TN
The National's Luxury Lifestyle Magazine
September 2025

Rami Al Ali makes history for Syria

Inside 75 years of the Seddiqi family

The return of Yasmine Hamdan

Sultan Sooud Al Qassemi on art

Iraq's endangered marshlands

Hend Sabry redefines herself

LÄDERACH

SWITZERLAND

Spoil yourself, your family and your friends with the finest chocolate

Give the gift of pure delight on all special occasions, surprise your loved one!

Browse our online shop [laderach.ae] and find unique products from Pralines, Truffles, FrischSchoggi and Snacks from Läderach in a wide variety. We deliver to any destination within United Arab Emirates.

Visit us at the following point of sales

WTC - Abu Dhabi 02-2222155 056-6857718	Yas Mall - Abu Dhabi 02-5627188 056-4184445	Bawabat Al Sharq Mall - Abu Dhabi 02-5864708 050-2470456
The Galleria Al Maryah Island - Abu Dhabi 02-6417894 056-5457644	Zayed Int. Airport - Abu Dhabi 02-8058478 056-4007894	City Centre Mirdif - Dubai 04-2888996 056-6821984
The Dubai Mall - Dubai 04-3344000 054-5840002	Mall Of The Emirates - Dubai 04-2982298 054-9966386	City Centre Al Zahia - Sharjah 06-5340882 056-4181499

LaderachUAE Laderach_UAE

A MEMBER OF MOHAMMED RASOOL KHOORY & SONS GROUP OF COMPANIES

Share the joy of fresh chocolate

laderach.ae

LÄDERACH

SWITZERLAND

CONTENTS

30

36

46

34

48

EDITOR'S LETTER

You might notice something has changed this month. This is no longer *Luxury*. This is *TN*.

The change is about more than just a name. It's a shift in perspective, a new way of telling stories about culture, influence and what truly matters in our part of the world. We want *TN* to be a cultural compass, pointing towards art, entertainment, ideas – and the people shaping them.

The new name also nods to *The National*, our home. We want readers to know the magazine upholds the same values: redefining the standard for quality English-language journalism in the Middle East, always in service of its audience.

In this first issue, we start with some of the region's most singular voices. In our September cover profile, Hend Sabry reflects on loss and meaning, with the conviction of someone who knows the weight her words carry, whether on screen, on stage or in the public sphere. Accompanying the story are stunning images by one of Egypt's most exciting young photographers, Hussein Mardini, shot on location in the heart of old Cairo.

Elsewhere, Rami Al Ali, Syria's first haute couturier, shares what it means to carry his country's story on to the runways of Paris, while Yasmine Hamdan reminds us of the power of return with her first album in eight years. Sultan Sooud Al Qassemi pens the first of his monthly columns, connecting contemporary debates with works of art that matter to him – this month reflecting on education through Gazbia Sirry's 1954 painting *L'institutrice*.

We travel to Iraq's southern marshes, where an entire ecosystem is under threat, and to Dubai's Jumeirah, where a vanishing row of bungalows tells a quieter story of belonging and change. Together, these narratives sketch a portrait of a region that is always in motion. A region that is imaginative and unafraid of its contradictions.

And of course, *TN* is still the home of the finer things in life. In these pages you'll find Prada's playful new Dada bag, take a journey through Jumeirah's Thanda Safari in South Africa and learn the history of the most beautiful dive watches ever made. We also sit down with leading figures in the world of luxury, from Chanel's president of fashion Bruno Pavlovsky to Ahmed Seddiqi chief executive Mohammed Abdulmagied Seddiqi, whose family has shaped the UAE watch industry for four generations.

But we also look at things with a fresh eye: how superyachts are being reimagined as platforms for ocean research, and how artificial intelligence is opening the secretive world of perfumery to new voices. For us, luxury is not only about consumption, but also about craft, innovation, knowledge, creativity and legacy.

This is the magazine we want to make for you: curious, elegant and alive to the world around it. Thank you for opening these pages. I hope you find something in them that speaks to you.

Nasri Atallah

The National

Editor Nasri Atallah **Deputy editor** Sarah Maisey **Art director** Gerald Du **Creative director** Nick Donaldson **Picture editors** Olive Obina, Scott Chasserot **Sub-editors** Aarti Jhurani, Panna Munyal **Contributors** Dana Alomar, David Tusing, Evelyn Lau, Faisal Al Zaabi, Farah Andews, Francesca Fearon, Hussein Mardini, Josh Sims, Razmig Bedirian, Saeed Saeed, Simon Wilgress-Pipe, Sultan Sooud Al Qassemi, William Mullally

For marketing and partnership opportunities, contact Mireille Puskulian on mpuskulian@thenationalnews.com. For advertising and commercial opportunities, contact Shakeel Shaikh on 055 454 5911 or shakeel.shaikh@eng-futuremedia.com

Newsletters

Checking In

Check-in for travel news and destinations in our fortnightly newsletter

Sign up now

The National

PRADA

The art of contradiction

The new Dada bag embodies Prada's deliberately undone and rebellious elegance, writes **Sarah Maisey**

Prada's autumn/winter 2025 women's show was theatre by way of paradox. Titled Raw Glamour, the collection explored femininity through a lexicon of contradiction – harmony met dissonance, structure wrestled with improvisation.

Typically, Miuccia Prada and Raf Simons offered little elaboration, leaving audiences to decode which pieces best articulated their manifesto. But one accessory crystallised the entire proposition: the Dada bag.

Named after the antiestablishment art movement that dismantled logic and beauty, the bag channels Prada's own compulsion to unpick codes of classic femininity, reassembling them into something stranger and more magnetic. Rendered in white, soft nude, grey or black, it tapers delicately with elongated handles positioned a third of the way down – a subtle redistribution of weight and perspective.

A narrow buckled belt cinches the bag's "waist", gathering soft nappa leather into loose, intentional folds. This isn't the prescribed perfection of razor pleats, but the haphazard beauty of studied nonchalance. Prada's creative duo have always favoured the undone over the immaculate, finding profound humanity in moments of deliberate imperfection.

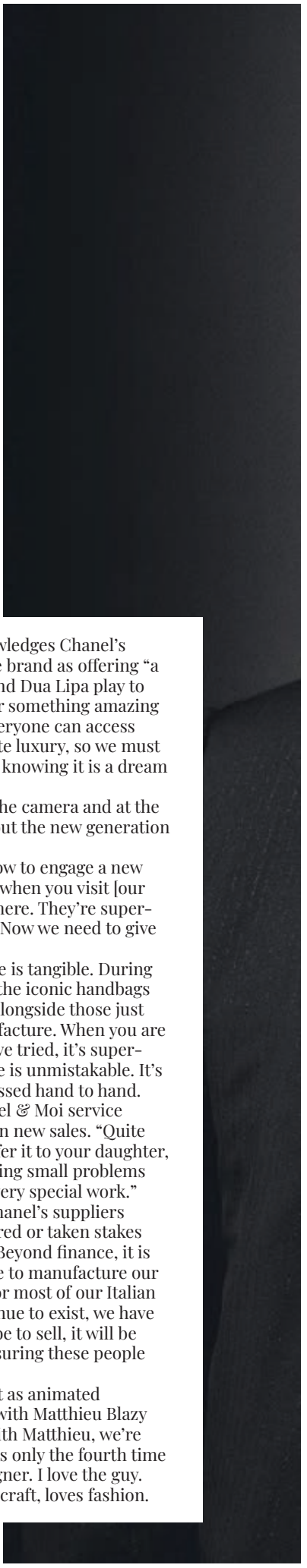
Belting is hardly novel at Prada; it's a recurring motif exploring body-garment relationships. Here, applied to soft and smooth nappa, it conjures ladylike sophistication, while pivoting between elegance and utility.

This is Miuccia's particular genius – transforming supposed flaws into new standards of taste. With its ambiguous proportions and utility-inflected elegance, the Dada feels destined not for It-bag hysteria, but for women too self-aware to follow prescribed rules. The bag serves as metaphor for the entire collection – a study in restraint and release, order and undoing. Clothes, too, inhabited this liminal space – rigorous tailoring met spontaneous draping, rugged knits paired with whisper-light silks, suggesting strength and fragility aren't opposites, but collaborators in defining modern femininity.

At Prada, contradiction isn't merely tolerated – it's skilfully curated. With the Dada bag as a standard-bearer, this season clarified one truth – feminine glamour isn't extinct. It has simply been deconstructed.

The pragmatist behind the poetry

On the eve of a new era at Chanel, Bruno Pavlovsky talks to **Nasri Atallah** about couture as the house's soul, why slowdown is no cause for alarm and the artisans who keep its dream alive



Two hours before Chanel's haute couture show, the air around the Grand Palais is thick with anticipation. Backstage, hundreds of people move with clockwork precision, while at the Grand Cafe nearby, Bruno Pavlovsky sits improbably calm. He has lived through countless shows, yet the moment still stirs him.

"It's always a big moment," Chanel's president of fashion says with quiet satisfaction. "This collection is amazing, a powerful collection. Couture is always special at Chanel, it's in our DNA."

For Pavlovsky, couture is not spectacle but essence – a reminder of what luxury means when freed from compromise. "In the execution everything has changed," he says of the evolving landscape, "but the philosophy, the strategy, it's always the same. Haute couture is pure design. There are no constraints. The designer delivers what they feel is most appropriate, the most impactful. It's about creating something unique for clients."

He speaks less like a businessman than a custodian of culture. "When you talk with the atelier, there are no limits. It's about the designer and the artisans capable of delivering. It's a very unique experience."

Even though the show unfolds in Paris, couture follows the clients. "For couture, it is not the clients who are coming to Paris. Some of them are, but we are travelling everywhere. Starting next week, we go more or less everywhere," he says.

Pavlovsky is famously steady, even when the luxury market falters. He shrugs at talk of slowdown. "I am always optimistic. In 2020, it was a big question mark," he says of the pandemic. "Afterwards, there was an acceleration of growth and for us at Chanel, we more than doubled the business in three to four years. Quite a lot of new clients joined the boutique for the very first time."

For him, a cooling market is healthy. "You cannot be at double-digit growth forever. Sometimes it's good to see some adjustment. It obliges the brand to focus on the fundamentals and reimagine what the client experience must become."

It's that combination of pragmatism, optimism and enthusiasm that defines him. "When you offer the best to the client, when there is purpose in the collection, storytelling, when the products are well executed, when the orchestration is super well done … we can do amazing things."

Couture, he insists, is always a tightrope walk between preservation and innovation. "This collection was a mix of both. You see embroidery, new fabrics, new ways of putting things together. There is space for both. But for me, it's more about doing something outstanding."

He repeats "unique" like a mantra, not a buzzword. Couture must resist sameness. And when asked about risk, he looks inward rather than outward. "The risk is always about scale. Our products are sophisticated. We are expensive, but we're expensive because there is a lot of know-how in what we are doing. On top of that, our sustainability engagements make our product even more expensive." He acknowledges Chanel's prices put it out of reach for most, yet he frames the brand as offering "a dream for all". Recent campaigns with Jennie Kim and Dua Lipa play to that aspiration. "Every time we can engage and offer something amazing to all, it is important. We have to be realistic. Not everyone can access our product. The brand is the incarnation of ultimate luxury, so we must balance between offering a dream for everyone and knowing it is a dream for very few."

What excites him most is talent – both in front of the camera and at the workbench. Pavlovsky is animated when talking about the new generation of craftspeople entering the métiers.

"Twenty years ago, 25 years ago, we were asking how to engage a new generation of craftspeople. It was challenging. Now when you visit [our ateliers] at Verneuil or 19M, the next generation is there. They're super-excited and learning. We are attracting new talents. Now we need to give them a sense of comfort about their career."

At Chanel's ateliers, the transmission of knowledge is tangible. During a visit to the Verneuil-en-Halatte workshop, where the iconic handbags are made, I saw artisans with 40 years' experience alongside those just starting. "The 11.12 is the most difficult bag to manufacture. When you are quite young, your first results are catastrophic. I have tried, it's super-difficult," he says with a laugh. The pride in his voice is unmistakable. It's not about handbags. It's about continuity, a craft passed hand to hand.

That continuity extends to care. The brand's Chanel & Moi service restores old bags, unusual for a house that thrives on new sales. "Quite often, the bag is about transmission. You want to offer it to your daughter, your granddaughter, your friend. Sometimes it's fixing small problems under guarantee. Sometimes it's restoration. It's a very special work."

Another quiet battle Pavlovsky wages is keeping Chanel's suppliers alive. Over the past few years, the maison has acquired or taken stakes in a string of specialist ateliers in France and Italy. Beyond finance, it is about safeguarding the future. "We want to continue to manufacture our product in 20 or 30 years. Covid was very difficult for most of our Italian suppliers. We realised that if we want them to continue to exist, we have to be with them. In 20 years, the challenge will not be to sell, it will be to manufacture. It's not about control, it's about ensuring these people continue to exist."

If he sounds like a guardian of continuity, he is just as animated about change. Chanel enters a new era in October, with Matthieu Blazy presenting his first collection. Pavlovsky beams. "With Matthieu, we're opening a new era. What is special with Chanel is it's only the fourth time in the lifetime of the brand that we have a new designer. I love the guy. He's super-talented, he loves the product, loves the craft, loves fashion. Only good vibes."

CHANEL

Left, Bruno Pavlovsky, president of fashion at Chanel
Top, the brand's latest haute couture autumn/ winter collection was shown at Grand Palais
Above, young craftspeople work alongside experienced artisans at the maison's ateliers in Paris

VICTOR BESA / THE NATIONAL

Rami Al Ali, known for his sculptural creations, is the first Syrian designer to be formally invited by the Fédération de la Haute Couture et de la Mode, earning him the title of haute couturier

The dream weaver

Rami Al Ali recalls his journey from Damascus to Dubai to become the first Syrian designer on the haute couture calendar. By **Nasri Atallah**

In July, Rami Al Ali made history. After years of showing off-calendar in Paris, the Syrian designer was formally invited by the Fédération de la Haute Couture et de la Mode to join the official haute couture schedule. In doing so, he became the first Syrian fashion designer to claim the rarest of titles: haute couturier.

