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SUNDAY, JANUARY 8, 2023

SundayStyles

The New York Times



PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY ADAM POWELL FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES



A party store in Toronto was open for business on New Year's Eve.
KYLE BERGER FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

How We Welcomed the New Year

Writers around the world describe the activities they took part in to kick off 2023.

A FEW DAYS before the Earth completed its latest orbit of the sun, we asked a group of essayists, novelists and journalists to chronicle how they would bring 2022 to a close and kick off 2023. Their dispatches, filed last Monday, provide glimpses of public and private moments from around the world: a game of beer pong in Toronto; a cu-

linary misadventure in Los Angeles; crowds of samba dancers in Brasília; a homey celebration, with soba, in Tokyo; and a quiet wedding in a Manhattan apartment.

Giving It a Shot

TORONTO — I've never really liked New Year's Eve. I don't drink, and I don't really like being forced to reflect, and I especially don't like being pressured to self-improve (especially when the self-improvement in question feels increasingly focused on getting me to the gym or buying green pow-

der). New Year's is like casual dating or your first month of university: It feels as if you're supposed to be having the best time of your life, but it also feels as if everyone else is having a better time than you.

This year, though, I was back in my home city after a cross-country move and looking for any reason to avoid spending the night watching a movie at my parents' house. My friends insisted that I'd just never given New Year's Eve an honest shot. So, roused by that challenge, I decided to give it my all. CONTINUED ON PAGE 8

EPISODE

Falling in and Out of Love With ‘Red Scare’

By EUGENE RABKIN

In the middle of the pandemic, my wife and I moved to Manhattan from Brooklyn. There would be less space for Gerda, our husky, but no more 45-minute car commutes and no more road rage. I would walk everywhere. And I would take Gerda with me.

Those first morning walks were exciting for both of us. As we rounded the island’s southern tip, I admired the view of the Brooklyn Bridge as Gerda lunged at scraps of food. But soon the charms of the garbage-strewn plaza in front of the Staten Island Ferry started to wear off, and the 1980s architecture of Battery Park City seemed to take on a generic look. With so much to sniff, Gerda was content, but I felt the need to fill the hours with something that would drown out the city noise and occupy my brain.

A friend recommended “Red Scare,” a cultural commentary podcast, pointing out that it was hosted by two self-described “bohemian layabouts” from the former Soviet Union, Anna Khachiyani and Dasha Nekrasova. Since I’m from Belarus, my friend thought the show would speak to me.

When I was 15, my family left the Soviet Union as political refugees fleeing antisemitism. I made it through public high schools and a mediocre business college that left me with more student debt than knowledge, before I finally learned something while getting a master’s degree at a liberal university. Each of my 30 years in America had gradually chipped away at my once-rosy view of my adopted home as I battled my way out of poverty — material and spiritual.

Politically, I was on the left, the Marxist teachings of my Soviet youth only strengthened by the injustices I saw during my formative years in the United States. But in the past several years I’ve come to feel lonely on the political spectrum, finding moments of sanity in conversations with friends, rather than in publications that seem to favor opinion-driven pandering. Still, I looked to the news media for a reality check, hoping that someone out there must have a clue. But where do you find sanity in an insane world?

When I started listening to “Red Scare” on my walks with Gerda, I felt as if I had found a refreshing critique of the increasingly polarized political landscape. While situating themselves on the left, Ms. Khachiyani and Ms. Nekrasova didn’t shy away from calling out the excesses of so-called progressivism. They waded into the culture wars, highlighting the absurdity and cynicism of corporate media while emphasizing that the poor always seemed to get fleeced in the end.

The hosts went after the political naïveté

EUGENE RABKIN is the editor of *StyleZeitgeist* magazine.

of some leftists and criticized slogans like “Defund the Police,” noting that the police were more often than not from lower-middle-class and minority backgrounds. Ms. Khachiyani spoke highly of “The Culture of Narcissism” by Christopher Lasch, one of my favorite books.

On my rounds with Gerda, I came to think that the hosts shared a mature, European sensibility to go with a certain wisdom common to immigrants who have grown up without privilege and are able to see America with some clarity.

I wasn’t the only one enthralled with “Red Scare.” Patreon reports that it has roughly 12,000 supporters who collectively donate nearly \$53,000 a month. Part of the show’s appeal has nothing to do with politics. Mixed into their dissections of current events, the hosts frequently discuss shopping, beauty regimens and bits of celebrity gossip. The show’s popularity is probably helped by the celebrity of Ms. Nekrasova, an actress who has appeared on “Succession” and “Only Murders in the Building.”

More often than not, I nodded along as I listened to back episodes. Gerda and I started spending more time on our walks, much to her delight, and my headphones discouraged strangers from trying to engage me in mind-numbing doggy chitchat. To celebrate her new outdoorsy lifestyle, Gerda took NASCAR-style laps around the dog run, chasing off the males who tried to hump her.

But somewhere along the way, the podcast began to grate on me. Maybe it was when Ms. Khachiyani offered a defense of Kyle Rittenhouse, the teenager who fatally shot two men and wounded another during a 2020 Black Lives Matter protest in Wisconsin. (Mr. Rittenhouse was acquitted of criminal charges in 2021.) And it didn’t sit well with me when Ms. Khachiyani questioned the efficacy of vaccines in the efforts to curb Covid-19, describing herself as becoming “an even more conservative Covid truther.”

While “Red Scare” had played host to favorites of the so-called dirtbag left — Slavoj Žižek, Adam Curtis and John Waters — a guest in November 2021 was Alex Jones, the founder of the misinformation website Infowars and a prominent conspiracy theorist who described the killings of 27 people, including 20 children, at the Sandy Hook Elementary School as a hoax.

The hosts were apparently trying to re-

habilitate his reputation, asking him softball questions like, “Do you feel like a caricature that the liberal media made you out to be?” A photo posted on Ms. Nekrasova’s Instagram account at the time of the interview shows the two hosts on either side of a smiling Mr. Jones, with Ms. Nekrasova’s arm around him. (Late last year, Mr. Jones was ordered by a court to pay the victims’ families nearly \$1.5 billion in damages.)

Ms. Khachiyani declined to comment about the apparent shift when I contacted her via email for this essay. Ms. Nekrasova did not reply to requests for comment. In a 2019 interview with The Face, the hosts complained about critics who have likened them to “crypto-fascists.” “The idea that we’re somehow dangerous or influencing discourse in a toxic way is unfair and misguided,” Ms. Nekrasova said. Her co-host added: “We are two chicks with an entertainment radio show that you can voluntarily opt in or out of. We’re not policymakers or political figures.”

Increasingly, I was dismayed by what I

was hearing. Did they truly believe what they were saying? Was it a function of being children of Russian-speaking immigrants, whose conservatism, often tinged with racism and anti-socialist sentiment, is commonplace and one of the reasons I couldn’t wait to get out of my old Brooklyn neighborhood?

On it went, along with their talk about their shopping trips and spa routines. Worst of all was the careless spouting of increasingly provocative and unsubstantiated views. I found myself stopping 20 minutes into each episode, wondering why I was wasting my time. As I fumbled with my phone, Gerda looked at me judgmentally for interrupting our walks.

One day a “Red Scare” episode notification popped up on my phone. I hit the little x. Then I deleted the podcast.

Since then I’ve been mostly listening to music, which allows me to spend time with my thoughts as we navigate the narrow downtown streets. Gerda doesn’t seem to mind, as long as she has something to sniff.

Increasingly, I was dismayed by what I was hearing. Did they truly believe what they were saying?



DADU SHIN

Maybe You Shouldn’t Mock It Until You’ve Tried It

Alcohol-free cocktails gain admirers. But would you pay \$26 for a boozeless drink?

By ALYSON KRUEGER

On a Saturday night in December, just after sunset, Megan Horton sat at the bar of Nubeluz, a 50th-floor lounge on top of New York City’s newest Ritz Carlton hotel, savoring a drink.

She was in town from San Francisco, where she works for Apple in client services, and was in the mood to splurge.

With the city skyline in view around her, she watched as the bartender made an Emerald Coin, a drink with honeydew, lemongrass, lime and celery, and served it in a coupe glass.

She drank it alongside a friend and other stylish patrons and smiled as she took in the ambiance.

The only difference: Her cocktail didn’t have any alcohol in it.

Ms. Horton, 43, stopped drinking regularly over the past few months, mainly because she no longer craves alcohol. “I partied for so many years, but now I don’t feel like drinking,” she said. “Something has shifted in my brain.”

When she came to New York City for a weekend girls’ trip last month, she was planning to order seltzers when she went out. “I love the ambiance, and I can still have fun without drinking,” she said. But she quickly realized most establishments, including the city’s most popular bars, had a sophisticated and comprehensive list of spirit-free cocktails.

The night before, at Oscar Wilde, a quirky, Victorian-themed bar on West 27th Street, she had one with fruit juices.

She didn’t even mind that the mocktails at Nubeluz cost \$20, a few dollars less than those with alcohol. “It was so fun that I could get a cute cocktail along with my friend,” she said. “Plus, I’ll pay whatever to feel happy that I’m not hungover the next day.”

Across New York City, locals and tourists alike are indulging in elaborate, pricey spirit-free cocktails. Far from your everyday “mocktail,” these are imagined by professional mixologists, made with premium ingredients including distilled alcohol-free spirits, and presented in sparkling glassware with garnishes.

“This isn’t just a bartender mixing cranberry juice and adding ginger ale and calling it a fancy cocktail,” said Chelsea DeMark who creates beverages for bars, including the Thompson Central Park. That hotel, which opened about a year ago, serves a drink called a Bee’s Knees with a Twist, which costs \$19 and includes spiritless gin, lime and honey (cocktails with alcohol range from \$21 to \$28).

To the naked eye, these booze-free cocktails are indistinguishable from the ones



KRISTA SCHLUETER FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

From left, Nino Melon, Squaring the Circle, Firefly and Emerald Coin are four mocktails on the menu at Nubeluz.

that will get you tipsy.

Miguel Lancha, who leads the cocktail program at Nubeluz, which opened in September, said he had had multiple guests accidentally order spirit-free drinks off the menu. “I would say when they find out their drink has no alcohol, on the whole, they are pleasantly surprised,” he said, laughing.

Some sober patrons are thrilled with these options because it allows them to still enjoy the experience of going to a high-end cocktail destination. Others, however, say the cocktails don’t taste good, aren’t healthy enough or are simply not worth the high prices.

Still, they are selling.

At the Thompson Central Park, one mocktail is sold for every five with alcohol, according to Ms. DeMark.

Tony Mosca, the director of food and beverage at the Carlyle, the famed Upper East Side hotel, said: “Our alcohol-free cocktails now make up almost five percent of our sales. It shows there is a market for this.”

“We are seeing people who are looking for an alcoholic beverage, but they might have a secondary drink, which might be al-

cohol-free,” he added.

Bemelmans Bar, the Carlyle’s piano bar, already has four nonalcoholic options, including Pepito “The Bad Hat” with spirit-free tequila, lime juice, orange syrup and club soda, which costs \$26. Four more will be added within the year, Mr. Mosca said.

Mixologists say they can now offer nonalcoholic cocktails because they have novel ingredients.

“There used to be no nonalcoholic spirits, so alcohol-free cocktails would just be juice and soda,” Mr. Lancha said. “Now the ingredients available to make the drinks are very modern and only getting better.”

Ritual Zero Proof, a company that produces nonalcoholic spirits for cocktails,

‘I’ll pay whatever to feel happy that I’m not hungover the next day.’

for example, makes a whiskey, gin, tequila and rum alternative. Seedlip is another company that makes nonalcoholic distilled spirits with a variety of flavor profiles, many of which match up with traditional types of liquor. (There are also many brands making nonalcoholic wines and beers.)

One of the reasons nonalcoholic cocktails are so expensive is that the ingredients are also costly. Nonalcoholic spirits can retail for around \$40 a bottle. “They are putting effort into the distillation just like a spirit is,” Ms. DeMark said. “They cost us a good chunk of change, and often you have to use more of them than regular spirits to achieve the same results because the flavor isn’t as strong.”

Some patrons can tell.

When Sandie Gong, 33, who works for a tech company and lives in Williamsburg, Brooklyn, became pregnant last year, she ordered spirit-free cocktails at five different bars in Brooklyn and Manhattan. “I remember one of the first drinks I had was an Aperol spritz, but it tasted like it was made entirely of sugar,” she said.

She didn’t just try cocktails. “I bought a \$25 dollar bottle of nonalcoholic red wine that tasted like it had gone flat,” she said.

“I just love the taste of alcohol, and these drinks don’t taste like it,” she said. “I just want them to create a synthetic alcohol that tastes like alcohol.”

Indeed, mixologists say one of the challenges of nonalcoholic cocktails (and another reason the price is so high) is that zero-proof spirits can be more difficult to work with. They are also new, so there has been little time to get them right. “Think of all the history whiskey has,” Mr. Lancha said.

