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The National's Luxury Lifestyle Magazine
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In conversation with Tom Dixon

The return of the fountain pen

Sultan Sooud Al Qassemi on Zayed National Museum

Swizz Beatz is an artist with a plan

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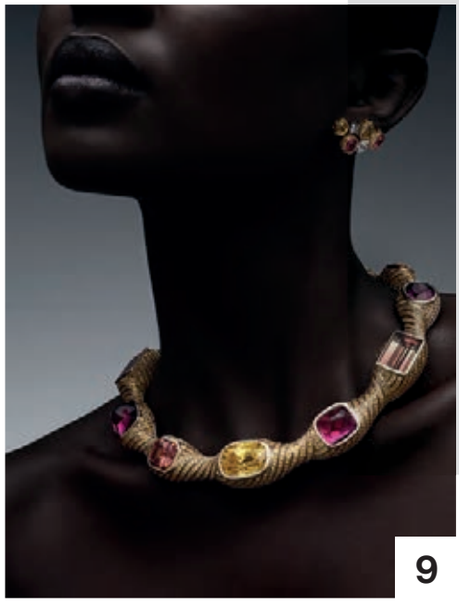

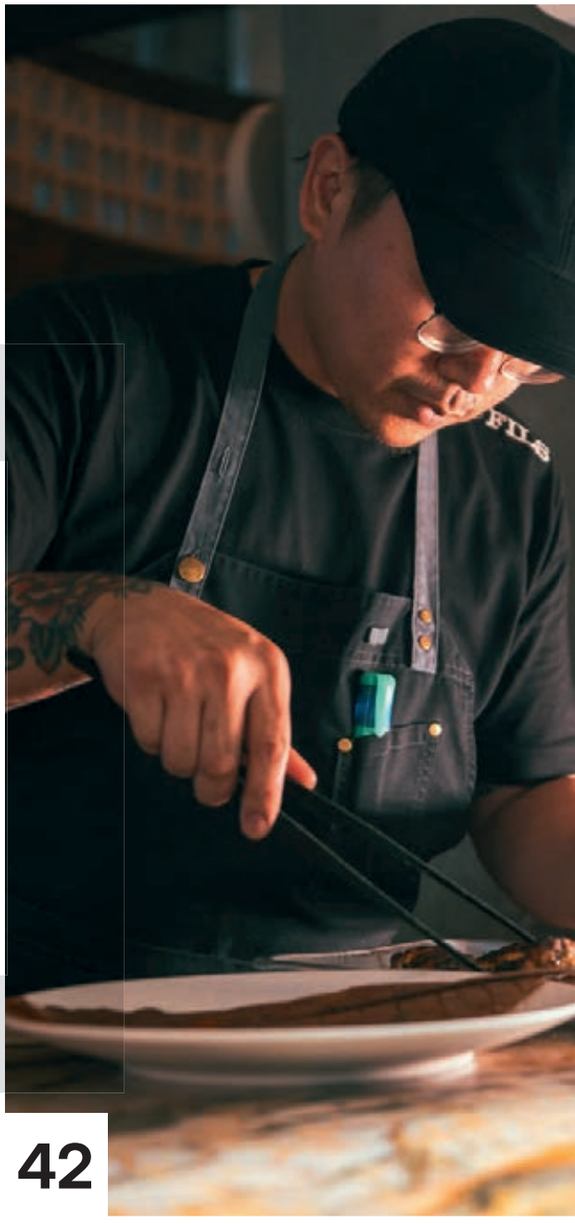

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EDITOR'S LETTER

There's one phrase Saudi actress Sarah Taibah keeps returning to – a mantra she leaves for herself in notebooks and around her home. It first came to her during a depressive spell after returning from an artist residency in Europe, back to routine and feeling her creative momentum slip. "I wrote it on big pieces of paper across my wall: 'Nothing to wait for. It's happening now,'" she tells William Mullally in his profile of one of the rising voices in alternative Saudi film and television.

"I have to remind myself to be here, not in yesterday or tomorrow," she says. "Because my brain loves yesterday and tomorrow. It's being in the now that I struggle with." The line struck me – because when you see Taibah, she appears completely present. On set for our cover shoot, she was focused, generous, fun. She made it easy for the team to get the best out of her, and more importantly, out of themselves. It's reassuring to know that someone so outwardly self-assured and unmistakably accomplished wrestles with the same things we all do.

Taibah's latest film, *A Matter of Life and Death,* which premieres at the Red Sea Film Festival this month, sees her at her sharpest – capitalising on the goodwill she has generated through her offbeat work both in front of and behind the camera. It comes hot on the heels of the success of Emirati horror film *Hoba* (*The Vile)*, in which she plays a character well out of her comfort zone, with fantastic results.

Looking at Taibah's accomplishments is a reminder that as we reach the end of the year, being present can become harder. We look back at what we've achieved – and what we haven't. We look forward, hoping a clean slate awaits. That side project we promised ourselves we'd start becomes a priority again – whether it is writing a novel, getting healthy or putting up a shelf. And with the world feeling increasingly dire, many people struggle to look ahead with optimism, even at the small things.

Still, as always, we seek beauty and that sometimes elusive optimism in these pages. We visit the Prada Academy in Florence, meet the self-confessed accidental designer Tom Dixon in Dubai, explore the discreet world of Fedeli, and speak to the co-founder behind the most coveted trainers of the moment. We chart the renaissance of fountain pens, highlight winter watches and travel through Uzbekistan, an ancient country that is still discovering itself. We take a spin in the original grand tourer from Maserati, tuck in at 3Fils in Abu Dhabi and meet artist–entrepreneur Swizz Beatz in Doha. Sultan Sooud Al Qassemi writes movingly about Emirati identity and art, while musician and architect Carl Gerges joins us for our quick-fire questionnaire.

At this time of year, it's tempting to over-plan or dwell on what didn't go your way. It can make a beautiful season feel heavier than it should. So I've decided to borrow Sarah Taibah's mantra as my own. There is nothing to wait for. It is happening now.

Nasri Atallah

The National

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The National

LOUIS VUITTON

Colour in motion

Louis Vuitton's latest high jewellery collection features vivid hues and creative mastery, **Lindsay Judge** discovers

Louis Vuitton's Virtuosity high jewellery collection turns up the volume on the maison's craft vocabulary. Revealed earlier this year, the extensive offering signals a house pushing past the expected – marrying its storied savoir-faire with a bold step into a more expressive and emotionally charged territory.

With 110 one-of-a-kind creations divided into two distinct worlds, Virtuosity probes the relationship between brand heritage and a renewed sense of artistic freedom, offering masterful high jewellery pieces that both honour tradition and quietly rewrite the maison's stylistic codes. One half of the collection, The World of Creativity, emerges as a vibrant expression of the maison's vision. It is the livelier, more chromatic side of Virtuosity – a chapter that revels in the emotional power of colour, pairing rare stones with unexpected contrasts and clean, contemporary lines. Within it, the Joy necklace emerges as a defining statement – a piece that quite literally radiates the theme's energy and optimism.

Crafted entirely in yellow gold, the Joy necklace carries a sunlit warmth, a sense of intensity that allows each gemstone to glow at full strength. Weighing in at more than 204 carats, it is every bit a showstopper, yet its composition feels considered and balanced, exploring a warm colour palette of complementary sunset hues. Three exceptional yellow sapphires, rich in tone, anchor the palette, and are framed by 10 powder-pink tourmalines. Chosen for their vivid hues, these stones swing dramatically in scale – from 10 carats to more than 40 – and several perform subtle magic tricks of their own, with bicolour tourmalines shifting from pink to green within a single stone.

The maison's signature rope design returns – a fluid, spiralling interpretation that becomes the structural thread of the necklace. Twisting around the neck, it represents continuity, movement and the idea of creative expansion. This unique design showcases remarkable technical achievement and gives the necklace depth and a reason to take a second look. Each stone is set at a different height, yet the piece maintains a seamless flow, integrating complex engineering with an artistic perspective and highlighting how perfection can come in unexpected compositions.

The Joy theme extends beyond the hero necklace. A pendant, a rope-inspired bracelet centred on a vibrant bicolour tourmaline and a ring glowing with rose and golden yellow tones all expand the chapter's universe. Four pairs of earrings continue the warm, joyful palette, while a star-shaped brooch – set with a 35-carat antique cushion-cut yellow sapphire – becomes one of the theme's most striking declarations.

Together, these pieces form a vivid chapter within the Virtuosity collection: a celebration of colour, proportion and the power of creativity.

Standing on the shoulders of giants

The Chalhoub Group has been at the forefront of fashion retail in the Middle East since the 1960s. Now, a new generation is taking over.
By **Sarah Maisey**

As Michael Chalhoub describes his ascent to leading the family empire, he speaks with the deliberateness of someone who never fully expected the baton to land in his hand. "I didn't think that it would lead me to this one day," he says, still sounding faintly surprised.

Yet on New Year's Day this year, he officially stepped into one of the most influential roles in the Middle East's luxury landscape as chief executive of the Chalhoub Group. He succeeds his father, Patrick, who moved into the role of executive chairman after more than two decades at the helm.

Michael's appointment was far from a coronation. "Last year, the executive committee ran a process with two internal candidates and a few external candidates. It lasted six months and I got chosen," he explains. "I feel incredibly lucky, incredibly proud and very humbled to write the next chapter of this beautiful book."

Although born into a dynasty that has shaped the region's retail landscape for seven decades, Michael initially showed little interest in joining it. After earning an MBA in business administration from Harvard Business School and another in international affairs from Université Paris-Dauphine, he launched *Sport360*, a successful media venture. "I'm an entrepreneur at heart," he says.

It took the pandemic to bring him back. "I wanted to help at a time when everyone was suffering because of Covid. I was rolling up my sleeves and thinking, now is the time I can really help out." He joined the business in 2020, overseeing strategy, growth, innovation, investments and joint ventures, and was quickly pulled back into the family's long-standing conversations. "Dinner debates were about how to push this brand or that, or how to reimagine things for the 21st century. It was very present in our everyday life."

To understand the weight of the role he now holds, one must understand the arc of the group itself – a story shaped by resilience. In Damascus in 1955, his grandparents Michel and Widad Chalhoub opened a boutique for Christofle to bring European style to the Middle East, soon followed by Jean Patou and Baccarat. "My grandfather and grandmother built this to make a small living," he says. "And it slowly grew into something."

Political instability pushed the family to relocate to Beirut in 1965, civil war forced a second move to Kuwait and the Iraqi invasion of 1990 triggered a third upheaval to Dubai. Each move meant rebuilding. "My grandparents stayed in Kuwait and rebuilt with a few employees, but obviously everything was destroyed," Michael says.

Those upheavals forged a resilience that underpins the powerhouse of today. The group now owns 10 brands outright, partners with more than 450 international luxury labels and operates more than 950 stores across the Middle East. Last year, it reported luxury sales of $12.8 billion – a six per cent rise despite a two per cent global downturn. From only 100 employees in the early days, Michael proudly notes how his father "grew this to employing 16,000 people".

As the next generation to lead the group, he says: "It's incredibly humbling. It feels like I'm standing on the shoulders of giants."

He has wasted no time. Rejecting the idea of a singular "Middle Eastern customer", the group has built a hyper-local presence, with offices in every major city, from Kuwait to Jeddah. "The Dubai customer is different to the Abu Dhabi customer, who is different to the Qatari or Saudi customer. It is important to have a presence in each place." Intelligence teams feed real-time customer insights to leadership and brands. To listen properly, Michael has spent much of his first year on the road. "This year has been about listening and learning – Panama in September, Jordan and Egypt in October, Kuwait this week, Riyadh last week."

His philosophy is encapsulated in a phrase that has become a cultural mantra within the organisation: servant leadership. "The frontliners are our bosses," he says. "The customer is our boss. The information flow must go both ways."

While the group's success has long been rooted in partnerships – its relationships with Louis Vuitton and Chanel date to 1983 and with Christian Dior to 1979 – he insists the future requires a more balanced equation. "We need to reinvent ourselves. We can rely on our partners, but we can't rely on them forever. We need to build our own equity and our own brands."

This evolution began under his father, who championed in-house ventures such as the fragrance brand Ghawali (2016) and Level Shoes (2012), now expanding into the US and home to its own men's and women's lines, Forsa and The Lline. The family have also entered the crowded bag market with Makette, launched in November with three minimalist silhouettes priced from Dh3,900 to Dh4,950.

Having advised global luxury houses for decades on how to thrive in the GCC, the group has an clear view of what customers want – and what is missing. "We notice the white spaces," Michael says. "Sometimes brands dismiss them. We don't think they should."

This insight has guided investments in brands such as Willy Chavarria, the bold American label steeped in social justice – a surprising choice that signals a wider, more adventurous vision. "We studied this carefully. We innovate, create or invest into white spaces. Investing lets us accelerate."

The goal is not to replace legacy partners, but to create a portfolio that spans the full spectrum of modern luxury – from storied maisons to boundary-pushing newcomers. And the footprint is no longer regional. Following expansion into Latin America, the group now operates in Panama, Colombia, Chile and Peru, with a $100 million business stretching from Santiago to Saint Barthélemy. It is also growing in sub-Saharan Africa.

"What's most important is to stay on our toes and reinvent ourselves before the landscape changes, because it is changing so fast. Resilience means diversification. We don't want to put all our eggs in a few adjacent baskets."

Michael's entrepreneurial instincts also led to The Greenhouse, the Chalhuob group's start-up studio and incubator, created to capture the energy of emerging talent and new ideas. "Our customer is rapidly evolving and we need to evolve even faster."

While staff at the company speak of Patrick's warmth, his ability to remember every name, his steadiness through geopolitical storms, Michael, by contrast, is quickly earning a reputation for accessibility and curiosity. "The hardest thing," he admits, "is managing the old with the new."

So what comes next? "We're working on a few exciting new brands," he says. "Some creating a buzz globally, but underrepresented in the region. And we're building more of our own brands. There is a lot to come."

The son who once avoided the family business is now steering it into a new era. "It is important to realise we were very lucky to be in this fantastic country, in this fantastic region, accompanied by these fantastic brands. It came with a lot of hard work, and I've learnt from my family about resilience and perseverance, because to start a company from scratch not once, not twice, but three times, is rare."

CHALHOUB

Michael Chalhoub and his father, Patrick, in a campaign for Level Shoes, one of Chalhoub Group's companies

PRADA; REUTERS

The future will be made by hand

In an age of AI-programmed obsolescence for many careers, the Prada Academy in Florence is training craftspeople whose jobs will never be automated

At Prada's leather atelier in Scandicci, on the edge of Florence, Andrea Guerra is taking his time. "If you are in a hurry in the luxury field, you'd better change business," the Prada Group chief executive says with a shrug. "We are in a world that should be, and should remain, slow. It is a world that should embrace technology, while at the same time valuing creativity and human values."

