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THE INTERVIEW: DON CHEADLE

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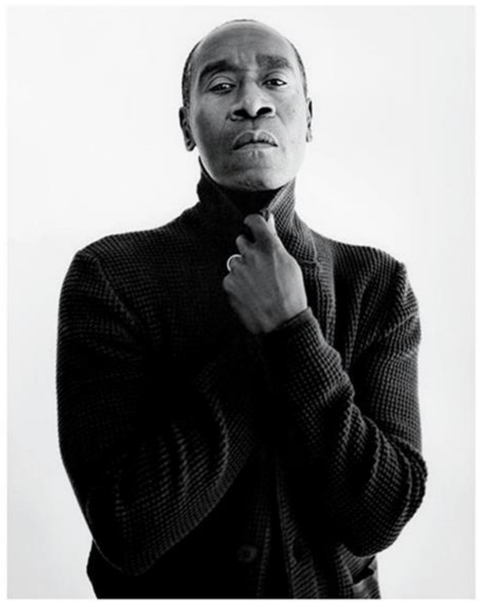


Don Cheadle

To paraphrase the man himself: Hollywood is a business built on sand, a town that eats you twice, where acting and reality become one. Even after a 30-year career, Cheadle is still on the balls of his feet. With the premiere of his riskiest project yet—the Miles Davis biopic *Miles Ahead*—as well as *House of Lies* and superhero roles to attend to, the screen legend explains why in his *Playboy Interview*.

Matt Farwell

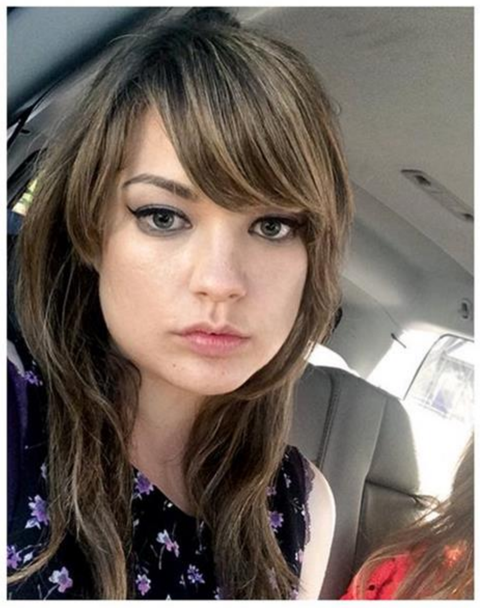
Veterans commit suicide at twice the rate of civilians, and posttraumatic stress is often the cause. Farwell, who served as an infantryman in Afghanistan, struggled to regain his footing after returning to the U.S. With his life spiraling out of control and other treatment options exhausted, it took an experimental injection to get him back on solid ground; he reports his own story in *The God Shot*.

Guy Aroch

It's hard to tell whether Aroch could have captured his intimate portraits of Playmate Camille Rowe had the two not been longtime friends. And it's hard to tell whether Rowe looks to the camera as a lover, a best friend, a partner in crime or something else. As only a master can, Aroch uses the space between himself and his subject to capture an indescribable relationship, leaving us full of wonder.

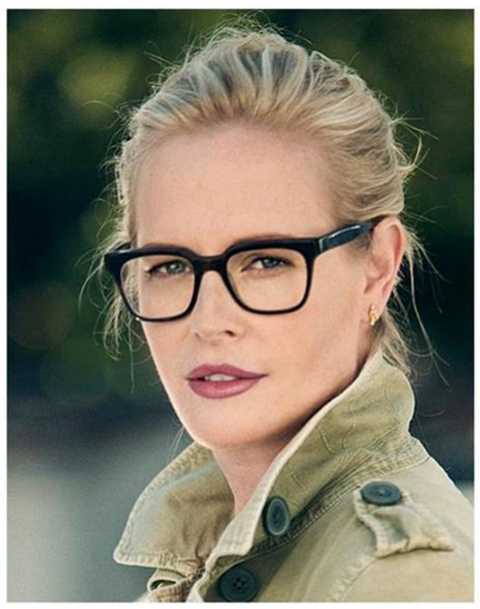
Chantal Anderson

Our March article on Javier Valadez's deportation drew much of its emotional weight from its photography, thanks to Anderson, a Los Angeles–based photographer, documentarian and journalist with a talent for capturing visual narrative. Few others could make a Porsche look downright gritty, as she does in *The Hottest Topless Porsche Ever* in this month's *Auto* page.



Marie Calloway

Calloway is a writer who stares down the harshest details of human experience and refuses to flinch—and her work is all the richer for it. In *Insipidities* Calloway examines the world of a woman whose existence is a tangle of apparent contradictions; in her sex life and beyond she both encourages and inverts the relationship between domination and subjugation. What results is fiction that burns.



Rebecca Black

Photo Director Rebecca Black came to the magazine fresh from coproducing the Sundance-opening documentary *Queen of Versailles.* The same drive to draw high art from reality motivates her aesthetic vision for PLAYBOY's pages. In a world where Instagram has swept aside the airbrush and authenticity reigns supreme, her effort to give expression to the female form is as vital as ever.

Aurel Schmidt

This month's Artist in Residence doesn't just cross high culture with low: She injects both with steroids, mashes them into an unrecognizable pulp and sets the concoction on fire. Schmidt's multimedia art is as varied as her work's emotional range, which can conjure sex, heartbreak, madness and existential angst—sometimes in the same breath. Trust us, it works.

Adam Skolnick

After two decades of reporting from around the world, travel started to feel bland to Skolnick. His jones to escape cookie-cutter tourism brought him to Lagos, Nigeria, where hustle is king and the streets buzz with music, danger and chaos. Welcome to the last genuine city on earth, where no one escapes without searching their soul. Skolnick asks: *Is Lagos the Most Dangerous Party City on the Planet?*


ELL-BEHAVED WOMEN
Y MAKE HISTORY.

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ON THE COVER (AND OPPOSITE) Camille Rowe, photographed by Guy Aroch. Diamonds aren't a girl's only friend: You'll find our Rabbit hanging cozily on Camille's vintage necklace.

PLAYBOY

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MUSK

JŌVAN

It's what attracts

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"I'm no expert on Carl Jung, but I'm connected to his concept of the shadow self. So the *X* in my name stands for the variables in life. We all have an *X*. My music is about the journey to finding a sense of wholeness. But I'm not some religious cult leader telling people they won't be whole until they do the same. Being confused is a big part of it. After all, the least complex thing about me is that I'm a white girl who grew up in the suburbs." *CollXtion II, Allie X's next release, is out this spring.*

"It's liberating when you realize we're supposed to have dark thoughts."

PHOTOGRAPHY BY OLIVIA JAFFE

YES, IT'S COOL TO DRINK CACTUS

Our resident bartender on why now is the perfect time to shake things up with your margarita

You know by now that tequila is cool again, as evidenced by the multitude of premium bottles designed to go down easy. And with warm weather on the way, it's high time to expand your cocktailian mind with the lesser-known agave spirits from Mexico. While smoky mezcal—made in Oaxaca from the espadin agave—has been trending recently, it's being matched in popularity by single-varietal versions from other regions. Though technically a mezcal because it comes from the agave plant, tangy and intense *raicilla* is distilled in the Mexican state of Jalisco and thus falls outside the mezcal denomination of origin. *Bacanora* hails from Sonora; it tends to be less smoky and tastes quite vegetal, almost like juniper and basil. *Sotol* is created in a similar manner as mezcal (generally speaking, agaves are roasted and smoked in an in-ground pit before their juices are distilled) but comes from a member of the evergreen family that looks like an agave. The result is a clean, crisp, vegetal spirit that's awesome for making cocktails. And there's some poetry in these drinks: Once, in Guadalajara, a man told me that tequila makes drinkers shine—the agave, having soaked up all that heat and sun for many years, just has to come out when we drink it, he explained. So drink up and bring on summer from the inside out.—*Ivy Mix*

How to Mix Mexican

Alternative agave drinks to order at the bar (or add to yours)

EL JOLGORIO MEZCAL
This brand produces nine distinct bottlings, each from a different variety of agave and by a different distiller. At about $100 a bottle, it should be savored as a sipper—or mixed with extreme precision.

SOTOL POR SIEMPRE
Chihuahua-based Por Siempre uses alembic pot stills to preserve the smokiness the fruit picks up as it's being roasted. In this case the fruit isn't agave but the desert spoon plant—a.k.a. *sotol.*

DEL MAGUEY ESPADIN ESPECIAL
This very limited bottling is one of the benchmark mezcals on the market. It's extremely complex, with floral, citrusy, salty and butterscotch notes—a mezcal to be sipped, for sure.

THE JAVELINA

Think of this celery-flavored cocktail as a fresh and savory (and slightly spicy) alternative to an old fashioned.

1½ oz. Sotol Por Siempre • ¾ oz. fresh lemon juice • ½ oz. simple syrup • ¼ oz. Velvet Falernum • 2 dashes Bittermens Hellfire Habanero Shrub

Muddle two or three one-inch celery pieces in cocktail shaker. Add liquids. Shake and strain into rocks glass filled with crushed ice. Garnish with thinly sliced celery stalk.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY GRANT CORNETT

The Smartest Dumb Phone

Imagine a mobile phone that can't take a photo, run an app or give you directions. It sounds retro—and strangely refreshing. The Jasper Morrison–designed MP 01 from Swiss company Punkt is basic and black in a way that makes Apple products look weak and fussy. While the MP 01 will never replace your smartphone, think of it as a backup phone or a blissful downgrade in connectivity. Free of the distractions of shitty Instagram photography, lazy geolocation and clichéd emojis, you may feel your urge to dip into the data stream subside, if only for a moment. *$295, punkt.ch*

PHOTOGRAPHY BY GRANT CORNETT

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It's Time to Buy an American Watch

How to get in on the ground floor of this homegrown revolution

With all due respect to Switzerland, the United States is poised to reclaim its status as the global leader in watchmaking. In the mid- and late 19th century, stateside watch brands were unveiling innovations left and right, only to be overtaken by the Swiss during the Great Depression. But today, with Detroit-based Shinola seeing success with its locally assembled Runwell, "we are currently in the middle of an American watchmaking revolution," says Michael Wilson, co-founder and chief executive of Kansas City–based Niall. Although the Niall GMT's movements are still produced in Switzerland, most of its production happens within 10 minutes of the company's main office. Kobold (launched in 1998 by founder Michael Kobold as part of a school project at Carnegie Mellon University) also relies on Swiss movements, but when the company released its Spirit of America model back in 2006, it was the first large-series timepiece to be produced in the U.S. in nearly 40 years. Now Los Angeles–based Weiss Watch Company is set to take things to the next level with the spring launch of the first scalable production of a watch movement in the U.S. in five decades. Founder Cameron Weiss designed the 120-part mechanical movement, and the entire thing is manufactured in L.A. by a team of artisans cobbled together from different fields. The initial watch outfitted with the American-made movement is a limited-edition run, but there are ambitious plans for expansion. The company's aviation-inspired Field Watch with aged leather strap will soon be head-to-toe American. And now it's coming full circle: Weiss says, "I have even been approached by Swiss companies looking to source watch parts from Weiss Watch Company here in the U.S."—*Chadner Navarro*

Weiss Standard Issue Field Watch, white dial, $950.

The Future of Fragrance Is Unisex

Postgender cologne is having a moment, and it smells pretty good

When Calvin Klein launched CK2, the new update of its legendary unisex cologne CK One, it did so with much postgender fanfare. In addition to a bottle with multiple anatomical interpretations (pictured at right), a provocative ad campaign shot by art photographer Ryan McGinley features models paired in various guy-guy, girl-girl, androgynous guy–androgynous girl configurations. The company says the fragrance "celebrates the diversity of connections between two people...defined by who they are, not what they are" and that it is a "gender-free fragrance for a man or a woman, without prejudices." So what exactly does a prejudice-free fragrance smell like? In this case it's bright and cucumbery, with the subtlest of sweet wood notes. It doesn't indulge in the typical markers of masculine (super earthy) or feminine (floral) and as such is something versatile, inoffensive, everyday and, in a word, normal.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY GRANT CORNETT

CK2, $75 for 3.4 ounces.

Three (Manly) Postgender Fragrances

LE LABO SANTAL 33
If you want to musk up, this is the hipster cologne to do it with (smelled in emerging zip codes in New York and L.A.). It's intoxicatingly woodsy, funky and spicy—and best used sparingly.

ESCENTRIC MOLECULE 01
This cologne has grassy, fresh-cut wood aromas and reacts to your body chemistry to create a unique scent. Women will need to lean in to smell it, which is a good thing.

BYREDO ROSE OF NO MAN'S LAND
Named for the front-line nurses of World War I, this unisex perfume has subtle rose notes; wearing it is a true test of a man's trans-scent-ual confidence.

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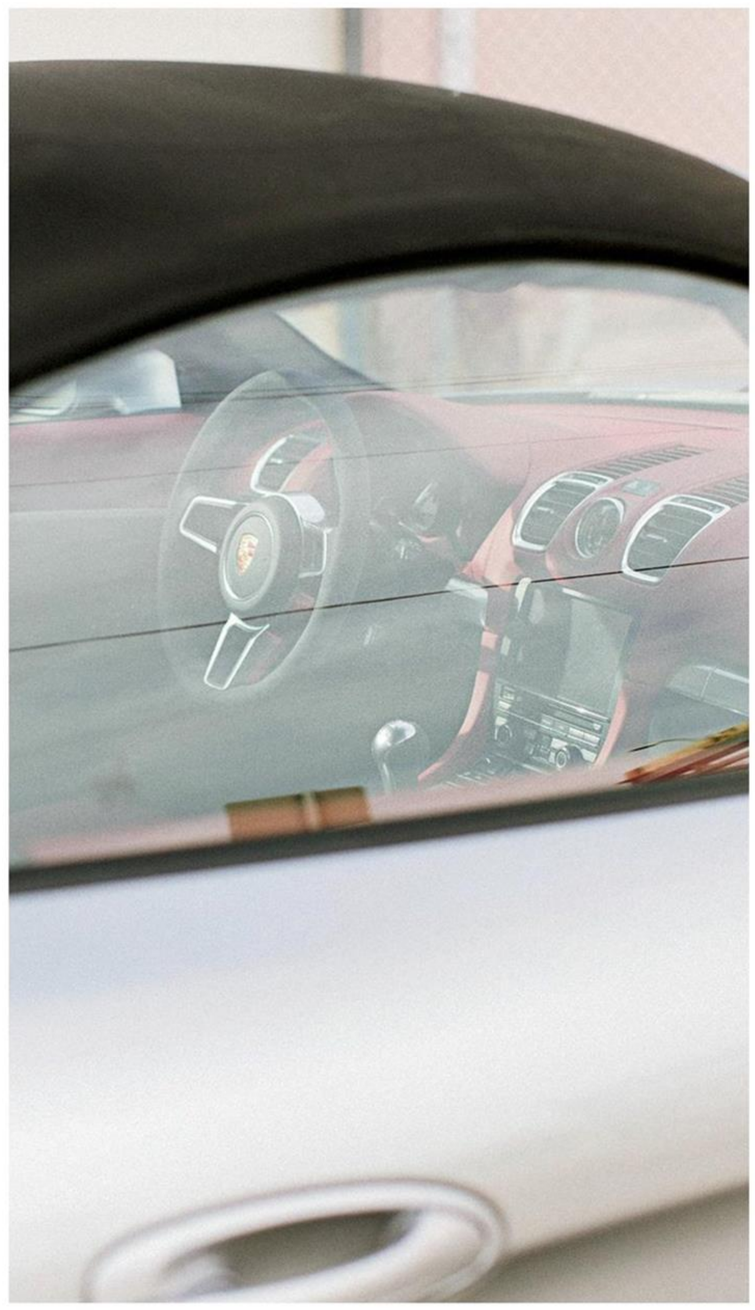
The Hottest Topless Porsche Ever

The new Boxster Spyder is lighter, faster and just about all you could want in a roadster

