

The National's Luxury
Lifestyle Magazine
April 2026

TN

Nada Debs *feels at home*

**Arab designers to support Jewellery looks to the past Sultan Sooud Al Qassemi on art
A Palestinian artist's Oslo monument Cardboard furniture goes high-end**

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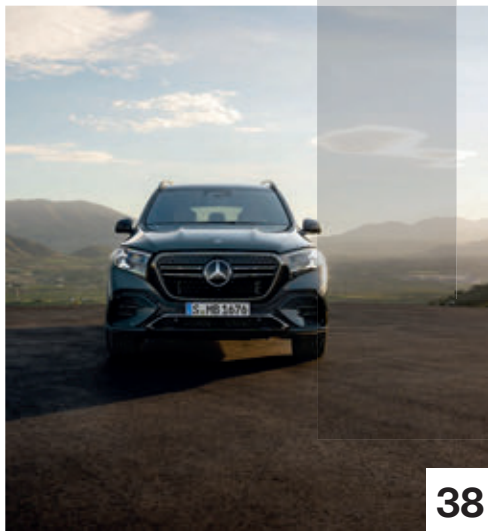
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The National

EDITOR'S LETTER

There was a moment during my conversation with designer Nada Debs for this month's cover story, when I felt as though I was looking into a mirror. Sitting in her studio and showroom in Alserkal Avenue, a few days after she had welcomed us into her home for our cover shoot, I realised I had more in common with Debs than I had expected. Her design language has long been celebrated as a global-facing reimagining of Arab craft, but her story begins in Japan. It is still where much of her centre of gravity seems to lie. "Japan seems to be the essence. It's what holds me together," Debs tells me over a cup of tea.



Her career has, in many ways, been an attempt to reconcile her multiple identities – Lebanese, Japanese, educated in the United States, with her first professional experiences in the United Kingdom. The result of that effort to make opposites complementary is something I deeply relate to. Many of us who have lived between places feel the same pull: to make sense of it all, and to find harmony in what can often feel like contradiction.

I was also struck by her reflection that moving to Dubai after the Beirut port explosion offered Debs a second act in her career – bringing both competition and the energy of a more cosmopolitan city. I found myself nodding along. Since moving to the UAE from London three and a half years ago, I have felt something similar. It is a place that challenges you, rewards ambition and, perhaps more than anywhere else, offers a home to those trying to make sense of multiple identities.

Elsewhere in this issue, deputy editor Sarah Maisey rounds up a selection of regional designers to support during challenging times and speaks to the founder of Thrift for Good, a second-hand store with a purpose. Josh Sims explores the surprising world of cardboard furniture design; Francesca Fearon writes about how archives may be a jeweller's most valuable material; Katy Gillett goes in search of stunning art-filled hotels; *The National's* deputy features editor Hayley Kadrou rounds up the latest on the UAE food scene;

and I head to Malaga to discover the newest Mercedes-Benz launch.

Also in these pages, Sultan Sooud Al Qassemi analyses a poignant painting that has much to say about our current moment; *The National's* arts editor William Mullally travels to Hong Kong to witness the healthy reach of the Arab art scene on the international stage; we look at a thought-provoking new artwork by a Palestinian artist in the heart of Oslo; and sit down with a historian of the Mediterranean and Middle East, Katherine Pangonis, for One Last Thing.

In challenging times, it has been a source of solace to put this issue together for you. It remains a privilege to work with our team and contributors each month to bring you the things we find beautiful, meaningful and worth paying attention to. I hope you enjoy reading it as much as we enjoyed putting it together.

Nasri Atallah



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Demna's bag of tricks

Gucci's creative director is focusing on accessories, starting with the equestrian Borsetto bag, writes **Sarah Maisey**

Since arriving at Gucci, Demna, the house's new creative director, has wasted little time in asserting his vision. The Georgian designer wrong-footed the industry by unveiling his first collection not in Milan, but during London Fashion Week. Then – having embraced Demi Moore as a muse – he draped the actress in dramatic petrol-hued feathers for March's Academy Awards.

Now his attention has turned to accessories, specifically the new Borsetto bag, introduced in a campaign fronted by Kate Moss and Emily Ratajkowski. In Demna's framing, there is an almost psychological intimacy to the idea, with images centred on the moment a bag stops being a mere accessory and instead "occupies the mind completely".

Shot by celebrated photography duo Mert & Marcus, the campaign sees Moss carrying the Borsetto, which was unveiled on the spring/summer 2026 runway. Its name fuses two Italian words – borsa (bag) and morsetto (horsebit) – with the equestrian mood reinforced by gold horsebit hardware and the distinctive Gucci Stripe, itself inspired by a saddle girth strap. The silhouette is relaxed, with a softly structured rectangular shape, while elongated handles allow it to tuck neatly beneath the arm. A detachable strap adds practical ease. It is, in essence, a continuation of the languid refinement that has defined the Florentine house since 1921.

Moss also wears the canvas GC coat from Demna's inaugural La Famiglia collection, its famous monogram in quiet dialogue with the bag, creating an exercise in cohesion that feels both considered and instinctively Gucci.

GUCCI; REUTERS





Kate Moss shot by celebrated photography duo Mert & Marcus in the latest campaign for Gucci by designer Demna, opposite page

Holding on to the thread

In times of uncertainty, independent businesses often feel the economic shock first. Sarah Maisey spotlights designers and labels whose work is worth supporting

Since early March, as events have unfolded across the region, a quieter and more fragile creative economy has begun to take shape across the Middle East – one that is defined by disruption. Designers and makers, long attuned to the rhythms of regional life, now find themselves navigating something far less predictable: the spillover effects of instability across several countries.

Studios have been displaced, supply chains interrupted and the rituals of consumption have shifted. The once dependable cadence of shopping and commissioning has faltered and, for many independent labels, this threatens a sharp contraction in business, compounding the uncertainty of daily life.

We wanted to use this moment, and this space, to highlight designers from some of the affected countries – those whose work is rooted in identity, tradition and distinctly regional sensibilities, and who now contend not only with the dominance of international brands, but also with forces that are far more immediate and existential.

To engage with their work is to help sustain a cultural ecosystem that feels particularly delicate. In moments like these, support becomes more than a transaction – it becomes a lifeline.



KUWAIT

Marzook Launched by siblings Fahad and Shouq Al-Marzook, the brand makes statement clutches such as the bestselling Pill, Fan and Orb. Defined by bold shapes and metallic finishes or Swarovski crystals, the label is all about head-turning glamour. Always surprising, and with a keen eye for the unconventional, it has even carved a globe-shaped Orb bag from wood, inlaid with metal.

May Al Qasser May Al Qassar's jewellery is a celebration of Kuwaiti culture, expressed through pieces inspired by Arabic calligraphy. Founded in 2010, the label offers rings, bracelets and necklaces, often designed to be stacked – from the Badra ring in white gold and two-toned sapphire to the Element necklaces set with marquise and round-cut diamonds.

MARZOOK; NOON BY NOOR; WADHA, KML; ODEEM



Above, Qatari brand Wadha is rooted in quiet simplicity
Left, Kuwaiti brand Marzook is known for its statement bags, such as the Pill clutch
Right, Bahraini brand Noon by Noor offers laid-back pieces for women



QATAR

Wadha Founded by Wadha Al Hajri in 2010, Wadha is rooted in quiet simplicity. Pieces include a voluminous black dress cut from dotted tulle, with front pockets and a tied Watteau back, while another pairs a fitted bodice and dropped waist with a full skirt and a train falling from the shoulders.

Nóra Founded by three Qatari sisters in Dubai, Nóra is a womenswear brand offering fluid dresses in soft jersey, bamboo yarn and fine knits. Cut to skim the body, the designs are flattering, modest and easy to wear, in tones of deep red, mocha, cream, pale blue and sienna.



Right, Emirati brand Odeem handmakes its bags in South Africa
Far right, Saudi brand KML offers avant-garde menswear silhouettes



BAHRAIN

Noon by Noor A fixture at London Fashion Week, Noon by Noor is a laid-back womenswear label built on masculine codes. Relaxed tailoring is softened with delicate detailing, creating silhouettes that are modern and feminine.

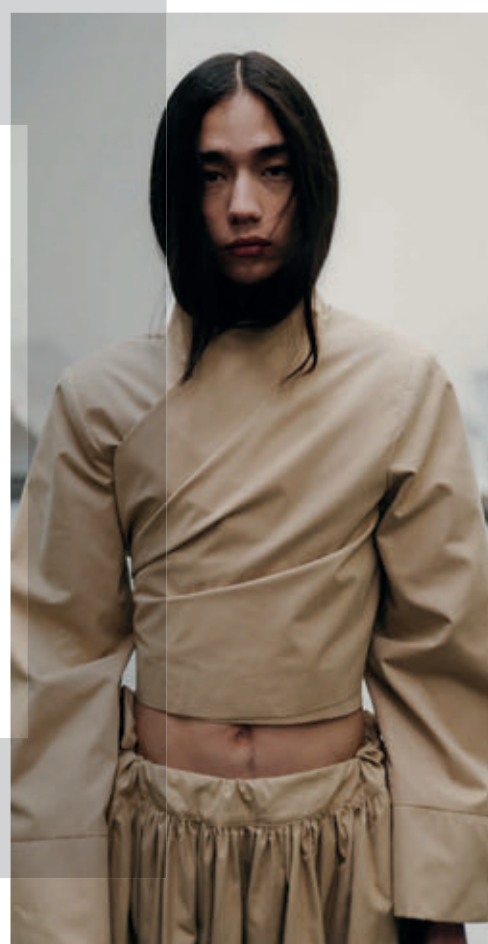
AKS The Label A luxury abaya house, AKS The Label sees traditional garments through a modern prism. Think kaftans cut on the bias in bold black-and-white stripes, or velvet abayas fastened with grosgrain ribbons. Elsewhere, floaty floral kaftans feature petals and leaves that seem almost burnt into the chiffon, lending them a fragile beauty.



UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

Odeem Founded in 2018 by Emirati designer Fatma Al Otaiba, Odeem grew out of her search for the perfect bag. Handmade in South Africa, the range now includes pieces such as the Odeem x Alia Bin Omair collaboration and the Carry Leather Granulated Ring clutch – a slouchy drawstring silhouette in calf leather, finished with textured gold-coloured rings.

Boughessa Launched by self-taught designer Faiza Bouguessa in 2014, Bouguessa has established itself as a go-to name for minimalist tailoring. The oversized Alison jacket, for example, features selvedge tape across the shoulders and a welt pocket at the back, while the Elisa jacket has an intentionally flipped collar. The bitter-chocolate Muriella dress, meanwhile, is draped through the front for an elegantly cinched waist.



SAUDI ARABIA

Ashi Studio Designer and founder of Ashi Studio, Mohammed Ashi broke boundaries in June 2023 when he became the first Saudi designer invited into the exalted ranks of French haute couture. Beloved by celebrities, Ashi recently dressed Margot Robbie in a shredded, corseted custom couture look for the Australian premiere of *Wuthering Heights*, and Teyana Taylor in a body-moulded bustier stretch-satin gown for the 57th NAACP Image Awards.

KML Pronounced *kamel* (which means complete), KML is an avant-garde menswear label. A semifinalist at the 2025 Fashion Trust Arabia Awards, it is earning plaudits for its fresh take on menswear, reworking thobes and bishts into contemporary silhouettes – from wrap-front tops and high-waisted, extra-wide trousers to oversized kanduras recut as skirts.

From left, Omani brand Bthaina offers luxury kaftans; Iraqi brand Zeena Zaki is known for its glamorous occasionwear; Palestinian brand Hazar Jawabra reimagines local crafts into colourful suits; and Lebanese brand Sarah's Bag works with disadvantaged women to craft its pieces



OMAN

Deema Oman One of Oman's first luxury brands, Deema Oman was launched in 2008 by mother and daughter team Shadya Al-Ismaily and Suad Al-Riyami, offering distinctive, high-quality jewellery. It has since expanded its offerings across homeware and interior design, but jewellery remains central to its DNA. Notable pieces include the wavy hoops of the Mushawak three-toned earrings, in gold with peridot, citrine and amethyst; the asymmetrical Mashribiya Charm necklace in 18K yellow gold;

and an open choker, the ends of which are tipped with geometric patterns.

Bthaina Making luxury abayas and kaftans since 2010, Buthaina Al Zadjali folds traditional Omani craftsmanship throughout her designs. Embroidery, regarded as a wearable archive of Omani cultural heritage, features frequently, as lavish handwork encasing shoulders, covering bodice panels and down sleeves of lightweight kaftans. Metallic stitches glimmer on flowing apricot kaftans, and double as breastplates on chic black cover-ups, while tone-on-tone work adorns a fitted, lemon yellow dress.



IRAQ

Hajer Ghani Iraqi jewellery designer Hajer Ghani draws on history, shaping her work around cuneiform – the wedge-shaped script of ancient Mesopotamia dating back 5,000 years. Its distinctive lines run through her pieces, from earrings and bracelets to chokers and necklaces, including the Wisdom pendant in 18K yellow gold and pearls.

Zeena Zaki A regular at Dubai Fashion Week, Iraqi designer Zeena Zaki is a familiar name in the UAE. A self-taught designer, she launched her label in 2006, drawing on Edwardian tailoring for her corseted, body-conscious evening gowns. Known for glamorous occasionwear, Zaki most recently looked to the Indian lehenga, merging her signature silhouette with intricate handwork.



PALESTINE

Reemami Already a favourite of Bella Hadid, Palestinian label Reemami uses traditional motifs to animate its womenswear and wall art. Playful and modern, its designs include the Ghazal Al Banat dress, decorated with hand-drawn illustrations, and the Maqluba dress – named after the Levantine rice dish – printed with sketches of keys symbolising return, tins of olive oil and traditional tatreez embroidery.

Hazar Jawabra The designer-artist behind fantastical, almost creature-like knitwear, Hazar Jawabra is unconcerned with practicality. Taught to knit by her grandmother, who was taught by hers, Jawabra reimagines Palestinian craft and memory into colourful, almost childlike suits. Her work was recently featured in Roberto Filippello's talk *Dressed for Dissent: Decolonial Fashion and the Struggle for Palestine* at the Institute of Art in the Arab World in Beirut.



LEBANON

Sarah's Bag Based in Beirut, Sarah's Bag is more than an accessories label – it is also a social enterprise. Founded in 2000 by trained sociologist Sarah Beydoun, every stitch, bead, zip and handle is made by disadvantaged women through a long-running programme designed to offer dignity and financial independence to those caught in cycles of poverty. Pieces include the Mandala Palm clutch, crafted from wood and painstakingly inlaid with mother-of-pearl in intricate geometric patterns, and the Hobb Loulou pouch, a hand-beaded velvet design

spelling out hobb (love) in faux pearls. Now expanded into outerwear, Sarah's Bag is reaching a whole new audience.