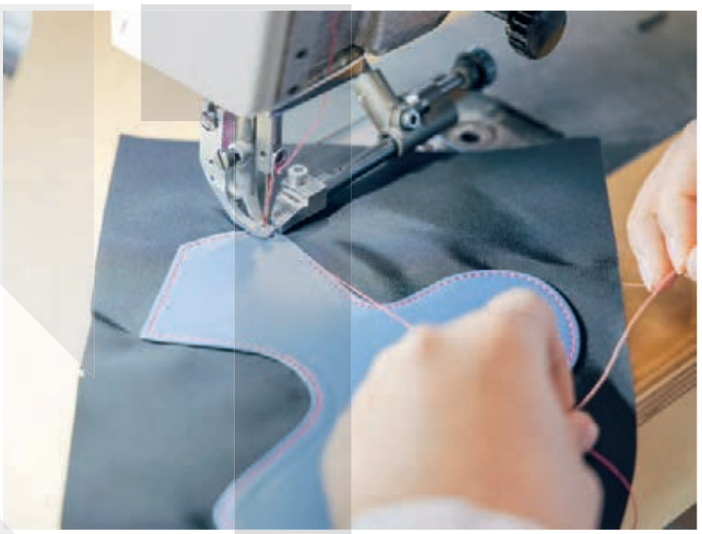
Florence is one of Italy's historic craft districts, famous for its leatherwork since the 13th century. Last month, the normally private factory floor opened its gates to mark the 25th anniversary of the Prada Academy, the maison's training ground for the next wave of artisans. There is now an academy in four Italian regions: Tuscany, Marche, Veneto and Umbria, which feed talent directly into Prada's 23 Italian factories. Since 2021, the Scandicci site alone has trained 571 leather-workers.

For Prada's chief marketing officer, Lorenzo Bertelli – who is also the son of the brand's co-chief executives, Miuccia Prada and Patrizio Bertelli – the academy is not just an addition to the business, but its backbone. "My father always insisted the factories should be our own," he says.

"People didn't understand why we chose the hard way, but the problems our competitors have now, we have experienced in making our supply chain as transparent as possible."

The conversation today around "Made in Italy" has become complicated. Long a label that guaranteed excellence and quality, recent investigations have revealed a network of poor practices at its outer edges, with murky subcontracting chains where wages and working conditions fall far below the level of the dream being sold on the shop floor. Now, in an attempt to salvage the industry's reputation and erase exploitation, Italy's government is preparing legislation that will force all companies to audit every level of their complex supply chains.

Prada, meanwhile, is happy to let a few dozen journalists wander through its workshops. Calling it a factory feels like a misnomer, as the vast space is all-white and spotlessly clean and tidy, with the hundred or so employees dressed in white coats. The workers, who are



Students practise shaping leather, left, and sewing, below, at the Prada Academy
Opposite page below, Lorenzo Bertelli, left, and Andrea Guerra

predominantly under the age of 35, are focused on the many steps that go into making the Galleria, Arcadie and Cleo bags. "Eighty per cent of what we do," Guerra says, "is hands, hearts and thought. Leather is a living matter – no two skins are alike, you have to start from there. It's manic attention to detail, but these are the details that build the overall picture. This is a total focus we have put in place."

The academy is Prada's answer to a challenge facing the luxury sector, of how to make craftsmanship feel not nostalgic, but contemporary. Students are paid during their four-and-a-half-month training and during the seven-month apprenticeship that follows. If their work meets Prada's exacting standards, they join the factory floor full-time.

Two graduates, both in their twenties, Francesca Rettori and Leonardo Nesi, speak about the shift from student to expert. "Every stitch, every gesture matters," Rettori says. "The academy taught me to see the accuracy behind every detail. I like to see something coming out of my manual skills." Nesi adds: "The main reason I decided to pursue this career is curiosity. I'm interested in everything that's behind what we do – the materials, and the processing. At first you think tasks are repetitive, but once you understand the process, you realise how complex it is. You need patience."

As AI is reshaping the world of work, Lorenzo maintains that white-collar workers are most at risk. "Technological advances mean that knowledge-based jobs that were seen as high-value can be replaced by technology. But the jobs that require manual skills will stay and survive, even though they were considered low-value in the past."

"*The Wolf of Wall Street* was the hype for a whole generation, but today, most are presenting PowerPoint and Excel files," he jokes. "But in a world where technology is replacing process, technology cannot replace craftsmanship. These are people who are not going to lose their jobs, because working with your hands cannot be replaced."

Inside the Scandicci factory, that sentiment feels tangible. One worker guides the quilting of a Miu Miu Arcadie, where a layer of Lycra beneath the leather and cotton wadding creates the bag's softly ruched signature. Another perfects the chamfered curve of the Prada Cleo, a line so distinctive that only one craftsman is permitted to stitch it. Nearby, a table is devoted entirely to folding tissue paper for the final packaging, an unhurried ritual of its own.

Work at this factory is not just assembly-line labour. Guerra says: "When we say manufacturing, we think about assembly lines, repetitive moments, components, but we're not talking about that. This is totally different; it's industrial craftsmanship. 'Made in Italy' craftsmanship is a part of our culture."

Prada wages, Lorenzo says, match or exceed industry standards – "if they're not competitive, people leave" – but salary is no longer the only measure of value. "Young people are interested in health and health conditions, they think about their families, their children. Also, we have many young women with us and it's important to provide them with support – a woman by definition is a multitasker."

Guerra agrees. "I see younger generations interested in manual work and things created by hand. Even in Milan, I don't think all young people want to be consultants, they want a work-life balance and to reduce alienation in their work."

The company's chief people officer, Rosa Santamaria Maurizio, points to the academy's deeper purpose "Luxury is about emotion, even in the workplace. The academy preserves Made in Italy, transfers knowledge between generations and builds pride in what our people do."

As the industry wrestles with pricing, responsibility and the role of technology, Prada seems clear on one thing: the future will be made by hand. Or as Lorenzo puts it: "What was once seen as nostalgic is now our most modern source of value."

Guerra adds: "What matters is to have the continuing ability to plan, to be patient and to look ahead. When you have an academy, you can't think that after just three months someone will be able to produce a bag. It's a long path and journey – but we are not in a hurry."

Sarah Maisey

The accidental designer

Tom Dixon explains to **Sarah Maisey** how two motorcycle mishaps and a failed career in music set him on the path to create avant-garde furniture

"I was born in Tunisia," British furniture designer Tom Dixon tells me when we meet. "I lived in Rabat and Suez. Obviously that's not here," he says gesturing around to the general space at Dubai Design Week last month. "But culturally, linguistically and religiously, there are similarities. I've not really spent any time here, so it's nice to discover it."

In town to speak at an event, Dixon is not your average designer. Entirely self-taught, he has spent more than four decades producing a fearless and eclectic body of work, from industrial-style furniture to hotel interiors. Curious, restless and averse to formality, he has launched a design laboratory ("Space"); served as creative director of Habitat; opened The Manzoni – a Milanese restaurant designed down to the last detail – and established his own brand in 2002, followed by his architecture and interiors studio in 2007.

In 2000, Dixon received an OBE royal honour for his services to design from Queen Elizabeth II. Today, his studio spans cities such as London, Milan, Hong Kong, New York, Tokyo, Shanghai and Hangzhou, and his work sits in the permanent collections of major museums.

The path looks linear, he says, but it wasn't. Though many online profiles list him as a graduate of Chelsea Art School, he laughs at the idea. "I tried art school for about six months because I didn't know what else to do. Then I had a motorbike accident, broke my leg and never went back."

Part of London's underground music scene in the early 1980s, Dixon became the bass player in disco outfit Funkapolitan. "For two years, I was a professional bass player. Then I had another motorbike accident and broke my arm." Dropped from the band, he watched a "much better player" take his place and later perform with Madonna, Michael Jackson and Pink Floyd. "That could have been my destiny if I hadn't had an accident, right?"

Instead, he channelled his energy into making furniture, welding salvage metal into new forms. Initially only "making things for fun", he began selling pieces to friends. "It grew organically very quickly. I never went back to music."

GETTY IMAGES

Self-taught British designer Tom Dixon, far left, has crafted several famous pieces, including the Beat Fat pendant light, left, as well as the Fresh Fat chair, above

By 1987, he had created the Fish Pan chair – assembled from welded pots, pans and ladles – followed by collaborations with Cappellini, which yielded the sinuous S chair, its curved steel softened with woven rush; as well as the Pylon chair, a lattice of intersecting metal lines resembling an electricity pylon.

Today, he has designed thousands of products and works out of a former coalyard in London's King's Cross, producing everything from furniture and perfume to stackable marble candlesticks and the Melt pendant, inspired by the interior of a glacier. Materials – polished metal, tubular aluminium, brushed oak, moulded glass, cork mixed with resin – are deployed with intelligence, while fabrics come textured and slubbed. The effect is a visual language that is as distinct as it is avant-garde.

The functional beauty of these designs is what brings him to Dubai, under the wing of Huda Lighting. "What we sell is hoping to go into bars, hotels, restaurants, as well as into homes. It mirrors what happens here. There's a lot of construction and building in a way that isn't really around in Europe. It looks like Shanghai maybe 15 years ago – people from all backgrounds and cultures are here because there's opportunity. That feels positive compared to the old world at the moment," he says. With Europe and the US feeling sluggish, Dixon – like many others – is looking towards the GCC. "You can't just chuck product at a place and hope it'll stick. We need to be here."

With his shock of grey curls and Savile Row suit worn sans socks, perhaps no one is more surprised that he earns a living breaking the rules than Dixon himself. "I never had an ambition to be a designer. I didn't really know anything about designing. I like making things. That could be anything – music or food – it's about the joy of creation."

His refusal to be bound by discipline or medium fuels his work. "I'm kind of agnostic. 'Design' is a pretty flabby word that covers all kinds of activities. If I were doing fashion, interiors or software design, they're not the same profession, but they all fall under this umbrella. It allows me to never get bored."

While many designers benefit from prestigious colleges and well-connected tutors, Dixon did it alone. "My only qualification is an A-level in pottery." A student at a failing London secondary school, he found refuge in the wood, metal and ceramics workshops. "I came out literally with one A-level," he tells me.

Selling ceramic tobacco pipes to his classmates at only age 15, Dixon was already entrepreneurial. "Turning play into something functional probably had an impact on me."

Decades later, he still craves the physicality of making. "I like making the full-sized model and welding is very good for that because you're making a real structure. Metal is very plastic in a way that you shape it, reshape it, put it together and break it apart. It suits the impatience in me."

His lack of formal education, he believes, freed him. "I wasn't fearful. Students today see commerce as separate from what they do. They think it's someone else's job. I never had that separation. I make something, I sell it, then I make the next."

This practical mindset accidentally created one of his best-known lights. Sent by the British Council to Lagos and Jaipur to work with street artisans, he was too busy to go, so he dispatched 10 students instead. They returned with designs artisans couldn't produce – "stuff too complicated and too cerebral".

Dixon stepped in, recalling local craftsmen who made brass water-pots. Using their hammering techniques on redesigned forms, he created the Beat Fat pendant. "It came from dissatisfaction with the students' work and seeing those pots could be repurposed.

"I like chaos theory," the designer says. "I'm good at spotting a pattern in chaos. I wouldn't say there was always a plan, but I can spot an opportunity – or create one."

Now viewed as an industry veteran, Dixon still resists the label. "My two accidents made me an accidental designer. I never intended it. It was a hobby that became a much better way of earning a living than music or art. And we get to make things, right?"

Checked in

Jumeirah has collaborated with Bouguessa on a capsule collection, part of a growing movement towards hospitality-inspired fashion essentials

JUMEIRAH

The Jumeirah Heritage Club x Bouguessa capsule features travel essentials such as crew-neck T-shirts, zip-collar jumpers and soft ball caps in nautical colours

Jumeirah, the hospitality group that owns some of the country's best-loved hotels such as Burj Al Arab, Emirates Towers and Marsa Al Arab, is doubling down on its heritage by launching its first capsule collection in collaboration with Dubai fashion brand Bouguessa.

Called Jumeirah Heritage Club, the collection is tightly curated to offer travel essentials such as a cap, crew-neck T-shirts and zip-collar jumpers. In nautical colours such as navy blue and white, each piece is a nod to Jumeirah's history as a hotel brand whose evolution is closely linked to the sea.

Now retold through the minimalist lens of Bouguessa, the resulting capsule is about simple and functional pieces that are elevated by attention to detail. The crew-neck T-shirt, for example, comes with two bands of jaunty blue around the collar, while the soft ball cap has triple stitching around its peak.

Even the logo, stitched in cursive lettering, is finished with the date 1999, to commemorate the opening of Jumeirah's world-famous Burj Al Arab hotel. Some pieces also carry an image of the landmark hotel in further homage. Speaking about the collection, Faiza Bouguessa, founder and creative director of Bouguessa, says the project looked to evoke Jumeirah's position at the heart of Dubai. "From the beginning, our conversations centred on capturing that quiet elegance and translating it into pieces that feel both modern and familiar, inspired by the textures and rhythm of coastal Dubai," she says. The result blends simplicity and structure with a "sense of nostalgia that bridges past and present".

"Luxury hospitality and fashion share a common clientele, both of whom are looking for emotional connection through design, storytelling and experience," says Jumeirah's chief brand officer Michael Grieve.

With this capsule, Jumeirah joins a small coterie of hotels that have lent their name to fashion lines. Château Marmont in Los Angeles inspired a sold-out, 18-piece collection by Gucci in 2019, which included an update on the hotel's own laundry bag remade into a drawstring tote that remains a hot ticket on resale sites.

Last year, Ritz-Carlton asked Spanish brand Late Checkout to create a capsule that featured items such as jogging bottoms and classic crew necks. Expect the new Jumeirah Heritage Club collection to fly off the shelves just as quickly.

Sarah Maisey

The silent brand

Several generations of the Fedeli family have been the custodians of one of fashion's best-kept secrets, discovers **Sarah Maisey**

In the world of the wealthy, there's an old saying: "Shirtsleeves to shirtsleeves in three generations." In Italy, they express it with far more bite. "The first generation makes it, the second enlarges it and the third kills it," says Luigi Fedeli with a laugh.

As the third generation to lead his family's venerable Italian fashion house, he knows the adage well. "It's what we say back home," he says with a smile.

He can afford the humour. Luigi has upended the prophecy, quietly evolving Fedeli from a discreet Milanese gentleman's outfitter into a full-fledged luxury label for both men and women. The house still remains under the radar, but its creations are admired by those who appreciate understatement.

The story begins modestly. Luigi's grandfather – also named Luigi – was one of 13 children, many of whom were lost to the Spanish flu. Coming from nothing, he opened his first store in 1934, selling gentlemen's hats in Monza, just outside Milan. A second store followed on Via Monte Napoleone in 1946, as the city emerged from the ruins of war and bombings. "My grandfather opened a shop called Red and Blue. It became famous for made-to-measure shirts. People came from all over the world," says Luigi.

With a distinctly British sensibility, the shop sold ties, braces, handkerchiefs, belts and knitwear, all handmade to exacting standards. By the 1960s, it had become one of Italy's cashmere specialists.

When Luigi later joined the family business, he felt its name should match its reputation and prestigious address. "Via Monte Napoleone was the most important street in the world,"

FEDELI

Luigi Fedeli, below, is the third generation of his family to lead the house, which champions refined elegance, left. The Italian brand opened its first regional store in Dubai Mall this year, below left

he says. “Red and Blue didn’t feel right. So I changed it to Fedeli.”

He also streamlined the offering, bringing everything in-house and sharpening the focus on knitwear. Today, the brand creates the well-dressed man’s wardrobe – from technical outerwear to swim shorts – as well as womenswear. “In retail, you need everything,” he says. “But people still think of us as knitwear. That’s where our heart is. Innovation is essential, though, as you cannot grow if you stand still.”

Quietly, Fedeli has become one of Italy’s most admired houses. Its collections favour refined elegance – a pure cashmere fisherman’s-rib bomber; a long-sleeve shirt in organic Egyptian cotton; a crew neck spun from vicuña, one of the world’s rarest fibres. Womenswear is equally understated – a cashmere-silk hoodie; a feather-light brushed-wool Cambridge jacket; a pencil skirt in cashmere and wool. Everything is built around timeless, polished finesse.

