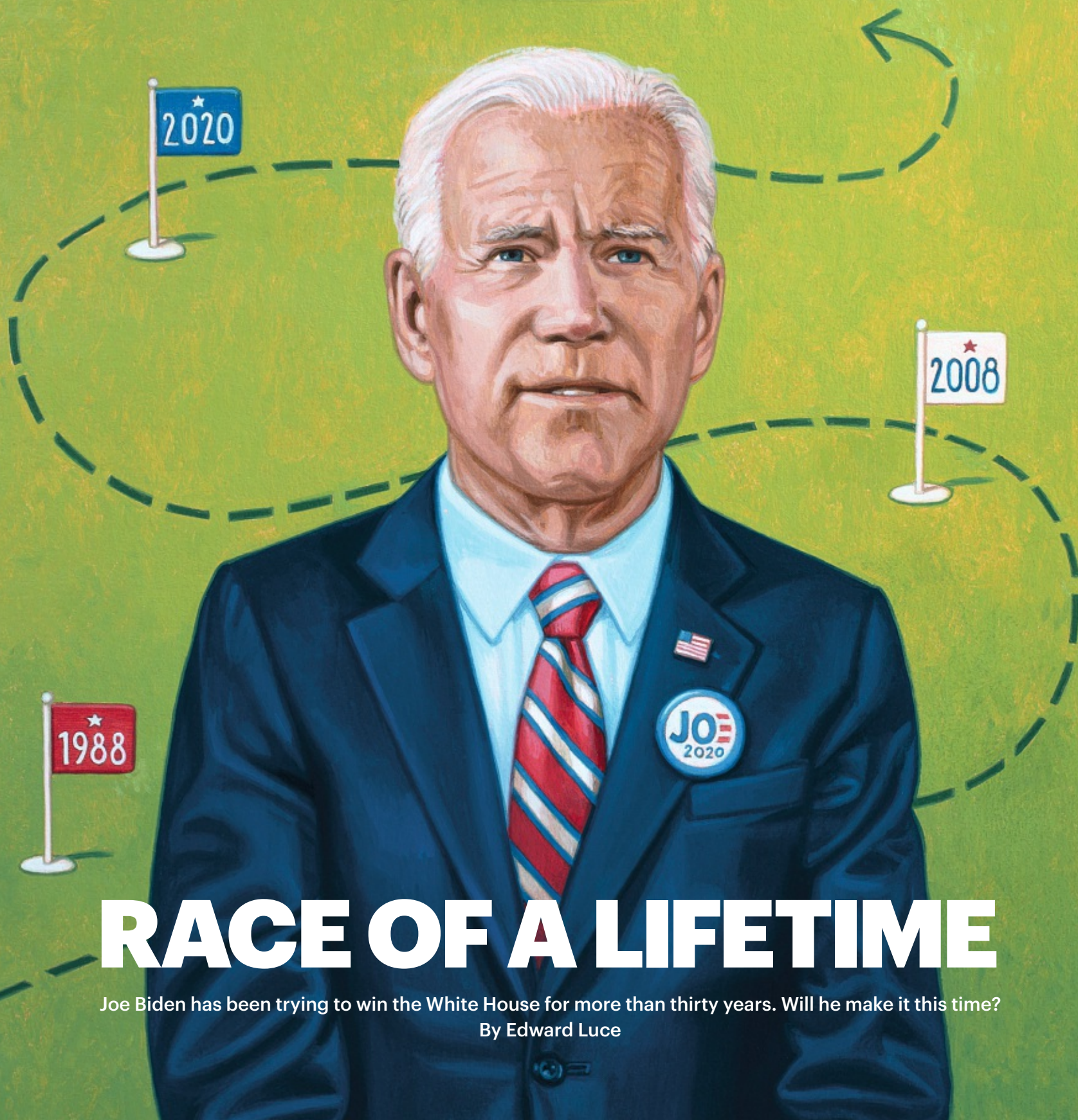


AUGUST 15/16 2020

FT Weekend Magazine



RACE OF A LIFETIME

Joe Biden has been trying to win the White House for more than thirty years. Will he make it this time?

By Edward Luce

A different perspective

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Cover illustration by Marco Ventura



JAMES MOLLISON

'Puglia was the perfect place to be in quarantine – but our trees were dying before our eyes'

James Mollison on the decline of the region's olive groves, p24



'I'm a bit concerned about Anglo-Saxon table manners'

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'My mother's daily dal was an expression of her love'

Recipes from FT writers, p34

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JEMIMA KELLY

OPENING SHOT

Why we're all hypocrites in the end



If there's one thing that people across the political spectrum can agree on, it's that they cannot stand a hypocrite.

In our polarised political climate, the charge of hypocrisy is one of the most powerful weapons, often used to silence anyone with whom we don't agree without having to actually engage with their arguments. Once someone has laid out any kind of moral principle, if they are ever found to have so much as come close to breaching it, it is as if they have effectively forfeited their

right to say anything else on the subject.

"Hypocrite!" a woman shouted at Dominic Cummings as the British prime minister's chief adviser entered his home back in May, shortly after it emerged that he had broken the government's own lockdown rules by making a 264-mile trip across England. Some pointed out that the hordes of photographers, journalists and other members of the public who had gathered outside his house were themselves being somewhat hypocritical, given that many of them were failing to adequately social-distance as they chided him.

It's much harder to recognise our own hypocrisy. Virtue-signallers who spend their time calling out other people's moral transgressions often seem blissfully unaware of the instances when they may be breaking their own too-rigid rules.

In a recent poll by Ipsos Mori, 75 per cent of respondents said they were following the government's coronavirus regulations all or nearly all of the time, but only 12 per cent believed the rest of the British public was doing so. In the early days of lockdown, one would frequently hear grumbings about how many people were in the park, making it impossible to keep two metres apart. One wondered how they had managed to find this out.

And while people tend to make fairly accurate assessments of others' behaviour in areas where there isn't much implied moral judgment or a sense of them unfairly obtaining an advantage, in surveys on issues such as tax avoidance and throwing "sickies", we hugely overestimate how "bad" other people are.

We seem to have a kind of paranoia that everyone apart from us is busy breaking the moral principles that hold society together. Our instinct, therefore, is to pounce upon anyone who transgresses, so as to keep that moral framework intact, while giving ourselves a considerable amount of leeway. To varying extents, we are all, in other words, hypocrites.

So why can't we stand this characteristic in others? Daniel Effron, associate professor of organisational behaviour at the London Business School, says it's because we resent people getting a "moral benefit" that they don't deserve. If someone condemns another for some kind of wrongdoing, they are in effect signalling that they themselves not only do not engage in that activity, but are more virtuous than the person who does. Of course, says Effron, we are more motivated to rationalise our own inconsistent actions than

those of others – and it is easier to do so because we have greater insight into what lies behind them and a greater desire to excuse ourselves.

Hypocrisy is often described as "saying one thing and doing another". But actually it is about more than mere inconsistency; failing to "practise what you preach" gets closer to it. A drug addict who warns others not to take drugs is not seen as a hypocrite, though someone who publicly condemns drug-taking as morally abhorrent, say, and then is found to have been taking drugs themselves probably would be.

'We have a kind of paranoia that everyone apart from us is breaking the moral principles that hold society together'

Donald Trump has been wildly inconsistent during his presidency, and is often called a liar, a cheat, a fraud. Accusations of hypocrisy, however, don't tend to stick. That's because Trump doesn't take the moral high ground; he misleads, exaggerates and brags shamelessly. That gives him a kind of protection against the charge. During the 2016 presidential campaign, it was suggested that he should be taken "seriously, but not literally". "If you don't take someone's words literally, that person has a lot of latitude in what they can then do without seeming like a hypocrite," says Effron.

While people may not like a liar, according to Jillian Jordan, an assistant professor at Harvard Business School who led a 2017 study on the subject, hypocrites are seen as worse. In the study, people perceived those who condemned others for illegally downloading music and then did so themselves as more objectionable – and more hypocritical – than those who lied about doing so.

"Our theory is that the problem with hypocrisy is that it involves false signalling, and interestingly hypocrisy involves more false signalling than outright lying," she says. "That might contribute to why people hate hypocrites even more than they hate liars."

But though we might hate it, hypocrisy is perhaps a necessary evil. If we are to live in a society guided by moral principles, it is inevitable that we imperfect humans will sometimes breach them. And while some of our moral principles might be too rigid, it is surely better to have standards that cannot always be kept than to not have any at all.

That doesn't mean that we should not call out hypocrisy, but perhaps it should be allowed to slide down our ranking of moral transgressions. After all, we are all hypocrites some of the time. Never more so than when we are berating others for their hypocrisy. **FT**

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*Jemima Kelly is a reporter on FT Alphaville; jemima.kelly@ft.com @jemimajoanna
 Simon Kuper is away*



INVENTORY ANNE LAMOTT
AUTHOR

‘I found literal salvation in reading, like other people found salvation in Jesus’

Anne Lamott, 66, is the author of best-selling non-fiction titles such as *Traveling Mercies*, *Operating Instructions*, *Hallelujah Anyway* and *Some Assembly Required*, as well as novels including *Imperfect Birds* and *Rosie*.

What was your childhood or earliest ambition?

To be a writer. I found literal salvation in reading, like other people found salvation in Jesus. I would not have been able to bear life without early and full immersion into books.

Private school or state school?

University or straight into work? Private hippie high school in San Francisco. Two years of liberal arts college, then I quit to be a writer. Accidentally became a Kelly Girl, temping for a while instead.

Who was or still is your mentor?

My father was my first mentor, until he died when I was 25. He was a very disciplined writer, at his desk at 5.30am five days a week, rain or shine, flu or hangover, tap tap tapping away. For the past 30 years, my mentor has been a wild Science of Mind healer whom I call Horrible Bonnie, because she loves me and life unabashedly, no matter how awful our circumstances are.

How physically fit are you?

Very, for 66, although I wish I had remembered to go to the gym after the baby was born 30 years ago. I walk an hour every day.

Ambition or talent: which matters more to success?

Talent - some sort of inner gift. And then the ability to develop strict professional habits. Discipline has been my path to freedom - ie I do not ask myself if I want to get a little writing done today. I'm the living Nike ad: "Just do it."

How politically committed are you?

Extremely.

What would you like to own that you don't currently possess?

A Shar-Pei puppy. Also, a private jet.

What's your biggest extravagance?

A new skin serum that costs \$57 an ounce - it promises I will look like Emma Watson any day now, instead of like a Shar-Pei puppy. Cheap at twice the price!

In what place are you happiest?

On my bed, reading, or hiking nearby under the redwoods, which I do every day. Walking to 7-Eleven

with my grandson for ice-cream bars. Lying on the couch with my dog and the latest New Yorker.

What ambitions do you still have?

None that I can think of. I'd like to get back to India one more time.

What drives you on?

My faith in God and goodness, trying to be a woman who gets out of herself to be a person for others, feeding the hungry. (There are many kinds of hunger, many kinds of food.) God and I have a deal: I take care of her other kids, and she takes care of me.

What is the greatest achievement of your life so far?

Maybe being sober for 33 years, one day at a time, with a lot of help. Also, I'm a fabulous Sunday school teacher.

What do you find most irritating in other people?

Platitudes during times of hardship and suffering, eg "God never gives us more than we can handle." What a crock! And male privilege. That sense of victimised and self-righteous entitlement.

If your 20-year-old self could see you now, what would she think?

That she would want to be me when she grew up, but would strongly recommend that I get heavily into sunscreen ASAP.

Which object that you've lost do you wish you still had?

My phone.

What is the greatest challenge of our time?

Trump.

Do you believe in an afterlife?

Absolutely. And I want to sit near the dessert table.

If you had to rate your satisfaction with your life so far, out of 10, what would you score?

Eight or nine. I have been beyond lucky and blessed professionally. My 30-year-old son is (mostly) a wonderful person, and he gave me a grandchild when he was 19 - which had not exactly been in the plans - which has been the greatest joy. There were years of desperation and poverty - my teens and entire twenties - too many deaths when I was much younger, a gorgeous and sometimes harrowing career, astonishing lifelong friendships and now a late-in-life marriage to an excellent man. So let's say nine. **BT**

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Interview by Hester Lacey.
"Bird by Bird" by Anne Lamott is published by Canongate Books in paperback and ebook (£9.99/£7.99)

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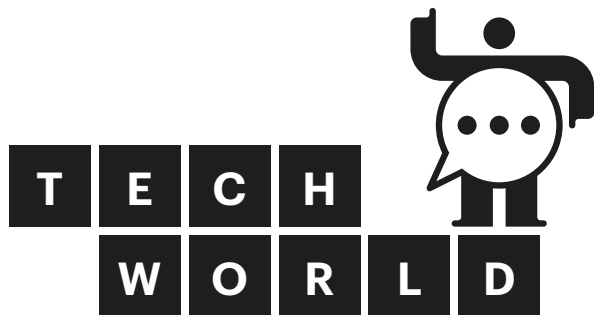
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BY TIM BRADSHAW IN LONDON

Is it time to call time on time zones?

Anyone who has struggled to schedule a conference call across multiple time zones should pity the poor residents of Indiana. For decades, the Midwestern US state has been in flux over whether to observe Central or Eastern time. Some counties even switched time zones twice in as many years during the mid-2000s.

This situation must be particularly baffling to the people of India and China, whose countries span thousands of miles yet obey a single time zone – whatever the cost to their citizens’ Circadian rhythms.