Ms. DeMark said: “You can shake the heck out of a gin, and it still tastes like gin, but if you do that with a nonalcoholic spirit,

you might lose all the taste. We tried to make a nonalcoholic vermouth where we cooked down grapefruit and herbaceous ingredients and added a touch of vinegar. It’s tricky, and it didn’t come out the same every time.”

She said she currently thought the lighter, fruitier options like Tiki drinks were easier to make than the darker ones like old-fashioned and Manhattans. “If you are interested in that richer, deeper profile, we have ways to go,” she said. “It’s hard to get that rich, warm, wintery cocktail.”

Another complaint from patrons is that drinking nonalcoholic cocktails still feels unhealthy.

“Most mocktails at restaurants are like sugar-filled kid’s drinks,” said Lisa Morse, 55, a clinical psychologist in New York City.

She tries to stay away from alcohol because it gives her a headache and affects her sleep. She’s tried many spirit-free concoctions at bars and restaurants — “I like the experience of having a cocktail without the negative health effects that come with alcohol,” she said — but has left not feeling good about what she put into her body.

Instead, she’s started to make cocktails at home by mixing seltzer with Ghia, a booze-free, low-sugar aperitif (a bottle costs around \$40). “If we have people for cocktails or dinner, it’s fun to have a drink and share in the experience,” she said.

Bartenders say that as the quality of zero-proof spirits improves, they will be able to make “cleaner” or simpler drinks.

“We don’t yet have good sipping alcohol, like the equivalent of a glass of cognac or whiskey,” Mr. Lancha said. “I think we will soon.”

Mr. Mosca said he hoped to be able to offer the Carlyle’s martini in nonalcoholic form soon. “That is definitely something we will have to work on,” he said. “Never say never.”

CORRECTIONS

An article last Sunday about the value of suggestions misstated the name of the university where Lyn Van Swol is a professor. It is the University of Wisconsin-Madison, not the University of Madison Wisconsin.

An article on Dec. 25 about a guest at a dinner party attributed an erroneous distinction to the songwriter Jerry Livingston. He was not a co-writer of “Que Sera, Sera.” (That song was written by Jay Livingston and Ray Evans.)

An article on Dec. 18 about the wedding of Kelly Daniels and Emir Muhovic misstated the day of their first date. It was March 4, 2011, not May 4, 2011.

An article on Dec. 18 about the ways that anger affects the body misstated the given name of a clinical psychologist and professor at the Yale School of Medicine. He is Dr. Matthew Burg, not William.

Arena

HIGHLIGHTS FROM TMAGAZINE.COM



T WANDERLUST

Art, Eating and Chilling in Johannesburg

T Wanderlust is a new travel newsletter from T Magazine. The first one, excerpted below, focuses on Johannesburg. For the complete article and more information about the newsletter, [tmagazine.com](#).

Driving down the busy roads of Johannesburg — past the faux Tuscan homes in the Fourways area, the shiny office blocks in Sandton and the dilapidated buildings downtown — it's easy, at first glance, to see why it has been considered little more than a stopover for many en route to Kruger National Park or neighboring countries. Though there are 10 million trees throughout the city and jacaranda season turns the streets violet each spring, starting in September, its natural beauty isn't immediately obvious. A longtime financial center, Johannesburg attracted people who worked in business and manufacturing from across the continent. And while it has never managed to shake its scruffy image, not everyone sees this as a drawback.

With its grit comes a profound sense of resilience; it's a place where artists can thrive. The South African artist William Kentridge and the American-born photog-

rapher Roger Ballen, for example, have been based there for years. Cape Town is often seen as the country's cultural capital thanks to its regular influx of travelers, many of whom seek out art, but Joburg is now home to major fairs such as FNB Art Joburg, which commences each September. Additionally, younger South African talents like the fashion designers Rich Mnisi and Thebe Magugu, who won the LVMH Prize, have chosen to stay rather than relocate to Cape Town or abroad — despite the relentless challenges the city contends with, including high levels of crime and intermittent water shortages. “We have accepted that [such obstacles are] part of our life going forward,” says Thobile Chittenden, the chief executive of Makers Valley Partnership, a community organization that supports artists and entrepreneurs alike. “That’s what I love about Joburg: We adapt to whatever we face.” Here are three places to check out in the city. *MARY HOLLAND*

Hallmark House

With an architectural upgrade by the Ghanaian British architect David Adjaye, Hall-

mark House is a soaring black concrete-and-steel hotel and residence located in the revitalized neighborhood of Maboneng in downtown Johannesburg. While the gentrification of the district has been contentious, Hallmark House has remained a favorite spot among locals since it opened in 2015. They sip gin-and-granadilla cocktails on the rooftop and listen to live jazz at the underground Marabi Club over plates of calamari.

Test Kitchen Carbon

After two of his cooks relocated to Johannesburg and a space became available, the English-born chef Luke Dale-Roberts debuted the Test Kitchen Carbon, a riff on his popular Cape Town restaurant. Though now closed, the original Test Kitchen won many awards, making repeat appearances on the World's 50 Best Restaurants list. The prix fixe service and à la carte selection both take pointers from the old menu, offering sesame gyoza and pork belly in a Penang-style coconut-and-lime broth (Mr. Dale-Roberts lived in Asia and has long looked to the continent for inspiration).

BKhz Gallery

The artist Banele Khoza saw a need for a gallery that highlights emerging artists and accommodates young collectors, so in 2018 he started the kind of place where he would want to show his own work. “For many people, the gallery feels like a safe and genuinely encouraging space,” says Mr. Khoza, who, two years later, relocated BKhz to a new place at the Keyes Art Mile, a strip of shops, galleries and restaurants in the Rosebank neighborhood. The glass-fronted white cube transforms with each show; for an exhibition by the South African painter Zandile Tshabalala, it featured lush greenery. “It was our most visited experience; people still pass by looking for ‘the garden at Keyes,’” Mr. Khoza says.



MICHAEL SUBOTZKY AND PATRICK WATERHOUSE. VIA MAGNUM PHOTOS AND GOODMAN GALLERY (VIEW OF JOHANNESBURG); ELSA YOUNG (PENTHOUSE SUITE AT HALLMARK HOUSE); BOTTOM, FROM LEFT DREAMCATCHER PRODUCTIONS (TEST KITCHEN CARBON), JAMES WHITE (BANK OF JOHANNESBURG), AND ZANDILE TSHABALALA (BKHZ GALLERY)

For Some, the Mask Maintains Its Hold

The triplendemic has revived familiar fears and tensions.

By ALYSON KRUEGER

In early December, at least one party at Art Basel in Miami featured a sight not seen in some time: bowls of nuts on a bar, intended for communal consumption. “Is this a test?” one well-heeled attendee asked her friend.

Probably not, but it was a sign that many people were willing to return to prepandemic practices and all the germ spreading that came with it.

There have been other signs too: Fish-bowl cocktails with multiple straws are back on bar menus. Buffets have made a comeback at conferences, casinos and galas. In November, Brianna Lapaglia, a 23-year-old in Manhattan who has her own podcast, “PlanBri Uncut,” on Barstool Sports, said, “I feel like we are doing all the things we did before the pandemic, but 10 times harder.” To wit, she was going to dive bars, house parties and clubs where she and her friends would pass a bottle and drink straight from it.

Some surveys supported this semi-sigh of relief. YouGov, a market research company, found that 49 percent of American adults didn't wear a mask at the beginning of December, compared with 16 percent last January. Morning Consult has been asking consumers on a weekly basis about their comfort with returning to prepandemic habits and activities. In the middle of December it found that 78 percent of Americans were comfortable going out to eat (compared with 66 percent in mid-December 2021) and 65 percent were comfortable going to a party (compared with 46 percent).

But now, Covid-19, the flu and respiratory syncytial virus, or R.S.V., are raging, creat-

ing a triplendemic. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recently recommended a return to masking (as did Mayor Eric Adams of New York, while wearing one). Some people are starting to pivot, and some are resolutely not, which is creating certain tensions and aggravations. Sound familiar?

'Who Wants to Get Sick?'

Hayley Cranberry Small, 31, a ceramist in Brooklyn, took off her mask back in September and ended up with Covid. “I went to a fashion week and an art gallery opening in TriBeCa,” she said. “I wanted to look cute, so I took my mask off.”

When she tested positive for Covid, “it was this feeling of, ‘Wow, classic, of course I go out without a mask on one time, and I get Covid,’” she said.

But time passed and she did it again, this time in early December for her birthday. She and a friend went to Twins Lounge, a bar in Greenpoint, Brooklyn, that packs in over a hundred people at a time on weekends.

“I didn't want to wear a mask at the bar,” she said. “It isn't cute.”

This time she woke up with strep throat, another illness making its rounds through New York City. She has vowed to keep her mask on. “A lot of my friends are going out, and a lot of people expect you to be comfortable at this point,” she said. “But I don't care anymore. Who wants to get sick?”

Keep Calm and Party On

As a Transportation Security Administration officer in San Juan, Angela Ochoa, 53, knows the risk. But in the middle of October, she went on a four-day cruise from Los Angeles to Ensenada, Mexico, where she spent her nights dancing to cover bands in the theater. During the day, she exercised in the gym and shopped in crowded ports.



GETTY IMAGES

Concerns about germs have abated, but haven't disappeared.

She recently caught Covid but doesn't regret any decisions. “I knew I would get Covid sooner or later because everybody gets it,” she said. “Now that I got it I am like, OK, I don't have extreme symptoms because I am vaccinated. I feel better about doing all these things, including going on a cruise again.”

Patrick Pho, 39, attended three holiday parties and threw himself a birthday party at a bar in Washington. “I am aware of the higher chances of getting sick at this time of year,” he said. But he feels protected: “I got the latest bivalent Covid vaccine,” he said, adding that he also got a flu shot.

Parental Priorities

Jessy Roor, 36, is a mother of four, 18 months old to 8 years old, who owns a therapy practice in Calgary, Alberta. She has been shocked by how many children have

gotten sick this season.

“I have two friends with small children hospitalized right now with pneumonia,” she said. For the past two weeks, her children have been passing a flulike virus from one sibling to the others.

“I finally pulled them out of school last week even though their last day of school isn't until this week,” she said. “There has been no break. We're cycling from one illness to another.” She is especially concerned about her children catching something else since their hospital is already overwhelmed with patients and there is a global shortage of antibiotics. She said it was all she and other parents talked about.

On Dec. 9, she tweeted about how her child cried after not being able to go to a friend's birthday party at an indoor play place. “There's simply no way to make that a safe activity,” she wrote. “I hate this.” She was shocked by the vitriol aimed at her from strangers. “On Twitter, on Facebook, on Instagram, I was inundated with aggressive, awful DMs,” she said. “I got one-star business reviews, and people emailed me.” She changed all her settings to private.

Julia Dahl, 45, a novelist and a professor of journalism at N.Y.U. who lives in Cornwall-on-Hudson, N.Y., decided to skip all holiday gatherings this year. “We are not doing anything social outside of my family,” she said.

The person she is battling with is herself. “I hate that I am like this,” said Ms. Dahl, who has a 7-year-old son. “I am a total extrovert, and I love parties.”

She tells herself it won't last. “I feel like this is not forever, and I am willing to do another holiday season where I don't do a lot,” she said. “I hope next year will be better, but right now my priorities are my family and keeping us healthy and happy. It's a price to pay, but it doesn't feel like a huge price to pay.”

Their Collaboration Started With a Tablecloth



ABOVE, TOP RIGHT AND BELOW, DANA GOLAN FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

A collection from Bode and Prounis Jewelry was inspired by a midcentury nightclub.

By THESSALY LA FORCE

The Edith Piaf impersonator was belting out “La Vie en Rose” as an ice sculpture of the divine Greek stallion Pegasus slowly melted between two seafood towers. Potted orchids dotted the draped tables alongside standing ice buckets filled with bottles of champagne, in a nod to a more midcentury kind of evening décor.

What had seemed an ordinary winter night at Orsay, the French bistro on the Upper East Side of Manhattan, had been temporarily transformed into a scene from the city’s 1940s cabaret culture. And even if the partygoers, who included the actor Lucas Bravo, the artist Nate Lowman, the actress Tommy Dorfman, the model Ella Emhoff and the fashion designer Aurora James, appeared more interested in the present than the past, it didn’t matter. The evening’s hosts — Emily Adams Bode Aujla, the fashion designer, and Jean Prounis, the fine-jewelry designer — stood side by side, satisfied in having transported their guests to another moment in time.

The two friends — and now collaborators — were celebrating their first capsule collection, inspired by Ms. Prounis’s family history, which combines Ms. Bode Aujla’s unisex silhouettes with gold-plated silver buttons and charms designed by Ms. Prounis. Eight pieces hung on a rack by the bar: a tunic, a pair of trousers, a pair of boxer shorts, four different shirts and a scarf. In addition, Ms. Prounis had also crafted three pieces of fine jewelry for the occasion: a gold pin, an emerald ring and gold earrings.

