its return.

See orchardstreet.com.au

Claire Morris' rules for building a business

Know your numbers. "Know what your gross profit is. Know what your levers are. Make sure you've got enough runway." Don't let cashflow become the thing that forces bad decisions.

Don't outsource the homework. Spend as little as possible before you understand your market and customer yourself.

Build the right team. Skills matter, but shared purpose matters more. "If people aren't on board with the why, then it's not the right place for you."

Find mentors. Good advisers give founders perspective when they are too close to the problem.

Don't assume you need investors. Outside capital can accelerate growth, but it can also complicate decision-making. If you do take investment, "make sure you know who you're marrying".

Protect your energy. Burnout is not a badge of honour. "Not burning yourself out, making sure you always have perspective, is probably the most important thing."

Future wealth

For years, financial planner Canna Campbell has watched women carry shame, fear and confusion around money. But in her new book, co-written with Michael Thompson, she explains how financial freedom isn't built through perfection or punishing budgets – it begins by changing the way you think, and taking one small step at a time



FINANCIAL FREEDOM IS PERSONAL

"Financial freedom" is one of those phrases that gets thrown around constantly, but I believe its meaning is deeply personal. For one person, it might mean being able to work part-time; for someone else, it could mean buying a home or simply knowing they can pay an unexpected bill without reaching for a credit card. For me, financial freedom means having my money working for me so I don't have to work unless I want to. It is about having choice, stability and independence.

The first step is to define what financial freedom looks like for you. Too often, people set goals such as, "I want to be better with money". But what does that actually mean, and how will you know whether you're making progress? Give your goals definition, clarity and detail. If you have $5000 in credit card debt, you might decide that by December 1, you will reduce it to $3000. You now have a deadline, an exact amount and a clear destination for your money. That specificity creates accountability.

YOU ARE NOT "BAD WITH MONEY"

Your money mindset is the way you think, feel and behave around money. When you picture your financial future, do you feel excited and empowered, or frightened and ashamed? Many people grow up hearing things such as, "You're bad with money", "You're useless with money" or "All you know how to do is spend". Over time, those statements can become part of your identity – but they may not be true. Perhaps you spent excessively because nobody taught you how to save, budget or invest. Maybe money was never discussed in your family, or your parents lived from pay cheque to pay cheque and you absorbed the idea that financial chaos was normal.

Your past can explain your money habits, but it does not have to dictate your future. Start challenging the story. Who told you that you were bad with money? Why did they say it? Were they good with money themselves? Some of the most powerful transformations happen when we face the things that make us uncomfortable. I have seen people take difficult childhood experiences and turn them into motivation. They decide, "I don't want to live like that. I deserve better and I can teach myself a different way."



Above Financial planner and author Canna Campbell.

MAKE MONEY AN ACT OF SELF-CARE

Being good with money is an act of self-love and self-care. We understand that moving our bodies, eating nourishing food or spending time outside supports our wellbeing; looking after our financial lives deserves the same attention because financial stress infiltrates almost every part of life. Ask yourself: what does money represent in my life? What do I remember about money from childhood? What do I respect about the way money was handled in my family, and what would I like to leave behind? What are my five proudest financial moments? How would I like to feel about my financial future?

You may discover you are better with money than you give yourself credit for. Saving your first $1000 matters. Opening an investment account matters. Checking your superannuation balance matters. Rewrite your negative statements in a positive, present-tense way. Instead of saying, "I'm useless with money," try, "I am learning to manage my money with confidence." When you approach money from a place of care rather than punishment, the entire process starts to feel different.

A BUDGET SHOULD HELP YOU LIVE

I don't believe budgeting should involve shame, deprivation or an overwhelming spreadsheet. A budget is simply a set of healthy boundaries around your money. However, a budget on its own is only a piece of paper with good intentions; the cash-flow system behind it is what makes it work.

I use two main accounts. The first is an everyday account, where income is deposited and regular expenses are paid. The second is a financial float account, where I gradually put aside money for quarterly, biannual and annual costs such as insurance, registration, school or sporting fees, birthdays and Christmas. These expenses are not truly unexpected. We know Christmas is coming, cars require registration and people have birthdays. A financial float allows us to look into our "financial crystal ball" and prepare, rather than being sideswiped and turning to debt.

I also believe in spending money. The point of budgeting is not to eliminate everything that brings you joy; it is to spend intentionally on what you value. I budget for getting my nails done because it makes me feel good. Someone else might value fresh flowers, dinner with friends or a family holiday. There is no universal "right" purchase. The question is whether it gives you lasting value or a fleeting dopamine hit. And if something no longer fits within the budget, I'm not ashamed to say, "I can't do that right now." A budget must be fluid because life changes. Adjusting to rising costs, family needs or setbacks is not failure – it is responsible financial management.

STOP TRYING TO FIX EVERYTHING AT ONCE

One of the biggest barriers to financial progress is overwhelm. People tell themselves they need to fix their super, review their insurance, begin investing, pay down their mortgage and clear their credit card debt immediately. Stop. You will burn out. Slow the process down, focus on one area and don't move on until you feel confident.

Finishing one task gives you a sense of achievement – and the energy to tackle the next. My original $1000 Project was built on this philosophy: finding and investing $1000 at a time. That portfolio is now worth close to $400,000. It wasn't created through one dramatic financial gesture; it was built through small, deliberate actions repeated over time.

CHANGE YOUR MINDSET

You don't have to transform your entire financial life this week. You simply need to begin, build your confidence and keep going.

DON'T COMPARE YOUR FINANCES

Social media is one-dimensional; it doesn't reveal what is happening behind closed doors. The person enjoying a luxurious holiday may have saved for years, inherited money or made sacrifices you cannot see. They may also be drowning in credit card debt or living from pay cheque to pay cheque to maintain that lifestyle. You don't know the full story.

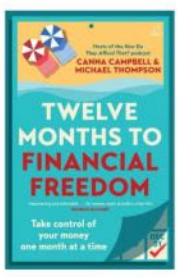
Comparison is the thief of joy, so bring the energy back to yourself. What do you want? How long are you willing to save for it? What will you sacrifice along the way, and is it something you truly value? Money does not necessarily buy happiness, but it can help you build a life that makes you happy. Authentic wealth is found in loving relationships, time and the ability to make choices on your own terms. It might mean reducing your working week because your finances give you that freedom, or simply being able to slow down and be present.



LOOK BENEATH YOUR SPENDING

Spending can sometimes mask a deeper emotional need. After I had my son Rocco, I experienced severe postnatal depression and went through a period of shopping far more than usual. Eventually, I asked myself what was really happening. I realised that when I entered those stores, I was temporarily removed from the exhaustion and mess of caring for a baby – another adult spoke to me kindly and I felt nurtured. That feeling – rather than the clothes themselves – was what kept drawing me back. Once I understood the need beneath the behaviour, I could begin finding that care within myself instead of chasing it through another purchase.

Decluttering can offer similar insights. When you fill a bag with barely worn clothes, don't simply remove them and continue shopping in the same way. Ask why you bought them. Were you chasing a fantasy life or looking for an emotional lift? The goal isn't minimalism for its own sake; it is to stop wasting money on things that add noise rather than value.



This is an edited extract from *Twelve Months to Financial Freedom: Take Control of Your Money One Month at a Time* by Canna Campbell and Michael Thompson (Allen & Unwin, $34.99), out now.

DON'T NEGLECT YOUR SUPER

Even modest additional contributions can make a meaningful difference over decades.

PROTECT WHAT YOU ARE BUILDING

Financial freedom is not only about saving and investing; it is also about protecting yourself from the things you cannot predict. Emergency savings can prevent a broken phone, medical bill or urgent repair from becoming credit card debt. Income protection insurance may provide part of your income if illness or injury prevents you from working, although policies, eligibility and structures vary. Your ability to earn an income is one of your greatest financial assets. Without it, paying the mortgage, buying groceries and continuing to work towards your goals becomes much harder.

Superannuation also deserves your attention. It is not simply money for "one day when you're old"; it is an investment portfolio that may become one of the largest financial assets you own. Check where it is invested, understand the fees and consider whether the strategy suits your timeframe and comfort with risk. The earlier you engage with your super, the more opportunity you give that money to grow.

START WITH WHAT YOU'RE AVOIDING

If you feel overwhelmed, choose the single financial task you have been procrastinating on most. Complete your budget, check your debt, open your superannuation account, find out how much emergency money you have, review an insurance policy or make an appointment with a qualified adviser if you need help. Most of the time, the task is not as frightening or confusing as you imagined. Even if the number is not what you hoped, you will have replaced uncertainty with clarity. That feeling of progress becomes your dopamine hit, and momentum begins.

Nobody is perfect with money – including me. I make mistakes and procrastinate, too. The difference is that I don't beat myself up; I ask, "What can I learn from this, and how can I avoid making the same mistake again?"

Financial freedom does not begin when you reach a particular number. It begins the moment you stop hiding, start paying attention and take responsibility for creating the future you want.

Photography Hilary Chan; Getty Images

AMIwho

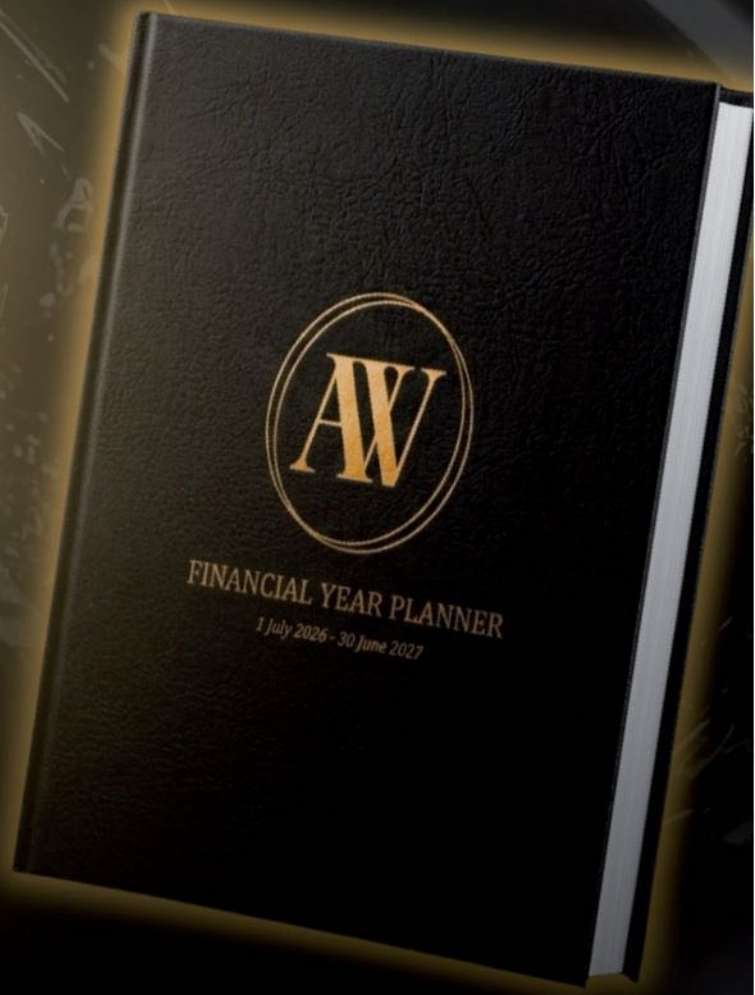
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Having a moment

SUZIE MILLER

Following the global success of *Prima Facie*, *Inter Alia* and *RBG: Of Many, One*, playwright Suzie Miller is now spotlighting the fight to establish the AFLW with *Strong is the New Pretty*

WORDS HARRIET SIM

On a hot and humid afternoon in March 2017, 15,610 fans packed into a Gold Coast stadium to watch history be made. It was the first-ever AFL Women's (AFLW) grand final, and the tension held until the final siren, when the Adelaide Crows defeated the Brisbane Lions by six points. In the stands watching the victory unfold was esteemed Australian playwright Suzie Miller, who had been invited to the game by her friend Sam Mostyn, a driving force in the development of the AFLW and now Australia's Governor-General. "[The experience] was mind-blowing," Miller says. "Having grown up in Melbourne, where AFL was everywhere, I was always a bit peeved that it was just the blokes playing. So when I saw these women playing, I thought, 'Gosh, [how] had this been denied for so many generations?'"

Nine years later, the AFLW has grown into an 18-team national competition, and Miller is revisiting where it all began in her new play, *Strong is the New Pretty*. The inaugural AFLW season was the result of a seven-year battle to establish a national women's competition, driven by players, administrators and advocates who spent years fighting for a place in the sport. Even when the AFLW finally launched in 2017, there was no guarantee that the women's game would endure beyond its first season. "This play was my



Opposite Olivier Award-winning playwright Suzie Miller.

This page *Strong is the New Pretty* is a celebration of how women revolutionised the AFL.

love letter to Australian women," Miller says. "There is a particular struggle for women in a country that's very macho, and I feel the women here are tough. They're really capable and they don't give up easily."

The production follows the women working behind the scenes to make a national women's league a reality, including a character based on Mostyn, who became the AFL's first female commissioner in 2005. Since the AFLW formed, women's and girls' participation in Aussie Rules has grown by nearly 200 per cent.

Strong is the New Pretty is just the latest production in an impressive body of work for Miller, who left law to pursue full-time playwriting in 2009. Putting her legal expertise to good use, in 2019 she premiered *Prima Facie* – a one-woman play that would transform her career. It follows Tessa, a sharp criminal defence barrister whose view of the legal system is disrupted after she is sexually assaulted. The play went on to become a global phenomenon, transferring to London's West End in 2022 with Tessa played by *Killing Eve*'s Jodie Comer – who won both Olivier and Tony awards for her performance – and has now been seen by more than 1.2 million people worldwide. Now, *Prima Facie* has made another leap: from stage to screen, directed by Susanna White and starring Cynthia Erivo. It recently premiered at the Toronto International Film Festival and will head to the London Film Festival in October.

> "I think girls will feel empowered and that their bodies are strong"

Last year, Miller followed *Prima Facie* with *Inter Alia*, another interrogation of law, gender and justice, this time starring Rosamund Pike as a judge whose personal and professional worlds collide when her son is accused of rape. The play premiered at London's National Theatre, with Pike going on to win the 2026 Olivier Award for Best Actress. This month, the novel of *Inter Alia* will be released in Australia.

While *Strong is the New Pretty* might feel like a pivot after *Prima Facie* and *Inter Alia*, at its heart is a familiar question: how do women change systems that weren't designed for them? "I've written so many plays about the blind spots that women have had to fight to be seen in," Miller says. "When I grew up, you knitted a bloody football scarf for a boys' team. You didn't conceive of the possibility that there would be a girl doing a kick on the field." While researching the play, Miller was struck by the number of young girls wearing jerseys bearing the names of their favourite AFLW players – and the young boys doing the same. "It doesn't just inspire young girls to see that inclusiveness," she says. "It does something to young boys' perception of female bodies to see them as powerful and strong."



Photography Michele Aboud; Sam Scoufos

Next, Miller will complete the loose trilogy that began with *Prima Facie* and *Inter Alia* by turning her attention to the jury. "It really is a bit of a psychological thriller of sorts," she says of the currently untitled production. "I've always been fascinated by juries. There's a real dynamic there: 12 people who don't know each other are put in a room and have to reach a unanimous decision. It's extraordinary that we have that expectation, but also how seriously people take it."

There's also plenty more ahead for Miller. On top of her play about the jury, she's currently working on two new plays in London, including one for the West End. For now, though, Miller simply hopes *Strong is the New Pretty* changes audience perceptions of what female strength looks like. "I think young girls will feel empowered and that their bodies are strong. [I also hope they] celebrate that there are so many women under the surface trying to make things happen in this country, and thank God for them."

Strong is the New Pretty *runs September 24 to 26 at Canberra Theatre Centre, October 8 to 11 at Geelong Arts Centre and October 22 to December 5 at Sydney Theatre Company.*

FIRST COMES LOVE, THEN COMES THE DIVORCE DRAMA



Katie Holmes and Tom Cruise at their 2006 wedding. They divorced in 2012.

WORDS HARRIET SIM

Romantasy has had a good run, but a growing genre reveals we're far more interested in what happens after the happily ever after

People say marriage is hard work, but those people clearly have never been through a divorce. There are expensive legal fees, complicated assets to divide, lives to untangle and often painful custody arrangements to negotiate. It's messy, old wounds can be reopened, sides are taken and families are pulled apart. But there is one silver lining of divorce (when you're not involved, that is): it makes for great entertainment. This year, divorce dramas are everywhere, with a growing slate of books, films and television series examining what comes after the end of a marriage. And new stats from the ABS reveal there is certainly an audience for it: 49,158 divorces were granted in Australia in 2025, up 4.1 per cent on the previous year and marking the first increase since the pandemic.

On the page, the year's fascination with marital breakdown started with Belle Burden. In January, she dropped her cautionary memoir, ***Strangers***, detailing the end of her 20-year marriage and her attempt to make sense of how the person she knew most intimately became a stranger. The book sparked a global conversation about whether you ever really know the person you're married to and is now being adapted into a Netflix film starring and executive produced by Gwyneth Paltrow.

ON SCREEN



How to Divorce During the War.



Youth, starring Sharon Horgan.



War, starring Sienna Miller and Dominic West.

In May, *The Housemaid* author Freida McFadden released ***The Divorce***, a pacy psychological thriller about Naomi, whose husband leaves her for a younger woman, kicks her out of their home and hires a top divorce lawyer to represent him. But when Naomi starts digging into his new relationship, she uncovers secrets that suggest her marriage was never what it seemed and that fighting to keep her family together could put her own life in danger. Before the book was even released, Studiocanal snapped up the film rights, following a competitive auction.

Cult Danish author Helle Helle has recently released ***Hafni Says***, about a newly divorced woman who marks the end of her marriage by setting off alone on a culinary road trip through Denmark. In November, ***To the End: Queer Writers on Divorce and Liberation*** brings together writers reflecting on divorce, separation and the freedom that can follow. Then, just in time for Christmas, American chef Carla Lalli is carving out an entirely new subgenre: the divorce cookbook. ***Food is a Feeling: Recipes & Stories, with Love*** turns the end of Lalli's 24-year marriage into a collection of personal essays and the recipes that carried her through it.

On stage, marriage breakdowns have proved equally good material. The hit comedy play ***The Italian Divorce***, about a man forced to move back in with his Italian parents after his wife kicks him out, has been touring Australia throughout 2026. But it's on screen where divorce is really having a moment, with film and television turning the emotional, financial and legal fallout of a marriage ending into everything from comedy to prestige drama. ***How to Divorce During the War*** had its Australian premiere at the Melbourne International Film Festival in August. The film follows a successful breadwinner who tells her unemployed filmmaker husband she wants a divorce. They agree to tell their daughter the following day, only to wake to news that Russia has invaded Ukraine, suddenly overshadowing their private crisis. HBO's new comedy series ***Youth*** follows a 50-year-old divorcee (Sharon Horgan) as she juggles dating with caring for ageing parents and raising a teenage son. Also from HBO is ***War***, starring Sienna Miller as international film star Carla Duval and Dominic West as her estranged husband, tech mogul Morgan Henderson. Their explosive split becomes the divorce case of the century, seeing two of London's most prestigious law firms pitted against each other and resorting to ruthless tactics to win.

If this new divorce canon reflects anything, perhaps it's a changing appetite for romance: we've had our fill of happily ever after and now we're ready for something a little off-script.

BOOKS



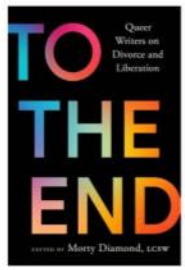
Strangers by Belle Burden (Penguin, $36.99).



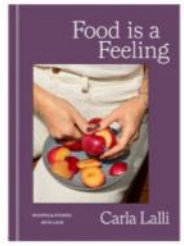
The Divorce by Freida McFadden (Penguin, $34.99).