Today’s time zones are a 19th-century invention, driven by railway engineers’ desire to harmonise schedules across states and countries. Now that we travel at internet speed, the system is breaking down.

If the “robber barons” of the railways were able to impose their timetable on the world, perhaps it is time for today’s “cyber barons” to abolish time zones altogether. From video chat to virtual reality, Silicon Valley has given us the tools to conquer space. But time is proving a tougher adversary, even within the tech companies themselves.

In the wake of the pandemic, companies such as Twitter in San Francisco and Ottawa-based ecommerce group Shopify have told staff they can carry on with remote working indefinitely.

However, despite predictions of an exodus from San Francisco, employees should be careful how far they venture from Silicon Valley. Companies that have run far-flung teams for a while have found time zones to be an intractable problem.

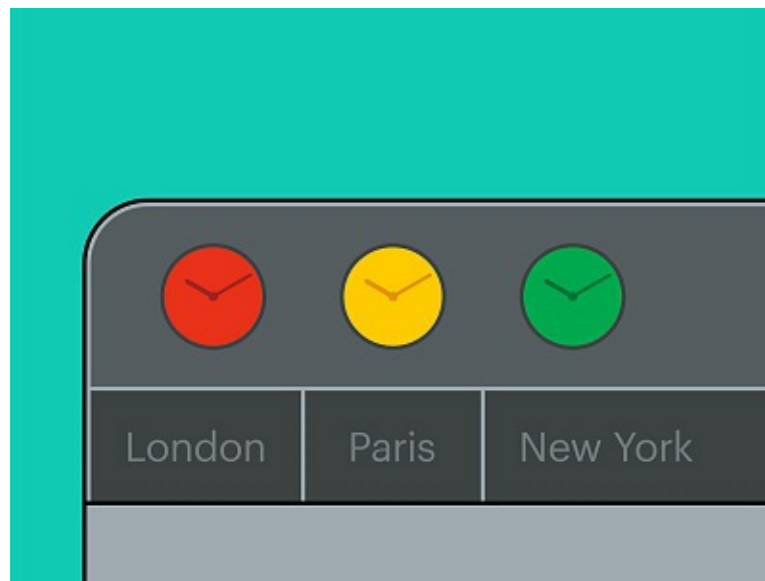


ILLUSTRATION BY PÂTÉ

Payments company Stripe, for instance, has formally operated a “remote hub” for engineers for more than a year, but it still asks most team members to stay in adjacent time zones to their immediate colleagues.

“We wouldn’t hire a scaled number of engineers 12 time zones away from those projects,” Patrick McKenzie, a software engineer and marketer who helped draw up Stripe’s remote working guidelines, told me earlier this year. There is no easy way to get people collaborating at the same time without forcing some to be awake at odd hours.

One of the first modern-day attempts to disrupt time zones came, counterintuitively, from a watchmaker. In 1998, as dotcom hype was crescendoing, Swatch tried to divide the day into 1,000 “beats”, each lasting one minute

‘Silicon Valley has given us the tools to conquer space. But time is proving a tougher adversary’

and 26.4 seconds. “Internet Time exists so that we do not have to think about time zones,” Swatch declared. Swatch no longer produces .beats watches and the idea has been largely forgotten.

In 2011, economist Steve Hanke and physicist Richard Conn Henry suggested a slightly less radical version of the same idea. Instead of replacing the current 24-hour system of timekeeping altogether, they argued for replacing the “cacophony of time zones” globally with Coordinated Universal Time (UTC), sometimes also known as Greenwich Mean Time. “The readings on the clocks... would be the same for all,” they wrote, while office hours or shop opening times would be adapted locally.

This seems even more feasible today, in a world when the nine to five has been replaced by gig-economy jobs and home-working parents spend their evenings with laptops on their knees.

But such a change to global UTC would create new headaches of co-ordination. We would no longer be able to ask, “What time is it there?” to understand when it might be appropriate to call someone. Assuming our calendars tracked UTC in the same way they do local time today, days of the week would become a confusing concept for many parts of the world. When the clock passes what we now call midnight, Monday would tick into Tuesday at lunchtime in some places and breakfast in others. No amount of fiddling with the numbers on the clock can change the fact most people will want to work when it’s light and sleep when it’s dark.

Still, if they wanted to, the tech moguls of Silicon Valley could impose this order more easily than Swatch. Now that many of us have replaced our wristwatches with smartphones for timekeeping, Internet Time 2.0 could be just a software update away.

But two decades on from Swatch’s original concept, it is getting harder to imagine a single Internet Time with each passing day. The late-1990s utopian vision of one world unified by the web is giving way to an ever more balkanised internet, with China, India, the US and Europe all raising local barriers to foreign tech companies.

Eradicating time zones may feel like an idea whose time has come but the moment to achieve it has probably passed. **FT**

Tim Bradshaw is the FT’s global technology correspondent



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MIRANDA GREEN

THE NATIONAL CONVERSATION

In praise of going backwards

There's no going back, or so they say. And when it comes to our last family car, there's never been a truer example of dedication to progress - or at least to forward motion. About 80 per cent of the time, a hopeless gearbox left it refusing to reverse.

Where other drivers circle around simply for somewhere to leave their vehicle, we were forced to seek parking spots from which we could cruise out again the only way we knew how: forwards. Journeys became a game in which you had to avoid any space - or indeed situation - that might require backing up.

If coaxed, it did sometimes co-operate. This was greeted with cries of amazed delight from both front and back seats: I boasted about having "the knack". But it's been less knack and more knackered for a while. So this week, we finally gave up and traded it in.

The noise of the jamming gear stick (we were on our second gearbox) was so painful that passers-by would flinch and stare. But even these social penalties have not been harsh enough to prevent us from putting up with the situation and adjusting our routes and behaviour.

The uncompromising attitude our venerable Volvo adopted seemed very much in tune with its era - Tony Blair boasted in 2003, the year of its manufacture: "I can only go one way, I've not got a reverse gear." But why did we endure over a year of this Blairite "forward, not back" intransigence?

Our car, to my mind, proves the theory that the human race is prepared to accept an unrecognised degree of downward convenience - and sometimes even to prefer it. Being content with less is often the best use of our resources. While marketers



ILLUSTRATION BY LUCAS VARELA

may chivvy us to update or upgrade, many of us are absolutely fine with the same or less if it frees up time, money or energy for other priorities.

My favourite example is a friend in whose flat all the bulbs gradually blew except one. He was frantically busy and lived alone at the time. Rather than buy replacements, he carried the one functioning lamp from room to room. Crazy or efficient? It's a tough call.

Of course, adaptation works in both directions: woe betide any politician who tries to deprive us of privileges we have become accustomed to. But I feel greater affection for our species by dwelling on how well and how quickly we can cope with reduced circumstances.

Decrepitude in cars seems to bring out this trait in many of us. A Twitter boast from radio host Matthew Stadlen about jammed windows and the vegetation growing inside his ancient VW Golf brought forth a litany of affectionate tributes to bottom-of-the-range motoring.

The driver of one car without wipers had to take a passenger along when it rained, to lean out and dry the windscreen with a tea towel. She only threw in the aforementioned towel when, on

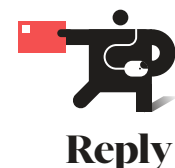
World Book Day and dressed as a witch, she found herself sweeping aside snow with her broomstick.

A surprising number reported having to clamber through the hatchback or back seats to get to the wheel. This became quite normal to them. One man was cultivating a pea plant growing out of his dashboard - snacks! His delight is testament to our heroic resilience. We should revel in this tendency to do so well with a workaround.

Sadly, the pleasures of making do usually come to an end through disapproval; one person's charming minor dysfunction is another's insane compromise on safety or quality of life. It was only a friend's genuine shock at our unique no-reverse feature that finally forced me to admit we had to ditch the car.

We are now the proud possessors of a former fleet vehicle with blacked-out windows and not just a reverse gear but also a namby-pamby techno-luxury called a reversing camera. I don't really like it. But you see, you can get used to anything. **FT**

Miranda Green is the FT's deputy opinion editor; miranda.green@ft.com. Robert Shrimsley is away



Re Robert Shrimsley's column "From parenthood to Covid: judging each other is back with a vengeance" (August 8/9). We're familiar with judgments made about others based on their choices being bad for them; what's different now is people are judging others because their choices are bad for me. This is an overreach in any free society and the authorities need to be mindful of indulging it: once the precedent is set, the intolerant of a "healthy" society will not let it go. **123 Beer St** via FT.com

Re "Was buying a Brooklyn townhouse just before lockdown the worst trade of my life?" (August 8/9). Five years ago I was deciding between a city house and one in the suburbs. The idea of commuting one and a half hours every day convinced me to live in the city. The Covid crisis is the first time I have regretted my choice. But once it subsides, people will flock back to the city. Work cannot survive without personal interaction. **Jaga the Wise** via FT.com



@cfruman August 6
If you read one article today, let it be this one via @FT.
Thoughtful voices on how to close the gender pay gap

What a wonderful piece ("DIY fermentation: confessions and recipes of a culture vulture", August 8/9). I really enjoyed that. Who would have guessed from reading Alex Barker's past pieces that he's utterly bonkers? Thanks. **Cold air balloonist** via FT.com

Fascinating article ("A life in pictures: how photographer Nancy Floyd captured time passing", August 8/9). I scanned our family photos when we went digital and sequences such as starting school every September since 1966 are lovely. I hope I can be sent a photo of my grandchildren when they start school next month. **English Rose** via FT.com

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Quiz answers The link was people and things on a building site 1. The Master Builder 2. The Diggers 3. Asphalt 4. Brick Lane 5. George Foreman (to Muhammad Ali in the Rumble in the Jungle) 6. Spades 7. Girders 8. Crane 9. The Scaffold 10. George Sand **Picture quiz** Ezra Pound + Raheem Sterling = Pound Sterling

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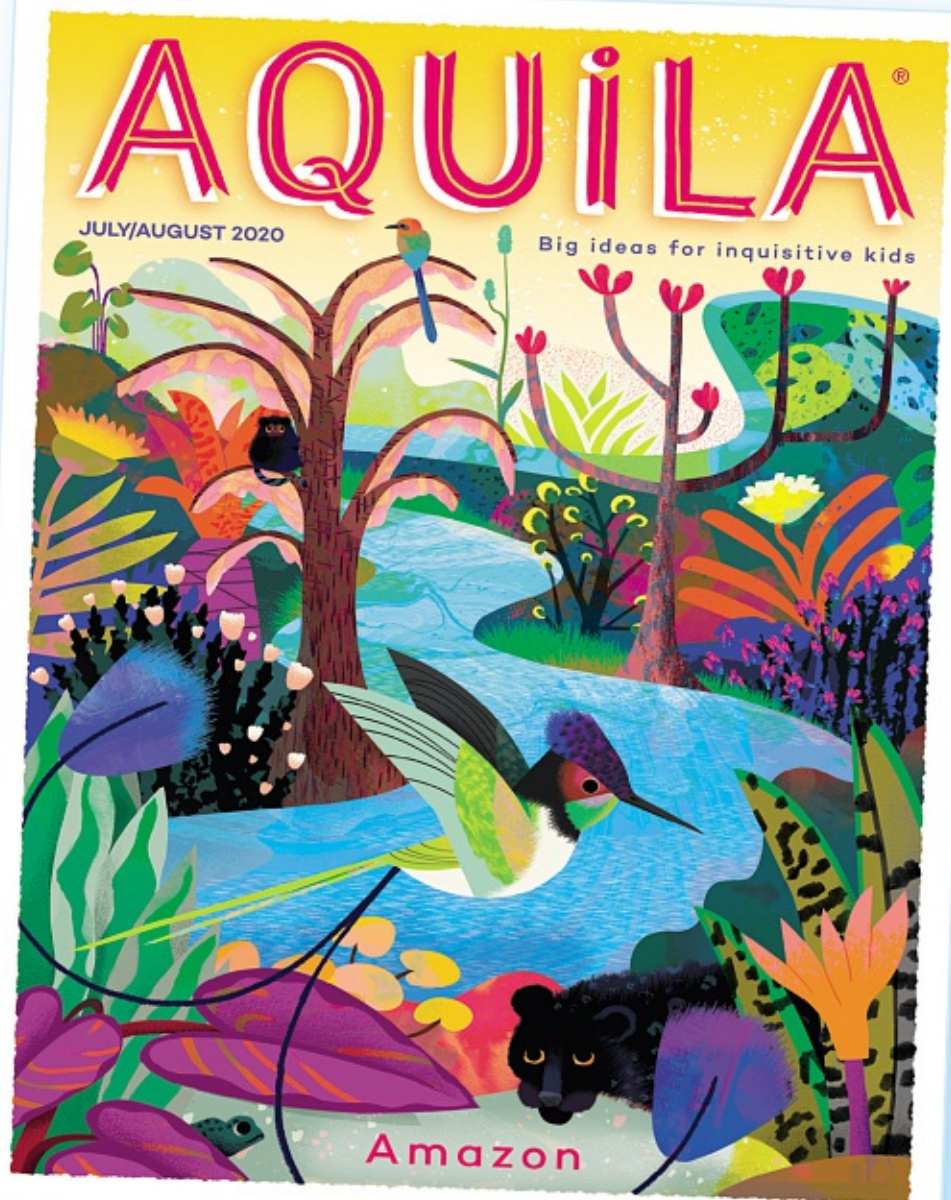
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RICHARD ROBINSON - BRIGHTON SCIENCE FESTIVAL

A photograph of Joe Biden walking from left to right in a formal setting, likely the White House. He is wearing a dark suit, a light blue shirt, and a red patterned tie. He is holding a black folder or book under his left arm. Behind him are several American flags on stands. The floor is dark wood. A blue dashed line curves across the image from the top left towards the bottom right.