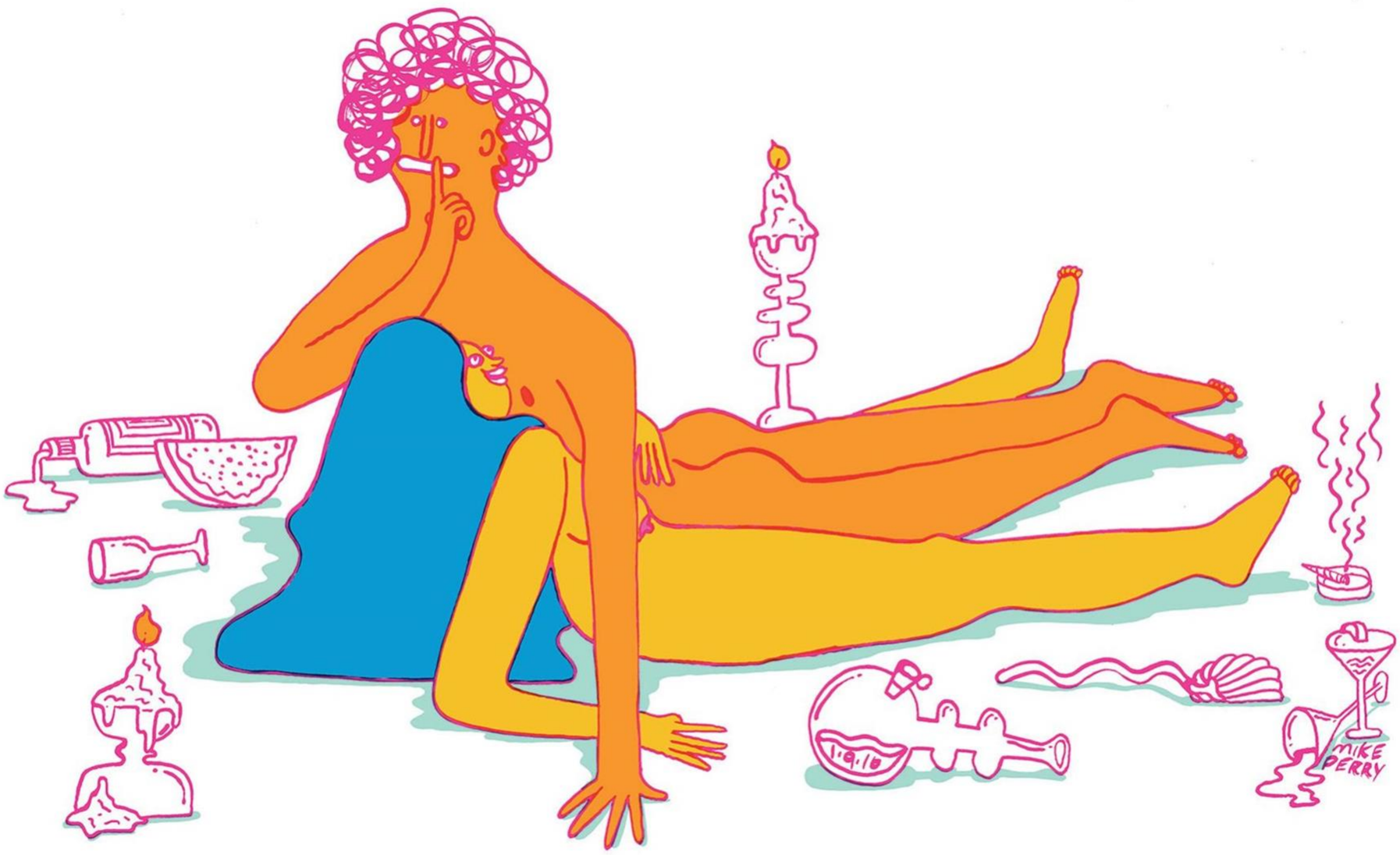
Call us superficial, but we think the Speed Racer–like humps behind the headrests of the 2016 Boxster Spyder are its coolest feature. And if you're into the substantive side of driving, you won't be disappointed either. We found the new top-of-the-line Boxster as addictive cruising Sunset Boulevard as it was powering through the sloping volcanic byways on the Big Island of Hawaii—though the latter definitely leaves you more tempted to pony up a down payment on the $82,100 auto. It's easy to get a little cocky driving the topless two-seater because of how well it handles as you push in and out of turns. Powered by the same 3.8-liter six-cylinder engine that drives the Cayman GT4, with a few tweaks, the Boxster Spyder's overhaul includes a lighter aluminum body, a tighter version of the 911 Turbo's electromechanical power-steering system and brakes from the 400-plus horsepower 911 Carrera S in-line. Inside and outside, it's the best bang-for-buck Porsche yet.—*Marcus Amick*

PHOTOGRAPHY BY CHANTAL ANDERSON



THE NUMBERS

PRICE: $82,100
HORSEPOWER: 375
TORQUE: 309 LB.-FT.
ZERO TO 60 MPH: 4.3 SEC.
TOP TRACK SPEED: 180 MPH
MPG: CITY 18/HIGHWAY 24



My Friend's a Self-Involved
SENSITIVE DOUCHEBAG

BY **RACHEL RABBIT WHITE**

Q: *I kind of hate my best friend. Dan was my college roommate. I was the shy kid from nowhere; he was the one with experiences beyond his years. He lost his virginity on a hayride, did mushrooms at 14 and could always outtalk everybody else in the room. He introduced me to everything: drugs, girls and drama. Flash-forward a decade. I've landed a decent job and a comfortable living situation, while Dan is still living like a 21-year-old. He works part-time at a grocery store and wakes up next to a new Tinder date every morning. Maybe it's jealousy, but lately I find him to be grotesque. These days we don't have much to talk about, unless the subject is Dan and how many chicks he's hooked up with or drugs he's done. I'm starting to think our friendship has run its course. Am I being too sensitive, or is Dan a total douche caboose I need to drop?*

A: It sounds as though Dan is what I like to call a "manic pixie fuck-boy." The MPFB is marked by his slight handsomeness, impressive speech, emotional meltdowns and an insistence on making your life more "meaningful"—whether you want him to or not. In the romantic realm, breaking up with an MPFB is hard because, well, there's never actually any true "dating" in the first place. Your connection with Dan is a platonic alliance between bros, but a common toxic friendship narrative keeps you together: The MPFB gets to fuck up, and in turn you get to be the "real adult," the one with your shit together.

To discuss these dynamics I brought together a cadre of Prada-bag-wielding bitches who refuse to settle but are not impervious to the MPFB's charms. After comparing notes on archetypal MPFBs—Shia LaBeouf! Ethan Hawke!—we got down to the issue at hand. One of the girls, Helena, 26, sat forward with a serious expression. "They're unstable, and that's what is interesting to us," she said. "Other women would walk away within minutes of meeting this type of dude, but the cycle of being chased and then rejected is intoxicating."

"I often casually date MPFBs," said Maureen, 29. "I treat them with as much humanity as they treat me: none. And that's why it's necessary to ghost on them. Of course they'll blow up your phone. If it gets bad, just send a text saying you need to break it off, and leave it at that."

"But a manic pixie fuck-boy never really lets go," warned Gabby, 22. The girls concurred enthusiastically. "You agree to take space, and the next thing you know, he's based a character in his novel on you." (Be grateful, Sensitive Bro, that you'll never have to read your "fictional" sex scene in which an MPFB narrates the thoughts running through his mind as he goes limp, suddenly aware of a certain existential malaise, the sound of the curtains rustling in the A/C.)

Defriending the douchebag is the best way to break the cycle you're stuck in. Friendship works only when it's voluntary. The people in an MPFB's life are a captive audience to his genius. There is no contract binding you to Dan—only the bro-ment, which you should enjoy, not endure. Ghost away.

Questions? E-mail advisor@playboy.com.

ILLUSTRATION BY MIKE PERRY

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GREG CHAIT

The founder of luxury cashmere brand the Elder Statesman on what keeps him inspired

PHOTOGRAPHY BY **KATE PARFET**

MY WAY

I think, live, work and talk in a stream of consciousness. Let's just call it a fluid life. A trip to Tokyo, 10 executed ideas, six great meals, four dips in the ocean, two dates, three trips to a Russian *banya,* countless beers with friends, one and a half major hangovers, a lot of quality family time and much dreaming—these are only a fraction of what can happen in a typical week.

When I think about what "my way" means in my personal language, it translates to "living free and unwavering belief." Dylan Thomas's poem "Do Not Go Gentle Into That Good Night" resonates with me because it's beautiful—and because it partly describes my process.

I have literally and metaphorically been saying "when in Rome" my whole life, in my business, my personal life, my family life. But my Rome isn't so much about conforming to society as it is about conforming to the spirit of the moment, whatever that may be. Let me explain.

Want to go to Normandy for a day? Sure. Make an eight-foot cashmere teddy bear? Make it 12 feet. Eight days to finish a collection? Totally possible. It may seem fragmented, but viewed all at once, everything adds up.

A lot of people need to go far away to find themselves, or need to head to big social gatherings to have fun, or need a drink to relax, or have to go to an office to work, or have to drive a certain car to feel good. These are things I do and like, but they can be limiting if you overcommit to just one as the solution. I view them as evolving tools in an ever-expanding tool kit put to use for the greater good of Rome. Let me explain further.

When I close a big deal: Rome. Find just the right color: Rome. Have a beautiful moment with my kid: Rome. Figure out a modern-family tactic with my ex and her new husband, whom I call a friend: Rome. Have a crush on a girl: Rome. Brainstorm a totally insane but executable project: Rome. Fight for a belief even though no one thinks it's going to work: Rome. Have the freedom to make the hard decision: Rome. Take small hits: Rome. Take major hits and get right back up: Welcome to the Vatican.

Not pursuing a dream because of imagined fears: not Roman. Staying with a shit project out of ego: not Roman. Justifying good when great is possible: Roman suburbs at best.

I applied this ethos to the creation of the Elder Statesman, and a beautiful monster was born. She's a vehicle for my expensive eye, my weirdness, my addiction to work and fun, and my need for creative instant gratification. She's forever young, fertile, sensitive and sometimes mean, but she's beautiful, strong and sweetly naive with a very old soul. I built something I could love. ■

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THE RABBIT HOLE

ON MARIJUANA

BY **BEN SCHOTT**

4:20

Just as 2:30 is the only time for a dental appointment, so 4:20 is the best time (or date) to get high. The etymology of this "stoner code" is still debated ad absurdum, but it's safe to say that it has nothing to do with:

Adolf Hitler's birthday (4/20/1889)
Four-and-twenty blackbirds *baked* in a pie
Bob Dylan's "Rainy Day Women #12 & 35"
The number of compounds in cannabis
A Columbine remembrance (4/20/1999)

The most likely origin dates to 1971 and a quartet of San Rafael High School stoners (the "Waldos") who met (by a wall, hence the nickname) to get high at 4:20 in the afternoon. ¥ Contrary to myth, the clocks in *Pulp Fiction* are not all set to 4:20; however, Bill Murray is seen wide-awake with jet lag at precisely 4:20 A.M. in *Lost in Translation.*

JAZZ CIGARETTES

The Jazz Age was infused with marijuana, which *vipers* (devotees) called *tea, reefer, muggles* and *gage.* The influence of weed is more than hinted at in a range of jazz songs:

"The Man From Harlem" · Cab Calloway
"Viper's Drag" · Fats Waller
"Texas Tea Party" · Benny Goodman
"When I Get Low, I Get High" · Ella Fitzgerald

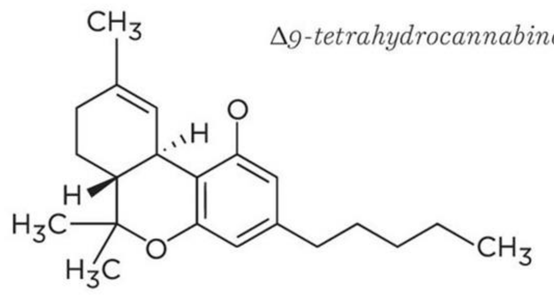
In his 1959 study "The Use of Drugs by Jazz Musicians," Charles Winick asked 357 New York jazz artists about their narcotic use:

MARIJUANA		HEROIN
82%	*tried at least once*	53%
54%	*occasional user*	24%
23%	*regular user*	16%

"4:20 mean you either roll up or roll out."

—METHOD MAN

SPLIFFCELLANY



Δ9-tetrahydrocannabinol

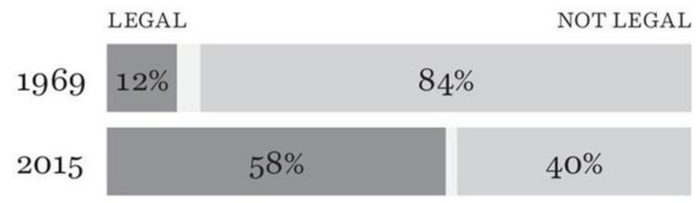
The "marijuana detection window" for urine tests is a crucial issue for drug courts (and some job applications). Yet the common belief that "washout" takes 30 days may be an overestimate; research from 2006 suggests that weed may be detectable for only three (light, occasional use) to 21 days (heavy, chronic use). But don't blame us if you get busted. ¥ The slang "B" refers to the amount of dope that fits inside a matchbox. ¥ A 2010 *Lancet* study ranked 20 illicit and licit drugs by the overall harm they cause, with the most harmful in first place:

1	Alcohol	11	Ketamine
2	Heroin	12	Methadone
3	Crack cocaine	13	Mephedrone
4	Methamphetamine	14	Butane
5	Cocaine	15	Khat
6	Tobacco	16	Anabolic steroids
7	Amphetamine	17	Ecstasy
8	Cannabis	18	LSD
9	GHB	19	Buprenorphine
10	Benzodiazepenes	20	Mushrooms

¥ Interviewed by the BBC, Chico Marx revealed how his brother Julius acquired his now famous nickname: "We used to wear a little bag around our neck, called a grouch bag. In this bag we would keep our pennies, some marbles, a couple of pieces of candy, a little marijuana, whatever we could get." ¥

POLL YOUR OWN

"Do you think the use of marijuana should be made legal, or not?"—Gallup poll



Below are the rates of marijuana use within the U.S. population, surveyed in 2014:

%	*lifetime*	*past year*	*past month*
TOTAL	44	13	8
Male	50	17	11
Female	39	10	6
Age: 12–17	16	13	7
18–25	53	32	20
≥26	46	10	7

When users report how they got their last hit, a friend with weed is a friend indeed, but a friend who shares is a friend who cares.

Bought it	47%
Got it free or shared someone else's	48%
Traded for it	1%
Grew it	1%
Method unspecified	2%

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, "National Survey on Drug Use and Health," 2014

FOUR STAGES OF SCHWAGG

Excited mental well-being accompanied by motor excitation
Mental confusion accompanied by illusions and hallucination
Oneiric (dreaming) ecstasy
Depression and sleep

SOURCE: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 1951

DOPE-CABULARY: *Acapulco gold · Aunt Mary · bhang · bifter · Bob Hope · chronic · doobie · dutchie · gage · ganja · giggle-smoke · grass · hash · hashish · herb · joint · kif · kush · kutchie · loco weed · Mary Jane · Mary Warner · mohasky · mooters · mota · mu · muggles · paca hash · pot · reefer · roaches · schwagg · sinsemilla · soles · sticks · tea · temple balls · tool · wacky-tobacky · weed · whoonga*

BOB ODENKIRK

You'll be glad to know that the star of Better Call Saul and W/ Bob & David—two of the most adored spin-offs in recent TV history—is not comfortable with his newfound success

Q1: *Your longtime manager, the late Bernie Brillstein, said, "When your time has come, success will find you." Where were you when it happened?*

ODENKIRK: Sitting in an office at Raleigh Studios, writing a pilot that was destined to fail—one of many. I got a phone call from my agent. "You're going to get offered a role," he said. "Don't say no. It's a good one." I don't know why he felt he had to remind me: I'd been saying yes to everything. I was in development on a couple of projects. I was directing commercials. I'd shot three films. I wrote a show about four dads, *Incompetent Husbands,* and I wrote a show about minor league baseball, *San Diego Snakes.* I wrote a couple of movies. I was also doing little roles here and there, stuff a friend asks you to do and you show up for a day. But it's not really filling your life. I felt a little lost in the wilderness. So I get this call, and the show was *Breaking Bad.* It was a drama and a different kind of acting than anybody had asked me to do before. I'd never seen the show. I called a friend who had. "Oh yeah, that's my favorite show," he said. "You gotta do that." It helps to have someone go, "It's *awesome.*" So I said okay. I had to fly to Albuquerque. I took the bus to the airport. From then on, good things started happening.

Q2: *At the final Breaking Bad wrap party you said, "A TV series is ultimately judged by its spin-off." What are your favorite spin-offs?*

ODENKIRK: If I said *Petticoat Junction,* would you believe me? You would be a fool. No, my favorite is "Schultz's Schnitzelhaus," the spin-off from *Hogan's Heroes* where Sergeant Schultz opens a noodle restaurant after the war. Lasted for eight seasons in Austria.