This philosophy extends beyond the shop floor. Fedeli cashmere is sourced from select farms in Mongolia and spun in Biella, Italy; all cotton is organic; swimwear is partly made from recycled post-consumer plastic; and packaging has been redesigned to eliminate single-use plastics.

What truly distinguishes Fedeli in a crowded luxury landscape is its near-silence. Its pieces do not carry any logos, advertising is minimal and new customers arrive mostly by word of mouth. “We are a very silent brand,” Luigi says. “We are not loud.”

Instead, it caters to those with no need to announce their wealth. “People who have had money for a long time don’t need to prove it. When I see the names of those who buy Fedeli – people worth eight, nine billion – it makes me proud. They can buy anything, and they buy us.”

He cites Patek Philippe, Goyard and The Row as philosophical neighbours. “Something like a Patek Philippe, many people don’t even know what it is because it doesn’t look special. You could walk down the street in London or Milan wearing it without worrying. Or Goyard. They even do bags with the pattern on the inside so you cannot see it, yet every shop does incredibly well with queues outside. It’s the way they think – they want to be silent. This is the mentality. That’s the way we are.”

This mindset comes with an absolute refusal to compromise on quality. If a wealthy client requests a Fedeli piece strewn with logos, the answer is still no. “I don’t change my policy. That’s the way we are. If you like it, follow us. If you don’t, that’s OK.”

Fedeli’s reputation was further underscored in June 2023, when the Prada and Zegna groups each acquired a 15 per cent stake. Typically, such deals signal rapid expansion; instead, both shareholders have backed Luigi’s steady, deliberate approach. “Until now, they let me do what I want,” he says. “We’re growing slowly, but it’s OK. I don’t live for growth. I live for something else.”

This calm confidence follows decades of work. “I started working with my father and grandfather when I was young, only 20 or 22 years old, and now I’ve been working on my own for the past 16 or 17 years.

“I was very lucky to be able to lead the company with both of them. They taught me a lot. I don’t think I have made too many mistakes,” Luigi says with a smile.

There is an air of unhurried pursuit of perfection that defines the brand. Fedeli pieces are not mass-produced; they are carefully handmade by artisans with years of experience. Luigi notes that everyone in the company shares the same measured mindset. “The people working with me, they’re all the same. We all work with the idea of doing a good job, making a good product and working with people to have a good relationship. And that’s the most important thing for me.”

Beyond Fedeli, the wider luxury sector faces pressure over supply chains and labour practices. As a brand committed to producing exclusively in Italy, this is something Luigi takes seriously – and speaks about with rare candour. “The problem isn’t making in Italy – it’s how it’s made,” he explains. “Suppliers subcontract to others, who subcontract to others, and sometimes those people don’t work in fair conditions. If you’re paying someone three euros an hour for the work, that’s not ‘Made in Italy’, that’s slavery.”

Auditing every step of the supply chain – including the suppliers of his suppliers – is costly, Luigi admits, but essential. “It costs a lot of money. But it’s necessary. Being ‘Made in Italy’ must mean everything is done properly. I cannot look away. I mean, we are selling expensive things – everything has to be correct,” he says.

With Luigi’s son Niccolò, the fourth generation at Fedeli, joining in 2016 to grow the brand’s American market, the company continues its quiet expansion. In July, the brand opened its first regional store in Dubai Mall, and has operated a pop-up at the Four Seasons Hotel in Dubai since November last year – both launched with characteristic restraint, letting word spread naturally.

Listening to Luigi, one senses that his confidence stems from conviction rather than bravado. Fedeli’s allure lies in its integrity and its refusal to chase the noise of luxury. “People who know, know,” Luigi tells me. “And for us, that’s enough.”

Dream on

Founded in 2010, a Swiss start-up rewrote the rules of running and raced its way to a $14 billion finish line

ON

Last month, Kenyan long-distance runner Hellen Obiri set a course record at the New York City Marathon, clocking 2:19:51. She didn't only break the old record – she obliterated it by two and a half minutes. And she did so while wearing the Cloudboom Strike LightSpray shoes by On.

A few days later, the exhilaration is still palpable during a chat with On co-founder Olivier Bernhard. "Emotional rollercoaster," he says. "It gets me every time. Maybe because I've been there myself, I have literally been in their shoes. I wish I had run the marathon – probably would've been easier than just watching it."

Obiri's achievement delights him. "This is what sport is all about. It's so honest and authentic."

Bernhard knows exactly what it takes to reach such heights. Before launching On in 2010 with friends David Allemann and Caspar Coppetti, he was a professional athlete – three-time world champion, European champion and 15-time Swiss champion in duathlon and Ironman events. That experience informed the company's founding mission: to create the ultimate performance footwear.

Searching for the perfect balance between cushioned landing and explosive lift-off, Bernhard began by stapling pieces of garden hose to the soles of shoes. Those experiments evolved into On's signature CloudTec cushioning: hollow pods that absorb landing energy, then lock together to generate powerful propulsion. Because the pods compress both vertically and horizontally, each shoe adapts to a runner's individual style.

It was this breakthrough that attracted Swiss professional tennis player Roger Federer, who joined the company as an investor and collaborator in 2019.

Professional insight remains On's competitive edge, Bernhard says. "Feedback is what allows us to lift every product to the next level. I was a professional athlete, but I was not asked for feedback. It's a waste of knowledge, as I was the one at the end of the chain demanding the most of the product."

But building for elite competition comes with pressure. "The dream is to deliver the best power possible. But the New York City Marathon or Olympic Games come with a date. So we have to not only deliver the shoe, but also deliver it when the athlete needs it."

On's reputation for performance and coherence continues to grow. Every product is clearly defined by purpose – the Roger for tennis hard courts, the off-road Cloudvista 2 for wet, mixed terrain, the Cloud 6 Waterproof for daily wear. Clothing ranges from ultralight windproof jackets to heat-wicking tops designed for wider training temperatures.

Innovation sits at the centre. The Cloudboom Strike LS worn by Obiri – also used when she took bronze at the Paris 2024 Olympic marathon – is built with On's new LightSpray technology. A robotic arm winds a continuous thermoplastic thread around a carbon-fibre mould, producing a featherlight, seamless, sock-like shoe in just three minutes, weighing only 170g. "LightSpray is not just another product; it's a revolutionary long-term innovation, because it's a new way to make shoes," Bernhard says.

Left, On collaborated with Loewe for a capsule collection that included the Cloudtilt trainers
Opposite page, professional runners and On Athletics Club Global Team, from left, Dathan Ritzenhein, Joe Klecker, Hellen Obiri, Patrick Kiprop, Ryan Ford and Laura Thweatt
Below, Olivier Bernhard, co-founder of On

It's sustainable, too. The process uses less material, requires smaller machinery and could allow On to create micro-hubs where shoes are made locally, cutting shipping distances and environmental impact.

Another innovation, the Cloudmonster 2, incorporates On's patented Speedboard – a nylon-blend plate that transfers energy from heel strike into forward propulsion. It stems from Bernhard's frustration at having to choose between cushioning and responsiveness. "I always thought, how beautiful would it be to combine these two things in one shoe, and deliver a new running sensation."

When On launched, industry insiders warned against competing with giants such as Nike and Adidas. Bernhard brushed it off. "When we founded On, we were no one. Because I was a runner, I wanted to line up at the start line and see who finishes first."

The ability to innovate meant the expected battle never materialised. "We thought the finish line was so far off that we would never win. But we actually won very quickly," he says. Fifteen years in, On reached a market capitalisation of $13.8 billion to $14 billion in November.

But success brings new expectations. "I've been a world champion. I wouldn't say that was easy, but in a naive way, you just race and look around before the finish line and say, OK, I'm the world champion. But second time around, everyone is expecting you to finish first again. That's the position we're in now." His answer lies in the company's DNA. "We are very proud to have Swiss engineering in our shoes."

Despite its technical rigour, On has become an unexpected fashion favourite. Its minimalist silhouettes caught the eye of Loewe, resulting in a 2022 capsule that fused Swiss precision with Mediterranean luxury, including the Cloudtilt trainer and its deep, comfort-oriented sole. More recently, the brand unveiled its second collaboration with American actress Zendaya: the Cloudzone Moon, built for all-day wear with CloudTec cushioning.

Still, the athlete's mindset remains central – curiosity, resilience and learning through failure. "We celebrate the failure of the month," Bernhard says with a laugh. "It's not a blaming session at all, because we learn from it."

The brand is also investing in community. Through run clubs, events and apparel engineered for extreme climates, its mission – "to ignite the human spirit through movement" – is spreading globally, including its first GCC retail space in Riyadh.

Part of that vision includes addressing what happens to shoes at the end of their life. In September, On introduced the Cloudrise Cyclon 1.1, featuring a Speedboard made from leftover materials and recycled Cloudneo shoes – a quiet but meaningful step towards circular design.

"Innovation will remain at the core of everything we do," Bernhard says. "There's no reason to deliver just another shoe in a different colour. There has to be underlying innovation pushing us to a higher level. The future is On."

Sarah Maisey

SARAH TAIBAH

Sarah Taibah has never known what to do with labels. When people pin them on her, she feels inauthentic. When she pushes back, she feels pretentious. So she aims for something in between – an insistence on honesty, even when it's messy, even when it's misunderstood.

"I know I can't bring everything – some things are too personal, of course – but I try to bring as much of myself on screen as I can," she says.

It can unsettle people who expect polish, but the ones who stay become loyal. Over time, that honesty has built a small, committed cult of viewers who see themselves in what Taibah makes.

That connection began with *Jameel Jeddan* – the 2022 MBC series she created and starred in, about a young woman who wakes from a five-year coma and has to finish high school in a Saudi Arabia she barely recognises. What began as a stylised, offbeat comedy, built an unexpectedly intimate fan base, especially among young women who wrote to her as if they already knew her – exactly as she intended.

"I want girls to look at me on screen and feel like I'm their cousin," she says. "Someone familiar."

Before she ever acted, Taibah was an illustrator. She studied fine art and spent years creating children's books – more than 15 of them – long before she imagined herself in front of or behind a camera. Even now, she still carries a notebook everywhere – a mix of diary pages, loose drawings and half-formed ideas. It's where she goes when things feel loud, a place to steady the rush in her head.

A year of personal and creative upheaval forced the Saudi creative to stop, reset and rethink. Her new film captures the version of herself that emerged on the other side. Taibah tells **William Mullally** her story

IN THE MOMENT

On the cover: Single-breasted velvet jacket; embroidered cotton shirt; and Galleria leather bag, all from Prada
This page: Single-breasted fabric coat; fleece leggings; leather boots; Galleria leather bag; and Robot Saffiano leather key ring charm, all from Prada

This page: Cotton polo shirt; embellished pinstripe wool midi skirt; and Galleria leather bag, all from Prada
Opposite page: Single-breasted cotton canvas coat; leather belt; Galleria leather bag; Robot Saffiano leather key ring charm; and leather pumps, all from Prada

> I have to remind myself to be here, not in yesterday or tomorrow. I need reminders to get out of my brain and get back in my body

And things often feel a bit too loud. From afar, Taibah can look like the life of the party, but crowded rooms overwhelm her, and it takes careful self-management to tap into the collective joy she feels with her fellow creatives.

"A lot of people think I'm an extrovert," says Taibah. "But I'm really a high-functioning introvert."

More than anything, she tries to stay grounded. Her notebook is full of affirmations, as are the walls and mirrors at home or whatever hotel room she happens to be staying in. "I make magic. I am balanced. Replace anger with passion. Things like that," she says.

Her hands are often covered in smudged ink from the notes she writes on them – usually reminders or grocery lists. "They're in my face that way," she says.

There's one phrase she returns to more than any other. It first came to her during a depressive episode after returning from an artist residency in Europe – back home and feeling like her creative momentum had dropped off again.

"I wrote it on big pieces of paper across my wall: 'Nothing to wait for. It's happening now.'"

Now, that line is everywhere – in her notebooks, on room-service menus and scribbled across her bathroom mirror.

"I have to remind myself to be here, not in yesterday or tomorrow," she says. "Because my brain loves yesterday and tomorrow. It's being in the now that I struggle with. I need constant reminders to get out of my brain and get back in my body."

For a long time, she managed it. She worked, she acted, she wrote. She carried that phrase with her like a compass – until the thing she cared about most fell apart.

She had spent nearly two years developing what she calls her "baby" – a series she believed would define her next chapter. She built it with a close collaborator whose voice was deeply woven into the world they were creating. When that person stepped away, the project halted.

"It was a heartbreak," she says.

She recovered, made *Jameel Jeddan*, and when it was done, she went back to the "baby" and rebuilt it almost entirely. By the time she finished – every beat planned, every detail sharpened – she realised it was the best thing she had ever written. For the first time in years, she felt exactly where she wanted to be.

Then came the next blow. Something shifted internally at the platform developing it, and they told Taibah they could no longer move forward. The show stalled. And something in her stalled with it.

"That was the second heartbreak," she says. "And it triggered something in me – I got an artist block worse than I'd ever gotten before. I realised that I don't have an identity – I don't know who I am without art and creativity and work," she says.

She pauses, remembering the sensation of facing that emptiness. Everything stopped. Her creativity. Her momentum. Her sense of self. "I put a pause on everything," she says.

At the same time, her mother – her biggest inspiration – was dealing with health issues. Emotionally, everything pressed in at once.

The block didn't arrive as silence – it arrived as a question Taibah suddenly couldn't answer.

But, just like it often was, the answer was waiting for her in her notebooks. It was a seed planted years earlier, long before the heartbreaks. The concept was simple: A guy who wants to kill meets a girl who wants to die. But when she'd initially tried to make it work, the idea didn't come together.

After praying, the most alive I feel is on set. That's where everything goes quiet

After the collapse – the heartbreak of losing her series, followed by the first major creative block she had ever experienced – it was the only project she could bring herself to look at again. She pulled the folder out.

This time, something moved. The characters arrived clearly – a girl who feels cursed; a doctor with heart problems who gets a secret thrill from surgery. The tone was sharper. The world made sense.

She sent the new draft to the Torino Film Lab without expecting much. She was accepted. And when she arrived in Amsterdam for the workshop, the momentum continued. "It was such a good week," she says. "Things finally started to click."

Working with her long-time collaborator Anas Ba-Tahaf, she rebuilt the project from the ground up. Scenes tightened. The emotional logic held. The block, finally, lifted.

By the end of the programme, her writing had momentum again – and with it, a sense of herself Taibah thought she'd lost.

What came back with the writing wasn't confidence so much as clarity. She remembered what she loved – not the industry, not the recognition, but the craft itself. The decisions that thrill her. The discipline of tightening scenes until they're lean. The satisfaction of removing anything indulgent. "I love killing my darlings," she says, referencing the editing ploy of eliminating words and ideas that do not serve a story well.

Taibah's taste has always skewed towards the sharp and the uncomfortable. She talks about *Chewing Gum*, *Fleabag*, *Girls* and *Search Party* the way some people talk about teachers – with affection and a kind of creative allegiance. What she responds to is honesty that isn't softened,

This page: Velvet top; washed denim jeans; Petit Sac Noir mini nappa leather bucket bag; and suede pumps, all from Prada
Opposite page: Double-breasted suede Caban jacket; fleece leggings; and Galleria leather bag, all from Prada

This page: Wool and cashmere crew-neck sweater; satin shorts; cotton jersey T-shirt; Galleria leather bags; and Robot Saffiano leather key ring charms, all from Prada
Opposite page: Crew-neck cotton sweater; jacket; skirt; Galleria leather bag; and leather pumps, all from Prada

comedy that comes from wounds rather than punchlines, female characters who are messy, unguarded, contradictory.