Alexandra Hakim This Lebanese-British designer focuses on zero-waste jewellery, reworking discarded and reclaimed materials into handmade, one-of-a-kind pieces. Now operating out of Spain, her work is fresh and modern, from the hand-hammered Gold Sparkle Sun charm in 22K gold-plated brass with white cubic zirconia, to her bestselling Gold Matches earrings, inspired by burnt matchsticks and rendered in recycled 22K gold-plated brass, oxidised silver and red enamel.

Antidote to spectacle

For their debut at Loewe, creative directors Jack McCollough and Lazaro Hernandez pivot to a space where American sportswear ease meets Spanish craft and heritage. By Sarah Maisey





Below, Loewe's creative directors Jack McCollough, left, and Lázaro Hernández bring a touch of refined athleisure and lashings of bright colours to the storied Spanish house

There is a moment in any fashion house when the temperature shifts and the mood quietly recalibrates. At Loewe, that moment came with the arrival of Jack McCollough and Lázaro Hernández as creative directors a year ago. The duo behind New York brand Proenza Schouler made their spring 2026 debut at the Spanish house with a quieter and considered take on modernity.

Where Jonathan Anderson, who led Loewe from 2013 until March 2025, delighted in surrealist provocation – balloon shoes, grass dresses and trompe l'oeil oddities – McCollough and Hernández are taking a different approach, one less interested in spectacle.

In the two seasons since they arrived, they have brought with them an American vocabulary rooted in sportswear, now elevated into tailored bombers, generous denim and pieces designed to suggest movement, giving athleisure a more refined, lived-in ease across the spring/summer and autumn/winter collections.

Their palette is central to this new story. Citrus and butter yellows, sanguine reds, and flashes of orange, purple and blue speak to a brighter optimism, feeling like an intentional move away from the cerebral cool of Anderson's tenure.

At a leather house, surface matters. Here, the pair coax leather into unexpected forms – pressed and crumpled to resemble cotton, or shredded into featherweight T-shirts – while shearling is shaved into dresses or folded into coats that frame the face. Knitted tops and dresses trail loose threads, while a cocoon coat becomes a tangle of intricately knotted plastic strands. Elsewhere, plastic appears in floral daywear tops, and high-shine leather is moulded into sharply waisted coats.

The designers are not afraid to lean into Loewe's Spanish heritage, either – reworking flamenco ruffles across minidresses and, most notably, into the undulating neck of the new Flamenco bag.

Their debut collection continued the house's long-standing dialogue with art, taking as its starting point a painting by American artist Ellsworth Kelly, an abstract work in primary yellow and red that helped establish the collection's tone.

Beloved house motifs have been subtly reworked, too. The Anagram bag now nods to the codes of the 1970s, while the Arizona bag has been revisited to mark an anniversary year in 2026. Perhaps most significantly, the logo has been redrawn in a typeface unearthed from the museum archive. Add to that the introduction of humo grey – Spanish for smoke – and McCollough and Hernández's language begins to take shape: one that mixes precision and technical mastery with an innate, almost streetwise wearability. Positioned as an "antidote to spectacle", the collections feel like a discreet redirection of Loewe's recent past, bringing a new approachability to the house's studied intellectualism.

For a duo so fresh to the role, their impact already feels pronounced. As Loewe marks its 180th anniversary, the deeply loved Spanish house appears energised, refracted through a lens of street-smart Americana. It makes for a compelling – and quietly joyful – proposition.

“It’s our mission to rehome pre-loved items, reduce waste and help children around the world,” says Jennifer Sault, founder and managing director of Thrift for Good.

Sault has worked in the charity sector since 2003, including three years at Gulf for Good – the UAE charity that raises funds through bucket-list adventure challenges. Over time, she began to notice a gap in Dubai’s crowded fashion landscape: there were virtually no second-hand stores.

So, in 2020, she founded Thrift for Good, combining the feel-good altruism of charitable fundraising with the thrill of unearthing a thrifted treasure. Set up as a sister enterprise to Gulf for Good – on whose board Sault remains a trustee – Thrift for Good resells donated clothes, shoes, jewellery, bags and books, while donating 100 per cent of its profits to some of the world’s most vulnerable children.

A natural optimist, Sault is something of a force of nature. Armed with a master’s in non-profit leadership and philanthropy, and years of hands-on experience, she says one deeply personal experience proved “pivotal” to her fundraising journey. During a gap year, she volunteered with orphaned children in Nepal. Aged between three and 18, they were “the most beautiful children you can possibly imagine”, she says.

Sault quickly discovered, however, that the children were not orphans, but had been sent there by their families in the hope of receiving an education. Instead, she believes, whoever was in charge, chose profit over care. “There was no education. Four kids to a bed, bad nutrition standards and just not good care for those children.”

When she returned two years later, the home was empty and the children had disappeared. As she tried to trace them, she found herself dreading what might have happened.

The experience has haunted her ever since. “That’s what got me into charity work and just wanting to dedicate my life to being able to help kids,” she says.

From that experience, Thrift for Good was born. Its premise is straightforward: people donate unwanted goods, which are then cleaned, repaired and sorted by an army of volunteers before being sold across four outposts in Dubai. Industry experts are also brought in to appraise jewellery, offering shoppers greater transparency.

The aim is a more curated retail experience than the standard charity shop. At Thrift for Good, rails of high-street staples sit alongside carefully sorted designer labels such as Tom Ford, Viktor & Rolf, Dolce & Gabbana, Prada, Zegna and Loro Piana – all priced at a fraction of their original value.

While the Dh10 high-street pieces move fastest, Sault says it is the designer items that generate one-third of Thrift for Good’s revenue. That such expensive pieces are donated is not lost on Sault and her team. “We’re so lucky that people are so generous with their clothing here. You wouldn’t find that in a lot of other countries,” she says. “It’s beautiful that we can take the privilege of Dubai and use that to create something that transforms change and sustainability, in places where it can have a massive impact.”

To date, Thrift for Good has raised more than Dh4.7 million through the sale of more than 208,000 items. “We’re growing every year, which is really good to see.”

The backdrop to that success, however, is less elegant. According to reports, the global fashion industry produces upwards of 100 billion garments a year, 40 per cent of which are never even sold. Instead, they go straight to landfill or are exported to countries such as Chile, where they are dumped in unimaginable quantities. In Ghana, the waste is known as obroni wawu, meaning “dead white man’s clothes”.

“The global fashion industry is growing unchecked, and is becoming more and more unsustainable,” Sault says. By reselling pre-loved clothes, “we can turn what might have otherwise been waste, into treasure for kids,” she explains. “Our model is absolutely keeping it local. We don’t depreciate other economies by flooding them with used clothing. Instead, we set up empowering projects to help children gain access to education, healthcare and housing.”

Sault’s ambition is not simply resale, but to help close the loop altogether by encouraging repair, reuse and, ultimately, recycling. That includes Thrift for Good’s work with Landmark Circulife, the textile recycling centre that turns discarded cotton into raw material for new clothing. Opened in Dubai last year by Landmark – the company behind brands such as Splash, Shoe Mart and Home Centre – it is one of a growing number of circular-fashion initiatives in the UAE.

Second life

What began as a second-hand shop has grown into one of Dubai’s most quietly effective charitable ventures – turning pre-loved fashion into funding for vulnerable children, while offering a more hopeful model for retail, as Sarah Maisey finds out





Thrift for Good resells donated clothes, shoes and bags to provide children in need with a better life, says founder Jennifer Sault, below



THRIFT FOR GOOD



Sault's long-term vision is ambitious. With Unicef estimating that more than 100 million children are linked to the global garment and footwear supply chain, millions are denied an education in order to work in factories or support their working parents. As well as helping to build a fully circular fashion ecosystem in the UAE, she is determined to eradicate child labour in Nepal within the next decade. It may sound insurmountable, but Thrift for Good is already making small but critical steps towards both. "I'm really excited about what we can do to help," she says. "We're getting close to closing the loop in circular fashion."

To ensure full traceability and accountability, Gulf for Good vets every charitable project Thrift for Good supports, carrying out due diligence and applying strict criteria, with a preference for projects built around transparency and longevity. "We always go to visit the children's charity projects that we support, and we've reached thousands of kids," she says. "It really doesn't take much to make a change in a child's life. Just Dh1,500 – that's enough for a kid to go to school, and to have food and shelter."

Sault now plans to expand to Abu Dhabi this year, and then across the rest of the country – ambitions that have not wavered even as the region contends with wider tensions. "Something that's been reinforced in my mind is that resilience is built through community," she says.

Thrift for Good is, Sault believes, a "hidden gem" that will continue to grow through community engagement. Anyone with sewing skills is welcome to volunteer, while the stores are always looking for people to help paint walls or man the tills. She also hopes that those who are decluttering their homes and wardrobes will keep Thrift for Good in mind. "There are so many bite-sized ways to support a good cause, and I think people need that, especially here, and especially during times like this, right?" she says.

"As the world shakes with what's happening, I think it's a call to action to not let more children become vulnerable, and to do what we can to be a force of positivity and good around the world."

As I sit down to speak with Nada Debs, a storm is brewing outside, and a bird – a white-eared bulbul – has sought shelter inside her studio and showroom in Dubai’s Alserkal Avenue. Rather than panic about it disrupting our interview or causing havoc among the many intricate, valuable objects around us, Debs seems enchanted by its presence – as am I. Her enchantment quickly turns to concern for its well-being. Throughout our conversation, we keep one eye on the bird, wondering whether it is all right and whether it needs help finding its way back outside.

In between answering my questions, Debs asks plenty of her own. It becomes clear very quickly that beyond hard work, craft and creativity, her greatest strength may be her attentiveness – her ability to truly take in the world around her.

It makes sense, then, that her work is best appreciated when you understand the life behind it. To look at a Nada Debs design is to see something that is ordered and calm. There is often a Japanese restraint to the line, an Arab richness to the surface and a sense that several worlds have somehow been persuaded to coexist. It is furniture and object design as a kind of autobiography – or perhaps, even a kind of diplomacy.

That idea of duality – of living between places, cultures and visual languages – runs through everything Debs does. Born into a Syrian family that moved to Japan in 1917 after seeing opportunity in the textile business, she was raised in Kobe, educated between Beirut and the US, then professionally shaped in London before returning to Lebanon. Debs has spent much of her life assembling a coherent identity from those apparently opposing parts.

“There was this drive to belong, because there was no one I could belong to,” Debs explains, showing me a photograph of herself as a young child in Kobe – the only foreign student in her entire class.

She opened her first Beirut store in late 2003, but the story began slightly earlier, and with a degree of serendipity. She moved to Lebanon from London at what she describes as a difficult point in her life.

“I was asking myself: ‘What am I doing in the Arab world?’ I never wanted to live in the Arab



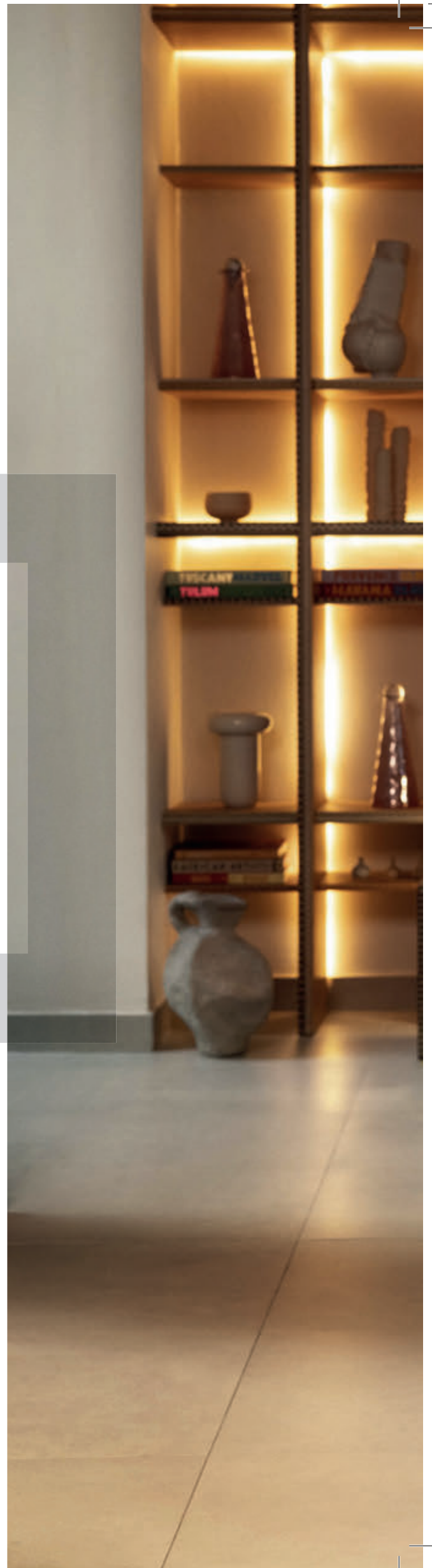


NADA DEBS FEELS AT HOME

Born between cultures and shaped by craft and traditions from Japan to the Arab world, the Lebanese creative has built a design language that is all her own. Now living in Dubai, she reflects on identity, reinvention and what it means to leave a legacy. By **Nasri Atallah**

PHOTOGRAPHER: **ANTONIE ROBERTSON**

COVER STORY



world,” Debs tells me, with disarming honesty. “I had a complex about being Arab and Muslim.”

Then came the commission that changed everything. A member of the Jordanian royal family, who had seen Debs’s children’s furniture in London, got in touch. “She said: ‘I’m pregnant and I want to have a kid’s room done by you.’” It would launch Debs into a whole new world as a designer.

At the time, the designer had been making highly crafted children’s furniture, using traditional British marquetry techniques, but she was applying them to nurseries rather than to drawing rooms. “Because I had my own kids and I wanted to make furniture for them,” Debs says simply.

It is an early indication of the way she works: with a respect for tradition, but never piety. She is interested in taking something established and twisting it into something playful, contemporary and new.

But arriving in Beirut forced a larger question: why stop there? “And from then on, I asked myself: ‘Why am I only doing children’s furniture?’” That question would eventually

lead her to Damascus, where she began working with craftspeople trained in traditional marquetry, mother-of-pearl inlay and carving. What interested Debs was not preservation for preservation’s sake. She was not interested in reproducing inherited Arab interiors exactly as she found them.



There was this drive to belong, because there was no one I could belong to

but at that time, it was revolutionary.

“What I did is I started to take this traditional stuff and clean up the lines because that’s what the Japanese way is,” she says. “You remove and remove and remove, and you end up with this.”