Hafni Says by Helle Helle (Giramondo $29.95).



To the End edited by Morty Diamond (North Atlantic Books, $45).



Food is a Feeling by Carla Lalli (Penguin, $64.99).

Photography Getty Images



WHAT'S ON

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

WORDS HARRIET SIM

visit SCULPTURES IN THE GARDEN

There are few better pairings than good wine and art. Just ask the owners of Mudgee's Rosby Wines, who each year open their estate for Sculptures in the Garden. This year, more than 300 works will be dotted throughout the property's gardens and vineyards, as well as live music, delicious food and workshops.

From October 10 to 25. Visit sculpturesinthegarden.com.au.

see THE SLEEPING BEAUTY

Germany's world-renowned Stuttgart Ballet takes the classic story of a princess cursed to sleep for 100 years to a darker place for The Australian Ballet. Set to Tchaikovsky's iconic score, this version leans into the story's more sinister side by turning the familiar fairytale into an epic battle between the benevolent Lilac Fairy and vengeful Carabosse.

From October 9 to 18 at Melbourne's Regent Theatre. Visit australianballet.com.au.





watch MATCHBOX: THE MOVIE

First Barbie, now another Mattel favourite is making the leap from toy box to screen. Inspired by the iconic Matchbox cars, this action-filled flick brings together Jessica Biel, Teyonah Parris and John Cena for a globe-trotting adventure about a group of childhood friends unexpectedly pulled into a mission to save the world.

Stream on Apple TV from October 9.



see NOAH KAHAN TOUR

If Noah Kahan's *The Great Divide* is already destined for your Spotify Wrapped this year, now's your chance to hear it live. The American singer-songwriter kicks off his Australian tour in Melbourne on September 25, before heading to Sydney from October 2.

Visit noahkahan.com.



watch **VERITY**

Colleen Hoover's twisty bestseller is getting the big-screen treatment, with Anne Hathaway and Dakota Johnson leading the cast. When Lowen (Johnson), a struggling writer, is hired to ghostwrite for bestselling author Verity (Hathaway), she discovers a manuscript containing some seriously disturbing secrets.

In cinemas October 1.



watch **SENSE AND SENSIBILITY**

Jane Austen fans have been spoilt this year. In March, *The Other Bennet Sister* arrived on Binge, and a remake of *Pride and Prejudice*, written by Dolly Alderton, is on its way to Netflix. This month, *Sense and Sensibility* is back on the big screen with a screenplay by Australian author Diana Reid, and starring Daisy Edgar-Jones and Esmé Creed-Miles.

In cinemas October 15.



watch **THE SOCIAL RECKONING**

A companion film to 2010's *The Social Network*, *The Social Reckoning* follows the explosive Facebook Files investigation, which exposed that Facebook knew about the damaging effects of its platforms while publicly downplaying the risks. Jeremy Strong steps into the role of Mark Zuckerberg and Mikey Madison stars as whistleblower Frances Haugen.

In cinemas October 8.

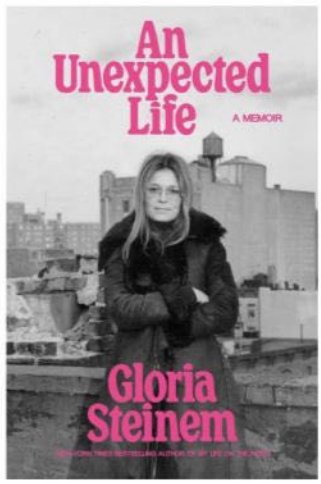
Photography Amber Creative; Getty Images



see **THE UNFRIEND**

Steven Moffat, the writer behind *Doctor Who* and *Sherlock*, is bringing his West End hit *The Unfriend* to Sydney. The dark comedy follows a British couple who befriend an American widow, only to discover she may be a serial killer.

From September 29 to October 31 at Sydney Theatre Company. Visit sydneytheatre.com.au.



read **AN UNEXPECTED LIFE BY GLORIA STEINEM**

If you don't know writer and activist Gloria Steinem, consider *An Unexpected Life* your required reading on one of the most influential figures in modern feminism. In the memoir, Steinem, who died in September aged 92, looks back on the experiences that shaped her life, from her unconventional childhood to the landmark moments of the women's movement.

Penguin, $45; out September 29.

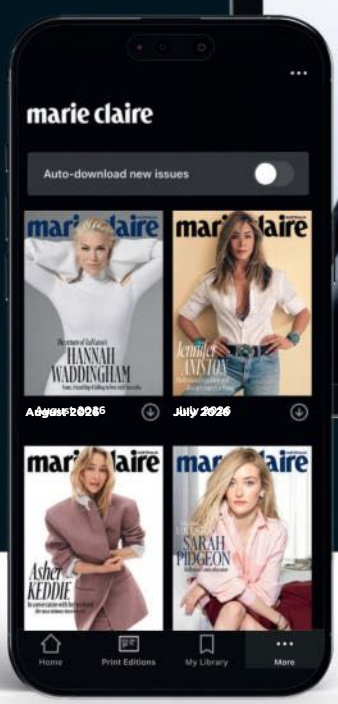
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FASHION

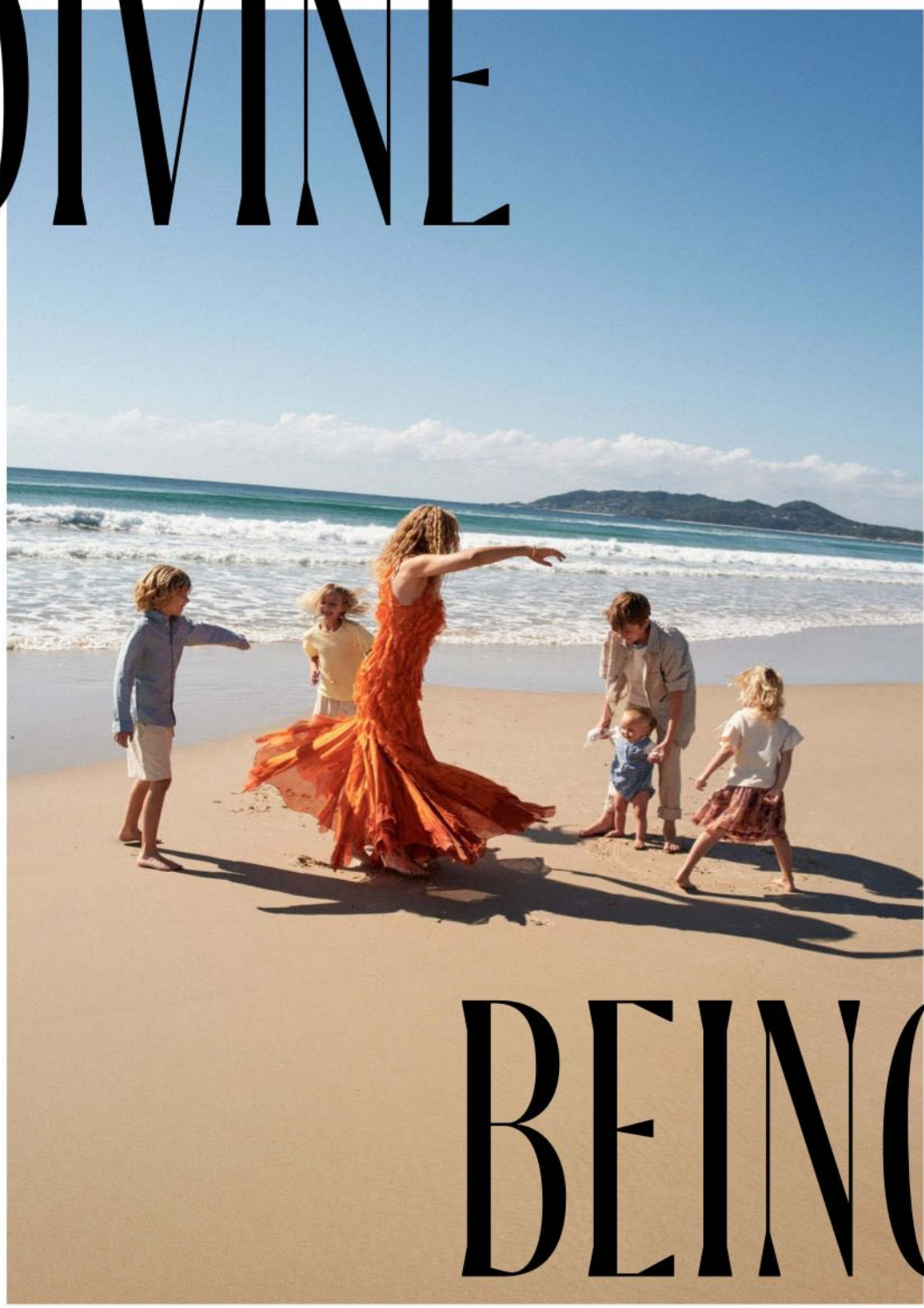
This issue we head to the beautiful beaches of Byron Bay to catch up with Australia's own Teresa Palmer, adorned in Cartier's latest jewels. Then we take a look at layers that will get you through the trans-seasonal months in style



Bondi Born dress, $620; **Cartier** earrings, $13,900, necklace, $19,300, bracelets (from top), $10,500 and $34,100, and rings (Teresa's right hand), $13,000 and $3450.

Photography Bec Parsons/Artist Group. **Styling** Aileen Marr

DIVINE BEING



Five kids, a blissful Byron Bay bolthole and a lead role in a major US series – Australia's Teresa Palmer has got it all going on. Luckily, she thrives on chaos

PHOTOGRAPHY BEC PARSONS **STYLING** AILEEN MARR **WORDS** EUGENIE KELLY



Opposite (from left) Forest wears **Country Road** shirt, $79.95, and shorts, $55.95. Poet wears **Uniqlo** top, $19.90; **Grown** pants, $59. Teresa wears **Lee Mathews** dress, $2199; **Cartier** bracelet, $34,100, and ring, $13,000. Bodhi wears **Cotton On** shirt, $49.99; **H&M** top, $19.99; **Country Road** pants, $149. Lotus wears **Seed** romper, $54.95. Prairie wears **H&M** top, $12.99; **Grown** skirt, $65.

This page: Acler top, $450; **Cartier** earrings (from top), $13,900 and $14,700, necklace, $19,300, bracelet, $34,100, and rings (from left), $13,000 and $3450.









Opposite: **Zimmermann** dress, $1150; **Cartier** necklace, $19,300.

This page Teresa wears **Matin** shirt, $690; **C.Design** swimsuit, $365; **Cartier** earrings, $14,700, necklace, $34,700, bracelet, $10,500, and ring, $13,000. Lotus wears **Grown** jumpsuit, $69.

So much for the chilled-out Byron lifestyle. Teresa Palmer bursts into the empty bedroom, making a beeline for her laptop and our Zoom meeting where I'm already waiting. Clutched in one hand is an oversized yellow-and-white striped bucket of microwave popcorn. "Lunch!" she says, laughing. She's all translucent skin and enormous blue eyes; an ethereal diminutive blonde swallowed by an oversized T-shirt and hooded camo jacket – a skater-style look that suggests she might offer to show you her kickflip.

"Sorry," she apologises in between mouthfuls. "I was downstairs with the babysitter trying to do today's puzzle piece. When you've got five kids, of course they're all going to need to be picked up at the same time. 'I'll go here, you go there, Mum can walk here,'" she recites, replaying the conversation. "Nope, that won't work!"

Managing the diaries of Bodhi, 12, Forest, nine, Poet, seven, Prairie, five, and 12-month-old Lotus chez Palmer sounds a considerably more complex production than what we're here to talk about today: perhaps Teresa's biggest role yet, playing Sif, the Norse goddess, in Amazon Prime's upcoming *God of War*. Currently on a break from filming seasons one and two in Vancouver, the mega-series is on a scale more akin to *The Lord of the Rings*, based on the blockbuster PlayStation franchise that has sold tens of millions of games since its 2005 debut.

Given the level of fandom surrounding the games, Teresa was understandably nervous the night before her casting was announced. "I thought, 'Maybe I better stay offline tomorrow, in case I see things that make me wobble.' It's a dedicated fanbase who immerse themselves in the mythology and feel a real deep connection to it," she says.

Insight gleaned from raising boys. (Teresa's brood also includes 18-year-old stepson Isaac, who lives in Los Angeles.) At least this was an audition the two youngest happily helped her prep for. "They're not allowed to play violent video games, so I told them if I booked this job, I'd let them play," she says, laughing. Teresa initially auditioned for the role via self-tape,





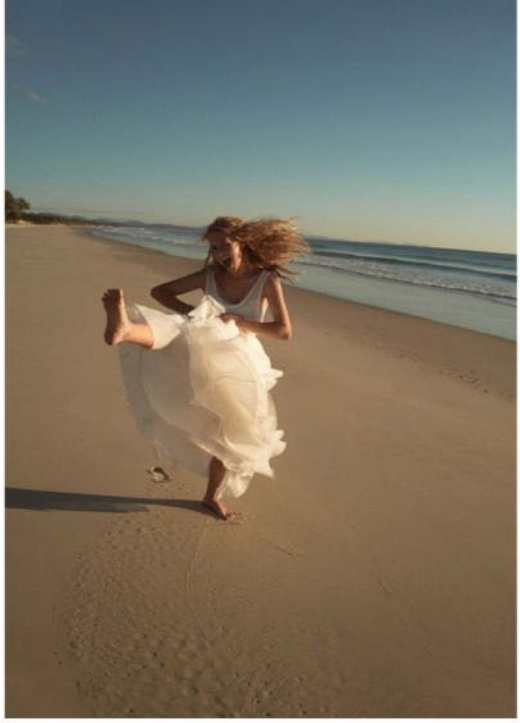
Opposite: Aje dress, $599; **Cartier** ring, $13,000, bracelets, $34,100 and $10,500, earrings, $3850, and necklace, $34,700.

This page: St. Agni top, $499; **Cartier** earrings, $14,700, and bracelets (Teresa's right arm), $34,100 and $10,500.

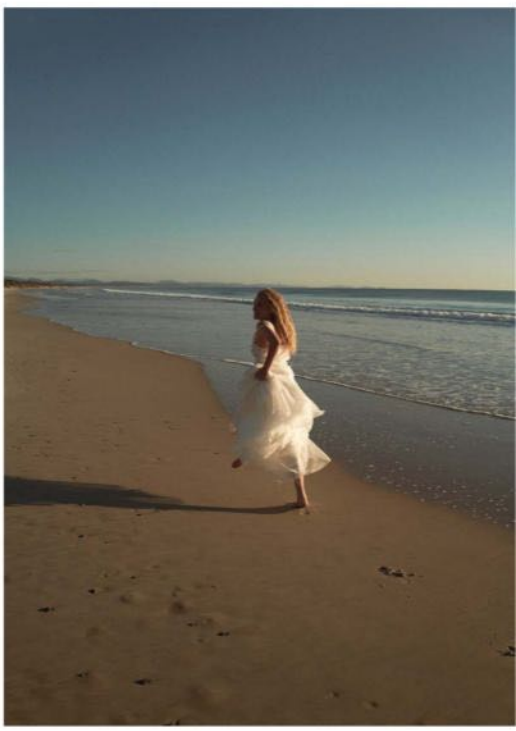


(From left) Poet wears **Uniqlo** top, $19.90. Forest wears **Country Road** shirt, $79.95. Lotus wears **Grown** jumpsuit, $69. Teresa wears **Zimmermann** dress, $1150; **Cartier** bracelet, $34,100, and ring, $13,000. Prairie wears **H&M** top, $12.99. Bodhi wears **Cotton On** shirt, $49.99; **H&M** top, $19.99.










"Teresa is living proof: don't ever put limits on yourself"

– Bruna Papandrea, Australian producer

roping in Bodhi to read opposite her. When the director heard him, he offered both Bodhi and Forest parts too. "We actually had a giggle when this part came up," says Teresa. "Sif is the goddess of fertility, so I wondered if casting thought, 'Hmm, let's get that actress from Australia with five children.'"

Everything pours out of the 40-year-old with a startling degree of candour, whether she's joking about her fertility or revisiting the less-glossy chapters of her past. Growing up in Adelaide with a single mother who struggled with bipolar and schizoaffective disorders and relied on a disability pension meant there were stints in public housing. At 16, Teresa convinced her dad to pay for acting lessons, which led to extra work and student films. Three years later, she moved to LA to pursue acting. Rejection had her contemplating a return to Adelaide and a career as a teacher, before she landed the lead in zombie-romance film *Warm Bodies* in 2013. While in the US, she met Australian producer Bruna Papandrea, who recalls Teresa telling her she'd be a birth doula if acting didn't work out. "She didn't choose, she did both," Bruna tells me later. "Teresa is living proof: don't ever put limits on yourself."

Mel Gibson's Oscar-winning *Hacksaw Ridge* followed in 2016, then Cate Shortland's *Berlin Syndrome* and the Rachel Griffiths-directed *Ride Like a Girl*, based on Michelle Payne's historic Melbourne Cup victory, alongside three seasons of *A Discovery of Witches*.

"You'd think the impostor syndrome would quieten, but it never does," Teresa confesses. "I'm still a real swinging pendulum. Sometimes I feel proud of all the work I've done and think, 'I deserve to be on something like *God of War*.' But most of the time, when I'm there it just feels surreal. I'm on this huge set, looking around at the people, taking in the scale of the thing, and the gratitude pours out of me. Post-Covid I started working a lot in Australia again and did a lot of compelling television that was so nourishing to my artistry. My agents were encouraging me to get back to America and book a job, but I'd convinced myself those doors had closed."

Finally dipping her toe in Hollywood's waters again last year, Teresa auditioned for a string of roles that didn't go her way. "I felt that self-critical voice, 'Nobody wants me.' But with *God of War*, I feel I can quieten that. I pull myself down all the time," she laments. "I don't want to be that way, especially as I have daughters."

She makes it sound as if she has been sitting around twiddling her thumbs. Quite the opposite. Alongside *The Mother Daze*, the popular podcast she co-hosts with LA-based best friend Sarah Wright Olsen, and Lovewell, the wellness supplement brand she runs with Kate Clarke, Teresa's film output in the past 18 months has been prolific. There was *4 Kids Walk into a Bank* (out 2027) with Liam Neeson, shot in Ireland. Then *The Get Out* with Russell Crowe (out September 25, on Amazon Prime), with Russell calling her "the definition of a great actress. She just brought such a beautiful energy to the set every day. She's fun but also serious about the job at the same time." Then there was the submarine thriller *Subversion* (due in 2027) with Chris Hemsworth, who Teresa amusingly refers to "as one of the dads from school".

Both *Subversion* and *The Get Out* were filmed on the Gold Coast, a location that offered a rare novelty: "I could drive to work," she declares, adding that the family's decision to make Byron Bay their base, after moving from Adelaide, has been a positive one. "Mark [Webber, Teresa's husband and a fellow actor] has connected with a lot of creatives here. The community embraced us in a way I wasn't expecting, and my older kids are forging friendships I know they'll come back to."