"I love dark comedy," Taibah says. "It's the most real. It's the closest to how life feels."

There are parts of her in her *A Matter of Life and Death* character, to be sure – in a way, it's a way of working through her own obsession with the past and future. But she's also Taibah's reclamation of the manic pixie dream girl trope, a familiar archetype, often portrayed as a two-dimensional fantasy, lacking agency of its own.

"I wanted to show her perspective," she says. "Her wants, her needs."

Taibah says this lightly, but it echoes something deeper in her: a refusal to be flattened into an image. Years ago, a casting director told her to fix her teeth and get fillers. She didn't. She never considered it.

"I have to be honest – things like that do play with your self-esteem," she says. "But I'm not going to do it."

On set, she feels fully present in a way she struggles to access elsewhere. "After praying, the most alive I ever feel is on set," she says. "That's where everything goes quiet." The performance she has given opposite Yagoub Alfarhan is unlike anything she's done.

I love dark comedy. It's the most real. It's the closest to how life feels

He brings discipline, sharpness and a kind of gravity; while she brings instinct and volatility. Together, they found something that felt alive. And for the first time since the heartbreak, Taibah felt like she kept finding herself where she should be – in the moment.

At the same time, another version of her is appearing on screens in *Hoba*, Majid Al Ansari's Emirati horror film, now in cinemas across the Gulf. The character – the film's terrifying villain – is so unlike anything she's done that those who have seen it say they can't even recognise her in the role. "That made me so happy. I thought: 'OK, I can do this too.'"

For her, that was enough. Proof she isn't bound to one tone or version of herself – that reinvention sits more easily on her than she once believed.

And with that renewed confidence, she's bounding forward like never before. She's writing again. She's acting again. She's scripting a feature – not her idea this time, which she finds strangely freeing. It lets her treat writing as a craft rather than an extension of her identity.

The series that broke her still sits in a folder. She isn't ready to open it. "One day," she says, not promising anything. What she carries now is simpler, steadier. She knows what silence feels like. She knows what losing her identity feels like. And she knows what it takes to climb out of it. Taibah keeps writing notes to herself, not because she wants motivation, but to remind her she's headed in the right direction.

She repeats it: "Nothing to wait for. It's happening now."

The reminder is working. For the first time in a long time, she feels present in her own life. The work is here again. The rhythm is back. And, finally, so is she.

FASHION DIRECTOR: **SARAH MAISEY**
PHOTOGRAPHER: **BEN COPE**
MAKE-UP ARTIST AND HAIRSTYLIST: **KAROLINA KUROWICKA**
STYLING ASSISTANT: **MAANOSHRI GANGULY**
SPECIAL THANKS: **NAJD ALTAHER**
PHOTO SHOOT CREATED IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PRADA

THE WRITE STUFF

Once dismissed as a relic, the fountain pen has returned as a symbol of taste, craft and contemplation. **Josh Sims** heads into the quietly booming world of nibs, inks and the people who swear by them

Of all the things you might not expect the young folk on social media to get excited about, this tops the list. "The explosion of interest in stationery over recent years – all those notebooks, paper and desk accessories – and the practice of journaling has become a kind of gateway," says Patrick Yandell, brand manager for Omas, the Italian maker of what sometimes pompously gets called writing instrument. "So, yes, we now have penfluencers."

But not just any pen. As much as the digital world has sparked a counter-revolution in analogue technologies – vinyl, film cameras and the like – the fountain pen is back in favour. Yandell argues it answers a need for the tactile and, more surprisingly, the meditative. "I'd hesitate to use words like mindful or therapeutic, but that's what it is," he says. A fountain pen is easier on the hand, requires almost no pressure and, crucially, slows the writing process to help clarify thought.

As novelist Graham Greene once noted: "My two fingers on a typewriter have never connected with my brain. But my hand on a pen does. A fountain pen, of course. Ball-point pens are only good for filling out forms on a plane." Fellow writers Paul Auster, Tony Kushner and Colm Tóibín have likewise sung the praises of the fountain pen for how it best gives vent to their thoughts. Because a nib gradually moulds to its owner's hand – which is why you should never share one – the connection becomes more intimate still.

That, however, is not the only reason for the fountain pen surviving against the odds, argues Giuseppe Aquila, the third generation of his family to run pen manufacturer Montegrappa. "Did I have a choice not to? No," he says with a laugh. "It was like an arranged marriage." Half of the company's sales are now fountain pens, despite or maybe because of them being so traditional.

The basic idea of a pen carrying its own ink supply goes back 390 years to German inventor Daniel Schwenter, who set a quill inside another quill and sealed the end with cork, but it wasn't efficient for daily use. Lewis Waterman's 1884 model is widely considered to be the first practical fountain pen. Waterman – an insurance salesman, who no doubt delighted in collecting signatures – had the insight of placing an air hole in the nib and supplying ink to that through a grooved feeding mechanism, which in turn was held by a barrel that contained the ink.

Technology has since solved the frustrations that once drove people away – leaks, blockages, scratchy nibs, messy filling mechanisms, even the need for constant refilling. Today's pens have capacious wells cut directly into their barrels. Omas offers double and even triple-stacked nibs, allowing one pen to create both razor-fine and broad, paintbrush-like strokes – a popular feature in the Middle East, given the region's penchant for calligraphy.

But more than their functional use, fountain pens have, Aquila says, become expressions of shape, finish, materials, decoration and craft. Omas, for example, is set to release an update of its famed – and sometimes counterfeited – 360 model with a triangular barrel.

Italian company Omas offers double and even triple-stacked nibs, allowing one pen to create both razor-fine and broad, paintbrush-like strokes

The sheer collectibility of fountain pens is further magnified by the rise of limited-edition models

OMAS

Status is increasingly expressed through difference – you don't necessarily want the same Montblanc pen as everyone else

CONWAY STEWART; MONTEGRAPPA

Conway Stewart, left, and Montegrappa, above, are known for their limited-edition pens

Japanese maker Namiki is beloved for its lacquer and filigree work. Montegrappa may use its proprietary resin, Montegrappite, or its dwindling stock of vintage cellulose, but also ceramic, mammoth ivory, titanium and carbon fibre.

"Materials sometimes bring functional benefits – such as reduced weight, for those who like that – but they're often a challenge to work with, so as a company we have to keep developing new skills, from engraving to gem-setting," explains Aquila, who, in order to meet demand for an increasingly personalised product, has recently added three lines to Montegrappa's online "configurator", which allows the brand's clients to design their own pen. "Making a fountain pen goes beyond its engineering," he stresses.

In that, the fountain pen echoes the enduring appeal of the mechanical watch – another object that has been functionally outmoded, but still enjoys a booming market. "When digital watches came along, everyone said the mechanical watch was dead. But look what's happened with that industry," notes Aquila. "And I think the same is set to happen for fountain pens."

The sheer collectibility of fountain pens is further magnified by the rise of limited-edition models. Montegrappa has licences with the likes of Lamborghini, as well as the Harry Potter and James Bond franchisees, while Omas will release a line inspired by the works of famous architects. British pen-maker Conway Stewart has reported double-digit growth every year for the past decade now. The company has made special pens marking Victory in Europe Day, the coronation of King Charles and even replicated the Conway Stewart pen used to squirt ink into a villain's eyes in *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*.

When the likes of Rolls-Royce come calling to the company for an exclusive model, it's not a rollerball they want, but a fountain pen. That, argues Conway Stewart's managing director Alastair Adams, is because it remains a symbol of wealth or power, especially as it has grown more visible with time. "There are only a few things that a man can carry that show his status – especially if you wear a traditional dress – that's his watch, his cufflinks and his pen," he explains. "And status is increasingly expressed through difference – you don't necessarily want the same Montblanc pen as everyone else."

Not that there's anything wrong with one of the fountain pens considered to be a classic, such as the fat-barrelled Montblanc Meisterstück 149 – carried by the likes of Ernest Hemingway, John F Kennedy and the cinematic James Bond.

There's also Pelikan 100, Parker Duofold, as well as Parker 51 – which was favoured by Bauhaus designer Laszlo Moholy-Nagy and was designed by Marlin Baker in 1941 with a barrel made from the same Lucite material used to make the canopy of the Second World War-era Mustang fighter. Today, however, the options are vast. "I think that's why if you're a fountain pen enthusiast, you almost certainly don't have just one," notes Yandell. "Fountain pens are, for many, a hobby – people have different pens for different occasions, different-coloured pens to match different-coloured inks. Sure, fountain pens are tools, but nobody really needs one. People have them because, in different ways, they're emotional products, which is easier to understand when you try using one."

A pencil is good if you make a lot of mistakes. A ball pen is fine for paperwork. But if you want what's written to be personal, or to reflect gravitas or a sense of occasion – as the public signing of many treaties testifies to – then it has to be a fountain pen.

WINTER WONDERLAND

As the weather gets cooler, it can be an opportunity to switch up the timepiece on your wrist, as **Mehdi Mabrouk** explains

Clockwise from **l**eft, **Aude**mars Piguet Royal **Oak 'Jum**bo' 15202XT; **Grand** Seiko SBGA211; **and Ja**eger-LeCoultre **Rever**so Tribute **Chron**ograph

Winter in the city changes the way a watch behaves. Coats get heavier, colours deepen, the light turns flat and silver. Suddenly, you notice how a case slips beneath a cuff, how a dial tone plays against flannel, wool or cashmere. In summer, a watch is decoration; in winter, it becomes part of the uniform – a quiet, necessary companion.

Some pieces handle that shift better than others. They are less concerned with brilliance and more with bearing. It is not so much about drawing attention across a room, but more about sitting naturally in the muted palette of the colder months – something you glimpse on your wrist on a grey afternoon and feel, instinctively, that it belongs.

Take the Audemars Piguet Royal Oak in steel with a grey dial, for example. On paper, it is a design icon. In winter, it becomes something sterner and more architectural. The broad brushed surfaces of the case and integrated bracelet catch what little light the day offers – with a purposeful metallic glow.

The slate tapisserie dial echoes rooftops, pavements after rain, a dim winter sky. Under a long navy coat with a dark knit, it sheds its trophy aura and settles into a city's rhythm. It isn't delicate and doesn't pretend to be, either – it is structure and steel, and in winter, that honesty feels exactly right.

Where the Royal Oak channels the city, the Grand Seiko SBGA211 Snowflake represents something more easy-going. The nickname hints at novelty, but the dial offers something else entirely. It's white, but alive – a field of fine texture, tiny ridges and soft shadows that catch the light like snow when you take the time to really see it. The impression is calm rather than cute – early-morning cold, clear air, the world before it goes into movement.

The titanium case keeps it unexpectedly light, a relief when you're already layered. Grand Seiko's finishing gives you razor-edged lines and mirrored facets that contrast beautifully with brushed wool and soft knits. Worn under a cream sweater or grey flannel, it becomes a poetic detail in an otherwise relaxed frame. Not necessarily a thematic winter watch – but a refined piece of engineering entirely at ease in the season.

If the Snowflake is the quiet morning, the Vacheron Constantin Overseas in deep blue captures escape. Winter travel has its own cadence: airports, train platforms, late check-ins, early departures. In these in-between spaces, it helps to wear something that feels built for the journey rather than to be hidden away in a safe.

The Overseas does exactly that. The navy dial appears almost changeable – near-black at night, opening into deep blue by day. The case and bracelet have a crisp geometry, but the proportions remain easy and wearable. Most compelling is the strap system: on steel it suits the office with a coat; on blue rubber, it belongs in a mountain town with boots and a parka; and on leather, it becomes something of a dinner companion. One watch, three moods – a winter traveller's best friend.

And then there is the Jaeger-LeCoultre Reverso, which is in its element in the cosy interiors of the season. It isn't about travel or skyline steel; it is about rooms, conversations and the small rituals of dressing when it's cold outside. With its slim rectangular case on a dark leather strap and its silvered dial with that faintly frosted sheen, it becomes a natural dress watch for the season.

AUDEMARS PIGUET; ALAMY; JAEGER-LECOULTRE

Everything is quietly considered – crisp numerals, elegant hands, nothing extraneous. It works with a white shirt and charcoal suit, with black tie, or with a fine roll-neck worn under a jacket. The famous flip of the case, once a practical gesture, feels now like a private one – a small, tactile reminder that time can still be something you manipulate.

What unites all four watches is a kind of restraint. The palette narrows to greys, blues and whites, while textures deepen across brushed steel, grained dials and confident lines. These pieces feel made for wool coats, leather gloves, scarves and walks in darkened streets.

A winter watch is about mood and feels perfectly in tune with the world outside

In winter, what matters most is that everything on the dial feels necessary, nothing is ornamental. A winter watch isn't about specifications; it's about mood. It's about the moment at seven in the evening, already dark, when you glimpse your wrist in a window and the watch feels perfectly in tune with the world outside.

The Royal Oak in grey is the structural one – steel, rhythm, the city in winter. The Grand Seiko Snowflake is the quiet one – patient, textured, full of soft light. The Vacheron Constantin Overseas in navy is the traveller – flexible, assured, built to move. The Jaeger-LeCoultre Reverso is the elegant one – for warm rooms where the season finally slows.

Choose any one, live with it through a long winter, and see how it responds when the days shorten and the layers multiply. If it still feels like an extension of you when spring arrives, you chose well.

The long way round

Kieran Morris travels across Uzbekistan in search of the ghosts of its ancient empires and finds a country that is still discovering itself

My first impression of Tashkent came as a taste – the metallic tang of smog in a city undergoing yet another transformation. The ancient capital, which has been levelled and rebuilt countless times across millennia, is currently obscured by the dust of its latest reincarnation. Twinkling towers sprout from the earth at remarkable pace, while the midday air hangs heavy with the price of this progress.

Uzbekistan is in the midst of an extraordinary pivot towards tourism, putting billions into the national effort while pitching itself as the cultural heart of Central Asia. The nation, once sealed off to foreigners by Stalin, and largely inaccessible to tourists only a decade ago, is now opening itself to the future by reaching into its turbulent past.

I checked into the Wyndham Garden for my first night, a slick base just a short cab ride from Tashkent North station, my launch pad for catching the high-speed Afrosiyob train through the heart of the Timurid empire. Before leaving the capital, I managed entry to Gravity Bar at Sapiens Hotel, a members-only rooftop sanctuary where Tashkent's new elite convene at the end of the day. From here, you watch the new Uzbekistan take shape in real time – construction cranes pirouetting against the sunset and minarets competing with LED billboard screens.

The following morning, I visited the Centre for Islamic Civilisation at Hazrati Imam complex, a gilded show of strength for the new regime. Its centrepiece is the eighth-century Uthman Quran, one of the world's oldest, looted from Damascus 600 years later by Amir Timur, better known to English-speakers as Tamerlane. I would chase this man's ghost for the next week. Tamerlane is omnipresent here – the national idol who displaced Karl Marx from the podiums after independence. His statues form the spine of Uzbek identity. In Tashkent, he is on horseback, roving and conquering. Yet it is in Samarkand where his ghost feels most alive, for here, at the heart of his empire, he sits enthroned.