That process of subtraction and refinement became the essence of her work. “For me, it was natural to simplify lines and keep it pure,” she

“This was my first piece I ever made,” she says, pointing to an early design. “And all I did was I told them to make me something very geometric, circles, squares, triangles. It’s a basic bedside table,



Nada Debs has a studio and showroom in Dubai's Alserkal Avenue

says. "But it wasn't natural for the people I was talking to. It's like betraying their own craft." She explains that persuading artisans to see this as evolution rather than erasure often took time. But that instinct – to strip back ornament without stripping away meaning – is precisely what made Debs one of the first designers from the region to articulate what a contemporary Arab design language might actually look like.

"I was representing a modern Arab identity that didn't exist before," she says. It became so resonant that it eventually led to her being commissioned for the renovation of the Arab League Hall in Cairo.

It helped, perhaps, that Debs never approached Arab craft with unquestioning reverence. She came to it as both insider and outsider. Japan, more than Lebanon, remains her philosophical anchor. "Japan seems to be the essence. It's what holds me together," she says. "Their philosophy of life is so real. It's very spiritual and connects to the essence of things."

That sensibility has shaped not only her work, but also her worldview. "I am always about connection because I'm Japanese. I

Debs moved to the UAE after the Beirut port explosion destroyed the studio space she had carefully built there



mean, I grew up there and I'm Arab, but I'm always searching for that connection between opposites," she says.

If Beirut gave Debs a design vocabulary, Dubai appears to have given her a second act. Her move to the UAE came in the aftermath of the 2020 Beirut port explosion, which devastated both the city and the studio space she had so carefully built. Yet in Debs's telling, it was also the shock that pushed her out of a kind of creative and commercial comfort zone.

"I was too comfortable in Beirut," she says. "It wasn't challenging any more." That is not said with any lack of affection for Lebanon. Quite the opposite. But there is a striking honesty in the way Debs speaks about the limits of operating there. Beirut, she suggests, had become too familiar, too forgiving, too small for what the brand might become.

Hearing that feels surprising. From the outside, Debs always seemed like the ultimate Beirut-based Lebanese design success story – a figure whose reputation already travelled far beyond the city. It is revealing to hear that she did not experience it quite that way.

"Here, I'm competing now with much bigger brands," she says of the UAE. "So this was my challenge in Dubai. How would I compete on a wider scale?"

The answer, in part, has been visibility. In Dubai, Debs became newly legible to global luxury brands seeking a designer who could embody regional craft in a contemporary form.

She has collaborated with the likes of Dior and Louis Vuitton, alongside projects with government institutions and private clients across the region.

What Debs offers is exactly what many global brands are now trying to tap into. "They're coming to us for exactly what we're representing, which is the craft of the region," she says.

Still, Debs is refreshingly unsentimental about the realities of that work. She speaks movingly about artisans and their devotion to process



I would have liked to create a craft industry in Lebanon. But it's not feasible

– "they just love the craft itself, the act of it" – but she is also blunt about the structural challenges of building a business around endangered handicrafts in the Arab world.

"I would have liked to create a craft industry in Lebanon," she says. "But I don't think that's feasible." That tension now sits at the centre of the business, not least because her son has joined the company.

Where Debs is driven by instinct, craft and cultural meaning, he brings scale, systems and spreadsheets. "Finance. Of course," she says with a laugh, when I ask what world he comes from. "Numbers are not what drove me."

Between them sits the central question of the next chapter: how do you grow a craft-led



The designer wants to expand further into interiors and architecture



I grew up in Japan and I'm Arab. I'm always searching for that connection between opposites





business without hollowing out the very thing that made it valuable in the first place? “That’s our biggest debate,” she says.

Preserving the ethos of Nada Debs the person, while growing Nada Debs the brand, may be the challenge of the next two decades.

The brand has strong foundations to build on. What has always made Debs’s work resonate is that it is not merely decorative, or “heritage-inspired”, or any of the other slightly oversimplified phrases used to flatten regional design into shorthand. Her work has a tension within it. It contains migration, ambivalence, adaptation, loss and pleasure.

Now, more than 20 years after opening her first store, Debs is thinking less in terms of objects and more in terms of legacy. She wants to expand further into interiors and architecture.

“Just making objects is not enough. Let’s say I make this table, but it’s in a room that I don’t like,” the designer says with a tut. You get the sense that Debs is easily bored by sameness – and that she is always on the lookout for the next challenge.

During our photo shoot at her beautiful Dubai home – where she made sure we had a steady stream of snacks and Uzbek tea – Debs showed us brooches made from mother-of-pearl in the shape of emojis. She seemed genuinely delighted by them, a flicker of mischief in her eye. Dedicating her years of talent to something that’s just a bit of fun seems to animate her as much as the grand commissions.

She also talks, tellingly, about Hermès – not necessarily as a stylistic reference, but as a model for longevity. A family business. A craft house that evolved without losing itself. “Maybe I can leave a legacy,” she says.

For a designer whose entire career has been built around connecting disparate worlds, it feels like a fitting ambition. Not simply to make beautiful things, but to leave behind a system, a language and a point of view sturdy enough to outlast her.

And perhaps that is what a Nada Debs object really is: not simply a table, a cabinet or a box, but proof that contradiction can be turned into coherence – and that identity, if you work at it long enough, can become form.

Several designers are rethinking one of the world's most overlooked materials and challenging long-held ideas of value and permanence, as **Josh Sims** finds out

LIBBOARD

THE
CASE
FOR

CARRIED BOARD



“I have two of my pieces at home,” says artist-designer Illya Goldman Gubin, who lives in Berlin. “They’re very tough, very usable. And when people find out what they’re made of, they make for good icebreakers. It’s a material I’ve really grown dedicated to”.

Indeed, Gubin’s works – art meets furniture design – are crumpled, creased and sometimes misshapen stools and benches superficially made from resin and fibreglass. But underneath those materials is cardboard – the type that, along with paper, accounts for 17 per cent of global waste.

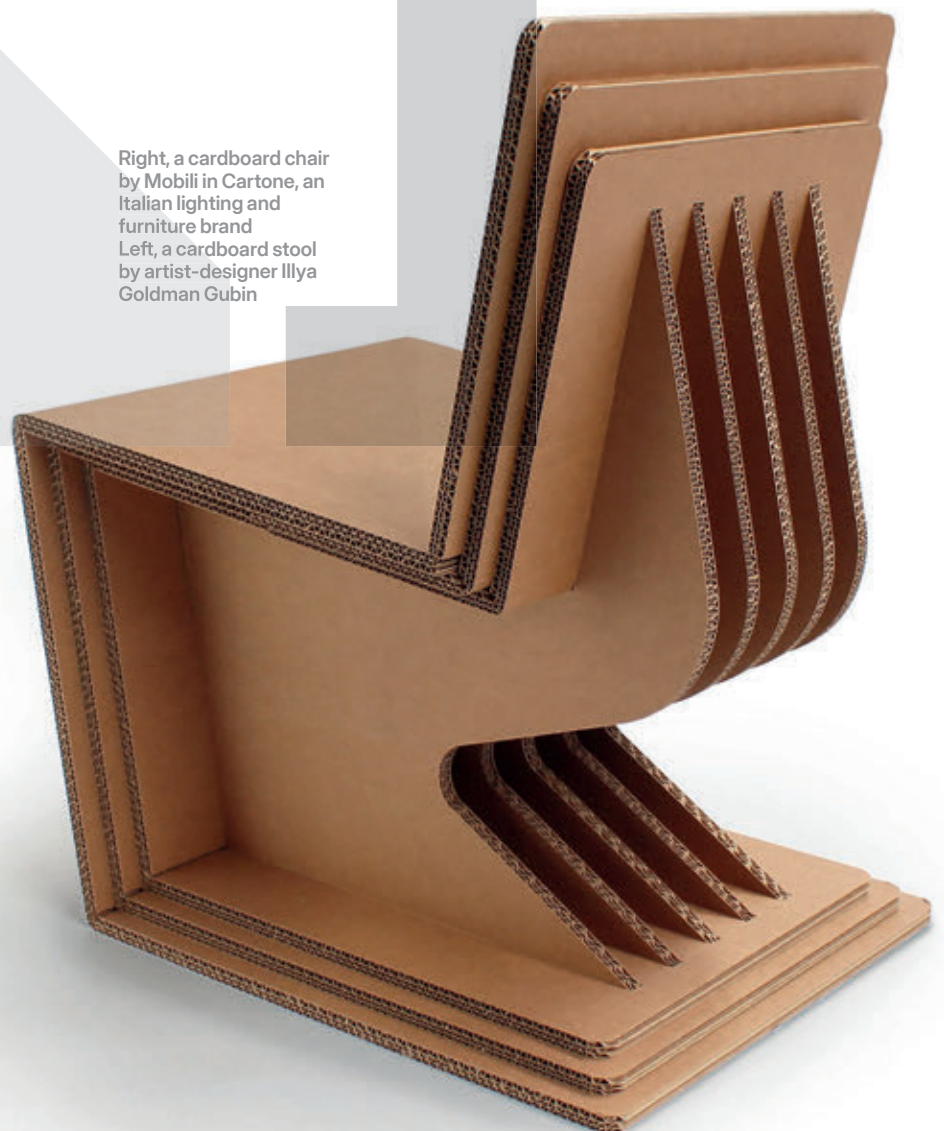
“People think of cardboard as a banal material. Cardboard boxes are already everywhere in our homes, arriving daily through deliveries. I’m interested in rethinking something so familiar and overlooked – working with an element that already exists within our domestic space, but shifting its purpose,” explains Gubin. “Even seeing discarded boxes on the streets changed how I look at them. The crumpled, bent and torn forms become unexpectedly beautiful. I think we’re still finding out what we can do with cardboard.”

Designers have long dabbled with the material: Canadian-American architect Frank Gehry experimented with it to make his Easy Edges series of furniture – of which the Wiggle Chair is most famous – back in 1969. Now, given environmental pressures, designers are exploring cardboard again to diverse ends.

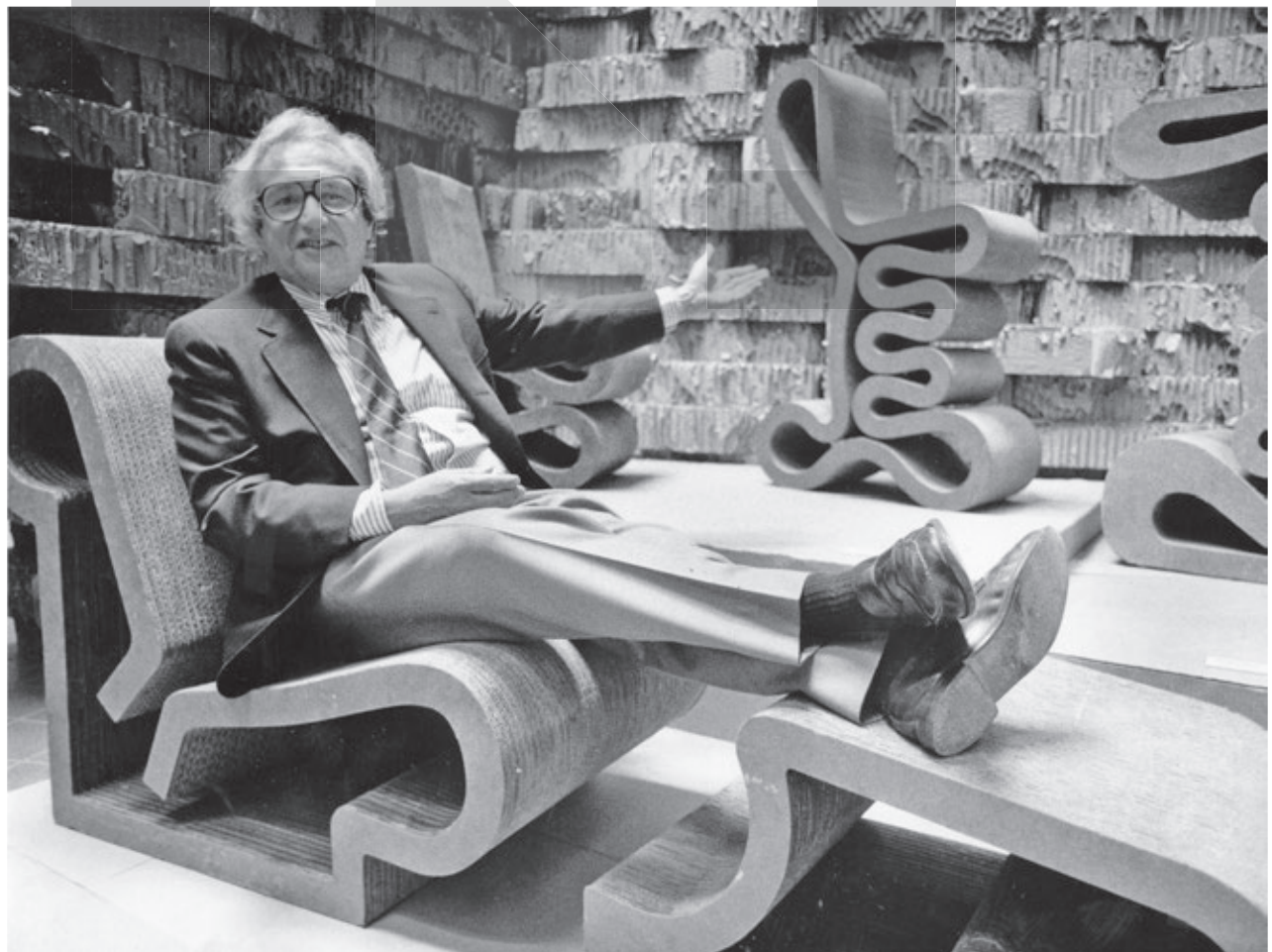
Quart de Poil, a French company, has used the techniques and principles of origami to create armchairs, sofas, bar stools and coffee tables from cardboard – with some of its pieces displayed in museums. Hungarian company Karton Art, meanwhile, uses the material to make wall systems for galleries. Cardborigami, from Los Angeles, uses the material to create pop-up emergency shelters, an idea also explored by Japanese architect Shigeru Ban, who recently won the AIA Gold Medal for his pioneering use of renewable materials, cardboard included.

But cardboard is also being used in an area that is usually the preserve of noble materials – statement interior pieces. The R16 lamp by design studio Waarmakers from Amsterdam, for example, is made from its own packaging; while British designer Max Lamb has also experimented with waste cardboard to make a capsule furniture collection.