Q3: *In his recent Playboy Interview, Bryan Cranston said he rents you his house in Albuquerque and you sleep in his bed. What are your dreams like when you slumber in the bed of the one who knocks?*

ODENKIRK: I dream of being chased by Emmys trying to give themselves to me.

Q4: *What was Bryan's best advice on how to be a leading man?*

ODENKIRK: I wanted to know how hard it was to have my own show. He was very encouraging: "You ran *Mr. Show,* so you've already been a leader on set. You're ready for this." I said, "I know that, but how do you do it? What does

BY **DAVID RENSIN** PHOTOGRAPHY BY **AMANDA DEMME**

your day look like?" He said, "Oh, okay. You wake up, you study your lines, and you get to work. At lunch you study your lines. You have them make you dinner—because you will not have time to get dinner—and then you go home and study your lines. You study your lines in the airport. You study them on the plane. You study your lines when you're back home. That's how you do it." Maybe it sounds obvious, but he made it concrete. You work hard.

Q5: *It sounds like there's no time for fun.*

ODENKIRK: There are times when, if the dialogue is fairly dry, I have a great, deep-seated need to be goofy. I might ask the director if I can just do a take where I get to be stupid, to get it out of my system. On the movie *Nebraska* I had to read a news report. I could not get through that thing. I said, "Can I just do a silly one? Please? Shoot it, but I'm just going to completely make fun of everything I'm saying." Once I did that I was able to do it straight. On *Better Call Saul* there's a courtroom scene in the first season, a montage of me walking around yelling and lecturing. That's all me goofing around.

Q6: *Under what circumstances would you call Saul?*

ODENKIRK: A car accident? [*laughs*] Please tell me I'll never have to call one of those lawyers.

Q7: *Late last year you and David Cross did a highly anticipated four-show run on Netflix of your inimitable brand of sketch comedy provocatively titled W/ Bob & David. Where is Mr. Show now and what is he doing?*

ODENKIRK: He's in Ukraine and is a very successful live stage act touring Eastern Europe. I imagine it's still very popular in Turkey.

Q8: *Given your recent noncomedy commitments, how much did you feel you had to re-hone your comedy edge when you did W/ Bob & David?*

ODENKIRK: I didn't. I've done it for 25 years pretty much day in and day out. If I had to write a comedy show starting today, I wouldn't be intimidated by it. You have to remember a few things, but I don't think it's that hard. We did *W/ Bob & David* in just a few months. We kicked right into it. And we want to do more if we can and be even more different—like the "Salesman" piece in the last show, where we riffed on the Maysles brothers documentary *Salesman*. I had also recently done [IFC sketch series] *The Birthday Boys*. I was in the writing room every day for months, even while I was doing *Better Call Saul*. In fact, there are probably four sketches in *W/ Bob & David* that I wrote for *The Birthday Boys*. So I don't feel that far away from comedy. But ask me in two years.

Q9: *When you were a guest on Marc Maron's WTF podcast, he said many of his listeners regard Mr. Show as "the starting place of modern comedy." Do you agree?*

ODENKIRK: *Mr. Show* was a really strong point-of-view sketch show at a time when there weren't many. Anything like that is always a touchstone for people, and it inspires them to think, What about *my* sensibility? If these guys can do it so purely and so directly, it gives me hope. I spent years writing on *Saturday Night Live,* and I learned about sketch writing from Jim Downey, Robert Smigel and Al Franken. Those guys are really good. I came to *Mr. Show* wanting to do the best work I could do, so it has a rhythm to it. The sketches have fairly good construction overall. I think it's true, but you'd have to ask the people who claim to be inspired by it.

Q10: *You've cited Monty Python as a major influence. Have you ever discussed Mr. Show with any of them?*

ODENKIRK: I interviewed John Cleese onstage in San Diego for his latest book. I certainly told him about *Mr. Show,* but he'd never heard of it. No idea. He didn't know *Breaking Bad* either. I didn't care. It's my job to know their stuff. *Monty Python* truly was the inspiration for me to try *anything* in this business. It makes me so happy. I don't think the stuff I've done is *Monty Python* level, but I'm proud that the material Dave and I do is grounded there. Okay, "more leaden" could be another term. But I'm okay with that.

Q11: *Is it true you originally wanted to do drama?*

ODENKIRK: Even though I wanted to do sketch comedy, onstage I felt like, What am I doing up here? No one wants to look at me when I'm standing next to David Cross or Chris Farley or Jay Johnston. Those guys are fun to watch doing sketches. Instinctively I felt I might actually be fun to watch in a good drama. I have a complex energy. You watch and go, "That guy says he wants one thing, but what does he really want?" That really works in drama when you're looking for ulterior motives; in sketch comedy it's not good. Sketch comedy should be simple, fun, direct. [*pauses*] I know what you're going to say: that I do fine with sketch comedy. Okay. But I'm not *as good* as those guys.

Q12: *What about David Cross makes you jealous? Would David be even funnier with hair and you with less hair?*

ODENKIRK: He's funnier than me. He's one of the funniest people I've ever met. He's quick with a joke, a line, a turn. I can be quick, but he's quick 90 percent of the time, compared with my 40 percent. I'm serious. He takes an attitude quicker and he's got a comic dimension that's readily understood. And he's super funny just the way he is. I might be funnier bald—totally bald, instead of half bald.

Q13: *When you work with David Cross, why does your name always come first in the titles?*

ODENKIRK: Could you not bring that up, buddy?

Q14: *In a Better Call Saul podcast you discussed Jimmy McGill/Saul Goodman getting comfortable in his own skin. How and when did you get comfortable in your own skin?*

ODENKIRK: I'm not very comfortable. I'm pretty restless. You should get comfortable

EVEN IF YOU LIKED ALL THE STUFF I DID IN THE PAST TWO YEARS, YOU'D THINK, BUT YOU'RE A SKETCH CLOWN.

at some point, don't you think? Like somewhere around the age of, uh, 53. It's hard to find balance in life. Maybe now I'm a little more sure of what I can do, which also includes what I can't do, so I'm a little more secure with saying, "It's okay I can't do that; it's not me." For instance, you're asked to do things for PR, and when I was younger I'd say, "Yeah! Anything to get the word out. I mean literally *anything*." But now I know who I am, and I know when something's not good for me and when I won't be fun.

Q15: *Which you demonstrated on Jimmy Kimmel Live! when you gave him a list of tough questions to ask you because you thought people were too nice to you.*

ODENKIRK: That joke was meant to come out of honesty. I'm sorry, I can't help but think that, however much somebody appreciates this great work I've been allowed to do, they also have another question, which is "Look at your fucking head. Why are you even on a show?" I would ask it. I'm proud of the work I've done. I think it's good, and I'm glad it works. I don't try to tank. But I still think that even if you liked all the stuff I got to be a part of in the past two years, you'd think, But you're a sketch clown. What right do you have? Years ago, I remember being shocked at how my friends in comedy oftentimes couldn't take criticism of what they did—which is weird, because all we do is criticize. We make fun of everybody in the world for being indulgent, hypocritical and full of themselves. That's what comedy is: pointing out idiocies. So shouldn't we expect and even look for people to do the same to us?

Q16: *As you said, you're good at playing a dramatic character who is more complex beneath the surface. So what does Jimmy McGill really want?*

ODENKIRK: Sadly, respect from the people he loves: his brother, his girlfriend. I wish him luck with that. Also, to get lucky. He's cynical but goodhearted. He's very much an everyman. Jimmy is so much more relatable and likable than Saul Goodman. He even says, to Walter White, "My name isn't Saul Goodman. I'm *not* Saul Goodman." In *Breaking Bad* you only see one very small part of his life. We don't know what his world looks like outside that office. I think we can assume, from his energy, that he's got some equilibrium in his life, briefly. But there's no certainty. I hope the viewers of *Better Call Saul* notice that.

Q17: *How do you find your equilibrium?*

ODENKIRK: Riding my bike up to the Griffith Observatory. Just being distracted, not trying to solve a problem or get something down on paper. Especially in Los Angeles, because the danger of riding in traffic really focuses you and makes you think of what you want on your tombstone.

Q18: *When do you get scared?*

ODENKIRK: I got scared about *Better Call Saul* when I saw the billboards go up. Up until then it's just a project I'm raring to go make happen and do the best we can with. I'm like, "Let's go! Let's go! Yeah! Who knows what we can do with it! It's exciting!" And then the billboards go up and you go, "Uh-oh. People are going to *watch*."

Q19: *Where do you keep the 1989 Emmy you won for writing on SNL? And the 1993 Emmy from The Ben Stiller Show?*

ODENKIRK: They're at my wife's office, and I think they're impressive there and make people smile. If I looked at them every day my blood would curdle and my ego would turn to an evil snake-eating-itself kind of creature.

Q20: *Is it necessary to suffer for art?*

ODENKIRK: Yes. Come on, do you trust anyone who enjoys doing their work too much? I don't. That's how you get *A Prairie Home Companion* and Thomas Kinkade shit. ■

You Can't Handle THE TRUTH

We're more fascinated with true crime than ever before. But what are we really looking for?

BY **KATIE WALSH**

It has been a banner couple of years for true-crime creeps. We're accustomed to bingeing on Investigation Discovery with the curtains closed, but the rise of what could be called "prestige true crime" on cable, streaming networks and the podcastosphere has allowed us to come out of the closet. Being fascinated with murder is beyond trendy; it's highbrow, crowned with the laurels of NPR, HBO and Netflix. You can hardly go online without brushing past a think piece on *Serial* host Sarah Koenig's introspective slant on investigative journalism, an update on the trial of Robert Durst, whose bathroom bombshell capped off the final episode of *The Jinx,* or a *Making a Murderer* subreddit dedicated to Steven Avery's court documents.

But is all prestige true crime created equal? We now live in the world of "Fancy *Dateline,*" where the line between art and exploitation can get blurry. Case in point: *The Jinx* began as a fascinating portrayal of a New York real estate scion who escaped retribution for his numerous suspected crimes, but the latter half of the season devolved into director Andrew Jarecki's dogged pursuit of a confession. And for all *The Jinx*'s pedigree and elevated production values, its format—stern male host, cheesy reenactments—soon took on a familiar network glare.

Those reenactments are a far cry from the methods of documentarian Errol Morris, whose groundbreaking 1988 film, *The Thin Blue Line,* resulted in an innocent man's exoneration. Morris's abstract, balletic dramatizations change as the movie progresses, morphing to match each subject's version of events. The idea, he tells us, is that "consciousness is a reenactment. We all reconstruct reality for ourselves again and again and again." *The Jinx,* on the other hand, keeps its reenactments to a single POV. "Are they asking you to think about the nature of the crime," Morris asks, "or are they just showing you the crime?"

Other series trade closure for ambiguity. During the first season of the *Serial* podcast, Koenig spotlights her bewilderment at the then 15-year-old murder of Baltimore teenager Hae Min Lee. Koenig becomes an audience proxy, wrestling with seemingly incompatible facts. Her bond with Adnan Syed, Lee's ex-boyfriend and the man convicted of her murder, further complicates her position. Far from alienating listeners, that factual and ethical murkiness drove hordes of armchair detectives to their keyboards to analyze whatever evidence they could scavenge online. The show's uncertainty, carried along by a plucky soundtrack and Koenig's nerdy charm, became a hallmark of quality.

The filmmakers behind *Making a Murderer* likewise accepted that the truth would defy their show's allotted run-time. The tale of Steven Avery, a man exonerated by DNA evidence after 18 years in prison on a sexual assault charge and then convicted again, this time of the rape and murder of photographer Teresa Halbach, took a decade to adapt into roughly 10 hours of streaming television. Moira Demos says that when she and her co-director, Laura Ricciardi, set out for Wisconsin, they had a lot of questions: "We thought the questions might lead to answers, but actually, each question just led to a thousand more questions." They sought to preserve that experience for viewers by collecting as many primary-source materials as possible—including interviews, documents, courtroom tapes and original documentary footage—and then "immersing the viewer in these materials to let them try to experience the case for themselves," says Ricciardi. But the series is taking a beating for neglecting to include specific pieces of evidence that might have further implicated Avery, and prosecutor Ken Kratz has publicly criticized the show's presentation of events. A Wisconsin radio reporter who appears as part of the media pool in the series has even announced a podcast, *Rebutting a Murderer.* If anything, the truth behind Halbach's death seems further away than ever, but that doesn't mean we'll stop searching for it.

The trend continues to expand and mutate: Older series such as SundanceTV's *The Staircase* are being dusted off for new fans, and Morris is working on another crime documentary, as well as a book about how movies have influenced criminal investigations. True crime even bleeds into fiction: USA Network has announced the "docustyle" crime drama *8 Years Lost,* while the upcoming fifth season of the cult comedy series *Arrested Development* has been billed as "*Making a Murderer* meets Donald Trump." And the colossus of modern true crime finally arrived in February with *The People v. O.J. Simpson: American Crime Story.*

Maybe the difference between true crime and *prestige* true crime is that the latter leaves you craving more information—and more engagement. A common complaint among pop-culture editorialists involves the overheated and unregulated nature of online speculation surrounding these series. But to Demos, the high stakes and complexity that come with real-life crime stories serve as "an antidote to apathy." She adds that "people are craving that—to get involved in the world." When we witness injustice, the desire to be involved in righting a wrong is almost too enticing. And maybe that's enough. If nothing else, this new wave of true-crime entertainment has shown millions of Americans the guts of our criminal justice system—a system that's convoluted, fallible and all but indistinguishable from the gavel-banging operas of prime time. ■

PHOTOGRAPHY BY TREY WRIGHT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Five True-Crime Authors, One Question

Q: *Do you feel you arrived at an indisputable truth about your subject, or did you end up with more questions than answers?*

***The Long Shadow of Small Ghosts* by Laura Tillman**
Years after an unthinkable murder, a small town decides whether to raze the crime scene.
"I came away with a multitude of questions, some of which haven't yet been resolved and may never be. This story is ambiguous and messy by nature, and tailoring it down to a neat thesis would be dishonest. I hope that by leaving things open-ended I've given readers space to engage more directly with these questions—to come to their own conclusions."

***I Will Find You* by Joanna Connors**
The author investigates her own rape, finding connections with the perpetrator's family.
"For me, telling my story didn't bring peace or closure. I learned a key lesson: The rape will always be part of who I am, and I can't change that. I will never, ever be fearless. But it gave me something better: I am open instead of closed. I want connection. I want to hear the stories."

***Boy With a Knife* by Jean Trounstine**
A classroom murder leads to a damning look at the way our system sentences minors as adults.
"I spent seven years writing this book. I began with a question about why a young man who killed someone at 16 could be sentenced to life in prison with only the hope of parole after 15 years. My research into how we arrest, judge and sentence our juveniles who commit crimes took me to more questions about our justice system. I became convinced that our laws need to catch up with our knowledge."

***Alligator Candy* by David Kushner**
A reporter delves into his past to confront the tragedy of his brother's childhood murder.
"I suppose I wound up with a little of both—although I don't know if there is such a thing as indisputable truth. I do think, though, that one of the main reasons I wrote the book was to feel a better sense of who my brother was as a person, and I'm grateful I achieved that for myself. Everyone faces unexpected challenges that seem insurmountable. Perhaps by reading our story, others can be inspired to not only survive but grow from their own trials."

***The Father* by Anton Svensson**
Translated from the Swedish, this stranger-than-fiction story of a trio of bank-robbing brothers is told by a fourth brother from the fringes.
"This is my truth, my way of looking at what happened to my brothers. If you write a book that has the starting point in your own life soil, it is like growing questions in a greenhouse. They will find you faster, force themselves at you and create trouble, but now and then you will also find an answer that is there just because the book was written."

PHOTOGRAPHY BY TREY WRIGHT

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THE S&M OF GAMING

Dark Souls creator Hidetaka Miyazaki will humiliate you and leave you baying for more

It wouldn't quite be accurate to call *Dark Souls III,* out worldwide this month, the most anticipated video game of the year. Of course there's every reason to be excited about its arrival: The release of a new game from the visionary and reclusive developer Hidetaka Miyazaki is always an event, and after *Bloodborne,* his Gothic masterpiece from last year, fans are desperate to revisit the *Souls* franchise. But anticipating the next installment is a lot like trying to psych yourself up for a boxing match knowing full well that, win or lose, you'll be beaten to a pulp.