For Al Ali, sending his looks down the runway in Paris was both triumphant and unnerving. "I have always looked at the official calendar and the names on it and thought: 'This is an institution, these old brands, it's farfetched.'" While "proud and happy" to be included, he admits to being "a bit intimidated that the work now is going to be seen more widely. It's a bigger audience and my work is going to be examined thoroughly."

If there is a theme to Al Ali's career, it is careful, deliberate progress. "Whatever I've done with the brand since its start, I've always progressed forward. Small steps, very carefully chosen," he explains. "From now on, the plan and the strategy need to be studied really well." But the newfound recognition does not mean he's in a rush to get anywhere. "Moving forward is going to be still as careful, cautious and smart as it was before," he says, assuring both himself and his audience.

Al Ali first arrived in Dubai in 1996, intending to stop over in the city before continuing his studies in the United States. "I was working on the internship and the paperwork and all of that. I took a temporary job in one of the old fashion houses in Dubai," he says, "and that gave me a bit of confidence to stay a little bit longer." Decades later, he is part of the beating heart of the city's creative scene.

What kept him here was timing. The city was just beginning its evolution into a global fashion hub, with luxury brands setting up a regional presence and international editors flying in. "The clients became jet-setters and most of the fashion press and international brands started coming to the region," he says of Dubai's emerging status as a hub. The market was hungry for a potential entrepreneur to start something. There was high demand, but there was not enough supply. By 2001, he had opened his own atelier in the city.

About two and a half decades later, with his new title comes responsibility. "When you say 'the first Syrian designer', it is already a responsibility that you're going to present the creative industry of a whole country," he says. "It makes you feel proud."

It also means he joins the exclusive club of Arab couturiers – such as Elie Saab, Zuhair Murad, Georges Hobeika and Mohammed Ashi of Ashi Studio – who, by carving out global recognition, created a lineage where none existed. "Graduating in 1995 and looking at the international landscape, I didn't find an ideal who came from the same background. Someone who would give me hope to adjust my dreams to," Al Ali remembers. "It was a low ceiling."

Now, he hopes his own success can be the blueprint he once longed for. "It would give not only hope, but also a kind of manual for younger entrepreneurs, younger brands to look up to. And they will probably raise the bar."

Al Ali knows better than to assume the role of gatekeeper. "Every day there's younger talent that comes along that is cooler, edgier and more relevant." But he believes the job of those who make it is to open doors. "I think it is our duty, when we get to certain places, to open those doors to the younger generation to make their dreams bigger."

For Al Ali, couture is not only clothes – it is culture. "It's a lifestyle. It is the ultimate luxury in the fashion industry. It represents the elite – not in terms of lifestyle, but in terms of taste."

His latest collection draws directly from Syria – its crafts, its geometry and its overlooked history. "As always in my work, I go back to the craft, the artisan, the heritage. It is a permanent source of inspiration," Al Ali explains. This season, however, he came with a special collaboration – a partnership with a Syrian organisation dedicated to archiving and restoring traditional craft.

"It is not only nostalgic, warm and very personal, but also a documentation of the identity that was lost and neglected over the past 12 or 13 years. Now we're trying to restore it," he says.

As we tour Al Ali's Dubai atelier, the couture designer points to a look, with its geometric shapes inspired by Syrian mosaic and woodwork, punctuated with tassels for movement and modernity.

"It became a very strong reference. When you see it, immediately, you relate it to where it belongs," he says.

As they say, you work for years and suddenly you're an overnight success. Al Ali's slow, steady and perfectly planned career means he now finds his name written beside Dior, Chanel and Balenciaga. A fact he finds surreal.

When asked if he has broken down some sort of gate that others can now get through behind him, Al Ali says: "I don't think I'm the one who broke the gate, it's my work. The creativity and authenticity of the work is what got their attention to put us next to those names."

But this is only the beginning, the designer insists. "This is probably one of the major columns in building the brand globally. It's a major one, but there are definitely still many other columns that need to come along with it to support going to the second floor, third floor and fourth floor in this high-rise building that we're working in."

The retail therapist

Sarah Maisey sits down with consultant Kate Hardcastle to discuss the industry's evolving art and science, and how the UAE is leading the way

Few understand the art and science of shopping trends better than Kate Hardcastle. With about three decades of experience tracking global habits and patterns, she is now an industry authority – as valued for her consumer insights and boardroom counsel as for her documentaries. In 2018, that expertise earned her the MBE royal honour from Queen Elizabeth II.

Her latest project distils that expertise into a book, *The Science of Shopping: How Psychology and Innovation Create a Winning Retail Strategy*. "The book talks about every kind of theory, from pricing strategy to retail theatre, to retail experiential and scarcity, which we've just seen on something like Labubus," she says.

Though it may sound aimed at insiders, she insists it speaks to consumers too. "My entire existence has always been consumer-focused. I've been checking the pulse, regularly and in-person, for nearly 30 years," she explains.

Hardcastle says few places rival Dubai and Abu Dhabi for shopping experiences. "Retail in the UAE has always been the pinnacle. We used to bring everyone here as a centre of excellence."

The region's strength, she notes, is vision. "It was born out of climate, as people needed spaces to escape the heat. These had to be social, free to access, free to park and offer a variety of opportunities."

That led to a wave of malls with ski slopes, art shows, fine dining and children's play areas – part of a deliberate strategy to make shopping destinations enjoyable, immersive and communal. "The thinking was: 'How do we make this beyond retail?'" Hardcastle explains. "How do we make it experiential?" It extended to longer hours, strong customer service and spotless bathrooms. "That was the brilliance."

For Hardcastle, it is a lesson in adaptability as malls, stores and brands confront seismic change. "We're in the biggest retail evolution in 30 years, with the consumer front and centre."

She contrasts this with her own childhood. "Stores would open at set hours, with set merchandise. The idea of being able to somehow get those wares without using a retailer was unheard of. And that was the state of play everywhere."

Then came the internet, followed by a pandemic that normalised online shopping. Social media accelerated the shift further, driven by younger buyers. Stores lagged, she argues, clinging to outdated models. "The only idea seemed to be to shop cheaper. That kind of erosion is challenging, because if everyone's on a race to the bottom, no one is making any money," she says, citing the collapse of Macy's and Sears in the US, as well as Debenhams in the UK.

Understanding why we shop is central to Hardcastle's work. To clarify, she developed her Buyerarchy of Needs, a riff on Maslow's model. At the base – essentials such as reverse commerce and value; in the middle – sustainability, speed, peer influence and desire; and at the top of the pyramid, financial capability.

"What are the drivers? Why is emotion part of shopping? Because it is quite a cold transaction without it."

For retailers, this means embracing cultural nuance, not imposing sameness. "I don't want cookie-cutter retail globally. I want it to feel different. And hats off to this region for leading the charge."

In an age of AI and hyper-fast production, she argues, authenticity is non-negotiable. Consumers "sniff out inauthenticity instantly". Brands must create unlikely, but credible collaborations – such as Gucci x North Face – offering freshness without exploiting fanbases.

Meanwhile, digital fatigue is rising. "The more AI and AR infiltrate retail, the more people crave human connection," she says. Calling it "digital distress", she points to a return to craft. "Knitting, baking, handwriting. As a rallying cry, Hermès handed its social media to 50 artists, giving creativity back to those who need it. Spot on."

One of retail's greatest contradictions remains unsolved, however: that of sustainability versus affordability. Hardcastle, who is known as the "customer whisperer", rejects the idea that there are "two audiences", with one for fast fashion, another for luxury. "It's a dichotomy within the same person. We might watch a David Attenborough documentary and vow to live sustainably, and then buy a Dh300 bikini because that's what our bank balance allows. The pendulum constantly swings."

This tension creates space for challenger brands such as Farm Rio, Zimmermann and Sass & Bide, which mix desirability with responsibility. For Hardcastle, these point the way forward.

Her research also highlights consumer fluidity – curating personal worlds by mixing luxury with value, rather than pledging to one brand. Nowhere is this clearer than beauty, as women build make-up bags around Dior foundation and drugstore lip gloss.

And yet, for all the data, algorithms and forecasts, shopping will always remain gloriously unpredictable. "If people were easy to understand, I wouldn't have a career."

What Hardcastle is most excited about, however, is the celebration of artisanship, as well as a renewed appreciation for local makers, craftsmanship and the preservation of skills. That means supporting emerging designers and respecting consumer intelligence by reflecting real lives. Above all, she says, it requires humility. "The idea of elite, exclusionary service is outdated," she warns. "The next customer who walks into your store could be a teenage entrepreneur – and three years later, they could buy your entire stock."

Retail's golden rule, Hardcastle concludes, is simple: never underestimate your customer.

KATE HARDCASTLE

Kate Hardcastle received an MBE from Queen Elizabeth II in 2018

Scents and sensibility

Once the preserve of heritage houses and secretive masters, perfume is being reimagined by Alex Wiltschko, whose AI tool Generation can conjure new fragrances in seconds, writes **Sarah Maisey**

Above, Generation by Osmo founder Alex Wiltschko, right, and master perfumer Christophe Laudamiel use AI to come up with an instantaneous formula for fragrances, which are then created in a lab, above right

Would you wear a perfume designed by AI? Thanks to Alex Wiltschko, you may already have without realising it.

The founder of Osmo and its perfume creator tool Generation, Wiltschko is reshaping one of the world's most secretive arts, using what he calls Olfactory Intelligence (OI) to democratise scent. "There are 600 perfumers in the world. There are more astronauts alive than there are perfumers, but it doesn't mean that you and I can't design scent and can't participate deeply in the scent design process. We believe that everyone should have the right to be creative and in the medium of scent and fragrance."

The premise is simple – harness AI's computational power to create perfumes to any brief. And there's space, he argues. "There are maybe 100,000 fragrances on the market. But how many photographs? How many paintings? How many songs?

"I grew up in south Texas, and my parents were scientists," says Wiltschko, who has been fascinated by smell since childhood. His early attempts at being a perfumer were, by his own admission, "garbage". The issue was not talent, but access. "The world of fragrances has kept them a complete secret for 300 years, and that always stuck with me."

Undeterred, he pursued a doctorate in olfactory neuroscience at Harvard University to study how the brain processes smell. "I learnt very acutely that we don't know that much." He went on to Twitter, then Google Brain, where he founded parent company Alphabet's olfaction group, before stepping away – with Google's blessing – to digitise scent full-time.

For three years, Wiltschko and his team have been "deep in the weeds of research, development and science", making the breakthroughs that underpin Generation. "We can now take a smell from one location, digitally encode it, then decode and reprint it as the same smell elsewhere. That's what generates the data to train the OI algorithm that lets us build the experience."

It's easier to demonstrate than explain. During our call, we set a brief: niche, feminine and nostalgic. Within seconds, Generation produces Childhood Reverie, with top notes of orange, mint and bergamot "to evoke summer air and outdoor adventures", layered over violet, berries, peach and honey, recalling childhood desserts. Alongside comes a moodboard of pastel skies. Generation also outputs the molecular formula, with precise ratios enabling a lab to create it. This is the most important step, Wiltschko explains, that would normally take a perfumer months to formulate.

Each client receives three OI-generated samples before Generation's master perfumer, Christophe Laudamiel, steps in to refine them for the market. "We have to smell it, and everything that goes out of the door, there are human perfumers involved," Wiltschko stresses. "The AI doesn't make the process happen, it just speeds it up."

During our half-hour interview, Generation produces two distinct but complementary perfumes from the same brief. "For a master perfumer, that's a year and a half of work," he notes. The implications are vast.

Where fragrance was once the preserve of heritage houses and conglomerates, Generation allows emerging brands – even individuals – to launch bespoke scents quickly and at low cost. In theory, a boutique could brief Generation and have a fragrance ready within weeks, bypassing the layers of exclusivity that have defined perfumery for centuries.

Though it was launched only recently, Generation has already produced a scent for Seattle's Museum of Pop Culture, inspired by a nine-metre statue of guitars. "It even smells electric," says Wiltschko with a laugh.

For all the innovation, he is unfazed by competition. Isn't he worried others will copy the idea? "I've been working towards this for nearly 20 years, and it's by far the hardest thing I've ever done. If someone wants to replicate it, start your engines. Good luck."

All in the family

Four generations of the Ahmed Seddiqi family have defined the watch industry in the UAE. Chief executive Mohammed Abdulmagied Seddiqi tells **Nasri Atallah** the secret of the firm's longevity

In Dubai, there are few names as synonymous with the city's story as Ahmed Seddiqi. This year, the family-run business marks 75 years, an anniversary that predates the country's modern founding. While Mohammed Abdulmagied Seddiqi – or Mams to those in the know – talks about everything from retail spaces to the vision of the city he calls home, he always circles back to the same point: passion.

"The soul is my grandfather," he says immediately, when asked what still anchors the group today. "He had this passion for watches from a young age, importing them from Kuwait and Bahrain while working for another family in Dubai in construction products. Once he had clients coming into the shop, he was offering them watches and radios. After work, he would ride home on his bicycle with a small box, stopping by houses to sell watches along the way. It was a very humble start. But the secret to success was passion."

That passion became the foundation of a business, which started with one store in 1950 and now spans a retail empire that represents more than 100 brands in horology. "He built the identity of Ahmed Seddiqi and Sons at that time, and now we have changed it to Ahmed Seddiqi." The change is to reflect that far more of the extended family now populates the halls of its ultra-modern headquarters in Umm Al Sheif.

Today, the company is in its third, even fourth generation, and the governance is as carefully assembled as any mechanical movement. "We still have my grandfather's DNA in the company. We are a hundred per cent family-run. Out of 11 family members who work here, two are from the second generation, eight are from the third and one is from the fourth. We've worked with many consulting companies to create a family protocol and a governance model to ensure the company isn't dissolved or taken public. We don't want to be taken over by a conglomerate. It's about preserving his legacy for years to come."