“I’ve always wanted to find a way to go back,” said Ms. Prounis, 29, wearing a flowy silk dress from Desert Vintage, the coveted downtown-by-way-of-Arizona retailer, and a black hat with period-appropriate netting. Beginning in 1936, her great-grandfather and his brother, Otto Prounis and Nick Prounis, were the owners (along with a subsequent third partner, Arnold Rossfield) of a popular Manhattan nightclub called Versailles.

Originally at 151 East 50th Street, Versailles was where wealthy New Yorkers, celebrities, aristocrats, showgirls and other regulars rubbed shoulders, dining on French cuisine, cocktails and champagne over live music and other entertainment.



Clockwise from top left: pieces in a print based on a tablecloth from the midcentury nightclub Versailles; Emily Adams Bode Aujla, left, and Jean Prounis, who created a collection inspired by the club; a scene from the party for the collection’s debut; a button detail.



AAYUSHI KHOWALA

‘So much of our brands are about heritage and family history.’

EMILY ADAMS BODE AUJLA
CREATOR OF A CAPSULE
COLLECTION WITH JEAN PROUNIS

Famous musicians and comedians, including Abbott and Costello, Dean Murphy, Hildegard, Perry Como, Desi Arnaz and Peggy Lee, performed there. Edith Piaf was a frequent guest singer beginning in 1947. When Versailles shut its doors for good in 1958 — its owners were facing “some financial troubles and ready to retire,” according to Ms. Prounis — it was one of several closures that signaled the end of a particular era of New York nightlife.

Ms. Prounis’s obsession with her family history first took root when she was a child, after her grandfather showed her photographs and other ephemera from Versailles’s heyday, such as old menus, silverware, napkins and autographed showgirl portraits. He also introduced her to his personal library devoted to ancient Greek culture — the Prounis family is originally from Metsovo, Greece — where a young Ms. Prounis pored over images of architecture, statuary and other artifacts with an obsessive eye. Both would eventually become the inspiration for Ms. Prounis’s namesake fine-jewelry line, which she introduced in 2017, offering stately pieces made out of a buttery green 22-karat gold alloy composed only of copper, silver and gold that was commonly used in antiquity.

“My parents’ house was a museum to Versailles,” said Michael Prounis, 67, the father of Ms. Prounis. “It was a very big part of our upbringing. But my siblings and I never really engaged with my father about Versailles. Jean immediately fell in love with its history; it touched her and impacted her, obviously.”

Both brands, Bode and Prounis, possess distinct aesthetics; the former a kind of refined-but-dusty flea market chic, the latter more of a glittering ode to antiquity. And yet the two have found meaningful ways to come together, sharing a spirit that bucks at the flashiness of contemporary fashion. At Bode’s spring 2019 men’s wear presenta-

Delivered to Home, But Make It Fashion

When FreshDirect stopped taking back its grocery bags, people put the material to work.

By ADRIANE QUINLAN

Before the pandemic began, leather was a go-to material for the handbag designer Shelley Parker. But when life went remote during the lockdowns, Ms. Parker, 54, couldn’t stand the idea of buying it online. “When I buy leather,” she said, “I touch it, I feel it. I smell it.”

As her leather supply depleted in 2020, Ms. Parker started to experiment with a medium that by then had become more plentiful at her Queens apartment: the colorful plastic totes used to deliver groceries from FreshDirect, which feature the company’s logo surrounded by produce.

“The colors, the patterns, the small text — I like all of that,” said Ms. Parker, an adjunct professor in the accessories design department at the Fashion Institute of Technology and the designer of the accessories line Riveting. “It just speaks to me.”

Ms. Parker began by slicing the FreshDirect bags into pieces. With those scraps, she made a handful of purses and small pouches using techniques including plaiting, macramé and sashiko, a form of Japanese embroidery. “I’m a FreshDirect artist,” said Ms. Parker, who is selling some of the purses for \$899 on her website. “I didn’t mean to be, but the bags called to me.”

As more people turned to grocery delivery during the pandemic, others also started using FreshDirect bags as material for design projects.

Colleen Paeff, 54, a children’s book author,

used some of the bags to extend a short curtain in her Brooklyn home. “I realized that if I had more, I could have made the entire curtain out of FreshDirect bags,” she said.

After Bailey Conostas, 29, used them as packing material when she moved from Brooklyn to Denver, she cut the bags into pieces that she painted and used as the covers for handmade journals, which she is planning to sell at local craft fairs. “I’m just letting the material speak to me,” Ms. Conostas, an artist and digital consultant, said of the FreshDirect bags.

FreshDirect was founded in 2002 in Queens, and since then its delivery footprint has grown to include about 21 counties in the tristate area. About 150,000 bags are now used to deliver groceries each week, said John MacDonald, the company’s chief marketing officer. For many years the bags could be returned to FreshDirect, which would recycle some of them. But the company ended that policy in 2020, leaving many people with more bags than they knew what to do with.

It wasn’t long after FreshDirect stopped taking its bags back that Alex Dabagh, 40, whose company Anybag in New York uses plastic bags to make tote bags, heard from people looking to offload their stashes. “They’re reusable but, you know, it’s like, there’s just so much out there,” he said.

“I started getting phone calls and emails from people saying, ‘Hey, we have all these FreshDirect bags piling up in our house, in my apartment, in my kitchen. I don’t have any more space for them,’” he added.

He began to collect FreshDirect bags and turned four of them into a \$133 Anybag tote. Since then Mr. Dabagh has acquired 300 to 400 more FreshDirect bags, which he plans



KAT HOELCK

to use as material for a collection of totes.

FreshDirect’s bags are designed by its marketing team, which chooses and photographs the produce that appears on them. New designs are introduced seasonally to reflect the types of fruits and vegetables that may be inside the bags. “The bags kind of express some of the personality of the brand,” Mr. MacDonald said.

Though they are made using recycled plastic, the bags are “not easily recycled,” said Vincent Gragnani, a spokesman for the New York Department of Sanitation. Mr. MacDonald said that one reason FreshDirect stopped taking back its bags was that the recycling process was inefficient and created waste.

Last year, FreshDirect partnered with organizations that will accept its customers’ bags as donations. Those organizations include the Brooklyn Book Bodega, which uses the bags to distribute books to children and schools, and The Red Door Place, a food pantry and soup kitchen in Manhattan that uses the bags to distribute groceries.

“Trying to purchase bags online would



Above, an \$899 handbag, top, designed by Shelly Parker, and journal covers made by Bailey Conostas from FreshDirect grocery bags after she let the material “speak to me.” Left, Anybag, a company that uses plastic bags to create totes, has been stockpiling the grocery bags.

have taken a big chunk of our already tightly strained budget,” said Teresa Concepción, executive director of The Red Door Place. “Honestly the bags have made the difference,” she said.

While people like Ms. Concepción see benefits in the abundance of FreshDirect bags, others like Theda Sandiford, 52, an artist and the senior vice president for commerce and digital at Def Jam Records, cannot look at the bags without being reminded of the pandemic during which they proliferated, and the grief and stress that it has caused. To help process those feelings, Ms. Sandiford sliced up FreshDirect bags that she had collected from the trash room of her apartment building in Jersey City, N.J., and wove the pieces through shopping carts to create artworks for a series she called Emotional Baggage Carts.

“I’m an emotional empath and I needed to put it somewhere so I wasn’t carrying it,” Ms. Sandiford said. The first cart she made using FreshDirect bags, called “Wide Load,” now belongs to the Museum of Contemporary African Diasporan Arts in Brooklyn. She showed other carts, last month, at the Satellite Art Show in Miami Beach, Fla. On her website, one cart she made using FreshDirect bags is for sale for \$15,000.

Janet Linville, 65, said she also grew to loathe seeing the bags because the sight of them reminded her of the millions of years it would take for their plastic material to fully decompose. Perhaps the only thing she hated seeing more, she added, was the goose droppings littering a lawn near her Roosevelt Island home where she would go to read on warmer days. Sick of washing blankets, she tore up some FreshDirect bags and sewed the pieces together to create a plastic tarp to lie on.

Ms. Linville, a retired head milliner at the Metropolitan Opera, was so pleased with the result that she considered using the bags to make a hat as well. “I’m sure that I could,” she said. “But I don’t know if I could go around wearing a FreshDirect hat.”

MODERN LOVE

A Web Between Her Body and Mine

For decades, the two women connected nearly every day. One moment changed all that.

By KAREN PAUL

The nurse had to unwrap the bandages that were holding the skin grafts in place in order for Miriam to use the bathroom. I had just arrived at the hospital — the first non-family visitor since the accident — and my timing was such that I got to see my best friend naked for the first time in our many years together.

Miriam laughed, holding her tummy while trying to stand. “It’s OK for her to see me this way,” she said to the nurse, “because we have no secrets anyway.”

The nurse chuckled, steadying Miriam as she shuffled to the toilet. The door closed and I stood there, glued to the floor, not certain yet as to my role.

Since the accident, I had been working with Miriam’s husband to set up a visitor calendar. In the burn unit, you’re only allowed one visitor a day other than your family member. And when you have suffered third degree burns all over the top of your body and the side of your face, it takes a while before even that is permitted.

This was indeed a day to celebrate. The first two grafting surgeries had been a success, and we believed that things were looking up.

Once we got Miriam back to the bed, the nurse began the process of rewrapping the bandages and helping Miriam get settled again. I saw that the side table was covered with sugary treats from friends who probably didn’t know about her diabetes diagnosis a couple of years earlier.

Miriam picked up one of the boxes and, with a conspiratorial smile, offered me a chocolate. Knowing that I wouldn’t say no, she took one too and we bit into the gooey truffles, sighing with guilty pleasure, knowing that the sugar was bad for her but not nearly as bad as why she was here.

“Kate is the best of all the nurses,” Miriam said. “She knows how to wrap me up without hurting me. I know I shouldn’t have too many of these sweets, but today is a day to celebrate. I can have visitors at last!”

While it was hard for her to move her head since the burn had snaked its way around her neck, she leaned over to Kate and said, “And I’m so lucky because my best friend was the first to arrive.”

We had been friends since meeting at work 23 years earlier, both pregnant with our daughters. She and her husband were preparing to move to Washington and she was trying to figure out what she would do after the baby was born. Our daughters arrived about a month apart, looking a bit like cousins, and our families began to meld.

The early days of our friendship were conducted through long phone calls. Miriam had suffered profound hearing loss through a bout of Ménière’s disease, and our conversations were slow as I worked to speak loudly and clearly and she to hear.

During the nine months our family lived beneath hers in a duplex, we were able to be together in person more, which deepened our friendship. Our husbands were also close, playing poker and sharing the experience of having lived in the same yeshiva in Israel at the same time many years earlier.

At some point texting became an easier method of communication for Miriam and me, and we began having long, rambling text conversations every day. Since we worked in the same field — nonprofit fund-

KAREN PAUL, a writer and nonprofit fund-raiser in Washington, is working on a memoir.

EMAIL modernlove@nytimes.com



BRIAN REA

raising — we understood each other’s work problems and accomplishments. We even shared the same favorite children’s book, “Charlotte’s Web,” and she often quoted its last lines to me: “It’s not often that someone comes around who is a true friend and a good writer. Charlotte was both.”

Miriam loved to cook and to feed her friends. We had spent many a Jewish holiday and Thanksgiving at her home with lavish feasts and a house filled with love and laughter. And she always made sure to make a chocolate dessert for me.

The night of the accident she was cooking dinner for her husband and herself. She had not yet changed from her work clothes and was wearing a billowy blouse. The sleeve brushed one of the burners and caught on fire. Instead of stop, drop and roll, Miriam screamed and froze. Her husband came running into the kitchen to see her engulfed in flames. He doused her and called 911.

I was coming home that same evening from outpatient knee surgery. By the time I got the call that they were in the hospital, I was home with my leg up and unable to do anything to help.

The second and final visit I made to the hospital was on Miriam’s 60th birthday. Several weeks earlier she had been planning a party, a festive gathering to mark the end of our pandemic isolation. But instead, she was in the burn unit, continuing her trajectory of surgeries.

I arrived that morning empty-handed, as the presents I had bought had not yet been shipped — two silky scarves that she could use to wrap loosely around her neck when she was out of the hospital. Miriam took her style seriously, and I wanted her to feel chic and beautiful. When I told her about the scarves, she was delighted.

After that day there was a long line of close friends who were signed up for visits, and I demurred going again, figuring I would have time with her after her return

We even shared the same favorite children’s book, ‘Charlotte’s Web,’ and she often quoted its last lines to me: ‘It’s not often that someone comes around who is a true friend and a good writer. Charlotte was both.’

home. I started preparing to make room in my schedule for daily visits.