In each of Miyazaki's games you play a pathetically under-equipped milquetoast, feeble where most heroes are mighty, plunged into a medieval hellscape with a coat of shabby armor and an ineffectual sword. It's common enough for action titles to build to a formidable boss battle or make you slog through an arduous set piece late in the game, but *Dark Souls III* (PC, PS4, Xbox One) is something else entirely. You'll find yourself handily trounced by the very first enemy you encounter—and, rest assured, by every enemy you encounter thereafter.

But that's precisely Miyazaki's appeal. Most games arm you to the teeth, careful not to let the difficulty level interrupt your fantasies of heroism and power. Miyazaki aspires to a higher sort of satisfaction. Conquering even a portion of one of his games feels like a serious accomplishment. You never forget the moment you finally defeat the knight who kept filleting you, or the first time you stand your ground against a dragon and actually survive. Your math teacher was right: The more difficult the problem, the more rewarding its resolution.

Every time Miyazaki makes a new game he raises the challenge—pretty astonishing, given that the urtext of the series, *Demon's Souls,* already seemed virtually impossible. That's how he keeps the thrill fresh and how a *Souls* fan, no matter how accustomed to the gauntlet, will always have another trial to brave. Perhaps at some point we'll hit the wall and the appeal will exhaust itself. But for now, that balance of pleasure and pain is irresistible. We can't wait to be agonized all over again.—*Calum Marsh*

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Stewart Into Darkness

From damaged anchorman to backwoods bigot, ***Patrick Stewart*** *is doing his bravest work yet*

Before he was knighted (leading to the much-loved Twitter handle @SirPatStew), before he was Professor Charles Francis Xavier in the *X-Men* movies and Captain Jean-Luc Picard on *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, and before he started bagging Olivier Awards for his work with the Royal Shakespeare Company, Patrick Stewart had this friend who pulled a knife on him.

"We were drinking in a pub, and he followed me into the men's room and stood barring the door with the knife in his hand," Stewart recalls. "I thought I wasn't going to get out alive. We talked and talked, and finally he put away the knife. I had that experience in mind while playing this bad, violent, unspeakable character in this new movie—only with the man I play, you couldn't exactly have a rational chat."

The bad man in question is the centerpiece of *Green Room,* a brutal thriller written and directed by Jeremy Saulnier (*Blue Ruin*). Stewart plays the velvety-voiced leader of backwoods white supremacists who terrorize a touring punk band (played by Anton Yelchin, Imogen Poots, Alia Shawkat, Joe Cole and Callum Turner). "It was the unlikely nature of the role that caught my attention," Stewart says. "I got to page 35 of the script, put it down and went around my home making sure all the windows and doors were locked. I thought, If the script can terrify me like this in the comfort of my home, what will it be like in a movie theater?"

About his choice to play a character who, bald head aside, is light-years away from Stewart's elegant and sympathetic oeuvre, he says, "He made me think of Norman Bates in *Psycho,* who seems so mild, quiet and reasonable—for a while. I've been looking for roles that will help fracture the perception of me. Jean-Luc Picard and Charles Xavier came to characterize who Patrick Stewart was, in a way that I didn't particularly enjoy."

Mild, quiet and reasonable aren't exactly how you'd describe Walter Blunt, the sexed-up anchorman protagonist of *Blunt Talk*. In the Starz series, brainchild of Seth MacFarlane and *Bored to Death* creator Jonathan Ames, Blunt gets arrested with a transgender prostitute, dreams about Burt Lancaster in tights and begins to deal with PTSD from his army service during the Falklands invasion of 1982—and that's just season one. "To play Walter's wacky, unpredictable behavior is always fun, but his PTSD is something I'd love to see us explore much more," says Stewart, whose father suffered from the condition. "It's a massive problem with veterans and military personnel."

But don't let the heavy roles fool you: SirPatStew, ageless bon vivant, lives on. With the 75-year-old's ongoing commitments, including another Wolverine movie, how can he hope to be available when Taylor Swift—who made him part of her "squad" after he recited her lyrics on NPR—invites him to one of her pajama parties? "I'll pack a book of etiquette so I can make absolutely certain I don't misbehave or offend in any way. The invitation has not yet come."—*Stephen Rebello*

The Thinking Man's Indie Band

Long the poster boys of erudite Brooklyn indie rock, ***Parquet Courts*** *lay themselves bare on their new album, Human Performance*

The last time Austin Brown was at New York's Ace Hotel, he was getting fired from his job as a bellboy "for being criminally late," he explains over bites of bone marrow in the hotel's restaurant. Rising early was a challenge for him, but don't ever question the work ethic of Brown or bandmate Andrew Savage, the dual frontmen of Brooklyn's Parquet Courts: They're one of the most driven bands in modern rock. They've managed at least one annual installment of their word-drunk storytelling and spiky riffs since 2011, growing more assured with each outing. "Any artist who's excited about their new songs," Savage says, "isn't going to want to wait."

Starting with the 2012 single "Stoned and Starving," Parquet Courts have become indie standard-bearers, year-end-list regulars and music festival mainstays. Along the way, they've jammed onstage with members of Pavement and Sonic Youth—role models for smart bands in search of mainstream success without creative compromise. The Courts' fifth album, *Human Performance,* hits on two levels: It's their most nuanced set of songs, and it comes closest to capturing the explorative guitar storms of their live shows (especially the psych epic "Berlin Got Blurry"). And while their previous albums presented them as wiseass young New Yorkers happy to let you know they're too smart to be fooled by anyone's crap, this one finds Savage and Brown focusing on the heart instead of the brain.

The band, which also includes bassist-singer Sean Yeaton and Andrew's brother Max on drums, took their time on the album, recording in multiple studios while on tour. Savage was reeling from the messy end of his first major adult relationship, and Brown was dealing with a debilitating depression. The latter subject is addressed on album opener "Dust," of which Brown notes, with a wipe of his hands, "Once you notice it, you see that it's everywhere."

With *Human Performance,* the band members appear to be more comfortable with themselves and less wary of stepping onto a larger stage. After several releases with the tiny New York label What's Your Rupture? they signed with Rough Trade, the venerable U.K. indie that has brought us everyone from the Smiths to the Strokes. Parquet Courts have a reputation for eschewing social media, interviews and press photographs (instead releasing often deliberately unprofessional snaps), an anti-everything stance Savage chalks up to his childhood as a punk kid in Denton, Texas. Maybe they've loosened up on the press obligations and made an album containing hooks and piercing observations in equal measure, but that Denton kid would be happy to know the band's first release for Rough Trade was the EP *Monastic Living,* an instrumental tangent that's as harsh as *Human Performance* is warm. "A lot of people hate it," Savage says, adding with a smile, "which is great."—*Michael Tedder*

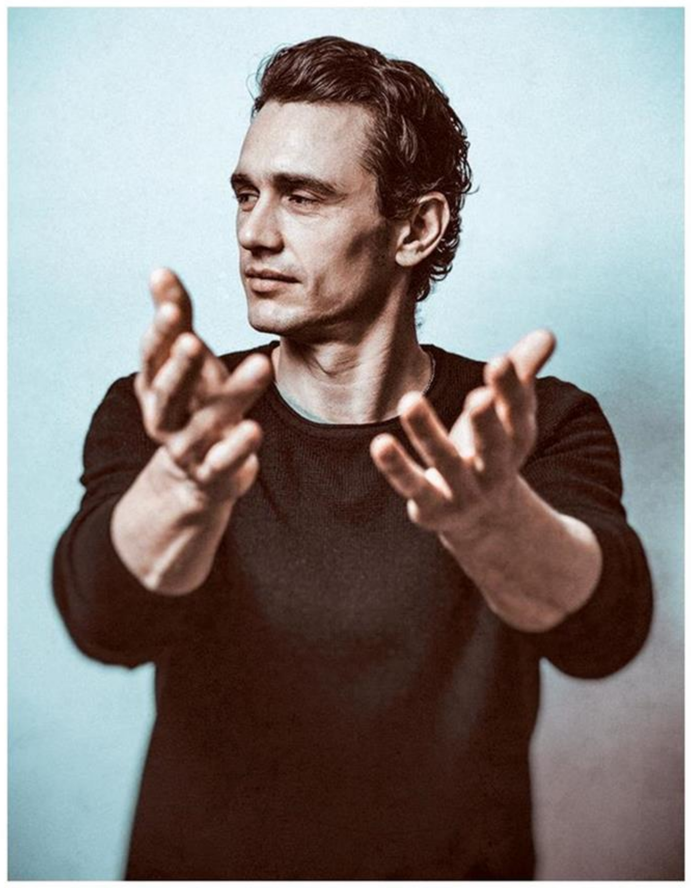
PHOTOGRAPHY BY BEN RAYNER

From left: Austin Brown, Max Savage, Sean Yeaton and Andrew Savage.

COLUMN

FRANCOFILE

Game of Thrones director ***Michelle MacLaren*** *on dealing with diva bears, making* Breaking Bad *and the art of sex scenes*



BY
JAMES FRANCO

JAMES FRANCO: You and I worked together on *The Deuce,* which involved me getting partially naked. You came to me and were very specific about what you were thinking for the scene. What if I had said no?

MICHELLE MACLAREN: You have to approach sex scenes like an action shoot. You have to be matter-of-fact, almost mathematical. As soon as you start being weird about it, everyone starts acting weird. We knew exactly what we were going to do and how we were going to approach it. There were a lot of discussions beforehand with the actresses as well. I don't believe in gratuitous sex or violence. If it serves the story, great. But I don't want to kill someone just because it's a cool, violent shot. In this particular story, nudity is important. It's also important to be real. I've done a lot of sex scenes. I've done *Game of Thrones.* [*laughs*]

FRANCO: You also directed a bear in *Game of Thrones.*

MACLAREN: The trainer came on the set and said to the crew, "Okay, there's no food on set, there are no angry voices, there's no yelling, and everybody has to participate." We said, "What does that mean?" He said, "Every time the bear does something right, the whole crew has to clap and cheer." So every time he did something right, we would all go, "Good boy, Bart!" It made him really happy. It was great. We were shooting the second day and were almost done, but we needed one key shot. It was January or February, which is hibernation season for bears, and Bart decided he was done. He turned around and started toward his trailer. We needed the shot, so we started going, "Come on, Bart! You can do it!" And I swear to God, like a diva, he stopped, slowly turned around and looked at us as if to say, "Oh, all right." Then he sauntered back to the set and did the shot.

FRANCO: You got your start on *The X-Files* with Vince Gilligan. How did you join him on *Breaking Bad*?

MACLAREN: After *The X-Files,* I had one credit to my name. I would get jobs directing, but it was here and there. It was tough. I had to produce to support my directing habit. Vince and I are friends. He called me up and said, "Michelle, will you help produce this pilot with me called *Breaking Bad*?" He pitched the story to me, and I said, "You are the only person I know in Hollywood who could sell a story about a high school teacher dying and selling drugs."

FRANCO: Were you really responsible for the most expensive episode of *Breaking Bad*?

MACLAREN: No, that is so not true! [*laughs*] I was directing an episode called "Four Days Out." I got the script and thought, Oh my God, they want this to be a bottle episode. A bottle episode is one that has very few actors in it, and it's usually shot in one location. The idea is to save money. I remember thinking, Goddamn it, I'm doing a bottle episode. I didn't know how lucky I was to do an episode with Bryan Cranston and Aaron Paul stuck in an RV. So I said to them, "I know you want this to be a bottle episode and you want to shoot the whole scene onstage in an RV, but what's outside the window? What are the guys seeing when they go outside?" I got them to shoot part of it in the desert and part of it onstage, and it evolved into a visually awesome episode. Since it started off as a bottle episode, it did end up costing more money than they thought it would. So Vince told the story in an interview that it was the most expensive *Breaking Bad* episode, which is so not true. I busted Vince about it, and he was like, "I know, I'm sorry." Now I'm going to tell him this happened.

FRANCO: Is it true Jesse Pinkman was going to be killed off?

MACLAREN: Originally, Vince was going to kill Jesse. I think after the pilot, he went, "This guy's great." But I also know that he credits the writers' strike with a lot of the show's success. There was a long hiatus because of the strike, and during that time Vince changed his mind about some things. When he came back, the show went in a different direction. But yes, Jesse was going to be killed off.

FRANCO: *The Deuce* is set in New York City's Times Square in the 1970s, a very particular time and place. There are a lot of female prostitutes in the story who are not treated so well. How do you deal with subject matter like that?

MACLAREN: It was a very sexist time. That's a good question, because when I read the script, I thought, Can I do this? David Simon is really great about writing stories that are controversial and attack an issue head-on. This story is a part of our history that is very real and true. When I wrapped my head around it like that, I realized it's important to tell these stories and show where we evolved from. It's interesting: Some of the moments are empowering for women in an unexpected way. ■

PHOTOGRAPHY BY DAVE MA

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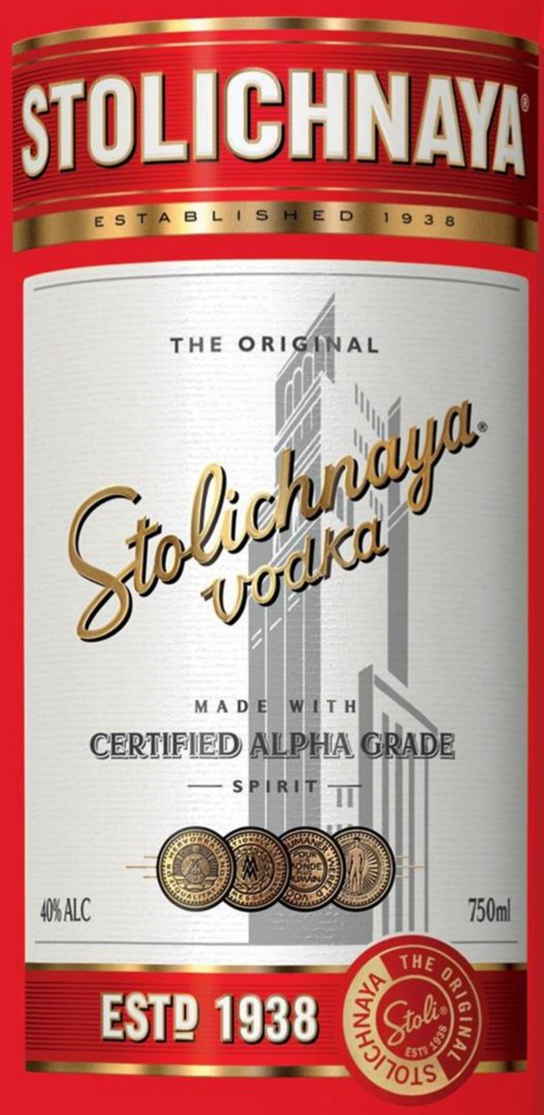

THE POWER OF THE PEOPLE

The political establishment hates primaries and candidates barely survive them, but they're the voters' biggest weapon

BY **JOHN MERONEY**

"You know what, guys? This isn't easy." That was Barack Obama's admonition to his campaign aides back in 2008 after staffers accused Hillary Clinton of being a fake. Clinton had broken down at a café in Portsmouth, New Hampshire while discussing how passionate she was about running for president. Regardless of her sincerity, Obama could appreciate that they were both in one of the most grueling stages of a presidential campaign.

Eight years later, here we are again at the presidential primaries, when the winnowing for the White House hits full force and each side picks a dog for the fight. It's a month when Democrats and Republicans in 29 states cast ballots in primary elections in a frenzy of strategizing and espionage that sends Washington's political class and its biggest donors into fits and convulsions.

As famed *Making of the President* author Theodore H. White once put it, the primary is America's original contribution to the art form of democracy, and political pros hate it because it "removes the nomination of candidates from the hands of cynical party leadership and puts it directly in the hands of the people." And in this year's cycle, unlike most in recent memory, voters have given a giant middle finger to the so-called establishment in both parties.

For those who want to blame someone, start with Theodore Roosevelt. He served as president from 1901 to 1909, but by 1912 he was looking to get back into the game and decided to challenge the sitting president, William Howard Taft, for the Republican nomination. To do so, Teddy had to circumvent the wise men in Washington's (then) smoke-filled rooms, so he pushed the idea of primaries—let the people rule, he exhorted. Roosevelt never made it back to the White House, but he planted the seed.

It didn't reach full flower until 1972. Under this system, the candidate who wins a majority (or a plurality) of the state primaries gets the national party nomination. John F. Kennedy, Jimmy Carter, Ronald Reagan and Obama all benefited from this system, because none of them were Washington's darlings.