I came off the Afrosiyob train with one clear priority: plov, the national dish of lamb and rice. Not just any plov, but Samarkand plov, which arrives as architectural layers you are explicitly forbidden from mixing. The oil catches light in ways that seem deliberately theatrical; chickpeas and garlic act as structural support and chillies are positioned like warning flags. Of all the plov I had, Samarkand's stood above the rest.

After lunch, a visit to Tamerlane's mausoleum, the Gur-e-Amir, stopped me cold. Step inside and you find his tomb positioned deliberately at his Sufi teacher's feet, alongside his children, rather than above them.

DMITRIY EFIMOV / UNSPLASH

Hazrati Imam complex is home to the Centre for Islamic Civilisation and the Barak Khan Madrasa, pictured

Uzbekistan is building its future by excavating its history. It is a nation where ancient trade routes are being reborn as high-speed rail corridors

GETTY; FARKHOD SAYDULLAEV / UNSPLASH; MAXIMUM EXPOSURE

The conqueror, who sacked Damascus, chose humility in death, a contradiction that fascinated me as much as any tale of his military victories. In the evening, I headed to Registan for an ambitious light show. The projections could easily have descended into kitsch, yet there's a certain gravitas to how many eras have shaped this 2,000-year-old city. Uzbek history is splashed across earthquake-tilted madrasas in patterns that complement, rather than compete with the architecture. The square leans noticeably, imperial perfection interrupted by tectonic reality.

The city's grand necropolis, Shah-i-Zinda, struck a different chord. Crypts climb upwards in aggressive blue, their tiles fired at three alternating temperatures for durability. They now sit beside Soviet restoration attempts that look superficially similar, but lack the indefinable quality separating craft from replication. But, really, it is about the steps. Pilgrims count them ascending, make a wish and count them descending. Matching numbers means your wish is granted; a discrepancy ensures your return.

If Samarkand is marked by the preservation of its glories, Bukhara is marked by their persistence and their absence. The Ark fortress was the most astonishing site of the trip. Once a self-contained citadel built for the pleasures of the Emir of Bukhara, it now exists in semi-dilapidation, half-preserved and half-annihilated by a brutal Russian aerial assault in 1920. Brits like myself weren't always so welcome here. During the Great Game, Colonel Charles Stoddart arrived in 1838 to forge an alliance, but made the fatal error of approaching the Emir's gates on horseback, a catastrophic breach of protocol. He was imprisoned and when Captain Arthur Conolly (under the playful pseudonym "Khan Ali") arrived in 1841 to negotiate his release, he too was captured. Both men were thrown into the infamous Bug Pit, a dungeon filled with vermin and rotting flesh. After months of torture, both were publicly beheaded in June 1842.

Beyond the Ark looms Bukhara's famous Kalon minaret, another tool of the Emir's brutal rule, where miscreants were forced to climb step by step before being thrown from the top. It overlooks a market square showcasing brilliant Islamic architectural acoustics, with ceiling domes calibrated to amplify the sound of falling coins, ensuring no transaction went unnoticed. Further out, the last Emir's summer palace, the Sitorai Mohi-Hosa, offers a rare glimpse into 19th-century Russian opulence. Peacocks are still kept on site; one can easily imagine them strutting through the courtyards, their turquoise plumage echoing the pearly blue of the region's mosques.

The history here runs beyond Islam. Structures such as Samani Mausoleum display intricate Zoroastrian brickwork that, after days of similarly sculpted mosques and minarets, comes as genuinely refreshing. And in Bukhara, where the land is flat and timber scarce, the use of wood becomes a display of extreme wealth. This is evidenced in the spindly wooden pillars holding up Bolo-Hauz Mosque facing the Ark, where courtiers would once pave the streets with carpets, so the Emir could walk to his Friday prayers without his feet touching the dust.

The seven-and-a-half-hour coach journey to Khiva tested my patience. I am delighted to report you will not suffer this, as the high-speed train finally reaches this transcendent old city next year. Upon arrival at 11pm, dehydrated and dusty, I checked into Darvaza Hotel, a newly opened luxury property directly opposite the old town. There were drinks and snacks waiting, for which I was grateful. The walled old city, Itchan Kala, glowed under pitch-black skies, its stubby blue towers illuminated like something from a fever dream.

Dinner at nearby Ayvon that night was a break from the plov hegemony, consisting of manti dumplings filled with lamb and pumpkin, a Khorezm speciality. The next day, exploring Itchan Kala, I heard tales of craftsmen killed by jealous emirs to prevent them from replicating their architectural magic elsewhere. I visited the mausoleum of Pahlavan Mahmoud, Khiva's beloved patron saint, an undefeated wrestler – a Timurid Hulk Hogan – with perhaps the grandest monument in the entire district. Currently, Khiva feels like the end of the line, a final outpost before the vast emptiness of the Karakum desert swallows everything whole. But this isolation is temporary. Once the Afrosiyob reaches Khiva, the four great cities will be threaded together, transforming what was once an arduous odyssey into a seamless journey.

Returning to Tashkent days later, I found myself back at Gravity Bar. With a week of Uzbekistan behind me, the tombs, the madrasas and the brutal history of emirs and conquerors, I watched the construction cranes continue their patient work against the evening sky. The contradiction struck me fully then: a nation building its future by excavating its history, where Tamerlane's statues guard shopping districts and ancient trade routes are being reborn as high-speed rail corridors. The dust will settle eventually. The towers will stop rising. But Uzbekistan's story has always been one of metamorphosis. Six centuries after Tamerlane, the country is still becoming itself.

Clockwise from opposite page, Sitorai Mohi-Hosa palace offers a glimpse into 19th-century Russian opulence; Khiva's walled old city, Itchan Kala; Amir Timur monument at Amir Timur Square in Tashkent; and Gravity rooftop bar at Sapiens Hotel

THE GRANDEST TOUR

Maserati invented the original grand tourer in 1947 – and it seems to have perfected the formula again, writes **Nasri Atallah**

There are a few things I've always loved about Maserati. The fact it was founded by no fewer than five brothers, for a start – can you imagine the arguments? Or that the company began life making spark plugs, developing technology for the Italian government during the First World War. Then there's the racing pedigree – the glorious Maserati 250F, which was driven by Juan Manuel Fangio and won the 1957 Formula One World Championship.

But my favourite fact is this: in 1947, Maserati essentially invented a new category with the A6 1500 GranTurismo – the first car built for both luxury and performance on real roads. It created the grand tourer, still my favourite kind of car. A machine that delivers power without requiring a physiotherapist on retainer.

The first generation of the modern GranTurismo arrived in 2007, around the same time I spent a couple of ill-fated years in the wealth-management arm of a major

The Maserati GranTurismo 2025 features a twin-turbo 3.0-litre engine, borrowed from the marque's MC20 supercar, but detuned for this model

MASERATI

Swiss bank. While plotting my future millions – perfectly timed for the global meltdown of 2008 – I convinced myself success would look like me behind the wheel of a GranTurismo.

I then made the genius decision to leave finance for the famously stable world of media, so the Maserati-shaped gap in the garage endures. And, honestly, over the past few years, I'm not sure the desire would have stuck. The Maserati line-up was feeling a little fatigued.

Which is why this new GranTurismo feels like such a breath of fresh air. It is still recognisable thanks to its sensuous, ludicrously long bonnet and sinewy lines, yet updated enough to turn heads on Dubai's supercar-congested streets in 2025. The interior is properly modern and the car feels responsive, tight and alive. Inside, you get a 12.2-inch digital dashboard and a 12.3-inch touchscreen handling most primary controls. I often complain that we've reached peak-screen in modern cars, but this one feels sensibly proportioned. My lone gripe? A hazard button should always be a physical button – something I can slam without scrolling through a user interface while doing 120kph.

And then there's the engine – the part that matters once the novelty of the screens wears off. The Trofeo's Nettuno V6 is a reminder that Maserati still knows how to make something with a pulse. It's quick in the way that feels usable rather than theatrical – plenty of low-end shove for city bursts, a satisfying surge once you open it up and enough exhaust drama to remind you you're not in something sensible. What I liked most was the confidence it inspires. The car is powerful, of course, but never intimidating – it offers the sort of performance that flatters you rather than exposes your limits. A grown-up kind of fast.

The grand tourer performs like a sports car, but more importantly, it welcomes you in

It's almost enough to make you forget the twin-turbo 3.0-litre masterpiece under its interminable bonnet is borrowed from the unhinged Maserati MC20 supercar, detuned to a civilised level of vehicular aggression: 542hp arranged not for shock, but for sensation.

But back to the only thing that really matters: how the car makes you feel. And across a weekend of zipping around town in the Trofeo edition – tuned for sharper performance – my overwhelming thought was, I could easily spend a lot of my life in this.

That's the whole point of a grand tourer. It performs like a sports car, but more importantly, it welcomes you in. You don't feel you need an engineering team in the passenger seat to extract its best. It just works. The Maserati GranTurismo is the kind of car you pop out to the shops in and think: what if I just switch my phone off, roll the windows down, blast some Tame Impala and keep driving? It's definitely back on the vision board.

CAPITAL SUCCESS

In only a few months, Japanese restaurant 3Fils Abu Dhabi has become a coveted dining spot in the emirate, writes **Katy Gillett**

From an unassuming single-room dining space in Jumeirah Fishing Harbour to a full-blown, four-storey restaurant at the swanky Abu Dhabi Edition Hotel, 3Fils has come a long way since it opened about 10 years ago. Back then, its approach to modern Japanese fusion cuisine was a revelation for Dubai and it quickly garnered a cult following, among both the city's chefs and foodies.

The three original founders – Emiratis Abdulhakim and Adnan Ali, along with Singapore-born chef Akmal Anuar – maintained the restaurant has always been about "making complex simple" – offering their three fils (a play on two cents) on what dining should be. It's this ethos that has won the Emirati-owned eatery accolade after accolade, including securing the No 1 spot on the inaugural Mena's 50 Best Restaurants list three years ago and making Michelin's Bib Gourmand list annually since 2023. And while the original location in Dubai is still very much a coveted spot, expansion to the capital seemed like a natural progression. "It was time," says head chef Jovani Manalo, who was involved in the launch.

The restaurant, which opened in July, has a kitchen on one floor, plus three sections for diners, including an outdoor rooftop space that's buzzing now it's winter, says Manalo. The team worked hard to replicate what they've achieved in Dubai, but the venue in Abu Dhabi is considerably larger than its sister down Sheikh Zayed Road. "We tried to focus on every detail and we asked ourselves if we needed to do more in a bigger space. I was like: 'No, let's keep the same vibe, make it simple.'"

Simple is something of an understatement for the grand venue that sits alongside Al Bateen Marina, but the simplicity is in its stylish, minimalist design, where wood meets marble, a sweeping staircase and oversized chandeliers. It's refined, but still maintains that distinctly cool vibe the Dubai venue is well known for, like a grown-up version for a different kind of city.

Taking on such a big venue was a nerve-racking decision at first, says Manalo. "There were a couple of times during construction, when it was all ripped out, and I would wonder: 'How are we going to pull this off?' It was our first time handling this big of a space … At the same time, I was like: 'Let's go big. Why not?'"

3Fils has earned a place on Michelin Guide Abu Dhabi's prestigious Bib Gourmand list

3 Fils, left, in Abu Dhabi Edition, is headed by chef Jovani Manalo, opposite page. The menu in the capital features the restaurant's signature dishes, such as karak ice cream, above right

3FILS

This meant hiring and training a much bigger team. They've also tweaked the wildly successful menu to cater to a more local market, keeping the signatures, but adding a few specials. This includes black lime baby chicken with shoyu marinade, ponzu-shiso butter and sudachi (a Japanese citrus fruit); and octopus tempura with muhammara, gremolata and sun-dried tomato. "We play around with local ingredients," says Manalo. "It somehow works and we're going to keep doing that."

The innovation has already paid off in just a few months. In October, the team earned a place on *Michelin Guide Abu Dhabi*'s prestigious Bib Gourmand list, along with Bua Thai Cafe and Goldfish & Yakitori Abu Dhabi, two other Asian spots. 3Fils was also named Opening of the Year. "We felt so high," Manalo says of the moment the award was announced at a glitzy ceremony in Emirates Palace Mandarin Oriental, clearly proud of what he and his team have achieved together in such a short time. "It's like another level."

It's not been without challenges, though. Manalo says there is an element of education they're bringing to the market – just like they did in Dubai back in 2016. "Our role at 3Fils is to educate people more about this cuisine," he says, not in a condescending way, but as a matter of fact. "I think some people are intimidated, particularly by raw food, but we need to educate them on the benefits, like how it's good for your health."

There are several ways they do this. Manalo and his team interact constantly with the diners. The Lab Holding, the company behind 3Fils, also has SLRP Ramen & Rolls Bar, an ode to Tokyo's underground street culture, which has a branch in Yas Food Hall and opened a venue in Dubai's Nad Al Sheba Square last month. Then they play around with pop-ups such as Konbini, which takes beloved dishes and repackages them as ready-to-go meals adapted for events with signature 3Fils flair, while paying homage to Japanese convenience culture.

Day by day, week by week, they're seeing a shift in perception around Japanese cuisine across the country – and the capital's venue is getting exponentially busier. "We have a lot of regular guests in Abu Dhabi now," says the chef.

The next stop for 3Fils is Kuwait, "very soon", Manalo adds. "There's a lot coming," he says with a smile. "I'm trying to understand the country – I think it's going to be close to what we're doing in Abu Dhabi."

As for SLRP, it's growing so fast it's hard to keep up, he adds, which is a good problem to have. There's also a Sharjah opening on the cards.

What about Saudi Arabia? "That's quite interesting," he says. "You never know … We'll see how Kuwait goes first." For now, they're taking it step by step, Manolo says. 3Fils might have started as a tiny dining room in a rustic harbour setting next to where the fishermen hang out, but there's no limit to where it can go. "We're doing it in sequence," adds Manalo. "Little by little."

Sultan Sooud Al Qassemi
ON ART

Two Arab Sheikhs (1978) by Munira Nusseibeh

As the UAE celebrates the opening of Zayed National Museum – a space dedicated to honouring the legacy of UAE Founding Father, the late Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan – it's worth looking back at how artists have captured the likeness of this towering figure who left an indelible mark on all our lives.

Among them is Palestinian artist Munira Nusseibeh, who spent about 15 years in the UAE between 1968 and 1983. Her time in the country made her a witness to Abu Dhabi's rapid development and the wider transformation unfolding under Sheikh Zayed's leadership. In her painting *Two Arab Sheikhs*, from the Jordan National Gallery of Fine Arts, Nusseibeh depicts Sheikh Zayed alongside Sheikh Hamdan bin Mohammed Al Nahyan (1930–1989), a pivotal figure in Abu Dhabi and the UAE during the 1980s as deputy prime minister.

Another work by Nusseibeh, *Serenity* (1973) – which is part of the Barjeel Art Foundation collection and now hangs in the Etihad Museum's Observers of Change exhibition – captures Sheikh Zayed's characteristic contemplative personality and inner peace. The artist's use of sand and tar from Abu Dhabi gestures towards his deep-rootedness in his home emirate and the UAE at large.

Her portrayals of the country and Sheikh Zayed are particularly significant as Nusseibeh counts among the first professional artists to have met both Sheikh Zayed and Mother of the Nation Sheikha Fatima bint Mubarak.