After the fifth surgery, Miriam was no longer laughing with the nurses. She had given up the effort it took to be a good patient, and her spirits had darkened. Then we got the word that she was being released. The evening of her homecoming was to be the first night of Passover.

I was hosting a small Seder with my partner and his son. I held up Miriam’s Cup — a new Seder addition, usually filled with water, representing liberation and life — and told the story of how Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Moses and Aaron, led the Jewish women as they sang and played timbrels, celebrating the crossing of the Red Sea and the freedom of the Jewish people. Then we drank to my own Miriam’s liberation, after a month in the hospital, the same evening.

What I didn’t know is that while I was retelling the story of Miriam’s Cup, my Miriam had arrived home, walked into her house, lay down and died, most likely of a pulmonary embolism. Her liberation was never to arrive.

In Judaism, when someone dies, the community sits shomer with the body until burial, keeping its hovering and restless soul company until the body is interred — a sacred task.

I signed up to sit shomer, and when I ar-

rived at the funeral home, I found the room in the basement. It was next to the space where taharah is performed — the washing and dressing of the body, also done by community members trained in this ritual.

Instead of sitting in the shomer nook with the tiny sliding window that allows you to be present without sitting with the body, I walked directly into the taharah room — chilled and white — and saw Miriam’s body, so still, wrapped in a plain bag on a steel table, reminiscent of the bandages that had wrapped her in the hospital. I could feel her presence — her soul was there with us, waiting for direction.

I sat in a chair a few feet away and tried to say something, but for the first time in our many years together — chatting, laughing, texting — words failed me. Instead, I took out the copy of “Charlotte’s Web” I had brought and read the last few chapters aloud to her, weeping because I didn’t know how to tell Miriam what she meant to me, and I would never have the chance again.

As I read the final sentence of the book, I closed my eyes and imagined I could feel the tendrils of a gossamer web spin out between her body and mine. And I could visualize in the middle of the room, out of the complex web that represented our lives and our relationship, a word knitted into sticky threads, sparkling with fresh dew: “Friend.”

Tiny Love Stories My Grandma, the Pilot

When her youngest graduated from college, my grandmother decided she wanted to be a pilot. She completed ground school, but that’s as far as she went. When we grandchildren were born, she was widowed, living on a teacher’s salary in New Jersey. In lieu of an inheritance, our grandmother promised us memories. Traveling with us every summer, she shared her desire to explore, a desire that led me to complete my pilot’s license. As a thank you for her encouragement, I recently took my grandmother flying down the Hudson River, both of us in awe of the other. **JESSICA WARD**

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RESPONSIBLE FASHION

The Push for Sustainability

Kourtney Kardashian Barker, the reach of Shein and big changes for Patagonia.

By ELIZABETH PATON

Who gets to decide what is green or green-washing? Is it a good thing that more celebrities and reality stars are embracing pre-loved clothing? How much should governments step in when it comes to sustainability? What protections do garment workers have?

These are just some of the questions that dominated the debate in 2022 about how the fashion industry can reduce its impact on the planet and safeguard its hundreds of thousands of workers in poor countries.

Going into 2023, there are soaring energy prices in Europe, global supply chain disruptions and spikes in the cost of living in many parts of the world.

These factors are all expected to pose challenges for an industry under pressure from regulators and consumers to find

meaningful solutions — fast.

Here are some of the most memorable moments when it came to responsible fashion in 2022.

Shein's Fast-Fashion Dominance

A lot of people don't know how to pronounce Shein (it's "she-in"), the Chinese fast-fashion behemoth, but chances are they've probably heard of it, shopped for its clothes or perhaps even boycotted it.

Shein grabbed plenty of headlines in 2022: There were labor violation investigations and allegations of elevated levels of lead in some products. At the Copenhagen Fashion Summit in June, Shein pledged \$15 million over three years to the Or Foundation, a charity working at Kantamanto, the world's largest secondhand clothing market, in Accra, Ghana.

The pledge also prompted suggestions of greenwashing as the company continued to make a fortune from sales of supercheap clothes.

It's hard to tell whether these negative re-

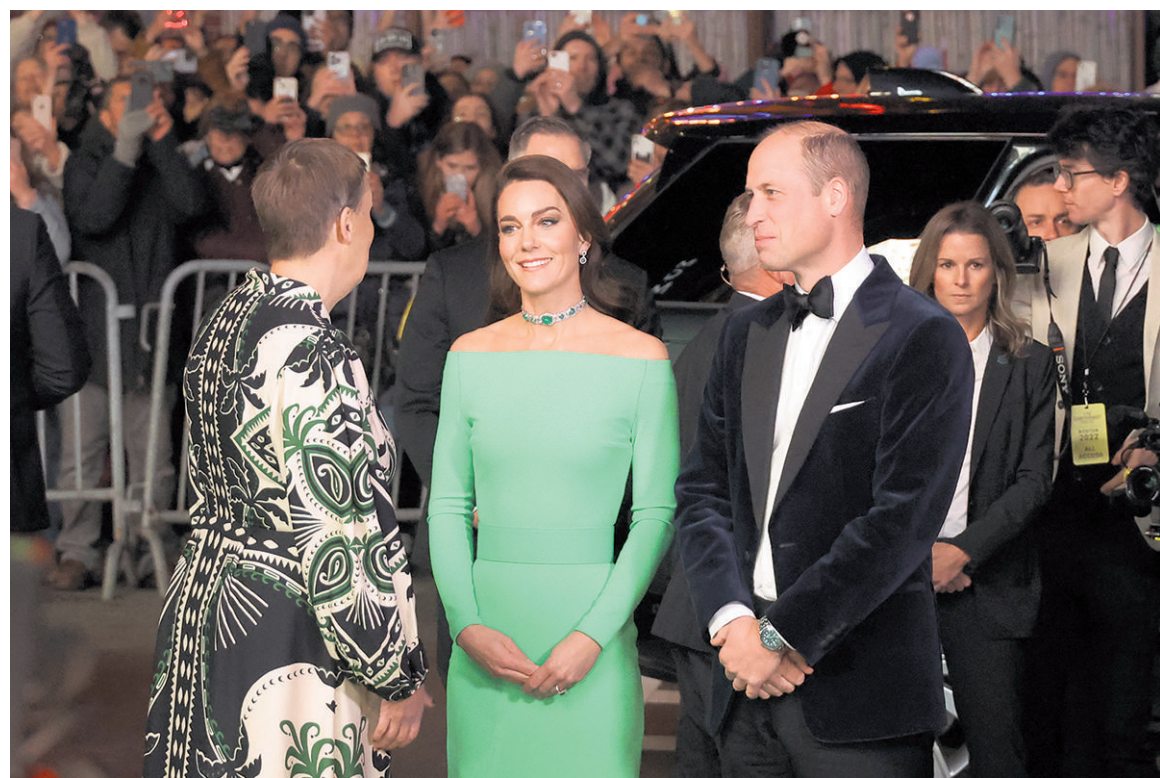
ports have affected the company. According to research compiled by Money.co.uk and published in December, Shein was the world's most popular fashion brand in 2022. After analyzing a year's worth of search data on Google, Shein topped the list of most-searched-for brands in 113 countries in the world, beating Zara to the top spot.

Patagonia's Founder and Climate Activism

Patagonia has long positioned itself as a brand at the forefront of the war against climate change, giving away 1 percent of its sales to environmental causes since 1985. But last year, the outdoor clothing retailer's founder, Yvon Chouinard, took a bold step: He gave his company away.

He, his wife and children handed Patagonia to a nonprofit group, a measure to ensure that all of the company's profits — some \$100 million a year — are used to fund conservation efforts around the globe.

While it is a move that, according to Bloomberg, will allow the Chouinard family to avoid a substantial tax hit, it also may set



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OFFICE OF US SENATOR KIRSTEN GILLIBRAND

From far left: Catherine, Princess of Wales, in a rented gown, and Prince William in Boston last month; Shein's first permanent showroom opened in Tokyo in November; Senator Kirsten Gillibrand, center, introduced the FABRIC Act in May.

The message spread that more brands need to incorporate repair, resale and rental services into their business models.

a precedent for fashion's numerous other mega-rich dynasties.

Rentals on the Red Carpet

In 2022, the message spread that for the fashion industry to reduce its environmental footprint, more brands will need to incorporate repair, resale and rental services into their business models. Spurred by the rise in popularity of rental clothing, which has already been embraced by influencers, a handful of megawatt stars also began renting high fashion for red-carpet appearances. The most notable outing of the year? A turn last month by the Princess of Wales, who wore a Kermit green off-the-shoulder frock by Emilia Wickstead to the Earthshot Prize Awards ceremony in Boston, that she rented for £74, about \$90, from the British website Hurr.

Questions About Measuring Progress

The Sustainable Apparel Coalition has been one of fashion's most powerful sustainability-focused trade groups. Its tools, known as the Higg Index, are used by companies including Walmart, Nike and H&M Group, and were seen as a de facto industry standard to measure environmental and social

impact. Until it wasn't.

Regulators in Norway said last spring that Higg data was not sufficient for environmental marketing claims. A Quartz investigation found H&M's environmental scores were "misleading" and "outright deceptive." And a New York Times article said the index strongly favored synthetic materials made from fossil fuels over natural ones like cotton or leather.

Fueled by other controversies such as the fraudulent auditing of organic cotton in India, the debate over how fashion can create a standardized way to measure and substantiate sustainability claims by companies is only getting more heated, with no clear solution in sight.

Laws Aimed at Fixing the Industry

In 2022, many governments seemed to wake up to the fact that companies are not reforming themselves at a pace and scale that will meaningfully combat climate change. Last January, organizers of the Fashion Act introduced a bill that, if passed, would make New York the first state in the country to pass legislation that would set broad sustainability regulations.

In May, Senator Kirsten Gillibrand introduced the federal FABRIC Act, aiming to introduce better labor protections for U.S. garment workers as well as manufacturing incentives. In November, the European Commission proposed new rules to reduce packaging waste that would affect things like perfume bottles and e-commerce packaging.

Beefing up government oversight may be a messy and slow process, but its start has climate advocates encouraged.

Fast Fashion and Reality TV

The symbiotic relationship between reality television shows and fast-fashion brands like Fashion Nova, Shein and Boohoo is well established. But in May, "Love Island," the hit British reality dating show that has turned scores of contestants into influencers, embraced a new sponsor, eBay UK.

For several years, "Love Island" contestants wore the fast-fashion brand I Saw It First, which sells clothes for as little as \$3. But this season, contestants wore pre-loved clothes and accessories to promote responsible shopping.

In September, the internet went into a sharp-tongued uproar when Kourtney Kardashian Barker was unveiled by Boohoo as its latest collaborator and sustainability ambassador. But, overall, there seems to be more scrutiny about how reality TV and fast fashion are both peddling a false egalitarianism, or a way for everyday people to embody aspirational lifestyles.

Materials and Manufacturing Processes

The fashion industry is still heavily reliant on fossil-fuel-based fabrics and materials. A report by the environmental lobbying group Changing Markets Foundation found that brands continue to mask a dependence on synthetics under the guise of increasing their commitment to sustainable materials.

Still, while invention should not be overly prioritized over implementation, which is what really guarantees change, a number of innovations drew attention last year that have the potential to change some fashion manufacturing processes. A new textile recycling plant in Sweden, run by Renewcell,

Social Q's | PHILIP GALANES

A Neighbor's Cold Cat

Over the summer, a Bengal cat appeared on our back porch. (Bengals are an expensive breed of domestic cats that resemble tiny leopards.) It was meowing urgently and was much too thin. I could see its ribs. It had no identification, so I fed it a can of salmon because it wasn't clear whether anyone else was feeding it. After that, it started coming by regularly. One day, it stayed into the evening, so we kept it overnight. We were worried about foxes. The next day, the cat appeared wearing a tracking collar, and its owner soon followed. He told us he had another cat and a dog, but he didn't leave any contact information. Now it's winter — and extremely cold — and the cat comes every day (without its tracker). We shoo it away at night, but it clearly wants to stay here, napping under the radiator. What should we do? We love the cat, but we don't want to steal someone else's expensive pet. Still, we're not sure it has anywhere to go.

CAT MOM

I understand your concern about the optics of pricey pet abduction, but I am more worried about keeping this cat safe. Even outdoor cats require warm, dry shelter when temperatures fall below freezing. You have no idea what happens to the cat after you

cultural appropriation to me, even without the spoken "namaste."

I'm sorry this happened. I doubt the clerks mean disrespect to you or South Asians. That's no reason to be quiet, though. If you feel comfortable speaking up, say: "You may not know this, but the namaste greeting is not just for yoga classes. South Asians use it even today, and people from that culture may find it hurtful or offensive for you to borrow it."