Right, a cardboard chair by Mobili in Cartone, an Italian lighting and furniture brand
Left, a cardboard stool by artist-designer Illya Goldman Gubin

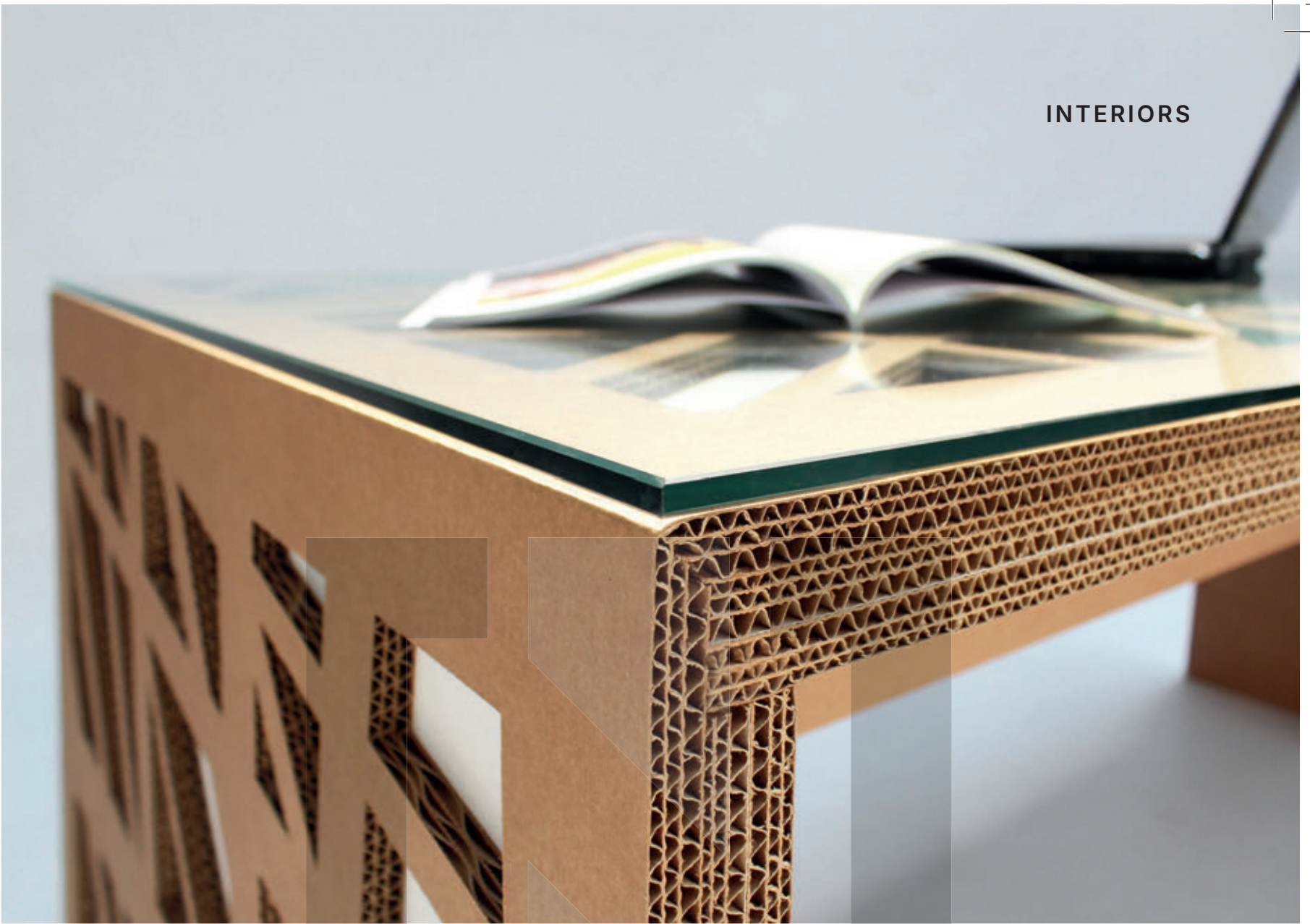


MOBILI IN CARTONE; PHILLIP KOLL



MOBILI IN CARTONE; GETTY IMAGES

Top and opposite page, cardboard chandeliers and a desk by Mobili in Cartone
Right, Frank Gehry experimented with the material with the Wiggle Chair, part of his Easy Edges furniture line



Designer Vadim Kibardin, likewise, produces high-end, made-to-order lighting and furniture by layering stacks of flattened cardboard of varying thicknesses in his Prague design studio. Last year, he drove home what he believes to be cardboard's potential through a concept project as part of which he made a collection of trainers from two kinds of egg boxes. He's currently working on new chairs made from the same material.

"Cardboard is a serious material for designing and creating unique objects, its sculptural quality and the ability to build volume layer by layer allowing for almost architectural forms," says Kibardin. "Unfortunately, it's also deeply associated with packaging, waste and short-term use, and that cultural bias makes it difficult for people to see it as a 'serious' material. In design, value is often tied to rarity or permanence, and cardboard challenges both of these ideas. Working in cardboard has involved overcoming a fair amount of scepticism."

And yet, the functional appeal of cardboard is obvious. It is not only recyclable, but also strong – extremely so when corrugated. It is also lightweight – ideal for an increasingly mobile population, while also making international transportation cheaper. It's flexible, easy to cut and fold, and can easily be printed, scored or glued. Treated, it can offer a degree of water, dirt and fire-resistance. Untreated, it develops an appealing patina. Since it traps air, cardboard is naturally insulating and appealingly warm to the touch. And it's affordable, so more easily replaceable once it shows signs of wear. Other base materials, such as plywood and concrete, have gone through a process of being reconsidered as quality. So, why not cardboard?

Ross Lovegrove, the product designer behind Dubai-based architecture practice Deond, agrees. When it came to creating the pavilion for Dubai Design Week in 2024, he chose cardboard – together with a chipboard floor – in part inspired by his enthusiasm for Apple's iPhone packaging, "which only goes to show how cardboard can be engineered with extreme precision, how it doesn't have to be this brown hippie stuff".

Lovegrove argues that the naturalness of cardboard is especially important now as a "counter to the very 'hard' technologies that have invaded our lives". Why not more children's toys in cardboard, or maybe window blinds, he suggests. But that's not to belie its potential at scale. He points out that while cardboard's perishability limits its use – "you wouldn't want a cardboard hairdryer", he notes – there's no reason why the material cannot be used to make large-scale structures in consistently dry climates.

"It's the very affordability of cardboard that allows you to be more expressive," Lovegrove says. "The pavilion wouldn't have looked better in anodised aluminium at 10 times the cost. Using cardboard is also perhaps a message about how we perceive luxury, especially in the Middle East," he adds.

Dutch company Wikkellhouse has adapted a packaging technology that wraps layers of cardboard around a mould, rather than folding sheets into shape, then adds a waterproof, breathable vinyl foil to create the components of an entire flat-packed cabin. These parts can be delivered to remote locations, assembled quickly on site, and just as easily disassembled and moved.

As the company has joked, scepticism about this use of cardboard can be allayed by telling

prospective clients that the cabins are made using "a more efficient form of wood" – which they tend to be more relaxed about – and pointing out that this is, after all, precisely what cardboard is.

"But what will see cardboard embraced more in the home is a change of perception – a better understanding of how good the design, engineering and crafting around cardboard can be. When those are experienced, people tend to change their perceptions quickly," argues Stefano Compagno, sales director for Italian cardboard lighting and furniture brand Mobili in Cartone. "Good design is about not just so-called luxury materials, but also the stories behind the materials. And cardboard is a material that communicates forward thinking."



Using cardboard is also a message about how we perceive luxury, especially in the Middle East

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Francesca Fearon explores why past collections remain the most valuable material for high jewellery

Last year, the Victoria & Albert Museum in London staged a major exhibition of Cartier's archive. Two years earlier, Louvre Abu Dhabi did the same. Each took a different lens: the V&A focused on Cartier's London story, while the UAE museum explored its long dialogue with Islamic design. Last autumn, Chaumet brought its Ode to Living Nature exhibition to Expo Osaka, while a previous nature-themed show was on display at M7 in Doha in 2024, tracing the house's naturalistic lineage back to 1780.

Together, these exhibitions underscore how seriously France's great jewellery houses invest in their archives. Archivists pore over ledgers, track provenance and reacquire historically significant pieces. These jewels serve a dual purpose: drawing wider audiences into a rarefied past and feeding the creative present by providing inspiration to the current crop of creative directors.

The high jewellery presentations in January were a perfect example of the Place Vendôme maisons delving into their archives to inspire new collections. At Chaumet, envol – a recurring theme of flight – drew on a pair of diamond and translucent blue enamel wings acquired in 1910 by collector Gertrude Payne Whitney, later fashioned into a tiara. The new collection reinterprets these stylised wings alongside other archival motifs.

“The heritage is an inexhaustible source of inspiration for Chaumet,” says the maison's conservateur des archives. Founded in 1780 by Marie-Étienne Nitot, jeweller to Napoleon and Empress Joséphine, the house has long mined its own history – particularly Joséphine's tiaras and aigrettes – for contemporary collections. “A jewellery house cannot last 250 years if it continuously produces the same jewels,” the archivist adds. Jewellery, like fashion, reflects shifts in culture and lifestyle; Chaumet's task is to create for the present while remaining anchored in time.

At Boucheron, creative director Claire Choisne sees a similar continuity. She says she shares founder Frédéric Boucheron's “deep enthusiasm for creativity and a desire to push beyond the limits of high jewellery”. Since 2020, her annual Histoire de Style collections have treated the archive not as nostalgia, but as a source of creative energy.

Themes have ranged from the Question Mark necklace and the Maharajahs collection to Queen Elizabeth II's brooches.

The latest turns inward: octagonal motifs echo Place Vendôme, where Boucheron was the first contemporary jeweller to establish himself back in 1893.

There is the Untamed necklace, a cascading version of the Question Mark necklace based on

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JEWELLERY

Untamed is a tribute to Boucheron's Question Mark necklace, and it can be taken apart to create several wearable pieces



I E R

BOUCHERON





CHAUMET

Left and above, earrings, brooch and tiara in grand feu enamel and diamonds from the Envol collection by Chaumet

ivy leaves – he preferred unassuming foliage to the fashionably stylised flora of the time. The piece can be separated into 13 different jewels to be worn on different parts of the body.

“Our archives are not a museum, they are a living resource,” Choisine explains.

“Honouring the past is not just a business strategy. It is a way of staying true to the spirit of the maison.” For clients, that translates into something tangible. “There is a feeling of touching part of our history,” she adds – but always brought into the present through modern cuts and versatility.

Nearby on Rue de la Paix, Mellerio – founded in 1613 and often cited as the world’s oldest jewellery house – approaches its archive with similar intent. “Our history is fundamental to who we are,” says Laure-Isabelle Mellerio, the 14th-generation president and artistic director. The house holds records of every design since 1825. “We don’t just dip into them; they are a constant, vital source of inspiration,” she says. “Reconnecting with this history gives our pieces a soul.”

Among those references is a cameo bracelet featuring Roman emperors that was made for Marie Antoinette, now echoed in the Cabinet de Curiosités collection. There are also 18th-century-style Italian girandole earrings that are popular with clients because they combine history and contemporary design, while the

bright Colour Queen rings and bracelets have a Renaissance spirit. For Mellerio, heritage is also strategic. Entering new markets, it functions as “a vital psychological tool”, inspiring trust as much as admiration.

Claudia Piaserico, creative director of Italian goldsmith Fope, echoes the point. “When the world feels unstable, we look for something that feels safe,” she says. “History gives that feeling of safety, that you are a strong and reliable brand.”



Design records are a constant, vital source of inspiration. They give pieces a soul

Founded in 1929, Fope is younger than its Parisian counterparts, but rooted in centuries of Italian goldsmithing. Its signature Mesh and Flex’it chains – introduced in

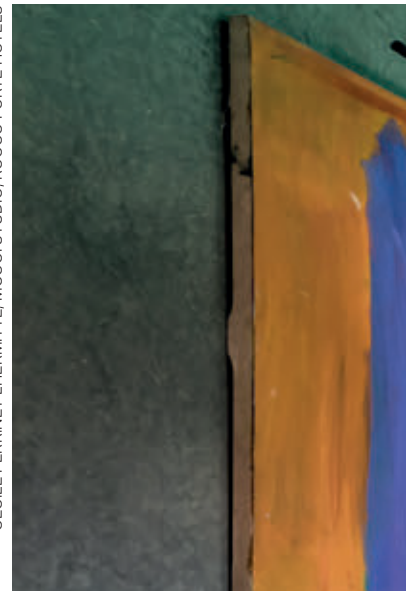
the 1980s and 2007 – embody that balance of innovation and tradition. It is a modern business that prides itself on centuries-old traditions of gold craftsmanship in Italy.

Piaserico believes it is important to make people aware of their history. “We need to understand social evolution. Clients are buying luxury, but they also want reassurance that what they buy will hold its value,” she says.

“And value,” the creative director adds, “comes from heritage.”



CECILE PERRINET L'HERMITTE; MOGGI STUDIO; ROCCO FORTE HOTELS



THE GRAND TOUR





Far left and left, El Fenn in Marrakesh houses works by Terry Frost, Hassan Hajjaj and Leila Alaoui
Bottom left, Renaissance antiques adorn Hotel Savoy in Florence

At these beautiful five-star resorts, art comes first, as **Katy Gillett** finds out

There are hotels that hang a nondescript painting above the bed and then there are those where art is the reason to visit. These seven properties fall into the latter camp. Collectors, curators and commissioners have been working on these spaces, turning guest corridors into veritable galleries, sea-facing lounges into sculpture parks and Victorian rooms into a Picasso viewing area. From a reborn Brutalist government building in Doha, which has become a showcase for regional talent, to a Maldivian island where a guest's morning walk is mapped like a museum floor-plan, art here is not an afterthought, but the premise from which everything else follows.

EL FENN, MARRAKESH

The name says everything: Riad El Fenn (the hotel's original name) translates from Arabic as "house of art". When co-owner Vanessa Branson opened this property in the Medina in 2004, only five minutes from Jemaa el-Fnaa, she brought her personal collection with her, including works by William Kentridge, Sir Terry Frost and David Shrigley, and hung them in corridors and bedrooms. The next year, Branson cofounded the Marrakech Biennale, running it for six seasons and embedding El Fenn at the centre of the city's arts ecosystem. Since then, the collection has grown to include Moroccan and other African artists – from Hassan Hajjaj to Leila Alaoui – alongside names from around the world. The permanent

collection lives across every surface, making the line between art hotel and artist's home deliberately thin. The hotel also offers twice-yearly temporary exhibitions in collaboration with local art galleries. Recently, to mark March's 1-54 Contemporary African Art Fair, Moroccan artist Rita Alaoui painted a series of large-scale murals on to the walls of the hotel's main entrance corridors, a fresh backdrop to the Inner Garden, celebrating the power of nature.