There are few documented examples of Emirati artists painting Sheikh Zayed, with Mohammed Al Ansari, Moosa Al Halyan and Feryal Matar among the only known to me. Many of these works were gifted abroad during official visits, raising the question of whether they might one day be retrieved and placed in our museums – and in the Zayed National Museum in particular.

Qatari artist Jassim Zaini's *Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan* (1983) shows the leader raising his right hand in greeting as Emiratis gather in festive celebration, surrounded by banners bearing Nabati verses such as "A band that stands together is never humiliated" and "Ask not about us or how you met us; ask history and time about who we are".

Behind him rises Abu Dhabi's skyline, including the Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Mosque, still standing today in the Al-Hisn area. Zaini, who trained in Baghdad under artists including Faeq Hassan and Hafidh al-Droubi, drew inspiration from the Iraqi capital's murals. Sadly, this painting – commissioned for the first Gulf Cooperation Council meeting in Doha in November 1983 – has been missing for years, reportedly lost during a hotel renovation.

The inauguration of Zayed National Museum fills a major gap in the UAE's museum landscape: the story of the formation of Emirati identity, embodied by Sheikh Zayed himself. Until now, young Emiratis lacked a dedicated destination to learn the story not only of the Founding Father, but also of the nation. While the seven emirates have their own local museums, and Dubai's Etihad Museum offers a focused narrative, none match the breadth of the new institution.

This inauguration is a moment to celebrate – but also a moment to reflect on who we were, who we are and who we hope to become. Zayed National Museum has the potential to instil in younger generations – especially those who did not grow up during Sheikh Zayed's lifetime – the wisdom, kindness and generosity he exemplified, qualities we should continuously aspire to.

Sixteen years ago, I wrote in *The National* that while Sheikh Zayed was alive, there was no need to preserve Emirati identity, for he embodied it. Today, 21 years after his passing, the Zayed National Museum can not only safeguard Emirati culture and identity, but also inspire young Emiratis to draw from his teachings and apply them to a rapidly changing world.

MUNIRA NUSSEIBEH

> Inauguration of Zayed National Museum is a moment to reflect on who we were, are and hope to become

There was a time when Roberto Bolle thought mastery meant control. However, since celebrating his 50th birthday, the Italian ballet star now understands it as communication.

For such a physically demanding art form, Bolle says he has learnt to be more attentive regarding his body as he continues to tour the world with his self-curated gala performance, Roberto Bolle and Friends, which he performed at Dubai Opera last month.

"You must constantly listen," he says, describing his morning routine as a checklist of questions that determines how the day will unfold on stage. "The smarter you are in that, the better. Every morning, I start by working on my body, and every day it's different. I've learnt that daily practice is very important. You have to be regular and disciplined. You can't push and then stop, it has to be steady. If you go step by step, little by little, you reach your goal. Don't think you have to go fast."

These steps have been ingrained for more than three decades. Trained at La Scala Theatre Ballet School, Bolle joined the company as a teenager. By 21, he had become a principal dancer.

More than a decade later, he joined the American Ballet Theatre in New York as a principal, becoming one of the few Italians to hold that distinction with both institutions.

Bolle reflects on how those early years were driven by a ruthless youthful ambition. "In the beginning, I wanted to be perfect. Now I want to be true. When you are young, you think of steps; when you are older, you think of feeling," he says.

"Maybe part of my ambition was driven by the fact I was more scared and more insecure when I was young. So at this stage, I'm much more aware of who I am, and who I am as a dancer. And so on stage it reflects this personality as to where I am in this moment of my life."

These threads come together in Roberto Bolle and Friends, the gala project he conceived in the early 2000s as a way to dance alongside artists he admired. What began as a one-off performance in Milan has since evolved into a long-running international production, with guest stars along the years including Polina Semionova and Marianela Nunez, and stops ranging from Tokyo and London to Abu Dhabi and Muscat.

As the Dubai programme moved between classics and contemporary work – including solo and ensemble performances from modern and classic ballets *Flames of Paris*, *Moonlight*, *Don Quixote* and *Carmen* – and guest dancers including Hungarian National Opera principal Tatiana Melnik, Bolle says he no longer worries about proving range.

"I just want to be comfortable in what I do and to really give the audience an experience, to take them into a story. That's what matters to me now," he says. "Where I am now in my career, it is even more important for me to focus on sharing something honest, and I think that comes with time."

That desire to connect is not limited to theatres. Each summer, Bolle brings his annual festival, OnDance, to Milan's Piazza del Duomo with open classes and performances. The audience here is deliberately tailored to those in the city who never experienced him at La Scala.

"We bring thousands of people who are not part of the dance community and it is really beautiful because they start to understand that dance is not something distant, not something just for theatres or professionals.

"It's a language everyone can feel," he says. "When we are in the square, people stop, they watch, they try, even if they have never danced before. That's the most emotional part for me, to see them smiling, moving, feeling free. It's important that people feel dance belongs to them."

Yet, for all the desire to make dance accessible, Bolle admits a career in classical ballet is born from early discipline. "It must start very young, otherwise it's difficult," he says.

"Classical ballet is really a discipline. It needs time, patience and a lot of work from an early age. If you start later, of course you can dance and enjoy movement, that's beautiful, but to reach a professional level in classical ballet, it's almost impossible. The body needs to learn when it's young; it becomes part of you, like a language you speak without thinking," he says.

His Roberto Bolle Foundation, he explains, is a way to plug the gap for the relative late bloomers with 10 schools across Milan where youngsters take an hour of ballet each week. "It's not to make professionals," he says. "It's to make them aware of what the body can do, to learn balance, respect, concentration."

Bolle elucidates these themes further in the foreword to the book *Effetto Danza* (Dance Effect) by Italian pharmacologist Paolo Mariconti. "What I was saying in that is that moving your body with music creates a new awareness that has very positive effects on body and mind," he says. "It's something science is studying now, but for us dancers, it's already part of our daily life. When you move, you activate parts of the brain that connect memory, co-ordination and emotion. It's like you wake up everything inside you. That's why I think dance can help people at any age. It's not only about performance, it's about well-being."

> **Classical ballet needs time, patience and a lot of work from an early age**

The commentary that won't help a new generation of dancers, Bolle notes, comes from social media. He is concerned about how these platforms have the potential of snuffing out promising talent through abuse or overconfidence. "You can be beautiful online doing 15 pirouettes," he says. "But then you have to go on stage and perform, be consistent, portray a character. That is the goal. Social media can show talent, but it can't teach you presence. The real test is in front of an audience, feeling their energy, holding the silence, telling a story through movement. That's something no video can give you."

These initiatives and concerns point towards what could be Bolle's greatest legacy, to keep ballet in the public conscience, particularly in Italy, where opera still dominates the cultural field. "We have to protect ballet," he says. "It is part of our culture. Sometimes people think it's something old or distant, but it's not. It's a living art that still speaks to people today. We just need to show it in the right way, to make it accessible without losing its quality. For me, that's the balance, to respect the tradition, but keep it alive for the next generation."

It's also the kind of clear-eyed reflection that can only come from a seasoned veteran. "You know, I am not romanticising anything," he says. "You cannot dance the same as when you are 20. But you can understand better what you are doing. When I move now, I think of the meaning. Every step has to speak."

AFP; EPA

Roberto Bolle brings his annual festival, OnDance, every summer to Milan's Piazza del Duomo, far left, with open classes and ballet performances

AFTER PERFECTION COMES TRUTH

Italian ballet star Roberto Bolle reflects on age, control and the confidence that comes from experience. By **Saeed Saeed**

Kasseem Dean, popularly known as Swizz Beatz, has spent more than five years working across the Gulf in cultural and sporting roles

THE ARTIST WITH A PLAN

From Doha's Creative 100 to his Saudi Bronx camel racing team and Jeddah's Art Promenade, Swizz Beatz tells **Saeed Saeed** about his vision and the Gulf connections behind his new projects

One of the year's most acclaimed hip-hop songs nearly fell apart in its final stages. *So Be It*, the lead single from American duo Clipse's long-awaited reunion album *Let God Sort Em Out*, is built around a sample of *Maza Akoulou*, a song recorded by the late Saudi singer Talal Maddah in the 1970s. The track was almost pulled off the album because clearance from Maddah's estate was running out of time.

As a last attempt to keep the sample, the group contacted Swizz Beatz, real name Kasseem Dean, the Grammy-winning producer who

RAFID ALLO

GETTY IMAGES

has spent more than five years working across the Gulf in cultural and sporting roles.

Dean says he was already travelling to Riyadh and took the required meetings in person. The clearance was completed within days of his arrival. Released in June, *So Be It* became a key track of *Let God Sort Em Out,* which is now in the running for Best Rap Album at next year's Grammy Awards.

Dean downplays the moment and says the experience reflects what he learnt through his time in the region. "A lot of people think this region is transactional. You can do business for sure, but if you move like that, it will take the long way around. The people here are smart. You still have to earn it," he says.

The anecdote captures the way Dean has been working in the Gulf, where he describes the ethos as "relationships over transactions", reflected in everything from art exhibitions and creative programmes to a camel racing team that became a winner on the Saudi circuit.

Doha sits at the centre of Dean's latest venture, Qatar Airways Creative 100, launched with the national carrier and scheduled to host a gala event at Art Basel Doha in February. The event is designed to bring together a hundred figures from music, art, design, film, fashion, sport and technology each year.

Among the first names announced are Black Coffee, the Grammy-winning South African DJ and producer, Olympic fencing champion Miles Chamley-Watson, jewellery designer Yoon Ahn and Flavio Manzoni, chief design officer at Ferrari. Dean confirms regional names will be announced soon, including Qatari and Emirati cultural personalities.

Dean says he doesn't want the initiative to function as a "who's who list" of the creative industry. Instead, it is meant to be an evolving fellowship of creatives who can collaborate outside their usual practices and build work that moves across disciplines.

"No disrespect to any of the lists that are out there. This is more of a community," he says. "We are picking people because they are already doing amazing things, and we are taking our time to build it the right way. Leading up to February is when the full list will be finished. It is not like we printed something and a week later said: 'OK, that is it.' The creatives are connecting together. It feels like a cohort, like a family, going out into the world and continuing to do amazing things."

In addition to designing the livery for the Qatar Airways plane – in a slick burgundy, black and silver Formula One-inspired scheme – Dean is also planning to bring his own art fair, No Commission, to Doha next year. Launched in 2015, the fair has already travelled through Miami, London and Shanghai, and it operates on one rule: artists keep 100 per cent of their sales.

"No Commission is me and my family giving back to the creatives," he says. "We are not a gallery. We are not brokers. We are patrons. I saw too many shows leaning towards the fairs and the collectives and not the artist. Instead of complaining, I said, let us build something where the artist keeps 100 per cent. Let them feel their power. Let them see what the ecosystem looks like when they come first."

The Doha event will include artists from across the Gulf, selected by curators and advisers working locally and in the wider region.

Dean's current work in Doha builds on two decades of visits, collaboration and cultural immersion in the Gulf. That timeline begins with a lesser-known role he played in shaping the early aesthetics of Dubai's coastal district Jumeirah Beach Residence. He recalls taking a short-term advisory role with developers in 2006, four years before the area was formally launched. At the time, the original vision was markedly different from what it became. "When I first went there, they were making it look like a Wall Street thing," he says.

"A lot of guys in suits, a very corporate, very financial district. And I remember thinking, Dubai already has that. They already have the serious business side. This did not need to be another version of that. This did not need to look like the new Wall Street. This area, to me, looked like Miami. The palm trees, the water, the movement. The youth could be here. If you leaned into that, the whole space could breathe."

The experience also gave him an early sense of how quickly things move in the Gulf and the possibilities that pace opens up. "Those days in Dubai showed me the pace of decision-making out here," he says. "You know how it is. Everything has to happen tomorrow when you finally get the 'yes'. A three-year project can be done in two weeks. And you have to meet that energy. If you cannot move at that speed, you are not ready for this region."

It also pushed Dean to recalibrate his own approach. "I had 20 ideas I thought I was going to do from real estate to different businesses," he says. "But I realised if I grabbed everything off the floor, I would burn relationships. I had to pull back and be a student of the culture first."

This meant return visits to absorb the cultural scene, including a trip to Sharjah, where he met Barjeel Art Foundation founder Sultan Sooud Al

Swizz Beatz, pictured right at MDLBeast in Riyadh in 2021, commissioned a golden falcon sculpture by Canadian artist Kwest, the first installation for what is now the Jeddah Art Promenade, left

> **Here, you feel a different type of passion, a different type of hunger, a different type of camaraderie, a different type of brotherhood**

Qassemi, whom he credits with giving him an insight into contemporary art from the region.

"Sultan was my entry point and I was invited to Sharjah to see the museums," Dean says. "He is an amazing person. The energy, the enthusiasm, the way he spoke about the work, it was different. He was ready to go, ready to have fun with it. That visit introduced me to people I still keep in touch with today."

Dean's Saudi work came later. It included appearing at the inaugural Soundstorm festival in 2019 and taking part in panel discussions at the annual industry conference and showcase XP Music Futures. His former Riyadh-based consulting company, Good Intentions, developed cultural programming across the kingdom. Among its projects was commissioning a golden falcon sculpture by Canadian artist Kwest, the first installation for what is now the Jeddah Art Promenade.

Good Intentions also helped produce a conference featuring Saudi women leaders and creatives. Last year's event included a panel session with Grammy-winning singer Alicia Keys – who is also Dean's wife.

During a visit in 2020, a friend suggested he watch a camel race. Dean recalls being taken to the track and seeing a sport built on heritage, community and careful preparation. Those elements led him to start his own team, Saudi Bronx, named in part after the New York City borough where he was born.

"Here, you feel a different type of passion, a different type of hunger, a different type of camaraderie, a different type of brotherhood," he says. "I did Saudi Bronx because I thought it was a great homage back to the region. It is representing and celebrating the Bedouin culture, which I am in love with."

He says the sport has yet to reach its potential, and part of that comes down to how it is presented to audiences. "It is basically one camera following the race for like four hours and we need to change that," he says. "I have many ideas for camel racing. I have 10 things that I feel can multiply the business between three to five times immediately. But the heritage is so deep it will take time."

Dean's business acumen is built from the rigours and disappointments of the music industry, something he is keen to pass on to Arab creatives as they forge their own paths.

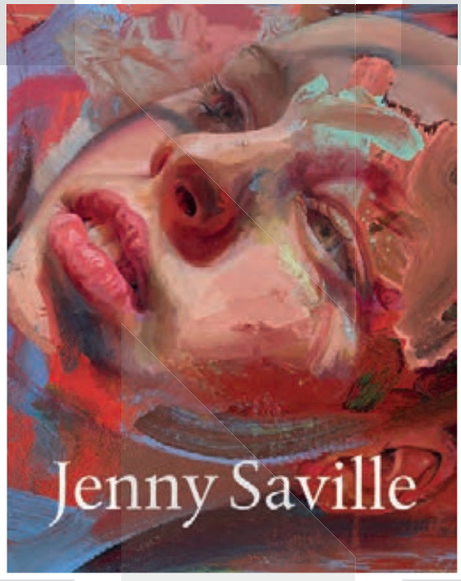
He recalls his heady period in the early 2000s, when production work for artists such as DMX, Eve and Beyoncé made him one of the most in-demand names in the business. "Success is heavy, man, and there was a period I had nine songs on radio at the same time," he says. "Then I had only three songs, and that is still is a lot, but people thought I fell off and they began to move on to the next person. Corporate companies like to pick who is the flavour of the month. They will use you, then eject you when their mission is done. They have their plan. As an artist, you have to have your plan."