RACE OF A LIFETIME

At the start of Joe Biden's campaign, many dismissed him as too gaffe-prone, too garrulous and too old. But after a political career spanning nearly 50 years – and previous abortive runs for the top job – the polls suggest that he may well be elected America's 46th president. *Edward Luce* weighs up the man, his prospects and his plans for the divided, pandemic-blighted USA

It was late afternoon on February 2, the eve of the Iowa caucuses. We were jammed into a high-school gymnasium in Des Moines, the state capital, for Joe Biden's closing rally. No one thought he would win the primary season's talismanic opening contest the following day. Nor was he expected to come close to beating Bernie Sanders, the socialist Vermonter, in New Hampshire the next week. Though he was still ahead in the national polls, the 77-year-old former vice-president was treated as yesterday's news.

A crowd of several hundred was waiting unexpectedly. Biden entered roughly half an hour late, accompanied by a phalanx of retired politicians: John Kerry, 76, the former secretary of state; Chris Dodd, 75, the retired senator from Connecticut; Tom Vilsack, 69, former governor of Iowa; and Harold Schaitberger, 73, president of the International Association of Firefighters. The oxygen seemed to drain from the room. As Biden's surrogates spoke one after the other, the air got progressively thinner. By the time the candidate got up to speak, it was positively embalmed. "This is like a wake," joked one veteran television anchor. Biden's low-key soliloquy did little to lift the energy.

Such are the limits of conventional wisdom. Twenty-seven days later, Biden grabbed the Democratic mantle after sweeping the South Carolina primary. With the notable exception of Sanders, who fought on for another five weeks, most of the rest of the field dropped out and endorsed him. It was a breathtaking twist. With hindsight, Biden officials say they always knew he would be the Democratic nominee. They were playing the long game. "We made a decision from the start not to listen to the loudest voices on Twitter," says Stef Feldman, Biden's policy director. That was not how many sounded at the time. When I asked a Biden staffer in Des Moines about the campaign's mood, he used the TV anchor's same funereal analogy.

Who could blame them? Biden's long history of running for the White House offered no cause for hope. Over a span of more than 32 years, he had not won a single primary. In 1987, he crashed out months before the voting began, having been accused of plagiarising a speech by Neil Kinnock, leader of the British Labour Party. In 2008, he quit after having won just 0.9 per cent of the Iowa caucus vote. "At that point, most people thought his presidential career was over," says Shailagh Murray, then a journalist with The Washington Post, who became Biden's deputy chief of staff. He had at least another 12 years to go. Nobody that night imagined that Barack Obama, winner of the Iowa caucus, would go on to pick Biden as his running mate.

The vicissitudes of Biden's 50 years in politics ought to make anyone sceptical of forecasts for this November. In the absence of time machines, we can only go by the numbers. Both the betting markets (about two to one in Biden's favour) and the polls (an average eight-percentage-point lead over Donald Trump) suggest Biden will be America's 46th president.

What manner of president would he make? Half of Washington claims to know the man well. At a year above the median US male's life expectancy, many expect him to be a ceremonial president. Even Biden's close friends admit his energy and power of recall are not what they were.

His would be a restorationist presidency - an erasure of what he is fond of describing as the Trumpian "aberration". Others, notably Trump, depict him as a geriatric prisoner of the Democratic party's left. Most agree that whatever his agenda, and whatever the time of day, he would probably still talk too much. The word "logorrhea" (a tendency to extreme loquacity) has recently come into fashion. Biden's campaign is keen to emphasise he would not, like Trump, be the "Twitterer-in-chief".

Those who know him the best - many of whom spoke to me for this profile - are in little doubt about the character he would bring to the presidency. Their Biden may stray too readily into



'Joe doesn't suffer from inner demons, he doesn't bear grudges and he loves being around people'

Louis Susman,
former US ambassador

Speaking during a presidential campaign rally at a school in Detroit, Michigan, on March 9

Previous spread: leaving the platform at the Hotel Du Pont in Wilmington, after giving a talk about the outbreak of Covid-19 in the US, in March



From left: Joe Biden shortly after being elected senator for Delaware, on his commute between Washington and Wilmington, Delaware; Biden made the daily round trip (for which he became known as 'Amtrak Joe') so he could say goodnight to his two sons who were recovering from a car crash in which Biden lost his wife and baby daughter; he was even sworn in at their hospital

schmaltz. But his empathy for people is real. In this pandemic-blighted election year, that quality could count for a lot. "Biden is the same guy I first met in 1969 - he was full of piss and vinegar," says Louis Susman, a Chicago-based investor and former ambassador to the UK. "He doesn't suffer from inner demons, he doesn't bear grudges and he loves being around people."

Should he make it to the White House, Biden would have completed the longest marathon in US political history. No other serious figure has tried this long to make it over the finishing line in recent history. A majority of Americans were not born when Biden first entered national politics. At 30, he was the fifth youngest senator in the country's history after he won office in 1972. Biden's 48-year political career is older than John F Kennedy, Bill Clinton and Barack Obama when they were elected.

Yet he sounds remarkably similar today to the ambitious, blue-collar Irish-American that he was then. Staffers tried and failed to get him to avoid using words such as "record player" during the 2020 primaries. Calling someone a "horse's ass" is no longer thought to be cutting. In an interview

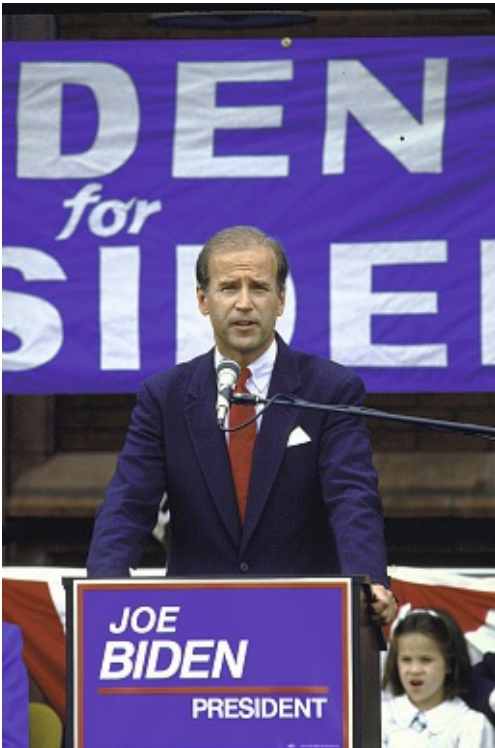
with Kitty Kelley in 1974, Biden worried about being seen as a "gay young bachelor" around Washington - by which he meant "happy", not "LGBTQ".

So popular are Biden's anachronisms that there is even a "Biden insult bot" - a Twitter algorithm - to which fans can turn. "You got something stuck in your craw, you milk-swillin' circus peanut," reads one tweet. "Shut your piehole, you hood-winked britch soiler," reads another.

Most American voters already know of the tragedy that struck Biden in his early career. A few weeks after he was elected to the Senate, he lost his wife, Neilia, and one-year-old daughter, Naomi, in a car crash while they were Christmas shopping in Delaware, his home state. His sons, Beau, aged three, and Hunter, aged two, survived but were hospitalised with severe injuries. Most people would have disintegrated. Biden considered not taking his Senate seat. In the end, he was persuaded to be sworn in at the hospital beside one of his sons. He said he could only continue in politics if he saw his kids every morning and night. Thus was born "Amtrak Joe" - the senator who took the 90-minute

‘Joe has a total blind spot about Hunter... the campaign just has to keep him out of the picture’

A family friend



From top: campaigning for the Democratic nomination in the 1988 presidential elections with Jill, his second wife, in Wilmington; announcing his candidacy

◀ journey each evening from Washington to Wilmington to say goodnight to his sons. He commuted until 2008, long after the boys had grown up. Subtracting a tenth of nights for other travel, and nearly half the year for recess and weekends, I calculate that Biden spent at least 21,000 hours – or three years of his life – on that train.

“He knew the names of every conductor and they all loved him,” says Paul Laudicina, Biden’s legislative director between 1977 and 1982. “Often, he would still be talking when he boarded, and I would go to Wilmington with him and then cross the platform and come straight back.”

In the 1974 Kelley interview, the famously acerbic journalist said that Biden “reeks of decency”. He nevertheless managed to sound almost Trumpian about his deceased wife. “‘Let me show you my favourite picture of her,’ he says, holding up a snapshot of Neilia in a bikini. ‘She had the best body of any woman I ever saw. She looks better than a Playboy bunny, doesn’t she?’” Kelley described his office as a shrine to Neilia.

Biden recently conceded that he has been too invasive of women’s personal space – “handsiness” has also entered the DC lexicon. Unlike some of his contemporaries, however, he has not been dogged by rumours of infidelity. A former Senate staffer, Tara Reade, accused him earlier this year of sexually assaulting her in a corridor in 1993. Biden denies it and her story has been criticised as inconsistent.

In 1977 Biden married Jill Tracy Jacobs, a teacher based in Wilmington. On their first date he dressed in a jacket. When he dropped her back home he shook her hand. According to *What it Takes*, the celebrated 1988 campaign book by the late Richard Ben Cramer, Jill said she could not believe

such men still existed. “Jill is Biden’s least appreciated strength,” says Susman, who often hosted the Bidens for Thanksgiving in his Nantucket home.

Much of Biden’s sense of gravity comes from her. Even when her husband was vice-president, Jill Biden continued to teach every day at a community college in Northern Virginia. When he left office in 2017, the Bidens’ net worth was less than \$500,000. They still hadn’t paid off the mortgage on their Wilmington home.

Until he was rescued from near-certain genteel decline by Obama, Biden was defined by his disastrous 1988 presidential bid. Most of the people who helped him on that jinxed quest, including Ted Kaufman, his long-running chief of staff, Michael Donilon, his chief strategist today, and Donilon’s brother Tom, Biden’s foreign-policy adviser, are still around him. They are mostly Irish-American and very tight-knit. Cathy Russell, Tom Donilon’s wife, was Jill Biden’s chief of staff when she was “second lady”. Her husband is tipped as a possible secretary of state. Kaufman is running Biden’s presidential transition – that long and rickety bridge between victory and inauguration.

In the 1988 campaign, Biden tried to present himself as the new John F Kennedy – young, Irish-Catholic and handsome. It never quite took hold. Then he saw a video of Kinnock’s soaring oratory – “Why am I the first Kinnock in a thousand generations to be able to get to university?” That was the middle-class poetry Biden had been lacking – the story of how the sons and daughters of coal miners had been lifted up by the welfare state, Britain’s version of the New Deal. “He grabbed that tape and took it home; he inhaled the thing,” wrote Cramer. “It was like when Barbra Streisand came

on the radio – Kinnock was singing Joe’s song.” For the most part, Biden credited Kinnock’s words. But the rival Michael Dukakis campaign found one tape where Biden had not. They leaked it.

Suddenly, Biden was inundated with calls asking whether his grandfather had been a coal miner (none of his forebears had been). “It looked like Joe didn’t just steal the words, it looked like he ripped off Kinnock’s life,” Cramer wrote. A few months after dropping out, Biden had a near-fatal aneurysm. Then another. He was given a 50-50 chance of surviving the first nine-hour operation.

“Joe wouldn’t be alive today if he had still been running for president,” says Kaufman. “He wouldn’t have had the time to get his headaches checked out.” Or, as Biden said when he emerged from the anaesthetic: “Now I know why the campaign ended like it did.” For what it’s worth, Kinnock’s Labour Party lost the election too.

Biden’s 2008 loss left less of a mark on him, partly because he became vice-president less than a year later. “How could you begrudge losing to Barack Obama?” says Murray. “Obama was like The Beatles.” The campaign Biden still regrets was the one that he didn’t fight in 2016. His reluctance stemmed from another tragedy, the death in 2015 of his son Beau from brain cancer. But he had little encouragement from Obama, who had already committed to backing Hillary Clinton. Biden’s internal polls show that he would have beaten Trump. But he had little chance

of wresting the crown from Clinton, whose machine he could not hope to match.

In his memoir *Promise Me, Dad*, named after Beau’s request that his father stay in politics, Biden recounts his anger following a Politico story that he was exploiting his son’s death for electoral purposes. “It exceeded even my worst expectations of what the opposition was going to be like,” he wrote. In truth, he could not discuss running without breaking down. “He would literally start to cry every time we raised the subject,” says a Biden confidante.

In another cycle, Biden’s lachrymosity might have been an albatross. During coronavirus, his emotional antennae look like a virtue. More than 165,000 Americans have now died in the pandemic. That toll is likely to be approaching a quarter of a million by early November. Trump’s inability to express condolences for America’s grieving families could not be further apart from Biden’s.

In 2016, anger was the dominant political emotion. In 2020, it feels more like sadness. “If Trump were matter, then Biden is anti-matter – their characters are opposites,” says Laurence Tribe, a Harvard law professor who has been advising Biden on constitutional matters since the mid-1980s.