HOTEL SAVOY, FLORENCE

One would think the setting of Hotel Savoy is artistic enough, since it's set in Piazza della Repubblica, right by the Duomo, Ponte Vecchio and Via de' Tornabuoni. Yet, the Rocco Forte property was dressed by interior designer Olga Polizzi, who has a taste for the exceptional, adorning this hotel in signature prints and Renaissance antiques. This commitment to art extends beyond the hotel's interiors. It's also embedded within the experiences on offer – think guided tours of Florence's most glorious cultural landmarks or a private painting session with a local artist. Until August 23, Savoy suite guests can also access exclusive after-hours tours of a landmark retrospective of Mark Rothko, taking place in venues across the city – from Palazzo Strozzi to Museo di San Marco, curated by the artist's son Christopher Rothko and art historian Elena Geuna.

THE NED DOHA

Before it was a hotel, this building on Doha's Corniche housed Qatar's Ministry of Interior in a 1970s Brutalist structure designed by Lebanese architect William Sednaoui. Ahead of the 2022 Fifa World Cup, however, David Chipperfield Architects transformed it into The Ned Doha, and the result is one of the most considered hotel art programmes in the Gulf.

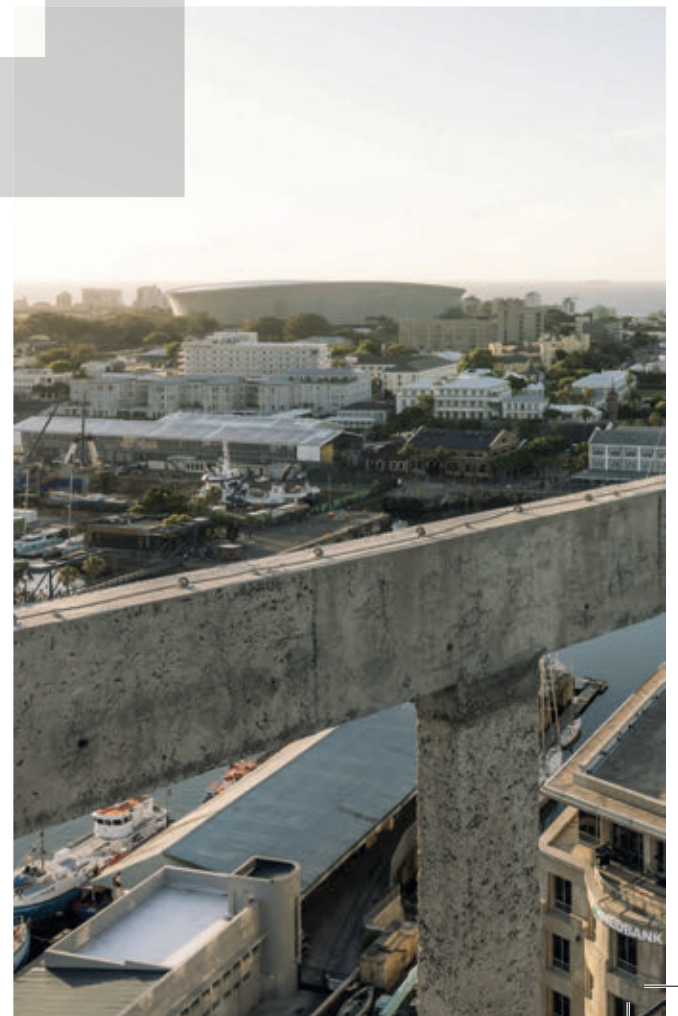
TRAVEL



THE NED DOHA; THE FIFE ARMS; ACCOR; THE SILO HOTEL; JOALI MALDIVES



Clockwise from above, The Fife Arms in Scotland has a watercolour painted by Queen Victoria; The Ned Doha is housed in what a 1970s Brutalist structure; Jaoli Maldives has sculptures guests can interact with; Hamilton Princess in Bermuda includes artworks by Andy Warhol, Damien Hirst and Banksy; and The Silo in Cape Town sits within V&A Waterfront's repurposed grain silo complex alongside Zeitz Museum of Contemporary Art Africa





The collection features more than 350 works by close to 100 regional artists, with more than half living in Doha and nearly three-quarters of who are women – a conscious decision rooted in the curation brief given to Mathqaf, an arts consultancy cofounded by art historians Wadha Al-Aqeedi and Elina Sairanen. Works are threaded through the lobby, restaurants, guest rooms and the private members' club, turning a stay here into an up-close encounter with the contemporary creative scene of Qatar and the wider region.

JOALI MALDIVES

The Maldives is not short of luxury resorts by any means, but Joali, which bills itself as the archipelago's first art-immersive luxury island resort, operates on a different playing field. Its 73 beach and water villas sit on an island where more than 20 international artists have made permanent interventions, allowing themselves to be absorbed by the environment entirely. An island passport guides guests through the works like a gallery map, and an art studio offers resident programmes. For example, a heron chair by South African vernacular sculptor Porky Hefer is placed on Mura Beach, where you'll also find an interactive sculpture by Cuban-American artist Gabriela Noelle, which invites children to eat ice cream and play. Elsewhere, a sculpted communal table by American designer Misha Kahn, who drew inspiration from Gaudí and Niki de Saint Phalle, sits alongside coiled rope forms by Canadian sculptor Doug Johnston, designed to make guests "feel the waves and textures of the island". In The Living Room, find French artist Jeanne Susplugas's illustrated virtual reality journey inspired by the property, as well as British wildlife artist Josh Gluckstein's Green Turtle Coral Garden, which invites reflection on the fragility of coral ecosystems and the resilience of marine life in the Indian Ocean.



THE SILO, CAPE TOWN

Few hotels occupy a more loaded address in the art world. The Silo sits within the V&A Waterfront's repurposed grain silo complex, the same structure that also houses the Zeitz Museum of Contemporary Art Africa, one of the continent's most important modern art institutions. Guests at this five-star Royal Portfolio property, owned by Liz Biden, wake up inside a hotel that treats its collection as a living programme rather than a fixed installation. In February, a new exhibition called The Salon opened in The Vault, which sits in the property, offering an intimate snapshot of its curatorial approach over 12 months. For travellers who want to further explore regional talent, the proximity to Zeitz MOCAA means some of the most significant African contemporary art is effectively on your doorstep.

The Ned Doha's collection features more than 350 works by 100 regional artists

THE FIFE ARMS, BRAEMAR

The village of Braemar sits in the Cairngorms, with a modest population, but spectacular surroundings. It is, perhaps, an unlikely home for one of Britain's most extraordinary private art collections. But The Fife Arms – a Victorian coaching inn overhauled and reopened by Iwan and Manuela Wirth, co-founders of the noted Swiss modern and contemporary art gallery Hauser & Wirth – contains more than 16,000 works, from 19th-century antiques to major contemporary commissions. Zhang Enli, Guillermo Kuitca, Subodh Gupta, Richard Jackson and Bharti Kher have all created site-specific pieces for the building. A Picasso hangs near an ornately carved chimney piece carved with scenes from Robert Burns's poetry. There's also a delicate watercolour of a stag's head painted by Queen Victoria. Guests are offered a complimentary daily art tour, while visitors can take one alongside afternoon tea. You could easily stay a week and still be discovering what's around you.

HAMILTON PRINCESS, BERMUDA

The Hamilton Princess has been Bermuda's grande dame since 1885 – affectionately known as the island's "Pink Palace" – but its art collection is far more present-day. The works on display read like a roll call of the most recognised names in contemporary and modern art: Ai Weiwei's *Untitled (Divina Proportione)*, a huali wood piece exploring material and meaning; a Julian Opie silkscreen depicting figures on the streets of Seoul; and Mr Brainwash's *Charlie Chaplin (Just Kidding)*, a screen print from an edition of 100 that sets the hotel's irreverent tone. Elsewhere, the collection also includes famed artists such as Warhol, Banksy and Hirst, including a signed set of Warhol's Mick Jagger prints. Each corridor and dining room at this property functions as a curated exhibition rather than a holding space for decoration. The hotel publishes its own *Little Book of Art*, a room-by-room companion to the works, and the entire collection is free for all to see.



A chef wearing a blue denim cap with a red logo and a blue denim apron over a white t-shirt is smiling. He is holding a light-colored tray with a burger topped with cheese and meat, a bowl of orange soup, and two lime wedges. The background is a kitchen setting with a green countertop.

Opposite page from top, join a Thai cuisine cooking class at Pal Thai; sample ramen at Sushi Art's latest outpost in Abu Dhabi; enjoy premium cuts of meat at Canary Club; Maki & Ramen is now open in Dubai; Leong Tek Chuin is Shang Palace's new dim sum chef; hot and sour wonton soup on Jun's set menu; and dig into slow-smoked meats at Spike Bar. This page, Good Burger has opened its first outlet at Damac Hills Mall.

FIRST SITTING

From limited-time menus to hot new openings, Hayley Kadrou rounds up all the culinary news you need to know

PAITHAI

If red curry and dumplings are among your favourite dishes, and you'd like to dish them up in your own kitchen, sign up for the Nam Jai masterclass at Pai Thai in Jumeirah Al Qasr. Led by chef Amara Mahayothee, the sessions welcome groups of up to 10 to learn tricks of the trade – from shaping flower dumplings to making delicious curry paste from scratch. After the class, guests are treated to a set three-course Thai meal.

Last Sunday of the month through to May, Jumeirah Al Qasr, Dubai

GOOD BURGER

What began as recipe testing in their home kitchen for Luma and Haider, founders of family-run HL food, became Good Burger – a delivery-first concept in Dubai. Now it has opened its first brick-and-mortar outpost in Damac Hills Mall. The menu includes the popular Boujie, a 160g Black Angus patty with caramelised onion, crispy onion and truffle aioli in a buttery-soft potato bun, as well as chicken burgers, wings and every kind of fries you might want: loaded, waffle or Cajun-spiced.

Damac Hills Mall, Damac Hills, Dubai

MAKI & RAMEN

Check out the recently opened Maki & Ramen at Mövenpick Hotel Jumeirah Village Triangle. Founded in Edinburgh in 2015 with a mission to make expertly crafted Japanese food accessible, the brand opened its first branch in the UAE this month. Expect steaming bowls of ramen and freshly rolled sushi in a cherry-blossom-inspired setting.

Mövenpick Hotel, Jumeirah Village Triangle, Dubai

JUN'S

Head to Jun's this month to sample the restaurant's signature dishes. Chinese-Canadian chef Kelvin Cheung, who trained in France and worked in India for 10 years, has created a new six-course tasting menu. The Short Story, distilling some of the restaurant's best-loved dishes into refined, bite-sized courses. Each one traces Cheung's own culinary journey: dry-aged sea bream with tomato water dashi and wasabi-infused olive oil, inspired by a creative exchange in Amman; hot and sour wonton soup, rooted in his mother's recipe and first served at a bubble tea shop in Chicago; and a loomi paleta dessert that reimagines childhood summers in Chicago through an Emirati lens.

Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Blvd, Dubai



SUSHI ART

Sushi Art has been part of the UAE dining scene for more than two decades, and it is showing no signs of slowing down. After opening in Dubai Mall earlier this year, the brand is expanding with a new outpost at Abu Dhabi's Galleria Mall, due to open soon. Located in the extension on the second floor, the new space will be bigger than the restaurant's current spot in the same mall. Take your pick from delectable offerings such as miso and ginger shrimp tacos; surf 'n' turf rolls; chicken katsu; and shoyu ramen.

The Galleria Al Maryah Island, Abu Dhabi

SPIKE BAR

The restaurant at Emirates Golf Club has launched a new weekend dining experience that pairs a relaxed neighbourhood hangout feel with a menu centred on premium slow-smoked meats, including a Smoke Wagon platter piled with beef ribs and sausages, plus a six-hour brisket taco.

Emirates Golf Club, Dubai

SHANG PALACE

If it has been a while since you visited Shangri-La Qaryat Al Beri's Shang Palace – the hotel group's signature restaurant, established in 1971 – now may be the time to book a table. The Cantonese restaurant has welcomed three additions to its team:

Leong Tek Chuin as dim sum chef, Luo Ming Hui as chef de cuisine and Teh Cheng Keong as restaurant manager. The trio bring years of culinary and hospitality experience across the Middle East, Europe and Asia. Consider this one to watch for what comes next, whether that means new chef specials or menu collaborations.

Khor Al Maqta, Abu Dhabi

CANARY CLUB

The rooftop restaurant and lounge in Jumeirah Lakes Towers is adding food-themed nights to its offerings – from Shell Yeh Mondays to Meat Affair Wednesdays. Start the week with two hours of unlimited mussels served fresh with house-baked bread, or enjoy a midweek feast with premium cuts such as rib-eye and strip loin with a trio of sides.

Banyan Tree Residences, JLT, Dubai

MOTORING

There is something faintly absurd about a luxury SUV this large trying to present itself as discreet. The Mercedes-Benz GLS is not so much a car as a well-appointed private club on wheels. A declaration that the school run, the airport transfer and the drive to the desert should all feel as if they have been arranged via concierge.

And yet, it does manage a kind of discretion. Something in the model's proportions has always disguised its sheer bulk. That remains true here with this facelifted version, presumably the final makeover ahead of an all-new generation in a couple of years.

At the international media preview in Malaga, where we had been flown out to experience the new model against a stunning natural backdrop, the weather seemed determined to demonstrate the full range of atmospheric possibilities. It was by turns gusty, grey, rainy, then suddenly bright and suitably Mediterranean. The GLS, even when standing still, looked as though it could have taken all those conditions in its stride.

Mercedes has long called the GLS the S-Class of SUVs, which is a useful shorthand. With this update, the company is doubling down on the idea. It's worth remembering that the model began life as the GL-Class in 2006 and was renamed GLS a decade later as a nod to its connection with the marque's flagship saloon.

So, 20 years on, this is still not being pitched as an off-roader with delusions of grandeur or a family hauler in expensive shoes. It is being sold as a proper flagship – a seven-seat luxury car for people who prefer their refinement with a commanding view.

The style changes on the new model are designed to make sure that commanding position is clear to everyone. Up front sits a larger grille, ringed in chrome and contour lighting. New star-signature headlamps and tail-lights ensure you know you are looking at a Mercedes even in the dead of night, while a redesigned front bumper and fresh wheel and paint options, including the rather handsome Dark Petrol finish in these photos, push the GLS a little further away from rugged utility and closer to rolling penthouse.

Inside, the emphasis is on atmosphere and in keeping with the rest of the marque's upmarket model range. Mercedes talks about a "welcome home" feeling, which sounds like the sort of thing a creative agency would write on a whiteboard, but there is substance behind it.

The cabin has been reworked around the standard MBUX Superscreen, a broad glass panel housing three 12.3-inch displays that stretch across the dashboard like an expensive piece of delicate architecture.