That outlook now underpins all of his regional projects, each tied to artists owning their work and understanding how their respective businesses operate.

"I created the Creative 100 as an IP so we can make brands responsible for creativity for the long term. Everything is business, and you need to know how it comes together so the artist does not get hurt," he says. "Never abandon the core idea. You might need some temporary moves to get there, but the foundation has to stay the same. At the end of the day, as an artist, you have to have your own plan," reiterates Dean.

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



JENNY SAVILLE: THE ANATOMY OF PAINTING BY SARAH HOWGATE (NATIONAL PORTRAIT GALLERY PUBLICATIONS)

It's been a while since I picked up a paintbrush, but in my more artistic days Jenny Saville loomed large – as she did for almost anyone practising portraiture in the late 20th and early 21st centuries, or any art historian looking at the visual world through a feminist lens. Rising to prominence in the early 1990s, her work became recognisable for its bold depictions of the female form – not photogenic flattery, but unapologetic flesh in all its variations. Her work was a direct challenge to the objectified gaze of the "lad mag" culture of the era. Earlier this year, the National Portrait Gallery in London hosted a show titled Jenny Saville: The Anatomy of Painting. I may have missed the exhibition, but I'm not missing the book. The accompanying volume features all 60 works, along with detailed close-ups and studio photography.

Hayley Kadrou, deputy features editor

PEE-WEE'S BIG ADVENTURE (CRITERION COLLECTION)

Some childhood films stay frozen in nostalgia, but *Pee-Wee's Big Adventure* never felt like that. Despite springing from a children's TV character, Tim Burton's debut always played like a strangely grown-up experience. Returning to it now, you feel its evolution – the way it grows with you, revealing new layers each time. It's funny, thrilling, occasionally frightening and often unexpectedly beautiful. Criterion's new 4K Blu-ray captures that spirit perfectly, arriving in packaging as considered as the film itself.

Faisal Al Zaabi, gaming journalist

WISH YOU WERE HERE 50TH ANNIVERSARY REISSUE BY PINK FLOYD (SONY RECORDS)

Go ahead and buy that record player you've been eyeing for years – you now have the perfect excuse. On December 12, Pink Floyd and Sony Records will mark the 50th anniversary of *Wish You Were Here* with a deluxe re-release spanning box set, CD, digital formats and vinyl, complete with previously unreleased alternates and demos. At a lean 44 minutes, the album still punches well above its weight, capturing the melancholy and disillusion of the modern world, the ache of loss and all the truisms that haven't softened since 1975. The 13-minute opener, *Shine On You Crazy Diamond (Pts. 1-5)*, begins with a drone that nods to Eastern traditions, while pushing firmly into the future with synths and heavy-reverb guitar. And the title track – the album's most famous – still takes you back to a simpler time, letting nostalgia steer: "We're just two lost souls, swimming in a fish bowl, year after year." Aspiring guitarists, take note: you can learn that intro riff the same night you bring this home and let the vinyl carry you back through the decades.

Kat Balleh, social media editor

WHO IS THE SKY? BY DAVID BYRNE (MATADOR RECORDS)

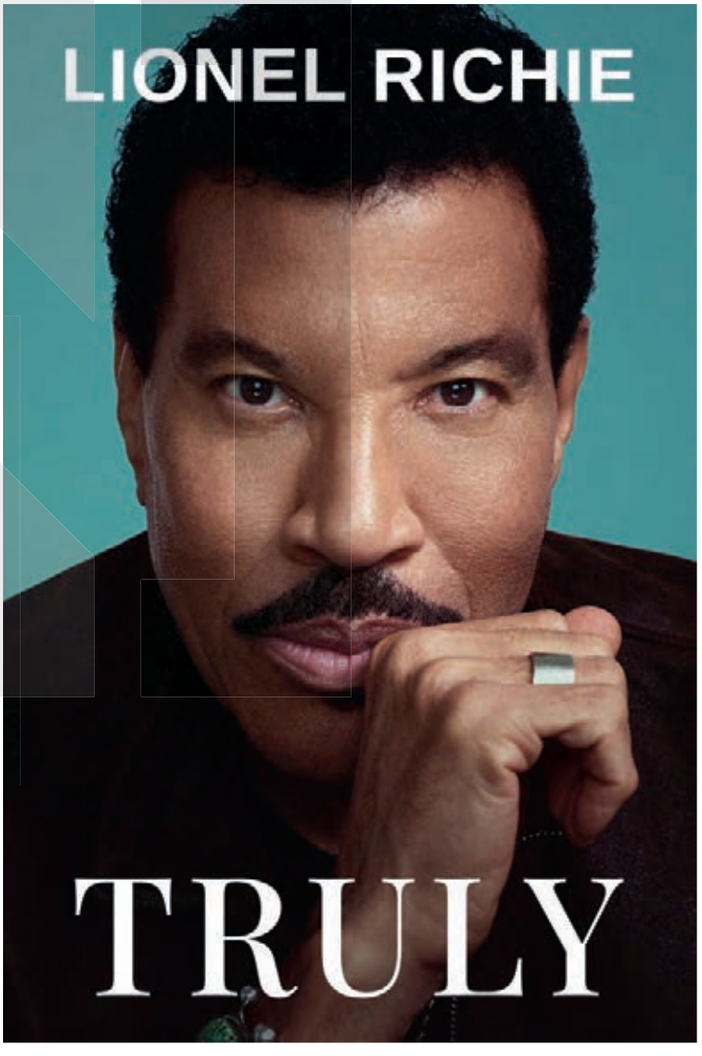
David Byrne returns with *Who Is the Sky?*, his first album since 2018's *American Utopia*. The album came out in September, but it belongs in this physical media round-up because it's exactly why vinyl still exists. Produced by Grammy-winner Kid Harpoon and arranged by New York's Ghost Train Orchestra, it pairs Byrne's anthropological lyricism with a 15-piece chamber ensemble that gives the songs a vivid, eccentric pulse. Guests include St Vincent, Paramore's Hayley Williams, The Smile's Tom Skinner and percussionist Mauro Refosco. They drift through the record, especially on the buoyant single *Everybody Laughs*. Inspired by Ghost Train Orchestra's 2023 Moondog tribute, Byrne embraced their offbeat instrumentation as a late-career push into the unexpected. With psychedelic packaging by Shira Inbar and styling by Belgian artist Tom Van der Borght, it's a release designed to be experienced – and collected – on vinyl.

Nasri Atallah, TN Magazine editor

TRULY BY LIONEL RICHIE (HARPERCOLLINS)

Lionel Richie's memoir reads a lot like one of his concerts: fun, colourful and packed with the kinds of anecdotes only someone with a five-decade career can tell. It almost comes as a surprise that it took him this long to release *Truly*. The book moves from his childhood in Tuskegee in the American South to the long nights gigging with the Commodores, and into the 1980s stretch, when he became one of the decade's defining voices. What gives the memoir its pull is Richie's admission that even at the height of his fame, he was still dealing with stage fright, doubt and the uneasy edges of being a celebrity. He writes about the break-up of the Commodores, the burnout that followed and the long road back – all with the dry Southern humour that fans will recognise from his shows. For a figure whose songs have soundtracked so much of modern pop, this memoir is entertaining, candid and ultimately hopeful.

Saeed Saeed, arts & culture writer



THE WATCHLIST

From a fast-paced drama to the return of a fantasy series, **David Tusing** rounds up what to see this month

1 F1: THE MOVIE (APPLE TV+)
After earning rave reviews and more than $630 million at the global box office, making it Apple Studios' highest-grossing film, *F1: The Movie* will be available to stream. Directed by Joseph Kosinski, the film centres on Brad Pitt's character Sonny Hayes, a racing driver who returns to the sport he left 30 years prior to mentor a brash young rookie Joshua Pearce, played by Damson Idris.

Besides its strong cast and performances, the film was hailed for its technical filmmaking, with *The National*'s review calling it "a ride, full of pulse-pounding Hans Zimmer music, frenetic cuts, immersive sound design and breathtaking cinematography".

The movie will have special resonance for UAE residents as it was extensively shot in Abu Dhabi.

- December 12

2 AVATAR: FIRE AND ASH (CINEMAS)
The third instalment in the record-breaking *Avatar* film series thankfully didn't take as long as the second one, *The Way of the Water* (2022), which took about 13 years to make.

Fire and Ash will continue to follow Jake and Neytiri – played by Sam Worthington and Zoe Saldana respectively – as they grapple with the loss of their oldest child, Neteyam (Jamie Flatters), who was killed in the previous film.

Still settled with the ocean-dwelling Metkayina clan, the duo encounter another Na'vi tribe, the Ash people, who have allied with antagonist Quaritch (Stephen Lang), setting the stage for another massive showdown.

- December 18

3 FALLOUT SEASON TWO (PRIME VIDEO)
Based on the hugely popular video game, *Fallout* is set in 2077, in a post-apocalyptic world ravaged by nuclear war. The first season centred around three main characters: Lucy MacLean (Ella Purnell), an underground community dweller who ventures to the surface to find her father, Hank (Kyle MacLachlan); Maximus (Aaron Moten), a member of the paramilitary Brotherhood of Steel on a mission; as well as The Ghoul/ Cooper Howard (Walton Goggins), a former actor and mutated bounty hunter.

In season two, Lucy and The Ghoul set out on a journey in search of Lucy's father, taking viewers through the wasteland of the Mojave to the post-apocalyptic city of New Vegas. Along the way, as they discover new worlds, they will also potentially peel back their prewar lives and uncover what caused the devastation in the first place.

- December 17

4 PERCY JACKSON AND THE OLYMPIANS SEASON TWO (DISNEY+)
Coming two years after the debut of the first season, which was positively received by audiences, the fantasy series based on Rick Riordan's book series of the same name follows the adventure of Percy Jackson, a young demigod and the son of Poseidon.

In the new season, Percy (played by Walker Scobell), returns to Camp Half-Blood, a training ground for demigods, a year after the ending of the first season. But his world is turned upside down – his friendship with love interest Annabeth (Leah Sava Jeffries) has changed; he learns he has a Cyclops, or a one-eyed giant, for a brother and his best friend, Grover (Aryan Simhadri), has gone missing. Meanwhile, the camp is under siege from the forces of powerful villain Kronos, the god of time. Percy's journey to set things right will take him off the map and into the deadly Sea of Monsters, where a secret fate awaits.

- December 10

5 WAKE UP DEAD MAN: A KNIVES OUT MYSTERY (NETFLIX)
Private detective Benoit Blanc and his Southern American drawl return for what director Rian Johnson has promised is his most dangerous adventure yet. The third film in the hit mystery series, starring Daniel Craig as Blanc, has a stacked cast of suspects including Josh O'Connor, Glenn Close, Josh Brolin, Mila Kunis, Jeremy Renner, Kerry Washington and Andrew Scott.

In this film, detective Blanc teams up with a young priest in upstate New York to investigate a perfectly impossible crime in a church with a dark history.

- December 12

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APPLE TV+; 20TH CENTURY STUDIOS; PRIME; DISNEY+; NETFLIX

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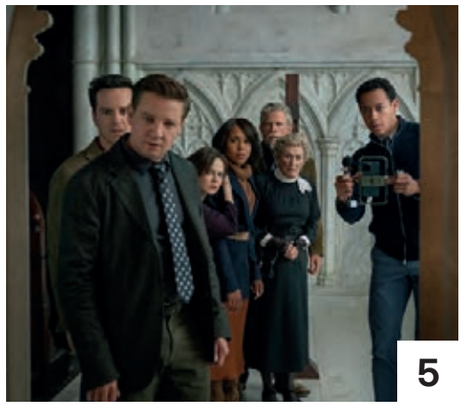

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GIFTING SEASON

From a hair styler to a digital pet, **Dana Alomar** offers suggestions for festive presents

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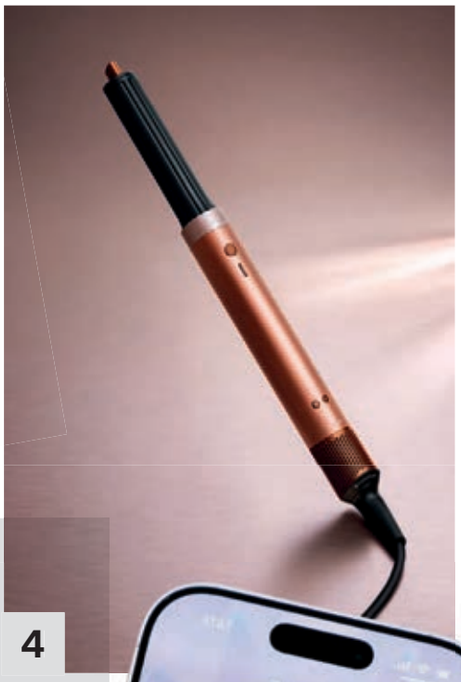

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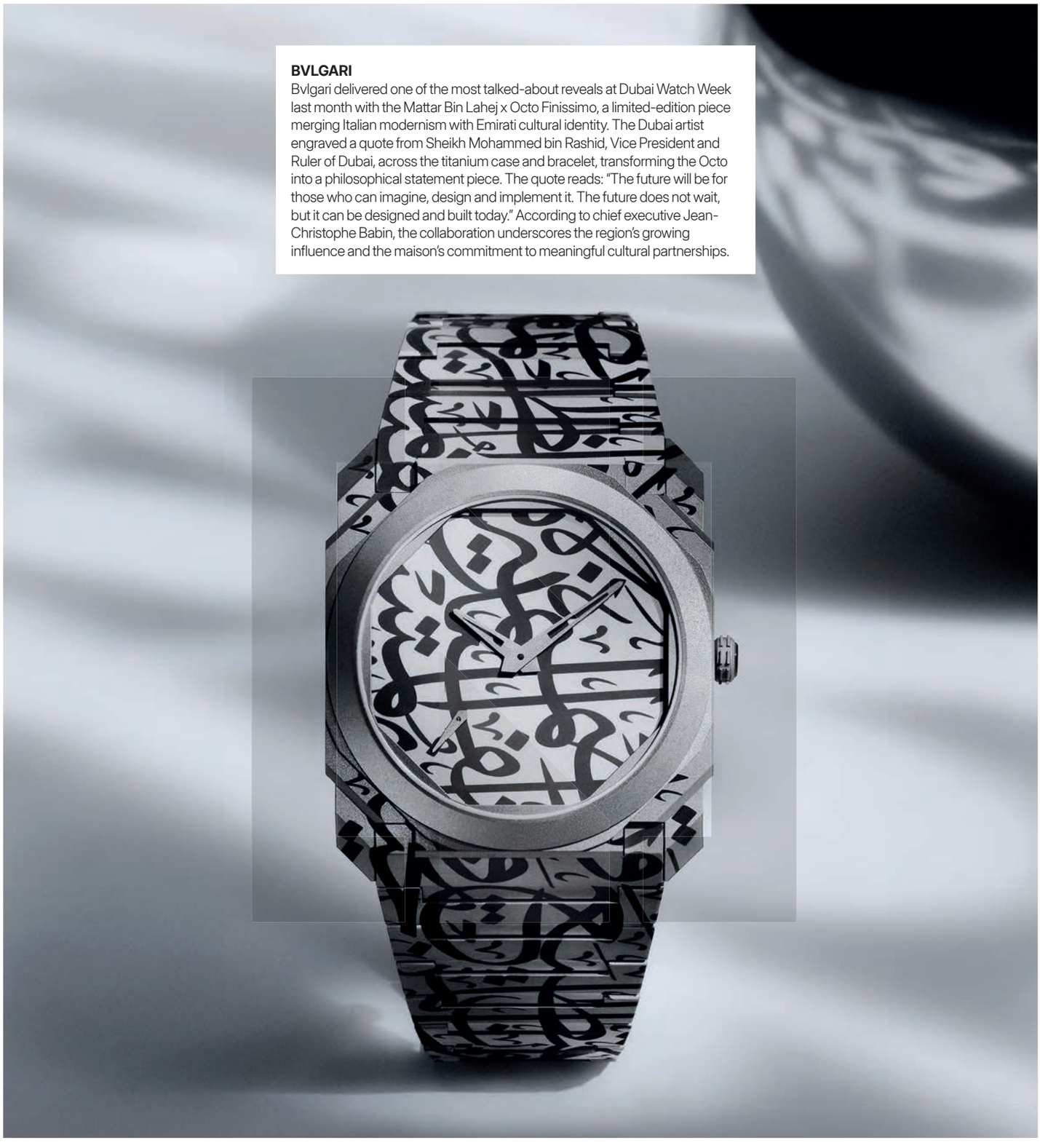
1 NINTENDO SWITCH 2
The latest version of Nintendo's popular hybrid console introduces performance upgrades, sharper visuals and – in a nice touch – backward compatibility with original Switch titles. With both hand-held and docked TV modes, it's designed for everything from solo gaming and family fun to competitive multiplayer mode. Fair warning, if this shows up under the Christmas tree, there'll be some fighting over the controls after dinner.
- From Dh2,449