Too Few Cooks in the Kitchen

My mother-in-law loves cooking and thinks she's a fantastic cook. She dislikes restaurants and takeout. So, when we visit, which we do for a week at a time, we are forced to eat food she cooks at every meal. The problem: I find her cooking awful, almost inedible! When we visit, I am always hungry and often feel sick and weak from lack of food. My husband agrees about her cooking, but he is terrified of hurting her. What can I do?

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW

Color me unimpressed by your ingenuity. If you hate your mother-in-law's cooking, why not help her and make something you enjoy eating? Stop at the shops and buy some delicious cheeses and breads. Bring gifts of fancy nuts and olives. Just because you are staying with a parent doesn't mean you have to act like a child.

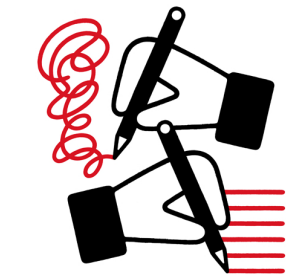
Out of the Loop

What is the best way to handle a Christmas card that was addressed to me and included my son, but used the wrong surname for him? He was not adopted by my second husband. Also, my son is no longer alive! My niece hasn't kept up with her family.

LESLIE

My first thought was to express concern that your niece's card might have triggered fresh grief. If so, I am sorry. But you seem more interested in scolding her, focusing on her use of a wrong surname before even mentioning your son's death. Clearly, she hadn't heard the sad news. I don't regard that as her fault, though. If you want her to know, tell her.

For help with your awkward situation, send a question to SocialQ@nytimes.com, to Philip Galanes on Facebook or @SocialQPhilip on Twitter.



shoo it out the door. And the failure of the owner to put a safe breakaway collar on it with contact information leaves you no humane choice but to keep it inside for now.

It's possible that the cat was implanted with a microchip with identification information on it. Check with a vet or animal shelter. (Leave your name and number, too.) The owner tracked the cat to your home before. It would n't take the detective skills of a Hardy Boy to drop by again.

Now, on to the emotional component of your rescue operation: You've become attached to the cat. But remember you are only fostering it until you can assure its safety. If the owner shows up again, make sure the cat has easy access to shelter before you return it to him. And take his number this time!

When a Salute Feels Like a Slap

On a couple of occasions, clerks have helped me in stores, and at the end of our transactions, they put their hands together in prayer in front of their hearts and bow their heads. I feel this gesture is racist toward Asians. (I am Asian.) So far, I've bitten my tongue. What should I do?

K.T.

Blame yoga. Most of the yoga classes I've taken end with students sitting cross-legged with our hands in prayer as we bow our heads to the teacher and say "namaste" — Sanskrit for "I bow to you." Now, plucking this gesture from a yoga studio, where classes often explore Hindu traditions, and bringing it thoughtlessly to a retail space seems like



Kourtney Kardashian Barker was criticized for her role as sustainability ambassador for Boohoo.

which creates a material called Circulose from cotton waste, said it had reached its full production capacity after signing deals with brands like H&M and Zara.

Stella McCartney, who invested in Mylo, a mycelium material produced by Bolt Threads, as part of a 2020 consortium including Kering, Adidas and Lululemon, introduced a venture with Protein Evolution that will process leftover mixed nylon and polyesters into new material for use in new clothing. And innovative textiles like seaweed fabric, mushroom leather and pea silk have also been gaining momentum, as well as Spinnova, a natural fiber that is compostable and recyclable and made without water or any harmful chemicals.

Garment Workers and Their Rights

Fashion brands rarely own the factories that make their clothes. The vast majority of garment and footwear orders are outsourced to suppliers in emerging markets, where overhead is cheap and the cost of human labor is even cheaper. In 2022, hundreds of thousands of garment workers, who power the global clothing trade, took to the streets to protest wages and working conditions as inflation and canceled orders took a toll. In Haiti, Thailand, Myanmar, Bangladesh and Pakistan many used social media to alert the world to their cause.

The news in December that factory workers in Pakistan would now be protected under the International Accord, a legally enforceable health and safety agreement, was a significant step. But the furor at the start of the World Cup soccer competition over the mistreatment of thousands of workers making uniforms for the likes of Adidas and Nike was another stark reminder that there remains a long way to go.

How We Welcomed the New Year



PHOTOGRAPHS BY KYLE BERGER FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES



From top, scenes from Toronto on New Year's Eve, captured by Kyle Berger, a local photographer: A car enthusiast spins some wheels on Yonge Street; a clock store ticks off the final seconds of the year; a woman applies makeup before heading out to celebrate, and some lipstick application paper is discarded after use; and a server at the restaurant Ten selects a bottle, below.



CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

A couple of friends — one from Montreal, one from Scotland — came into town to celebrate with me. I hadn't lived in Toronto since I was a teenager, so it felt like divine intervention that one of the bands I used to see at house shows was doing a New Year's Eve set. We went to an indie rock show that turned into a punk show, picking up new people along the way. Then we set off to a friend-of-a-friend's mysterious house party (after waiting until the host was high enough to let eight strangers into his crowded apartment).

We played beer pong until midnight. I won, but maybe just because I was the only person who wasn't drinking. Gwen Stefani played as the countdown started, and I kissed my boyfriend when the clock struck 12.

After midnight, I grilled everybody for their 2023 predictions (in: flip phones, sincerity, digging a hole in your backyard; out: polyamory, being mean, performative Catholicism). We took the first smoke break of the new year (in: cigarettes; out: vaping), barefoot and shivering in the cold.

As we walked home, the tone shifted — we talked about the year that lay behind us and the year that sprawled ahead. We felt sad and somber and strange, confronted by the passage of time during one of the most precarious periods we were likely to ever experience. When we got back to my apartment, we set up makeshift beds in my living room for the people who'd missed the last train home, and I watched them fall asleep on the floor I still couldn't quite believe was mine. Everything felt new.

RAYNE FISHER-QUANN

Rayne Fisher-Quann is the writer of the Substack newsletter *Internet Princess*.

Duck Manqué

LOS ANGELES — What's more festive than spending New Year's Eve getting cursed by a frozen duck?

My family's duck spent a peaceful existence in our freezer until the middle of Christmas Eve dinner, when we, after calmly contemplating how good it was going to taste the next night, had the collective heart attack specific to realizing that tomorrow's main course was still covered in ice. But because the year-end holidays come one after another, any frozen duck originally intended for one celebration can be used to celebrate something else. So our Christmas duck swiftly turned itself into a New Year's Eve duck that didn't mind frozenly listening to this year's explanation of Kwanzaa to my son. All we had to do was get it out of the freezer in time to be marinated in salt, herbs and orange zest before we dumped it in the oven.

This time I took the duck out of the freezer with two days to go. While I relaxed in our fridge, I spent a calm 10 minutes searching for the New Year's black-eyed peas I'd bought 364 days in advance, after shopping for them too late the year before. And then I spent a frantic 10 minutes wondering where a bag of beans goes to die while also being quizzed on the whereabouts of our Chewbacca Christmas tree ornament.

My son, who is having a "Star Wars" year, spends much of his free time in Jedi robes, heroically battling our apartment's dust bunnies with a light saber. So of course we decided that the most Christmassy thing we could do would be to get a Chewbacca for our tree. Sadly, our frozen duck had absorbed all the energy we would have spent on Chewbacca and the black-eyed peas. I ended up buying a new batch of black-eyed peas and tracking Chewbacca's location to a warehouse in Ohio, where he was still waiting out the aftereffects of a snowstorm.

I took the duck out of the fridge on New Year's Eve only to discover that it was still frozen, resembling a large hockey puck with legs and refusing to be served for dinner. So we ate a hastily assembled cheese plate and declared the duck our New Year's Day dinner — unless it finds a way to sit that holiday out, too, in which case we'll throw

the duck back in the freezer so we can have it for an extremely festive Martin Luther King Day. KASHANA CAULEY

Kashana Cauley, a former staff writer for "The Daily Show," is the author of the novel "The Survivalists."

A New Day in Brazil

BRASILIA — On New Year's Eve, I found myself in the tent of a 60-year-old mechanic who was camped outside the headquarters of the Brazilian Army. He was showing me where he pooped: a bucket full of sawdust.

He emptied it every three days, he said. "It doesn't smell bad," he assured me.

The people in this camp were earnest — but deluded. They had been here for two months, convinced Brazil's October election was rigged and demanding that the military intervene before the new president could take office. (The election was not rigged, and the military said it would not intervene.)

I'm The Times's Brazil correspondent and had been following the story for months. So with a day until the inauguration, I wanted to hear what these Brazilians thought.

"The army will step in; it's already doing it," said Magno Rodrigues, 60, the mechanic in a leather jacket. He had been in the camp for 62 days, sharing the tent and a narrow mattress with his wife.

I toured the grounds and heard the protesters out. Eventually, some got upset — to them, the press had been lying about the situation all along — and I left.

That night I met with some French TV correspondents and another friend from Rio de Janeiro, where I live, for a free samba concert along the river. The mood was far different. People from across Brazil had swarmed the capital to celebrate the transition to a new government. It meant the return of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, the 77-year-old leftist former president, who has an almost messianic following, and the ejection of Jair Bolsonaro, the far-right president who had overseen four years of tumult.

I've been to plenty of New Year's Eve parties but never one with such sheer joy. The crowd spilled out of the tented area onto the grassy riverbank below, and the street vendors were running out of beer. At midnight, we marveled at the fireworks, but the main attraction was yet to come.

I woke up early to write, and chants of Mr. Lula's name were already ringing out in the streets. I was finishing my story on the inauguration, which was partly focused on Mr. Bolsonaro. He should have been a key figure in Sunday's ceremonies, passing the presidential sash to his successor, but he left for Florida two days earlier, hoping the distance would help cool the investigations he faced. His absence now set up a peculiar moment: Who would pass the new president the sash?

I reported that afternoon from the presidential offices, where Mr. Lula would ascend a ramp and put on the sash. I went up as high as I could for a vantage point. From above, I watched Mr. Lula and his wife, Janja, pause at the base of the ramp as a small group assembled: an Indigenous man, a Black woman, a disabled man, a 10-year-old boy — collectively a representation of Brazil's diversity. They interlocked arms and walked up together, the crowd cheering and chanting, a pulsing sea of red behind them.

As they reached the top, a voice announced that Mr. Lula would accept the sash from "the Brazilian people." A 33-year-old female trash collector played the role of Mr. Bolsonaro and placed the sash on the new president. I looked around and much of the crowd was crying. JACK NICAS

Jack Nicas is the Brazil bureau chief for The New York Times, covering Brazil, Argentina, Chile, Paraguay and Uruguay.

Hope and Soba

TOKYO — Our New Year's Eve peaked around 9 p.m.

Sure, we coulda, shoulda hopped on the subway to Shibuya Crossing, the pedestrian nerve center of Tokyo where revelers gather for the midnight countdown. (Nah, too crowded.) Or we could have walked to Zozoji, a Buddhist temple that dates back to the 16th century, to witness the annual bell-ringing ceremony and expunge our anxieties and worldly desires. (Too cold and too crowded.) Instead, my husband and I committed to the couch.

I kept the television volume turned low on "Kohaku Uta Gassen," an annual New Year's Eve musical competition among bands divided by gender. Usually I find the show a total bore and turn it off after one or two kitschy acts. But this year, my hairdresser was styling the hair and makeup of one of the pop groups, and I wanted to show my support.

Waiting for the band to come on, I remembered my childhood, when I lived in Japan with my parents for two years during elementary school. Back then, I loved the "Kohaku." I would try desperately to stay awake for it, but fell asleep on my father's lap, only to be shaken awake for the final countdown.

My own children had no such interest. My daughter, home after her first semester at college, headed out to meet some high school friends. My son watched another show in his room.

Right around 9 p.m., the band I had been waiting for came onscreen. Their hair was perfectly scruffed and dyed. For a moment, something of my childhood excitement returned.

An hour before the year ended, I cooked "toshikoshi soba," buckwheat noodles traditionally eaten on New Year's Eve to ensure a long and happy life. My son emerged from his room for the final meal of 2022, joining us for the salty slurping. My husband and I watched several bell-ringing ceremonies broadcast on the television from around the country. When the clock flipped to midnight, I texted friends in the United States to wish them a happy new year from the future, one of my favorite rituals since we moved to Japan six years ago.

On New Year's Day, we walked to Atago Shrine, where we climbed its 86 steps to pay our respects and express gratitude for the year. We bought "o-mikuji" fortunes printed on folded strips of paper.

"A storm is blowing hard outside, but inside the house it's warm like spring," mine read. "Your Fortune: Quite Good."

I'll take it. MOTOKO RICH

Motoko Rich is the Tokyo bureau chief for The Times, where she covers Japanese politics, society, gender and the arts, as well as news and features on the Korean Peninsula.

A New Year's Wedding

NEW YORK — The calendar is arbitrary and devoid of meaning in the quantum world, or so my husband, John, likes to tell me, but I like to cram meaning into even the most random tedious days. So New Year's is a seductive opportunity to find omens in every puddle with a little sparkle of light. I don't indulge in self-sabotage by making resolutions. I just want to make lists, envision and reflect — to offset the Forgetting, make course corrections and increase the gratitude.