"The whole point of this was to get it away from the bosses and democratize the process," says former Massachusetts governor Michael Dukakis, who defeated Capitol Hill heavyweights Al Gore, Joe Biden and Gary Hart for the 1988 Democratic nomination. "Have we done that? Well, yeah."

That accomplishment carries a lot of risk. The grassroots might be galvanized by a candidate who doesn't follow the capital's rules, such as a real estate billionaire from Manhattan or a democratic socialist senator from Vermont. The likelihood that voters will continue to deviate from politicians such as Hillary Clinton and Jeb Bush and turn toward mass movements that oppose Wall Street bailouts and U.S. interventionism is sending shock waves across D.C. Neoconservative *New York Times* columnist David Brooks is afraid of whom voters might favor; he admitted on PBS's *NewsHour,* "I wish we had gray men in suits—[big] donors and other people going and saying, 'We're just going to pick this guy.' "

Until Brooks and other establishment types get their wish, the grind will continue. When I ask former U.S. House Speaker Newt Gingrich, who ran for the Republican nomination in 2012, what he considers the worst part of the primaries, he laughs and says, "Raising money." With the exception of Donald Trump, who says he is funding his own campaign, most candidates would agree. Then there's what Dukakis recalls as the constant "getting out of bed in the morning, going to an airport, going up in the air, coming down, making a speech, going back to the airport, up in the air, coming down and making another speech."

Others see advantages to the long primary slog. "You get your ideas tested," says conservative commentator Patrick Buchanan, who ran an insurgent campaign for president three times beginning in 1992. "You'll be up there speaking and suddenly there's a round of applause for something you've just said and you've said it differently than before. You build up your case and your argument and your speech."

On the road to the White House, the primaries are the most difficult hurdle. It's where candidates learn which issues rouse voters and sharpen the themes they hope will carry them through to the fall. Until they win election night, candidates make those stands in local diners, living rooms, makeshift cable news studios and—in the case of Trump and Bernie Sanders—giant sports arenas that pack tens of thousands of voters, all the while praying that nothing fizzles or, worse, derails their presidential hopes. As JFK said while working his way through those final weeks, "If they don't love you in March, April and May, they won't love you in November." ■

Celebrities, athletes and VIP guests enjoyed a DJ set by Alesso as 24 Playmate Bunnies tore up the stage.

PHOTO CREDIT: GETTY IMAGES

THE PLAYBOY PARTY

On February 5th, guests celebrated the future of Playboy and the newly redesigned magazine at the hottest event in San Francisco during the biggest weekend in pro football.

Thank You To Our Partners

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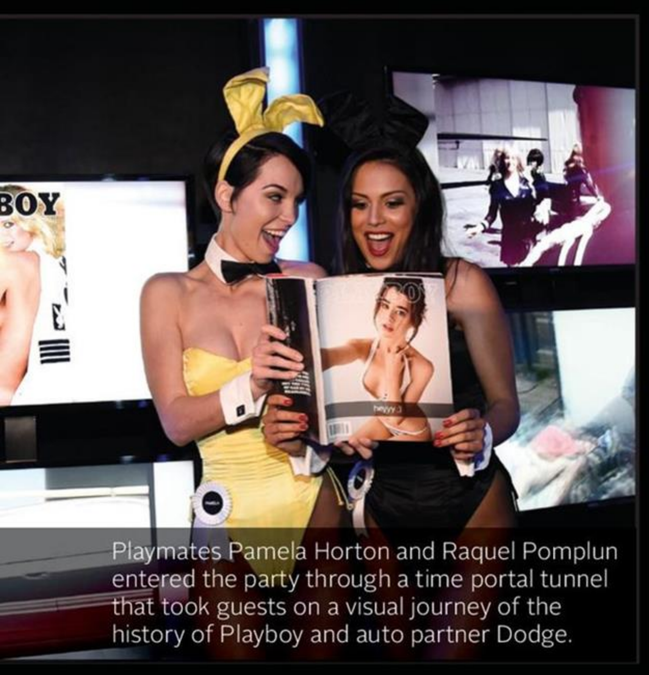
The star-studded event took place in Lot A of AT&T Park.

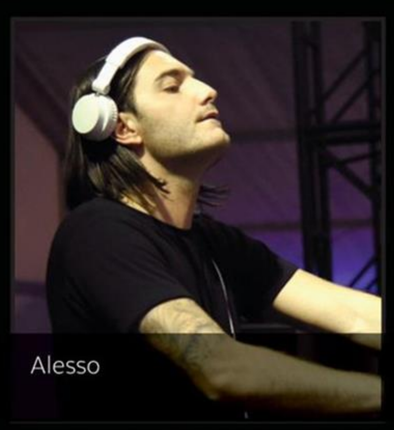
Rapper and entrepreneur 50 Cent celebrates the weekend with Playboy Playmates Eugena Washington, Hiromi Oshima, Carly Lauren and Ashley Doris who wore Bunny Costumes inspired by the gold detailing on his limited edition EFFEN® Vodka football bottle.

Actress AnnaLynne McCord poses with a 2015 Dodge Viper GTS on the red carpet.



Playmates Pamela Horton and Raquel Pomplun entered the party through a time portal tunnel that took guests on a visual journey of the history of Playboy and auto partner Dodge.

TV personailty/ recording artist Nick Lachey enjoys music by DJ Politik.



Alesso

Pro football player Michael Sam arrives at the Playboy party.

DJ Ruckus performs as Cuba Gooding, Jr. joins him on stage.

DO SILENCERS LOOK GOOD WITH SKINNY JEANS?

Meet the gun-loving, indie-music-listening, hipster-beard-growing millennial entrepreneurs disrupting the gun industry

BY **JOHN ALBERT**

Out on the horizon, halfway to Cuba, jagged streaks of lightning illuminate the still waters of the Gulf of Mexico. Inside a Key West resort, a group of men congregate outside a private dining room. Several have the noticeable bulge of barely concealed firearms. A few are dressed in pastels approximating the look of the 1980s television show *Miami Vice*.

The crowd in the dining room is almost exclusively white and male. There are some obvious ex-military men, an assortment of press and a few punkish action-sports types. On a small stage are several covered display cases framed by two large video screens. An intense-looking man in his 30s named Josh Waldron takes the podium. He is a co-founder of SilencerCo, a company that designs and sells high-tech gun silencers. He and his colleagues are in Key West to introduce several new products: the Hybrid, a silencer compatible with pistols, rifles and submachine guns; the Radius, a mounted range finder; and their newest product, a futuristic, angular-looking pistol with a built-in silencer called the Maxim 9, which is a dead ringer for RoboCop's service weapon.

But these tools of combat are being target-marketed to an unexpected crowd. Imagine a New York City coffeehouse. The customers are in their 20s and ironically tattooed. They sip fair-trade coffee and stare at a line of silvery MacBooks. Now imagine a large percentage of them armed with concealed weapons. Sure, it's an unlikely scenario. But if middle-class kids raised on first-person-shooter games such as *Call of Duty* were to eventually transition from online to actual firearms, it might not be far off. The gun debate tends to be defined by the fringes: bird-sanctuary-occupying "patriots" on one side, angry Birkenstock-wearing vegans on the other. The rest of us...well, we're probably more in the middle than we might admit. We abhor mass shootings, but we don't object to a whole lot of gunplay in our movies. We love animals, but we eat tons of meat. So when a company like SilencerCo sets its sights on so-called hipsters and racks up more than 250,000 Instagram followers while indie-rock darling Ryan Adams has fewer than 100,000, all bets are off.

• • •

If you think gun silencers are illegal, you're not alone. Now often referred to as "suppressors," they're legal in 41 states. That said, they remain intensely regulated as part of the National Firearms Act of 1934, alongside machine guns, short-barreled shotguns and rifles. Most admit the inclusion of silencers in that list has much to do with a combination of Depression-era poaching fears and a history of bad press that has marked them, according to the American Suppressor Association, as "assassins' tools."

Advocates for suppressors, including the folks at SilencerCo, argue that the devices merely protect the hearing of the nearly one in three Americans who legally own and shoot firearms. In addition, SilencerCo's artfully designed website touts an increase in accuracy due to less noise and recoil. The company has mounted a combined political and marketing campaign called "The Hearing Protection Act" that includes a #FightTheNoise hashtag along with photos of men, women and children with duct tape over their mouths holding suppressed firearms. It calls fellow suppressor advocates "the Suppressed"—a term the company has trademarked. And while the campaign undoubtedly makes some valid points regarding logic and legality, it all evokes a victim mentality not dissimilar from much of the so-called patriot movement.

No matter where you stand on the firearms divide and the role of the federal government, the fact is, even the best silencers are far from silent. A suppressed gun still sounds very much like a gun, just not ear-shattering. The notion that you could shoot someone at a crowded cocktail party and go unnoticed is absurd. Knox Williams, president of the American Suppressor Association, an industry-sponsored pro-silencer advocacy group, is not pleased with this misconception. "It's guilt by association," he says. "James Bond has done us no favors. The only times I've seen suppressors used in movies and television is by assassins. That's the only time most people have seen a suppressor, and they think it will sound like that. But the sound effects they use have no basis in reality."

As a result, purchasing a suppressor, even in states where it is legal, is far from simple. The process involves arduous paperwork, a signature from law enforcement, a hefty $200 federal tax and a waiting period of four months or more. Regardless, suppressors are steadily gaining in popularity, and no one sells more of them than upstart SilencerCo out of Utah. It does so by

PHOTOGRAPH BY CAESAR SEBASTIAN

DJ Steve Aoki holds up a target while visiting marketing-savvy SilencerCo's Salt Lake City headquarters.

Clockwise from top: Target practice at the launch event; a still from a *Miami Vice*–inspired SilencerCo promo video; weapons on display; Rick Grimes packs a SilencerCo-equipped pistol on *The Walking Dead.*

deliberately ignoring almost every marketing convention of the existing firearms industry.

SilencerCo's Key West event delivers the requisite product specs, but that's where similarities to your typical industry presentation end. Each product is introduced with its own state-of-the-art video featuring atmospheric postrock (think the *Friday Night Lights* soundtrack) and production values rivaling any action-sports company. SilencerCo creative director Michael Shumway explains the tactic: "I think getting a younger demographic involved is something the firearms industry as a whole is ignoring. We hire people from industries that are more progressive. The influences that drive us are not other firearms companies. Action sports are a big one and, as far as technology goes, someone like Apple because of the speed at which they innovate."

The quest to connect with a younger demographic has benefited from recent high-profile product placements. The company may bristle at the depiction of silencers-suppressors as assassins' tools, but its popular Osprey model has annihilated zombies on *The Walking Dead* and figures prominently in the latest *Mission: Impossible* film, *Rogue Nation.* SilencerCo products have also appeared in a number of video games, including the hugely popular *Call of Duty.* Shumway insists none of it has been pay-to-play. "We work with a lot of the prop houses in Los Angeles," he says. "A lot of movies contact us directly because they think our products look cool. We also work directly with a lot of video game studios when they're developing games."

While most of the firearms industry continues to embrace the aesthetic of "tacticool," fetishizing military special ops and law enforcement, SilencerCo aims for the decidedly younger, tattooed X Games crowd. A recent video has extreme mountain biker Cam Zink riding through the desert, executing aerial maneuvers and firing a suppressed automatic rifle. The company's website also features photos of hipster DJ Steve Aoki visiting the Utah facility and shooting an assortment of guns.

That's all part of a strategy that Christian Lowe, editor of *Shooting Sports Retailer* magazine and a longtime firearms writer, finds fascinating. "It's intriguing to me that this company is fully embracing beards and skinny jeans," he says. "It's an interesting tactic for them to place themselves as a company in the firearms market. As someone who follows the industry, I don't see a risk of them alienating anyone. I do wonder if the demographic they're targeting is actually going to buy suppressors."

• • •

Following the Key West dinner presentation is a lavish party on the beach complete with a

retro 1980s band, a sullen alligator posing for pictures, an open bar and complimentary massages. Amid it all, sitting on opposite ends of a large sectional, are Jep Robertson of the TV show *Duck Dynasty* and Chris Cheng, winner of the History Channel's shooting show *Top Shot.* Cheng, who is Asian and openly gay, lives in San Francisco with his husband.

"One of the things I've discovered over the past few years is what I call closeted gun owners," Cheng says. "There are a lot of people exactly like me who are afraid to reveal this part of their lives. For a lot of my tech and foodie friends who enjoy shooting, it's something I still see them wanting to keep under the table. I would hope that everyone would come out as a gun owner, and I would also hope that everyone would come out as gay. But depending on where you live or where you work, there could be negative consequences."

The festivities on the beach are abruptly interrupted by a torrential downpour that sends attendees running for shelter. A short time later the rain stops and the party resumes. A chorus of male voices soon echoes throughout the resort, singing along enthusiastically with the band. By morning, multiple reports have the female lead singer and a male backup singer frolicking naked in the pool.

• • •

If SilencerCo is charting an unorthodox path in the firearms world, it's an ethos that ties directly to its founding. While most gun-related companies are at least several decades old and deeply rooted in military culture, SilencerCo was started eight years ago by a musician and a photographer.

Josh Waldron and Jonathon Shults are childhood friends. Waldron worked as a professional photographer, snapping images for publications including *Newsweek, Outdoor Life* and *Forbes.* Shults was a bass player and a recording studio engineer. "We both come from the belief that if you're going to do something in life, you should enjoy it," Waldron says. "Which is why we got into the creative world. But in Utah it's hard to make a living doing art, so we were looking for another opportunity. We've always been passionate about firearms, and even though we were artists, we've always shot guns."

They say it was originally supposed to be a hobby. They got hold of a silencer one day, and sound engineer Shults became intrigued by the mechanics. "I've been a tinkerer since I was a kid," he explains. "In fact, that's where the engineering side of music came in. I was fascinated by the silencer. It's similar. You're dealing with sound—how to get the explosion to be quiet. We took it apart, and my mind just started clicking." Waldron offers an additional explanation: "Something about Jonathon that a lot of people might not know is that he's a genius. Literally."

Two factors moved the endeavor from hobby to full-fledged business. Along with Shults's quick mastery of the mechanics was a shared perception that the existing competition was vulnerable. "I thought, You know what, man? These guys suck," says Shults. "I told Josh, 'Dude, with your background and my background we can have a real company and not just something we're gonna do in the garage.' " When they started in 2008, they say, approximately 18,000 silencers were sold in the United States that entire year. SilencerCo now ships more than 7,000 silencers a month. "We created that market," Waldron says.

SILENCERCO AIMS FOR THE YOUNGER, TATTOOED X GAMES CROWD.

Although Waldron claims to be a fan of such left-leaning musicians as Ryan Adams and the band Wilco, it's hard to imagine the admiration is reciprocated. SilencerCo boasts a relationship with the aforementioned Robertson, who has publicly supported his father's homophobic and anti–civil rights statements. In addition, Waldron's defense of guns and the Second Amendment echoes perfectly the fervor of the NRA. "Shooting is a culture that is ingrained in America," Waldron says. "The only reason people are scared of it is because the media has put a twist on what firearms are. I'm a conceal-carry person. It's empowering to know I can protect my family. And to have some politician think they can take that right away from me puts us in the same position as Nazi Germany."

• • •

The morning after the beach party, the attendees, looking a bit worse for wear, gather for the main attraction—a voyage to a nautical firing range in international waters. As the group assembles on the dock, another sudden downpour sends everyone scrambling for cover. The ensuing search for Dramamine resembles a scene from William S. Burroughs's *Junky.* Minutes later a water taxi filled with attendees bobs and rolls toward a large chartered catamaran. Shults promptly vomits over the side and decides to return to land. There are looks of trepidation all around. Only those who are ex-military, including SilencerCo chief revenue officer Jason Schauble, an Iraq war vet with a Silver Star, a Bronze Star and a Purple Heart, seem unfazed. "I was a marine," Schauble offers with a smile.

The catamaran eventually reaches international waters. Crew members crank techno music and grill burgers while young SilencerCo employees lay out an arsenal of suppressed firearms and shove a pontoon of Osama bin Laden and zombie targets into the churning ocean. Someone asks with a laugh where the Hillary Clinton targets are before being reminded that she has Secret Service protection. In the following few hours, the sound of discreet vomiting is matched only by the sound of (suppressed) gunfire. The biggest attraction by far is the Maxim 9 prototype. The sleek handgun with a built-in suppressor is an anomaly with the potential to revolutionize both the suppressor and the firearms industries. It is also an admittedly risky endeavor for SilencerCo in the traditionally conservative gun world.