When Biden was vice-president, Norm Ornstein, a veteran Congressional watcher, lost his son in a tragic accident. “The moment he heard, Biden telephoned and spent an hour on the phone with me and my wife, talking us through it,” says Ornstein. “The next day I received a handwritten letter of condolence from him. There is nothing fake about his sympathy. He feels it deeply.” ▶

‘What leaps out about Biden’s people is their competence. Neither he nor his team need training wheels’

John Podesta, former Clinton and Obama official

With his late son Beau at the Democratic National Convention in Denver, Colorado, during the 2008 presidential campaign





Speaking to families about his affordable healthcare plan in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, earlier this summer

‘If Trump were matter, then Biden is anti-matter – their characters are opposites’

Laurence Tribe, Biden adviser

and Susan Rice (successive national security advisers to Obama), Kurt Campbell (who ran Asia policy for Obama), Jake Sullivan (who leads Biden’s campaign policy), Nick Burns, a former under secretary of state, and Bill Burns (no relation), a former deputy secretary of state. Michèle Flournoy, a former under secretary of defence, is tipped as a likely Pentagon chief.

One adviser predicted that Biden would choose Romney, the Republican senator from Utah, as his secretary of state. That would annoy Vladimir Putin’s Russia, which Romney described as America’s “number one geopolitical foe”. It would also upset most Democrats for very different reasons.

Either way, the contrast between Biden’s friends and the parade of often bizarre cameos that have staffed the Trump administration is glaring. The current president is now on his fourth chief of staff and sixth national security adviser. By contrast, most of Biden’s coterie have known him for decades. “What leaps out about Biden’s people is their competence,” says John Podesta, a senior official in both the Clinton and Obama White Houses. “Neither he nor his team need training wheels.”

There are also lingering worries about Hunter Biden, who has long been a source of concern for his father. “Joe has a total blind spot about Hunter,” says a close family friend. Hunter was discharged from the US Navy because he tested positive for cocaine. He launched various business ventures while his father was vice-president. He was accused of monetising the Biden name and subsequently got a seat on the board of a Ukrainian gas

company. Trump’s attempts to extort Ukraine to supply Biden opposition research resulted in his impeachment last year (though he was acquitted by the Senate). “The campaign just has to keep Hunter out of the picture,” says the friend.

What would Biden actually do in office? Tackling the pandemic would be the first, second and third priority of any incoming president. Little can happen while the US economy is under semi-permanent lockdown. Beyond that his economic platform is radical by the standards of any recent Democratic president, including Obama. “We would have the largest mobilisation of investments since world war two,” says Feldman. “We would start by putting pandemic logistics and supply on a war footing.”

Some people compare the gargantuan challenges of today to 1932, when Franklin D Roosevelt won the election in the middle of the Great Depression. Despite running a fairly bland campaign, FDR then embarked on a streak of “bold, persistent experimentation” that would remake America.

But the differences are more interesting. For all its ravages, coronavirus is not as intractable as the Great Depression. By next January, the world should be closer to having a vaccine. Biden would also be fulfilling the first rule of any job – always follow an under-performer. He could achieve a lot in his first 100 days simply by covering the basics, such as launching a national coronavirus plan, ►

◄ Andrew Yang, the maverick hit of the Democratic primaries, says: “When most people hadn’t figured out who I was, Joe took me aside and was very gracious and friendly. This was just as true when things were going badly for him – he’s always steady and good-natured, in public and in private.”

Some in Biden’s world admit they have one or two concerns about the election and beyond. Chief of these is his tendency to make gaffes. In that sense, the lockdown has a silver lining: there is no campaign trail to avoid. Zoom is easier to manage.

When Obama was elected to the US Senate in 2004, Biden invited him to join the Foreign Relations Committee of which he was chairman. Having listened to a trademark Biden disquisition, Obama scribbled a note and handed it to a staffer. It read: “Shoot. Me. Now.” When the two men were discussing how they would handle their White House relationship, Obama said: “I want your advice Joe, I just want it in 10-minute, not 60-minute, increments.” For the most part, Biden complied.

Sometimes, he could not help himself. The term “Bidenism” – self-inflicted public humiliation – has long been in currency. “Stand up Chuck, let ‘em see ya,” Biden once said to a Missouri state senator in a wheelchair. “Folks, I can tell you, I’ve known eight presidents, three of them intimately,” he said in praise of Obama, adding: “I promise you, the president has a big stick, I promise you,” in a mangled rendition of Theodore Roosevelt’s dictum about speaking softly and carrying a big stick. Fear of such miscues saw the Obama camp “quarantine” Biden for most of the 2012 re-election campaign. This year’s actual quarantine could thus be helpful.

Many in Biden world are betting that his choice of Kamala Harris as running mate will immunise

him against a record of racial gaffes. Earlier this year, Biden apologised after saying that “you ain’t black” if you would consider voting against him. As a mixed-race American of Indian and Jamaican heritage, the Harris pick will buy Biden more protection. Given Biden’s age, she is far likelier than most running mates to become president. As Biden discovered in the primaries, she also knows how to throw a punch.

It is hard to find anyone in Biden’s circle who is losing sleep over his three debates with Trump later this year. As Biden showed in 2008 with Sarah Palin and in 2012 with Paul Ryan – the Republican running mates of John McCain and Mitt Romney – he is a surprisingly taut debater. Trump, meanwhile, seems to be afflicted with his own severe dose of logorrhea. His recent boast in a Fox News interview that he recalled five words in order in a cognitive test was greeted with mockery. “I have two words for you,” says a senior adviser, when I ask about Biden’s age and prolixity: “Donald Trump.” Nor is the campaign worried about Twitter. When I asked two Biden officials whether he composed his own tweets, or would know how to send one, I got an unexpectedly constipated response: “No one has ever asked us that.” It turns out that Biden does not physically send his own tweets but is involved with their substance.

Their second concern is ageing. At 74, Trump is only a smidgen younger than Biden. The difference with Trump is the people with whom Biden would surround himself. Chief among these is Ron Klain, a long-standing Biden aide who is likely to be White House chief of staff. Tony Blinken would probably be his national security adviser. Other top-job contenders would include Tom Donilon

‘How could you begrudge losing to Obama? Obama was like The Beatles’

Shailagh Murray, Biden’s former deputy chief of staff



Alongside former president Barack Obama as Donald Trump is sworn in as the 45th US president in Washington, DC, January 20 2017

‘Biden and Bernie may disagree ideologically but they respect each other’s integrity’

Ted Kaufman

◀ shunning Twitter and not insulting foreign leaders. “If you have an American president at foreign summits eating with his mouth closed and not throwing cutlery around, the world will give him a standing ovation,” says one adviser and friend.

Low-hanging foreign-policy fruit that Biden would pluck in his opening days include rejoining the World Health Organization, the Paris Agreement on climate change and the Iran nuclear deal, says Jake Sullivan. He would also convene a global summit to tackle Covid-19. Domestic steps would include stopping work on the US-Mexico border wall (such as it is), setting up a daily coronavirus briefing led by Dr Anthony Fauci or Ron Klain (who led Obama’s Ebola team) and picking an attorney-general who would embrace planks of Black Lives Matter’s criminal-justice reform agenda.

In his dealings both with Republicans and foreign leaders, Biden would place great stock in personal chemistry. Enjoying the company of people is one area where Biden is as different to Obama as he is to Trump. “The thing that Biden most likes is what Obama liked the least – the personal stuff,” says Podesta. Nick Burns says Biden revels in the “constant gardening” of diplomacy – talking frequently to his counterparts.

Sceptics point out that today’s Republican party is unrecognisable to the one with which Biden grew up. Should he emerge intact from transition with a paranoid Trump, the chances of the defeated party working with him will be slim. Woke nativism will prove a more durable pathogen than Covid-19.

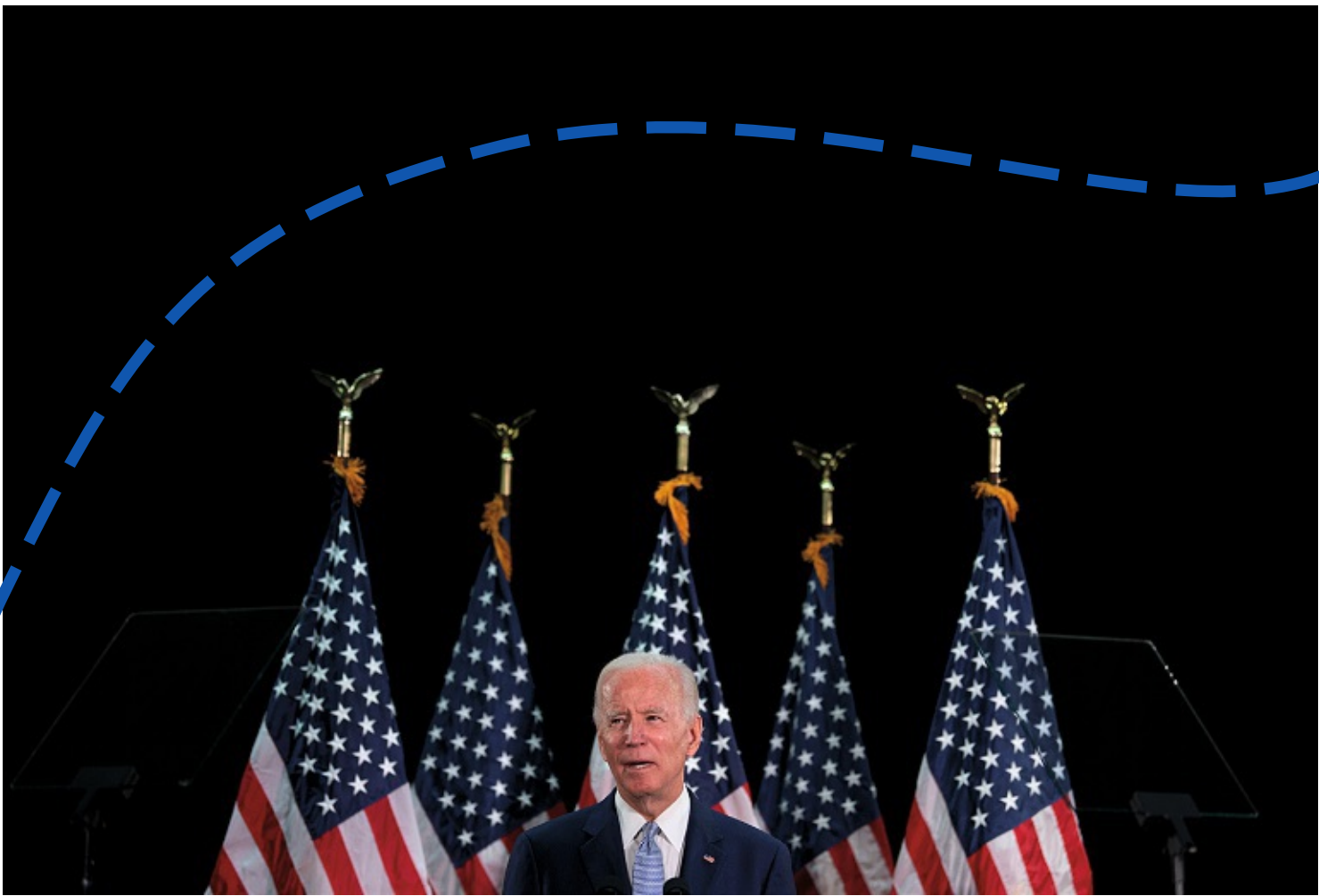
Moreover, Biden’s global honeymoon would be unlikely to last long. Most people view his musings about restoring the status quo ante – going back to the world before Trump – as wishful thinking, not

that geopolitical trends were particularly stable during the Obama years. China looms far larger today than it did in 2016. Biden’s favourite European, Angela Merkel, Germany’s chancellor, is due to retire by next year. And Biden will neither be inclined – nor likely in a position – to offer Britain’s Boris Johnson the US-UK trade deal he craves.

Not everyone is enamoured of Biden’s foreign-policy judgment. In his 2015 memoir, Robert Gates, Obama’s first defence secretary, said Biden had “been wrong on nearly every major foreign policy [and national security] issue over the past four decades”. This included voting against the first Iraq war in 1991, in favour of the second one in 2003 and opposing Obama’s Afghanistan surge in 2009. Biden was also a lonely voice in opposition to the Abbottabad raid that killed Osama bin Laden.

Gates now says he may have been a little harsh on the former vice-president. “If I had one change I would say that Biden and I agreed that Obama mishandled Hosni Mubarak [the autocratic Egyptian leader supplanted by the Muslim Brotherhood with Obama’s green light] and we both opposed Obama’s intervention in Libya,” he says. “Other than that, I stick to what I wrote.” Tony Blinken, Biden’s senior foreign policy adviser, says Biden’s scepticism about Obama’s ineffectual Afghanistan surge looks better and better in hindsight. “I respect Gates tremendously but he just wanted a rubber stamp for his Afghanistan plan and Biden disagreed,” he says. Biden was in favour of US intervention in Bosnia in 1995, he adds, to convey that Biden is not some inveterate peacenik.

But Biden’s biggest migraine would probably be at home. In the coming weeks, Trump is likely



Left: with Senator Kamala Harris, who he selected as his running mate on Tuesday, at a campaign rally in Detroit, Michigan, in March
Above: greeting fellow Democratic presidential hopeful Bernie Sanders at a CNN debate in Washington, March 15
Facing page: speaking at Delaware State University, June 5

‘Life is about choices, right? Biden or Trump?’