The challenge, of course, is working with family. He laughs at the suggestion. "I've been in the company for more than 20 years now and it's a challenge to carry the name of a business, yes." The trick seems to be boundaries and communication. Seddiqi is clear that if there are ever any issues between cousins or siblings, they are cleared immediately rather than allowed to stack up. "Talking to each other, understanding each other, working closely with each other, being transparent – those are all very important," he says. "I'm proud to say that in the third generation, when businesses normally tend to break down, we've handled it professionally. Things are going very smoothly."

Clearly, the company is larger and more influential in the world of horology than ever. And if family is the engine, Dubai is the road. Ahmed

CHRIS WHITEOAK / THE NATIONAL

Talking to each other, working closely, being transparent – those are all very important

Seddiqi has been a significant part of the city's development into a luxury hub and the emirate has played a big part in its vision. "Today, Dubai is considered one of the strongest cities in the world, one of the safest cities in the world. A woman can walk out at 3am wearing her most expensive watch without being harassed or robbed. This is a blessing and a vision."

At the heart of the family's own vision is the retail experience. Much of luxury buying might have moved online elsewhere, but here, retail remains a ritual. "Buying a watch or any luxury product is all about emotions," he says. "Whether it's a graduation, a marriage, a first job or a bonus after 20 years, our job is to deliver the best experience possible."

Emotions and understanding an evolving clientele seem to both be key to Seddiqi's continued success. "I don't call them clients, I call them friends of our family. Some families have been buying from us since the 1960s and 70s. One gentleman told me he used to come with his father from Abu Dhabi in the 1970s, staying at my grandfather's house while buying watches. We're still in touch today. At the same time, we might have a 22-year-old buying his first watch. We treat them all the same."

The company has not been afraid to experiment. The Edit concept was aimed squarely at a younger generation, blending watches and fashion. More ambitiously, the family has even moved into watchmaking itself with Vyntage Horology. "It was in our mind since 2008," he says. "In 2021, we launched a one-time collaboration with another brand producing 100 watches, and in 2023 at Dubai Watch Week, our first proper models: Purity and Monograph. It was a tribute to thank our grandfather. The brand is still small, focusing on the UAE and Saudi, but we've already had international clients and we hope to expand globally by 2027."

Dubai Watch Week, which is organised and run by Ahmed Seddiqi, is perhaps the clearest sign of how the Seddiqi name now extends beyond retail into the global horological conversation and how Dubai as a city keeps expanding when no one thinks more is possible. "When we started in 2015, we had maybe 200 visitors and a handful of brands. In 2025, the seventh event will host about 100 brands and hopefully 50,000 visitors. If Dubai Watch Week can grow that much in seven years, imagine what Dubai itself can do."

As we part ways, I can't help but ask if he can pick a favourite watch. "I have many watches that are dear to my heart. The first watch my father gave me when I was six, the first watch my wife gave me when we got married. Each has a story. When I sit with my boys, I tell them: 'This was from your grandfather, this was from your mother.' Each watch has a story. So no favourite. I love them all." Even if he can't pick one watch his answer says it all: it's about family and passion.

Hend Sabry finds herself

The actress on dealing with loss, raising her voice and making an impact.
By **William Mullally**

Hend Sabry looks at every choice as if she were planting a tree. "More trees," she says, "make a healthier ecosystem." It's how she approaches both her work and her life – raising daughters, choosing when to speak out, deciding when to walk away. The image is simple, but it has shaped the person she's become.

The Tunisian-Egyptian actress and producer is a woman of intention. She's also one of the region's most singular voices – earning esteem few others reach – precisely because she's so uncompromising. In an era when audiences expect more of their role models, that cultural shift has made Sabry feel more essential than ever. "We need to be the voices of the oppressed – of the people who cannot voice what is happening to them right now, for so many reasons," she says.

Sabry has shown, time and again, that her words carry weight. In November 2023, when the ongoing crisis in Gaza had just begun, she stepped away from her UN Goodwill Ambassadorship after 14 years because she felt the World Food Programme was not doing enough in response to the humanitarian catastrophe. What has unfolded since has only reaffirmed her decision.

"I could tell this was not what I was used to. This was not what I did with them for 14 years.

On the cover:
Bow shirt dress, Dh15,000, Givenchy by Sarah Burton
This page: Knitted cardigan, price on request, Fendi

Top; and trousers, prices on request, both from Taller Marmo

Custom-made shirt; and trousers, prices on request, both from Gozoour. Shoes, price on request, Prada

"There was something different here that, to me, was a no-go. I'm not going to abide by the double standards," she explains.

As of late, Sabry has been thinking about how she became the woman she is today. It's not a mystery she's unravelling, rather an act of self-reflection. For the first time in her life, her greatest influence is no longer with her.

In July, her mother, Dalenda Klai, passed away after a long battle with illness. And while Sabry had time to ready herself for this moment, nothing really prepares you for such a loss. In the weeks since, she's been struggling to parse the conflicting feelings that her mother's absence has awoken in her. "I'm working on my grief," Sabry says. "I hope with time, it takes another shape – that it's less intense after a while. It's a blessing to have this much love for someone. It's a gift. But it's a painful one."

In the years leading up to her mother's passing, as her condition worsened and even as conflicts in the region grew larger, Sabry's priorities became more stark. "I've been less and less willing to put my energy and my time in those projects that don't really matter to me, and that's why I've perhaps also been less productive in the past couple of years," the actress says.

My mother never judged me, she accepted me as I was from the very beginning

When she does take on roles, she's been doing some of the best work of her career. Her 2023 collaboration with Tunisian filmmaker Kaouther Ben Hania, on the genre-defying docudrama *Four Daughters*, earned an Oscar nomination for Best Documentary. And her Netflix series *Finding Ola*, a continuation of Sabry's beloved 2010 show *Ayza Atgawez*, is a light-hearted hit that portrays mature women from a perspective rarely seen in the Arab world. Both are fearless works of art, tackling taboos head-on and generating conversations that push to the core of the human condition.

And now that she's taken time to reflect in the wake of her mother's passing, Sabry has been thinking back to how she grew so self-assured in the first place.

"I'm realising it even more now that she's gone. She never judged me as a person, she accepted me as I was from the very beginning. I think this is how you give a voice to any woman in our society: let her discover who she is. That freedom allows me to take risks even today, because I was not part of the social construct that expects all women to be the same, to act the same, to dress the same. My mother protected me from that, and I'm so grateful."

Wool sweater, Dh6,150; draped silk and cotton trousers, Dh6,150; and toy rhinestone pumps, Dh6,666, all from Loewe

Encouraging a young girl to become the most assured version of herself is, at times, easier than it sounds. Sabry has felt that lesson most keenly as a mother herself. Both of her daughters are teenagers now, and she finds her greatest rival in helping them reach their own potential is social media.

"It's dangerous, because, while there are so many tools that help you be different, so much of it is about conforming. I worry about that, because the later in life you find your voice, the harder it is to use it. I believe that life drags you to find yourself at some point. But if you start early on, with a family atmosphere that fosters that journey, then you end up living with fewer regrets," she says.

Sometimes that requires a push. For Sabry, it certainly did. When she was 13 in the early 1990s, she and her parents attended a birthday party in Tunisia. There, she was spotted by director and screenwriter Nouri Bouzid, who was writing a film called *The Silences of the Palace* at the time. "He saw me and said to my father that I should come audition for the part, because I was the right age. And I responded: 'No, I don't want to go.' I wasn't up for it at all," she says.

Every generation has a group of people who band together and carry the voice of that generation

"But my mum and dad pushed me. They had no fear of what people were going to say, even though it was quite taboo back then in Tunisia to let your teenage daughter do a movie. It could have turned them into pariahs, but they didn't care, because they thought it was best for me.

"Meanwhile, I just wanted to conform, like any other teenager. I was afraid of my friends at school. What would they say? They might say that I'm different, I thought. But my mother and father told me: 'This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. How many other people get to do this at 13?' And they made me go to the audition, and helped me navigate through my fears," Sabry continues.

Directed by Moufida Tlatli, *The Silences of the Palace* won the Golden Camera award at the 1994 Cannes Film Festival – getting Sabry the Best Actress award at the Carthage festival at the age of 14. It is even now considered one of the best Arab films ever made, due in no small part to her contribution. "I realised, 'Oh, I must have some talent.' But it's people who saw it in me, I did not see it at first. I wanted to be a lawyer or a diplomat," says Sabry.

The biggest risk she ever took came six years later, when, at the age of 20, she moved to Egypt alone to pursue acting as a career.

This page: Knitted cardigan; knitted skirt; and Arco boots, prices on request, all from Fendi
Opposite page: Leather blazer, Dh16,200; and formal wool trousers, Dh5,050, both from Versace Men. Condora 85 slingback pumps, Dh4,021, Christian Louboutin

Once again, it was a move Sabry couldn't have made without her mother. "In retrospect, I realise how much faith in me she had, and how much confidence in whatever my choices were," she says.

With that kind of support, Sabry moved to Egypt with a far greater sense of herself than most people do when starting off in the film industry. Because of that, she keenly saw that just because she had left the art house for commercial fare, it did not give her the licence to take her craft any less seriously.

"I saw the impact that I could have on people's lives. I'm driven by sharing experiences or sharing knowledge. Acting is a great tool for that. I think that's what drove me and made me fall in love with this craft. You can tell people watching each series: 'You're not doing this alone. There are people who feel how you feel.' Some of them are people who haven't found their voices yet – and maybe my art can help them," she says.

Her serious-mindedness went on to attract kindred spirits, too, such as director Marwan Hamed, who cast her in the now-classic *The Yacoubian Building* (2006) when he was also in his twenties. Since then, the two have collaborated on several of the most ambitious and highest-grossing films in Egypt's long cinematic history, including *The Blue Elephant*, its sequel and *Kira & El Gin*.

"Every generation has a group of people who band together and carry the voice of that generation. I feel very privileged to be a part of this generation of directors and actors who grew together and have been able to make movies that were not possible before we started out," says Sabry.

Some of her greatest joy is in watching as her collaborators reach new heights. Hamed's next film *El Set* is a biopic about famed singer Umm Kulthum. Ben Hania's latest, *The Voice of Hind Rajab*, about the young girl in Gaza killed by Israel last January, debuted to a record ovation at Venice Film Festival this month. Sabry is bursting with pride for both of them – calling them fearless, invincible and visionary.

For her, their success feels like part of the same forest she has been tending all along. Each choice, each risk, each refusal to compromise are all trees that make the ecosystem stronger. And though grief is reshaping Sabry's life in ways she has yet to discover, she knows the only way is to keep planting – knowing that her mother is still with her, holding out the seeds.

"When you're gone, what remains is the legacy of a person. My mother was a teacher, and over the past several weeks, I've received messages, emails and condolences from so many of her former students. All of them have said the same thing: 'This teacher was different. She taught me to be myself. She believed in me when nobody did.' Only certain types of people get to have a legacy like that."

And as she moves forward into the next phase of her life, carrying her mother's lessons more firmly than ever, Sabry is determined to build on that legacy – the one her mother dreamt for her, and the one she now dreams for others.

Her mother planted the first tree, and Sabry will continue to spend her life making sure the forest outlasts them both.

FASHION DIRECTOR: **SARAH MAISEY**
PHOTOGRAPHER: **HUSSEIN MARDINI**
CREATIVE DIRECTION: **NOOR BABYLON**
ART DIRECTION: **MOHAMMED MAGED**
PRODUCER: **SALEH JUNIOR**
HAIRSTYLIST: **SILVIA BERNABA**
MAKE-UP ARTIST: **MARIAM HABASHI**
MAKE-UP ASSISTANT: **HAMSA**
PRODUCTION BY **UNSCENE**
SHOT ON LOCATION AT **BAYT YAKAN, CAIRO**

The last bungalows

In the shadow of Dubai's relentless reinvention, a cluster of decades-old homes in Jumeirah 2 has become an unlikely haven for artists, designers and dreamers. Soon they will be gone, taking with them not just walls and gardens, but also a community built on everyday bonds

Words: Nasri Atallah
Photography: Antonie Robertson

In Jumeirah 2 sits what resident Butheina Kazim calls "a compound of oil-men-era bungalows built in the 1980s". By this time next year, they will be gone. Another chapter erased in a city that never stops its march towards the future. Building, expanding inland and upwards, often over the past.

The villas themselves look as though they were lifted straight from Venice Beach, yet for generations of residents, they have carried meaning about inhabiting the city. "These structures are treasure troves of meaning and rootedness," says Kazim, founder of Cinema Akil. "In a place where there's a constant pressure to do away with the past, sentimentality or attachment can feel invisible, but it governs so much of how you exist here. These houses meant something to the people who chose to make them home. They eventually became a community."

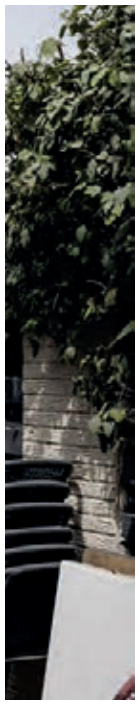
For Kazim, that cluster of low-slung, three-bedroom, tile-roofed homes – wedged between aesthetic clinics, the perpetual glow of luxe shisha joint Huqqabaz and the Four Seasons – became a haven for the city's art, design and creative communities.

"There is something so powerful in belonging to a community," says resident Ghita Mejdi, an executive coach and founder of the Kliff Project. "When we moved in six years ago, it was just polite nods from afar, and somehow that turned into knowing each other's names and habits. The comfort of seeing the same faces every day, saying hello, asking about dogs and families, greeting the gardeners, even feeding the stray cats together. Over the years, we've been there for each other, in the little things and in the bigger moments too."

When the bulldozers arrive, it won't only be the bricks and mortar that disappear, Mejdi says. "It's hard to think we have to start from scratch and imagine life in Dubai without these people."