2 TAMAGOTCHI
This updated version of the classic 1990s digital pet retains its nostalgic charm while introducing a fresh ocean-themed shell and improved responsiveness. Compact and keychain-ready, it offers simple, light-screen engagement through feeding, play and care mechanics. Whether gifted to children discovering it for the first time or adults reliving those childhood years trying to keep the thing alive on the playground, it's a low-tech digital companion. A thoughtful gift for the holiday season that brings fun without screen fatigue.
- From Dh129

3 EIGHT SLEEP POD 5
Built for anyone looking for a serious sleep upgrade, the Pod 5 system brings advanced smart-bed technology into the home. It features dual-zone temperature control, tracks sleep and health data by way of smart sensors, and includes vibration and thermal wake-up alarms. Ideal for anyone who takes their sleep as seriously as their tech, and wants next-level comfort and wellness in the bedroom.
- Dh10,999

4 DYSON AIRWRAP COANDA 2X MULTI-STYLER
Dyson's latest multi-styler uses Coanda airflow technology to dry and style hair simultaneously, without extreme heat. The 2x model enhances airflow pressure for faster styling and includes upgraded attachments that automatically rotate, making it easier to curl, smooth and volumise hair. It's a piece of premium beauty tech, and a gift that will make anyone happy – from teenagers to time-poor adults.
- From Dh2,699

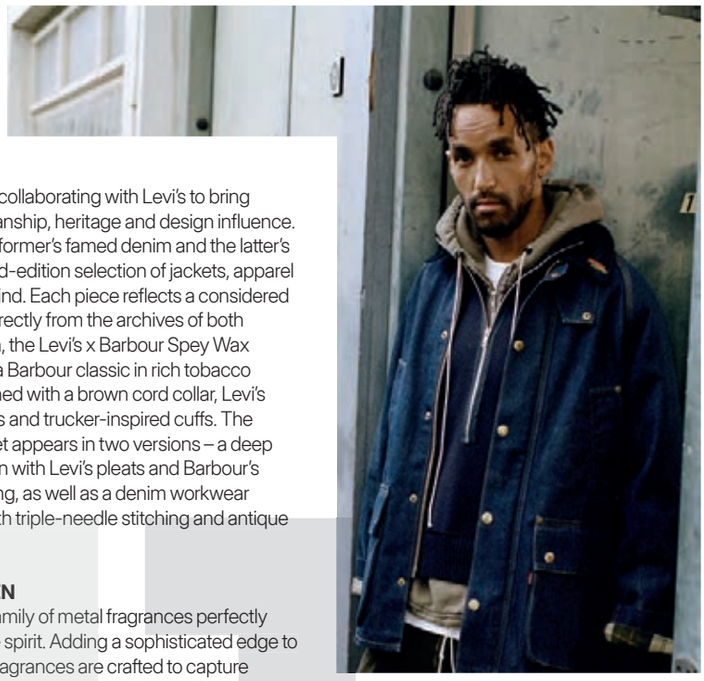
5 APPLE IPHONE 17
Apple's latest flagship smartphone features the A19 chip, a brighter Super Retina XDR display, an enhanced camera system and improved battery efficiency. Whether used for content creation, gaming, work or staying connected, the iPhone 17 remains a gift that won't be forgotten anytime soon. Whether you're giving it to someone entering the world of Apple for the first time, or helping move a parent along from their trusty iPhone 11, it'll be appreciated.
- From Dh3,399



BVLGARI
Bvlgari delivered one of the most talked-about reveals at Dubai Watch Week last month with the Mattar Bin Lahej x Octo Finissimo, a limited-edition piece merging Italian modernism with Emirati cultural identity. The Dubai artist engraved a quote from Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid, Vice President and Ruler of Dubai, across the titanium case and bracelet, transforming the Octo into a philosophical statement piece. The quote reads: "The future will be for those who can imagine, design and implement it. The future does not wait, but it can be designed and built today." According to chief executive Jean-Christophe Babin, the collaboration underscores the region's growing influence and the maison's commitment to meaningful cultural partnerships.

BLACK BOOK

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



LEVI'S X BARBOUR

Quintessentially British brand Barbour is collaborating with Levi's to bring together more than 170 years of craftsmanship, heritage and design influence. The Levi's x Barbour line-up merges the former's famed denim and the latter's signature waxed cotton to create a limited-edition selection of jackets, apparel and accessories built with durability in mind. Each piece reflects a considered balance of function and style, drawing directly from the archives of both houses. For women, the Levi's x Barbour Spey Wax Jacket reimagines a Barbour classic in rich tobacco waxed cotton, finished with a brown cord collar, Levi's arcuate pocket flaps and trucker-inspired cuffs. The men's Bedale Jacket appears in two versions – a deep navy waxed iteration with Levi's pleats and Barbour's signature tartan lining, as well as a denim workwear version elevated with triple-needle stitching and antique brass hardware.

DRIES VAN NOTEN

Dries Van Noten's family of metal fragrances perfectly captures the festive spirit. Adding a sophisticated edge to the season, these fragrances are crafted to capture distinct facets of winter indulgence. Havana Gold leads the trio with a warm, ambery scent that blends tobacco and liquorice. Voodoo Chile is a bolder aroma, featuring rosemary, patchouli, cedarwood and sandalwood, and is housed in midnight blue glass above an engraved metal base. Encased in a powder orange and brushed metal bottle, Camomile Satin completes the line-up, reimagining chamomile's soft innocence, infusing it with gourmand and leathery vanilla facets. And finally, arriving as a limited-edition collectable, the Mezzanotte Blu lipstick case combines a deep midnight-blue metallic cap with a sleek, fashion-forward design.

TAG HEUER

Tag Heuer unveiled one of its most technically ambitious creations at Dubai Watch Week last month. The Monaco Split-Seconds Chronograph Air 1, a limited-edition of only 30 pieces, pushes the boundaries of contemporary watchmaking, pairing the maison's racing heritage with cutting-edge engineering. Inspired by hypercar aerodynamics, the case is crafted from Grade 5 titanium using selective laser melting, an aerospace-grade technique that enables a sculpted, hollow form weighing only 85 grams. Its twin-layer honeycomb mesh evokes high-performance engine covers, while accents of yellow gold and black DLC add a sleek, modern contrast. Inside, the Calibre TH81-00 stands as Tag Heuer's most complex movement to date, a high-frequency automatic rattrapante chronograph built with lightweight titanium components and finished with racing-inspired detail visible through the sapphire caseback.

AIMEE MOREAU

Founded by Emirati designer and creative director Nour Alqemzi, Aimée Moreau is the region's latest brand to watch. Rooted in local craftsmanship, yet shaped by an international design sensibility, the label introduces contemporary luxury through sculptural, considered handbag creations. Its debut pieces are already poised to become the next coveted accessory among tastemakers in the region. Defined by a fluid, curved silhouette, Aimée Moreau's bags are designed to transcend seasons, conceived as long-term companions rather than trend-driven statements. The inaugural collection, Forme 01, presents a structured shoulder bag crafted in premium cowhide leather with a soft suede finish. Offered in three refined tones – black, brunette and clay – the style embodies the brand's founding principle: what you choose to carry should echo what you choose to keep. Launching in the UAE, Aimée Moreau will expand selectively across the GCC and Europe.

ONE LAST THING

Carl Gerges

KARIM GHORAYEB

Carl Gerges first found fame as the drummer of Lebanese indie rock band Mashrou' Leila. The band's music became the soundtrack for a whole generation of Arabs during its decade-long run, and they collaborated with global names such as Mika, Yo-Yo Ma, Nile Rodgers, Hot Chip's Joe Goddard and Brian Eno – as well as playing some of the world's biggest stages.

Then, during the pandemic, Gerges returned to his first love: architecture. He launched his own studio and has since designed a number of widely acclaimed projects across Europe, the Middle East and Asia – from Bottega Veneta's *Waves* installation in Dubai to the permanent exhibition space at Institut du Monde Arabe in Paris.

We sat down with him in Dubai, where he answered our quick-fire questionnaire.

What is your favourite time of day and why?
Sunrise, because the world is quiet and nobody is asking me for anything yet.

What is your favourite restaurant anywhere in the world?
Island Creek Oyster Bar in Boston. It closed after the pandemic and I'm still in denial. It reminds me of touring days with the band.

When was the first time you realised your parents were human?
When I saw them comfort each other quietly, thinking I wasn't watching.

What do you want to be when you grow up?
A hip-hop artist.

Do you have any hidden talents?
I can tell the difference between shades of black. It's a superpower.

Your favourite book?
Le Petit Prince.

What type of music can't you stand?
Music that's so experimental that it forgets it's music.

What puts you in a bad mood?
People who talk loudly on the phone in quiet places.

What can you not live without?
Family, friends and music.

Dream dinner guests?
People who show up on time.

Sitting on the sofa or out with friends?
On the sofa with friends.

What smell takes you straight back to childhood?
Pine trees after rain.

What food takes you back to childhood?
Quince from my grandparents' garden. I eat it with a bit of salt and suddenly I'm six years old again.

Which city do you love but would hate to live in?
Paris. It's too beautiful. I'd forget I even have a job.

Can you play a musical instrument?
Several. I literally toured with a band! It's basically part of the job description.

Have you ever been on a motorcycle?
Yes, and I still haven't told my mother.

Any words to live by?
Trust life and the process. What's meant for you always finds its way.

Biggest pet peeve?
People who clap to the wrong beat.

Do you believe in aliens?
Absolutely, and I hope they have better urban planning.

What is your favourite Arabic word?
Habibi!

The most niche thing you watch on YouTube?
Videos on the making of K-pop songs. Don't judge me.

How do you take your tea?
Herbal only. Black tea switches me to turbo mode for no reason.

What makes you cry?
Music and whatever I watch on a plane.

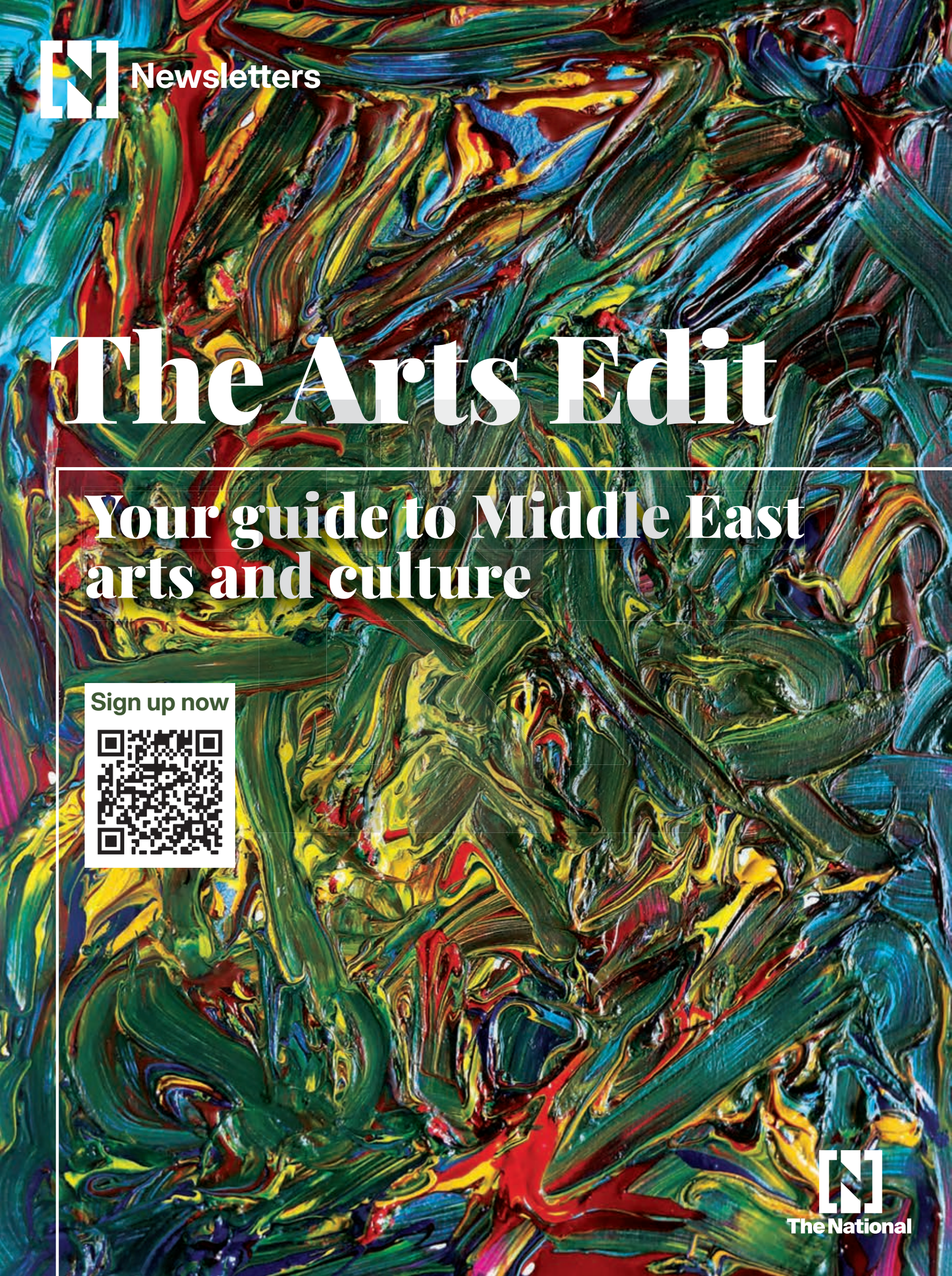
What do social algorithms think you're interested in?
Travertine slabs, golden retrievers and buying every piece of vintage furniture ever made.

TikTok or Instagram?
Instagram. I'm not built for TikTok speed.

What is it about you that would surprise people?
That I forget my keys more than any person should.

What was the last thing you did for the first time?
Woke up married in Rome and thought 'wow, this feels good'.

As told to Nasri Atallah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