Former CIA official

to make a lot of Biden’s “socialist” agenda – the hundreds of billions he has pledged to spend on everything from college education to rural broadband. Should Biden follow Obama’s example and pick Wall Street-friendly economic advisers, the left’s distrust would soon resurface. Last week, Lawrence Summers, Obama’s chief economic adviser and Bill Clinton’s Treasury secretary, ruled out joining a Biden administration. “My time in government is behind me,” he told the Aspen Security Forum.

To many people’s surprise, the left has largely fallen into line. Bernie Sanders dropped nearly all his most-cherished demands to agree a joint platform with Biden. This is in stark contrast to Sanders’ stand-offish – and simmeringly uneasy – ceasefire with Clinton in 2016. An estimated one-fifth of Sanders’ supporters in 2016 either sat on their hands or voted for Trump. Biden has not adopted a universal basic income, Medicare for all or a wealth tax – Sanders’ top three priorities. Yet the Vermont senator seems to be a happy passenger on Amtrak Joe’s train. Their policies may differ but their values are not miles apart. “Biden believes that his ultimate calling is to make life better for the middle class,” says Jared Bernstein, an economic adviser. “His watchword is ‘dignity.’” Ted Kaufman adds: “Biden and Bernie may disagree ideologically but they respect each other’s integrity.”

Might such charms work on Republicans? I spoke to many people in Biden’s world and none thought the Republican leopard was likely to

change its spots. One said: “Joe is still a romantic about the Senate. He will have to learn the hard way.” The omens for old-fashioned Biden-style bipartisanship are not cheerful. Yet there is an improbability to Biden’s odyssey that should give anyone pause. The lyrics may be corny. The music is not. It is an odd mix of Shakespearean tragedy and Shakespearean comedy.

I have heard people describe Biden as the embodiment of America’s can-do spirit. Shailagh Murray called him a “spiritual optimist”. A campaign official talked of his “strategic empathy”. I have also heard people call Biden a “clown”, including a former Obama official. Biden loves to talk of when “the man meets the moment”. The joke is that he has said this about himself every time he has run for office. There has never been a moment where Biden does not think he should be residing in the White House.

But perhaps this time he is right? “Life is about choices, right?” says a former senior CIA official who has interacted with Biden for more than 30 years. “Biden or Trump?” He admitted that he occasionally saw Biden as a “mediocre” politician. But he added that Biden always struck him as fundamentally decent, which sounds like a subversive quality in today’s Washington. “Even if you thought that Biden was mediocre,” he continued, “you would take mediocre over catastrophic every time.” **FT**

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Edward Luce is the FT’s US national editor

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THE GHOST TREES OF PUGLIA

Photographer *James Mollison* was so captivated by the beauty of the Italian region's olive groves that he bought one. But today, as the area's trees succumb to a deadly disease, he finds himself documenting their destruction



INFECTED TREE, SPONGANO, PUGLIA



A TRADITIONAL PAJARA (SHELTER) SITS AMONG INFECTED TREES, MAGLIE, PUGLIA

Sixteen years ago, a neighbour in Venice told me about some olive groves for sale in Salento, southern Puglia. I visited the region that July, and the groves were magical. They had a patchwork nature: huge groves owned by olive-oil-producers were mixed with many small groves, which had been divided into smaller and smaller plots as they passed down the generations. Meticulously neat groves bordered those where wildflowers burst out around the trees.

I bought a grove on a slope dotted with 116 old trees. A few months later, I met Amber and we had a house built, inspired by the *pajare* (shelters) erected centuries ago for those who tended the olive trees. The house was finished the day before our wedding, and we return to it every spring and summer and sometimes in winter.

In 2014, we heard about a disease called *Xylella fastidiosa*, which stops water reaching a tree's branches and causes them to die. The bacterium has ravaged vineyards and citrus groves in the Americas, where it's endemic. Once in Puglia, it jumped to olive trees among others.

When we asked how we might protect our grove, we encountered a wave of contradictory advice and conspiracy theories. Some men in the local bar were convinced the disease had been engineered by agribusiness to make money, while environmentalists blamed the use of chemicals. It took a year for the authorities to decree that the ground under the trees had to be kept clear, either by ploughing or cutting back the weeds that proliferate each spring, as *Xylella* is spread ►



INFECTED TREE, SPONGANO

◀ by plant-sucking insects. By then, more than a million trees in Salento had been affected with what is now known as olive quick decline syndrome, or QQDS.

A few of our trees began to show the tell-tale signs, with dried-out twigs on the outer branches. We cut them back, and the first trees to be infected sent out a few fresh shoots from the trunk. But these soon seemed the last gasps of a strong tree being slowly strangled, its centuries-old root systems desperate to survive.

This year, Puglia was the perfect place to be in quarantine – instead of being cooped up in a flat in Venice, our sons had an olive grove to play in – but our trees were dying before our eyes. We watched the grove turn from a soft green to a ghostly grey.

The local paper reports that 20 million trees have been infected, while the patchwork that once enchanted me is transforming into a grim new pattern. There are groves of stumps made by owners who believe you can cut out the disease; trees left to grow bushy by owners who have given up now they no longer produce olives; plots filled with tiny saplings; groves where people haven't had the heart to pull out the old trees and have planted new ones among them (as we have done).

There is still a beauty to the ghostly trees, yet last month I came across a bulldozer pushing over some several centuries old. A few weeks later, a wood grinder arrived. It picked up the trunks with their tangle of dead branches. Within 10 seconds, a mature dead tree was chipped and sprayed, ready to be reduced to pellets. **FT**



FELLED OLIVE TREES READY TO BE TURNED INTO PELLETS IN SPONGANO



OLIVE TREE IN OSTUNI WITH DEAD BRANCHES ON THE OUTER EDGES, POSSIBLE SIGNS OF INFECTION



A taste of antiquity

Why are we so interested in what previous civilisations ate and drank? And what does it tell us? *Fuchsia Dunlop* mixes gastronomy and archaeology to find out

The four sheep turned on their spits, wafting out rich aromas over the bleached Turkish landscape. Nearby, I stirred a vast potful of lentil stew over an open fire, lashed by smoke and sunlight. A long table in the yard was already laden with dishes: handmade hummus and fava bean paste, whole honeycombs, stacks of tandoor-baked bread and piles of pomegranates. Beyond it loomed the great burial mound of a ruler of the Phrygian kingdom who had died here in the eighth century BC – thought to be a historical King Midas or his father. Aided by a team of Turkish cooks and food experts, I was doing my best to recreate his funeral feast.

This wasn't an idle exercise. In the 1950s, archaeologists from the Penn Museum at the University of Pennsylvania had excavated the tomb, near the old Phrygian capital at Gordion. Although this King Midas was not the mythical man with the golden touch, they still found a treasure trove of bronze cauldrons, drinking bowls and clay pots in his burial chamber, including the largest Iron Age drinking set ever discovered. The vessels contained the physical remnants of a banquet the mourners had shared, but it was about 40 years before advances in science permitted chemical analysis of the residues. This was done in the late 1990s by experts from the Penn Museum, led by Patrick McGovern, scientific director of its Biomolecular Archaeology Project for Cuisine, Fermented Beverages and Health, and author of *Ancient Brews: Rediscovered & Re-created*.

Using modern techniques such as infrared spectroscopy, liquid and gas chromatography and mass spectrometry, McGovern and his team examined the vestiges of both food and drink found in the bronze vessels. The mourners, they concluded, had shared an unusual brew made from a mixture of honey, grapes and barley – a sort of cocktail of mead, wine and beer. And although the researchers couldn't be sure, they suspected it had also contained saffron because of the intense yellow colour of the residue (and because some of the finest saffron of the ancient world was produced in what is now Turkey).

The chemical detective work on the brown clumps of food matter showed these were

the leftovers of a great stew made from lamb or goat that had first been seared over fire to produce caramelisation, then simmered with some kind of pulse (probably lentils) along with ingredients such as honey, wine, olive oil, fennel or anise and other herbs and spices.

The remains of the feast at Gordion are among numerous ancient foods and drinks scattered throughout the collections of museums all over the world. Many have been retrieved from graves, store cupboards and shipwrecks; others were collected by 19th-century European explorers during their expeditions to the non-western world.

A recent exhibition at the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford, *Last Supper in Pompeii*, included carbonised bread and solidified olive oil dating from AD79, the year Mount Vesuvius erupted and buried the city. Desiccated pastries dating back to the Tang dynasty (AD618-907), now in the British Museum, were found in the Astana tombs in western China, as was a bowlful of *jiaozi* dumplings: totally dried out but otherwise much like those you might eat in northern China today.

More appetisingly, the preserved soyabeans with ginger from the Mawangdui tombs in China's Hunan province, interred about 2,200 years ago, appear no different from those sold in any modern Chinese supermarket.

At the first virtual Oxford Food Symposium last month, Dutch food historian Linda Roodenburg displayed a photograph of a 19th-century reindeer-milk cheese from the city's Pitt Rivers Museum: it looked hard and mouldy but otherwise intact. Roodenburg, the founder of a virtual food museum, is compiling a cookbook based on the assortment of comestible treasures in the Pitt Rivers collection, which also include wild potato bread from Japan and dried bird's nest from Sumatra.

Food objects were collected and shipped to European museums in the 19th century “because food was considered an important part of a culture, especially when it was related to specific rituals”, Roodenburg says. But as modern anthropology took shape, the ►



Illustrations by Toby Morison



‘We had eaten something that was older than Christianity and the Chinese empire. And still the siren scent of saffron was singing to us, like pure gold, untarnished by the passage of time’

◀ focus shifted from these physical relics and towards analysing and interpreting the social structures of “primitive” societies. “With this disengagement from natural science, organic and edible objects became irrelevant for anthropological research,” she continues.

The neglect of food relics did have one benefit, however: their survival. “Without any meddling of museum conservators, the contents fermented, dried, moulded or evaporated: a process of slow museum preservation that is still going on,” says Roodenburg.

Edible objects in museums have a low status today, she adds, perhaps because “nowadays ethnological museums prefer presenting their objects as ‘art’ instead of ethnographic artefacts. In this context, a piece of old reindeer cheese or a glass jar with mouldy sea cucumbers is less aesthetic than spectacular masks and sculptures.” The Tang dynasty pastries in the British Museum now lurk mostly unseen by visitors in the bowels of the institution, where they are known affectionately by staff as “the jam tarts”.

The archaeological finds at the Mawangdui tombs in China included not only opulent woven silks, gorgeous lacquerware and medical manuscripts, but plenty of food, such as desiccated grains, eggs, millet cakes and the bones of beasts and fowl. A nobleman’s wife had even been buried with a kind of last supper: a lacquer tray laid with bowls of food and wine and a clutch of skewered kebabs. These relics have revealed as much about the food and drink of the upper classes in Han-dynasty China as textual evidence.

Aside from their historical and scientific importance, food relics tend to fascinate museum visitors, says Liz Wilding, who is working with Roodenburg on the Pitt Rivers cookbook. “There is, of course, the pleasure of the unexpected, due to the obvious rarity of actual food in museums. Beyond this, food has an emotional and intimate power to engage people by evoking strong reactions of pleasure and disgust.” She cites visitors sniffing the pungent smell of ancient fermented milk in a gourd at the Pitt Rivers Museum as an

example that “has repelled some but provoked them to engage with the object’s background in more depth”.

Scientific advances have highlighted the value of preserving the vestiges of ancient food and drink. Some years ago, when I was seeking information about food remains in a Chinese tomb, museum staff told me they had been cleaned out of the excavated vessels and discarded, like dust or sand. But today, according to McGovern, archaeologists and curators take enormous care to preserve such materials.

My own initiation into the wonders of ancient food and drink, at the Gordion tomb, started 20 years ago when a television company hired McGovern as a scientific consultant for a documentary, *King Midas’ Feast*. They invited me, a recently published food writer with some experience of Turkey, to recreate the feast, guided by the evidence and the advice of local experts, including food and drink journalist Aylin Öney Tan.

McGovern had already collaborated with a winemaker to recreate the funeral beverage: a gorgeous golden elixir fermented from barley, grapes and honey. The golden colour came from saffron, which they used guided more by a hunch than any solid proof of its presence in the original brew (a craft brewery in the US still produces a beer inspired by this).

As I pondered the possibilities for a historically accurate menu, I began to wonder what the residues from the tomb would taste like and how it would feel to eat something that had been cooked more than 2,500 years ago. I was astounded that McGovern and his colleagues had never tasted the residues themselves: this would have been my first impulse – which is probably why I’m not an archaeologist. Would it be possible to try some? I asked McGovern, cheekily. I can’t remember his reply. In any case, it seemed unlikely he would agree.

After intense discussions, Tan and I came up with a menu we reckoned could have been made with the produce and techniques of Iron

Age Phrygia – long before the appearance in Turkey of modern ingredients such as tomatoes, lemons, chillies and even sugar.

On the eve of the feast, we marinated the sheep in salt, onion, wild thyme, honey, *pekmez* (grape syrup) and wine, ready for the spits and the sheep-dung fires. We made a rudimentary hummus, seasoned with sumac and vinegar rather than lemon juice, and a fava bean paste enlivened by dill. The following morning, I cooked the lentil stew according to McGovern’s advice, flavouring it with onion, sheep-tail fat, garlic, fennel seeds and *pekmez*. McGovern and the winemaker poured their recreated funeral beverage into magnificent copper cauldrons: replicas of the bronze vessels found in the tomb that had been made for us by the copper merchants of Ankara.