When I was 19, my stepmother was sitting next to me eating caviar, and I turned up my nose and said, "Ewww." She looked at me out of the corner of her eye and drawled serenely, "You are the kind of woman who would love caviar." I indeed turned out to be the kind of woman who loves caviar but only thinks to eat it once a year. So I endured the survival experience that is Eatly in the Flatiron on New Year's Eve morning to procure some of the same.

Then I went to Elizabeth Street to get a second piercing in my right earlobe. I had the idea for months, and it nagged at me up until the clock was running out on 2022. I suppose I wanted a physical token of the year to take into the next, a memento that wasn't a wrinkle.

Around 4 p.m., John and I, newly pierced, ate the caviar on blinis while listening to Judy Clay and William Bell. Then we ordered a pizza from Tappo, played three games of gin rummy and watched four episodes of "Slow Horses." At midnight we heard the yells from Times Square, 20 blocks north of us, clinked glasses and went to bed around 1 a.m.

I was really tired the next morning. It turns out that I'm not the kind of woman who loves eating caviar if it entails staying up after midnight. I vacuumed the living room, listened to "Irish Sundays" on WFUV and stared at the Christmas tree for awhile. Energy and anticipation started to build as we readied for the wedding of our close friend Marc Cohn. With only family and us in attendance, he was marrying Lisa Berg at their apartment on Riverside Drive at 4:30 p.m. on the seventh anniversary of their first date, New Year's Day 2016.

John and I sang "Let It Be Me" to the luminous couple as they stood under the huppah in the living room and the sun set over the Hudson River in the enormous picture window behind them. In their vows they mentioned that the "glass-half-empty man had found his glass-half-full woman," and I recognized myself and John in that. No judgment. My half-full needs his half-empty as much as the reverse.

I love and long for occasions that demand unequivocal optimism — where half-full meets half-empty. I love a ritual that is bound by memory and time. The calendar may be arbitrary, but there is meaning in a white dress and veil, a groom who chokes up and the mighty Hudson shimmering with pink and gold, glasses full, sparkle and glow, on a New Year's Day. ROSANNE CASH

Rosanne Cash is a singer, songwriter and author. Her most recent album is "She Remembers Everything."

CULTURAL STUDIES

All Signs Around Here Point to Los Angeles



PHOTO ILLUSTRATIONS BY ADAM POWELL FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Some of Southern California’s quintessential institutions are popping up all over New York.

By MICHAEL M. GRYNBAUM

It’s a balmy January afternoon. You buy an avocado and pickled turnip sandwich from Gjelina and some legal marijuana at a high-end smoke shop. After popping by a Fred Segal boutique, you meet friends for early mocktails under the trees at San Vicente Bungalows.

It’s an ideal Los Angeles day. And soon you won’t have to leave Manhattan for it.

New York City may think of itself as singular, but it’s increasingly possible to live the Los Angeles lifestyle here without the inconvenience of a cross-country flight. New Yorkers are driving more and riding the subway less. They’re eating earlier, dressing more sloppily and doing ketamine. The mayor parties at a Kardashian hangout, and there’s an organic mattress store on Fifth Avenue.

Is this the Los Ang-ularity?

Cultural exchange between the two cities dates back decades, and innovations like juice bars, fad diets and luxe leisure wear long ago brought a California feel to the gilded Manhattan of Carrie Bradshaw and Blair Waldorf.

But these days, in the bicoastal vibe wars, New York is giving L.A.

New York’s first legal recreational pot store opened last month, bringing a staple of Los Angeles living to Lower Broadway. New car registrations rose 28 percent in Manhattan between 2019 and 2021. A beach is being built off the West Side Highway, beneath the Whitney Museum.

Eleven Madison Park, Manhattan’s pinnacle of four-star dining, went vegan. Midtown is chockablock with Los Angeles culinary favorites like Katsuya, Dave’s Hot Chicken and Sugarfish. Keith McNally, the ultimate New York restaurateur, has a son who just married a Spielberg. Netflix bought the Paris Theater — the city’s last single-screen movie house — and built a 170,000-square-foot soundstage in Bushwick, Brooklyn.

Even the clearest distinction between the two cities — climate — has been smoggier of late. Last Wednesday, Los Angeles reached a high of 61 degrees; in New York, the mercury hit 66.

OK, so Manhattan will never have palm trees. (Soon, Los Angeles may not either.) But a convergence of forces — social, economic, epidemiological — seems to be bringing the cultures of the two cities closer together.

First, the pandemic: the time of Peloton, suburban fantasies and acute health consciousness. Deprived of their usual energies and social delights, New Yorkers lusted

for wide open spaces and spiritual awakenings, innovative exercise regimens and controlled environments.

“The entire pandemic was the L.A. lifestyle,” said Andy Cohen, the Bravo host and a longtime New Yorker. “We stayed at home and did nothing!”

Sue Chan, a food industry event specialist who splits her time between the Echo Park neighborhood of Los Angeles and the Lower East Side of Manhattan, said that New Yorkers’ isolation during Covid fueled an obsession with “self-improvement, self-care and self-love: a.k.a., the epitome of Californian living, where one can go for days without seeing a single human.”

Enter the wave of woo-woo.

Luxe wellness spots have proliferated. At Sage + Sound on the Upper East Side, the owners blessed black tourmaline crystals and buried them under the floor before opening the 5,000-square-foot store in October.

Remedy Place, the health club in West Hollywood, Calif., that opened in the Flatiron neighborhood of Manhattan in September, offers lymphatic drainage suits and hyperbaric chambers to members who pay fees of several thousand dollars a year; one sound-healing class features “harmonic frequencies of multiple Himalayan singing bowls.” The club’s motto — “When we remedy together, we amplify the shared experience” — promises togetherness, the kind of Los Angeles thing that New Yorkers once loved to avoid.

“There was always a cynical New York nostril flare about horoscopes and anything considered more Southern California, and that’s been completely normalized,” said Jill Kargman, the actress, writer and native New Yorker, citing acquaintances who now dabble in ayahuasca and kambo, an Amazonian frog toxin used for purging. “People microdose to get through a P.T.A. meeting.”

Even Mayor Eric Adams, a self-described vegan who secretly eats fish, recently told New Yorkers: “I deserve good work-life balance.”

New Yorkers have also adopted another habit of Los Angeles living: early dining.

Lauren Young, a spokeswoman for Resy, the reservation app owned by American Express, said that New Yorkers had “shifted a little toward earlier times, whereas L.A. historically already did dine earlier.” From 2019 to 2022, 5 p.m. reservations in New York City increased by 1.9 percent. “This might not seem like a big shift, but it amounts to thousands of reservations,” Ms. Young said.

“New York used to love to pretend it had a European-style, 9 or 10 p.m. dinner culture,” said Chris Black, a New York fashion consultant and a host of the “How Long Gone” podcast who now lives in West Hollywood. A recent return visit was less Marais, more Marina del Rey, Calif. Mercer Kitchen and Il

A convergence of forces seems to be bringing the cultures of two cities closer together.

Buco “wouldn’t seat me for dinner at 7 p.m., because it was so busy,” he said.

Manhattan’s next big Southern California moment will be the arrival here of San Vicente Bungalows, the private clubhouse in West Hollywood. Its owner, Jeff Klein, is opening a branch at the Jane Hotel, whose rooftop will be adorned with soil and trees to better replicate the verdant original. Gabé Doppelt, a former Condé Nast editor and gatekeeper of Tower Bar on Sunset Boulevard in West Hollywood, another Klein property, is set to move to Manhattan to ensure the social caliber of the new establishment.

Avocado Green Mattress sells California-made “vegan mattresses” at its Fifth Avenue “experience center.” Detox Market, a favorite in Los Angeles, has become part of the East Houston Street landscape. Nushama, a psychedelic wellness center featuring \$4,500 ketamine treatments, opened in Midtown in 2021 and plans to expand to Bay Ridge, Brooklyn.

Steven Phillips-Horst, a host of the podcast “Celebrity Book Club with Steven & Lily,” said the collision of West Coast wellness culture with New York decadence had resulted in something he called “responsible hedonism.”

“People definitely want their green juice and their matcha negronis,” he said. “There’s an element of indulgence to both cities that fuses a more traditional ’90s L.A. idea of green juice and health food and the New York, old-school brasserie vibe, putting that together in this incomprehensible TikTok slop.”

A useful case study is NoHo, the downtown Manhattan neighborhood once home to Jean-Michel Basquiat and Robert Mapplethorpe that has recently turned into LiLA: Little Los Angeles.

Gjelina, the organic food destination in the Venice district of Los Angeles, opened on Bond Street in New York on New Year’s Eve, a few doors down from fellow Southern California imports Reformation and Goop. Hillsong, the megachurch in Los Angeles once favored by Justin Bieber and Vanessa Hudgens (at least until its pastor’s scandalous downfall), is opening a new headquarters off Great Jones Street. There’s an Edie Parker Boutique that sells \$795 luxury bongs and a Bowery “wellness dispensary” with affirming neon signs like “Goodies Vibes Only.”

That first legal recreational pot shop? It’s around the corner just off Astor Place.

The trend extends south to SoHo, where Fred Segal, the West Hollywood fashion mecca, opened its first Manhattan location in November. Inside, shoppers can browse brightly colored cotton basics named for Los Angeles neighborhoods (Pico T-shirt, \$180) and a \$48 baseball cap embroidered with the word “Free.” The shop, a pop-up that will be open at least through April,

abuts a parking lot, “so it sort of felt like home,” said the owner, Jeff Lotman.

The new Fred Segal is near a new Staud, the West Coast fashion brand whose founder, Sarah Staudinger, recently married the Hollywood superagent Ari Emanuel. Irene Neuwirth, the popular Los Angeles jewelry designer, debuted her first Manhattan store in December; Jennifer Fisher, another jewelry designer, just opened a SoHo flagship.

Kate Berlant, the Angeleno actress and comedian, attended N.Y.U. But she discovered a different East Village after returning in the fall for her current one-woman show, “Kate.” “There’s this matcha hellscape — and I love matcha!” she said. “It really depresses me, all that athleisure and wellness. There’s that eerie feeling of an aesthetic taking over the culture entirely.”

The tilt toward Los Angeles is also evident in New York’s culinary scene, where nonalcoholic cocktails are now de rigueur.

Corner Bar, the Dimes Square spot, features three spirit-free cocktails, including an \$18 “amaretti sour” that mixes nonalcoholic bourbon, almond, lemon and honey; the newly reopened Monkey Bar in Midtown offers a \$19 “phony Negroni.” Compare that with old-school haunts like Sparks Steak House, whose “beverage and cigar” list includes a single virgin drink: nonalcoholic St. Pauli Girl beer.

Even the latest booze served in Manhattan is supposedly better for you: Body, a low-proof vodka that promotes “non-G.M.O. Indiana corn” as an ingredient — and was founded by Jilly Hendrix, a close friend of Lauren Conrad, the star of “The Hills” — is stocked at the Rockefeller Center cocktail emporium Pebble Bar and the new Aman New York on Fifth Avenue.

Maer Roshan, the editor of Los Angeles magazine, said he was not surprised that New York, his former home, was taking cues from its West Coast rival. “Everyone I know here had a shaman five years ago,” he said. “And now I’m hearing from my friends in New York, ‘We found this great shaman in Long Island!’”

Ms. Kargman pledged to do her part to beat back that trend.

“I dress up, hate vegan, loathe pot and don’t work out,” she said. “I was just asked if I wanted to do a mommy mushroom journey. Kill me now!”

Still, the true Los Ang-ularity may not occur until New York gains a branch of the upscale organic grocery store Erewhon.

On that front, there may be some hope. “It’s a big and exciting question, huh?” an Erewhon executive, Demi Marie Alhaik, said when asked about the prospect. She added that while Erewhon had no plans for a New York opening, “it is certainly on our radar.”

“It will happen,” Ms. Alhaik said. “It’s just a matter of when.”



Vows

UGOCHI NWOSU and FEMI KUTI

For Two Doctors, ‘a Spark From the Beginning’

By ERIC V. COPAGE

Dr. Oluwafemi Akinwale Kuti Jr. was only visiting California for a few months — but what he found was a long-term love.

It was February 2017, and Dr. Kuti, a general practitioner and entrepreneur, was participating in a start-up program for Reliance Health, a health care company he had co-founded the year before in Lagos, Nigeria, where he lived.

During this time, Dr. Kuti, who goes by Femi (sharing a name with the famed Nigerian Afrobeat musician, though they are not related) signed up for Tinder. Which is where he came across a profile for Dr. Ugochi May Nwosu.

“I thought she was cute, and I reasoned she’d be smart since she went to Harvard,” he said.