END OF AN ERA

From contemporary artworks and coffee-table books to accent lighting and rustic furniture, Butheina Kazim's home represents a 'treasure trove of meaning and rootedness'. The Cinema Akil founder will be leaving the storied Jumeirah 2 bungalows soon, ahead of their planned demolition next year alongside the other residents of what has become a close-knit community of Dubai's art, design and creative minds



LINKS IN THE CHAIN

For Ghita Mejdi, executive coach and former senior executive for a number of luxury automotive brands in the region, it's the people who made the community. Over the years, neighbours who became friends, knowing exactly when to extend a helping hand, might just be the most difficult aspect for her to leave behind

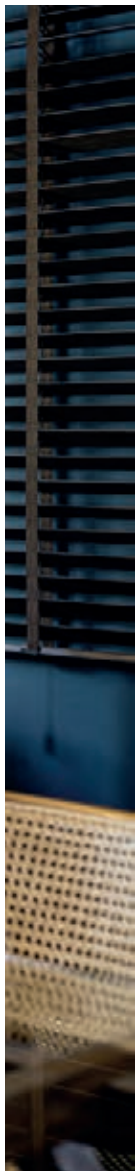
For Sunny Rahbar, founder of The Third Line art gallery, the bungalows are bound to memory. "We used to all be members at the Hilton Beach Club across the street when I was a kid. It was where we hung out after school. That place is long gone. Even the place that replaced it is long gone."

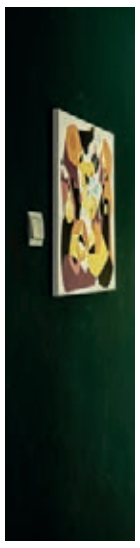
Rahbar adds: "When we were children, we'd pass these villas on our way home from the club. There actually used to be more of them. These are the last ones left. They've always been a mainstay of this stretch of Dubai."

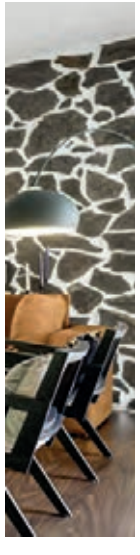
Rahbar herself has lived in one of the villas for more than a decade. "When I discovered that one was available for rent 13 years ago, I was completely over the moon. I was so happy I could live in one of these bungalows I remembered from my childhood. This house has been through a lot of my life with me.

"I've been in Dubai 46 years. For me, living here was a way to stay in a house that was part of the old city I grew up in. Leaving is very difficult. It's the end of an era," she adds.

In this poignant photo essay, *The National*'s Antonie Robertson captures the beauty of these homes and the melancholy of leaving them behind. And it leaves us wondering, where the next generation carrying Dubai's creative heartbeat will decide to congregate and build lives as a shared community.







EMPTYING THE NEST

Sunny Rabhar is the founder of Alserkal Avenue's The Third Line art gallery, which celebrates its 20th anniversary this year. Her relationship with the bungalows started as a child growing up in Dubai, when she would drive past them with her family. She has lived in one for 13 years, and will soon have to pack up lush plants and desert succulents alike, along with the mementoes on gallery walls lovingly collected and displayed over the years

Superyachts for science

From Indonesia to Scotland, high-end private vessels are helping scientists explore oceans in ways research boats can't, writes **Josh Sims**

You may have heard of a coelacanth. It is a prehistoric-looking deepwater fish that is rarely seen unless washed up dead onshore. Earlier this year, a scientific expedition off Indonesia dived to depths of 150 metres and beyond to study the creature in its natural habitat for the first time. What made this possible? The research was conducted from a private superyacht, hosted free of charge by its owner.

It's one of more than 300 vessels – from tugs, catamarans and sailing boats to cruisers and billionaire-class megayachts – registered with Florida's International SeaKeepers Society. The group connects marine scientists with boat owners to carry out research that, even without diminishing grant funding, would often be impossible. This year alone, it has helped run more than 20 expeditions.

"The fact is there is more research about the marine world to be done and so many scientists are trying to do that. And yet, the number of vessels available to them pales in comparison," says Tony Gilbert, the society's chief programmes officer. "Even if a university has a boat, it's one that maybe five labs are fighting over."

SeaKeepers offers an elegant solution – if a boat owner is heading somewhere relevant, persuade them to bring a scientist or six along. The gains for science are immense – not least

Yacht owners are signing up to organisations that match them with scientists seeking a ride to remote locations

Being able to say you've helped advance science on your last trip tends to strike other owners as 'wow, that's really cool'

Yachts such as Discovery, right, help scientists study marine life, left, including coral reefs, below

the comfort of a 100-metre floating palace, even if the vessel's size makes it less than nimble. Crucially, private yachts can access areas off-limits to official research ships – or at least without enduring months of red tape and permits from the governments that oversee those territorial waters.

That works both ways – scientists' research permits can grant boat owners rare access to tightly controlled waters, such as the Galapagos Islands or the South Pacific's Pitcairn Islands, visited recently by a SeaKeepers mission.

Owner commitment varies. Most contribute depth-sounding data to the Seabed 2030 initiative, to map the ocean floor by the decade's end. Some host only short daytrips, while others volunteer for multi-week expeditions. Research may focus on photogenic subjects such as whales, dolphins, sharks and coral reefs, but also less-headline-grabbing projects – tracking pollution in bays or data-heavy studies "full of jargon that only the scientists involved seem to understand", Gilbert says with a laugh. Owners who charter their vessels may even take a financial hit to participate. "Some owners may just think of their boat as a status symbol, and chances are they won't be working with us," Gilbert adds. "But others are aware that they have this vessel, crewed and ready to go – which is incredibly expensive to do – but which just sits there a lot of the time.

"These people typically love the ocean and understand the need to protect it. So getting involved with science is a recognition of the need to utilise their vessel well," Gilbert explains. "Besides which, boat owners tend to talk to each other. And being able to say you've just helped advance science on your last trip tends to strike other owners as 'wow, that's really cool'."

The concept is catching on. In the UK, Yachts for Science – which is backed by the Ocean Family Foundation – also matches boats with biologists. This year, it's sending researchers to French Polynesia to study manta rays and to Outer Hebrides in Scotland to investigate the sea floor.

"Many missions are simple," says project lead Rosie O'Donnell. "If you're tagging sharks off Majorca, you just need a local sport fisherman's boat. We're not usually asking for something with its own submersible." She currently oversees 20 projects and is looking for a major investor to help reach more boat owners.

"But there are a lot of research projects out there and a huge demand. Getting those projects up and running is all about access to boats and that means getting on to boat owners' radar," she explains. According to yacht market intelligence platform BoatPro, there are about 13,000 suitable vessels of more than 24 metres globally. "We just need a fraction of those," she says. "No money changes hands. They're out there and want to help."

Meanwhile, the Pink Flamingo Society, co-chaired by Romain Trouble of the French NGO Tara Ocean Foundation, goes a step further, engaging prospective owners before their yachts are even built.

Why so? The Pink Flamingo Society tries to persuade them that rather than build a floating hotel – which is of limited use for cutting-edge marine science – humanity would be much better served if they built a proper research ship from scratch, albeit an unusually well-appointed one. So far the building of seven vessels is under way, with others some years off, given shipyard schedules.

It is, Trouble argues, a new spin on the idea of private individuals investing in space, and advancing its exploration accordingly. Rather, here the investment goes into a world that is far more accessible, that covers about 71 per cent of the Earth's surface, and yet about which we know comparatively little.

GETTY; THE INTERNATIONAL SEAKEEPERS / UNSEEN EXPEDITIONS; RICK THOMAS / HARBOUR BRANCH OCEANOGRAPHIC INSTITUTE

BUILT FOR DEPTH

Decades after their invention, dive watches remain the ultimate blend of toughness and refinement, equally at home under water or peeking out from under a cuff, writes **Francesca Fearon**

The diver is one of the most popular categories of wristwatches, originally conceived as a tool for explorers and military divers. In its early years, it was built purely for function – waterproof cases, legible dials and rugged construction were essential. Today, however, the diver watch is as likely to surface in a boardroom as it is to plunge into the ocean's depths.

Omega was the first to dive in. In 1932, it released the Marine, the world's first diver's watch, worn by renowned explorers and oceanographers including Jacques Cousteau and Charles William Beebe, one of the inventors of the bathysphere, a deep-diving vessel. That pioneering watch was followed in 1948 by the Seamaster, which went on to become one of the most recognisable dive watches in history.

Blancpain, another watchmaker with a storied heritage, introduced the Fifty Fathoms in 1953. Named for its water tightness up to 50 fathoms (about 91 metres), it quickly became popular, adopted by French naval divers, as well as by Cousteau and marine conservationist and photographer Laurent Ballesta. Its reputation was not only technical, but cultural. It was a watch that spoke to the romance of the sea.

Other houses soon joined the current. Panerai developed the Luminor, instantly recognisable for its oversized crown guard, sandwich dial and luminous numerals. Breitling launched the Superocean. These, like the Rolex Submariner, were conceived as pure tool watches – sturdy, practical and uncompromising. But their functionality did not prevent them from becoming style icons. Omega's Seamaster was strapped to James Bond, and Steve McQueen was forever linked to the Rolex Submariner. The diver's aura of toughness and adventure became inseparable from its allure.

That enduring appeal has allowed the dive watch to evolve beyond its utilitarian roots. Increasingly, models are being designed for lifestyle wear and for a broader audience. One clear trend is smaller sizing, appealing to both women and men with slimmer wrists. Tudor's Black Bay 54 Lagoon Blue, for instance, shrinks to a well-balanced 37mm case, with a dial inspired by Tudor's 1950s divers. It's a nod to the Oyster Prince Submariner reference 7922, adopted by the French and US navies, but inside beats the modern Calibre MT5400, engineered for robustness.

Colour is another force reshaping the category. Blancpain's Fifty Fathoms Tech line, for example, makes a bold statement with new orange rubber straps. Still substantial at 45mm, the titanium case houses a unidirectional bezel with 120 clicks for use with gloved hands. For Blancpain chief executive Marc A Hayek, innovation is

OMEGA; PANERAI

Dive watches are now being designed for a broader audience and lifestyle wear

central. "When we developed the Fifty Fathoms Gombessa in 2023 [a watch named after Ballesta's scientific expedition to research the coelacanth fish, thought extinct for 70 million years], it came from a question I asked myself: 'If the Fifty Fathoms were invented today, what would it look like?'" The answer is the new Fifty Fathoms Tech BOC, which brings advanced technology into a more wearable form. "Now, I love that we can bring colour and style into the Tech line, proving that a serious diver's watch can also have a lifestyle side," says Hayek.

Omega has also embraced vivid hues in its Seamaster Aqua Terra series. The latest release is a striking turquoise, available in both 38mm and 41mm cases. With ceramic bezels, a turquoise varnish dial shaded with a black gradient and Super-LumiNova markers, the watch is as stylish as it is capable, water-resistant up to 150 metres. It carries forward the DNA of the original Seamaster while nodding to the technical refinements of the modern Seamaster 300M.

Montblanc, better known for its mountaineering-inspired timepieces, has moved decisively into diving with its Iced Sea Automatic Date collection. These are ISO 6425-certified divers watches, thanks in part to the brand's O Oxygen technology, which eliminates fogging under extreme temperature shifts and prevents oxidation so the components last longer. The line now comes in a smaller 38mm size, broadening its appeal, and offers glacier-patterned dials in crisp white and ice blue, paired with rubber straps or a steel bracelet.

Breitling's relationship with the sea goes back to 1957, when it debuted the Superocean. Then, as now, the model was as much about design as utility. Today, it has been reimagined as the Superocean Heritage. The collection includes a 42mm chronograph and automatic models in 40mm, 42mm and 44mm, equipped with the new B31 movement, plus a more compact 36mm version with the Calibre 10 automatic movement in mint green. "It's our most elegant sea watch and this update is about refinement," says Breitling chief executive Georges Kern. "Details have been perfected, but the spirit stays the same. It's about style at sea."

Oris, meanwhile, continues to champion accessibility and conservation. The Divers Sixty-Five Chronograph is a vintage-inspired piece with ocean-green accents, retro pump pushers and 100-metre water resistance. In its bestselling Aquis line, Oris has launched the Aquis Date in a fashionable New York Harbour aqua-green, paired with a rubber strap. Released last month, it supports the restoration of oyster reefs in New York Harbour.

Marine conservation has become a rallying cry for many watchmakers, tying the diver's tool-watch heritage to today's environmental concerns.

Ulysse Nardin has just released the Diver Hammerhead Shark chronometer, a muscular 44mm model in blue PVD-coated titanium, its case-back engraved with a hammerhead motif. It continues the maison's Shark series, which supports ocean protection.

Panerai, too, has integrated sustainability into its identity. The brand has forged partnerships with causes such as manta ray conservation and Ocean Literacy With All, making each watch purchase feel like a contribution. This year, it revisits the Luminor Marina of the 1990s, originally a military instrument, reinterpreted for civilians in lighter titanium and with a thinner case profile. The result is a watch that remains faithful to its military toughness, while offering clarity and lightness for those venturing below the surface.

From Omega's pioneering Marine to Blancpain's Fifty Fathoms, and from Panerai's rugged military instruments to today's vibrant, conservation-minded designs, the dive watch has continually evolved. What began as a practical solution for professionals, is now an icon of style, adaptability and purpose. Whether strapped on in the depths of the ocean or peeking out from under a shirt cuff, the diver remains one of watchmaking's most enduring creations.

Dive watches are offered by a number of storied brands including Omega, far left, and Panerai, left

CALL OF THE

Farah Andrews heads to South Africa for three days of unforgettable encounters at Jumeirah Thanda Safari

WILD

Guests are accompanied on game drives by both a guide and a tracker

"Shhh," our guide whispers, commanding quiet as we ease up a dusty track an hour into our first game drive. My eyes dart, trying to catch whatever he's seen on the horizon, scanning the scrub and the road ahead.

I get confirmation I'd make a terrible safari guide when, seconds later, I spot a male lion strolling down the middle of the track, only metres from our open-top Land Cruiser. At his side, a lioness locks eyes on our vehicle as it slows to a halt.

It's a moment I'll never forget – my first sight of the majestic big five in the wild. The feelings come all at once – calm in the presence of Africa's greatest predator, disbelief at being so close and exhilaration that this is the beginning – one of six drives I am able to experience at Jumeirah Thanda Safari in South Africa.