That afternoon, a hundred or so invited guests, including journalists and diplomats, arrived for the feast, along with 200 curious passers-by. The roasted lamb was carved off into the lentil stew, and we fed everybody in the golden light of the sun. Along with the visiting dignitaries, McGovern, Tan and I, happily exhausted after our labours, quaffed the amber brew from copper bowls.

Just when I thought the day couldn’t get any better, McGovern took me aside and told me he had brought some of the residue from one of the pots, a sample of the remains of the mead-like beverage. The two of us sneaked off, leaving the crowd and the drifting smoke from the fires, and took refuge in a secluded arbour where we sat down on a wooden bench. He removed a tiny plastic phial from his pocket and divided the contents between us. For a moment I just looked at the grainy crumbs in the palm of my hand, awestruck. Then we looked at each other and put them in our mouths.

Our faces lit up with amazement. For there it was: the taste of saffron, bright, pure and unmistakable. I couldn’t believe it. I had expected to get an emotional kick out of eating the residue but not to taste anything. Yet after more than two millennia in the tomb, the flame-coloured pistils had lost none of

their potency. The mystery was solved – at least, that is what I thought.

“So now you know,” I said to McGovern, elated, “it was saffron after all!” He, ever the meticulous scientist, was cautious, pointing out that the world was going to demand more proof than the assurances of two people who had tasted the residue at a party on a summer’s afternoon. It gave the revelation a bittersweet edge, knowing both that we had tasted saffron and that others might doubt it.

Though in a physical sense we were just eating grit, consuming it was one of the most extraordinary, and pleasurable, gastronomic experiences of my life – a reminder that eating is always a matter of psychology as well as physiology. McGovern and I, sitting in that arbour as the sun set, full of spit-roasted lamb stew and figs and hummus, mellowed by mead, were almost literally sharing a feast with the mourners of an Iron Age Phrygian king. We had eaten something that was older than Christianity and the Chinese empire. And still the siren scent of saffron was singing to us, like pure gold, untarnished by the passage of time.

Later, McGovern and I corresponded by email, and I asked him about the ethics of eating archaeological evidence. Was what we did, at my instigation, justified? Sure, we had consumed mere specks of residue, but did this count as the wanton destruction of a valuable sample? He replied that while he wouldn’t normally recommend eating the evidence, this case had been special. Pounds of the residues had been recovered, more than he had seen at any other site, and the chemical analyses had been completed. Nineteenth-century chemists had not shied away from sensory tests, so why shouldn’t a modern scientist have a taste, once in a while, if it might prove enlightening?

Since that unforgettable evening in Anatolia, I have looked at the saffron in my kitchen cupboard with a new respect. I had long suspected my Chinese preserved beans would keep for about two millennia in an airtight jar (or tomb). But now I know that the saffron, with a bit of luck, might last even longer. Put that on your sell-by date. **FT**



On the pulse

Dal, the superfood of the subcontinent, lends itself to countless flavours and textures. *Anjali Raval, Mamta Badkar and Tony Tassell* share their favourite recipes. Photographs by *Charlie Bibby*





Anjli Raval

‘A recent survey of my family yielded more than 20 “favourite” dals. Results depended on mood, occasion, where they were eating the dal and who was cooking’

This time of the year reminds me of my childhood home in east London. In the late afternoons, as my brother and I played, my grandfather would sit at the head of the dining table slicing fruit for the evening’s dessert. When Indian mangoes were in season, he would sneak us sweet, unctuous orange pieces. Later, strawberries, slices of watermelon or other summer fruits.

But the overwhelming aromas filling the air at that time of the day came from my grandmother’s Gujarati *rasoi*. Above all, from her “everyday” dal.

The scent of her red gram and moong lentils bubbling away with cinnamon, cloves, sweet and sour kokum, curry leaves, ginger, chilli and jaggery is fixed in my memory. The reddish-brown, thin, soupy dal packed a punch. The spice kick would hit the back of your throat. It was never meant to be had on its own or just with rice but was part of an array of dishes on our steel thalis. A small bowl would be set amid a masala-stuffed potato dish or okra curry, something fried like a *methi bhajiya* (fenugreek fritters) with coriander chutney, a *sambharo* salad made with shredded cabbage and carrot, *rotli* (flatbread), yoghurt, rice, pickle and *papad*.

Dal itself can mean a dried legume – such as a lentil or pea – that grows as a seed inside a pod and can be split or cooked whole. But it is also the nutritious soupy dish or stew made from these same pulses. The *Oxford Companion to Food* calls it “one of the principal foods of the Indian subcontinent”. Each dal differs in flavour, texture and cooking method. Varieties change according to the region – south Indian specialties are thinner and translucent, for example, while heartier and creamier ones are popular in the north. They can be finished with tempered spices or some finely chopped fresh coriander. They can be sweet or tomatoey, packed with curry leaves or a spice blend such as Bengali *panch phoran*, which includes fennel seeds, fenugreek, nigella seeds, cumin seeds and mustard seeds. The range is seemingly endless.

When I went to university and later moved abroad, my grandmother’s cooking was no longer accessible. I didn’t have the time or, frankly, the knowledge to make the array of dishes that made up the flavour-laden thalis the women in my family seemed to curate subconsciously. And with that my grandmother’s “everyday” dal disappeared from my life.

Eventually, however, my stomach pined for home cooking and I started compiling a compendium of family recipes. Until then, no one had really written them down. Measurements were vague and told to one another in “mutthi” or fistfuls, as opposed to grammes or cups. I interpreted recipes and wrote down everything – my grandmother’s original flavour combinations, my mum’s different versions of dishes and soon enough my own adaptations.

Preferences and styles of cooking vary even among those who have grown up together. A recent survey of my family – via a 14-person WhatsApp chat – yielded more than 20 “favourite” dals. Results depended on mood, occasion, where they were eating the dal and who was cooking.

Eight years ago, I rang my grandmother from New York and told her that my go-to dal had become a tweaked version of my mum’s *tadka* dal – originally a Punjabi dish, which she makes with yellow split peas and split moong beans. “You mean that thick one that is a meal in itself?” she asked. I remember how appalled she was, implying it was heavier and not as delicately spiced as her everyday dal.

It is indeed a meal in itself and that’s exactly why I turned to it when I was thousands of miles away from home. My everyday dal was simple to make, rich, delicious and it didn’t need the supporting acts.

These days, I’m not an ocean away from home. I’m six and a half miles down the road in London. Like many people lately, I have been cooking comfort food – including all the extras I never felt the need to make before. And at the centre of it all is my dal – even if the recipe is not one my granny will necessarily agree with. ►

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Anjli Raval is the FT’s senior energy correspondent

Everyday dal

- 1 cup yellow split peas
- ½ cup moong dal
- 5 cups water
- 3 tbs rapeseed or vegetable oil
- 2 tsp cumin seeds
- 1 dried red chilli
- ½ tsp asafoetida
- 1 medium white onion, diced

- 1 tsp grated garlic
- 1 tsp grated ginger
- ½ tsp chilli powder
- ½ tsp turmeric powder
- 1 tsp coriander powder
- 1 tsp cumin powder
- 1 tsp garam masala
- Salt to taste
- ½ cup blended chopped tomatoes or passata
- Fresh chopped coriander to garnish

1 — My mum gave me a small pressure cooker many years ago and it’s one of my prized possessions. It follows me wherever I go – and dramatically cuts the time it takes to make a dal.

2 — Wash the yellow split peas, then put them in a pressure cooker with the moong dal, two cups of water and a teaspoon of salt. Turn the gas under the pressure cooker on to a medium heat. After you hear about five whistles – roughly 15 minutes – turn it off and

let it cool before you open it. The dal should be cooked through but not mushy. (If you do not have a pressure cooker, soak the dal for a few hours – or overnight – and then boil it in a pan with water and salt until cooked.)

3 — In a separate pan add the oil and, when hot, the cumin seeds and dried red chilli. Then add the asafoetida and diced onion. When slightly brown and soft, add the grated garlic and ginger followed by the cooked pulses. Add another three cups of cold water. As the dal simmers, add the chilli powder, turmeric, coriander powder, cumin powder, garam masala and salt to taste. Once the dal starts to bubble, add the blended chopped tomatoes (or passata).

4 — Simmer for a further 15 minutes on a low heat, stirring frequently. You can use a hand blender to blitz it a little but try to keep the texture of the dal. You can make it as thin or thick as you like, adding water as needed. Garnish with chopped fresh coriander.



‘It took moving halfway across the world for me to realise that my mother’s daily dal was an expression of her love’

Growing up in Bombay, dal was a staple at lunch and dinner, and essential, my mother said, to add protein to my vegetarian diet. Yet it was something I ate willingly only when I was unwell.

I had a taste for more eclectic cuisine and my mother, an exceptional cook, pandered to these whims now and then. But dal – the prosaic pulse, the lacklustre legume – remained a constant fixture.

Every day I would try to mount a resistance and every day my mother would crush the sole mutineer at the dining table like some gastronomic despot. I found consolation in the *sabzis* (vegetables) – okra and a fenugreek and green pea curry were my favourites – and rotis.

Weary of my intransigence, my mother started to whip up a variety of dals. Most days we would have a simple *tadka* dal or a spicy masala dal, but then she started to pepper our menus with *kali* (black) dal – a creamy dal *makhani* – and a version of *meetha* (sweet) dal that uses jaggery and tamarind paste. Still, eating any dal was mostly a chore and something I associated with being ill.

Later, as I headed off to university in New York City – foodie paradise – I was ready to purge dal from my diet once and for all.

Notwithstanding, my mother scribbled a handful of simple Indian recipes into a notebook and tucked it – along with some essential spices and a small pressure cooker – into my suitcase.

These recipes remained in my luggage during my first few months in America, as I tested the limits of my metabolism. As a student, my daily budget was tight and my meals consisted largely

of falafel wraps from the halal cart just outside my campus, plus Koronet’s jumbo pizza slices, heavy on the grease and arteries, but light on my pocket.

It was the winter chill that made me long for the warmth of home – and, to my surprise, my mother’s homemade spicy dal. Much as I had dismissed it in my teens, it was what I had eaten when I was under the weather or stressed and nothing could comfort me more.

So, in December 2009, during my winter break, I reached for my mother’s notebook. She had helpfully led with an index of spices in both English and Hindi, followed immediately by an easy masala dal recipe.

I made my way from Manhattan’s Upper West Side to Murray Hill (or Curry Hill as it is often called) and bought some dal, chillies, onions, tomatoes, garlic and ginger from an Indian store. As I set out to cook dal for the very first time, I realised I didn’t have any bay leaves and panicked. My mother chuckled, explained that they aren’t essential and assured me that my cooking plans were not in fact ruined. She walked me through her recipe – one that I stick to, more or less, a decade later.

It took moving halfway across the world for me to realise that my mother’s daily dal was an expression of her love. Living in New York, one of the epicentres of the pandemic and far from family, it’s the meal I most often cook for my husband and me. And when I return home to Bombay, my first meal is always homemade curd rice and a serving of dal.

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Mamta Badkar is US head of fastFT

Aarti Badkar’s masala dal

- ½ cup red lentils
- ½ cup split pigeon peas
- ½ tsp turmeric
- 4 tsp sunflower oil
- 1 tsp mustard seeds
- 1 tsp cumin
- 1 or 2 bay leaves
- Pinch of asafoetida
- ½ cup onion, finely chopped
- ½ tsp ginger, finely chopped
- 1 tsp garlic, finely chopped
- ½ cup tomatoes, finely chopped
- 2 green chillies, quartered and deseeded
- 1 tsp red chilli powder
- 1 tsp curry leaves or powder
- 1½ tsp salt
- 4 tsp coriander leaves, chopped

1 — Wash the red lentils and split pigeon peas, then put them in a pressure cooker with three cups of water and the turmeric. Close the pressure cooker and set it on a medium flame until you hear three whistles. Then turn off the stove.

2 — Prepare your *tadka* (tempering) ingredients, while the dal cooks. On a low flame, heat some sunflower oil, add the mustard seeds, cumin, one bay leaf and a pinch of asafoetida. Don’t let the spices burn.

3 — Add the chopped onion and cook until it turns yellow, then add in the ginger and garlic. Add the finely chopped tomatoes, along with the green chillies and red chilli powder (I like to use Kashmiri chilli powder) and mix well. Then add the curry leaves and salt and, finally, pour the dal into the pan and let it all simmer for a couple of minutes. Turn off the flame.

4 — To top it off, rinse coriander leaves, chop and sprinkle on the cooked dal. Serve with roti or rice.

ately, I have gotten a little more dal, turning to the superfood of the subcontinent and one of the world's great comfort meals.

For many, dal is a taste of home.

Meera Sodha writes in her cookbook *Made in India*: "Ask any Indian what their favourite food is, and they will most likely tell you that it's their mother's *dal-bhaat* (dal and rice). It might sound humble, but in the hands of an Indian cook these simple ingredients are transformed into food for the soul."

I first acquired a taste for it on family trips to India as a kid and later as an adult, including a stint living in Mumbai in the 1990s. From bustling train station cafeterias to five-star restaurants, dal was found pretty much everywhere, in countless variations and flavours across the country.

Loyalty to favoured variations runs deep. In my family, we have developed a dal that we like most, a great, quick weekday meal, saving more elaborate ones for weekend experimentation or dinner with friends.