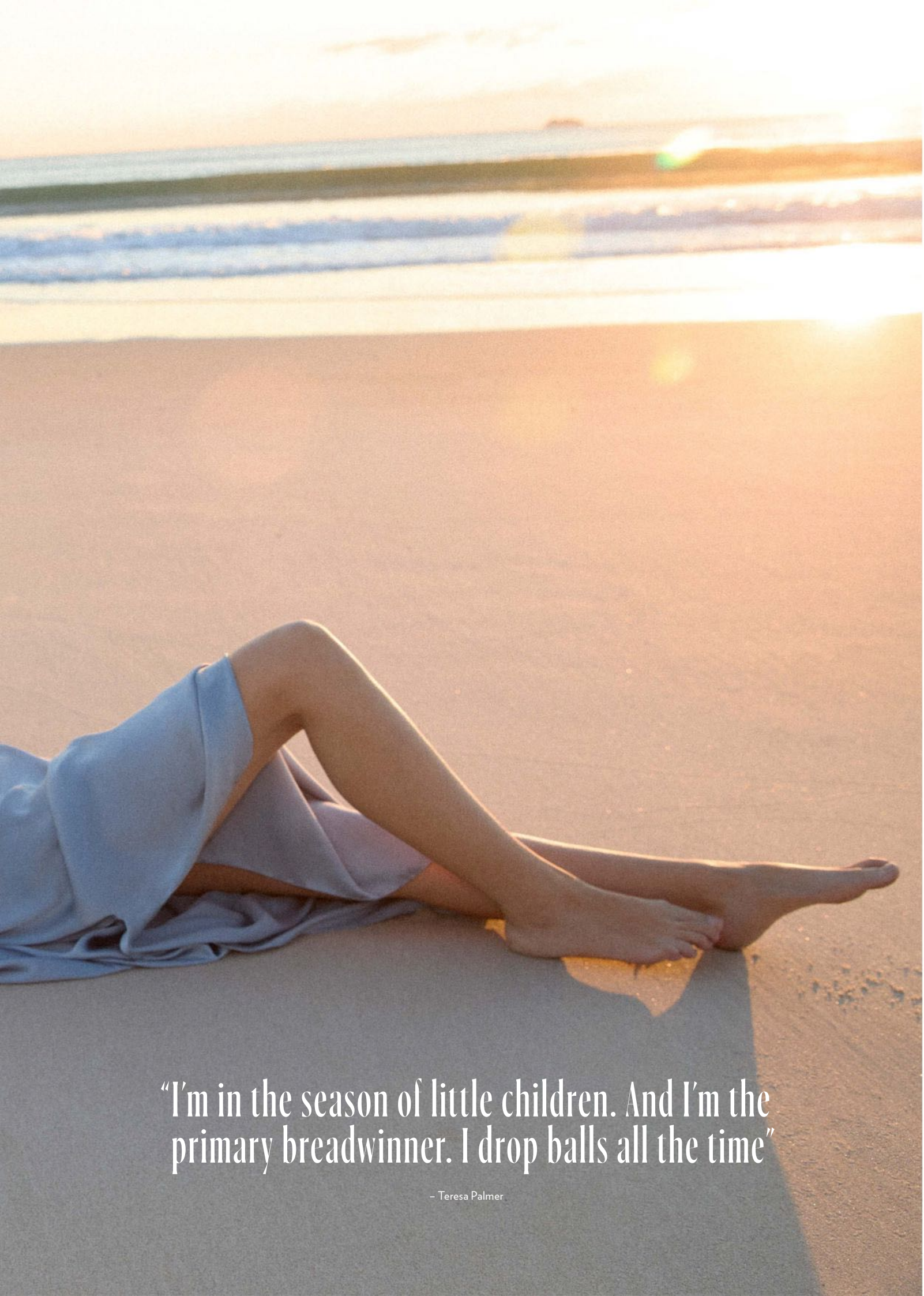
It's also made it easier for her children to meet others whose lives look like theirs. "In Adelaide we stuck out like a sore thumb because you're surrounded by people with a lot of traditional nine-to-five jobs. But here there are lots of entrepreneurs with a similar travelling-circus lifestyle to ours, so that's been helpful for the kids to see. We always want to have a safe place to land, where the kids can transition back to 'normal' life."

Teresa's perfect Byron day starts early, grabbing paddleboards and heading out with the kids to the

Opposite: Aje dress, $599; **Cartier** earrings, $3850, necklace, $34,700, and bracelets, $34,100 and $10,500.



Bondi Born dress, $620; **Cartier** bracelets (from top), $10,500 and $34,100, and earrings, $13,900.



"I'm in the season of little children. And I'm the primary breadwinner. I drop balls all the time"

– Teresa Palmer



waves in front of their house – and, on occasion, to literally frolic with humpbacks. "We're also a big bike-riding family," she says. "So we'll head to The Book Room at Byron and pick out something to read, grab a bubble tea or head to Bayleaf for lunch." Exploring the vegan dining scene is an activity the whole family loves; Teresa, Mark and their kids all follow plant-based diets. "We really left it up to them; there was never any pressure [to be plant-based]. The older boys made that choice for themselves, and then all of the siblings ended up doing the same," she says. "Now it's just such an easy, natural part of our family life." Teresa keeps vegan treats on hand for birthday parties, but otherwise says, "there's nothing difficult about raising plant-based kids. Most of our friends know our kids are plant-based and are really accommodating. It's quite similar to having a child who's gluten-free or lactose intolerant."

She lists inviting girlfriends over for champagne while the kids jump in and out of the pool as one of her favourite activities. Her close circle of Byron gal pals straddles film and fashion: fellow actor Elsa Pataky, who designed the Spell jacket she is wearing today; Jes Saddington, founder of bedding and loungewear label Dazed but Amazed ("we're working on a prototype for a reversible jacket together that has vintage Isabel Marant vibes. The plan is to launch it by Christmas"); Rowie Moore, founder and designer of Rowie the Label, whose clothes she champions on social media; Laura May Gibbs, co-founder of Nagnata ("I'd never wear a structured jean – their slouchy style is the best"); and models Jessica Gomes and Gemma Ward.

It might sound like a celebrity girl gang, but to Teresa, it's a village. She's a natural nurturer, although that instinct to look after everyone surely comes with its own weight? "When I really reflect on things, if there's anything missing for me, it's that I crave an unhurried life," she admits. "But I'm not sure that will ever be available to me. I'm in the season of little children. And I'm the primary breadwinner. I drop balls all the time because I'm so time-poor. When my friends moan to me that they're feeling bored … I can't even imagine that feeling! I've talked about this with my husband … and he's like, 'Do you really want that? Stay in Byron, barefoot, pregnant … running into the ocean every day in your floaty dress? You'd be so bored.' Maybe I'll stop when I get really tired. In my sixties. That's when I get to retire to the RV!"



Opposite: Aje top and skirt, $999 each; **Cartier** earrings, $13,900, ring, $13,000, and bracelet, $10,500.

This page: Aje jacket, $449; **Zero Meaning** jeans, $400; **Cartier** bag, $6750.

Photographer Bec Parsons/Artist Group. **Hair** Chris Coonrod; Jessica London. **Makeup** Isabella Schimid. **Production** Robyn Fay-Perkins.



Valentino coat, and dress; **Valentino Garavani** shoes.



LAYER CAKE

Trench coats, bomber jackets, knits and pullovers. 'Tis the season for layers that take the job seriously

PHOTOGRAPHY MATTIA PARODI
STYLING MORENO GALATÀ



Saint Laurent by Anthony Vaccarello coat (with belt), and shoes.

Opposite: Isabel Marant jacket, and jeans; **Loro Piana** socks.







Opposite: Cains Moore jacket; **Bless** pants; **Church's** shoes.

This page: Guess jumper; **Omega** watch; stylist's pants.



Issey Miyake dress.





Roy Roger's jacket, top, and pants; **Swarovski** ear cuff (worn throughout); **Omega** watch.

Opposite: Chanel jacket, shirt, and skirt.







Opposite: Max Mara dress; **Church's** boots.

This page: Peserico top; **Bless** jeans, socks and shoes.

Photographer Mattia Parodi/Tristan Godefroy Agency. **Hair** Marco Braca/Blend Management. **Makeup** Luciano Chiarello/Julian Watson Agency. **Model** Imke Ligthart/Mouna Models.

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BEAUTY



Dries Van Noten
Velvet Violet EDP,
100ml, $500.

This month we take you on an olfactory journey via Dries Van Noten's intoxicating and exquisitely bottled new scent, Velvet Violet, and Guerlain's reimagined L'Heure Bleue EDP, before meeting Max Mara's first fragrance and its face, Florence Pugh. We also check out makeup's latest must-have – refillable lipstick cases – and look at the 2026 hair trends to try

Photography courtesy Dries Van Noten



quiet armour



Florence Pugh is the face of Max Mara Le Parfum.

Actor Florence Pugh opens up about confidence, cult coats and Max Mara's new fragrance

WORDS TARA LAMONT-DJITE

Florence Pugh has many talents. Incredible actor. Passionate cook (and tea maker – just watch her TikTok on how to make the perfect brew). Style maven. Occasional comedian. She's the type of person you wish could be your next best friend, or at least have on speed dial.

And now the star of the upcoming *Dune: Part Three*, *East of Eden* and *Avengers: Doomsday* is adding something else to the list: she is the face of Max Mara's first fragrance, Le Parfum.

"For us, fragrance felt like a very natural extension of the Max Mara universe," brand ambassador Maria Giulia Prezioso Maramotti says. "Fashion expresses itself through form and texture, but perfume belongs to a more invisible dimension – something that is felt rather than seen."

As the brand celebrates its 75th anniversary, a fragrance is the perfect continuation of what Max Mara has been delivering for years: a collection of classic, truly effortless pieces that deliver a dose of confidence no matter the occasion.

Inspired by the brand's iconic camel coat – a piece loved by fashion editors and girls-in-the-know around the world – Le Parfum is built around the idea of an "invisible coat": armour nobody can see, but everyone somehow feels. It's a warm, captivating scent, with notes of sandalwood wrapped around a duo of tuberose and sweet vanilla at the heart.

Much like Pugh herself, it's grounded, heartwarming, instantly intimate. You can't help but want a little more. We spoke exclusively with the actor about coats as armour, her floaty dressing gown and what fragrance means to her.



Do you remember your very first encounter with Max Mara? Well, I think my first encounter was not even with the clothes themselves, but with images of the brand in fashion magazines. There was something so quietly captivating about them; a mix of strength and elegance that felt real. Over time, I naturally came to associate Max Mara with its coats. They kept appearing, season after season – beautifully made, deeply desirable. For me, they're now inseparable from the brand.

The house is known for celebrating remarkable, grounded women. How does that align with your own vision of femininity? For me, femininity has always been about balance: strength and vulnerability, confidence and softness, independence and intuition. Max Mara celebrates women who embody that balance and move through the world on their own terms. This resonates with me; it reflects the way I try to live.

How would you describe the new Le Parfum fragrance in three words? Intimate. Enveloping. Grounded.

What role does perfume play in your life? Perfume has always been very personal to me. It's never about announcing myself or leaving a strong statement behind. I wear fragrance for myself – as a way to feel grounded, held, more present in my body. It's often the last thing I put on before stepping out, and the first thing that helps me feel ready. Almost like a quiet ritual – something intimate that stays close to the skin and supports you throughout the day.

Do you remember your first reaction when you smelt Le Parfum? I do, very clearly. My first thought was, "Oh, this is intimate." It felt warm and elegant but also surprisingly modern. I remember closing my eyes for a second because it hit me emotionally before I could even describe it. First, there's a woody note; strong, almost masculine. Then a creamy floral note. As it settles, the vanilla appears – not loud, but addictive in the way it lingers. It really does feel like a second skin – like putting on something that's been made just for you.

Many people see you as a modern icon. How do you define an icon today? To me, an icon is someone who inspires others simply by being themselves. It's not about perfection or ostentation – it's about leaving a mark through honesty and, sometimes, courage. I don't see myself as an icon – that would be a bit presumptuous. But if my choices or my voice can help women feel stronger, freer, more confident, then I'm deeply honoured by that.

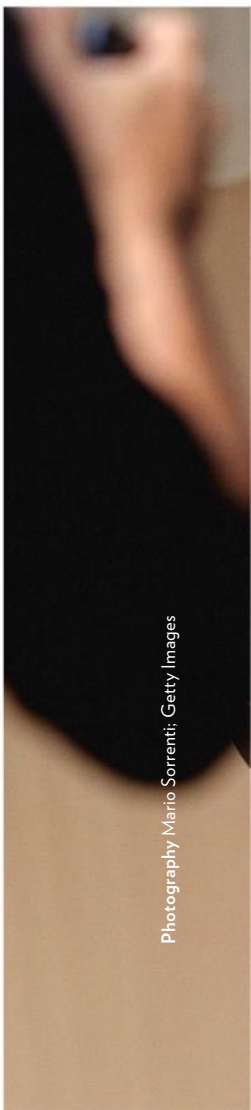
The campaign's theme is "When you're ready, you'll know." Why is it important for women to feel "ready" today? Life throws so many expectations at women, and feeling ready means handling things in a way that feels true to you. It's about knowing when to move forward and when to pause; about listening to that inner sense of timing rather than outside pressure. When you're ready, you don't need approval, you don't need to explain yourself. You just know. And that kind of readiness can be incredibly grounding in a world that's constantly asking women to do more, be more.

And what does being ready mean in your own life? For me, it's about showing up fully, in every role, every decision. It's admitting vulnerability while holding space for my own power. Some days that's easier than others, but being ready feels like being aligned with yourself, no matter what. It doesn't mean having all the answers; it means

"I wear fragrance for myself – as a way to feel grounded, held, more present in my body"



Max Mara's new Le Parfum fragrance channels the qualities of the house's signature camel coat: timeless, effortlessly elegant and imbued with confidence.



Photography Mario Sorrenti; Getty Images







Clockwise from above Florence Pugh at the UK premiere of *Spider-Man: Brand New Day*; in New York while on the press tour for *Thunderbolts**; wearing mint-green ruffles on the red carpet in Los Angeles; adopting a fresh take on tailoring in London; and serving looks at an American television appearance.



"Learning not to compare yourself is so hard. But real freedom – and real wellbeing – comes from being yourself, even if you don't fit into a mould"

trusting yourself enough to take the next step when it feels right. Being ready to chart your own path feels so important today, especially for women, who are constantly pushed by social pressure and beauty standards. Learning not to compare yourself is so hard. But real freedom – and real wellbeing – comes from being yourself, even if you don't fit into a mould.

What advice would you give young women to feel confident and ready? Trust yourself. Listen to your instincts, embrace what makes you different and don't let anyone define who you should be. Confidence comes from being fully yourself, unapologetically.

The fragrance explores the idea of an "invisible coat". What does that mean to you? The invisible coat felt instantly relevant. It's that quiet layer of confidence you put on before stepping into the world – the thing no-one else sees but everyone somehow feels. I've always relied a lot on intuition, on how something makes me feel, and this idea captures that perfectly. It's like being supported without being shaped.

THE FAST FIVE

If you were a flower, what would you be and why?
I would like to be an orange poppy. I like that they're short, have soft edges, yet they're intensely vibrant. They don't last long, so you have to appreciate them every day. Who doesn't want to be appreciated every day?

What moment of the day makes you feel most like yourself?
In the morning, after I'm halfway through my cup of Yorkshire Gold tea. I usually slowly get ready and swan around in my floaty dressing gown, enjoying each swish as I turn and move about the house.

Where do you go to feel calm and centred?
The woods. I like letting my nose track the smells, and then I like to compare the different types of moss from one area to another. The colours and textures of green really calm my mind.

What small gesture or habit helps you reconnect with yourself?
Bathtime. Pouring in a good bath oil and lighting a candle. Giving myself a moment to trace the skin on my body and allow myself to stop. It's been the saviour and tonic to many crazy days.

Are there any upcoming projects that you're particularly excited about?
I'm unbelievably excited for *East of Eden* to be released [on Netflix, from October 1]. We've created something beautiful and daunting; it's a feast for the eyes and a journey for the heart.



Max Mara Le Parfum, 100ml, $270.

The bob isn't going anywhere

... but it looks different in 2026



WORDS BRIAR CLARK

Winter can leave your ends feeling dry, the shape heavy and the style a little tired. However, according to Australian hairstylist Anthony Nader, a bob can fix all that.

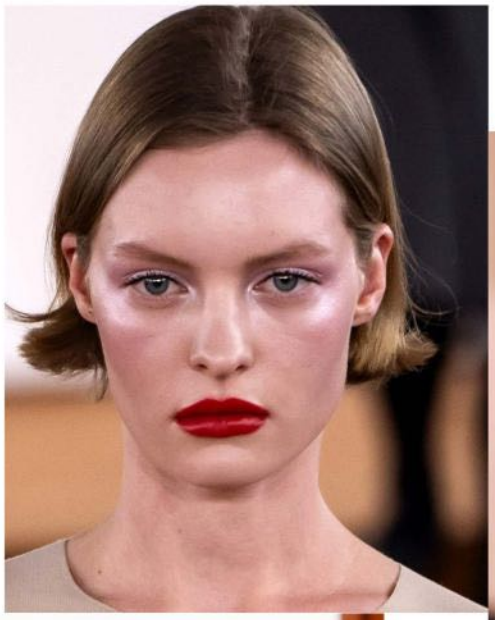
When you have a bob, it removes that visual weight, exposes the neck, and immediately brings the face into focus, he tells *marie claire*. But less hair doesn't necessarily mean less care. "In fact, the condition becomes more visible, because the perimeter is such an important part of the haircut," Nader explains.

To properly care for hair post-chop, the hair expert suggests investing in a few key products. Stock your shower with a lightweight shampoo and conditioner, and a weekly protein or hydrating masque. And when it comes to styling your hair, make sure you have a heat protection spray, a flexible styling product and an anti-humidity spray close at hand. "Anti-humidity spray is invaluable during our Australian spring and summer," says Nader. "It helps protect a sleek finish, but it's equally useful for keeping natural texture defined and controlled."

Finding a routine that works with your natural texture is especially important, because it's something that Nader says he's seeing in the bob trends surfacing on the runway and red carpet. The hairstylist notes the tousled volume and softness at the Stella McCartney autumn/winter 2026 show, and the calculated messed-up tresses that walked the Louis Vuitton runway. Sandy Liang's sleek, refined take on natural texture caught our eye too, with hairstylist Dylan Chavles somehow managing to achieve polished, glossy shine without sacrificing movement in the process.

According to Nader, it's that palpable tactility that makes this season's shorter cuts look and feel so good. The bobs of yesteryear were often one-size-fits-all, copy-paste versions of celebrity styles that were rarely flattering. But in 2026 you can finally retire "The Rachel".

Here are Nader's predictions for this season's bob.