Over the next three days, I get closer than I thought was possible to extraordinary wildlife, while learning about the park's conservation programme and retreating each night to sprawling private villas managed by the famed Dubai hotel group.

Set within a private reserve, the property is home to lions, giraffes, elephants, rhinos and zebras. The luxurious villas at the lodge, meanwhile, offer several creature comforts, including a pool

Set within 16,500 hectares of private reserve in KwaZulu-Natal, the property is home to lions, leopards, rhinos, elephants and buffalo, plus hyenas, zebras, impala and more than 500 bird species. Each day promises new tracking adventures to tick more animals off the list.

Our first drive begins with our guide, Amend, and tracker, Nhlanhla, asking what we hope to see. A car full of safari novices replies with a chorus of "lions", while elephants, giraffes, rhinos and leopards quickly follow. Smiling, Amend tempers expectations: "It's Zululand, not Disneyland," he says, but promises to try.

As we enter the big five reserve – separate from the lodge area – Nhlanhla suddenly signals for Amend to stop. Hopping from his perch at the front, he spots a lion's print in the dust and follows it for more than an hour.

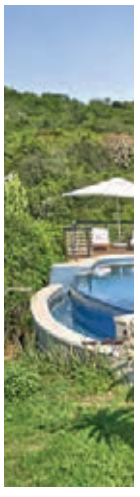
It's clear we're in expert hands. Nhlanhla has been at Thanda 14 years, Amend since the past October. They work in sync, reading the land and each other. Traditional trackers, they follow dung, footprints and broken branches, and co-ordinate with other guides to share sightings.

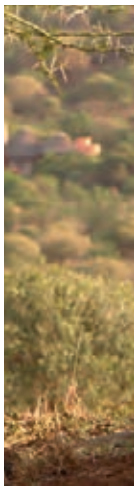
Animal welfare is central here. A strict rule allows only two vehicles at any sighting, giving animals space and visitors rare moments of exclusivity. At times it feels like it is just us and the wild.

Drives run morning and evening, with stops for refreshments. After our first lion sighting, we pause to debrief, still buzzing. Sunset drives become my most treasured memories. Amend agrees: "It's all about the sunrise, the sunsets and those unforgettable moments."

Over three days, the thrill of seeing lions never wanes. I stumble on a lone lioness mid-sprint

JUMEIRAH





Animal welfare is central here. A strict rule allows only two vehicles at any sighting, giving animals space and visitors exclusivity

to the lodge for a bathroom break – nothing halts urgency like a big cat in your path. On the last day, we find a male with three females, springing to life when he scents a rival nearby. It's like watching *Planet Earth*, but live.

As a first-timer, my illusions are quickly quashed. I thought animals were digitally tracked and easy to find. In truth, it's hide-and-seek, the adrenalin peaking when after hours of waiting, something finally appears. The leopard was the only big five to stay elusive.

I also assumed elephants were easy to spot. Wrong. Despite their bulk, they vanish into greenery. Our sighting comes only after veering down an overgrown track Nhlanhla had never tried before. We hear branches snap, then finally a young bull emerges, enormous and blocking the road.

My last misconception was that it's all about the big five. In reality, our guides were just as excited by the smaller creatures – from warthogs (immortalised by *The Lion King*'s Pumba) to plants and dazzling birds – as they were by lions or rhinos.

One thing didn't surprise me: the emphasis on conservation. Rhino poaching is an ever-present threat, so the hotel has a strong team working on anti-poaching efforts. Endangered species such as rhinos and cheetahs are carefully monitored by dedicated staff.

At the lodge, we stay in a vast four-bedroom villa with a living room, terrace, communal firepits and a pool. Villas can be booked privately or by the room, with facilities shared. Two daily game drives, three meals, snacks and select drinks are all included.

Each villa is privately owned, with mirrored layouts but distinct interiors. Ours has a fresh, Hamptons feel – crisp whites, canopied beds, light and airy spaces.

We visited in June, when it is winter time in South Africa, so I skipped a dip in the pool. But after early starts, nothing beats sitting on the outdoor lounge, breathing in the fresh reserve air and gazing at the endless green views. If a giraffe or warthog wandered by, it felt like the perfect extra.

Jumeirah Thanda Safari is a three-hour drive or a 60-minute helicopter ride from Durban's King Shaka International Airport. From the UAE, Emirates operates daily direct flights between Dubai and Durban.

RAGING BULL FINDS ITS VOICE ONCE AGAIN

All-new Lamborghini Temerario will impress on the road, but it truly comes alive on the track, as **Simon Wilgress-Pipe** finds out

Lamborghini's Temerario features razor-sharp lines on the outside and an efficient interior with comfortable seats and easily accessible controls

The air at Portugal's Estoril Circuit has often been thick with anticipation thanks to its Formula One legacy, but the buzz on the drizzly summer morning I visit is palpable by any standard. That's often the case with a new Lamborghini, a marque that's long defied convention with audacious design and unfiltered power. Take the Countach that, despite its notorious handling, influenced the silhouette of nearly every supercar since. Today's centrepiece is the debut of the Temerario.

Bathed in defiantly bright colours, a menacing line-up of Temerarios sit in the pit lane. Their low-slung, angular forms are new, but unmistakably Lamborghini. Razor-sharp lines hint at aerodynamic intent – the aggressive stance at massive power beneath the composite skin. Signature Y-motifs are subtly evolved. The colossal diffuser and high-mounted exhausts at the rear look ready to devour tarmac.

Underneath it all, an all-new 4-litre V8 twin-turbo engine is paired with three electric motors. This isn't only about horsepower. It's about torque delivered like a lightning strike. The 0–100kph sprint takes 2.7 seconds, with top speed pushing 350kph. But a Lamborghini, especially one built for circuits such as Estoril, is about more than straight-line brute force. It's about the dance between driver, machine and asphalt. In that respect, the Temerario proves ready to perform.

Slipping into the cockpit, I am immediately struck by the focused efficiency of the interior – not unusual in a supercar, but those not familiar with such vehicles might be surprised by how many manufacturers opt for a questionable cabin layout.

Every control is within easy reach, each display angled for optimal readability. The seats, sculpted for lateral support, cradle me firmly, a necessary embrace given what is to come.

Pressing the start button unleashes a growl that vibrates through the chassis and into my bones. This is the sound of about 800bhp, spinning up to 10,000rpm.

The Lamborghini Temerario is a defiant ode to the thrill of driving

The first laps of the famous circuit are for familiarisation, with the track and the machine. Even during those tame laps, the car's precision is obvious. Steering is direct and unfiltered, translating track textures to my fingertips.

With 60 per cent more downforce in the newbie compared to the Huracan Evo, even amateur drivers can avoid spin-outs. Carbon-ceramic brakes allow surgical late-braking – like dropping an anchor with scalpel-like precision. It is possible to hit 300kph on Estoril's straight. Those brakes are needed.

A firm throttle press turns the windscreen into a blur. The power-train lets loose a mechanical scream. Gear changes crack from the exhaust in perfectly timed bursts. But the Temerario truly shines in corners.

Estoril's demanding mix of sweepers and chicanes sees the car remain planted, balanced and astonishingly fast. Active aero systems glue it to the tarmac. The chassis stays composed and the grip through fast turns is phenomenal.

Pushing a machine like this to its limits brings primal satisfaction. Despite its sophistication, the Temerario retains Lamborghini's raw, unfiltered soul. It demands full attention. At full tilt, there's no room for error, just controlled chaos. Most drivers exit the cockpit with shaking legs and a desperate need for a strong Portuguese coffee.

The Lamborghini Temerario is a defiant ode to the thrill of driving. It reminds us that passion, engineering and a touch of glorious mayhem still create the extraordinary.

As with almost all supercars these days, it can certainly be used on the road, but, as with almost all supercars these days, something a little larger is probably more suitable for a proper road trip.

In the city, it's a caged animal – the symbolic bull, barely contained, straining against the bars. The Temerario isn't just a new model, it's a statement. And at Estoril, it lands with impact.

LAMBORGHINI

A taste of Mumbai in Dubai

Farah Andrews samples the fare at Khadak, former Dishoom chef Naved Nasir's Dubai restaurant, which is becoming an institution in the city

Khadak is no hidden gem. Since opening in November, the Indian restaurant has already earned a Michelin Bib Gourmand, awarded for "good quality, good value cooking" – an accolade it picked up only six months after opening.

I visit on a Friday afternoon in August, usually a quiet time in the UAE, but not here. Word is out: Khadak is the place for atmosphere, striking decor and excellent food.

The concept comes from Naved Nasir, former chef director of UK chain Dishoom – an institution famed for its food and infamously long queues. At Khadak, he brings the same energy with one Dubai-friendly twist – reservations are welcome, so no waiting in 40°C sunshine on Al Wasl Road.

The restaurant is named after a road in Mumbai's street food district Bhendi Bazaar, and the menu is inspired by the fare served in the area. Inside, the look is as considered as the cooking – rattan furniture, asymmetrical art, antique electronics, colourful tiles and velvet upholstery. It feels like the chic living room of a friend who knows how to entertain.

Sharing is the way to go. We start with morel cheese kulcha with truffle butter, karari kale chaat and tangra prawns, joined by murgh malai Sichuan and patthar ka gosht from the grill. I have since read that the keema pao on the menu is inspired by the famed Radio Cafe in Mumbai, so that will be on my list the next time I go back.

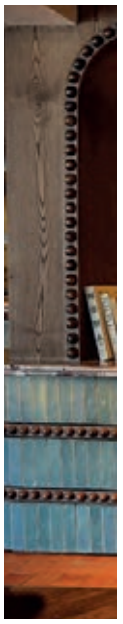
The kulcha is indulgent, gooey, creamy and irresistible. The chaat bursts with colour and crunch, crisp kale against pomegranate, chutney and yoghurt. The standout is the tangra prawns: tangy, ginger-garlic perfection.

The grilled dishes impress too. The murgh malai Sichuan brings smoky, succulent chicken marinated in warm, gentle spices. Patthar ka gosht, a "Hyderabadi heirloom", arrives under a smoke-filled glass dome for tableside theatre. The tender goat slices, paired with saffron rotis, are worth the drama.

It is at this stage that I realise the grilled dishes are not the main course. Too full to consider two or three more sharing dishes, we order the Khadak daal to share – slow-cooked black lentils, creamy and buttery with a tomato base, comfort in a clay bowl. I take the leftovers home, happily.

Dessert is impossible to skip. After chai, we try the Malabar coffee milk cake, a lighter cousin of tiramisu, spongy and subtly rich. Then Nasir himself insists on the mango milk cake, which acts as a bright summery addition to our table, all in honour of mango season. Layered with cream and fresh Alphonso, it was launched in May and was meant to rotate off the menu, but fan demand may keep it permanent.

Less than a year in, Khadak already feels like a Dubai dining institution. With food, detail and atmosphere to match its Michelin recognition, it's a place I'll keep returning to. The number of people I have told about the meal since is testament to that.



Featuring chic interiors and a menu inspired by Indian street food, Naved Nasir's Khadak is a Bib Gourmand restaurant in the Michelin Guide

The restaurant is named after a road in Bhendi Bazaar, Mumbai's famed street food district

Sultan Sooud Al Qassemi
ON ART

L'institutrice (1954) by Gazbia Sirry

September is back-to-school month in the region. Children return to classrooms, routines and that perennial mix of trepidation and excitement. Today, the Emirates is ranked among the globe's top education destinations, a remarkable feat given that formal schooling only took root in the early 1950s. Since the pandemic, classrooms have shifted again, with remote learning, artificial intelligence and mobile phones reshaping how children learn and interact.

Yet, school remains more than a place of instruction. It is a social crucible where identities are formed, friendships struck and where the memory of a good teacher can last a lifetime. Technology may enrich lessons, but it cannot replace those human connections.

It is precisely this bond that Gazbia Sirry captures in *L'institutrice* (1954). A group of young girls listen attentively to their teacher. One offers her a lotus flower, perhaps picked on the way to school, a gesture of thoughtfulness that precedes the lesson itself. The lotus, Egypt's national flower, becomes a symbol of unity and of the intimate ties between pupil and teacher. Behind them, the blackboard carries Sirry's message: "Love and peace between peoples and races, old and young". Painted at a time of sweeping reforms in Egypt – when writer Taha Hussein's campaign for free schooling opened classrooms to poorer families – the work is both tender and political.

The UAE, too, has had its own champions of education. Sheikha Fatima bint Mubarak, celebrated as the Mother of the Nation, has advocated for girls' education and literacy for over half a century. Pioneers such as Amna Al Hajeri and Nama bint Majid, honoured in 2014 as the UAE's first formal teachers, began their work in the 1960s. Today, Sheikha Bodour Al Qasimi, chairperson and president of the American University of Sharjah, inspires young Emiratis through her leadership in education and literacy. In 2015, the UAE launched the Global Teacher Prize, worth $1 million, to recognise outstanding educators worldwide. Its 2016 laureate, Palestinian teacher Hanan Al Hroub, devised her We Play and Learn approach after her own children were traumatised by witnessing a shooting on their way home from school. Her playful, trust-building methods are now celebrated internationally.

But admiring this painting is also an opportunity to remember that across the Arab world, millions of children remain outside the classroom. Sudan's civil war, raging since 2023, has left 17 million students without schooling. It is a tragic irony, given the role Sudanese professionals once played in building the Emirates – figures such as Kamal Hamza, Dubai Municipality's director from 1961 to 1985. In Syria, 2.4 million children were displaced from classrooms after 2011; with the war's end in 2024, there is cautious hope they may return. The most devastating case is Gaza, where what Lebanese academic Gilbert Achcar has called the karitha (the catastrophe), which, according to the UN, killed or injured 50,000 Palestinian children and left 645,000 more out of school, with no prospect of resuming their education.

As our own children head back to their lessons, we must remember those denied this fundamental chance. The words on Sirry's blackboard – "Love and peace between peoples and races" – feel painfully distant. Yet, for the sake of all children across the Arab world, we must keep them alive, as both hope and imperative.