“She was also Nigerian, and there weren’t too many in the Bay Area.”

Dr. Nwosu, 34, had immigrated to the United States with her family when she was 7 years old. On Tinder, “I saw that we had mutual friends,” she said, which drew her in.

A relationship that stretched from Nigeria to the United States.

Their affinity for each other grew as they texted and talked over the phone.

“We had a lot of common interests around health care, around traveling, around politics,” said Dr. Kuti, 37.

The couple couldn’t meet face to face for about two weeks because of Dr. Nwosu’s all-consuming cardiology rotation at the University of California, San Francisco Medical Center. But on March 1, the day after her rotation ended, they met for the first time for dinner at Bissap Baobab, a Senegalese restaurant in San Francisco.

“I think there was a spark from the beginning,” Dr. Nwosu said of the date, which ended with what she jokingly called a “stolen” kiss. They would have arranged for another date soon after, but Dr. Nwosu had planned a trip to Las Vegas with fellow residents. Afterward, she was set to visit to her family in Piscataway, N.J.

“But we were texting each other consistently,” Dr. Kuti said.

Dr. Nwosu said, “I was really looking forward to getting back to San Francisco to go on our second date” — which ended up being an archery lesson. Afterward they saw the film “Get Out.”

From then on, they saw each other as regularly as her busy hospital schedule allowed, every other day or so, and usually in snippets. “He would come and meet me around dinner time and bring me meals from nice restaurants as a way to make me calm when I was doing overnight call in the I.C.U.,” Dr. Nwosu said.

At the time, Dr. Kuti was staying in Mountain View, Calif., and Dr. Nwosu lived and worked in San Francisco, roughly a 50-minute drive away. Dr. Kuti said, “I now know it was a bit of a schlep.” But because of his growing affection, he added, “it didn’t feel like a schlep at all.”

A turning point in their relationship came that April during a day trip to Point Reyes National Seashore, a U.S. national park about an hour’s drive north of San Francisco.

They rented a car, stopped at the Devil’s Teeth Baking Company in San Francisco for breakfast sandwiches, then headed to the park. On the way, Dr. Kuti plugged his phone into the car’s stereo system and played a playlist of mainly ’90s soft-rock songs. But when the South African hit “Pluto (Remember You)” by DJ Clock and the group Beatenberg came on, the couple spontaneously began singing along together.

They both agreed that the song became the soundtrack of the trip.

Arriving at the park, the two began their hourslong trek taking in the fauna and flora



PHOTOGRAPHS BY MORGAN STUDIOS



Dr. Femi Kuti and Dr. Ugochi Nwosu were married last month in Nigeria, top. The couple’s Christian ceremony was held at the Crystal Lake Resort, Oguta, Imo State, above.

of the area. There was lots of laughter and expanses of intense conversation, as well. They said they gained crucial insights into one another.

“I think we spent a lot of time talking about big things we could do that would leave our mark on the world,” Dr. Kuti said.

“I didn’t know if we both had that big mission in life,” Dr. Nwosu said. “It was in that conversation I saw how similar we were in how we thought about the impact we wanted to make on the world. Hearing him talking about that in detail, I could really see myself with this person.”

Dr. Nwosu received her bachelor’s degree from Harvard and her medical degree from Columbia University Vagelos College of Physicians and Surgeons.

Dr. Kuti, who was born in Nigeria and raised there as well as in Portsmouth, England, received his medical training at Obafemi Awolowo University in Ile-Ife, Nigeria.

In late May, about two months after their idyllic day trip, the couple faced a reckoning. The next month, Dr. Kuti would return to Nigeria. Over dinner at El Techo, a Latin American restaurant in San Francisco, they tried to sort out whether they had a future together.

“I think we were both kind of realizing that I’m going to be leaving,” Dr. Kuti said. “She’s going to be staying. What are we go-

ing to do with this?”

“I’ve been in long-distance relationships before that didn’t really work out,” Dr. Nwosu added. “It just sort of loses its fizzles over time. So, I was concerned that whatever we were feeling then would sort of fizzle over time with the distance.”

They thought about different options, including splitting up and waiting until Dr. Nwosu finished her residency a year later, in June 2018.

After some soul searching, they decided to stay together long-distance, although both were “very wary” of the prospect. The nine-hour time difference between San Francisco and Lagos, Nigeria, didn’t help. Or perhaps it did.

“When I’m getting up, she’s turning in, and when she’s getting up, I’m turning in,” Dr. Kuti said.

This seemed like a disadvantage at first, but they figured out a routine to get the most from the time difference. “He would give me the first hour of his day and I would give him the last hour of mine,” Dr. Nwosu said. “So it worked out.”

There were also daily text messages and FaceTime conversations which might last a few minutes or hours depending on what circumstances permitted. And every two to three months, they would visit each other in person — with Dr. Kuti traveling to San Francisco since he had a more flexible work

ON THIS DAY

When Dec. 29, 2022

Where The bride’s family compound in Aro-Ibiasoegbe, Oru West LGA.

Blending Traditions The African ceremony incorporated cultural aspects of Igbo and Yoruba traditions in tribute to the bride and groom’s ethnic groups. During one part of the festivities, musicians played Yoruba talking drums, and a D.J. played contemporary and classic popular music sung in Igbo and Yoruba.

Overlapping Love The bride’s ring was designed by the groom and a Los Angeles-based jewelry designer, Maggi Simpkins. The two overlapping curves on the band represent love and unity in the African writing system called Nsibidi.

schedule as the chief executive of his health care company, Reliance Health. Once she completed residency in internal medicine at the University of California, San Francisco, Dr. Nwosu visited Dr. Kuti’s home turf.

“I was thinking about joining him in Nigeria,” she said. “It was a good trip for me to see what my life would be like.”

But they endured another year apart when she was accepted as an instructor in medicine at Weill Cornell Medicine in New York.

Over the years, Dr. Kuti had accompanied Dr. Nwosu several times to her parents’ home in Piscataway. In June of 2021, however, the trip was different. He planned to ask Dr. Nwosu’s father, Luke Nwosu, for his daughter’s hand in marriage.

“I told him I deeply loved his daughter and wanted to marry her,” Dr. Kuti said. “I wanted his permission and to know what rites I needed to put in place before doing so,” he said, referring to the customs often required before proceeding with a marriage.

Mr. Nwosu told Dr. Kuti he would think about it.

“The next day, he shows up with a list of rites,” said Dr. Kuti, “and then says he needs to meet my parents, even if virtually.”

The rites began with the Igbo tradition of Iku Aka, or “knocking on the door,” where the prospective groom and older male members of his family call upon the prospective bride’s family while bearing gifts — usually food and drinks. And so this is what Dr. Kuti did in October 2021, using beer, champagne and a malt-flavored soft drink.

In December 2021, he proposed in the Western tradition, on bended knee.

Dr. Kuti reconstructed the day four years earlier when they had gone hiking at Point Reyes. He rented a car and headed toward the park, buying a pair of breakfast sandwiches at Devil’s Teeth Bakery along the way. When they arrived at the park to begin their hike, Dr. Nwosu figured something was up.

For one thing, she said, Dr. Kuti was overly concerned about timing. “Who gets anxious about arriving at a specific time and place during a hike?” she wondered. “Femi loves to plan a surprise so I was eager to see what he had in store for us.”

Sure enough, when they arrived at a spot Dr. Kuti had predetermined, the photography team he had hired was there, to record Dr. Kuti’s proposal and him presenting her with the engagement ring he designed with a jeweler.

Dr. Nwosu said of the ring, “I had no idea that he was designing it,” she said. Without hesitation, she said, “Yes.”

On Dec. 10, the couple had a civil marriage, officiated by Grace Odia, an official at the Federal Marriage Registry in Ikoyi, Nigeria. On Dec. 28, they had a Christian ceremony at Crystal Lake Resort, Oguta, Imo State. A 31-member Catholic choir accompanied by traditional Igbo drums and other instruments performed during the ceremony. Dr. Adesegun Fatusi, vice chancellor of the University of Medical Sciences, in Ondo, Nigeria, and a former mentor to the groom, officiated.

On Dec. 29, the couple had a third ceremony on the bride’s family compound in Aro-Ibiasoegbe, Oru West LGA, which included both Igbo and Yoruba traditions.

The couple now resides in Lagos.

Reflecting on the journey that brought her and Dr. Kuti to marriage, Dr. Nwosu, now a senior vice president for clinical services at Reliance Health, remembers a time in the spring of 2020 when she was in New York and Dr. Kuti was in Lagos. He was supposed to visit her in mid-March, but the pandemic upended those plans.

When they finally got together in August, she said, “Going back to long distance after being together made it clear that I wanted to be with him, wherever in the world that was.”

WEDDINGS

Margot Ciccarelli, Meg He

With a Little Jiu-Jitsu, Getting Swept Off Their Feet

Before it was ever put into words, the connection between Meg He and Margot Ciccarelli was apparent from their movements.

Ms. He (left) and Ms. Ciccarelli both practice Brazilian jiu-jitsu. In 2019, when Ms. He first took up the martial art, she searched the internet for accomplished women whose techniques she could emulate. Her search turned up Ms. Ciccarelli, a professional jiu-jitsu athlete and teacher. Ms. He sent her an Instagram message, complimenting Ms. Ciccarelli’s dancing, her style — and her hair.

“I wanted to be really clear that I didn’t admire her for what she had won before or her titles,” said Ms. He, 35. “It was that her style was really unique and interesting.”

A friendship took root. The women shared similar backgrounds. Each was British Chi-

nese and an only child. Ms. Ciccarelli, who never stayed in one place very long, offered to take Ms. He on as a student and give her a private jiu-jitsu lesson if their paths ever crossed. In June 2019, they did. The women met in London, when Ms. He made a trip to visit her parents. The lesson was supposed to last an hour. It lasted three.

Ms. Ciccarelli was impressed by how much Ms. He, a novice, was able to understand about jiu-jitsu’s nuances. Ms. He said she felt self-conscious and out of her depth. She said when she and Ms. Ciccarelli touched, her body responded in unexpected ways. “I was unable to control myself around her,” Ms. He said.

Ms. Ciccarelli explained that the complexity inherent in jiu-jitsu can make it a very meaningful and deep exchange between opponents. “It’s a partner-based sport, said Ms. Ciccarelli, 29.

“We’re always creating something new.”

A couple of weeks after that sparring session, Ms. Ciccarelli traveled to New York City for a competition and stayed with Ms. He. They saw little of each other because of Ms. Ciccarelli’s demanding schedule. But Ms. Ciccarelli left behind her “lucky gi,” a garment she had worn in competitions, with a note, suggesting Ms. He could return it when they next met. Ms. He knew that something more than friendship was brewing between them.

Both Ms. He and Ms. Ciccarelli identify as pansexual. But Ms. He, a founder and co-chief executive of Aday, a sustainable clothing brand, was not out publicly, or to her parents. She also had never dated a woman before. Although she was willing to take that step, Ms. He worried that Ms. Ciccarelli’s nomadic nature would make a relationship untenable.



NINA FAULHABER

Ms. He was determined, however, to tell Ms. Ciccarelli how she felt.

In September, they met in San Diego, where Ms. Ciccarelli was participating in another jiu-jitsu competition. The two stayed at an Airbnb that Ms. He had rented. One evening they walked to a lighthouse along the Point Loma coast to watch the sunset. While sitting on a bench, Ms. He told Ms. Ciccarelli that she had feel-

ings for her. Ms. Ciccarelli responded: “I know.”

Ms. He said her shock caused her to fall backward off the bench. Ms. Ciccarelli fell, too, in solidarity.

Soon after, Ms. Ciccarelli, who was competing overseas, made frequent visits to New York. Their relationship was challenged by bouts of long-distance separation, as well as the pandemic, which forced Ms. Ciccarelli into a prolonged depression, not being able

to compete.

“Every relationship has its ups and downs and you’ve got to choose who you want to do that with,” Ms. Ciccarelli said. “I don’t want to be annoyed by anyone else.”

The tumult of the last couple of years also ushered growth, both personally and athletically. In May 2021, Ms. Ciccarelli became a black belt. And in November 2021, Ms. Ciccarelli proposed in Abu Dhabi, where they were participating in the World Professional Jiu-Jitsu Championship. “I wanted to show that I was committed to not being nomadic, that I was committed to her and committed to our ongoing journey,” Ms. Ciccarelli said.

In October, the couple moved to Costa Mesa, Calif., to allow Ms. Ciccarelli the opportunity to train with a black belt master.

The couple had an intimate ceremony on Dec. 26 at a private residence in the Mount Washington neighborhood of Los Angeles. Nina Faulhaber, who is Ms. He’s business partner, officiated, having been ordained for the occasion by the Universal Life Church. JOHN OTIS

Vows

FIELD NOTES

When One Wedding Requires Four Outfits, Try Renting

A new generation of business owners tries to crack the code of South Asian rental attire.