JIL SANDER A/W 2026



RAYE



EMMA STONE

THE CURVED BOB
Luxury doesn't shout

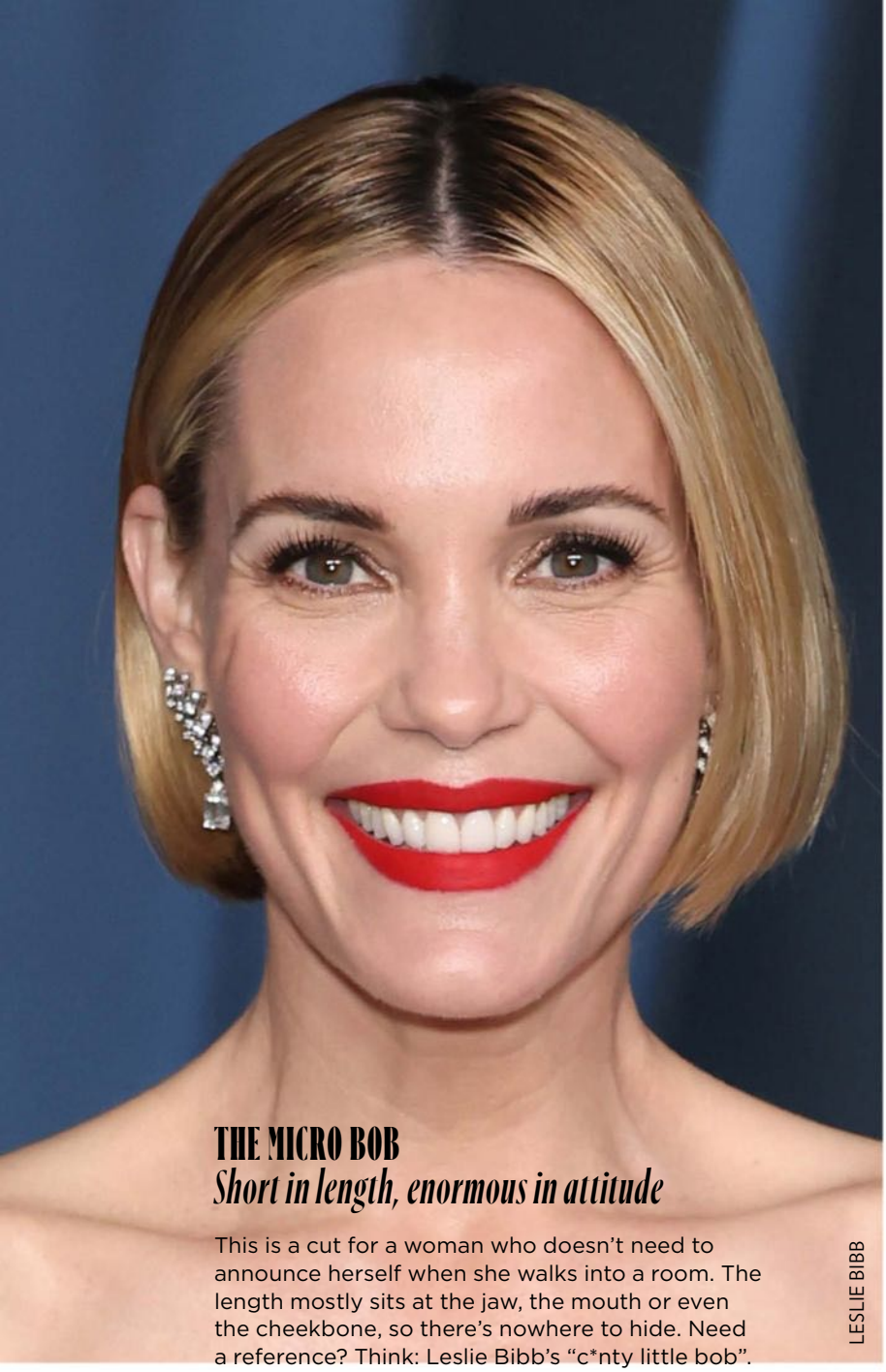
The curved bob feels polished against lighter spring tailoring, Nader tells us, referencing the recent runways of Jil Sander and Willy Chavarria for inspiration. "It hugs around the jaw, with the ends softly curving towards the face, creating a precise, expensive-looking silhouette," he explains. However, too much roll or bevel underneath and you risk looking like you're on your way to a board meeting in the '90s, he jokes. To avoid this, the hair expert tells us to use a medium round brush to direct the ends of the hair gently towards the face, while keeping the root area smooth but never flat.

THE LIVED-IN BOB
Subtly refined and never stiff

This is the bob for the woman who wants polish without looking laminated and stiff. The lived-in bob looks undone, but every piece is considered and intentional. "This length sits between the jaw and shoulder, and has subtle, almost invisible movement through the lengths, which, in my book, is key," says Nader. "When I saw Emma Stone's bob at the Golden Globes, I thought, 'What a strong example of balance and refinement'. She nailed it beautifully."

It pays to not be too precious; uniform waves can make the style look manufactured, warns Nader. "Place a few irregular movements through the middle lengths and leave some sections untouched," he says.

"When I saw Emma Stone's bob, I thought, 'What a strong example of balance and refinement'"

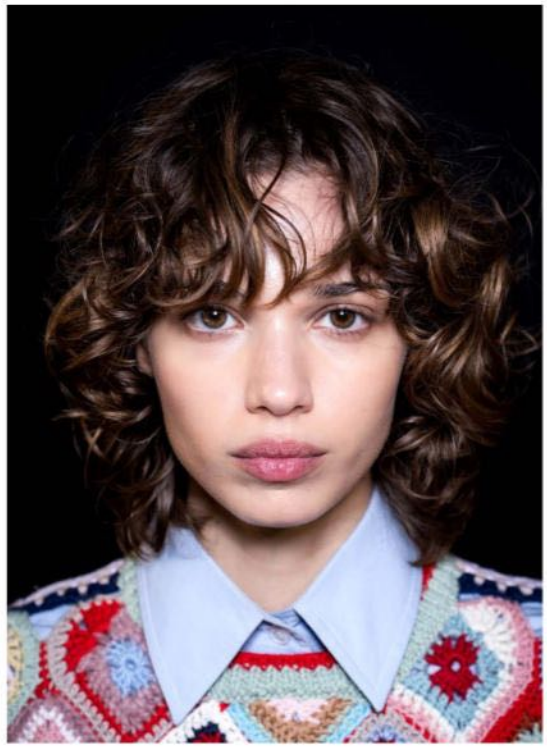


LESLIE BIBB

THE MICRO BOB
Short in length, enormous in attitude

This is a cut for a woman who doesn't need to announce herself when she walks into a room. The length mostly sits at the jaw, the mouth or even the cheekbone, so there's nowhere to hide. Need a reference? Think: Leslie Bibb's "c*nty little bob". The edgy cut is also surprisingly versatile. Customise it with a delicate razored fringe like Zoë Kravitz or embrace your natural wave pattern like Halle Berry.

When it comes time to style a micro bob, creating a flattering silhouette is everything. Hold a hairdryer close to the head, advises Nader, and use a small iron where you need refinement. A slight bend or flick at the ends is all a micro bob needs to give the shape a bit more personality.



STELLA McCARTNEY A/W 2026

THE CLOUD BOB
Airy and soft

This is all weightless bounce, airy movement and soft texture, but it's is not a style that's easy to achieve, warns Nader. It's a technical cut, and done correctly should look as though your hair woke up in a happy mood, he jokes. "This is particularly beautiful on natural textured waves, because you aren't trying to iron the personality out of the hair," he says. "Diffuse on a lower speed and resist touching the hair while it dries."

"The cloud bob is particularly beautiful on natural textured waves"

3 ESSENTIAL BOB-CARE PRODUCTS



1

A LIGHTWEIGHT LEAVE-IN CONDITIONER

Before blow drying, Kevin Murphy's Smooth.Again Anti-Frizz Treatment ($59.95) is your best friend. It boasts Australian fruit extracts and oils that strengthen, repair and protect, leaving hair silky smooth and easy to style.



2

A HUMIDITY-FIGHTING STYLER

For a sleek finish that stands up to the elements, the Oribe Impermeable Anti-Humidity Spray ($71) has been tested in balmy Miami, so it'll fight frizz while adding weightless texture.



3

A SMALL BUT MIGHTY HOT TOOL

Ltn's Hair Straightener Original Styler ($179.95) has 25mm floating ceramic plates with a germanium and nano ion coating, a round barrel design, an adjustable temperature range, and fast turbo heaters, to style short hair with ease and speed.

Photography Launchmetrics Spotlight; Getty Images

THE LONG BOB
The gateway cut

This length generally falls between the chin and collarbone, so it still feels fresh and directional, but there is enough length to tuck, wave or tie back. “It’s generally the gateway bob,” says Nader. The hairstylist cites Hailey Bieber’s viral “bronde” lengths to showcase the style’s steady mass appeal. We may not have celebrity hairstylists such as Justine Marjan, Irinel de León and Teddy Charles on speed dial like the Rhode founder, but Nader assures us that the lob isn’t complicated to manage. He is wary of a head full of artificial curls, though, as it can look saccharine, rather than sophisticated. “Keep movement through the middle of the hair, and leave the ends slightly straighter,” he advises. “That creates an elongated, luxurious finish.”



GRACIE ABRAMS



HAILEY BIEBER

“The boy bob finish is relaxed and slightly androgynous, but still incredibly sensual because it reveals the face and neck”

THE BOY BOB
Effortlessly cool

The boy bob doesn’t care if you think it’s cool or not. It sits around the jaw, has minimal layering and can be tucked absentmindedly behind the ears. “The finish is relaxed and slightly androgynous, but still incredibly sensual because it reveals the face and neck,” explains Nader. “Apply a small amount of cream or mousse, then tuck the hair behind the ears while it dries. Do not overbrush it. This bob needs a little natural imperfection or it loses its cool.” The hairstylist always uses singer Gracie Abrams as a reference for clients wanting to try the style, as “her boy bob feels effortless, rather than overly styled. It’s so versatile and fun.”



WORDS CLEO GLYDE

Is your vagina optimised?

While there are certainly benefits to better understanding the female body, does vaginamaxxing run the risk of turning our down-there wellness into a competition?

Bryan Johnson has never been shy about sharing intimate details of his body. The tech entrepreneur turned longevity evangelist has documented his blood tests, sleep scores and body fat percentage in the name of his "don't die" protocol. But in April, he crossed a new line in biohacking overshare. Johnson posted his Australian partner, Kate Tolo's, vaginal microbiome report on X, proudly announcing that her vagina had achieved a perfect 100/100 score.

Not just healthy. Elite. "Top 1 per cent of all vaginas," he wrote, citing her dominance of *Lactobacillus crispatus* – a bacterium associated with lower risks of bacterial vaginosis, urinary tract infections and some adverse reproductive outcomes – and proudly noting the absence of candida, sexually transmitted infections and other unwanted microbes.

The internet responded exactly as you'd expect. "Kate's vagina just got into Harvard," joked one X user. *Vice* deadpanned that "even pillow talk needs analytics now". Social media users questioned why anyone needed to know the composition of a stranger's vagina with general WTF merriment.

But Tolo defended the post, arguing that vaginal health remains unnecessarily taboo and that normalising conversations around the vaginal microbiome could help women better understand their health. Many women in the longevity and biohacking community agreed. If discussing gut bacteria, cholesterol and sleep scores is acceptable, why should the vagina remain off limits?

It's a fair question. Women's sexual health has historically received remarkably little research funding compared with other areas of medicine. Menopause, pelvic floor disorders and painful sex are often dismissed as something women simply must tolerate. For decades, women have been asking medicine to pay more attention to their bodies.

The wellness industry has caught up, making the vagina the newest frontier in optimisation culture. The thin end of the wedge? When Gwyneth Paltrow released her sellout This Smells Like My Vagina candle on her website, Goop. But this is 2026 – welcome to vaginamaxxing: a growing movement that treats vaginal health as another system to track using microbiome sequencing, hormone monitoring, personalised supplements, wearable technology and concierge medicine.

For those who like to geek out on their own lady garden, home microbiome tests from companies such as Evvy, Tiny Health and Juno Bio promise women greater insight into their own vaginal microbiome. Wearables such as the Oura Ring offer menstrual cycle tracking, fertility predictions and menopause insights. And researchers increasingly understand how bacteria such as *Lactobacillus crispatus* help maintain an acidic environment that protects against infections and supports reproductive health.

The problem is when information becomes competition. Johnson didn't simply cite his partner's healthy vaginal flora. He ranked it. Top 1 per cent. It had shades of bro bragging; a weirder, more intrusive version of "great tits". There's a subtle but important psychological shift between health and status. Women already navigate the steep mountain of beauty standards: thigh gaps, anti-ageing, collagen counts, biological age, glucose spikes and gut health. Now our inner lining?

When optimisation quietly morphs into judgement, we create a hierarchy. Once a number exists, comparison inevitably follows. From a psychosocial perspective, Professor Gemma Sharp at Adelaide University's School of Psychology sees vaginamaxxing as part of a broader trend. "In optimisation culture, aspects of the body are viewed as projects to improve rather than simply functioning as body parts," she says. "Social media, wellness marketing and new technologies have made intimate health another domain where people feel pressure to strive for an ideal."

We already compare salaries, parenting, fitness trackers, skin quality, fertility, weight, productivity and sleep, so of course a microbiome score would appear on our report card. Yet most gynaecologists emphasise that vaginal microbiomes naturally fluctuate throughout the menstrual cycle, during pregnancy, after sex, during illness and around menopause. A single test provides useful context for women experiencing recurrent infections or unexplained symptoms, but it isn't a trophy.

"In an era when data and self-tracking are often equated with greater control, it's important to remember that the vagina is a self-cleaning organ that usually doesn't require special interventions," says Sharp. "Good intimate health is often about recognising what's normal rather than trying to 'improve' it."

Because people rarely see the natural diversity of female genitalia, she adds, perfectly normal differences are being framed as problems that need fixing rather than accepted as part of human diversity. "Numerical scores or optimisation metrics can feel like an objective benchmark, even when variation is entirely normal," adds Sharp. "This satisfies our desire for certainty, control and reassurance."

The tension between appropriate healthcare testing and suspicious wellness marketing sits at the heart of a recent *The New Yorker* feature on Silicon Valley gynaecologist Dr Sally Greenwald, whose concierge practice has earned the tongue-in-cheek nickname The Billionaires' Vagina Club. Greenwald's patients – many of them tech executives and entrepreneurs in Jimmy Choos – pay tens of thousands of dollars a year for highly personalised care focused not simply on preventing disease but optimising what she calls a woman's "sexspan": maintaining sexual health, desire and function well into older age.

Greenwald argues that much of today's longevity movement remains rooted in "bro science" – research and biohacking protocols developed largely around male bodies. Historically, women have been excluded from clinical trials because fluctuating hormones were considered too complicated to study. The result is that sexual dysfunction and vaginal health have often been treated as niche concerns.



Greenwald's insistence that "sexual health is health" does feel overdue. Pelvic floor physiotherapy improves bladder control, prolapse symptoms and sexual function. Hormone therapy can dramatically improve quality of life for women experiencing menopausal symptoms. Researchers are increasingly uncovering links between bacterial balance and reproductive health. Innovation and insight are empowering.

But you can just hear exhausted working mums collectively moan, "Oh no, not *peak vagina*." How much of the demand for the latest Oura Ring or biome test is driven by genuine health concerns versus social comparison and beauty standards? "Narrow beauty standards almost certainly contribute to demand, making it difficult to separate medical need from cultural pressure," cautions Sharp. "Even though these interventions address legitimate symptoms."

Evidence-based care sits alongside a rapidly expanding marketplace of vaginal rejuvenation – including laser treatments, radiofrequency devices and platelet-rich plasma injections. Are intimate procedures becoming as normalised as facial aesthetics? "Cosmetic surgeries like labiaplasty are already considered part of a 'routine'," adds Sharp. This procedure reshapes or reduces the labia (the outer or inner lips) to relieve physical discomfort and improve aesthetics.

"The vagina is a self-cleaning organ that usually doesn't require special interventions"

– Professor Gemma Sharp

Madison Ashton had a labiaplasty procedure, saying that living up to a beauty standard is key to her role as Christine McQueen, one of Australia's most successful high-end sex workers. "I had my inner labia done at 31," she says. "This was purely aesthetic. I was always embarrassed by my vagina. I had an uneven labia on one side – the lettuce coming out of the burger, so to speak. Guys would tug on it and stuff. It got in the way, so I tidied it up. I had seen the tight and flush look in high-end porn, and I wanted people to go 'Whoa' when they saw my vagina."

Ashton is blisteringly practical about using surgery to pursue an aesthetic ideal on her mission to sexually dazzle and professionally thrive. "I'm not here to waste time as a sex worker," she says. "I needed armour and confidence to wield my beauty like a machete. If this little piece of skin is holding me back from a million-

Photography Getty Images



dollar income? See ya!" However, Ashton is equally adamant about not equating physical benchmarks with her internal worth. "It's not my identity," she says. "I didn't create the aesthetic. I just learnt the industry standards, so I am morphing into a symbol of beauty. It's not about me as a person. I go down the list, tick, tick, tick. It's just my body and I don't take it personally."

As the more mature, poised, MILF-style escort has become more a part of the adult entertainment industry, anti-ageing also comes into play. Ashton's second labiaplasty in 2025 was about youthful rejuvenation. "Cut forward 20 years and it was time to deal with the wrinkles," she says. "[My doctor] took out two eyelid sizes of skin on the left and right of the labia majora [outer lips] to make me look flush – no more drooping. It's like getting your face 'refreshed' and it heals equally fast."

Ashton sees procedures as maintenance. "I'm throwing everything at it. I get my vagina Botoxed every six months," she says. "I want to work as long as possible. I'm just monetising the misogyny. It raises your stock, your price." Ashton believes that, to a certain extent, all women play this game. "If you're in the dating or marriage market, you need to land your security, because we live in a patriarchy."

"I get my vagina Botoxed every six months. I want to work as long as possible. I'm just monetising the misogyny"

– Madison Ashton (aka Christine McQueen), a high-end sex worker

Although Ashton's working the system, does she deem it inherently wrong? "Yes, and I do consider myself a feminist. We are living in an upside-down reality. Men should be second-class citizens," she says, laughing.

I ask Sharp whether competitive wellness can actually become psychologically unhealthy. "Yes [it can], when the pursuit of 'perfection' is driven by anxiety, shame or the belief that a normal, healthy body always needs fixing," she says. Interestingly, Ashton echoes this sentiment, arguing that monetising your sexual appeal is one thing, but women shouldn't feel they are "not good enough" or change themselves to please men without a clear end goal. "You want him to put a ring on it? You're hooking up with a baller? Then it's not a waste of time," she says. "But all that pleasing just for dating? For some random dickhead? No, girl, put that money in your super."

So where is this trend heading? Sharp predicts there will be greater commercialisation: "We'll see AI-driven, personalised intimate health technologies," she says. "The challenge will be ensuring these innovations do not harm health, medicalise normal bodily variation or reinforce unrealistic standards of what 'healthy' genitalia should be."

A tip-top vaginal microbiome isn't an Olympic event. Your libido isn't a KPI. And your vagina certainly doesn't need a world ranking your boyfriend can boast about on social media.

More evidence-based healthcare that acknowledges sexual wellbeing as part of overall health? Awesome. You don't need to reach for perfection to deserve it. Getting your vagina into Harvard will be entirely up to you.



Are we all inflammageing?

WORDS DIVYA VENKATARAMAN

In recent years, a growing body of research has explored how long-term inflammation might be affecting our skin. We take a look behind the hype

For a long time, the beauty industry was all about the surface. It was a neat equation, tied into an intuitive bow: if the aim is smoother, glowier skin, naturally the method is to apply products onto its surface. In recent years, however, that focus has turned inward – no longer is beauty just about the way our faces and our bodies present to the world, but our bodies' internal machinations, too.

Now, beauty brands shill skin and hair health supplements alongside topical skincare; probiotics are sold as much for their glow-inducing potential as for their ability to balance gut health; and ingestible collagen has managed to shapeshift into a dizzying number of forms.

Beauty and the body have become inextricably linked in the minds of the modern consumer. Puffiness and breakouts? That's your high cortisol. Dull skin? Time for a microbiome intervention, stat. "Consumers are increasingly asking not only, 'How do I reduce this redness, breakout or wrinkle?' but 'Why is my skin behaving this way?'" says Katy Bacon, senior director of global education at science-backed skincare brand Murad. The growing interest in "inflammageing" – how chronic, low-grade inflammation can accelerate the skin's ageing process – reflects this broader shift, Bacon says. "[It's] moving beyond individual symptoms to understand the interconnected processes that may contribute to multiple skin concerns at once."

Inflammageing is not actually a beauty concept. Italian gerontologist Claudio Franceschi coined the term at the turn of the millennium to describe how age and the inflammation that comes with it can affect our cells. Beauty has since borrowed the term, translating a complex area of ageing biology into a much more marketable question: what is inflammation doing to our faces?

First, a disclaimer: despite its reputation, inflammation isn't inherently bad. When our bodies are under attack in some form – through injury, stress or one too many martinis – it's a defence mechanism that allows our immune systems to mobilise and protect us by promoting repair and healing. The problem comes when that response doesn't switch off. As we age, researchers believe the body can enter a state of more persistent inflammation, which may contribute not just to wrinkles and loss of elasticity, but to a broader decline in health. It's important to remember that the effects of this kind of chronic inflammation don't necessarily present as red or inflamed skin – it can look like dullness, fine lines and generally diminished skin health.