"We want customers to eventually go into a gun store and ask, 'Do I want a loud gun or a quiet gun?' " explains Shults. "And the only way for us to start that is to make a quiet gun. No one has really done it before, so we don't know what the market is. It's definitely a risk. But like everything else, if we think it's cool, it usually means it's going to be pretty awesome. We want to reach for the stars, right?"

And that appears to be exactly what Shults and Waldron are doing, though their particular stars inhabit a galaxy of high-tech weaponry. Beyond suppressors, range finders, affordable night-vision devices and their new hybrid pistol, their end goal is to create and market what they refer to as "weapon systems." "We want to create the firearms industry 2.0," Waldron says. "To create a market and an industry that are sexy to a new generation, because there's nobody out there trying to appeal to them. They're playing video games with all this fictional technology, and we want to make it happen in real life." ■

DON CHEADLE

There's a make-or-break moment in any movie based on the life of a pop culture giant—a moment when you either feel the performance burrowing under your skin or realize it's just dancing around the truth instead of channeling it. In Miles Ahead, a fractured, free-form big-screen riff on jazz trumpeter Miles Davis, that moment comes when Don Cheadle, playing the spiky, otherworldly Prince of Darkness, as Davis was known, takes the stage and plays the trumpet for the first time. You breathe a sigh of relief. Cheadle has the Davis of the 1960s down pat. The turbulent charisma. The coiled movements. The death stare. It's all there and more, and it's thrilling, especially for die-hard Davis fans and anyone who has read the man's 1962 Playboy Interview—the very first in the magazine's history.

When *Miles Ahead,* which Cheadle also co-wrote, co-produced and directed, shows us Davis in his late-1970s and 1980s incarnations, when he was infamously drug-addicted, violent and dressed like some ineffably hip deposed king, Cheadle is equally in the pocket. Even when the movie wobbles, the man never stops giving a bone-deep performance.

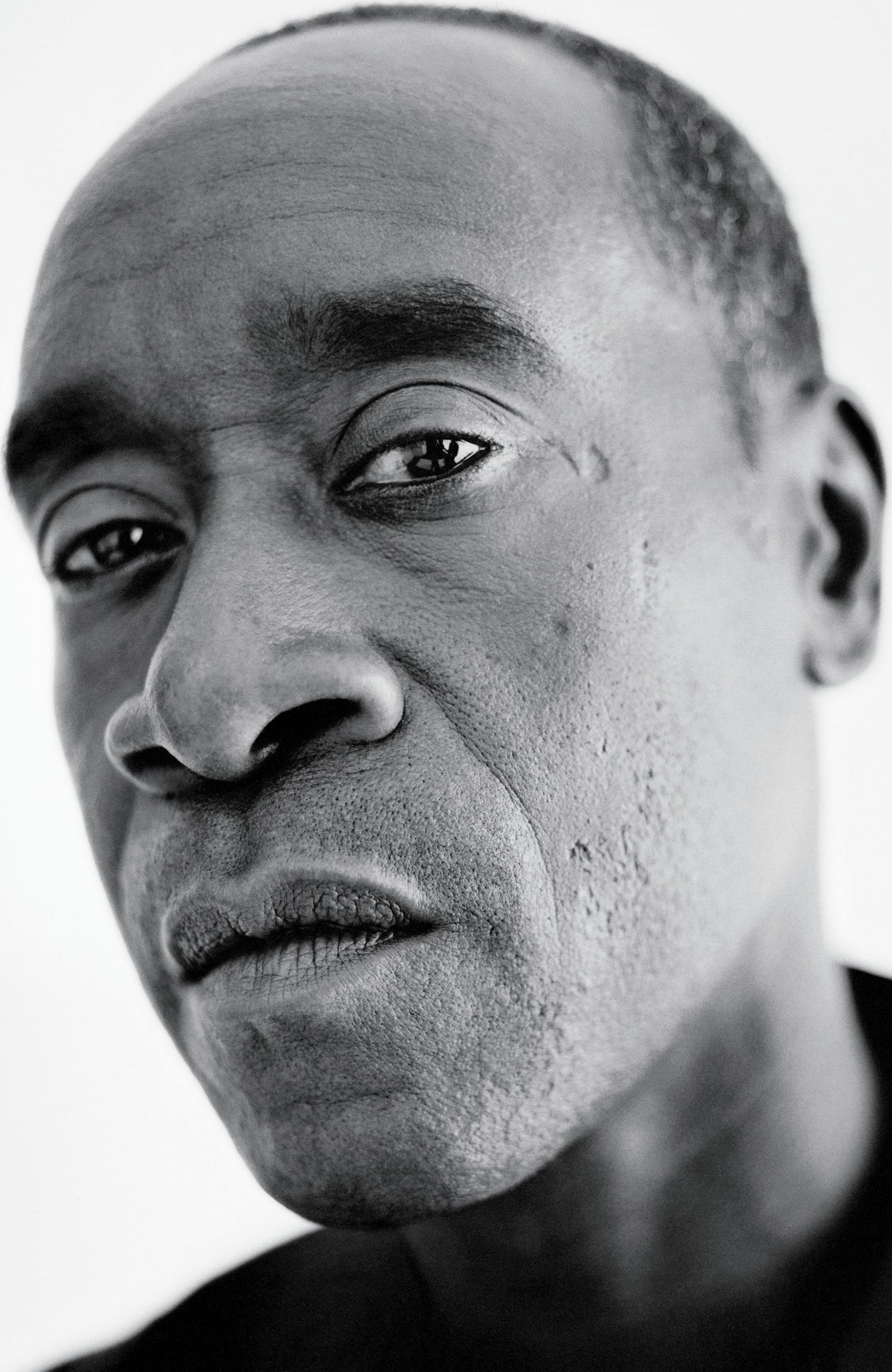
Miles Ahead is not only a landmark—who makes period movies about jazz musicians anymore?—it's also a big, ballsy move for Cheadle. After all, he has been everywhere in movies and on television for the past 30-plus years, but not often enough where he belongs: over the title and in the spotlight. If any proof is needed, just look at what happens for him when things click as they should. Check out his Emmy-nominated, Golden Globe–winning work as a morally bankrupt but weirdly relatable management consultant on *House of Lies,* now in its fifth season on Showtime. Then there's his Oscar-nominated performance as a hero who shelters refugees from ethnic cleansing in *Hotel Rwanda.* He also co-produced and starred in the controversial *Crash,* which won the 2006 Oscar for best picture—another achievement that stands on the shoulders of his scene-grabbing supporting roles in *Devil in a Blue Dress, Boogie Nights* and *Out of Sight.*

Cheadle can be serious and seriously funny, as in those *Ocean's Eleven* hits, and he holds his own against tsunamis of CGI as James "War Machine" Rhodes in two *Iron Man* epics as well as in *Avengers: Age of Ultron* and the upcoming *Captain America: Civil War.* Off-camera he's more apt to show his serious side, serving on the advisory board of Citizens' Climate Lobby and co-writing *Not on Our Watch,* a self-professed "activist handbook." His ongoing work with the United Nations on climate change and his efforts with George Clooney to stop the genocide in Darfur earned them the 2007 Peace Summit Award, given by Nobel laureates.

The man is intensely focused and apparently has been from way back. He was born in 1964 in Kansas City, Missouri. With his clinical psychologist father, Donald Frank Cheadle Sr., his educator mother, Bettye, and his siblings, Cindy and Colin, he relocated frequently throughout childhood. Making his bow in a fifth-grade school production of *Charlotte's Web,* Cheadle got bitten by the acting bug. In 1982 he moved to California to attend the California Institute of the Arts, turning down musical as well as acting scholarships to top universities.

Cheadle tasted success early enough that, unlike many new actors, he never had to gig as anything but a performer. He made his big-screen debut in 1985's *Moving Violations* and appeared on such hit TV series as *L.A. Law* and *The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air.* He played an uptight hotel manager on 1992's *The Golden Palace,* a short-lived spin-off of *The Golden Girls,* then moved right into three years as a sobersided district attorney on *Picket Fences.* Throughout the 1990s and into the 2000s, he

PHOTOGRAPHY BY **ANDREAS LASZLO KONRATH**



alternated between indie-minded features such as *Reign Over Me* and bigger films such as *Swordfish,* somehow squeezing in an arc on the hit series *ER* along the way. The meaty roles have never stopped coming for the versatile, intense actor with the good-guy vibe.

We sent writer **Stephen Rebello,** who most recently interviewed Christoph Waltz and Ron Howard for PLAYBOY, to Cheadle's sleek, multistory, modernist palm- and bamboo-shaded Santa Monica Canyon compound, which he shares with interior designer and actress Bridgid Coulter (*Westworld, Rosewood*) and two dogs, Kandi and Sasha. Their children, 21-year-old Ayana Tai and 19-year-old Imani, are both in college. Rebello reports: "Cheadle, whom I'd met decades ago when he was just about to appear in *Mission to Mars,* put on some sublime classic jazz tracks, poured water and, despite his crazy schedule, looked rested, chill and alive in the moment. He emits Zen calm and stillness, but his eyes are in constant motion, and he takes in everything. Almost involuntarily, he imitates virtually anyone he's talking about—an outgrowth of his sly, droll sense of humor."

PLAYBOY: In the five seasons you've starred on Showtime's funny, cynical *House of Lies,* your Los Angeles–based management consulting firm character, Marty Kaan, is shown grinding with hot lesbians, enjoying a couple of anything-goes orgies and having angry anal sex with his ex-wife, played by Dawn Olivieri. What reactions do you get from fans, especially those who know you from playing, say, a real-life anti-apartheid hero in *Hotel Rwanda* or the military man–superhero you play in *Iron Man, Avengers* and *Captain America*?

CHEADLE: It still feels like the audiences are, to some degree, segregated. The ones who know me from *House of Lies* don't necessarily know anything about the other movies I've been in. They also tend to take the Marty Kaan character at face value.

PLAYBOY: Meaning what? Do they propose orgies?

CHEADLE: Some come up to me with a salacious sort of thing: "Hey, hey, hey, you're all *right*," you know? I also get real-life management consultants who come up and say, "I love Marty and I love that show. It makes me really think about what I do—although it's nothing like that." But others will go, "Oh, it's exactly like that." And I'm like, "Bullshit."

PLAYBOY: Because the show is revved up for the sake of making fun, sexy TV?

CHEADLE: I didn't know anything about management consulting until we started interviewing people when we were putting the show together. My hair was kind of blown back, because for the young cats it was: "You're traveling four nights out of the week. You don't have a home life to speak of. You're making all these transitory, one-off relationships that get about as deep as a thimble. You're drinking and partying a lot and maybe trying to self-medicate, because if you have a conscience and know what you're doing, it's really dark."

I WAS ALWAYS THINKING, ACTING BETTER WORK, BECAUSE MY FALLBACK IS JAZZ.

PLAYBOY: Lots of travel, little home life, transitory relationships, partying and self-medicating. That sounds like some people's perception of an actor's life.

CHEADLE: When we were preparing the show and drilled down into all this research about management consulting, I did think, You know, actors could do this job really well if they just knew how and what to say. Actors study the psychology of people, whether from a learned perspective or from a layman's perspective. We're fascinated by why people do what they do. You're trying to find those vulnerable parts of yourself and see those vulnerable spots in others. That's what those management consultant guys zero in on too. Where are the person's weaknesses? Where's the fissure, and how do I drive a stake in there and make it a chasm that I can now inject myself into?

PLAYBOY: So certain actors might easily turn their talent——

CHEADLE: For evil? Absolutely.

PLAYBOY: You play a character with sexual swagger and magnetism, which can account for the salacious attitude some fans show you now. Is it just tickle and tease, or do they ever give you the impression that they'd like to sample that?

CHEADLE: If it's happening, I'm totally not picking up on it. Bridgid and I have been together 22 years. She'll walk behind me, notice somebody and go, "You didn't see that?" And I'm like, "No." The women I'm around for work? It's work. I don't really hang out. I don't go to clubs and usually don't go out to dinner without Bridgid or my family. I'm kind of a homebody. So is Bridgid. There aren't a lot of opportunities to jam me up or try to hand me a phone number as I'm going to the bathroom. We are not going to be bumping rails in the restroom, you know? People don't feel a frivolous vibe coming off me. I think I project to people "I'm serious." It's like, "Oh, that's the dude who was the goodwill ambassador in *Hotel Rwanda*." Besides, it's been scientifically proven that when you become domesticated your testosterone levels drop and your estrogen levels rise.

PLAYBOY: You've never embarrassed your family or yourself by pitching a diva fit on a set or getting caught in a compromising position.

CHEADLE: I know. I should. I'll have to get into a fistfight with my agent in the middle of the Cannes Film Festival or something. Then my career might have an uptick. When I moved into this house, the paparazzi and TMZ followed me—for about three minutes. They were like, "Ugh. You're really just going to go grocery shopping? Well, shit. Call us when you're exciting."

PLAYBOY: Outside of *House of Lies* and your upcoming Miles Davis movie, which was filmed on a modest budget, Hollywood hasn't often spotlighted you as the big male star in big-budget movies.

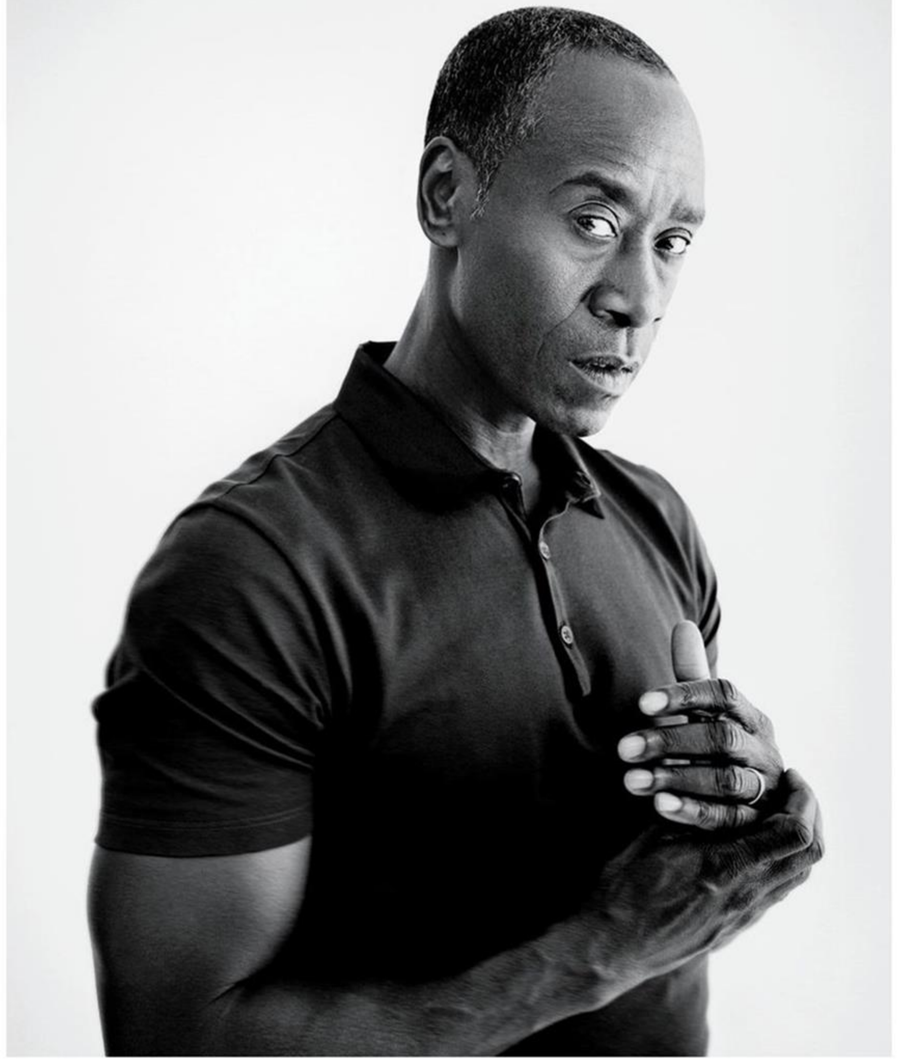
CHEADLE: You know the Will Smith movie *Concussion*? I passed on developing that independently. We didn't have a studio behind us, and I wanted to tell the story of the NFL players, not a doctor. Also, I didn't want to use names like the Arizona Pigeons or the Denver Ducks. If we couldn't say "NFL" and couldn't use the real logos and uniforms, I didn't see how it was going to get made well. I thought it was going to need a superstar like Will Smith and a big studio to deal with what was going to happen with the NFL.

PLAYBOY: Have you ever been up for movie roles that went to, say, Will Smith, Denzel Washington or Jamie Foxx?