I have said this before and will keep saying it: we have reached peak screen, and it is time for

The new Mercedes-Benz GLS features a larger grille, ringed in chrome and contour lighting, while the cabin is fitted out with three 12.3-inch display screens

The GLS masters the art of removing irritations before you notice they are there

car interiors to quiet down. But even I have to admit this is very polished and determined to make analogue life feel like a thing of the past.

New trim materials and colours, including a warm beech brown interior, make the GLS feel less corporate. The vents are now round, the ambient graphics more elaborate and the steering wheel has been revised with Mercedes's "rocker-and-roller" controls, which restore some tactile soul to modern in-car tech.

And there is a lot of tech. The GLS now runs on MB.OS, Mercedes-Benz's in-house operating system, which controls everything from infotainment to driver assistance and features over-the-air updates. Navigation blends Google Maps with Mercedes's own interface, while the latest MBUX assistant uses AI to handle more natural, multipart conversations. Increasingly, this is what luxury looks like: not just stitched leather and polished wood, but software that feels like a bit of a co-pilot.

Still, nobody buys a GLS because they want to admire the menu layout. The real question is whether it can move with enough grace to justify all the S-Class comparisons. Mercedes has revised the engine range across the line-up, with more responsiveness and improved refinement the stated aim. The top-end GLS 580 4Matic's V8 now generates 537bhp and 750Nm of torque, while the six-cylinder petrol model has been updated for smoother delivery, stronger low-end pull and better efficiency.

All engines are paired with a 48-volt system and integrated starter generator, allowing for coasting, boost and energy recuperation. Mercedes has also put considerable effort into reducing noise, vibration and harshness.

There is additional insulation, more acoustic treatment and a general sense that the engineers have spent a great deal of time worrying about sounds most people will never consciously notice.

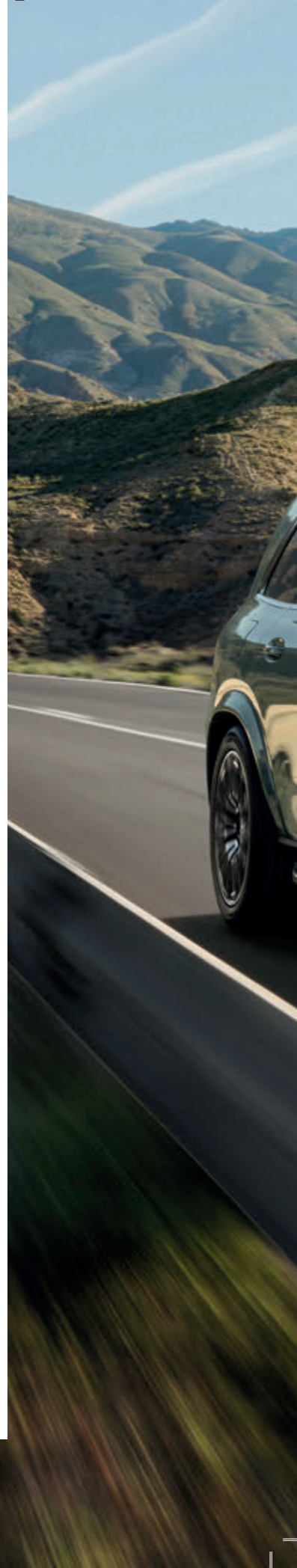
The chassis, meanwhile, is where the GLS earns its keep. Mercedes's E-Active Body Control remains one of the cleverest suspension systems in the segment, analysing the road and adjusting each wheel individually to keep the car level and composed. It can make a vehicle this large feel almost improbably calm.

The Airmatic air suspension has also been enhanced with cloud-based damper control, allowing the GLS to prepare itself for speed bumps before it reaches them.

Either way, the result is clear: comfort is key here, especially for those not doing the driving. The GLS remains a seven-seater as standard, with fully electrically adjustable rows and enough room in the back even for adults rather than apologetic children. The optional Rear Comfort Package Plus adds massage seats, wireless charging, entertainment screens and enough legroom management to make the second row feel like a business class cabin.

And that, really, is the point of the new GLS. It is not trying to be sporty in the way some luxury SUVs insist on being sporty, nor is it pretending mud and mountains are its natural habitat. What Mercedes has built is a form of insulation – from noise, from inconvenience, from the mild abrasions of modern life.

Which may not be romantic, exactly. But then true luxury rarely is. More often, it is simply the art of removing irritations before you notice they are there. On that front, the new GLS understands the brief perfectly.



KING OF THE HILL



The revamped Mercedes-Benz GLS shows why it is still the S-Class of SUVs. By Nasri Atallah

Sultan Sooud Al Qassemi ON ART

The World of Peace and War (1952) by Gamal El Sagini

An anthropomorphic bird sits with its arms outstretched in a protective pose. Beneath the bird is a group of men – what appears to be an Asian, an African, an Egyptian and perhaps a Caucasian figure. Behind them rises a factory belching the charcoal-black smoke of industry. Further to the right is a village lined with date palms, plants and flowers, alongside a Corinthian column and a colossal seated statue of a pharaoh.

The World of Peace and War by Gamal El Sagini was painted in 1952 and is rich with symbolism, much of it tied to a pivotal moment in Egyptian history, when a group of military men known as the Free Officers staged a coup that changed the region. El Sagini, who trained as a sculptor at the Higher School of Fine Arts in Cairo before continuing his studies in Paris and Rome, was an artist deeply responsive to his time. His sculptural works included depictions of then president Gamal Abdel Nasser and singer Um Kalthoum. He also portrayed the defining political moments of his era, including the 1973 crossing of the Suez Canal.



El Sagini's decision to use an Egyptian Swift pigeon to represent his country is especially resonant. For millennia, pigeons have appeared on ancient Egyptian tombs and sites as symbols of peace. In Islam, the pigeon is also associated with divine protection, having helped shield the Prophet Mohammed in the Cave of Thaur by nesting and laying eggs at the cave's entrance, thereby misleading the Quraish search party.

Nor is it unusual in art history for the nation to be personified as female. One might think of Eugène Delacroix's *Liberty Leading the People* (1830), the neoclassical Statue of Liberty or, more recently, Abdel Hadi El-Gazzar's *The Charter* (1962). Yet El Sagini's Swift pigeon, with her wings spread wide, is not carrying a flag, bearing a torch or holding a charter. Instead, she shelters the people below from incoming bombs and looming threats.

On February 28, Iran was attacked by the US and Israel. Tehran chose to respond by not only hitting Israel, but also launching its fury towards



It is essential that artists from the Gulf document the events they are living through



BARJEEL ART FOUNDATION, SHARJAH

the Gulf Arab states, who had advocated a peaceful resolution. The UAE has borne the brunt of this retaliation, facing more than 2,500 missiles and drones from Iran, compared with hundreds directed at Israel during the first few weeks. Fortunately, the UAE has spent decades building its defence systems and preparing for such a possibility, which explains its high interception rate.

I was reminded of El Sagini's *The World of Peace and War* after the start of Iranian aggression. Drones and missiles have damaged infrastructure across the region, including ports, oil refineries, hotels and airports, despite the Gulf states refusing to allow the US to use their bases or airspace to launch attacks on Iran. The defence systems, the proverbial protective wings – that Gulf Arab states had for decades been criticised for investing in – have, in the end, saved countless lives of people from all over the world who call the Gulf home. These have indeed proved to be unparalleled times.

It is essential that artists from the Gulf document the extraordinary events they are living through. Kuwaiti artist Farah Bastaki issued a call to that effect, writing that “visual arts are the true memories of the individual”. Emirati poet Amal Al Sahlawi similarly urged Gulf citizens to keep journals in order to record this period through personal testimony. It is equally important, however, not only to dwell on what is wrong, but also to pay attention to what remains right.

Such unpredictable times can be tense and unsettling, especially amid the cancellations and postponements of much that we look forward to. Yet these inconveniences, however frustrating, must be kept in perspective. Life in the UAE and across the Gulf has, by and large, continued with a remarkable degree of normality, albeit with disruption and delay. How we choose to act and react during such moments will shape much of who we become once they pass. I, for one, still have faith that we'll get back on track very soon.

ART

EAST MEETS EAST



William Mullally makes his way to Art Basel Hong Kong, Asia's largest contemporary art fair, to discover the Middle East and North African creatives and galleries taking part

Art Basel Hong Kong in March saw galleries from and representing the region using the platform to deepen relationships with Asian collectors, curators and institutions.

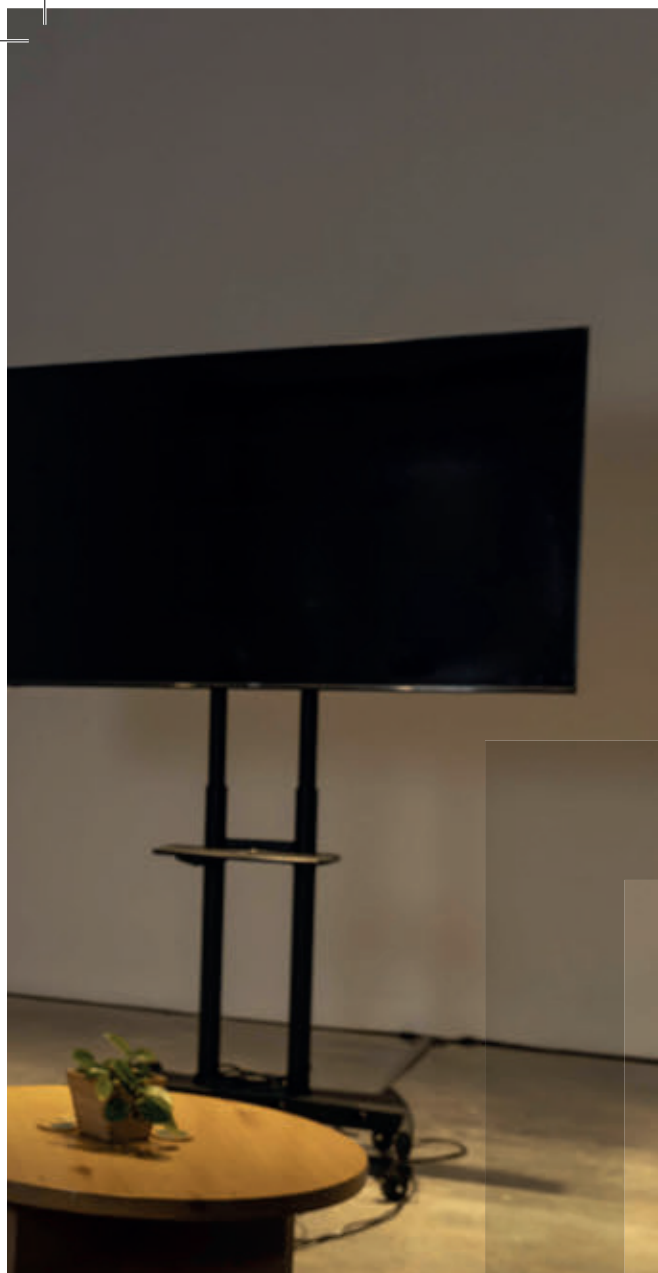
Taking place at the Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre, the event brought together 240 galleries from 41 countries and territories. More than half of this year's exhibitors operate spaces across Asia-Pacific, underscoring the fair's role as a regional meeting point as much as an international market event.

For galleries representing artists from the Middle East and North Africa, that regional role is a central part of the appeal. Hong Kong offers access to not only collectors, but also curators, institutions and biennale networks across Asia.

Art Basel Hong Kong
2026 featured
240 galleries from
41 countries



PAUL MESNEGER, ANTONIE ROBERTSON/THE NATIONAL, CATINCA TABACARU GALLERY AND NOME



Clockwise from left, British-Lebanese artist Lawrence Abu Hamdan; Tunisian art collector and gallerist Selma Feriani; and a painting by Moroccan artist Youssra Raouchi, left, at Catinca Tabacaru Gallery and Nome's booth at Art Basel Hong Kong



"This is our sixth year here in Art Basel Hong Kong," says Tunisian gallerist and collector Selma Feriani. The founder of Selma Feriani Gallery, which has outposts in Tunis and London, adds: "We've been introducing our artists to the community here in Asia slowly but surely. We steadily place our artists in Asian collections with returning collectors and newcomers every year. There is an interest and curiosity towards our programme and artists."

Feriani says that visibility has also been reinforced by the growing presence of Mena artists she represents in major exhibitions across the region. "We currently have Massinissa Selmani participating in Sydney Biennale and Monia Ben Hamouda in Taipei Biennale," she says. "It makes our presence here stronger."

At this year's fair, her gallery offered art from across the region and the world, describing the presentation as one centred on memory, material histories and the transmission of cultural knowledge across geographies and generations, with works spanning painting, textile, glass and marble.

Among the artists on view was Tunisian-Italian artist Hamouda, whose practice draws on symbolism, ritual and inherited forms. Sara Ouhaddou, a French-Moroccan artist, works across textiles, ceramics and mosaics, often examining cultural exchange and the shifting meanings of objects. Saoudi Ait Khay, a Moroccan artist who lives in Tunisia, meanwhile, weaves traditional Moroccan wool into abstract compositions shaped by memory and landscape.

A similar ambition is behind Catinca Tabacaru Gallery's presentation of Moroccan artist Youssra Raouchi. "Youssra is very new to the art world conversation, so building her an international base of collectors, curators and thinkers is critical at this point in her career," says gallery founder Catinca Tabacaru.

"There are many connections across history between the region and Mena, and we hope local museums are thinking seriously about exploring these threads through historic and contemporary acquisitions and exhibitions," Tabacaru adds. "There is much to say about why these ties continue to be relevant today, especially given the current state of peace and conflict."

The fair's Mena presence also extended beyond gallery booths. In the film programme, British-Lebanese artist Lawrence Abu Hamdan presented *45th Parallel* (2022), a five-act monologue performed by

filmmaker Mahdi Fleifel. Elsewhere, White Cube showed works by Mona Hatoum, while Catinca Tabacaru Gallery and Berlin's Nome jointly presented Raouchi, whose work draws on elements of Amazigh culture.

Additions to this year's fair included Friends of Art Basel Hong Kong, an initiative developed in collaboration with regional museums to strengthen ties across Asia. The fair also extended its footprint across the city through collaborations with institutions including Tai Kwun, M+, Hong Kong Ballet, plus a range of non-profit and university partners.

Also launched regionally was Zero 10, Art Basel's digital art initiative, which made its Asia debut in Hong Kong after launching in Miami Beach in December.

Curated by Eli Scheinman, the section featured 14 exhibitors, and was intended to expand how digital work is exhibited, contextualised and collected within the fair. Scheinman explains that with Zero 10, the aim was "to platform and amplify the voices of artists who are asking critical questions about the use of emerging technologies and the way that those technologies increasingly infiltrate our daily lives".