As we age, damaged or "senescent" cells can linger rather than being cleared efficiently by the immune system, explains Dr Prasanthi Purusothaman, a GP, cosmetic doctor and founder of L'Orient, a skincare brand targeted towards melanin-rich skin. Those cells release inflammatory signals, which can further impair the body's ability to clear them, creating a feedback loop. She describes the distinction simply: "Inflammation is an event. Inflammageing is a debt."

So what keeps this inflammatory response switched on? Ageing itself – the one guarantee in life – is part of the equation. Other contributors aren't mandatory but we seem to run around our busy modern lives as if they were: stress, overwork, pollutants and poor eating habits are key aggressors. For women, the picture becomes murkier because of the way our hormones intersect with lifestyle factors, time and life stages; immune systems are sensitive to progesterone and oestrogen, and the surges and lulls in amounts over

"Inflammation is an event. Inflammageing is a debt"

– Dr Prasanthi Purusothaman

"The wellness industry can sometimes ... make it sound as though inflammation is the single cause of ageing – and it isn't"

– Dr Leanne Girgis

the years dramatically influence our bodily responses. "Oestrogen has effects throughout the body, including on the immune system and inflammatory pathways," says Dr Leanne Girgis, a GP and founder of ingestible beauty brand Innour. It can also affect the skin's collagen, hydration, elasticity and barrier function. Menopause – historically under-researched and bafflingly heterogeneous in its symptoms – comes with "a number of biological and metabolic changes, and inflammation is one part of that much bigger picture," Girgis says.

So how do we slow down the signs of inflammageing? It's a question that the beauty industry is racing to answer. In recent months, the beauty shelves have been heaving with promises to cool, to calm, to soothe. (Do they work on our brains as well?) Ingredients such as ectoin, centella asiatica, azelaic acid and ceramides are being touted as cure-alls for inflammation, while new products said to tackle the issue are appearing at every price point. Culinary ingredients are featuring, too: Australian label Drops of Gold is offering grass-fed ghee as an anti-inflammatory product, while turmeric, the South Asian ingredient with a long heritage, has been co-opted by Western skincare brands touting its calming properties. And anti-inflammation travel retreats are cropping up everywhere, from the serene hills around Rome to the Mayrlife resort in Austria's Alps.

One thing that "calming" products can do is fight bog-standard skin inflammation and redness, whether that's caused by a complex intersection of age and inflammation, or because you are prone to rosacea. But sometimes the culprit can be an ironic one. In May, *The Guardian* reported that more and more women are suffering from perioral dermatitis, partly because of using too many active ingredients in their skincare routines. Too much of a good thing – that old dogma touted by the wise, and listened to by almost no-one.

But perhaps we'd do better to. Purusothaman says that her patients' routines are often doing too much rather than too little: over-exfoliation and layering multiple active ingredients night after night can provoke the skin barrier, kickstarting an inflammatory response that then leaves you flailing around for another product to calm it. It's part of a wider culture of optimisation, which has infected modern beauty shelves as much as it has modern work culture. Meaningful skin outcomes take months or years, she explains, while social media rewards results that can be photographed on day three.

Skincare can, however, help reduce the signs of deeper inflammation within the body, Bacon explains. It can help to create a "healthier environment at the skin's surface by reducing daily environmental stress, maintaining hydration and supporting the skin barrier and microbiome". But according to Purusothaman, the interventions with the strongest evidence are "a little boring": sunscreen, sleep and diet. "None of it is purchasable in a satisfying way. So none of it trends."

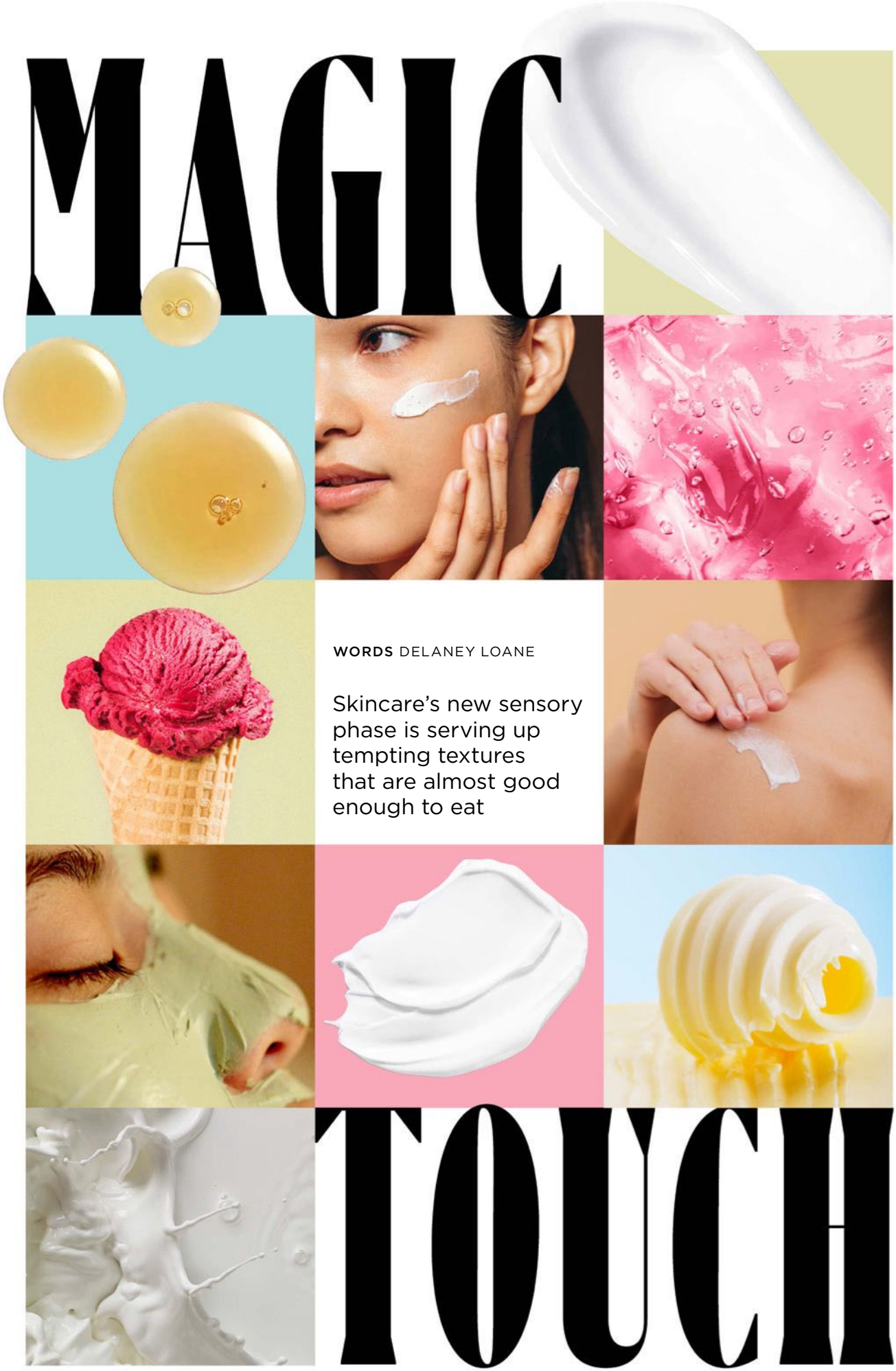
And there is a danger in turning inflammageing into yet another beauty problem to be solved. "The wellness industry can sometimes oversimplify this and make it sound as though inflammation is the single cause of ageing – and it isn't," Girgis says. "Skin ageing is multifactorial."

And there's the crux of it: ageing can't be stopped, no matter how hard we might try. Inflammation is part of the picture, and the goal isn't to eliminate or actively suppress responses to stress or poor lifestyle choices. Sometimes, your skin looking sallower or your eyes looking a little less bright is simply your body telling you something. Our bodies, after all, have been evolving ways of ringing internal alarm bells over millennia. As Girgis puts it: "The body isn't something we want to switch off."

Photography Stephen and Rebecca/August



MAGIC TOUCH



WORDS DELANEY LOANE

Skincare's new sensory phase is serving up tempting textures that are almost good enough to eat

There was once a time when decoding an "essence" from a "serum" was the most complicated part of building a skincare routine. Now, the language of beauty has become far more decadent; how a formula feels (and frankly, sounds) matters almost as much as what it does. Experiential skincare, where the ritual of applying is a treat in itself, is everything.

The shift makes perfect sense: texture is the first thing we register when a product meets skin. Before the actives kick into action or the results reveal themselves, it's the slip, bounce, creaminess or coolness that we notice. The right consistency creates its own kind of anticipation, one that makes you want to dip in, scoop up and smooth it over skin again and again. The most irresistible formulas are borrowing from the things we already crave, translating drinks, desserts and spreads into skincare designed to nourish from the outside in. Think whipped, milky, jelly-like and sorbet-smooth blends that make application feel almost indulgent.

But this is more than just skincare with a delicious vocabulary. Texture can change how a product delivers its ingredients, how it behaves on the skin and how we experience our routines. Consider this your glossary of the formulas turning every skincare step into something truly crave-worthy.

SORBET

This is the skincare equivalent of an icy palate cleanser: cool, airy and instantly refreshing. Dior's gel-cream has that exact melt-away quality, sinking into the complexion with no trace of grease. A hydrating product that won't pill beneath base makeup can be surprisingly hard to find, but this one hits the spot.

1 Dior Hydra Life Fresh Sorbet Crème, $130.

JELLY

The appeal of jelly lies in its soft, cushiony bounce, and this cleansing balm captures it brilliantly. The formula glides over skin, dissolving impurities without the tight, stripped feeling that can come with a foaming cleanse. Gentle but effective, it feels more like a moisturising gel going on, but still has the power to take off a full face of makeup.

2 Glossier Milky Jelly Cleansing Balm, $39.

BUTTER

The richness of butter makes it the perfect texture to dip into when skin needs a little something extra. Rhode's creamy butter-balm seals in hydration for a plush, velvety finish – spread it on as your final skincare step or wherever dryness has taken hold, from cheeks to elbows.

3 Rhode Barrier Butter Intensive Moisture Balm, $62.

The most irresistible formulas are borrowing from the things we already crave, translating drinks, desserts and spreads into skincare

MILK

This silky, milky serum folds moisturiser, primer and barrier support into one step, with hyaluronic acid, prickly pear flower and ceramides supplying a splash of lightweight hydration for a fresh, dewy look.

4 Ilia Beauty The Base Face Milk, $95.

SOUFFLÉ

Light as air yet rich in moisture, this whipped body cream takes its textural cue from a soufflé's delicate aeration. Shea butter and apricot oil pack in the nourishment, and the formula absorbs in no time.

5 Origins Plantfusion Hydrating Body Soufflé, $79.

BROTH

Broth brings depth without density, and this serum-emulsion hybrid follows suit. Concentrated and comforting, it feels nourishing rather than heavy, leaning on bio-ferments that help to reveal a brighter, more luminous complexion over time.

6 Reome Active Recovery Broth, $317.

JUICE

Imagine watermelon juice translated into skincare: crisp, ice-cold and thirst-quenching. Skin drinks this gel-emulsion up almost instantly, leaving a fittingly juicy sheen. Its oil-free, weightless formula delivers hyaluronic acid-packed hydration in a texture that layers easily and never feels sticky.

7 Glow Recipe Watermelon Glow Pink Juice Oil-Free Moisturiser, $66.



1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Photography Getty Images

NEW DIMENSION

Creating a sculpted, dimensional lip doesn't have to be complicated, particularly when your products are prepared to pull double duty







From below Like Naomi Campbell and Christy Turlington in the '90s, today's leading ladies – (from left) Kaia Gerber, Greta Lee and Mia Goth – love a two-tone lip look.

A little contrast can completely change the architecture of a lip look. Deeper colour around the perimeter creates definition and structure, while keeping things lighter through the centre visually brings the lips forward. Consider it an optical illusion, giving lips the look of extra fullness and dimension with makeup alone.

It's a technique the '90s knew well, and one that's firmly back in focus. In the age of the modern lip combo, we *might* have overcomplicated things a little, layering lipsticks, liners and stains in pursuit of the perfect dimension-adding recipe.

Turns out, two well-matched tones can do the heavy lifting. The Quick Flick Quick Lip 2 in 1 Double Sided Stain & Precision Lip Liner pairs a deeper liner with a complementary lip stain in one double-ended pen, so the colour theory is handled for you and all that's left to master is the placement. The liner adds definition, while the lighter stain plays up fullness through the centre. Together, that deliberate contrast lets lips appear more sculpted, without requiring an array of different colours and formulas to get there. Better yet, your perfect pairing won't end up separated at the bottom of your bag.

Its hazy soft-matte finish is another nod to the '90s. Thankfully, it leaves one less-desirable relic of the decade behind: the parched, chalky feeling mattes used to bring as their plus one. Instead, the vegan, cruelty-free formula feels nourishing and hydrating.

A dual-ended pen is about as portable as beauty products come, so it'll slip easily into any pocket or purse. Not that you'll need to reach for it often – once the colour dries down, it won't smudge or fade, keeping each shade exactly where you placed it.

STEP 1 Line

Start by tracing lips with the deeper shade, subtly overlining the Cupid's bow and centre of the lower lip to create a more pillowy appearance before gradually returning to your natural lip line as you move towards the corners. The pigment glides on smoothly (no dragging here), so it's easy to map out the shape you're after.

STEP 2 Fill

Next, sweep the lighter stain across the centre of the lips to fill in the shape you've created. Don't be tempted to blend your liner away – the contrast is the whole point. Keep that deeper outline visible, softening only where the two shades meet so everything feels seamless while the dimension stays intact.







Quick Flick Quick Lip 2 in 1 Double Sided Precision Lip Liner & Stain, $20.

Photography Getty Images. **Words** Delaney Loane



Embrace mixed metals with Isamaya's sleek metallic case. The magnetic closure snaps shut so you don't need to fear finding your beloved lip colour uncovered at the bottom of your bag. The pearlescent lip glaze balm that fits neatly inside it is worth protecting, we promise you.

Isamaya Lip Case, $55, and Lip Balm, $50.

WORDS DELANEY LOANE

CASE GOODS

Luxury craftsmanship has cemented the refillable lipstick case as beauty's chicest ethical accessory

The case your lipstick is housed in should be as reflective of your style as the shade itself. Whether it lives on your vanity, slips into your handbag or makes an appearance during an afternoon touch-up, it should come wrapped in a favourite colour, a print you're partial to or a metallic finish that feels more like jewellery than packaging.

A refillable lipstick case is a beauty purchase you never need to feel bad about. Even if you collect just a handful, you're only replacing the lipstick inside, cutting down on waste while investing in something designed to last. In fact, it's the ultimate excuse to curate your personal collection – you're playing for keeps this time.



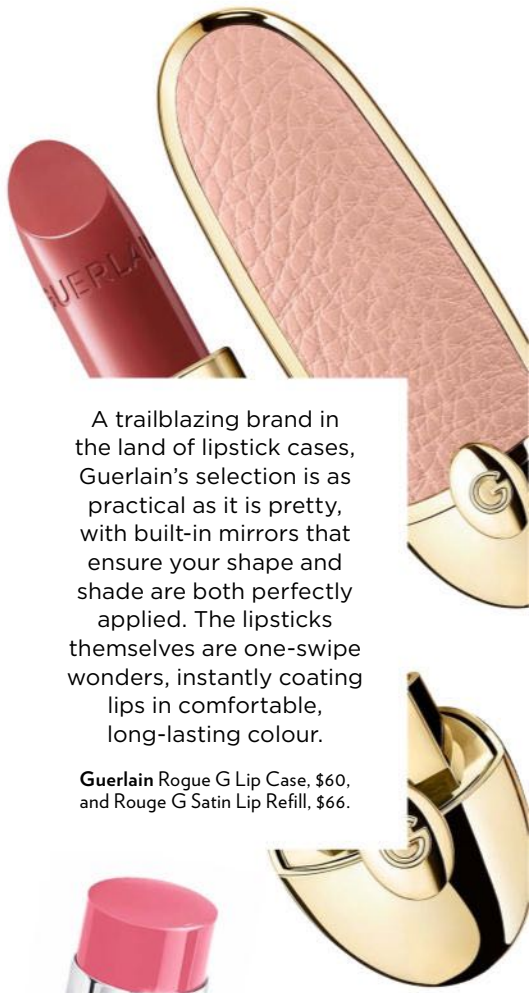
The ideal option for those with a collector's eye, Dries Van Noten's cases do "clashing" better than anyone, pairing bases and caps in varying textures, colours and prints. There's choice when it comes to your lip colour finish, too: matte, satin and sheer shades are all up for grabs.

Dries Van Noten Lipstick Case, $65, and Lipstick Bullet, $70.



Clad in shades of blue, crisp white and iconic Hermès orange, this refillable bullet comes assembled, with the ability to pop the luxurious logo-embossed gold-topped cap and swap in your next shade selection once the first has served its purpose.

Hermès Rouge Hermès Satin Lipstick, $130, and Rouge Hermès Satin Lipstick Refill, $80.



A trailblazing brand in the land of lipstick cases, Guerlain's selection is as practical as it is pretty, with built-in mirrors that ensure your shape and shade are both perfectly applied. The lipsticks themselves are one-swipe wonders, instantly coating lips in comfortable, long-lasting colour.

Guerlain Rogue G Lip Case, $60, and Rouge G Satin Lip Refill, $66.

A limited-edition drop too good to miss, Dior's lip-colour cases are upholstered with such intricate detail that it's like dressing your lipstick in its own couture piece. The glazed finish of the Dior Addict Glass Lipstick elevates an everyday lip beautifully, so refills will certainly be on the cards.

Dior Addict Shine Lipstick Couture Case, $61, and Dior Addict Glass Lipstick Refill, $58.





Fragrance is leaning into one of life's purest staples, as perfumers transform the familiar comfort of milk into an unlikely luxury

milking it

WORDS DELANEY LOANE

After years of raiding the dessert trolley, perfumery's latest gourmand fixation is surprisingly simple. Fragrance's sweet tooth is giving way to something softer, and milk is emerging as a quieter counterpoint to the sticky caramels and syrupy honeys that have defined the category. There's something endearing about an ingredient so ordinary. Milk is hardly exotic or extravagant, and that may be precisely where its charm lies: it carries a sense of comfort, tied to small rituals and some of our earliest memories. In the hands of perfumers, however, the familiar takes on a fresh appeal, suggesting there's still something new to discover in the things we know best.

Comfort scent

For Libertine Parfumerie founder Nick Smart, there's a clear reason milk-inspired scents are resonating: they're comfort food in fragrance form. "Milky fragrances are having a real moment. They tend to feel comforting rather than attention seeking," he says. "They're creamy and cocooning without feeling overly sweet, proving that sometimes the softest fragrances leave the biggest impression."

Fragrance has always had an extraordinary ability to summon memories, but milk comes with a head start. "Creamy fragrances have a way of tapping into feelings of comfort, warmth and familiarity, whether that's the memory of warm milk, freshly laundered linen or clean skin after a shower," Smart explains. "They sit close to the skin, feeling softer and more intimate."



Got milk?

A "milk" perfume won't smell like a freshly poured glass. There's no single ingredient responsible for that. Instead, perfumers can call on an assortment of notes to suggest milk without literally recreating it. "Sandalwood, soft white musks, tonka bean, vanilla, coconut milk accords and lactonic notes all play a role, alongside creamy white florals like tuberose," says Smart.

That freedom also means milk can move in different directions. Alongside vanilla or tonka bean it can skew more traditionally gourmand, while woods, musks and florals can pull it somewhere cleaner, subtler or more abstract. "Milky fragrances feel like the more grown-up side of gourmand perfumery," adds Smart. "Rather than leaning into caramel, chocolate or sugary sweetness, they're all about creating a soft, creamy texture. Think less sugar rush, more comfort."