CHEADLE: We are by nature journeyman actors and are also by nature terrified that whatever we last did is going to be the last one. Before I did *House of Lies* I had eight or nine months of not knowing what my next job was. I also had four or five movies that didn't get put together, and it was, "Oh, Will is doing that" or, "Jamie is doing that." I was talking to Matt Damon before he did *The Martian,* when he hadn't worked for a whole year and a half. He was like, "Dude, I don't know." I said, "You're good. You're Matt Damon." He said, "Am I? I don't know that I'm still me." You don't ever know, because you don't get an announcement from Hollywood that says, "Thank you very much. Good-bye." It's just like, Oh, it's not happening. It's death by attrition. Nobody in Hollywood calls you to say, "It's a wrap." You just stop getting called. It's a business built on sand.

PLAYBOY: Ron Howard recently talked in PLAYBOY about working with the veteran movie actor Don Ameche, who won an Oscar in 1986 for Howard's *Cocoon.* Ameche warned Howard not to be nostalgic for the so-called good old days of Hollywood in the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s, when an actor would get slotted and typecast and rarely, if ever, got to show all he could do.

CHEADLE: My black friends and I talk a lot about this. What's interesting is that if you were under contract to a movie studio back then, they could say to you, "Listen, kid, you're making 25 movies this year," which would have been like being in a touring company. That's great, but I don't get misty for the good old studio days. I'm black, so I'm pretty sure the roles I would have wanted to play and been able to play would have been four times a year, maybe—if that. There are old movies I love to watch, of course, but I watch a lot of the actors and hear people say, "Oh, she's great," and I'm like, "That person was a fucking raging racist." Or sexist. Or every *-ist*. People say, "They were just men and women of their time." Oh, you mean when you could be openly racist or sexist or homophobic? And certain people in politics would like to get us back to that.



PLAYBOY: So does that mean you won't be voting for, say, Donald Trump, Ted Cruz or Ben Carson?

CHEADLE: Right. And what I want to say to those people who support them is something they always fail to see: You're not in the club. They don't want you in the club. All those people you're supporting? Donald Trump? He isn't a friend of yours. He doesn't have your back. Everyone believes they have to back that stuff because they think they're suddenly going to be on that team.

PLAYBOY: Just as soon as they snag that winning lottery ticket.

CHEADLE: Exactly.

PLAYBOY: The characters on *House of Lies* sometimes abuse power for the fun of it, behavior that rears its ugly head in many fields, including politics and the entertainment business. Have you been around much of that behavior?

CHEADLE: I've been an actor for 30 years, and I've been really fortunate. I've had very few instances of an actor—and, let's be honest, it's almost always an actor—doing that. There's so much largesse in Hollywood. An actor friend of mine always says that success doesn't really change you, it just kind of makes you more of what you already are. And you get full support to be whatever you are. If you're generous, you have more to give now. You can also be an asshole. You can be a bastard. If you're neurotic, scared and suspicious, you have a whole army of people to project that on and act out on. That behavior is accommodated, as long as you have the ratings or the box office. As soon as it's not working, people get to eat you a second time. The first time is when they build you up. The second time, everybody wants to out you.

PLAYBOY: One of the very few times you've gotten publicly dinged was in 2010, when you replaced Terrence Howard in the role of Lieutenant Colonel James Rhodes in *Iron Man 2*. Howard has talked about the incident in interviews, suggesting that when Robert Downey Jr.'s salary demands strained the budget, they wanted to pay Howard less than what was promised and he balked. What really went down?

CHEADLE: I met with the Marvel people on *Iron Man*. Several wanted to hire me. Several wanted to hire Terrence. They went with Terrence. With the second *Iron Man,* they said to me, "It will not be him again. It will be you or it will be the next person after you say no to us." I did not take a job from Terrence. It was a vacant role. He was not being asked to continue.

PLAYBOY: Did you and he ever hash things out?

CHEADLE: The day after I said yes to the job, I was at Universal on the way to a meeting. The first person I saw was Terrence's manager, whom I know. I said, "You all right?"

and she said, "It's just kind of fucked-up how this whole thing happened. But we're 100. We know what's good." I was like, "And I hope *he* knows," and she said, "Well, here he is," and there was Terrence. I said, "So, dude, I'm sorry the way this whole thing happened. This is messed up." He was like, "Yeah." There's never been anything personal between him and me about that. Terrence and I tried to get *Talk to Me* made, and I was one of the producers of *Crash* who approved him and wanted him in that movie.

PLAYBOY: You talked earlier about Hollywood eating people twice. Your frequent co-star Robert Downey Jr. had a big career buildup in the 1980s and 1990s, then ran into difficulties with substance abuse, arrests and rehab and served jail time, but he rebounded stronger than ever playing Tony Stark in the *Iron Man* and *Avengers* movies. Some Hollywood snipers now accuse him of having become arrogant, corporate and politically conservative.

CHEADLE: I don't see him much outside of work. I don't know him deep down. Robert and I have a great working relationship. It's like a friend of mine was saying about a restaurant he'd gone to: "I love the food, but the service is terrible." When I said, "I got really good service there," he said, "Oh, Don, *did* you?"

PLAYBOY: Meaning that, being famous, you tend to get better treatment.

CHEADLE: Yeah. So I have to qualify everything. He's good to me. I don't know how he treats people outside. I don't know anything about his politics. We don't talk politics. He's never been untouchable or at arm's length to me—very much the opposite. I'll tell you a funny story about Robert, Jeremy Renner, Chris Evans and Chris Hemsworth when we were in London. About 11 o'clock one night we decided to go out to this crazy burlesque club in Soho. The streets were packed. It was a mob scene with everybody in London drunk off their asses and we couldn't get a taxi, so the five of us, with minimal security, headed out walking. We were trying to be low-key, kind of hiding, and nobody gave a shit. They weren't even looking at us. Chris Evans starts going, "This is Iron Man right here. I got Thor right here, guys. This is War Machine. I'm Captain America. *Nobody?*" Nobody cared. They were like, "Mate, get out of the way." I loved it.

PLAYBOY: Could you have gotten away with that if you'd been with your *Ocean's Eleven* co-stars George Clooney, Brad Pitt and Matt Damon?

CHEADLE: Obviously George is a huge star, and Matt too, but Brad's his own thing. I mean, whenever we wanted to take the heat off us and go somewhere, Brad just went in first and everybody would go crazy. Then the rest of us could go anywhere—the Vatican, the Colosseum, wherever. We always threw Brad under the bus.

PLAYBOY: Do those kinds of humbling experiences help guard against getting full of yourself?

CHEADLE: No. The kind of life I lead, I don't even think about that. I always think of myself as Don from the Midwest who's still hustling and trying to get jobs.

PLAYBOY: Have you ever taken home any of a character's worst traits once you finished work for the day—whether Marty Kaan from *House of Lies* or another character?

CHEADLE: It feels pretentious sometimes when I hear actors say that they do, but when you try to inhabit somebody and their energy, personality, habits—the things you do to try to create a character—your nerve endings don't know that when, say, you're screaming and tense, you're not actually mad. Your body doesn't know you're faking. There can be residue. Sometimes I get home from *House of Lies* and I move quicker. I'm short and clipped. Someone will say something and I have to think, Whoa, take it easy. I have to sit down, drink a glass of water or go into the sauna and just sit and be still.

PLAYBOY: Have you had much of that while filming this new season?

CHEADLE: This season has pretty much been no days off and all of us working every day. What Marty is wrestling with this season is "Am I really this thing I'm projecting, or is it just a suit I put on so I can go out and do these things? Am I a guy who wants to care about his kids and figure out what's happening with his relationships, with [Kristen Bell's character] Jeannie?"

PLAYBOY: But what if this role had come to you when you were in your 20s or 30s?

CHEADLE: [*Laughs*] Bridgid and I listen to our single friends talk about dating and I'm like, "What?" Their attitude is, "Yes, you old motherfucker, that's how it works now." One of my friends has an app where there are no profiles, just photos. It's like, "This one? Yeah. That one? No." Not everybody can join. There's a vetting process that's like the velvet rope at the old Studio 54. But when I went to school at CalArts in 1982, it was livewire. It was wild. We had coed rooms. The pool was clothing optional. It was just wide open, and everybody was exploring. Artists were free, and all of that was encouraged. I know a couple of people who either had AIDS or got AIDS at school. But it was still pretty nascent, as far as we knew. Once the parents left, a senior or older student would be like, "All right, here's what's up." I didn't know that going in. I was there to study.

PLAYBOY: Let's talk about your road to CalArts and how you grew up. Your mother is a retired educator. Like your character on *House of Lies,* your real-life father is a retired psychologist.

CHEADLE: My mother taught third to sixth grade. My father specialized in clinical and child psychology and worked for a hospital but then had his own private practice. They were both very supportive. I was born in Kansas City, but we moved as my father was getting his undergrad degree here, his M.A. in another place and then his Ph.D.

PLAYBOY: Was moving tough on you?

CHEADLE: I'm playing armchair psychologist now, but making friends became a skill. I had to find the funny and joke my way into cliques that had been established before I got

I'M KIND OF A HOMEBODY. WE ARE NOT GOING TO BE BUMPING RAILS IN THE RESTROOM.

GROOMING BY ERIC FERRELL FOR DION PERONNEAU AGENCY; HAIR BY QUAN PIERCE

there. We moved to Denver at the tail end of the fifth grade, and I was super lucky because I got a teacher who was a combination music-theater teacher—the kind who brings out the bells, glockenspiel and drums. She cast me as Templeton the rat in the stage version of *Charlotte's Web*. Both my parents were very playful and silly, and I liked to act, so I was always playing around anyway. The teacher gave real acting notes, like "What's a rat? How does a rat move? What's his center?" It was about playing but on a higher level, and it sent me on this whole quest of investigation and research. And then, when you sing a song, the audience leaps up, and you're like, "What?"

PLAYBOY: Did that hook you on acting?

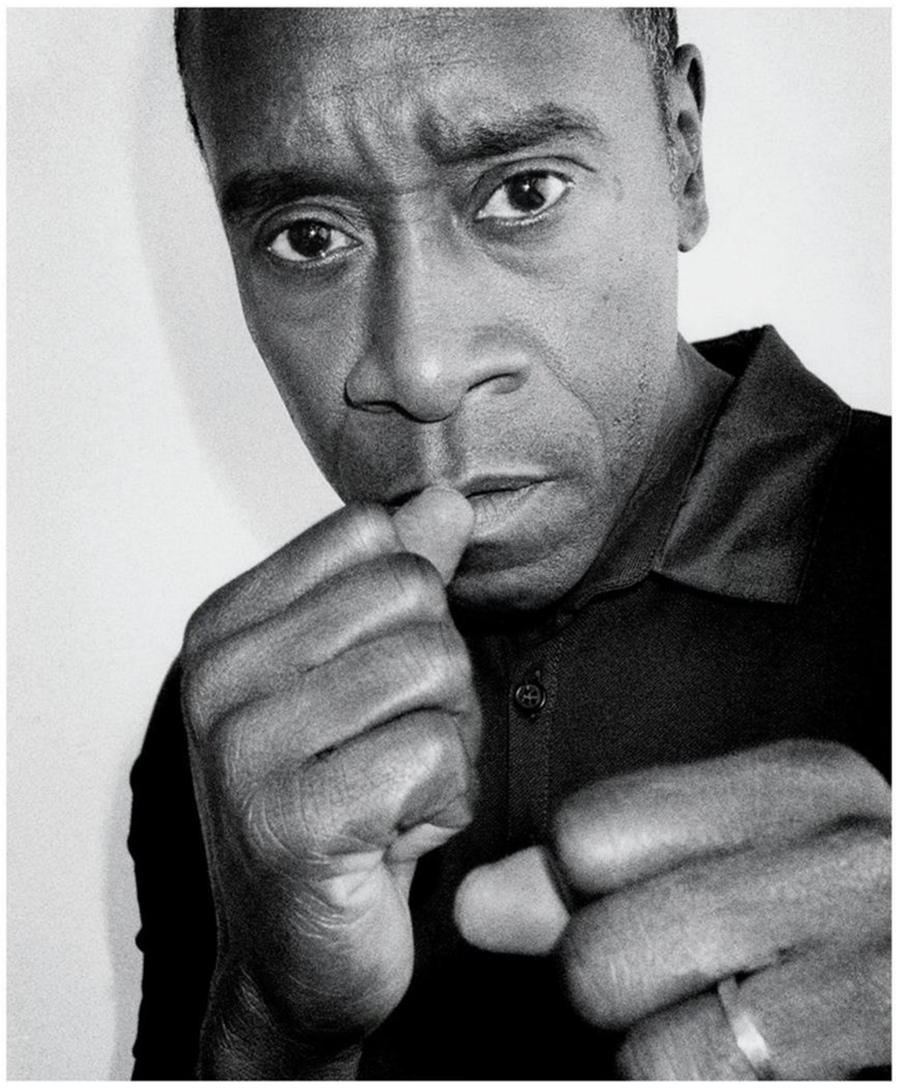
CHEADLE: Yes, but I loved music too. I played—and play—piano, bass, trumpet. At East High School in Denver I was with a really good jazz group with a fuck-everybody, us-against-the-world inner-city attitude. Everybody in the group was steeped in the love and understanding of music. I was 16, 17 years old, and my group was gigging at a festival where the a cappella jazz group Rare Silk was singing. They said to me, "We'll be at this club in Larimer Square tonight. Why don't you come sit in?" They sang a couple of numbers, then handed me the mike. So picture me in a club I wasn't old enough to go to, the band guy asking, "What do you want to do, Don?" and me saying, "Okay, let's do 'Perdido.'" I must have been a novelty. When I graduated high school, I had a couple of scholarship opportunities to places like Carnegie Mellon to study vocal jazz and instrumental jazz, and another couple of scholarships to study theater.

PLAYBOY: How did acting finally win over music?

CHEADLE: I wasn't going to put in the kind of work as a musician that it would take to get to a level I wanted to get to. I knew it was going to be crushing. I saw the sacrifices real musicians were making, and I wanted to have fun. That's how I came to CalArts. I got nothing but support from my family, who were like, "Great, go have fun."

PLAYBOY: Did either of your parents have any show-business aspirations?

CHEADLE: My mother sang in choir. I remember calling my mom when I first started working at acting and kind of going, "I don't know about this. I don't know if it's going to work out for me." She said, "What do you mean you don't know? That's what you've said you wanted to do for years. You went to school for it. You're out there. Just keep doing it." I learned that my mom really wanted to try to have a career in show business. It meant a lot to me that she said that, because I needed it at that point.



PLAYBOY: Did you leave behind girlfriends?

CHEADLE: I had a girlfriend at the time, through junior high school and high school.

PLAYBOY: How did you lose your virginity?

CHEADLE: The normal way: in the car on the way to the prom. It was with that girlfriend. She was a year younger than me, 16. When it was discovered that we were having sex, it didn't go over well with her father. He wanted the relationship dead, right then and there. She felt she could tell her parents the truth because we were going to Planned Parenthood to get protection. If we were going to have sex, we didn't want to have a baby, so we were going to do it right. But her parents went crazy, called my parents and said, "That's it. They're done." It was devastating. I kind of ended the relationship. It was like, "You have another year in school, and you're in Denver. I'm here in California at CalArts. I've just discovered my dick, and I don't think that this is going to work."

PLAYBOY: How did you break the news?

CHEADLE: It was Christmas break when I went home. It was terrible timing. I mean, I had started to party and here it was, the first time I'd seen her, so I told her right away. It wasn't going to work if I told her as they sang "Auld Lang Syne," you know what I mean?

PLAYBOY: Did you and your girlfriend go cold turkey, or did you see each other later?

CHEADLE: I was trying to communicate. I'd call her house and it was like, *click*. It was very tough. I imagine if I were the parent of a 16-year-old girl and she told me she was having sex, I don't think I would have reacted the same way he did. But it would have been difficult.

PLAYBOY: You have two kids. Have you gone through any of the same challenges?

CHEADLE: Not really. My youngest is 19, and she never really had boyfriends. None of the boys were really interested in her at school, or the ones who were interested in her she was only interested in until her senior year. But she was like, "I'm not going to mess around with any of these knuckleheads. I'm going to school; I'm out of here." My oldest has worked on several movies with me as a camera assistant.

PLAYBOY: After graduating from college you started booking TV commercials, TV series and music videos.

CHEADLE: I was always thinking, Acting better work, because if it doesn't, my fallback is jazz.