I have made it so many times, I could almost do it with my eyes shut. Once, when I was on a diet, I ate it every day for lunch with its slow-burning sustenance reducing the need for snacks. And as I have cut back on meat in recent years, I have cooked it more.

My recipe is based on an old one by the chef Merrilees Parker but I have adapted it over the years. Each time I make it, it is a little different. This is not precise cooking. **FT**

Tony Tassell is the FT's deputy news editor



Tomato and tadka dal

- 300g red lentils
- 1-2 tbs tomato paste
- 400g canned tomatoes
- A neutral oil (rapeseed or vegetable)
- About 12 curry leaves
- 2 tsp black mustard seeds
- 2 tsp cumin seeds
- A red or green chilli split down the middle
- 1 tsp chilli flakes
- 4 cloves garlic, thinly sliced
- Salt
- Juice of half a lemon

1 — Wash the red lentils in a saucepan until water runs through it clear. Drain. Then add 900ml of water. Bring to a boil and cook until tender, about 20-30 minutes. Remove any scum that comes to the surface during cooking. Blitz with a hand blender, if you have one, to your desired consistency. Or hand mash a little.

2 — Add a tablespoon of tomato paste and a tin of tomatoes. Stir and let simmer for a few

minutes. In a separate pan, make what is called the *tadka* – flavoured oil. Heat up three to four tablespoons of oil. If you want a richer dal, use ghee instead.

3 — Into the oil go the curry leaves, black mustard seeds, cumin seeds, red or green chilli split down the middle, chilli flakes and about four cloves of thinly sliced garlic. Fry for a minute or two. Then tip the tarka into the dal and stir. Add salt to taste

and the juice of half a lemon.

4 — Sometimes I also add a few handfuls of spinach to the mix. Another variation is to add a couple of teaspoons of grated ginger to the lentils when they are being boiled or to the tarka. Sometimes I will add coconut milk to the boiled lentils to make a richer flavour. But this is very forgiving cooking. It should be tweaked to your own tastes.

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on who is afraid
of Xi Jinping?



Camilla Cavendish
on Brexit, culture
wars and the politics
of post-crisis Britain



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Andrew Jefford Wine

Canada's wild west



Wine's complications are predicated on four sorts of differences: origin, vintage, grape variety and craft (the skill or otherwise of the winemaker). Origin enjoys the highest status of these, via the notion of terroir: the idea that wines might taste as they do because of the place in which their grapes grow.

Newly planted vineyards rewrite the range of possibilities, sometimes dramatically. In British Columbia, Canada's far west, local winemaking endeavours over the past three decades have unearthed some shockingly unusual growing locations, without parallel elsewhere in the world. "We're still in a giddy phase of experimentation," says Vancouver-based wine buyer and commentator Barbara Philip MW.

One nascent growing location called Lillooet, for example, lies further north than Reims and Epernay in Champagne - yet its warmth (measured as "degree days" - the summation of all the degrees over 10C during the seven-month growing season) exceeds that of Bordeaux in France's south. Philip's fellow Master of Wine Rhys Pender, who now makes wine at Little Farm in the nearby Similkameen Valley, remembers one August day in the southern Okanagan Valley when it was just 7C in the morning - but 46C by the end of the afternoon.

When Séverine Pinte, who had trained in Bordeaux and Languedoc, arrived at Le Vieux Pin winery in the Okanagan Valley, she found that the vineyards experienced similar overall warmth to those regions with which she was familiar - but had a month less to ripen, as the "shoulder seasons" were so brutal. A full year can see 60C of variation, from 40C in summer to -20C in winter. Frosts linger late and return early. The first autumn rains, after a summer too dry for



Illustration by Mark Long

the vines to survive unirrigated, may fall white - as snow.

One advantage of this high-latitude yet almost desert-like drama is that there are very clear differences of style between the wines of British Columbia and their Canadian siblings over the Rockies in Ontario, where summers are much more humid. There is a quietness, gentleness and restraint about the Ontario style, whereas

that of the Okanagan (source of 84 per cent of BC wine) is bright, colourful and dramatic, particularly for the Syrah-based red wines produced in its southern end, adjacent to the US border. It makes most sense, indeed, to see them as wines of the North American west coast: they share the unshackled exuberance of California and Washington state more than the European-style nuance and

inflection that characterises Ontario's seam of inspiration.

The Okanagan is spindly, topographically chaotic - and 170km long. There are considerable differences between the sculpted, shapely wines of its northern sector around Kelowna and Lake Country (Riesling, Chardonnay and Pinot) and the richer whites (the widely planted Pinot Gris can be excellent) and vivid, sometimes explosive reds (Merlot, Cabernet Franc and Syrah) of the south. The Similkameen Valley over the hills from the southern Okanagan is differently orientated and a little cooler, as well as having some propitious gravels; Riesling and Pinot Blanc

'Local winemaking endeavours have unearthed some shockingly unusual growing locations'

can do well there... but so, in the right site, can Syrah and Cabernet Sauvignon. Giddy experimentation remains the order of the day.

A final advantage for both regions is ambitious investors with deep pockets. The Chinese-Canadian Richter Bai's mining fortune funds Phantom Creek, which has managed to entice Olivier Humbrecht MW from Alsace to oversee its whites in the Okanagan (the Pinot Gris is promising) and brought Philippe Melka from Napa to tutor the reds. More unusually, the craze for White Claw Hard Seltzer (and before it Mike's Hard Lemonade) also helps fund terroir research in the Okanagan. Its billionaire creator, Anthony von Mandl, began his working life as a wine importer and now owns Mission Hill (one of the Valley's largest wineries) as well as CedarCreek, CheckMate, Martin's Lane, Road 13 and Liquidity Wines. ►

A selection of top British Columbia producers (with their best wine styles in brackets)

Okanagan Valley

- Bartier Bros (Chardonnay and Semillon)
- Bella (sparkling)
- Blue Mountain (sparkling)
- CheckMate (Merlot)
- Nichol (Pinot Gris, Pinot Noir, Syrah)
- Nk'Mip (Merlot)
- Osoyoos Larose (blends)
- Painted Rock (Syrah)
- Phantom Creek (Pinot Gris, Cabernet Sauvignon, blends)
- Poplar Grove (Chardonnay, Viognier)
- Quail's Gate (Chardonnay, Pinot Noir, Chenin Blanc)
- Synchromesh (Riesling)
- Tinhorn Creek (Roussanne)
- Vieux Pin (blends)

Similkameen Valley

- Clos du Soleil (Pinot Blanc, blends)
- Little Farm (Riesling, Chardonnay)
- Orofino (Riesling)
- Vanessa (Syrah, Cabernet Sauvignon, blends)

Vancouver Island

- Averill Creek (blends, Pinot Gris, Pinot Noir)
- Blue Grouse (Ortega, Pinot Gris, Pinot Noir)
- Emandare Vineyard (Pinot Noir)
- Rathjen Cellars (Auxerrois, Pinot Gris)
- Unsworth (sparkling, Pinot Noir, Pinot Gris)

For stockists, see wineseacher.com

Join Jancis Robinson for an interactive tasting of California wines at the digital FT Weekend Festival, September 3-5. For passes and information on pre-ordering wine, go to: live.ft.com/jancisrobinson



◀ That, though, doesn't exhaust BC's surprises. Vancouver Island is also an increasingly sought-after vineyard location – and it would be hard to find a bigger contrast to the Okanagan. In place of a land-locked mountain fastness, you'll find the island moist, oceanic and dreamy. During my pre-lockdown visit in February, a night-long storm rocked the house I was staying in, while the day that followed saw veils of fine rain dance with sunlight as they might during a Hebridean equinox. It's actually further south than the Okanagan – indeed, the island's capital Victoria is almost as close to Seattle as it is to Vancouver – yet despite that, this is a far cooler growing location, and one with a growing season as extended as the Okanagan's is abrupt.

Hybrid vines originally accounted for the core of plantings, notably those by independent Swiss breeder Valentin Blattner, but in recent years both Pinot Noir and Pinot Gris have flourished together with smaller plantings of other varieties including Gamay and Auxerrois. The island's sparkling-wine potential is evident and these were the most impressive wines I tasted here, together with some silky yet fresh white blends, sappy Pinot Gris and subtle, fine-toned Pinot Noir. Alcohols are always low, again in contrast to the wines of the Okanagan, even though picking runs into late October. This long, languid delivery of flavour ripeness

'This long, languid delivery of flavour ripeness with sustained acidity is just what sparkling-wine producers look for'

with sustained acidity is just what sparkling-wine producers look for.

You might assume that the pulse of global warming favours both of these high-latitude regions, but that isn't necessarily true. Vancouver Island growers don't need to irrigate at present, but drier summers might mean they have to; more warmth, too, would mean their wines begin to lose their distinctive edge and nuance. The situation in the Okanagan, meanwhile, illustrates the complexity of these issues. Summer storms have always caused fires in the mountains. Recent changes (including the devastation wrought by the mountain pine beetle on drought-stressed forests) means that these fires are growing worse. Smoke can hang in the valley for long periods during the summer ripening season, veiling the sunshine and potentially tainting the grapes. And even without the smoke risk, no one in the Okanagan would like much more heat and ripeness, or exuberance could risk toppling into caricature. **FT**

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FT Weekend





FANTASY DINNER PARTY

HENRY MANCE

The FT's chief features writer picks the guests, location, dishes and drinks for his dream meal

Let's be clear: any dinner party would be a dream right now. I'd take the first five people in the phone book. I'd probably take the first five in the comments section under this article.

But if I'm allowed to be greedy, the first name on the seating plan is **Victoria Wood**, the British comedian who died in 2016. She could be funny in almost any format. I'm imagining her at the piano, leading everyone in a rendition of her song "The Ballad of Barry and Freda" about a lustful woman ("No caution, just contortions! / Smear an avocado on my lower portions!") and her lustless man ("Stop pouting, stop shouting! / You know I pulled a muscle when I did that grouting"). Maybe it will work some time in that restless period between main course and pudding.

Name two is **Nelson Mandela**. Yes, I know it's a cliché. But I once had lunch in the same room as him and I've never seen anyone so keen on introducing himself to other people. You can forget, when organising a fantasy dinner party, that you want a social event, not five concurrent Reith lectures. Mandela would be the ideal guest - someone who everyone wants to meet, but who actually wants to meet them too. Fingers crossed he can sing.

A dinner party should include someone who's had a shocking day. Their presence makes everyone else feel better about themselves. I'm choosing **Harold Godwinson**, the Anglo-Saxon who was briefly king in 1066, before facing the almost simultaneous invasions of King Harald of Norway and William, Duke of Normandy, and then - possibly - being shot in the eye with an arrow.

I imagine Harold falling through the door, exhaling, "You won't imagine what's happened to me," and downing three glasses of red. I'm a bit concerned about Anglo-Saxon table manners. But however bad they are, they'd be worth it for hearing whether Harold did in fact promise the throne to William, thereby finally putting to rest

whether the Norman invasion was sort-of justified or not.

Alexander von Humboldt was an amazing polymath who explored the Americas at the end of the 19th century. He inspired Charles Darwin and Henry David Thoreau, and foreshadowed the environmental movement by signalling the harm caused by cutting down forests. Humboldt could also be gossipy and

'The party should include someone who's had a shocking day, making everyone else feel better'

incredibly rude. So he's on the list too - in a one-off dinner party, you need people who will cut to the chase.

Being green should mean being daring and curious. Humboldt was all these things. Although we probably want the young explorer, rather than the old know-it-all who barely let Darwin speak when they met.

I've struggled a lot with the last spot. I love the writer Joan Didion, but Tina Brown's diaries say she was hard work at dinners. Shakira is a lifelong idol. Brian Cox, the

Succession actor, never gives a dull interview. Is this my only chance to touch Roger Federer?

In the end, I'm going for the author **Zadie Smith**. I grew up in north London and *White Teeth* is, for me, the great north London novel (*NW* isn't bad either). Smith's essays are the mark of someone who can be interesting and nuanced on almost any subject.

The food is all vegan. But before anyone thinks about cancelling, it will be from vegetable king Alain Passard of the triple-Michelin-starred Arpège in Paris, relocated to some lush English countryside, maybe the South Downs. I am desperate to understand why anyone would pay €155 for a main course, and equally desperate not to pay €155 to find out. So this is the opportunity.

We won't go for the vegetable tasting menu - tasting menus are the culinary equivalent of speed dating, and you want to leave well before the end. Let's have some chunky portions of tomatoes from the rich soils of Passard's farms, followed by an arrangement of peas and other greens, then plums, quasi-vegan honey and orange for dessert.

I don't want to be prescriptive about wine. I am a fan of opening whatever guests have brought. It brings a certain accountability to the gifting process: you can arrive with a £4.99 bottle, but you're going to drink it.

The best dinner parties reach a point where the guests almost forget how they arrived, or why they were invited, or who the host is. You discover hidden passages to each other's personalities that you never knew existed, however long you've been friends. The conversation bursts whatever banks it begins with.

So Mandela and Humboldt start off talking about colonialism and wildlife, but end up on some tangent about how to reinvent the shoelace.

Zadie Smith would be prodding Harold Godwinson to see the bright side of overseas migration, before they zoom in on the hilarities of home-schooling. Bottle after bottle disappears.

All I ask is that I don't reach the stage where I get my phone out and ask Victoria Wood if she thinks my tweets are funny.