Milky ways

From barely-there to decadent, there's more than one way to bottle milk.

1 DedCool Xtra Milk EDP, 50ml, $148.
The no-makeup makeup of milky fragrances. Bergamot, amber and white musk create a second-skin effect that enhances without overpowering, giving the impression that smelling this good comes naturally to you.

2 The Nue Co. First Milk Functional Fragrance, 50ml, $205.
Milk is more evocative than literal in this nostalgic interpretation. Almond milk, cashmere woods and iris draw on one of our earliest sensory associations: milk as a source of comfort, nourishment and care.

3 Commodity Milk- Personal EDP, 100ml, $239.
Milk moves into woody territory thanks to mahogany and soft musk, as toasted marshmallow adds a sweeter touch. The cold milk accord cools down all that warmth, allowing the scent to feel creamy yet fresh.

> "Milky fragrances tend to feel comforting rather than attention seeking"
>
> – Nick Smart, Libertine Parfumerie founder

4 Ellis Brooklyn Vanilla Milk EDP, 50ml, $189.
A mix of milk and Madagascan vanilla nods to the familiar flavour of a frothy vanilla milkshake, before sandalwood and musk settle in. As it warms on skin, the effect becomes richer and more enveloping.

5 Borntostandout Dirty Milk EDP, 50ml, $361.
Plain milk isn't perfumery's only muse. A condensed milk accord takes the scent in a more indulgent direction, while black pepper sharpens the tonka bean and vanilla, lending this milky blend a little more bite.

6 Liquides Imaginaires Blanche Bête EDP, 100ml, $475.
This take on milk arrives in a cloud of creaminess. Jasmine and musk bring floral brightness; while cacao, tonka bean and frankincense build depth beneath. The contrast makes for a surprisingly weightless finish.

7 Phlur Heavy Cream Hair and Body Mist, 240ml, $64.
Despite the name, there's nothing heavy-handed about it. Coconut cream and vanilla mousse capture cream's whipped, pillowy softness, with the airy mist keeping their sweetness subtle and sheer.

PRECIOUS GEM

The finer facets are often the ones worth discovering

WORDS DELANEY LOANE

There's something curious about gemstones and fragrance: neither necessarily gives everything away at first encounter. A flash of colour catches the eye; a particular scent might spark a memory. Look – or smell – a little closer and the details tell a different story.

In Bvlgari's Omnia Amethyste eau de parfum, it's iris that invites a closer look. Master perfumer Alberto Morillas takes a note best known for its powdery elegance and expands on that familiar character, using rose, ambrette and vanilla to bring welcome warmth, softness and depth. It is a reminder that iris has far more range than its "pretty" reputation suggests. Much like a stone in a new setting, changing what surrounds it can reveal an entirely different side.

JEWEL TONES

Amethyst runs right through the fragrance, from the rich purple tones of the bottle to the violet nuances of iris itself. The stone also draws a natural connection to Bvlgari's jewellery heritage. And there's something apt about the overlap: scent and jewellery may appeal to different senses, but both are ultimately chosen to be worn close.

A NEW CUT

In revisiting the original Omnia Amethyste as an eau de parfum, Morillas has done more than simply turn up the intensity. Iris remains the defining note, but the way it's framed has shifted, bringing its richer qualities to the fore. It's a subtle distinction, but an interesting one: concentration doesn't have to mean more of the same.



Photography courtesy Bvlgari

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(1) Instrumental test after application of the Aminexil R.E.G.E.N. BOOSTER serum.
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From left: Guerlain L'Heure Bleue Scented Soap, $55, L'Heure Bleue EDP, 100ml, $292, and L'Heure Bleue Rouge G Limited-Edition Cases, $63 each.

Above, from left *Yves Klein* by Hannah Weitemeier (Taschen, $39.99); *Untitled Anthropometry (ANT 110)* by Yves Klein, 1960; and *Forms*, from the illustrated book *Jazz* by Henri Matisse, 1947.

Twilight zone

The most captivating time of day lasts mere minutes, but its influence lingers long after the last light fades

WORDS DELANEY LOANE

A blue sky may be familiar, but at twilight the colour takes on a more elusive quality. Deeper, softer and gone within minutes, this particular blue emerges as the air begins to cool and daylight turns to darkness. It's a blink-and-you'll-miss-it stretch known as the "blue hour".

"It is a suspended moment, a shift from one state to another," says Delphine Jelk, Guerlain's director of perfume creation. "Shapes blur, colours soften, everything turns blue." It's this fleeting atmosphere that she wanted to capture in the brand's new L'Heure Bleue collection. Anchored by the fragrance of the same name, it evokes "that moment when the day is almost gone and the night has not yet arrived: twilight".

More than a century earlier, that same blue sparked Jacques Guerlain's original L'Heure Bleue in 1912, later finding an echo in Yves Klein's famous International Klein Blue, also inspired by the sky's rich, otherworldly hue. The connection came full circle with Guerlain's 110th-anniversary edition, which dressed the original L'Heure Bleue bottle in Klein's signature blue – a meeting of two iconic visions of the colour. Jelk now picks up that thread with a contemporary palette. "It was essential for me to respect Jacques Guerlain's work and remain deeply connected to it," she says. "This is not a replica, but a modern interpretation with the same emotion.

"For me, it is a pastel fragrance – a fragrance of blur," Jelk adds. Rather than sharp transitions, the notes melt together in gradients, like the blue hour itself. An airy ozonic accord creates the cool feeling of evening setting in, softening into powdery iris and orange blossom before vanilla and skin-like ambroxan bring warmth. Jelk even created a new iris tincture, the result of three years spent perfecting a technique that draws a lighter, fresher quality from Italian iris rhizomes.

The bottle captures the shifting colour of twilight, too, with Guerlain's signature inverted heart design fading from dreamy to deep blue and finished with gilded details.

The inverted heart makes another appearance in a hand and body soap, which leaves a delicate trace of the fragrance on skin. From there, the blue mood moves into makeup. Three limited-edition Rouge G cases – each designed to pair with any of the range's lipstick shades – come dressed in glossy enamel, printed fabric and ombré rhinestones that mirror the blues of the twilight sky. Those shades may only appear overhead for a few minutes, but Guerlain has found more than one way to make the feeling last.

Photography Getty Images; courtesy Guerlain

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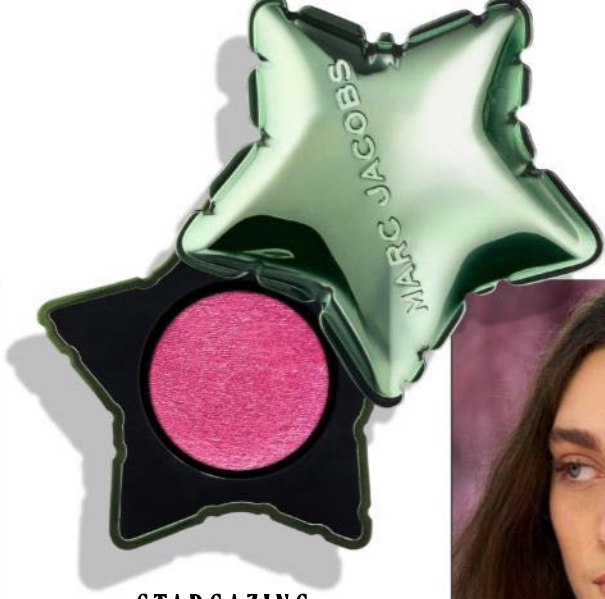
WORDS
DELANEY LOANE



Maison Margiela Replica Chasing Sunsets EDT, 100ml, $255.

SUNSET CRUISE

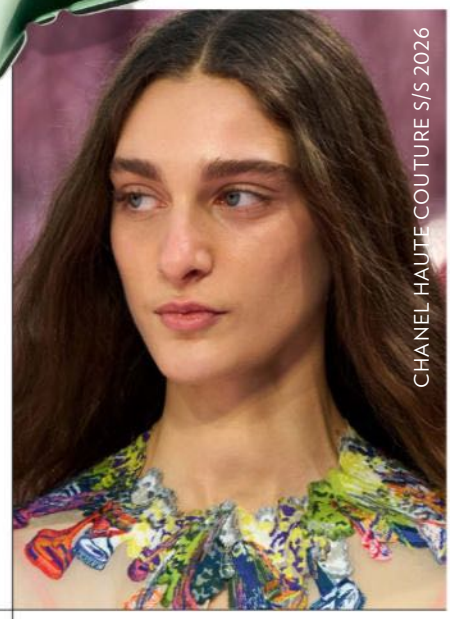
Crafted as a homage to a golden Brazilian sunset, this scent opens with juicy mango for a pop of sun-drenched sweetness before revealing its heart of tuberose and sandalwood.



Marc Jacobs Born Star Cream-to-Powder Eyeshadow in That's Cute, $48.

STARGAZING

The drawback of bright eyeshadow – messy fallout – isn't a concern with these fuss-free, star-shaped shadows. The magic lies in the buttery, bouncy texture, which glides on as a blendable cream before melting into a soft-powder finish.





Gucci Flora Eye Palette in Sunset Orchid, $135.

SHADOW PLAY

The beautiful packaging alone makes this palette covetable, while the edit of silky-smooth Gucci shadows features a range of practical shades, from matte cocoa to metallic khaki and shimmering gold.



Dior Vernis Nail Polish in Ruban, $50.

FROSTED TIPS

Shimmering pink feels fresh for the season ahead. Embrace the colour's comeback with a coat of Dior's pearlescent pastel polish, peppered with just enough sparkle to stand out in a sea of blush manicures.





Synergie Skin EyeDration Biomask, $92 (for five).

BRIGHT EYES

These refreshing eye masks cling comfortably to the skin, allowing their active-packed hydration to reach where it's needed most while you get on with your morning. Designed to reduce the appearance of puffiness and dark circles, they are the ideal early AM skin step.

JACK OF ALL TRADES

Add definition, sheen and colour to your complexion with this clever compact. Occupying the beauty bag real estate of a single product, it delivers the impact of three: a matte bronzer, iridescent highlighter and satin-finish blush in one sleek design.

Sisley L'Orchidee Blush in Bronze, $200.



Photography Launchmetrics Spotlight

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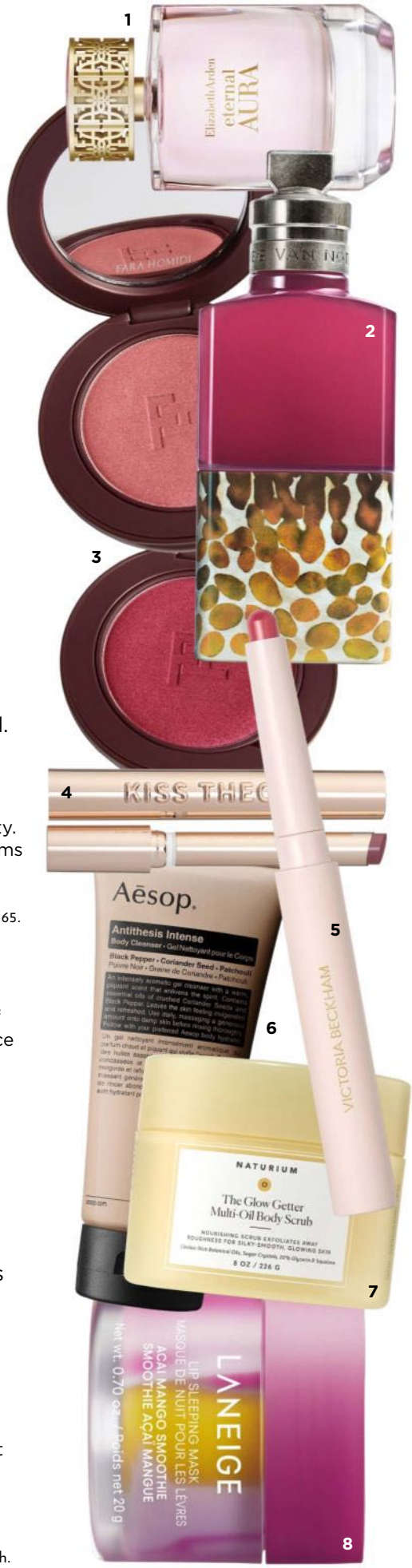
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Glow & Tell

marie claire's top picks of the latest products

WORDS BRIAR CLARK



PERFUME PLAY

As the weather warms up, so too does my proclivity for evocative, mood-altering scents. Conversation starters and compliments are assured.

Aura-farming fragrance
Strong, graceful and confident, Elizabeth Arden's Eternal Aura pays homage to timeless femininity. Zesty pink pepper, magnolia blooms and sensual amber make up this magnetic floral amber bouquet.
1 Elizabeth Arden Eternal Aura EDP, 100ml, $165.

Balance in a bottle
An exploration of duality, Velvet Violet pairs the freshness of violet leaves with the toasty nuttiness of roasted sesame, revealing a nuance and dimension that evolves on the skin throughout the day.
2 Dries Van Noten Velvet Violet EDP, 100ml, $520.

NEXT-GEN MAKEUP HYBRIDS

Get the best of both worlds with hybrid makeup products thoughtfully formulated with the modern woman in mind.

Healthy-flush hack
Fake a sun-kissed flush with Fara Homidi's bronzer and blush hybrid formula. Available in three burnished shades, it's the quickest way to emulate a Euro summer tan after spending most of our winter indoors.
3 Fara Homidi Beauty Essential Bronzer Compact in (from top) Nue and Velle, $128 each.

Kiss-proof colour
Not all long-wearing lipstick feels uncomfortable. Anastasia Beverly Hills draws on the comfort of lip balm formulas and the sheer, natural colour of gloss with its Kiss Theory Lip Balm. The result? An easy-to-wear, cushiony, non-sticky lip colour.
4 Anastasia Beverly Hills Kiss Theory Lip Balm in Twirl, $32.

Right where you want it
Only Victoria Beckham could dream up a blush applicator so skinny. Ideal for the colour averse, this stylus format allows for precise application every time.
5 Victoria Beckham Beauty Blush Stylus in Rossa, $67.

REPLENISHMENT ON REPLAY

Forget unrealistic self-care routines, I'm prioritising moments of rejuvenation all hours of the day with replenishing skincare.

Slow-day shower mate
A smoky and woody paradox, Aēsop's Antithesis Intense is warm but cool, marrying black peppercorns and coriander seed essential oils in an enlivening gentle lather.
6 Aēsop Antithesis Intense Body Cleanser, 180ml, $53.

Get your glow on
Reclaim the radiance winter stole with a sloughing body scrub. Naturium's The Glow Getter pairs sugar crystals with a slew of nourishing botanical oils, squalane and glycerin to refresh skin in the shower. Simply towel off to reveal a hydrated, healthy-looking glow.
7 Naturium The Glow Getter Multi-Oil Body Scrub, $33.

Smooth and soft
Laneige takes inspiration from a morning smoothie for this novel Sleeping Mask infused with acai and mango. Hydrate, soften and smooth lips, cuticles and elbows as you snooze.
8 Laneige Lip Sleeping Mask in Acai Mango Smoothie, $33.



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Photography by Jess Bonde

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LIFESTYLE



Louis Vuitton's long association with high-end travel took a new turn when the French maison helped repurpose retro Porsches with all the LV trimmings.

Photography courtesy Louis Vuitton

This month is all about discovery. Unlock the art of rustic luxury living in a soulful heritage cottage; explore the breathtaking beauty of Western Australia's Kimberley Coast on a decadent cruise; and indulge in the good life with all our insider news



Cottage soul

Perched between a national park and the water in Sydney's south, Simpson Cottage is a home layered with history and personal treasures, writes Georgie McCourt



Views of Simpsons Bay provide the perfect backdrop for long lunches.

Above The 160-year-old sandstone cottage retains its beautiful heritage facade.

There are holiday houses you love for a weekend, and then there are the ones you find yourself thinking about long after the bags are unpacked. Simpson Cottage was the latter for Tara Larnach. Before she owned the historic cottage, tucked into the wild coastal landscape of Bundeena in Sydney's south, Larnach stayed there with her husband, Steve, as a guest. It was love at first sight. "A good holiday property should hook you in and have you wanting to buy it, or at least one nearby," she tells *marie claire*. "Most of the time, when you get home, you realise it was just a holiday romance and the house was much like any other holiday property."

That didn't happen with Simpson Cottage. "We fell deeply, madly in love with it," she says. Part of the attraction was its extraordinary position. The cottage sits beside the Royal National Park, its unfenced boundary seemingly dissolving into bushland, and the water is never far away. For Larnach, who grew up on a farm near Tamworth,

it offered something she had missed since leaving the country: space. "It felt like I had a paddock to wander in again," she says. Meanwhile Steve, who grew up in Bondi, needed the ocean. "So a holiday house for me needs a paddock. For him, it needs the ocean. Somehow, Simpson Cottage gives us both."

When the couple eventually bought the property in 2011, Larnach knew she wanted to preserve what made it special, while continuing to share it with others. Today, Simpson Cottage is available to rent, welcoming couples, families and groups looking for a secluded escape surrounded by bushland and water. Over the years it has been the backdrop to family holidays, engagements, reunions and celebrations, with many guests returning year after year.

At 160 years old, this was never going to be a house that benefited from being stripped back and made new. In fact, Larnach hesitates to describe herself as its owner at all. "When the deeds were stamped with our names, I never really felt like we owned it," she says. "Instead, I felt like we inherited the history and stories and all that came before us."

She prefers to think of herself as a caretaker. "The cottage was here long before us and, hopefully, it will be here long after we're gone. Being a caretaker means honouring those stories while preserving the cottage so future generations can discover its history and add their own chapter."

That philosophy has become the guiding principle of the interiors. Rather than chasing pristine finishes or period-perfect reproduction, Larnach has allowed age, texture and imperfection to remain visible. New elements are softened with vintage furniture, timber and objects that already carry a sense of history. "We'll never truly be able to create old heritage-looking parts that look authentic," she explains, "so I soften the new with reclaimed timber, vintage pieces and materials that already have some age and character."





Above Simpsons Bay sits on the edge of the Royal National Park, about an hour south of Sydney's CBD.

Left Reclaimed timber shelves hold objects imbued with history.

Below Vintage furniture adds to the feeling of stepping back in time.



"Rustic luxury, to me, is full of patina and texture and old-world methods of making things"

– Tara Larnach

The result is an aesthetic Larnach describes as "rustic luxury". "If I had to use one word to describe the feel, it would be soul," she says. "I don't like shiny interiors that look perfect in the pages of a magazine. They tend to feel like places where you should sit up straight so you don't make anything messy."

At Simpson Cottage, the luxury is more tactile. Beds are dressed in pure linen, there are Turkish cotton towels and the kitchen is filled with handmade ceramics. Teapots and loose-leaf tea replace tea bags, while outside there's a fire pit





Above Built in the 1860s, Simpson Cottage was the home of an early settler family.

Left The internal fireplace still works to warm the house on winter evenings.

and inside the original open fireplace still works. "Rustic luxury, to me, is full of patina and texture and old-world methods of making things," she says.

There are very few objects here without a reason for being. The timber shelves in the lounge room and king bedroom began as recycled boards Larnach found on Marketplace and collected from a farm near Goulburn. She cut and sanded them herself before handing them to the builder. "He struggled with their wonky edges and I had to stop him from trying to make them perfectly straight," she recalls. "Given the cottage is nearly 160 years old, not much is perfectly straight these days, so the old worn timber felt like the perfect fit." The objects displayed on the shelves are just as personal: old tools from her father's shed, glass fishing floats her grandmother found washed ashore in Cairns, fishing reels from Steve's childhood, and oil cans salvaged from the first workshop he worked at in Bondi. Even a pair of Larnach's childhood riding boots has been given a second life as a doorstop.