RAMZI AND SAEDA DALLOUL ART FOUNDATION, BEIRUT / GAZBIA SIRRY ESTATE

As our own children head back to their lessons, we must remember those denied this chance

Yasmine Hamdan's first solo album since 2017 is shaped by her life between Paris and Beirut

A voice made of

Lebanese musician Yasmine Hamdan's first album in eight years showcases her freewheeling spirit, writes **Saeed Saeed**

YLIAS NAO

> **Music became this place where I would find myself, where I would reconnect to the past of this region, of my family**

Yasmine Hamdan thought a year away from music would be enough. But, somehow, one year became eight. This month, the singer returns with *I Remember I Forget*, her first solo album since 2017, which reflects on a homeland that has shifted dramatically since her last release.

"I stopped touring after my previous record, *Al Jamilat*," she says. "I decided back then to take a year off to do the things I never have the time to do and to connect with the people I love. But then Covid came, then the economic crisis in Lebanon, then the Beirut Port explosion. All these things I had to process. It took me time to gather my thoughts and to understand what I wanted to come up with."

Rather than rushing back into the cycle of releases and tours, Hamdan took time to develop material at her own pace. "I was going against the general tendency of productivity and communication, of being full-on all the time," she says. "For me, the world was very noisy. I needed clarity."

Working from her Paris home studio, Hamdan says most of the songs were completed there before she brought in collaborators to flesh out the ideas. "I had no plan whatsoever, aside from the pleasure of creating," she says. "It gave me strength. But when the work started to evolve, I began to feel this could become a record. When I had four songs, that really made me happy; I started to see the whole picture."

The songs became an exploration of living in liminality – between present safety and distant trauma – drawing from sources as varied as 11th-century muwashshah poetry and encrypted Palestinian resistance songs. *Hon* was the first track she penned for the album, co-written with Palestinian poet Anas Alaili, and it captured that tension between the here and the there.

"I had a blockage. For the first time in my life, I was going through an accumulation of crises. Making music is intuitive for me. But when it came to writing lyrics, articulating what I was feeling with words, that was tough," she says.

"I always like to mix influences that inspire me – Arabic instruments, but also Pakistani music, Japanese music, really old recordings," she adds. "I don't care for borders, whether it's Arabic or rock or anything else."

Shmaali, which merges subdued electronic production with chant-like verses and a hazy melody, is built around encrypted Palestinian songs dating back to the Ottoman era. These coded verses allowed women to communicate with imprisoned loved ones while evading jailers and censors. "I was completely in awe when I discovered this form," Hamdan says. "The idea of resisting with poetry, of using coded lyrics to exclude the authority that is oppressing you, was a powerful symbol. I wanted my version to be a victorious song, almost like a hymn."

Hamdan brought her sister in to provide backing vocals, working alongside frequent French collaborator Marc Collin and his newly acquired 1960s synthesiser.

The freewheeling spirit of *I Remember I Forget* reflects Hamdan's own life, split between Paris and Beirut. "This record is about exactly this – the sense of living in two places at the same time," she says. "Sometimes I feel it's absurd because I'm living here, but also living the time of war that is there. I don't think you can ever disconnect, because all the people I love are there."

Born in Lebanon and raised across Kuwait, Abu Dhabi and Greece, Hamdan was 13 when Iraq's invasion of Kuwait forced her family to return to Beirut.

"I lived this experience of exodus and it marked me deeply," she says. "I felt I was living a historical moment. When we came back to Lebanon, I didn't think of it as 'returning to my country'. I came back to a place where my parents came from, where I had a lot of family and where I had emotional ties."

She formed Soap Kills, the pioneering electronic duo with producer and multi-instrumentalist Zeid Hamdan, which helped shape Beirut's postwar music scene in 1997, when she was 22.

"It was a very particular period because everything was possible," she says of forming the band. "The war had ended and there was some hope that, after all this destruction, things would be corrected. But we were also a generation that inherited the war without understanding it, and the traces of it were everywhere."

She describes her work with Soap Kills – known for seminal tracks such as *Za* and *Cheftak* – as a soundtrack to her sense of alienation in Beirut. Coming to Lebanon after years abroad, she recalled feeling like an "insider outsider".

"I never really felt I belonged to any place. I didn't know where home was," she notes. "So for me, music became this place where I would find myself, where I would reconnect to the past of this region, of my family. We had such a scattered childhood and history."

As for the abrasive and pugnacious music – with Hamdan's raw and hypnotic vocals addressing themes of love, loss and urban dislocation – she says Soap Kills' approach was nothing if not resolute.

"I knew what I was doing and I knew that I had to do it," she says. "This was a way of transforming pain and also rebelling. I was not going to pursue any conventional way of existing. I wanted to find my own path, even if it wasn't easy."

Her relationship with her own former firebrand image has evolved considerably since those early days. "When I started, I felt that showing my image was violating something," she says. "Now I want to use images for fun, to experiment with them as I do with music. It's enriched my world so much."

Soap Kills disbanded in 2005 when she moved to Paris, and Hamdan, 49, says she has no interest in reviving it. "Every record for me is a new adventure," she says. "Now the world has changed. We have changed. Even the interaction with music has changed."

distance

After her time with the band, Hamdan began to define her solo identity. In 2009, she released *Arabology*, a sleek electropop album created with Madonna producer Mirwais.

The project marked Hamdan's first major step away from the band and her earliest attempt at confronting her resistance to showing her image. "I had a mission between me and myself to break this resistance," she recalls. "After that I was more present physically because I thought that if I am singing in Arabic, maybe it's important to put a face to the voice so it can connect to more people."

I Remember I Forget continues this trajectory through her push towards multidisciplinarity. "Now I don't feel the same way at all," she says. "I want to use images for fun, to experiment with them as I do with music. I've been writing and directing clips, and also engaging with filmmakers, animators and other artists.

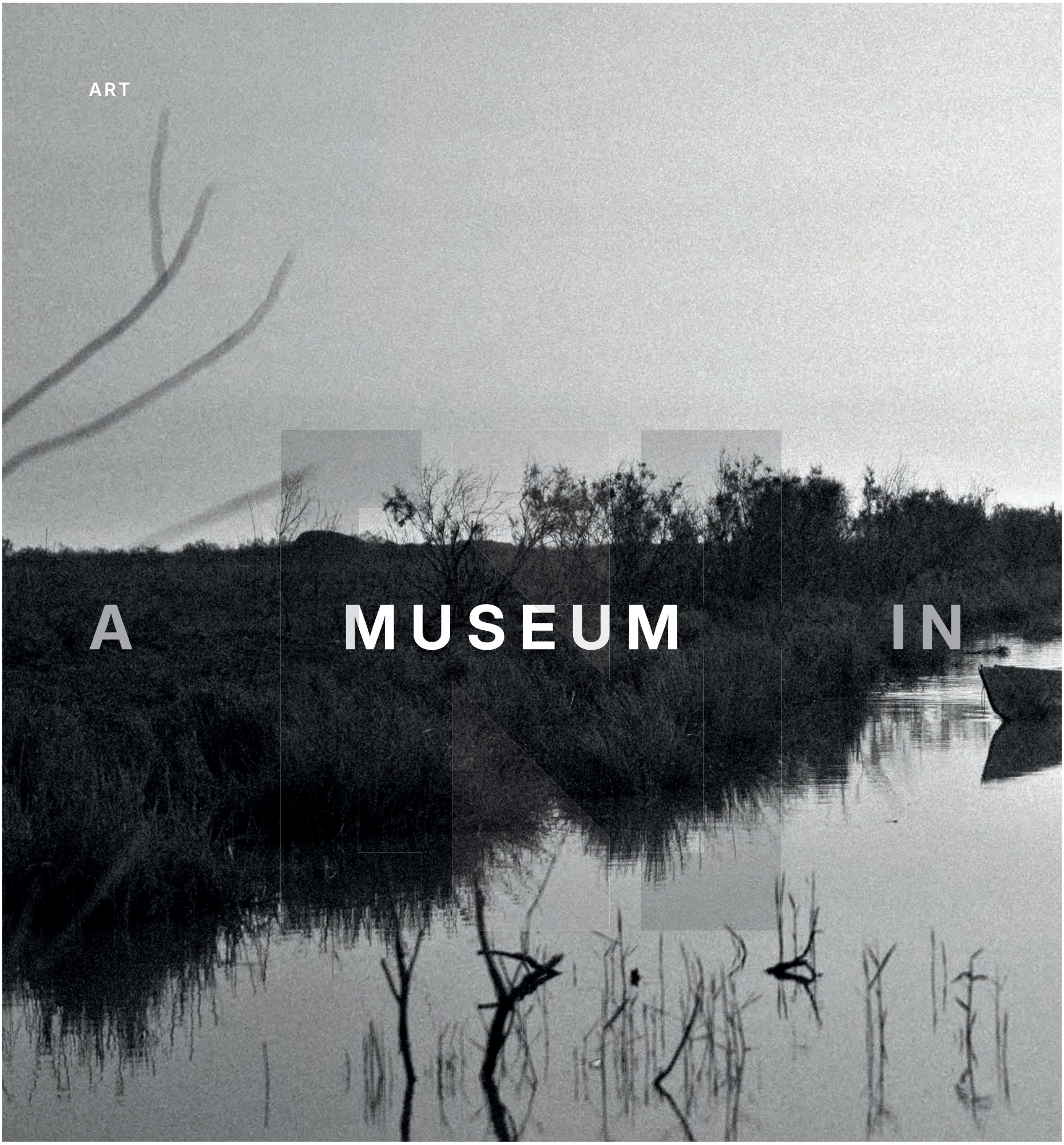
"This has enriched my world so much. This is how I want to evolve – towards something more multidisciplinary."

Living between France and Lebanon has shaped not just her music but her entire worldview.

"Paris is great, but I don't have the emotional engagement that I have with Lebanon," she says. "Lebanon, the region, Palestine – this is what nourishes my reflections.

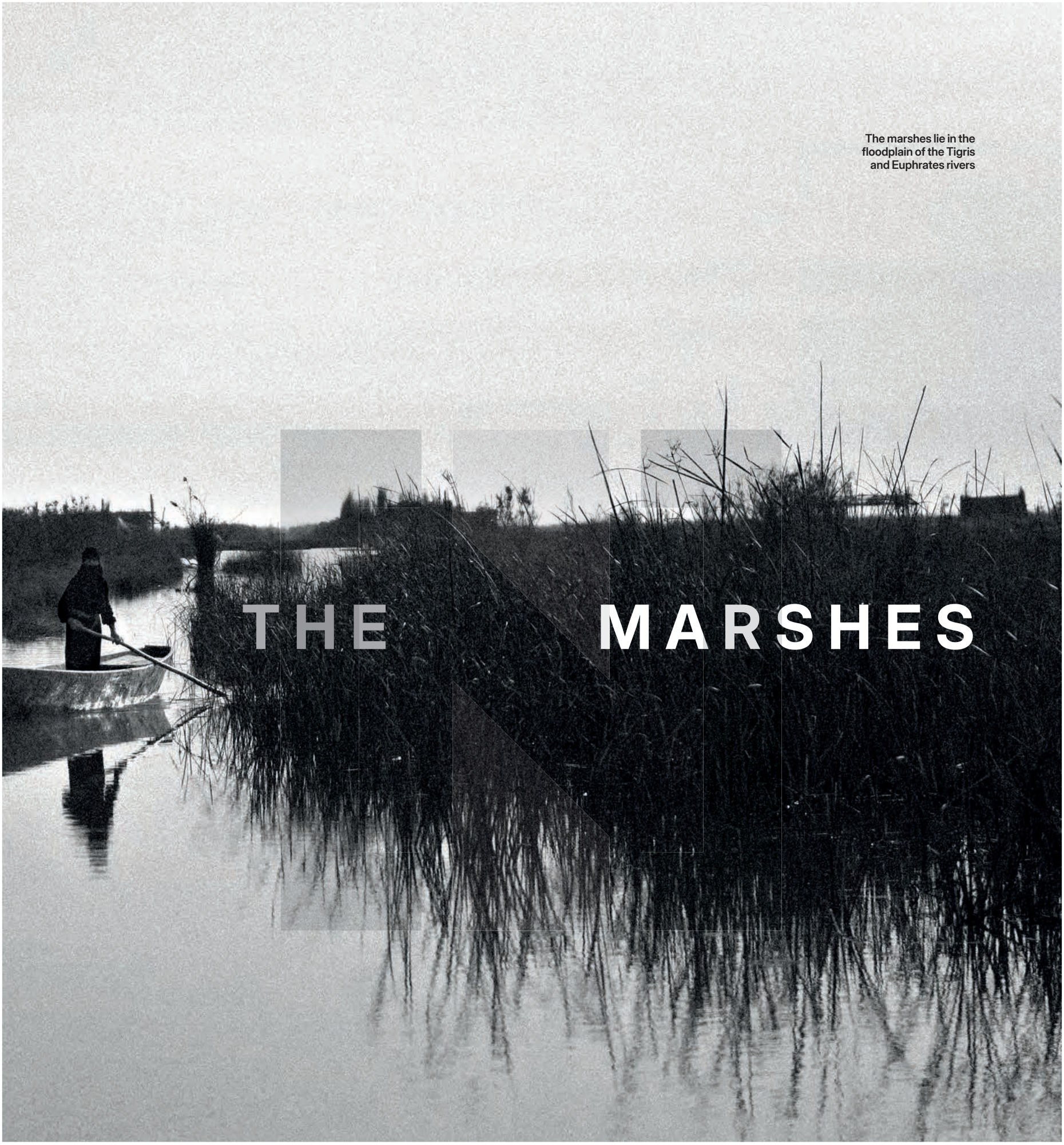
"It's a window through which I see the world. But I'm far, I'm not there. I'm not living what they are living. I'm living something else. And it's not something that you can disconnect from."