He points to Zhu Wen Chung's *Recursion* as one example, describing it as an exploration of human-machine collaboration and authorship through a performance in which the artist paints alongside robots, moving according to a data set she has built over time.

The Hong Kong event followed the February debut of Art Basel Qatar, the fair's first platform in Mena, at a time when Arab artists are making an appearance across several parts of Art Basel's global programme.

Arab art is increasingly in the spotlight globally, with that wider shift set to become even more pronounced with the opening of Guggenheim Abu Dhabi, which will be the largest institution in the Guggenheim network, later this year.

Mohamed Khalifa Al Mubarak, chairman of Abu Dhabi's Department of Culture and Tourism, said in December that the museum will place artists from the Arab world in dialogue with names such as Jackson Pollock, Mark Rothko, Andy Warhol and Jean-Michel Basquiat, positioning it as a more global institution in both collection and outlook.



There is an interest and curiosity towards programmes and artists from Mena

ARCHITECTURE

T H E M O N U

In Oslo's rebuilt government quarter, Palestinian artist Jumana Manna creates a vast floor from reclaimed stone – a work that challenges ideas of nationhood, memory and who gets to belong, writes **Giovanna Dunmall**



A N T I

M E N T

Jumana Manna's artistic floor for the government quarter in Oslo uses varying stones once used to build factories, bridges, saunas, prisons, schools and city halls

“My inspiration was spolia and the principle of reuse,” says Palestinian artist Jumana Manna of the new 800-square-metre floor, titled *Sebastia*, which she has created for the main square in Oslo's soon-to-reopen government quarter. Spolia, derived from the Latin word for spoils, refers to the reuse of materials or architectural fragments from earlier structures in new buildings.

“The use of spolia was common in Ottoman and Islamic architecture,” Manna says. “In Jerusalem, where I come from, the Old City is filled with beautifully repurposed architectural structures – pavements and stones from different eras.” The renovated government quarter in Oslo reopens this month, almost 15 years after a far-right extremist planted a car

bomb at the site. Later that same day, he opened fire on a Workers' Youth League summer camp on a nearby island.

Seventy-seven people were killed and many more injured. In the years since, the government quarter – which sustained considerable damage – has been rebuilt by Nordic Office of Architecture, with public art playing a central role in its renewal.

Sebastia is one of three major integrated artworks commissioned for the quarter by Koro, Norway's public art agency, which oversees all art across the site. The brief was intentionally open, Manna explains. The only stipulation was that the floor be made of Norwegian stone, preferably granite for its strength and durability.

KORO



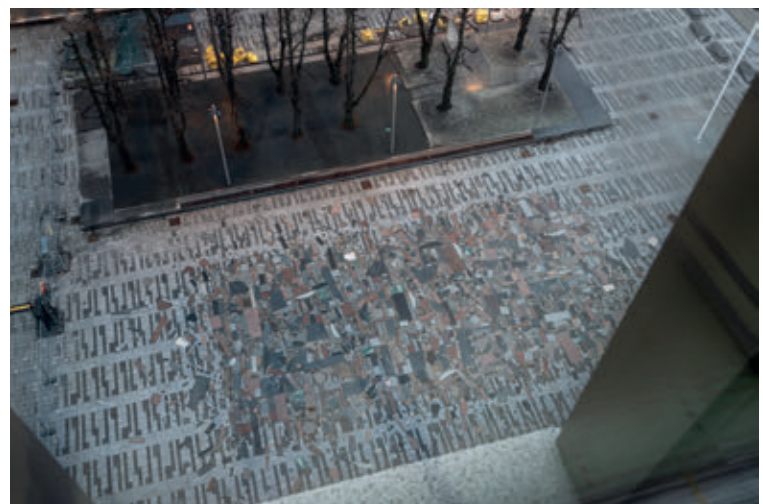
Despite Norway's abundance of quarries, Manna immediately decided to create the work "without the need for extraction, but rather from materials that already existed".

Her second decision became the guiding principle of the piece. "I reinterpreted the notion of Norwegian stone to mean any stone that had already made its way to Norway – a kind of semiotic twist that challenges ideas of what is considered Norwegian, and of belonging."

Manna and Koro sent letters to Norway's 350 municipalities asking for stone donations. About 100 responded. The resulting collection includes stones of varying sizes and types, once used to build factories, bridges, saunas, prisons, schools and city halls, as well as pieces from Trondheim Cathedral, the Royal Palace and Oslo's new National Museum.

The finished floor sits somewhere between sculpture, mosaic, architecture and mural, and is equally layered in its references.

"I did a deep dive into Norway's architectural and industrial histories, and how, about 300 years ago, there was a shift from a wood-based tradition to one increasingly centred on granite," Manna says. "The oldest building in the government quarter dates back to the 19th century and consciously used granite as part of a nation-building project, drawing on



KORO



It is about a material and cultural history of nation-building, and a critical perspective on how to build ethically



The Palestinian artist's contribution has drawn antipathy from the Norwegian right, but Manna chooses to focus on the work and what it can bring to the city

its symbolic role in European national imaginaries.” The work responds to this context, engaging with granite’s role in constructing national identity while also, as Manna puts it, remaining “antithetical to it” and “anti-monumental”.

With its uneven edges and dense patchwork of differently sized stones, *Sebastia* embodies this tension. It is at once striking and approachable – monumental in scale, but not in tone. Composed of reclaimed, varied materials, it carries a distinctly human quality; unlike more classical public works, it invites interaction rather than reverence.

The title adds another layer. *Sebastia* refers to the Palestinian village and archaeological site in the occupied West Bank, which has long faced looting and increasing Israeli control.

“*Sebastia* was deeply compromised by the Oslo Accords,” Manna says. “They divided the village from the archaeological site, making it easier for settlers to attack it.”

In the work, *Sebastia* becomes a broader symbol of the perceived failures of the Oslo Accords. “They represented a false promise of independence,” she says, describing the enabling of a system that allowed further annexation and fragmentation.

By bringing *Sebastia* to Oslo, Manna creates a conceptual inversion of the city’s role in the accords, while also pointing to Norway’s political involvement and, she argues, its continued investments in the occupation.

The project has drawn criticism from right-wing media in Norway and beyond. “It’s not surprising that the right wing are unhappy that a Palestinian artist is creating what they describe as the largest public artwork in Norway today,” Manna says. She adds that, as a Palestinian artist working in Europe, she has faced sustained attacks in recent years. “But that has nothing to do with what the work aims to offer,” she says.

“It is about a material and cultural history of nation-building, and a critical perspective on governance and how to build ethically.”

Made from fragments and remnants, the work also challenges dominant narratives of the nation-state. At the same time, it resonates with Manna’s own context, including the destruction documented in Gaza – and, increasingly, across the region.

In this sense, *Sebastia* becomes an example of how something new and dignified can emerge from what remains. “This is something that has become part of Palestinian culture,” she says.

MAKE IT LAST

In a world of viral sensations and disposable media, here is our team's selection of physical media that deserves to be enjoyed slowly and thoughtfully



LEAVE YOUR MESS AT HOME BY TOLANI AKINOLA (PAMELA DORMAN BOOKS)

Family tensions and long-held secrets come into focus in this contemporary novel centred on the four Longe siblings. Sola, the eldest, returns to Chicago after a decade away, trying to rebuild her life following a public setback. She is not alone, with each of her siblings facing their own uncertainty. When they are brought back together at their Nigerian immigrant parents' Thanksgiving table, several years of distance and unresolved resentment begin to surface. The novel explores the complexities of family life, as questions of forgiveness, expectation and identity unfold when past and present meet.

Evelyn Lau, assistant features editor

DIE MY LOVE (MUBI)

One of the most visceral films of 2025 is now available on 4K Blu-ray. This psychological thriller stars Jennifer Lawrence, who plays Grace, a young woman who swaps her life in New York for a remote Montana house with her partner Jackson (Robert Pattinson) after he inherits it from an uncle. After their baby arrives and Jackson grows increasingly absent, Grace's severe postpartum depression and psychosis unravels her marriage and her grip on reality. Directed by Lynne Ramsay (*We Need to Talk About Kevin, You Were Never Really Here*), it is based on the novel of the same name by Argentinian author Ariana Harwicz. Martin Scorsese, who recommended the book to Lawrence, joined her as one of the producers.

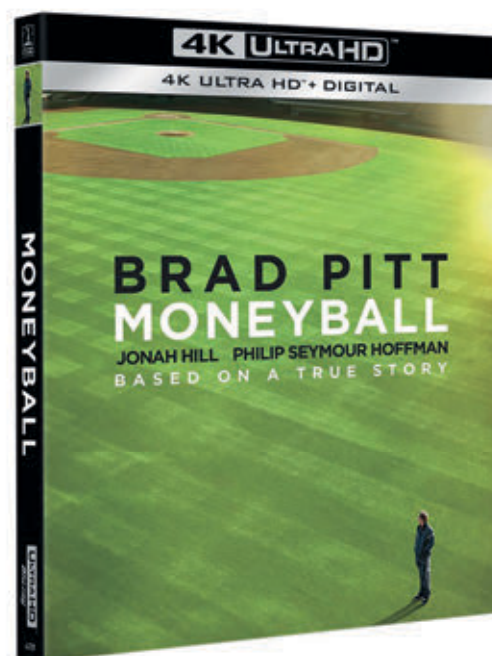
David Tusing, assistant features editor



MONEYBALL (SONY PICTURES)

Some films have the ability to stop you in your tracks – whether they surface unexpectedly on television or appear in the in-flight entertainment menu halfway through a long-haul journey. One of the finest examples is 2011's *Moneyball*, starring Brad Pitt. Based on the true story of Billy Beane, general manager of the Oakland A's, the film follows his attempt to build a baseball team on a shoestring budget using statistics, instinct and an eye for overlooked talent. Jonah Hill and Philip Seymour Hoffman deliver superb supporting performances. It is the kind of story that resonates far beyond the specifics of baseball management. It can now be revisited in a new 4K UHD release from Sony Pictures.

Faisal Al Zaabi, gaming journalist





ROMP! A JOURNEY THROUGH THE NATURAL HISTORY OF OTTERS AND WHY THEY MATTER BY HEIDE ISLAND (TARCHER)

There is, it turns out, a collective noun for otters: a romp. It is a charmingly ridiculous term, even when pressed into the title of Heide Island's book. Island, a behavioural ecologist and professor at Pacific University in Oregon, writes with the easy authority of someone who has spent years observing her subjects. A specialist in comparative animal behaviour, she focuses on otter welfare and ecology, drawing on field studies of wild river otters in Washington. Here, she follows a single family – named Patches – through the shifting waterways of Puget Sound, charting their lives with a blend of scientific precision and evident delight. My own knowledge of otters, such as it is, begins and ends with *Ring of Bright Water*, Gavin Maxwell's beautiful account of life with a wild otter named Mij. It was also an early lesson in loss, as I joined generations of children distraught by Mij's violent death. Island's book offers a happier mood. Her affection for otters runs clearly through the pages, even as she tracks their behaviour with academic rigour. She explores the threats they face from habitat degradation, human encroachment and climate change, while also outlining the complex rituals, family bonds and sheer mischievousness that shape otter society.

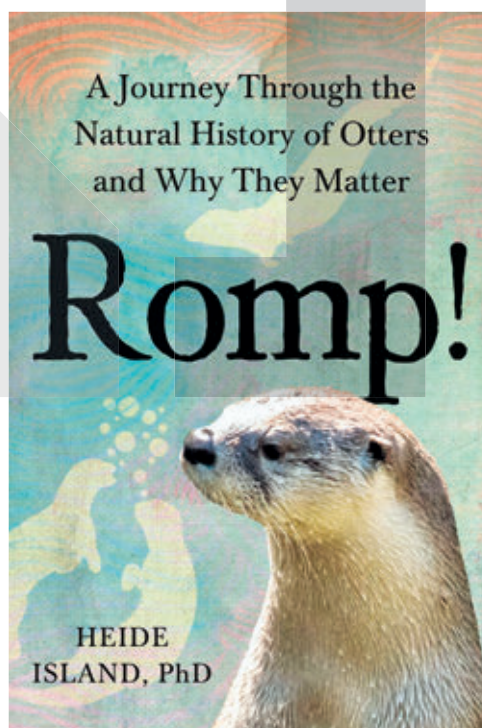
Sarah Maisey, TN magazine deputy editor



HOWL BY BLACK REBEL MOTORCYCLE CLUB (THE ECHO LABEL AND RCA)

The year 2005 marked peak blues revival, with The Black Keys and The White Stripes trading salvos of fuzzy riffs and heavy reverb. It was an era of performative grime – tattoos done in clean parlours, but meant to look prison-earned, growling vocals, studied Americana. Somewhere in that mix sat Black Rebel Motorcycle Club, who took their name from Marlon Brando's biker gang in *The Wild One*. It was a scene dear to my heart – I even spent a couple of years managing a Lebanese band in the same vein. So this 20th-anniversary repress of BRMC's *Howl* is a pleasure, not least because it includes my favourite track, *Ain't No Easy Way*. Remastered at Abbey Road and pressed on double vinyl, it also feels like a timely chance to place BRMC back where they belong – alongside their more celebrated peers.

Nasri Atallah, TN magazine editor



THE WATCHLIST

David Tusing unpacks this month's slate of must-watch releases, from returning favourites to a long-awaited sequel nearly 20 years in the making

1 THE BOYS SEASON FIVE (PRIME VIDEO)

Prime Video's anarchic superhero satire returns for its fifth and final season, bringing the blood-soaked showdown between Homelander and Billy Butcher to a close. Expect higher stakes, sharper political commentary and a number of shocking twists as one of streaming's most subversive hits signs off.

■ April 8

2 OUTCOME (APPLE TV)

Jonah Hill directs and stars in this dark comedy about a troubled Hollywood fixer forced to confront his past. Keanu Reeves plays Reef Hawk, a beloved celebrity who must confront his hidden demons after he is extorted with a mysterious video that's sure to shatter his image and end his career. With the support of his lifelong friends Kyle (Cameron Diaz) and Xander (Matt Bomer), along with his crisis lawyer Ira (Hill), Reef embarks on a soul-searching journey to make amends with anyone he could have possibly wronged, all in the hope of identifying the blackmailer.

■ April 10

3 EUPHORIA SEASON THREE (OSN+)

Zendaya returns in the long-awaited third season of the HBO drama, which continues to explore addiction, identity, social media and adolescence. While little is known about the plot of the next instalment, there will be a time jump that takes the characters out of high school – presumably to account for the actors' ageing process in the long waits between seasons; the show had its debut in 2019. Series regulars Jacob Elordi, Sydney Sweeney, Alexa Demie and Maude Apatow will also return.