At some point, she realised she had unconsciously created rules for what could come into the house. Every object needed to be at least two of three things: old with a story to tell, beautiful or useful. "I love the idea of guests wondering what the story behind something might be," she says. "I think a cottage becomes far more interesting when it's filled with stories rather than simply filled with stuff."

That relaxed approach extends outdoors, where deer wander freely through the garden, nibbling plants and ensuring any attempt at landscaping perfection remains futile. "The Royal National Park is wild and a little rugged, so a perfectly tidy interior and highly curated garden would feel jarring," Larnach says. "It would also be a battle I'd never win."

Instead, life observes the seasons. "In summer, we follow the shade and spend our days reading in cool corners between swims in Simpsons Bay," she says. "The doors are flung open to catch the breeze and blur the line between indoors and out." And in winter, they follow the sun. "We curl up with a good book, a game and good company, and long dinners in the gazebo overlooking the bay become a leisurely affair."

It's that rhythm Larnach hopes guests slip into, because for her, Simpson Cottage isn't simply somewhere to stay; it's somewhere

> "I think people are craving places like Simpson Cottage because we've forgotten how to ... do absolutely nothing without feeling guilty"
>
> – Tara Larnach

Photography Good Thanks Media





Above Where interiors have been freshened up, Larnach has softened the effect with vintage finds.

Right The fire pit with views of Simpsons Bay creates a cosy outdoor focal point.



designed to make you slow down. "There's a sense these days that everybody wants something from you," she says. "Our phones are constantly buzzing, emails never stop and there's rarely a moment without noise, distraction or something demanding our attention."

She admits she came "kicking and screaming into the digital age", only installing wi-fi at the cottage in 2018. Today, she believes part of its appeal lies in encouraging guests to ignore it. "I think people are craving places like Simpson Cottage because we've forgotten how to just be," she says. "To sit with a cup of tea, stare at a view, go for a walk or spend an afternoon doing absolutely nothing without feeling guilty about it."

Often guests don't realise that is what they need until they arrive. "The urgency starts to fall away," she explains. "People put their phones down. They spend longer around the dinner table. They go for walks without a destination. I know I've done my job when guests arrive and, after a day or two, realise they haven't thought about work, their emails or their to-do list for hours." And when it is finally time to leave? "If they don't want to go and they're already thinking about when they can come back, then I've done my job."

Above The cottage is filled with handmade ceramics.

Right The gazebo is the perfect spot for gathering, dining and lingering.



LUXURIOUSLY *WILD*

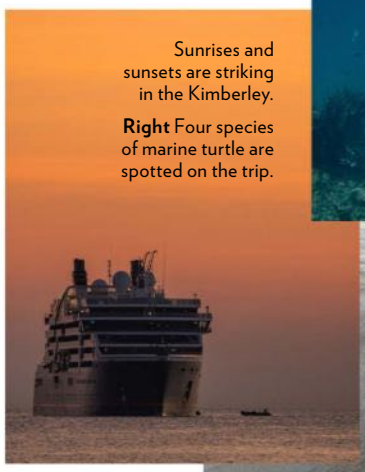
The main way to see the amazing Kimberley Coast is from the ocean, and the best way to do that is to combine hands-on adventure with hands-free luxury on a yacht-style small-ship cruise

PHOTOGRAPHY HARRY ASLAN
WORDS DANIEL MOORE



Talbot Bay's Garaanngaddim, or Horizontal Falls, were famously called "one of the greatest wonders of the natural world" by David Attenborough.





Sunrises and sunsets are striking in the Kimberley.

Right Four species of marine turtle are spotted on the trip.



As befits one of Earth's most remote wilderness areas, exploring the Kimberley's 420,000 square kilometres of gorges, savannas, ranges and rivers can be a challenge, even more so if you want to get up close to the spectacular 12,000km of coastline where few roads can penetrate.

The best way to see the towering cliffs, cascading waterfalls and teeming bird life and marine mammals is from the sea, and if sailing your own catamaran is not an option, then it's time for your first cruise – or perhaps your umpteenth.

"First cruise? And with Seabourn! Oh, you've spoiled yourself now by starting at the top," a fellow passenger says, echoing an opinion among the well-travelled onboard that Seabourn is one of the top cruise lines.

Cruising can be a polarising mode of travel and holidaying: some love it and dream only of their next voyage, while others picture being trapped far out to sea hemmed in by masses of party-people. But *Seabourn Pursuit* is no floating theme park crammed with thousands upon thousands of passengers and crew, like some of the biggest ships. Instead, it's a small luxury vessel with a maximum of 264 passengers, part of a trend known as "yacht-style cruising".

It's also part of the trend of expedition cruising. "Luxury meets exploration" is a company theme, and the daily expeditions are a big attraction. If you'd rather go for a bushwalk, a snorkel or see ancient Aboriginal rock paintings than lounge all day beside a pool (but still have the accompanying gin and tonic), then an expedition cruise is the one to pick.

As the world's largest inshore reef and covering some 400sq km, Montgomery Reef (Yowjab to the Dambimangari people) seems to rise out of the ocean as huge tides fall away.



Above The roomy cabins on *Seabourn Pursuit* all have balconies.

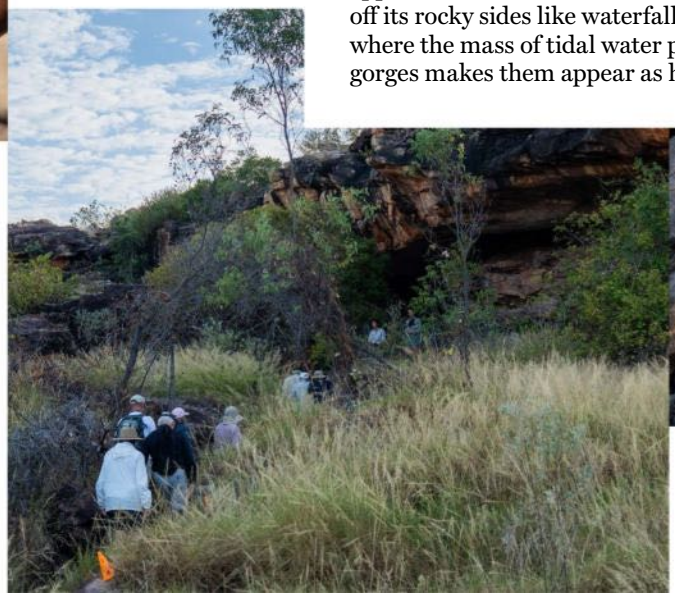
Waterfalls & Wanjinas is Seabourn's 10-day Kimberley trip, sailing between Darwin and Broome. Seeing that dramatic coast from a distance would almost be pleasure enough, but the bonus highlights are the daily expeditions in the inflatable Zodiac boats. Donning slimline lifejackets, passengers make their (careful) way onto the boats, and head off to the towering cliffs and escarpments, distant reefs alive with stingrays, turtles and birds, and shore landings to see rock art caves explained by Indigenous guides. En route, the expedition team member (and Zodiac driver) pauses to point out a perched osprey or a crocodile sunning itself, and details of the local flora, fauna, geology or Indigenous history.

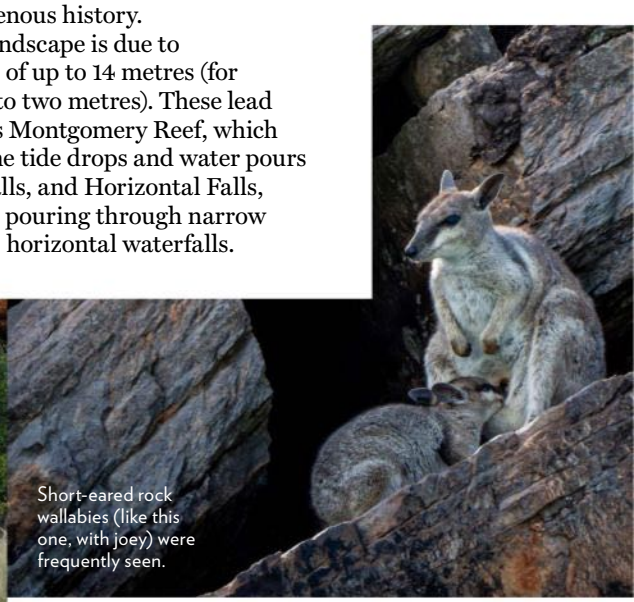
Part of the drama of the landscape is due to the Kimberley's massive tides of up to 14 metres (for comparison, Sydney's are up to two metres). These lead to amazing spectacles such as Montgomery Reef, which appears out of the ocean as the tide drops and water pours off its rocky sides like waterfalls, and Horizontal Falls, where the mass of tidal water pouring through narrow gorges makes them appear as horizontal waterfalls.



Above Traditional owners invited passengers to join an ochre-daubing ceremony.

Right On our way to view Gwion Gwion rock paintings.





Short-eared rock wallabies (like this one, with joey) were frequently seen.



Above After visiting King George Falls (Oomari), guests sip champagne aboard the Zodiacs.



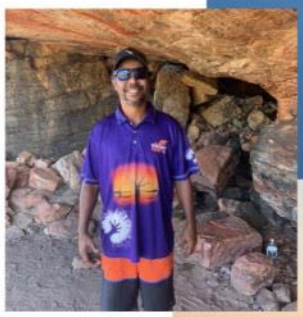
Left The central atrium connects the ship's decks, for those who'd prefer to skip the elevators.

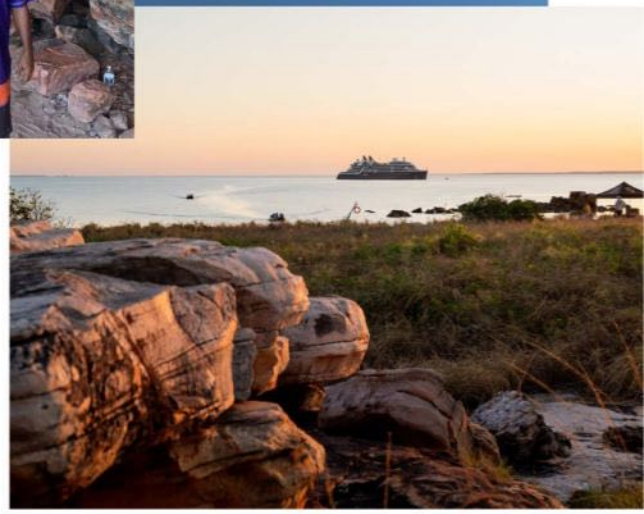


The crowded skies over the reefs.

Left Guide Neil Maru showing the group cave art at Freshwater Cove.

Below The *Seabourn Pursuit* off Freshwater Cove.





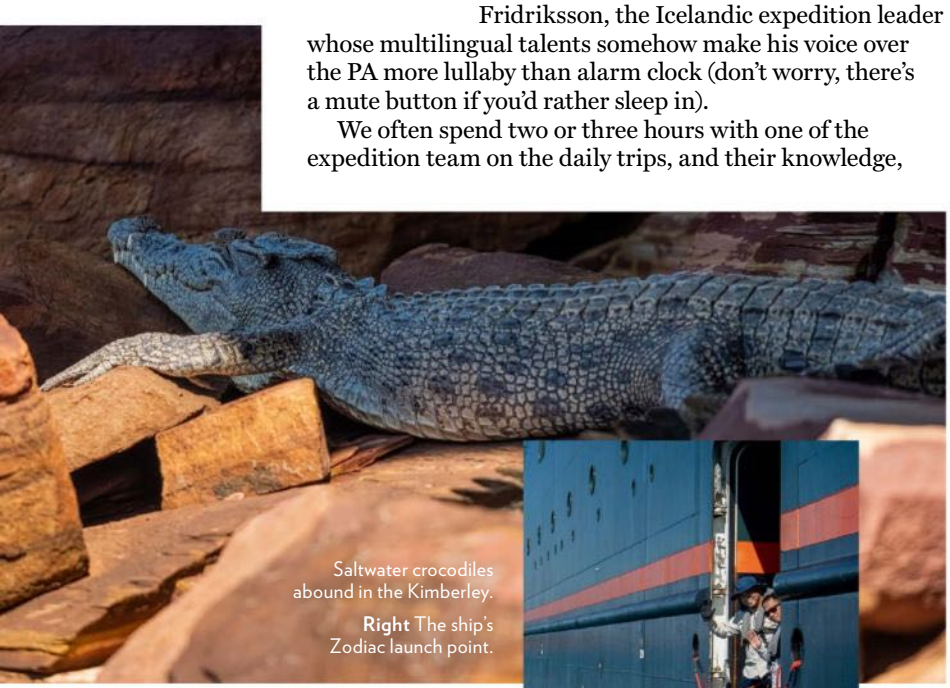
Seabourn Pursuit is a cracking ship, the newer of the line's two purpose-built polar class ships, well-designed, gleamingly clean and launched only three years ago in Genoa, Italy. It's relaxed on board, with lots of open deck areas to enjoy the smell of the sea, the breeze, the glorious sunrises and sunsets and views of the coast. There's an outdoor infinity pool and four whirlpool hot tubs, but yacht-style cruising means no casino, no show lounge or multi-deck theatre and no formal dress nights (thankfully).

It's said sea air sharpens the appetite, and there is plenty of great dining covering all preferences, from buffet-style breakfasts, lunches and dinners to a classier, more formal restaurant, plus cafe-style options and an excellent sushi and cocktail lounge in the evenings. As expected, there are endless alcohol options, with top-shelf spirits and mixers of your choice also supplied free to your cabin. When you want to kick back, the roomy cabins all have balconies, and there are various lounges and nooks around the ship's decks, where one can curl up undisturbed with a good book.

Most days there are fascinating dives into subjects we ought to know about but often don't

On the trip we get to know many of the 19-strong expedition team: naturalists, scientists, historians and adventurers. For early starts we're often coaxed awake by the surprisingly dulcet voice of Fridrik Fridriksson, the Icelandic expedition leader whose multilingual talents somehow make his voice over the PA more lullaby than alarm clock (don't worry, there's a mute button if you'd rather sleep in).

We often spend two or three hours with one of the expedition team on the daily trips, and their knowledge, expertise and passion add hugely to the experience. Most days there's also a lecture or slide show – fascinating dives into subjects we ought to know about but often don't. They include Aboriginal rock art (by Vishwa Rana, who also leads an evening of stargazing on the bow); the engineering marvels of "cathedral" termites (by Abraham Waqairoba); the hot local topic of crocodiles (by Erin O'Brien, a skilled crocodile trapper and researcher who has worked on programs to keep both humans and salties safe, i.e. separate. Erin also gives a powerful talk on the Kimberley's Indigenous heritage, European exploration and the tragedies that often befell when those two crossed paths); sexual strategies of Kimberley wildlife (always a popular topic, especially when by a very entertaining biologist, Dr Jarrod McKenna); the amazing biodiversity of the Kimberley (by marine scientist Dannii Creagh), and even how to improve your smart-phone photography (by cruise photographer Harry Aslan).



Saltwater crocodiles abound in the Kimberley.

Right The ship's Zodiac launch point.





There's great snorkelling at (croc-free) Ashmore Reef.

Left Naturalist and guide Vishwa Rana, whose interests include ethnoastronomy (the cultural and navigational use of stars by Indigenous people).

You also bump into the team around the ship, mingling with guests or keeping a lookout on deck for birds, whales or dolphins. It's not often one gets to chat to someone like Tasmanian David Sinclair, a lawyer turned explorer, guide and photographer who has made more than 60 polar trips and can casually start a sentence with "When I skied across Greenland". Or Sue Crafer, who has raced in 15 Sydney to Hobarts but is just as happy to discuss dinghy sailing.

This style of cruising doesn't see big names fly in for a performance. Instead, *Seabourn Pursuit* makes a highlight of more intimate entertainment: the talented cruise director Caroline Miller, a New Yorker with a background in opera singing and musical theatre, and delightful pianist and singer John Randall, who has toured in many a musical.

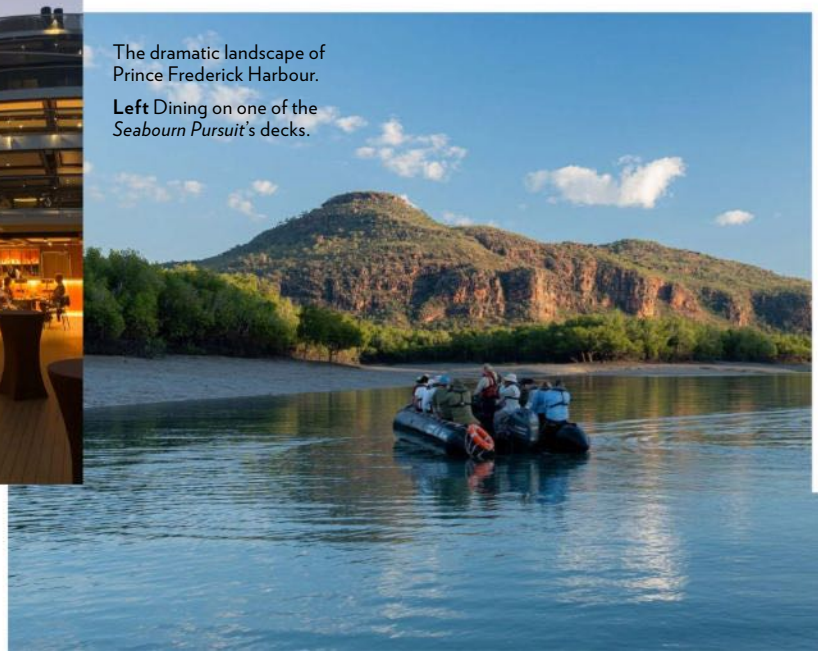
Far from only millionaires, the passengers are a happily mixed bag. Yes, there are plenty of wealthy retiree couples, some of whom cruise for most of each year. But there are also people on tighter budgets who find this style of cruising stress-free and value for money – no connecting flights or hotels to organise, nothing extra to spend on meals, drinks or entertainment, and a constantly changing landscape that unfolds before your eyes as it drifts past. Some couples bring their children or grandchildren, and one Queensland family of 12 includes several generations.

The Kimberley Coast is a spectacular part of Australia, and if you're going to the effort of visiting this remote destination, you may as well make the most of what might be a once-in-a-lifetime visit, and do it in style.

Visit seabourn.com for more.

There's a constantly changing landscape that unfolds before your eyes as it drifts past





The dramatic landscape of Prince Frederick Harbour.

Left Dining on one of the *Seabourn Pursuit*'s decks.

Ship to shore: Expedition highlights

King George River Home to the highest twin waterfalls in Australia, known to the Balanggarra people as Oomari.

Jar Island (Ngula), Vansittart Bay (Banjal) Magical Gwion Gwion rock paintings.

Ashmore Reef Beautiful snorkelling in this marine sanctuary, with turtles, rays, giant clams and brown booby seabirds skimming overhead. Later, pilot whales and Bryde's whales pass by.

Hunter River The fertile mangroves of this Wunambal Gaambera Country are a haven for countless species, notably saltwater crocodiles. The pod of snubfin dolphins is a bonus.

Swift Bay Caves and overhangs feature Wandjina rock art panels.

Montgomery Reef and Freshwater Cove (Wijingarra Butt Butt) At 400sq km, Montgomery is the world's largest inshore reef, abounding with birds and green turtles. At Freshwater Cove, Neil Maru of the Worrorra tribe takes us to a distant cave of paintings.

Talbot Bay After the amazing Horizontal Falls (Garaanngaddim), the rich country of the Garaanngaddim people displays Brahminy kites, ospreys and rock wallabies.

Lacepede Islands These beautiful cays are thriving breeding and nesting grounds for brown boobies, frigate birds, terns and green turtles.