I realise I have forgotten to invite my wife, so I guess this is a test of whether she does read my articles to the end.

One final request: can Donald Trump please be left washing the dishes? **FT**

Restaurant Insider

Nicholas Lander



TOMATO, BASIL AND PINE NUT SALAD (LEFT) AND DOMAINE DU MÉTÉORE'S RESTAURANT

Domaine du Météore, Cabrerolles

At the end of July, I enjoyed my first meal in a crater. Ten thousand years ago a meteorite crashed into a place now known as Domaine du Météore in the foothills of the Cévennes and left one of the largest craters on earth. Syrah vines have subsequently been planted in this bowl lined with holm oaks and arbutus.

The wine estate was bought 18 months ago by two English doctors, Paul Jenkins and Paul Jarman. Last summer they built a kitchen down in the crater, with a generator able to power a couple of fridges, a small induction hob and lighting for the outdoor tables, the kitchen and an eco-lavatory. In March, the French chef Nicolas Delorme and his Australian partner Jaclyn Sunley arrived in the Haut-Languedoc.

My wife and I met this talented couple (Sunley has a number of roles, including waitress, sommelier and guide down to the restaurant) in the winery's tasting room, where we chatted over a glass of rosé and some seriously accomplished snacks, including squid-ink crackers with wasabi cream and cured

anchovy, and a small bowl of spiced red pepper cream with octopus and crisp ham fragments. Then I helped Delorme and Sunley shoo their chickens into a coop for the night – another first for me.

Delorme drove his van down to the crater and we followed on foot. The rough track took us through the vegetable garden that they had recently planted, past a well they had discovered and through the vines. After about 10 minutes, we heard the hum of a generator.

We emerged from the undergrowth into the crater to find an outdoor restaurant. Four tables, each of which could seat four customers, stood beside a kitchen in a wooden shed with smoke from old vine cuttings billowing out. The tables were attractively decorated with leaves, candles and shards of the schist for which this region is renowned.

The scene was breathtaking. As the sun was setting just before 8pm, the moon rose to the south-east. It felt like being in Australia – rugged nature, the vines, scrubland and, quite soon, some extremely good food and wine.

Delorme is a classically trained French chef who has travelled and cooked widely. He knows what he has to do: find the best produce and



'We chatted over a glass of rosé and some seriously accomplished snacks, including squid-ink crackers with wasabi cream and cured anchovy'

Domaine du Météore
9 Route d'Aigues Vives,
Cabrerolles 34480, France
domainedumeteore.com
Dinner Wednesday to Saturday
until the end of September

transform it as intelligently and sensitively as he can. He seems to see the limitations of his kitchen as an extra challenge – and it's one that he rises to.

Our first dish was a couple of oysters from Maison Tarbouriech in Marseillan on the nearby Mediterranean, where an ecosystem of freshwater and seawater adds extra flavour. These came topped with thin slices of cured cucumber and a plum cleverly preserved in Marseillan's vermouth, Noilly Prat.

It was followed by, perhaps, the evening's most creative dish. The written description – "this season's tomatoes, basil and pine nuts" – scarcely did it justice. Half a dozen varieties of tomato – expertly peeled and confited – arrived in a colourful dish with three different basil leaves, red, green and small, hot Thai basil, over which Delorme poured a transparent tomato essence. Best of all were the pine nuts, which he had cleverly mixed with buckwheat, seasoned and baked and then broken into three small pieces to accompany the dish. On their own, these would have made an excellent cocktail snack.

Three contrasting subsequent dishes displayed Delorme's fascination with Asia. A slow-cooked egg with grilled sweet leeks was topped with top-quality miso, which he buys online. A loin of wild boar alongside multicoloured young carrots had been marinated in sake. And finally, thin slices of yellow peaches, with perfect meringue wafers, sat on top of a mousse flavoured by a Japanese long peppercorn. As well as having a nose for the ingredients that constitute an excellent dish, Delorme has a good eye for colours and textures.

By 9pm our meal was over. The sun had disappeared and the moon was bright. Delorme and Sunley did a quick tidy before driving us back to the winery where I paid my bill of €100 for two.

Before leaving I asked Sunley the obvious question: what happens if it rains? "Well," came her response, "I keep a close eye on the forecast. And, since we opened in May, there has been only one night when we had to cancel our bookings because of the forecast. And then, of course, it didn't rain." **FT**

More columns at ft.com/lander

Games



A Round on the Links by James Walton



All the answers here are linked in some way. Once you've spotted the link, any you didn't know the first time around should become easier.

1. Halvard Solness is the main character in which play by Henrik Ibsen?

2. During the English civil war (above), which radical group

– originally known as the True Levellers – was led by Gerrard Winstanley?

3. What kind of jungle featured in the title of a 1950 film noir directed by John Huston?

4. Which London street gave its name to a best-selling 2003 novel by Monica Ali?

5. Whose first defeat as a professional heavyweight boxer came on October 30 1974?

6. In bridge, what's the highest-ranking suit of cards?

7. According to a long-running advertising slogan, the drink Irn-Bru (below) is made from what?

8. Black-necked, red-crowned, Siberian and whooping are all species of which bird?

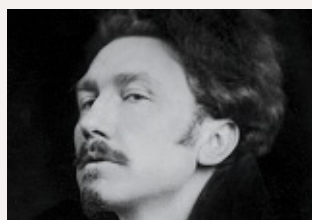
9. Which band of the 1960s and 1970s consisted of the comedian John Gorman, the poet Roger McGough and Paul McCartney's brother Mike?

10. Which French writer had a 10-year relationship with Chopin between 1837 and 1847?



The Picture Round by James Walton

Who or what do these pictures add up to?



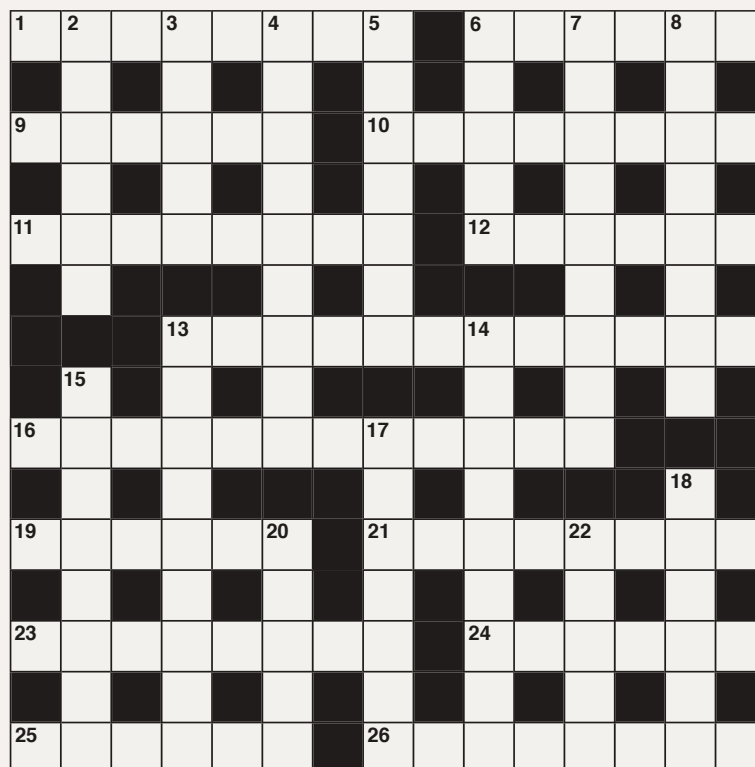
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Answers page 10

The Crossword No 501. Set by Aldhelm



The Across clues are straightforward, while the Down clues are cryptic.

ACROSS

- 1** Eccentric character (8)
- 6** Grinding teeth (6)
- 9** Small gland in the brain (6)
- 10** Tell off (8)
- 11** Short scene (8)
- 12** Of a group of singers (6)
- 13** Then, next (12)
- 16** Solo (6-6)
- 19** Rhapsodic (6)
- 21** Primary (8)
- 23** Computer's defence from attack (8)
- 24** Harm (6)
- 25** Dread (6)
- 26** Scottish east coast city (8)

DOWN

- 2** Not quite lifting fruit (6)
- 3** Completely pure (5)
- 4** Friend with a place for food that's tasty (9)
- 5** Swing gin with ease, we hear (7)
- 6** Impersonate operatic heroine with leader of contraltos (5)
- 7** Light food's cooked around beginning of night's sleep (4, 2, 3)
- 8** Naughty friend smashed cars, at first (8)
- 13** Tourist's wistful reaction to wild trees (9)
- 14** Weaken one Democrat with a symbol of aristocracy (9)

- 15** Drug with tonic mixed with popular drug (8)
- 17** Plant feet first after a nasty fall for one (7)
- 18** One church feature – hope (6)
- 20** One holding meeting about 1960s musical (5)
- 22** Vehicle with second pedal a learner missed (5)

Solution to Crossword No 500





GILLIAN TETT

PARTING SHOT

How Generation TikTok could soon be calling the political tune



Recently I spent an hour staring at an unruly mop of teenage hair on my computer. The owner was an 18-year-old Canadian called Josh Richards. That name probably means nothing to you if, like me, you are a staid member of Generation X. But if you belong to Gen Z, born between the mid-1990s and about 2010, you might squeal in delight – as one of my daughters did.

The reason is that over the past two years Richards has become one of the most successful “influencers” on TikTok, the platform where people post short videos of themselves, often dancing or lip syncing. He has garnered 1.3 billion likes for his videos and 21 million followers. Richards is often shirtless in his TikToks and frequently accompanied by a posse of fellow influencers, known as the “Sway House”, who have been living together in Los Angeles.

Then, last month, Richards and other influencers announced they were leaving TikTok to join a similar platform called Triller, where Richards will be “chief strategy officer” with a large equity stake – never mind that he has just left high school (he tells me he has no plans to go to college at present).

No, this news was not as big as other recent TikTok headlines, namely that President Donald Trump has tried to shut the app out of the US because of “national security” concerns relating to its Chinese parent company, ByteDance – or that Microsoft has been in talks to buy TikTok’s US, Canadian and Australasian businesses. But what Richards and TikTok teach us about power and information is worth heeding.

When I was a teenager in 1980s Britain, a “star” was somebody who was packaged by powerful corporate interests and presented to me in a one-directional manner, usually on a television show such as *Top of the Pops*. Information and celebrity flowed vertically down to me. Advertising was attached to this, on TV and radio and in print, in a relatively obvious fashion.

Today, however, celebrities build their fan bases more horizontally, by appealing to a crowd, interacting with them and persuading them to enlist their friends to spread ideas and brands. Richards, for example, says he started posting videos at 13, largely on his own, and while he is now “managed” by a professional crew, he knows he cannot build momentum unless he finds a way to constantly grab his audience’s attention in an interactive manner. “You have to surprise them,” he says.

Today’s influencers, in other words, are a little like the wandering minstrels of medieval Europe: unless they can constantly delight and read their crowd and echo their mood, their influence and fame will quickly die. So will their revenues: instead of endorsing top-down advertisements, the influencers monetise their fame partly through product placements. Richards, for example, has promoted musicians and brands such as sportswear maker Reebok and shoe com-

pany Crocs. The agency that represents Richards told CNBC that influencers make “anywhere from \$5,000 to \$20,000 a post” depending on how many followers they have, and thus how much horizontal influence they have on the crowd.

This is striking. But an even more interesting question is what it might mean for politics. One figure who has cropped up in this strange new landscape is Brock Pierce, a former child actor who apparently made a fortune in cryptocurrency. Last month he told me he had long been a mentor of Richards and the TikTok crowd; he is now running as an independent presidential candidate, on a libertarian, digitally focused ticket.

His candidacy is a long shot but he clearly hopes Triller’s audience – with 250 million app downloads, versus TikTok’s two billion – can help his campaign, insofar as they are of voting age, and that he can build a bigger web of influence himself.

‘Gen X leaders at the top of hierarchies are going to find it hard to read, let alone control, these new influencer channels’

The influencers are circumspect: Richards (and the managers of Triller) tell me they want to stay apolitical in the 2020 elections and be “friends with everyone”, including TikTok.

But the key point is that Pierce, and everyone else, knows that if anyone can harness this Gen Z crowd, through whatever app they are using, they could wield a powerful political weapon. Indeed, TikTok has already been deployed: in mid-June, TikTokkers said they had requested huge numbers of tickets for a Trump rally in Oklahoma, only to not turn up, leaving the venue largely empty. TikTok has also played a key role in spreading the messages of the Black Lives Matter protests.

So will the TikTok crowd turn more political ahead of the 2020 race, or be manipulated by outside interests? Or will they migrate to Triller? Could Instagram’s new platform, Reels – intended to compete with TikTok – disrupt things instead? Or might this whole phenomenon just disappear as fast as it emerged? It is hard to predict right now.

One thing is clear: Gen X leaders at the top of corporate and political hierarchies are going to find it hard to read, let alone control, these new influencer channels; hierarchical orders do not work well in this horizontal network world. So even if you have never heard of Richards, Pierce or the Sway House, watch what they do next and ponder what it means to live in a time of horizontal influence. The answer is as discomforting for Gen X as watching Richards’ 15-second videos. **FT**

Gillian Tett will be appearing at this year’s FT Weekend Festival, online September 3-5.

For programme, go to ftweekendfestival.com; gillian.tett@ft.com; [@gilliantett](https://twitter.com/gilliantett)

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