■ April 13

4 BEEF SEASON TWO (NETFLIX)

This comedy-drama anthology series created by Lee Sung Jin was a critical hit, with season one's leading actors, Steven Yeun and Ali Wong, winning Emmy awards for their performances as feuding strangers. *Beef* is back with a new cast and a fresh conflict, centred on newly engaged Gen Z couple Ashley Miller (Cailee Spaeny) and Austin Davis (Charles Melton), who find themselves at odds with their millennial boss, Joshua

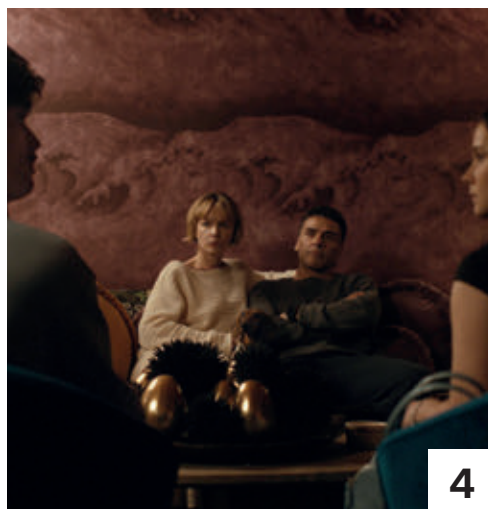
Martin (Oscar Isaac) and his wife Lindsay Crane-Martin (Carey Mulligan). As Ashley and Austin become entangled in the unravelling marriage of their general manager, they begin competing for the approval of their country club's billionaire owner, Park (played by Oscar-winning Youn Yuh-jung), who is grappling with a scandal involving her second husband. Sounds suitably messy.

■ April 16

5 THE DEVIL WEARS PRADA 2 (CINEMAS)

Nearly two decades after the original defined a generation – and launched a thousand memes – *The Devil Wears Prada 2* reunites Meryl Streep, Anne Hathaway, Emily Blunt and Stanley Tucci as Miranda, Andy, Emily and Nigel, returning to the high-pressure world of *Runway* magazine in New York. Now set in a fashion industry reshaped by digital media and shifting power dynamics, the sequel will explore how its famous characters navigate a new era. New cast members include Kenneth Branagh, Simone Ashley, Lucy Liu, Justin Theroux, BJ Novak and Conrad Ricamora.

■ April 30





1



2



3

PURE PLAY

Faisal Al Zaabi rounds up consoles where creativity, nostalgia and clever design take centre stage



4



5

1 NINTENDO SWITCH 2

The Nintendo Switch 2 sits firmly in the premium bracket for gaming hardware. It builds on Nintendo's hybrid formula with upgraded internals, including a smoother high-refresh display and 4K output when docked, while retaining the flexibility to shift seamlessly between handheld and home console play. Its biggest draw, however, is its software. Launch and early-window titles such as *Mario Kart World* and *Donkey Kong Bananza* showcase the system's scale. Add enhanced versions of *The Legend of Zelda: Tears of the Kingdom* and *Super Mario Odyssey*, and the result is a console that balances blockbuster appeal with inventive gameplay. That inventiveness extends to its motion controls, which encourage physical movement, gesture-based combat and intuitive play.

■ From Dh1,900

2 PLAYDATE

The Playdate stands apart immediately, with its bright yellow shell, monochrome screen and fold-out crank. Developed by Panic Inc, it reimagines what interaction in games can look like. Its most distinctive feature is its release model. Instead of buying games individually,

owners receive a weekly drop of titles over 12 weeks. Among the highlights are *Crankin's Time Travel Adventure*, which uses the crank to control time itself, and *Omaze*, a puzzle game that is built around playful abstraction. More recent additions such as *Bloom* and *Mars After Midnight* continue to expand the creative range of the device.

■ Dh840

3 SUPER POCKET

The Super Pocket is designed for immediacy. The console comes preloaded with officially licensed arcade classics and supports a wider library through Evercade cartridges, which collectively offer hundreds of retro titles. Its built-in line-up leans into arcade heritage, with games such as *1942*, *Bionic Commando*, *Bubble Bobble* and *Space Invaders* anchoring its appeal. Later editions expand that catalogue even further, with collections that include *Banjo-Kazooie* and *Battletoads*, turning the device into a compact archive of classic gaming. Simple, portable and refreshingly focused, the Super Pocket is a console that strips gaming back to quick sessions and timeless design.

■ Dh371

4 RETROID POCKET 5

This device caters to players who want flexibility. Running Android, it allows users to build their own library through emulation and apps, rather than relying on a fixed catalogue. Players revisit titles such as *God of War* (PS2), *The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time* (N64) and *Gran Turismo 4* (PS2), all on a single hand-held device. It requires some set-up, but that is part of its appeal. For those willing to tinker, it becomes a deeply personal console that can span decades of gaming history.

■ Dh1,054

5 SEGA GENESIS MINI

The Sega Genesis Mini is a carefully preserved snapshot of the 16-bit era. It replicates the look and feel of the original console while updating it for modern displays. Its preloaded library includes some of the most influential games of its time, including *Sonic the Hedgehog*, *Streets of Rage 2*, *Castlevania: Bloodlines* and *Ecco the Dolphin*. These are not just nostalgic picks, but titles that helped define genres and shape the industry. For those looking to revisit a formative period in gaming, it offers a curated experience that feels both authentic and accessible.

■ From Dh295

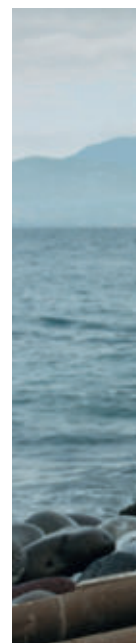


POMELLATO

Pomellato's Nudo line turns 25 this year, and the anniversary collection does what Nudo has always done: put colour front and centre. New Rivière necklaces in rose and white gold pair London blue and sky blue topaz stones with pavé white diamonds, while a second parure sets purple amethysts against green peridots – each gem cut with Nudo's signature 57 irregular facets, appearing as if they're floating. A prasiolite and green agate doublet introduces two translucent layers that produce a third, moss-toned hue. Meanwhile, the Toi et Moi ring pairs amethyst with pavé diamonds in two different sizes – the contrast here as deliberate as the stones.

BLACK BOOK

Our round-up of the most interesting and noteworthy arrivals in the world of fashion, fragrance, watches and jewellery





THE WHITE COMPANY

Sleep expert Dr Sophie Bostock, founder of The Sleep Scientist, is the authority behind The White Company's latest edit of bedroom essentials. Her advice for getting the best possible sleep is reassuringly practical: keep consistent sleep-wake times, layer your bedding rather than relying on one heavy duvet and get outside in the morning light. The products do the rest – from the 1,000-thread-count Egyptian cotton linen and a cool cotton-hemp bedspread to silk pillowcases, seersucker pyjamas, as well as a sleep candle infused with soothing notes of lavender, camomile, clary sage and cedarwood.

ZEGNA

Memorie, a new fragrance collection from Zegna, is structured as a biography in six volumes. Each scent corresponds to a specific moment in the life of founder Ermenegildo Zegna – the smell of his study at dawn, the wool mill where raw fibre became fabric, the road out of Trivero towards the wider world, the forest floor after rain in Oasi Zegna, the panoramic mountain road where he walked and built his long-term view, and, finally, an evening by the fire where memory becomes legacy. Crafted by three master perfumers – Dominique Ropion, Fabrice Pellegrin and Quentin Bisch – the six fragrances are designed as a single narrative rather than stand-alone expressions. Each perfume comes in a refillable glass bottle with an ash-wood cap and gradient finish. A cinematic film directed by Roman Coppola, starring Mads Mikkelsen, shot at Casa Zegna, the family's historic home, accompanied the launch.

PRADA

Launched in 2019, Prada's Re-Nylon collection spans accessories and ready-to-wear made from regenerated nylon-plastic recovered from landfill, textile waste and the ocean, broken down and rebuilt into a fabric that can be recycled indefinitely.

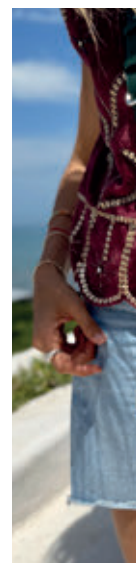
For the 2026 campaign, Prada enlisted Benedict Cumberbatch and Letitia Wright – and then took them to the ocean in Hawaii and Japan. Both actors also feature in a pair of documentary films produced with National Geographic CreativeWorks, tracing the real-world reach of Prada Group's Sea Beyond initiative, an ocean education programme run in partnership with Unesco that has reached more than 35,000 students globally. One per cent of proceeds from the Sea Beyond collection now goes directly to the project. The films, like the fabric, aim to educate.



SHOPPING EDIT

SAINT-LOUIS

Saint-Louis has expanded its Endiablés collection, 15 years after it was launched, with three new creations by designer José Lévy: a cocktail glass, a Roemer Apollo and a Bubbles flute. The pieces join an existing cast of forms that resist easy categorisation – part glass, part sculpture, part objet d'art – rendered in hand-cut crystal across nine shades of the Saint-Louis palette. Lévy, who served as creative director of the French Pavilion at the 2025 Osaka World Expo, first brought the Endiablés to life in 2011. The additions carry that same principle forward – immaculate craft and deliberately open to interpretation.



ETRO

Etro's Vela bag has always had an edge. The sharp, aerodynamic silhouette that made it popular is still very much present in the new Vela Blossom, but the pre-autumn 2026 update softens things up. The V-shaped structure and signature Pegaso medallion remain, only now both the metal frame and the coin closure are wrapped in leather, the latter reimagined as an embossed disc. The body is constructed from supple materials – nappa leather in black, ivory and plum; suede in dark brown and sand; and a shaded leather that mirrors the gradient shifts of nature.

RICHARD MILLE

The 2026 RM 07-01 Coloured Ceramics collection closes a chapter that Richard Mille opened in 2021. Three final models – in blush pink, lavender pink and powder blue TZP (tetragonal zirconia polycrystal) ceramic – introduce gem-setting for the first time in the series. Diamond-set components are housed within white gold inserts sitting alongside laser-cut rubber appliqués, guilloché and coloured ceramic details finished to the nearest micron. The inspiration is the 1980s: bold contrasts, unexpected materials, an era of emancipation that Richard Mille revisits and reimagines. Each model is limited to 50 pieces and powered by the in-house CRMA2 calibre – skeletonised, grade 5 titanium, 50-hour power reserve – so the technical architecture is as visible as the colour.





VEGANOLOGIE

Home-grown hero Veganologie has created the Watan Wild collection, which takes inspiration from species endangered in the UAE: hawksbill turtles, Arabian leopards, Arabian falcons and Arabian oryx. Each becomes a handcrafted charm made from bamboo fibre leather concealing a small functional surprise – a hidden mirror, a mini pouch, or a charging wire wrap. The collection launched in January, alongside an AI-animated series that follows the characters as they navigate city life far from their natural habitats. A portion of proceeds from every piece also goes towards protecting the habitats of the animals that inspired them.

GERALD CHARLES

Cosmic history becomes contemporary horology in Gerald Charles's Maestro 2.0 Meteorite, the maison's first Meteorite watch with a small-seconds indicator. The material comes from Muonionalusta, a meteorite that fell in northern Sweden. Estimated to be 4.5 billion years old, it is one of the oldest, most rare materials on Earth. The dial tells a specific moment: a meteorite colliding with Earth, expressed through two executions. The Black model captures impact – dark meteorite with flashes of red from the anodised baseplate below, Roman numerals tilted as if physically displaced by the blast. The Silver represents the stillness after, when the matter has cooled and crystallised. Both are limited to 100 pieces each.

BVLGARI

Bvlgari's latest high jewellery collection, Eclettica, draws on sculpture, painting and architecture as creative languages. The Italian maison has produced one of its most daring projects: 150 one-of-a-kind pieces, 14 transformable creations and more than 50 designs valued in the millions. At the centre sit nine pieces called the Capolavori – Italian for masterpieces – built around extraordinary gemstones and a level of craftsmanship that's rare today. The collection stretches beyond jewellery, into watches, bejewelled bags and three one-of-a-kind fragrances inspired by the same three artistic mediums.



ONE LAST THING

Katherine Pangonis

Katherine Pangonis is a historian of the medieval Mediterranean and Middle East, drawn to the stories that history has too often left out.

She specialises in re-examining overlooked corners of the past – particularly the lives and influence of women – and bringing them back into view. Travel is central to her process, with much of her research unfolding on the ground across the regions she writes about. Her books, including *Queens of Jerusalem: The Women Who Dared to Rule* and *Twilight Cities: Lost Capitals of the Mediterranean*, reflect that rigorous approach, told with vivid prose. Her latest, *A History of France in 21 Women*, was released last month. We catch up with Pangonis for our quick-fire questionnaire.

What is your favourite time of day and why?

Early morning. I'm an early riser, sometimes very early, and there's something special about those first hours of the day when you feel like you really have the whole world to yourself and the light is very soft.

What is your favourite restaurant anywhere in the world?

Ah that's bittersweet. One of the beach restaurants in Sour (Tyre) – Al Fanar or Captain Bob. Anywhere I can eat tabbouleh and fresh fish, and feel the waves on my feet while watching the sun set over the sea. Another one was Konak in Antakya – but that was destroyed in the earthquake. I still remember eating the delicious lamb chops in an Ottoman courtyard under an orange tree.

What do you want to be when you grow up?

A novelist.

Do you have any hidden talents?

I make a decent tajine.

Your favourite book?

A Hero of our Time and *The Sun Also Rises*.

What type of music can't you stand?

Metal.

What puts you in a bad mood?

Queue jumpers.

What can you not live without?

Animals.

Dream dinner guests?

Cher, Odysseus, Shajar al Durr and Alexander the Great.

Sitting on the sofa or out with friends?

Sofa.

When was the first time you realised your parents were human?

There wasn't one moment, it has kind of crept up on me over the years.

What smell takes you straight back to childhood?

Dandelions.

What food takes you back to childhood?

Custard.

Which city do you love, but would hate to live in?

Jerusalem.

Can you play a musical instrument?

If you don't count *Hot Cross Buns* on the recorder, no.

Have you ever been on a motorcycle?

Yes, but always pillion.

Any words to live by?

Carpe diem.

Biggest pet peeve?

Queue jumpers.

Do you believe in aliens?

Sorry, no.

What is your favourite Arabic word?

Yalla.

The most niche thing you watch on YouTube?

Dog videos.

How do you take your tea?

Strong, with milk.

What makes you cry?

Dog videos.

What do social algorithms think you're interested in?

Dog videos.

TikTok or Instagram?

Instagram.

What is it about you that would surprise people?

I'm a cat person.

What was the last thing you did for the first time?

I travelled to Casablanca.

As told to Nasri Atallah



There's something special about those first hours of the day when the light is soft

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