Yasmine Hamdan performs as part of Tamaas Festival at NYU Abu Dhabi Art Centre on January 29. Listen to her interview with Saeed Saeed on The National's podcast Tarab, available wherever you get your podcasts



A MUSEUM IN

Aymen al-Ameri's photographs of the Iraqi marshes reflect on threats to biodiversity, livelihoods and culture in the country's stunning wetlands, writes **Razmig Bedirian**



The marshes lie in the floodplain of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers

THE MARSHES

One of Iraq's most beautiful natural wonders and a cradle of surviving Sumerian traditions, the southern marshes now evoke more grief than awe. Photographer Aymen al-Ameri recently reflected on their deterioration in An Imaginary Museum on the Ground, a photography exhibition that ran earlier this summer at Cité Internationale des Arts in Paris.

Far from mere documentation, the project comes after a decade of journeys into the marshes, capturing their threatened beauty and showing why they are a cause worth fighting for. Al-Ameri first began visiting the wetlands about a decade ago. He was drawn to the landscape he had long admired in images and in the paintings that adorned many Iraq homes. In person, the marshes were even more breathtaking, with labyrinths of reeds, branching waterways and lakes flat between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, glinting green, blue and gold.

"It's out of the world, honestly," says al-Ameri who also works as a photographer with *The National*. "You can see the sky in the river's reflection. The water is very clean and clear."

Al-Ameri spent significant time learning about the area from the Marsh Arabs – also known as the Ahwaris – who have lived in the southern

AYMEN AL-AMERI

marshlands for centuries, navigating by canoe, herding water buffalo and preserving traditions that dates back to Sumer, the ancient civilisation that flourished between the fifth and third millennium BC.

"Everything I had seen in the National Museum of Iraq was suddenly in front of me," al-Ameri says. "The houses, the outfits they wear, how they fish, what they eat. Everything I saw in the museum, I saw in real life."

After his first trip, al-Ameri began making regular journeys to the southern marshes, a drive that can take up to seven hours from his native Baghdad. However, with each visit, he began noticing the gradual decline of the area's natural resources.

The wetlands had only just begun reclaiming their old splendour after Saddam Hussein's campaign to drain them, a move aimed at crushing political resistance among the Marsh Arabs and opening the land for agriculture and oil extraction.

But in recent years, upstream dam projects, particularly in Turkey and Iran, have again imperilled the marshes, threatening both their biodiversity and the livelihoods of the people who depend on them. "Everyone wants the water," al-Ameri says. "For the past five years, there has been little to no rain. There is also a shortage of the right people needed to deal with these issues."

Al-Ameri's photographs show the effects of these projects. Images of cracked earth, beached boats and parched expanses are in sharp contrast to photographs taken earlier, showing buffalo bathing in the waters and people rowing along the banks in canoes.

The architectural heritage of the Ahwaris is also visible, notably with mudhif, houses with arching designs that are made using reeds harvested from the area. They often have ceremonial functions, being used for weddings, funerals and other large social gatherings. Several of the mudhifs in al-Ameri's photographs are dilapidated – by time, neglect and movement towards urbanisation.

"It's a beautiful life when there is water," al-Ameri says. "But it's very easy to destroy this life when the water levels go down. In the first few years, we saw the damage to the people, to the fishing, birds, buffaloes, but they still managed.

If the situation continues like this, in 20 years, the marshes won't exist any more

"They found a way. But year by year, the water levels continued to drop and the heat continued to rise," he explains.

These environmental issues also threaten the region's history and its attachment to a millennia-long culture.

"It was linked to Sumer and 6,000 years of history," al-Ameri says. "If the situation continues like this, in 20 years, the marshes won't exist any more and most of the people there will have moved to the cities, their children will forget their culture."

After years of challenges and frustrations related to drought, people in the marshes are already feeling disconnected from the land, al-Ameri says. "They've got tired. There's little hope. Before they'd talk about how

Aymen al-Ameri spent about a decade journeying into the wetlands, capturing their threatened beauty and learning about the area from the Marsh Arabs

AYMEN AL-AMERI

they loved the land and the water. Now when they talk, it's mostly negative and their singing during their gatherings has become sad."

The situation, al-Ameri says, is layered. He wanted to do his best to capture this complexity through his photographs, but also to present these issues in a novel manner during his residency at Cite Internationale des Arts in Paris. He wanted to position the photographs in a way that compelled visitors to scan and sift through them with an intimate and thoughtful eye. To simply hang them on the wall wouldn't do.

Instead, al-Ameri spread a thousand photographs across the floor of the exhibition and in the halls that led to the space. The photographs were arranged in forms that allude to the waterways of the marshes. But there was also another reason that al-Ameri opted to have the photographs on the floor.

The idea came after a visit to the outskirts of the ancient city of Babylon. Standing on a mound covered in soil, al-Ameri realised that fragments of history, quite literally, were buried beneath his feet – with ancient pieces of clay, stones and other antiquities peeking out of the earth. "Like how we found prior civilisations underneath us," he says. "I wanted people to sit on the floor and look through the photographs, to excavate the treasures of the marshes."

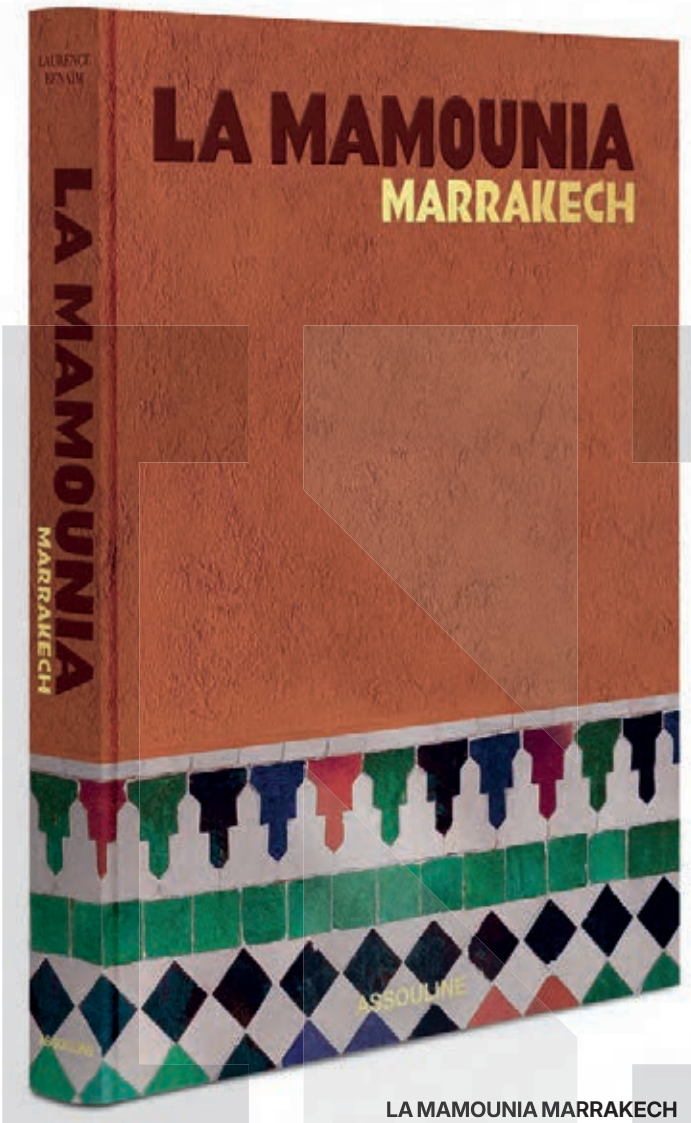
Al-Ameri says the exhibition in Paris helped introduce the history and richness of the marshes to an international audience. An Imaginary Museum on the Ground – which is part of Sarab, a larger project dedicated to the marshes – will have another run in the French capital, exhibiting at Galerie B50 in September.

But al-Ameri also intends to bring the exhibition back home. An Imaginary Museum on the Ground will be showing at the French Institute in both Baghdad and Erbil in December. Al-Ameri wants to highlight the environmental aspect of the situation in the marshes to local audiences with an added message.

"I want to show that it's full of history. And that we have these treasures that we need to fight for."

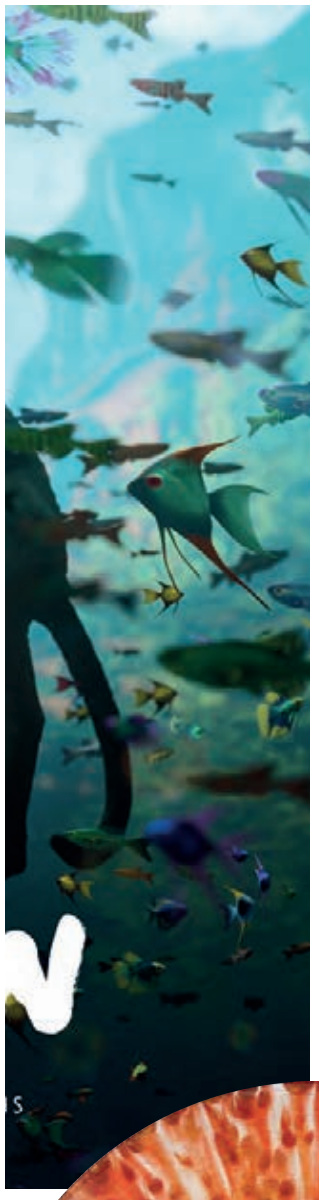
MAKE IT LAST

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



LA MAMOUNIA MARRAKECH BY LAURENCE BENAIM
(ASSOULINE)
"La Mamounia is the perfect blend of sunshine, kindness, good taste and calm," the late French singer-songwriter Charles Aznavour once said. Since opening in 1923, the famed Marrakech hotel has hosted royalty, presidents and celebrities such as Juliette Binoche to Salma Hayek and Jennifer Aniston, and has often been named among the world's most beautiful hotels. Luxury publisher Assouline is now releasing a book in homage to its history "and its relationship to artisans and artists". The title has been authored by French journalist and writer Laurence Benaïm, whose work includes a biography of Yves Saint Laurent. Named for its gardens, once the site of lavish 18th-century parties thrown by Prince Mamoun, the hotel remains both a cultural landmark and a tourist draw. The book features evocative new photography alongside rare archival images, including a 1935 portrait of Winston Churchill painting in the gardens. "I must be with you when you see the sunset on the snows of the Atlas Mountains," Churchill famously told Franklin Roosevelt after the Casablanca Conference in 1943 – words that naturally led them both to La Mamounia.
David Tusing, assistant features editor

FLOW
(THE CRITERION COLLECTION)
Oscar-winning film *Flow* is coming to DVD on September 23. Told entirely without dialogue, it explores friendship and survival through the journey of a courageous black cat, whose home is swept away by a great flood. As the cat joins forces with a capybara, a lemur, a bird and a dog aboard a makeshift boat, the unlikely crew need to rely on trust, courage and quick thinking to navigate a water-covered world and search for dry land. The animated feature made history at the 97th Academy Awards, becoming the first film from Latvia to win an Oscar. I originally watched *Flow* on a flight, and was struck by the beauty of both the story and the animation. I imagine viewing it again on a larger screen in 4K will only enhance the experience.
Evelyn Lau, assistant features editor



EXILES BY MASON COILE
(GP PUTNAM'S SONS)
There's something unnervingly familiar about the terror in Mason Coile's *Exiles*. The book is set on Mars, but it might as well be an attic, a cellar or a locked hotel room. A place where the air feels wrong and the silence watches you back. The premise is elegantly simple – a crew of astronauts arrives to establish the first human colony, only to find their outpost half-destroyed and the robots sent to prepare it behaving like wayward children who have read too much philosophy. They have taken names, forged alliances and cultivated beliefs. One has disappeared altogether. What unfolds is less a whodunit than an act of collective interrogation – of the machines, of the landscape, of themselves. Coile, whose earlier noir novel *William* became a word-of-mouth cult hit, once again uses the scaffolding of science fiction to stage a psychological horror. In the thin air of Mars, even machines develop nightmares; but it is the astronauts' own stories that prove most disturbing. Taut and propulsive, *Exiles* reminds us that the greatest alien environment isn't a barren planet, but the recesses of our own minds.
Nasri Atallah, editor, TN Magazine

THE LIFE OF A SHOWGIRL BY TAYLOR SWIFT
(REPUBLIC RECORDS)
What's that sound? A new era, of course, as Taylor Swift returns with her 12th album. As an unapologetic Swiftie, I was preordering the moment it was announced on August 12 – limited-edition CD (despite not owning a player) and vinyl included. Swift has gone all out this time. There's the *Tiny Bubble in Champagne* collection, *Baby, That's Show Business* collection and the *Shiny Bug* collection – each comprising two LPs, already sold out. Add to that the *It's Beautiful*, *It's Rapturous*, and *It's Frightening* CD releases, plus the standard LP, CD and cassette. The vinyl and cassette come in "sweat and vanilla perfume Portofino orange vinyl". My own stash – a standard LP and the *It's Rapturous* CD. So, come October 3, I'll be dissecting its 12 tracks – already hailed as "unbelievable" by Swift's new fiancé Travis Kelce, with the promise: "This album is going to make you dance".
Farah Andrews, head of features

JUNK SCAPE BY JUNK FUJIYAMA
(LAWSON ENTERTAINMENT INC)
On my travels to Japan, I've often lingered in shops, half-listening to the music drifting from the speakers. Once, a song caught me so strongly, I pulled out my phone to identify it. It was *Ano Sora no Mukougawa e,* the opening track of Japanese city pop artist Junk Fujiyama's 2013 album *Junk Scape*. I'd long been a fan of city pop, especially from its 1980s and 1990s heyday, but Fujiyama's music felt different – bright, hopeful and effortlessly uplifting. Even though I did not understand the lyrics, his melodies and voice carried the feeling across. *Junk Scape* is being re-released on vinyl on September 5, complete with a striking cover of a seaside pool framed by palm trees – a perfect visual echo of the album's breezy, sun-lit sound.
Faisal Al Zaabi, gaming journalist

CAIRO STATION BY YOUSSEF CHAHINE
(THE CRITERION COLLECTION)
Ask anyone – myself included – what's the first film you should watch from the golden age of Egyptian cinema, and they will invariably answer Youssef Chahine's masterpiece *Cairo Station*. And don't fear – this isn't some lugubrious, laborious epic. In fact, it's a surprisingly racy neorealist melodrama that is still as entertaining as it was in 1958, if not more so. Starring Chahine as a disabled newspaper hawker who becomes obsessed with a drink seller (Hind Rostom), this window into another era is unforgettable, restored to its former glory in ultra-high definition along with the director's 1991 documentary, *Cairo as Seen by Chahine*.
William Mullally, arts editor

THE WATCHLIST

David Tusing looks at the best in film and television being released this autumn, from the return of The Morning Show to Mark Wahlberg's action thriller

1 THE LAST FRONTIER (APPLE TV+)
Apple's newest series is a thriller set in the remote wilderness of Alaska. Jason Clarke plays Frank Remnick, a lone US marshal in charge of the state's rugged barrens. One day, life in his jurisdiction is turned upside down when a plane transporting prisoners crashes in the wilderness, setting free dozens of violent inmates.