Destination: desire

When Louis Vuitton meets Porsche, it's no surprise the result is stunning motor vehicles that are the definition of travelling in style. The French maison provided the detailing and accessories for two overhauled Porsche 911s, creating a fashion fantasy of soft leather, metal fastening buckles, luxe luggage, retro racing gear, surfboards, skis and sunglasses, all boasting the LV heritage codes and enough exquisite detail to make restraint look positively passé.



THE GOOD LIFE

COLOUR POP

Cult cookware brand Le Creuset has branched out into drink bottles and food flasks – all in the brand's distinct vibrant shades, from sunny yellows to berry pinks and pastel purples. Visit lecreuset.com.au to check out the new On the Go range.



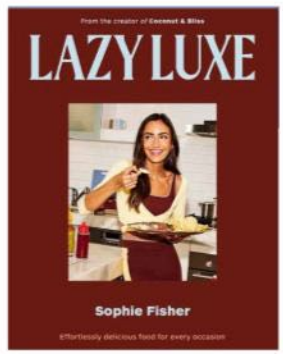
Le Creuset insulated water bottle, $45.



Freedom chair, $899.

BETWEEN THE LINES

Every balcony, deck, garden and sunny corner needs an easygoing outdoor chair. By pairing plush, sink-in comfort with natural acacia, tactile wicker and UV-resistant cushions, Freedom's Manly chair will be your new favourite seat for slow afternoons in the backyard.



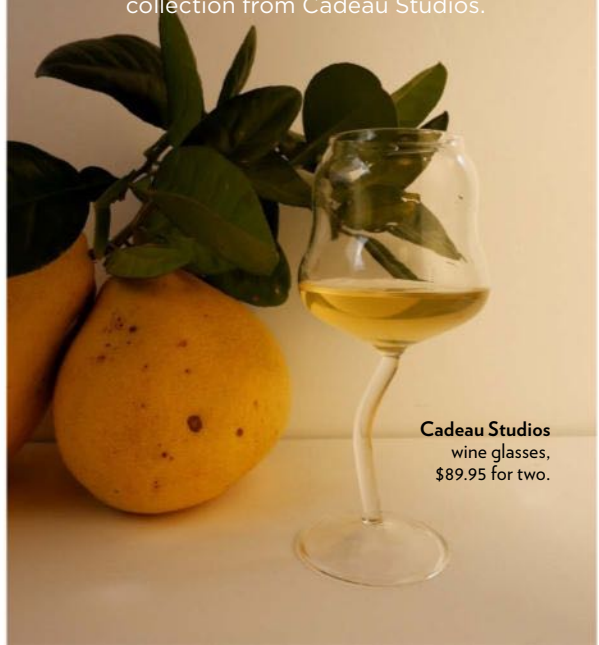
BLISS BOMBS

There's a reason why Sophie Fisher of @coconutandbliss fame has more than one million followers – she delivers on her promise of effortless and flavoursome food without the fuss. The Sydney food blogger has captured the magic in her new cookbook, *Lazy Luxe*, which launches in December. The cookbook is packed with nourishing, flavour-forward recipes designed for real life, pairing fresh ingredients with clever shortcuts and simple techniques. Think quick weeknight dinners, easy entertaining and seriously good food that will impress your friends and family.

Lazy Luxe by Sophie Fisher (Are Media Books, $29.99).

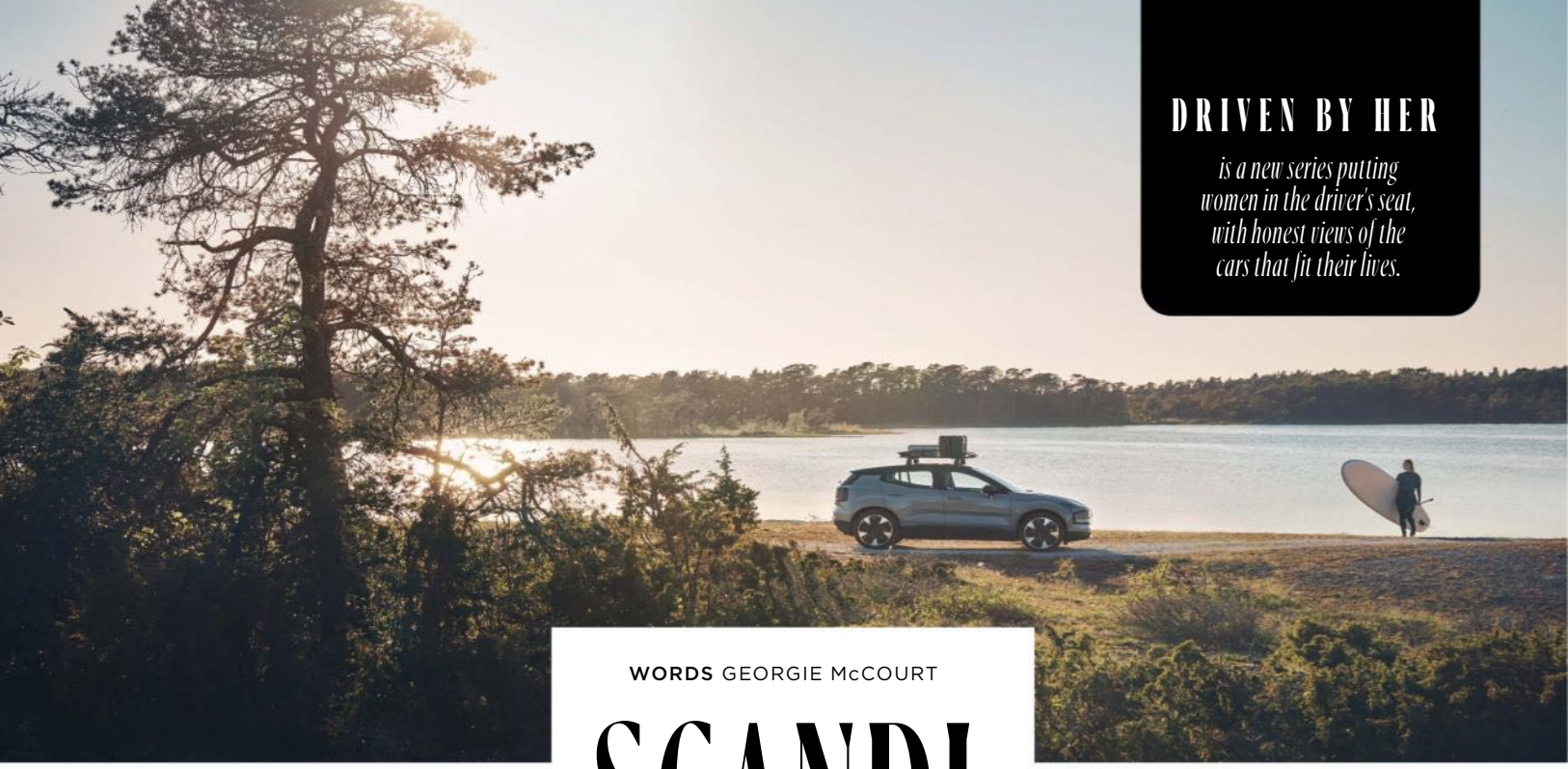
With a twist

It's cocktail season, which means it's time to re-evaluate that chipped and unmatched glassware from last year. Elevate everyday moments with the gorgeous Cin Cin collection from Cadeau Studios.



Cadeau Studios wine glasses, $89.95 for two.

Photography courtesy Louis Vuitton. **Words** Melissa Gaudron



DRIVEN BY HER

is a new series putting women in the driver's seat, with honest views of the cars that fit their lives.

WORDS GEORGIE McCOURT

SCANDI CHARGE

The Volvo EX30 proves good things really do come in small packages

As a woman juggling work, school runs, commutes and the endless logistics of family life, I want a car that feels stylish (just don't look inside – my car is where I embrace mess), but also makes my day easier. Enter the Volvo EX30: a compact, fully electric SUV that combines minimalist Scandinavian design with clever storage, impressive performance and Volvo's reassuring reputation for safety.

I've been driving an electric car for more than four years and, in the words of Taylor Swift, my ex (a petrol car) and I are never, ever getting back together. I'm electric for life – and trust me, one day very soon, you will be too.

The EX30 has all the versatility of an SUV, just without the bulk, making it ideal for busy city streets and tight parking spaces (and people like me who love to squeeze an SUV into spaces labelled "small cars only" – yes, I know, I'm awful). Its high ground clearance and confident proportions give it plenty of presence – you won't feel like you're driving a racing car – but it never feels hard to handle.

The exterior is unmistakably Volvo, albeit with a sharper, sportier edge. The signature Thor's Hammer LED headlights feature a striking segmented design, while sleek C-shaped rear lights sit flush against the body. There's even a welcome and farewell lighting sequence that twinkles as you approach or leave the car. It's a fun little detail, but one that makes the EX30 feel special.

The standard black roof and colour-coordinated spoiler create an athletic silhouette. Better still, the spoiler isn't simply decorative. Because Volvo makes sure every detail counts, it improves aerodynamic efficiency while cleverly concealing the brake light and rear-wiper washer nozzle. Even the 19-inch wheels have been designed to reduce weight and improve energy efficiency. The Single Motor Extended Range model features diamond-cut surfaces and glossy black inserts, while the Cross Country version has matte graphite wheels for a more rugged look.

For me, however, the real test of any car is how well it handles the chaos of daily life – and this is where the EX30 is particularly appealing. Despite its compact footprint, it comfortably seats five and offers up to 400 litres of boot space (I can't tell you how much boot space excites me these days). Fold down the rear seats and that expands to as much as 1000 litres: enough for suitcases, school bags, sporting equipment or the results of an over-enthusiastic interiors-shopping expedition. The cabin has also been designed with real life in mind. There's a removable storage box in the centre console, floor-level storage in the front and a seven-litre "frunk" for those less glamorous – but essential – items such as cleaning products and washer fluid.

Then there's the question every EV driver is asked on repeat: what about the range? The EX30 can travel up to 417 kilometres on a charge, while DC fast charging can take the battery from 10 to 80 per cent in approximately 28 minutes under suitable conditions. Depending on the powertrain, it can also produce up to 428 horsepower and accelerate from zero to 100km/h in just 3.7 seconds – far livelier than its petite proportions might suggest.

The EX30 feels designed for women who need their car to do many things at once – which is to say, every woman. It's practical without feeling pedestrian, compact without compromising on space and stylish without sacrificing substance. In other words, it nails the brief perfectly.



Above and right It may be a small SUV, but Volvo's EX30 makes a big impact thanks to its stylish minimalist design and powerful performance.

Photography courtesy Volvo

LIBRA SEASON

WORDS NATASHA WEBER @astrotash



Love and money come under the cosmic microscope for Librans, so get ready to make some decisions about finance and relationships

September 23–October 22

LIBRA

Venus, your home planet, begins its rare retrograde on October 3, forcing a reckoning around love and money. Couples may question whether their values still align, but questions alone do not doom a relationship. For some, yes, October marks the end. For others, Venus offers an opportunity to fine-tune the relationship and grow stronger. Singles, you're walking away from anyone keeping you hooked while they keep their options open. Your self-worth fortifies, along with your standards. Money also comes under review, with budget cuts possible. Wealth can grow, but sacrifice may be the price for future financial security.
POWER DAYS October 24, 25, 28

October 23–November 21

SCORPIO

Your sign hosts two major retrogrades this month, dragging you to a crossroads. Am I in the right career? Is my partner my forever person? Have I outgrown the city I live in? See this internal interrogation as a vital step in your personal evolution. October's clever trick is to allow space for reflection rather than forcing progress. Come the 23rd, the sun enters your sign, gifting a brand-new 12-month cycle and a renewed vision. Start reimagining your future, even if the plan stays private for now. Then the full moon on the 26th brings a business collaboration or plans with your sweetheart to fruition.
POWER DAYS October 16, 23, 24

November 22–December 21

SAGITTARIUS

Your subconscious is where the magic happens when October's retrogrades pull you inward. Therapy, past-life regression or shadow work could uncover what's behind your fears and offer healing for patterns you've outgrown. Come the 23rd, the sun joins Mercury and Venus in the same area of your chart, delivering your breakthrough. The new moon on the 11th brings a fresh face into your orbit, likely a woman from your professional circle, who becomes both a mentor and friend. Then by the 26th, the full moon has you honouring the wellness intentions you set in January, such as a 10pm bedtime or cutting back on sugar.
POWER DAYS October 3, 11, 15

Collage Inga Campbell. **Photography** Getty Images

December 22–January 19

CAPRICORN

With Mercury and Venus reversing through your social sector, October reveals who feels like oxygen and who feels like static. A friendship inventory is due, especially if someone's version of the truth keeps changing. Observation is your power move. From October 25, Venus points to professional frustration, but this energy favours strategy over job applications. Study someone whose achievements you admire. Their image, language and presence are the lesson. The full moon on the 26th sweetens your love life. Singles meet someone grounded and tactile, while couples thrive through a creative collaboration or at a fun event.
POWER DAYS October 4, 9, 16

January 20–February 18

AQUARIUS

October begins with a career review. Rage quitting could tempt you when your boss piles on shifts or a coworker takes credit for your work. But Venus' retrograde says play the long game. Polish your résumé and move when your leverage improves. Come October 24, Venus' cazimi invites a relationship upgrade. If you're seeing someone, things may become official, while singles refine their wish list, especially where money and values are concerned. The full moon on the 26th turns couples into homebodies. Whether you're fixing what's worn out or making a property decision, your space starts feeling easier to love.
POWER DAYS October 7, 16, 26

February 19–March 20

PISCES

A foreign woman has you captivated, perhaps for her self-assured energy or signature sense of style. She might be an influencer or a celebrity whose life embodies what you want to become. With Venus in retrograde from October 3, admire her without losing your own essence in the process. For couples, the new moon brings sexual adventure, with your lover floating a borderline taboo idea. Happily, the fantasy delivers. By the 26th, travel cravings need an outlet without a long-haul fare. A country B&B, loud playlist and best-friend passenger could easily turn a short local drive into a cinematic mini escape.
POWER DAYS October 3, 22, 26

March 21–April 19

ARIES

October opens with Venus retrograding from the 3rd, making financial collaborations feel like quicksand. Joint accounts and loan paperwork can wait. Instead, channel your energy into squirrelling cash into a private savings account. Pluto orchestrates a high-stakes networking opportunity around mid-month. If you're eyeing the big leagues, an organisation with clout could come calling. By October 25, coupled Rams might wonder if they are still reading from the same values playbook as their partner. Reflect rather than react. Singles, confidence in a date is sexy, just check it isn't arrogance in disguise.
POWER DAYS October 3, 4, 7

April 20–May 20

TAURUS

This month pulls you inward when your planetary ruler, Venus, reverses course on the 3rd. Momentum stalls while introspection deepens, especially around love and your wellbeing. Where are you settling in your relationships? Are you showing up fully present? Which health habits are stuck in a loop? When Mercury joins the retrograde party on October 24, official paperwork demands a second look. Read slowly, and if the fine print is unclear, ask questions. On October 26, the full moon in your sign spotlights body image. You're feeling fabulous in your own skin and are done chasing others' approval.
POWER DAYS October 11, 25, 30

May 21–June 20

GEMINI

Your health zone gets a planetary workout this October, though hardcore workouts aren't the prescription. Gentle, mindful practices such as breathwork, sound healing, yoga or meditation get you glowing from the inside out. From October 24, Mercury's retrograde has you streamlining your workflow at the office or finding ways to make your household run more efficiently. You might automate your bills or overhaul your filing system. Then the full moon on October 26 supports a money-making venture or side hustle, provided you've done the unsexy work of crunching the numbers and building a practical framework first.
POWER DAYS October 2, 5, 16

June 21–July 22

CANCER

This month hands you the keys to a home glow-up. The new moon on the 11th has you nesting hard, whether that means rearranging furniture or having a serious conversation about your living situation. Come October 23, the sun gives singles a romantic opening, but your date needs cues. A little eye contact and encouragement go a long way towards making a meaningful connection. Then, Mercury's rewind from the 24th asks you to audit your joy. The hobbies and pastimes that once filled your cup might feel hollow now. And the truth is, you're allowed to outgrow what you used to love.
POWER DAYS October 3, 11, 30

July 23–August 22

LEO

Pluto asks you to stop treating other people's opinions as gospel. Just because something works for the friend you admire, the partner you adore or the influencer whose content you've devoured for years, doesn't make it yours. From October 3, Venus' retrograde turns your home into a moodboard. Browse, research and gather quotes, but hold off on major domestic decisions. Then Mercury's rewind pulls you into family history when a relative's story or dusty old photo box sends you down memory lane. If you're curious about your family tree, this is the time to trace the stories that came before you.
POWER DAYS October 5, 7, 31

August 23–September 22

VIRGO

A conversation loops in your head from October 3, courtesy of Venus reversing through your communication sector. The harder you try to ignore the thought, the more persistent it becomes, so acknowledge your feelings and unpack why those words triggered you. The answer is buried in the discomfort. Pluto ends its retrograde on the 16th, restoring your zest and helping you decode a stubborn health niggle. With renewed vitality, household duties and your workload feel lighter too. Then at month's end, October's full moon messes with travel plans, so book refundable flights and keep your itinerary flexible.
POWER DAYS October 3, 24, 31

BEFORE YOU GO



Jessica Carrera, the writer/producer behind the new documentary *Tina Arena: Unravel Me*, discusses the pressure of ambition and the importance of taking up space

Why Tina Arena and why now? I'm drawn to stories of fearless women who refuse to stand still, who take risks, reinvent themselves and have the courage to begin again, even when the path ahead is uncertain. Tina and her music embody all these qualities, and *Unravel Me* is an opportunity to celebrate an extraordinary career spanning 50 years.

What has been the most challenging thing to unlearn in life? Unlearning the idea that I am my job. My working life from teen to now has been defined by what I do, mostly in service of others. It's been surprisingly difficult to separate my sense of self from achievement and ambition, especially now that my career has evolved.

Where and when are you happiest? When my fluffy little toy poodle, Ruby, curls up next to me on the couch and sighs. Hearing her little sigh of contentment is happiness personified.

What's your most self-indulgent purchase? Recently, the Chanel Sublimage La Crème Yeux eye cream. It's liquid gold.

"I've learnt that sometimes you have to speak up and let people know what you're capable of"

What's the most spontaneous decision you've ever made? I had long-service leave from my PR job just before my 30th birthday, and with a small suitcase, I left for a one-week trip to Koh Samui with friends. But I didn't come back. Instead, I travelled for the next three months through Thailand and across India, before somehow ending up in sub-zero Berlin for New Year's Eve. It was completely unplanned and one of the most memorable experiences of my life.

What piece of art or furniture in your home is most sentimental to you? I've been collecting contemporary art for several years, but the most sentimental piece is a Polish tapestry that belonged to my grandparents. It was one of the few items they brought to Australia when they immigrated after World War II. It hung on the wall in their house, then in my parents' house, and now it hangs in mine. It tethers me to my family history – it's truly a thread to the past.

What lesson do you wish you had learnt sooner? That modesty can sometimes hold you back. I was taught to let your work speak for itself and not make too much noise about what you've achieved. But I've learnt that sometimes you have to speak up, take up space and let people know what you're capable of. There's a difference between being modest and making yourself invisible.

Which fictional character do you resonate with most? Dana Scully from *The X Files* was a great role model – fierce and fearless, but still endlessly complicated and always challenging the status quo.

What's the soundtrack to your life right now? Rosalía's *Lux* takes me on a musical odyssey. I love any artform that brings disparate worlds together, and Rosalía does that seamlessly, blending pop, flamenco and opera across multiple languages.

What's a topic you wish people would talk about more? I wish we talked about climate change more urgently, particularly the fact that so much of it is human-induced. I'm desperate to see Antarctica in my lifetime, but will future generations have that same opportunity?

Tina Arena: Unravel Me *is in cinemas now.*

Photography Nick Robertson. **As told to** Caitlin Napier


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