By SARAH KHAN

When the wedding invitation for a family friend arrived in the spring of 2021, Sonya Patel, an entrepreneur who runs a small spice business in Cleveland, was in a bind. It was for an Indian wedding, which can span several days and require not just a single dress but an entire wardrobe: four outfits, perhaps, for weekend-long festivities; two pairs of shoes; three different purses; and bangles and earrings to match. Ms. Patel, 40, usually relied on lehengas, or skirts, and saris purchased by her mother during her regular visits to Jaipur, India; Ms. Patel hadn't traveled to India herself in more than a decade. But that spring, "no one had gone to India to go shopping" because of Covid, she said. "I went to try on everything at my mom's house, and nothing fit. I was in a panic."

Frantic Google searches led her to Borrow the Bazaar and Preserve, two rental sites specializing in South Asian formal wear. After a flurry of emails and Zoom calls, she chose a white mirrored lehenga from Preserve for the sangeet, a lively pre-wedding celebration. "Afterward, I put it in a box and sent it back and didn't have to think about it — it was amazing," Ms. Patel said. The cost was \$110 for a seven-day rental.

South Asian weddings seem like the perfect occasion for the fashion-rental juggernaut: Traditional attire can be expensive and take months to have custom-made; such delicate pieces can be difficult to clean and store, too. And once a look makes it to Instagram, who wants to be seen in it again at the next Diwali gala?

Renting is the next logical solution. Preserve and Borrow the Bazaar, along with sites like AllBorrow and the Pakistani designer-focused Almari360 — all introduced in roughly the past five years — are part of a new generation of businesses trying to solve the logistical and expensive difficulties of dressing for a South Asian wedding. Rent the Runway, which made borrowed fashion a mainstream fixture, announced in



SARA MESSINGER FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

February 2020 that it would start carrying Indian designs by Sani, a label based in North Carolina. "The pieces were completely booked out within 48 hours; then two weeks later the pandemic hit," said Niki Shamdasani, who founded Sani with her sister, Ritika. So far the partnership hasn't expanded beyond the initial few outfit options, which are usually unavailable because they are being rented. The demand can be high, according to Sonal J. Shah, a New York wedding planner who has overseen nearly 2,000 high-end South Asian nuptials in her two-decade career. "Post-Covid, I would say in the U.S. alone there are between 6,000 to 6,500" South Asian weddings per year, she said. (Translation: dresses for nearly 20,000 events.) The average budget for her clients'

Lindsey Chakraborty is the founder of Preserve, a clothing rental company that specializes in outfits for South Asian weddings. "Everybody's tired of spending thousands of dollars on outfits they only wear once," she said.

multiday extravaganzas, she said, is \$350,000 to \$400,000, and a designer trousseau can cost as much as \$60,000. Guests, of course, don't have to spend nearly as much, but even at less extravagant weddings, the numbers still add up: "Everybody's tired of spending thousands of dollars on outfits they only wear once," said Lindsey Chakraborty, Preserve's founder and chief executive. "In my personal experience, everybody you know is invited to every wedding, so you can't repeat that same lehenga for another couple of years — and then it's already out of trend." Ms. Chakraborty, 36, came up with the idea behind Preserve when she was dating her future husband, Shiv, and she found herself shopping for three Indian weddings in one year. "As a basic plus-one guest, I needed 15 outfits," she said. When she took

the "budget route online," she said the outfits that arrived were of poor quality and looked nothing like their pictures. Using her background in business, Ms. Chakraborty began researching the market and discovered how overlooked it was, especially with the rate of mixed marriages in the Indian community. (She is white; her husband is Indian American.) Ms. Shah, the wedding planner, estimates more than 60 percent of her couples are interracial, which means there's a diverse pool of guests who are eager to dress the part, but are also concerned about respecting traditions by choosing suitable attire and colors — and may lack a personal collection of saris to pull from. For a recent wedding she planned in Mexico, Ms. Shah said, "We probably filtered 60 to 70 emails just about the clothing and jewelry."

The more Ms. Chakraborty researched, the more convinced she was that there was a need for her to intervene. So she put all of her wedding money into Preserve and eloped on her TriBeCa rooftop in August 2021. She teased Preserve that summer with two Instagram Stories, which she said prompted 500 rental requests in response. Since fall 2021, Preserve has attracted more than 1,000 new customers, half of whom rent two or more outfits per order, she said. Ms. Chakraborty estimates half of her clientele is not South Asian. Aletheia Orphanidys, a 31-year-old lawyer in the Bay Area, is one of Preserve's non-Desi customers. When she was invited to a law school classmate's wedding in 2021, she was overwhelmed. "Everyone else knew what the sangeet versus the mehndi looks like," she said. "I had not a single clue what the events were, what colors were appropriate. I had no idea where to begin."

With consultation via text, Preserve helped her style a designer wardrobe of five ensembles for a total of \$500 — a fraction of the thousands it would have cost to buy them — for a seven-day rental period. Even women who maintain their own Indian wardrobes say they enjoy the freedom of experimenting the rental services provide. "It gives you confidence to try styles you might not try on your own," Ms. Patel said. "I rent outfits that are way more fashion-forward, that I would never in my life purchase."

WEDDINGS

Elizabeth Gregory, Charles Aoki

A Train Mix-Up Leads to an Unexpected Connection

Charles Nelson Aoki likes to joke that on the first night he hung out with Elizabeth Grace Gregory in April 2017, he "technically kidnapped her."

Mr. Aoki, who is a three-time team USA Wheelchair Rugby Paralympic medalist, was competing in the national championships in Phoenix that year, as a member of the Minnesota Steelheads. Mr. Aoki was born with a rare genetic condition called hereditary sensory autonomic neuropathy type II, which results in him not having sensation in his body below the knees and elbows. Ms. Gregory was working as an equipment manager for the Houston Texans, another team competing in the tournament, while also undergoing treatment for dysautonomia, a disorder of the autonomic nervous system that can cause dizziness. After games, athletes and staff members would typically go out together for drinks. Ms. Gregory, who had met Mr. Aoki through a mutual friend, agreed to take the train with him, assuming that he was going to the same bar after the game. But Mr. Aoki and his friends had been planning to go to bars on the other side of town in Tempe, Ariz., that evening. Thanks to a miscommunication, Ms. Gregory ended up waiting with Mr. Aoki for almost an hour for a train that would take her in the wrong direction. Even though she was annoyed with Mr. Aoki for their misadventure, Ms. Gregory couldn't help but notice while waiting on the train platform with him that he was "very handsome."

"I remember being charmed," Ms. Gregory, 24, said about Mr. Aoki. "I just felt like we had a really witty back and forth." Mr. Aoki felt the same way. "She was super funny, but honestly kind of sassy, but in like a really fun, vibey way," said Mr. Aoki, 31. "She clearly was just kind of rolling with the whole adventure, and I thought that was really awesome."

Ms. Gregory eventually arrived at her location, where she had arranged to meet a date that evening. Even though the date didn't go well, her night took a turn for the better when Mr. Aoki ended up at the same hotel bar where she was. They spent the rest of the evening together and "have literally talked every single day since," Mr. Aoki said.

In June 2017, Mr. Aoki, who was living in Washington at the time asked Ms. Gregory, who was then in Houston, to be his girlfriend. She was initially hesitant — Ms. Gregory was planning to start college in the fall at Bryn Mawr College in Bryn Mawr, Pa., where she eventually graduated with a bachelor's degree in English.

Mr. Aoki knew they would be in a long-distance relationship for the foreseeable future. She eventually agreed, though, and the couple spent the next few years visiting each other and talking on the phone. In March 2020, when Ms. Gregory's courses became remote, they moved to her parents' home in Kerrville, Texas.

In February 2021, while training for the Tokyo Paralympics in Birmingham, Ala., Mr. Aoki got a



LAUREN KIRKBRIDE PHOTOGRAPHY

bone infection in his knee, and spent a month in the hospital. Ms. Gregory moved to Birmingham for the month to take care of him, and by the time he started to heal, she knew she was ready for marriage. "After we went through that, I was like, OK, I can do this," Ms. Gregory said. In October 2021, Mr. Aoki proposed. In April 2022 the couple moved to Ann Arbor, Mich., where, along with being an athlete, Mr. Aoki works as the community access navigator for the University of Michigan's Adaptive Sports and Fitness Department. He received a bachelor's degree in social studies from Metropolitan State University in Saint Paul, Minn., and a master's degree in public policy from University of Minnesota Twin Cities. Ms. Gregory is currently pursuing a master's degree in social work at the University of Michigan, and doing her field placement work at Dawn Farm, an addiction treatment center, in Ypsilanti, Mich. The couple were wed Dec. 17 before 90 vaccinated guests at the Hennepin Avenue United Methodist Church in Minneapolis, followed by a reception at Windows On Minnesota, an events space in Minneapolis. The Rev. Judy Zabel, a United Methodist minister, performed the ceremony. "I've never met anyone with such gusto for everything in life," said Ms. Gregory, who plans to take her husband's last name. "When you're two people with disabilities, that kind of joy and gusto is really incredibly important in staying positive, staying happy, being able to laugh." Mr. Aoki agreed: "Knowing I have her as my partner in that going forward is really tremendous." EMMA GRILLO

ABOUT WEDDINGS

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Grey O'Reilly, Erik Ostberg

Pajamas and Wet Hair Led to Love at First Sight

The first time Erik William Ostberg saw Grey Alexandra O'Reilly she was sitting on a couch in her pajamas, feet curled under her, hair still wet from a recent shower. And, as might be expected of a woman who grew up in Ireland, she was sipping a cup of tea. "I loved everything about what I saw, because I saw her true self," Mr. Ostberg said. "I would call it love at first sight."

It was August 2017, and he was in New York from Washington for a job interview. Afterward, he met a friend for a drink and was then invited back to his friend's girlfriend's apartment to watch a movie. Ms. O'Reilly was the girlfriend's roommate. "I thought he was really cute," said Ms. O'Reilly, who learned that the Washington apartment she had recently moved from was only a few blocks from where he lived. "And when he left my apartment, he texted my friend, said he was interested in me."

And so a few weeks later, when she was included in a group invited to spend the Labor Day weekend boating at Mr. Ostberg's family home in Annapolis, Md., she didn't hesitate. "It was just a fun, relaxing time," she said. "It just felt like he was meant to be there, and I was meant to be there with him."

They shared their first kiss that Saturday, after a day out on the Ostbergs' 30-foot center-console motorboat. A few days later, they saw each other again — also at a group event — when he returned to New York City to watch Rafael Nadal play in the U.S. Open. "I just really liked him," said Ms. O'Reilly, 28, who graduated from American University in Washington and is now studying remotely for a master's degree in education from the University of Mississippi. "He brought me this sense of peace."

Soon after, she took the train to Washington, where he still lived, for their first one-on-one visit. "He told me he loved me a month later, and I don't think he meant to," she said.

The precipitating event, he said, was her selfless advice on a career decision he was facing: take a job that he really wanted in Washington and commit to a long-distance relationship, or move to New York for another job along with the allure of proximity to a new romantic interest. "And Grey told me, you have to do what you're passionate about and take the job in D.C.," said Mr. Ostberg, who is 30 and now a senior sales account associate at Hungry, a corporate catering and food delivery company in Arlington, Va. He graduated from Southern Methodist University. "That was the essential moment, being a good person and thinking about me," he said. "It solidified that I was going to marry her."

In September 2018, he found a job in New York and moved. When both their leases were expiring a year after that, they moved into an apartment together and soon acquired a mini goldendoodle



ANNA C PHOTOGRAPHY

puppy they named Lola. Then came the pandemic. The two stayed in New York until April, then went to his parents' place in Annapolis. After three months there, they decided to take a road trip out to Montana, and ended up staying there for 10 months. "It was her first time seeing what the U.S. looked like," said Mr. Ostberg, who proposed with his grandmother's engagement ring in December 2020, while on a trip to New Orleans. Soon after they returned from Montana, in April 2021, she obtained a head teacher position at the National Presbyterian School in Washington, and so by September, the two were once again — this time together — in the place where they had once lived as neighboring strangers. The couple married Dec. 30 at the Circuit Court for Anne Arundel County, in Annapolis, where the groom grew up. Sharon Burke, a senior manager in the clerk's office, officiated. And on an even larger scale, earlier that month, on Dec. 10, the Rev. Thomas F. Ryan presided over a religious ceremony at the Cathedral of Saints Peter and Paul in Ennis, Ireland, before about 240 guests. It's the small gestures, though, Mr. Ostberg said, that nourish their relationship. "When I go on a trip, like for my bachelor party, she put in my dopp kit a ziplocked bag of Advil, Liquid I.V., some candy," he said. "She just does every little thing. I will just come across little nuggets of love from her." NINA REYES

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Proposals

Please Pass To Lara Ginsberg
Will You Marry Me?
[] Yes
[] No