Tasked with protecting the town he's vowed to keep safe, he begins to suspect the crash wasn't an accident, but the first step of a well-crafted plan with far-reaching and devastating implications.

- October 10

2 THE MORNING SHOW SEASON 4 (APPLE TV+)
One of biggest strengths of AppleTV+'s flagship show, besides its brilliant cast, is its ability to mine the zeitgeist for gripping storylines. From the Covid-19 pandemic to the US Capitol insurrection and Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the series about a network broadcast morning news programme has seen it all.

Season four, which begins two years after the events at the end of the third season, will grapple with a polarised America and a world rife with deepfakes, conspiracy theories and corporate cover-ups. Returning alongside Jennifer Aniston and Reese Witherspoon will be Billy Crudup, Mark Duplass, Greta Lee, Marion Cotillard, Jeremy Irons, Aaron Pierre and fan favourite Jon Hamm.

- September 17

3 A BIG BOLD BEAUTIFUL JOURNEY (CINEMAS)
Korean-American director Kogonada, best known for acclaimed indie films *Columbus* (2017) and *After Yang* (2021), returns with a romantic fantasy starring Margot Robbie and Colin Farrell in the lead.

They play Sarah and David respectively – two singles who meet at a friend's wedding. Through a surprising twist, they get to relive important moments from their respective pasts together and learn to get a better understanding of their present and, hopefully, change the course of their future.

Robbie and Farrell, who also starred in *After Yang*, are joined by a top-notch cast including Kevin Kline, Phoebe Waller-Bridge and Jodie Turner-Smith.

- September 18

4 NOSFERATU (OSN+)
This Oscar-nominated Gothic horror film was released last year in cinemas, going on to make more than $180 million at the box office. For those who missed it, it's now available to stream.

A remake of the 1922 silent German film *Nosferatu: A Symphony of Horror*, the 2024 version stars Bill Skarsgard as Count Orlock, a nobleman and vindictive vampire, who holds a town hostage. Directed by Robert Eggers, the cast also includes Nicholas Hoult, Lily-Rose Depp, Willem Dafoe, Emma Corrin and Aaron Taylor-Johnson.

- September 19

5 PLAY DIRTY (PRIME VIDEO)
Mark Wahlberg is back in action mode in this thriller based on the *Parker* book series by Richard Stark (the pseudonym of Donald E Westlake).

Wahlberg plays Parker, an expert thief, who attempts the biggest heist of his life – only he needs to outsmart a South American dictator, the New York mob and the world's richest man.

Joining Parker on his mission is trusted Grofield, played by Oscar-nominated actor LaKeith Stanfield. The film is directed by Shane Black, known for films such as *Iron Man 3* and *Predator*.

- October 1

1

2

APPLE TV+; COLUMBIA PICTURES; FOCUS FEATURES; GETTY

3

4

5

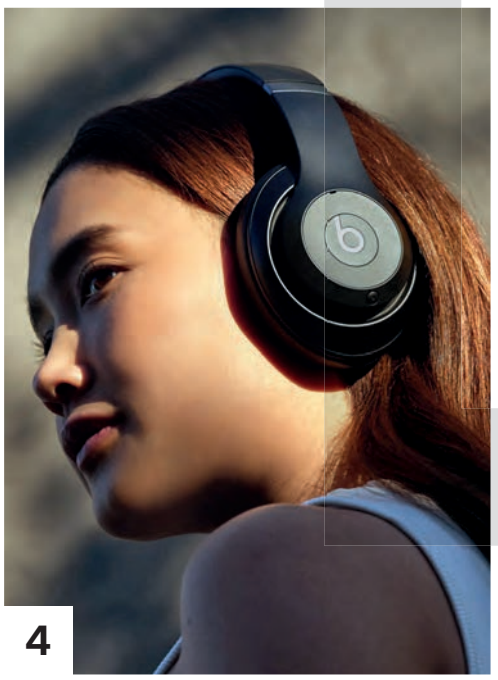
1

2

3

LEND ME YOUR EARS

From design-driven earphones to next-generation hearing aids, the latest audio innovations are redefining the way we listen, writes **Dana Alomar**



4

5

1 PHONAK AUDEO SPHERE INFINIO
Phonak's Audeo Sphere Infinio hearing aid transforms assistive technology into a refined audio device. Featuring AI-powered noise separation and Bluetooth streaming, it provides clarity in challenging environments, while doubling as a pair of discreet, high-quality earphones. It caters to both health and lifestyle needs, reimagining what a hearing aid can offer.
- Price on request

2 HATCH RESTORE 3
The Restore 3 is a smart sleep clock that blends gentle sunrise light and curated soundscapes to create a calming ambience. With responsive physical buttons and a growing library of scientifically backed ambient sounds, the device offers phone-free content that can help unwind and sleep deeply, while the light is designed to help you wake up gently. This white noise machine is wellness-minded tech in a beautifully understated form.
- From Dh624

3 CAMPFIRE AUDIO GRAND LUNA IEMS
The Grand Luna in-ear monitors combine artistry and engineering in a striking design. Built with a hybrid driver system that blends planar magnetic and balanced armatures, they are a good pick for audiophiles seeking precision. Their 3D-printed red shell and stainless steel lids make them functional collectables, elevating earphones into statement pieces of audio luxury.
- From Dh5,137

4 BEATS STUDIO PRO
Beats's latest headphones bring professional-grade sound to the mainstream. With upgraded drivers, lossless playback over USB-C and spatial audio with dynamic head tracking, the Studio Pro also features a new design for enhanced comfort, while adaptive noise cancelling and transparency modes make it versatile enough for travel, work or leisure.
- From Dh1,285

5 BANG & OLUFSEN BEOSYSTEM 3000C
This limited-edition device is a meticulously restored version of Bang & Olufsen's 1985 Beogram 3000 turntable. Paired with Beolab 8 speakers, the system blends analogue vinyl warmth with modern streaming capabilities. Crafted in walnut and pearl-blasted aluminium, only 100 units have been made, positioning it as both a functional hi-fi system and a collector's piece. It is audio as heritage, sound technology elevated to art.
- About Dh110,000

VAN CLEEF & ARPELS
The poetic language of French jewellery house Van Cleef & Arpels expands with the Flowerlace collection. Featuring openwork floral designs that nod to the house's couture heritage, the line includes rings, earrings, a pendant and a transformable clip pendant, all crafted using lost-wax casting to showcase the maison's mastery of warm, radiant gold.

BLACK BOOK

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

SUN SUNS
The Bahraini brand creates vintage-inspired sunglasses for the Middle Eastern market. Crafted in Italy, the frames use flexible cellulose acetate, while CR39 lenses deliver rich colour. Each pair is coated for 100 per cent UV protection. Styles range from women's frames such as Diva to men's designs including Dexter, with many genderless options, including Forte (pictured above) and Lea.

HAIDER ACKERMANN AT TOM FORD
Ackermann's highly anticipated debut collection for Tom Ford has arrived in stores. Handpicked to lead the brand famed for its sleek, charged silhouette, the French designer introduces his own slower-burn aesthetic. Fans of Ford need not worry, though – sharp tailoring remains, from a men's ecru suit with sequins woven into bouclé cloth, to a women's high-neck column dress in green satin.

BOTTEGA VENETA
Following the success of its 2024 perfume debut, Bottega Veneta unveils Mezzanotte – a trio of new fragrances named after the Italian word for midnight. Hinoki combines fir balsam, hinoki wood and patchouli; Goodmorning Midnight blends wild strawberry, Thai oud and rose; while Almost Dawn layers vanilla, truffle and chestnut. Each fragrance comes in a uniquely shaped glass bottle set on a marble disc.

BURBERRY
Burberry has tapped British-Moroccan model Nora Attal for its Back to the City campaign. Shot on a London double-decker bus, it features Attal in a dark red leather trench alongside Bemi Orojuogun, better known as Bus Aunty, the Nigerian TikTok star famed for her silent bus posts. "It's the personality of its people that makes London feel so unique," explains Daniel Lee, Burberry's chief creative officer. "Something you'll find woven into the very fabric of Burberry."

ONE LAST THING

Ahlam Bolooki

Ahlam Bolooki has spent her career championing the written word. Before becoming chief executive of Emirates Literature Foundation, director of Emirates Airline Festival of Literature and managing director of Elf Publishing, she was an avid visitor at the literature festival.

Now she is spearheading efforts to put Dubai on the global literary map. A cultural advocate, curator and supporter of regional voices, Bolooki is one of the UAE's most influential champions of books and ideas.

We sit down with her to ask her some questions for One Last Thing.

What's your favourite time of day and why?
Mornings, when my husband, girls and I come together for breakfast, cooking and listening to music. Twice a week, I have a 7am piano class, which I love. It's the time I feel most open to learning, creating, and embracing the possibilities of the day.

What's your favourite restaurant anywhere in the world?
It's always changing, but Trèsind Studio in Dubai blew me away. It's like theatre on a plate. Still, my all-time favourite chef is my sister-in-law, Sahar Al Awadhi, who elevates Emirati cuisine beautifully.

When was the first time you realised your parents were human?
It wasn't one moment, but in phases. As an adult, I began seeing my parents as people, not just 'parents'. But the real shift came when I became a parent myself. Suddenly, I understood just how deeply they loved me, and how hard it must have been for them to protect and guide me while managing their own fears.

What do you want to be when you grow up?
When I grow up, I want to sit in my library and read my books. And I'd love to become an excellent pianist, not professionally, just for myself, so I can enjoy music with my loved ones as I get older.

Do you have any hidden talents?
I write poetry.

Your favourite book?
There are just too many! I recently read *Whereabouts* by Jhumpa Lahiri, which reads almost like a daily journal, full of lines that linger. I was particularly struck by the way it captures someone as "at peace with himself, but at odds with the world".

What type of music can't you stand?
Repetitive or very intense music, like techno or metal, isn't my thing. I appreciate it, but it doesn't speak to me.

What puts you in a bad mood?
As someone who easily absorbs energy, negative moods affect me deeply.

What can you not live without?
Beyond my kids and husband, music and the arts: literature, galleries, theatre. The things that give life, life.

Sitting on the sofa or out with friends?
I love both, but evenings on the sofa with my husband are sacred. After the kids are asleep, we cook something and catch up on the day. That said, I also value time with friends – relaxed dinners, good food, and sharing life plans and stories.

What smell takes you back to childhood?
The smell of balaleet on Eid morning.

What city do you love, but would hate to live in?
London, the city I've visited the most as a child with my family and in many different stages of my life. I love walking all day, enjoying the parks, watching shows, eating great food, people-watching, but I'd miss the sunshine if I had to live there.

Can you play a musical instrument?
I'm in the early stages of learning the piano. Hopefully one day I can say yes, I can.

Have you ever been on a motorcycle?
No.

> I can't live without art, music, literature and theatre. The things that give life, life

Any words to live by?
Life is short, and every day is a gift. If there's something you want to do, don't wait. Just go for it.

Biggest pet peeve?
People being late. Time is the most valuable thing in the world.

Dream dinner guests?
Ziad Rahbani, Chris Martin, Ravi Shankar.

Do you believe in aliens?
I believe in some form of extraterrestrial life. The universe is vast, so it's hard to imagine we're the only ones out there.

What's your favourite Arabic word?
Yaqeen. A friend gave me a necklace with it after a big wish of mine came true. It's all about trusting God's plan; even if the worst happens, you know you'll be OK. It's a faith beyond faith.

The most niche thing you watch on YouTube?
I don't watch much YouTube, honestly. I mostly watch concerts and music covers, and since having kids, my screentime is really limited. When we do watch shows in the evenings, it's usually highly rated or award-winning – nothing too niche.

How do you take your tea?
I'm obsessed with tea, from karak to white and oolong teas. My go-to is a Ceylon tea called shamshiri. I love adding rosewater, saffron and cardamom.

What makes you cry?
Being surrounded by nature and nothing else. Feeling tiny against the majestic vastness of nature moves me.

What do social algorithms think you're interested in?
Right now, my feeds are full of Ziad Rahbani, art and toddler food inspiration. Thanks, algorithms!

TikTok or Instagram?
Honestly, I've disconnected a bit from social media. I try to stay present in real life, so I mostly use it just to keep in touch, but I'm focusing on being more present day to day.

What is it about you that would surprise most people?
I have a terrible fear of cats. Lately, I've been trying to face it. I even visited a friend with a cat and touched it, and now seeing a cat on the street doesn't completely freak me out.

What was the last thing you did for the first time?
Recently, I tried abalone and fugu at a Japanese dining experience. The textures and flavours were completely new to me. Fugu can be poisonous if not cooked right, so it was a wild first. I love trying new food with my husband, who is a big foodie!

As told to Nasri Atallah

EMIRATES LITERATURE FOUNDATION

Newsletters

The Arts Edit

Your guide to Middle East arts and culture

Sign up now

The National

LIFEStyle
FINE JEWELRY
28 ANNIVERSARY
Coronet
Diamonds

DUBAI • ABU DHABI • SHARJAH • BAHRAIN
Toll Free 800-STYLE (78953) • www.lifestylegcc.com

Get additional **10% Discount**
when you buy online at lifestylegcc.com

SCAN ME