PLAYBOY: As you were coming up, you worked alongside many big names. Who stands out?

CHEADLE: So many. I took a dance class at CalArts, and my friend at school, Jesse Borrego, went to an open call of 3,500 people and got cast on *Fame*. He left school to go do that, and we're still very close. His daughter's my goddaughter. Anyway, I did a lot of stepping in a big Coke commercial. They spent a ton of money on it, but they never showed it. Around

the same time, I gave my dog Jesse a ride to a music video that [*Fame* star and choreographer] Debbie Allen was directing and choreographing for Angela Winbush. I was watching the video and Jesse said, "You should do this." I was like, "You guys are doing grand jetés, leap kicks—I can't do that shit. I move. I'm not a dancer." Debbie Allen heard me and said, "Oh, you don't like my choreography?" I said, "I don't want to dishonor it. Those great dancers should do your choreography and I should go." As I was leaving she comes running out of the studio and goes, "You know what? You can't leave." She was just like Debbie Allen on *Fame,* where I later played a dancer who couldn't dance. She told me, "Don't you ever say you can't do something. Don't ever say no to an opportunity like that. Don't limit yourself like that. When they asked me to choreograph the Oscars, I was like, 'Yes.' I had no idea what I was going to do. You figure it out." I did the video.

PLAYBOY: It's hard to imagine you on the sequel to *The Golden Girls, The Golden Palace,* but there you were.

CHEADLE: With Cheech Marin. I had a ball with him and with Estelle Getty, Rue McClanahan and Betty White. They were hilarious, smart and sweet. Betty was a fucking exceptional person to be around. They had a hard time lighting both of us because she's so Betty White and I'm so dark. So she showed up one day with her hair dyed brown. I was like, "Why?" and she goes, "Well, you know, our lighting will work out better." I loved doing that show. It ran for only one season. Nobody wanted to see *The Golden Palace.* They wanted *The Golden Girls.* They wanted to see those four women—although Bea Arthur had left—talk about sex and shit.

PLAYBOY: You had a huge breakthrough in 1995 playing a sociopathic, scene-stealing hit man in the movie *Devil in a Blue Dress.* Some people said you even managed to steal the film from Denzel Washington. We met back then, and when Washington's name was brought up, you got quiet. Were you two copacetic?

CHEADLE: Professionally, Denzel was about to skyrocket. There was stuff going on with him that didn't have anything to do with me. There was just tricky shit sometimes. I was so enamored of him and amazed that I was getting the opportunity to act with him. I just tried to become that dude I played 24-7, and I had really studied, gone to Texas, gone to the wards and met gangsters. I would show up on set, get the clothes on, and when I would come out of the trailer, I didn't come out of that character until I left. It was all because I was like, "I got to be on my game. I'm playing with Magic. I can't dribble the ball off my foot out of bounds." To me it was really serious. More recently I did *Flight* with him. We're all good in the hood.

PLAYBOY: You've blended your acting prowess and musical gifts in *Miles Ahead,* a kind of anti-biopic of one of the greatest trumpeters, composers, innovators and mad geniuses who ever lived, Miles Davis. Being the star and the director, how does the film measure up to the one you dreamed?

I WANTED TO MAKE A MOVIE THAT MILES WOULD HAVE WANTED TO STAR IN.

CHEADLE: You know when you see photos of people who've climbed Everest? People often think they pop champagne and cheer. A lot of times it's just like, *I climbed this fucking mountain.* I was sort of told by Miles's nephew that they were going to do a movie about his life and I was going to star in it. And then people started calling, and the energy came this way. I wasn't out there chasing any Miles Davis movie. I didn't really want to do a biopic, having been in several of them, famously, including *Hotel Rwanda, Talk to Me* and *The Rat Pack,* and won awards for them. I didn't want to be hampered by facts. I didn't care about when Miles met Charlie Parker. I didn't care about when he first heard the birds sing the note that made him think about "B Flat Blues." Especially with a person like Miles, whose entire life was a canvas to create whatever he wanted—a style of clothes, music, a way of talking, the women in his life—I didn't want to create some up-and-down story about him.

PLAYBOY: At its best, the movie plays like some crazy impressionistic mosaic.

CHEADLE: When I met with the family, the approaches I heard all felt like different versions of the same biopic. I said, "I can try to do *Ray,* but do you think he'd really want that?" If someone comes to you with something different, fresher or elliptical, like "Miles is a gangster," that would be interesting to me. I could see this sort of 1970s movie: snap zooms, push-ins, "Don Cheadle is Miles Davis *as* Miles Davis in *Miles Ahead.*" I wanted to make a movie that Miles would have wanted to star in. I drove away from my meeting with the family, got seven blocks and thought, Nobody's going to do that unless I do. I called them back and said, "I think I have to do it."

PLAYBOY: Did any other movies inspire you?

CHEADLE: Every time my co-screenwriter, Steven Baigelman, and I thought we were going down the road of making something didactic and linear, we'd watch *Walk Hard: The Dewey Cox Story,* laugh and get terrified again. We also watched *Toto the Hero* because of the way it deals with flashbacks—they're like fissures that shoot the main character off to here, then slam him back into his present-day life at a 90-degree angle. When I was making it, I was terrified. I tried to give it away and hire another director. I would have been relieved if it had gone away, because it was just too, too hard. I had to learn to play the trumpet. I was the lead actor, director, writer, producer. I paid for it, did the music, raised the money. I was everything. It's not necessarily the smartest thing to do. I don't think I would like to do it like that again. The first time I watched it, I left the editing room and didn't go back for weeks. All I could see was everything I hadn't achieved.

PLAYBOY: Jazz music, a period look—not the easiest movie to get financed, right?

CHEADLE: Putting the movie together with the financiers, it was like, "Who's the white dude in it?" Not a white dude sitting shotgun; he had to be in the driver's seat. Until we got Ewan McGregor to play the journalist tracking

down Miles, it was not happening. Thank God Ewan came in and did it, and he's great in it.

PLAYBOY: Did you ever ask your *Ocean's* costar Brad Pitt to play the guy?

CHEADLE: No. Maybe I mentioned it to George Clooney. I know what they want to do and who they want to work with. *Miles Ahead* is a bit of a proving ground for me. I don't mind having to prove it that way. I don't mind it being a meritocracy that way. I'm very circumspect with the roles I take. I've done movies with first-time directors where I've had to be like, "No, we have to hang out. I've got to talk to you for a long time, because we're going into battle and it's too long a time to spend with somebody if they're not really solid." When Paul Thomas Anderson asked me to do *Boogie Nights,* he'd done only *Hard Eight.* Paul is the most wonderfully arrogant person, full of his own shit. We met at a deli, and he kept saying, "If you don't do this movie, you're going to be very upset that you didn't." Finally he dropped all the bullshit, and I was like, "Oh, I can see you're for real now."

PLAYBOY: Following up on your Miles-as-gangster take in the movie, there's a lot of gunplay involving a paranoid, drugged-out Miles and the music journalist—some serious, some comic. In real life, do you feel the need to be armed?

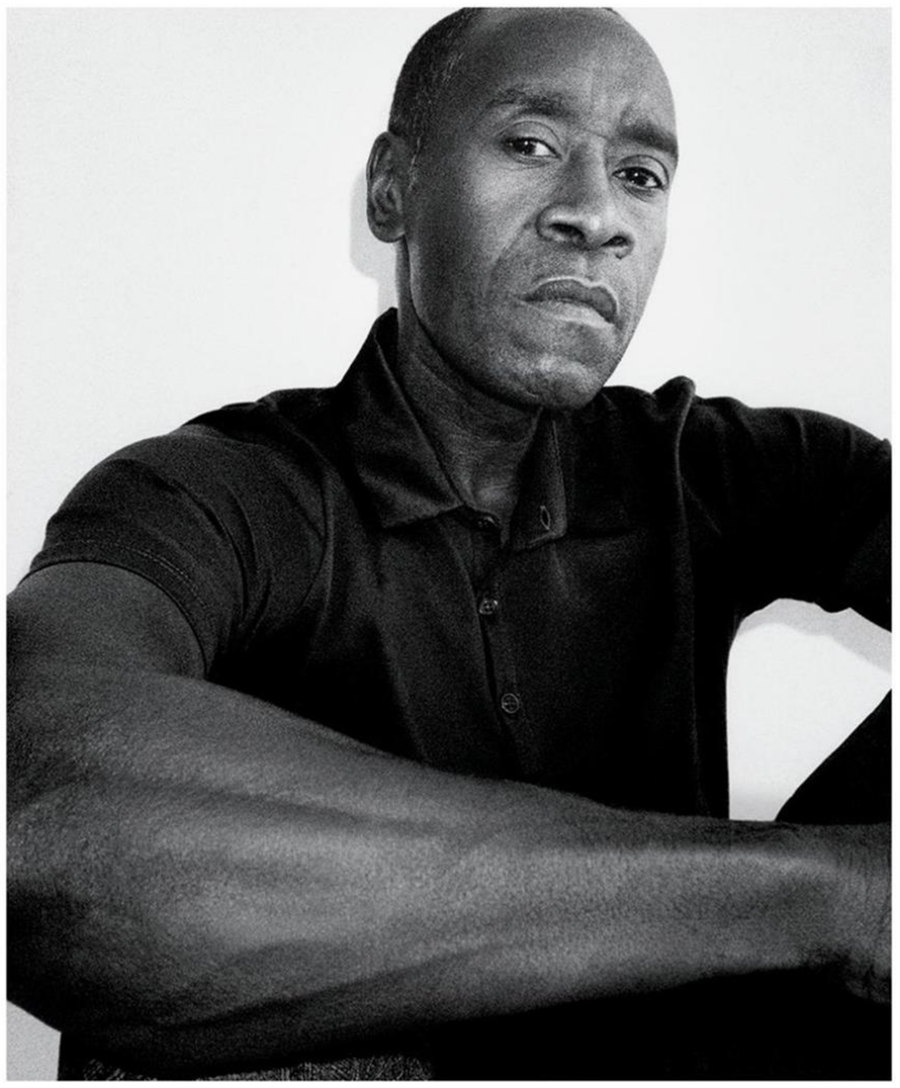
CHEADLE: No. I've thought about it. My mom grew up in a sketchy neighborhood in Kansas City, and she used to carry a little .22. She told me, "I had to stop carrying a gun, Don." When I asked why, she said, "Because 'excuse me' turned into 'move.' " It's dangerous to carry a gun, because at some point you stop having to be polite and it's a stone's throw away from "Fucking do what I told you to."

PLAYBOY: Things escalate fast.

CHEADLE: It's not about the gun; it's about what you're going to do with it. Are you that dude? Most of us are not that dude. Criminals come ready. The bad guys are going to walk up to you with your gun out and say, "Give me that fucking gun," slap you around with it and rob you. This gangster friend of mine who is now in a wheelchair is like, "I used to just walk up and take guns from dudes and go, 'You're not serious.' " He made a career out of that, as a lot of gangbangers do. He messed up and picked the wrong guy one time—that one out of 50 dudes who *was* serious.

PLAYBOY: At the risk of sounding cheesy, did you ever feel Miles Davis's presence while making the movie?

CHEADLE: Only his approach of "Fear no mistakes, for there are none. Jump off a ledge." If he heard you rehearsing a solo in your hotel room and you came down and played that same shit onstage, you were fired on the spot. It's like, "I'm paying you to rehearse in front of



people. I'm paying you to find it." *Miles Ahead* closed the New York Film Festival. I was waiting to go onstage to introduce the movie, and my daughter Imani said, "I'm 19 now, and I remember sitting on your lap when I was 10 and you were on the phone talking about this movie. You're here, you did it, and people are watching it. Come here with me, Dad. Be here with me." From that moment on, I've been like, "This is great."

PLAYBOY: What can we expect from the new *Captain America: Civil War*?

CHEADLE: If I open my mouth about it, I feel as though there's a red dot pointed at my forehead. Like there's a sniper behind that tree right there and he's saying, "Go ahead, tell him shit, Don." I'm excited that the Russo brothers, Anthony and Joe, directed it, because they want to bring back the good old days of the first *Iron Man.* They're edgy dudes who don't come from a Marvel or comic-book background. Hopefully they're able to infuse the movie with this more confrontational, darker energy. They're also doing *Avengers: Infinity War—Part I* and *Part II,* which I think will start toward the end of this year and go into 2017.

PLAYBOY: Does your character have more to do this time?

CHEADLE: If things keep going the way they have been, I will continue to make more but work less than ever. I was on *Captain America* four days or something, because they scan you doing 55 expressions; they send you in a circle and take images of your entire body. So in the movie, as soon as that visor goes down, it's a drawing or a stuntman. It's not even us anymore.

PLAYBOY: Some of the Marvel movies have been great, but others have been the same old, same old. Why do audiences keep going?

CHEADLE: It's wanted. It's desired. I want to hear Robert Downey Jr. talk shit and be flip to Captain America. I want Captain America to have a stick up his ass and tell Tony Stark about not cursing. I want to see Thor know he's the shit. These characters are important to people. They've grown up with them, if not in the movies, then in comic books in their bedrooms, reading at night with a flashlight when they weren't supposed to. That goes deep for people. The Marvel people understand better than anybody that we've got to start fucking with this genre a little bit. *Guardians of the Galaxy* wasn't like *Avengers,* and neither was *Ant-Man.*

PLAYBOY: So when you add it all up, would you say you've finally made it?

CHEADLE: Fifty percent. As an actor I'm always terrified I'll never get hired again. I'd say there's a better than 50 percent chance that I can work and make enough money so I won't lose my house. Maybe now I can go do a play and not think, Are they going to forget about me? That, to me, is making it. ■

THE ESCAPE ARTIST

*Photographer **Molly Steele** is celebrated for her serene images of nature. Now, with newfound attention, she's eager to capture something entirely different*

PHOTOGRAPHY BY **NATE WALTON**

Molly Steele never intended to be a photographer. Two years ago she found herself in a rut, working two jobs while studying botany as a full-time student. "I was overwhelmed and had no room in my head for my own ideas. I decided to break from everything and use the money I'd saved to buy a car and pursue photography. I haven't done anything else since." Today, the 27-year-old is lauded for her self-funded photography, which she shares on Instagram and describes as "primarily outdoors with a voice of solitude." While her online following of nearly 60,000 has undoubtedly fallen in love with her *Walden*-esque journeys into isolation, she's ready to push her art into another realm, turning the lens back on humanity. "If I were alive during the Vietnam War, I would have been a war photographer. I'm interested in experiencing the things I shouldn't experience alone," she says. Recently, Molly spent time living off the grid in a hut with a sexagenarian hippie. Last year she was arrested in Kansas for freight hopping. "I'm intrigued by offkilter lifestyles, but the deeper I go into documenting them, the more danger I put myself in. I don't tell my parents half the stuff I do until afterward," she says. "Through it all, I find myself saying that if something bad goes down, it's my fault because I was asking for it. That's what's heartbreaking—that, as a young woman, I can be victimized because someone else sexualizes me." For Molly, appearing in PLAYBOY is, in some way, an avenue to combat a fear that her creative drive (and safety) may be compromised by the gaze of others. "What does it mean for me, a photographer, to use my body as a vessel for communicating my art? I want people to believe in the integrity behind what I'm doing. I want to move this machine forward. I want to be set free."

THE GOD SHOT

Can a single injection save thousands of soldiers suffering from severe PTSD? An Afghanistan combat vet goes under the needle to find out if there really is a cure for war

I would be pissed I didn't get this shot earlier if I weren't so grateful I got it at all. I haven't been quite right since the war, posttraumatic stress and all. Nothing I did in seven years of trying to get back to normal—therapy, meds, madcap schemes—really helped. It turns out a big part of the cure was under my nose the whole time. Well, six or seven inches under my nose and a couple of inches back and to the right, in a cluster of nerves by the spinal column called the stellate ganglion. Two injections of a couple of local anesthetics—lidocaine, the same thing dentists use, and bupivacaine—into that part of the neck and I was pretty much back to my old self.

Dr. Eugene Lipov, the man who administered my shot and who has pioneered the use of the so-called stellate ganglion block for PTSD, tells me the Navy SEALs call it the God shot. Well, SEALs have their sea stories. Here is mine.

I came back from Afghanistan in the spring of 2007, developed insomnia that was eventually diagnosed as PTSD in 2008 and every few months for the next five years had either a major legal or psychological issue—the kind that led to hospitalization or jail time. As hard as I had to fight in Afghanistan, I had to fight doubly hard to get here, a place where I'm celebrating two years without getting locked in a loony bin or a cell.

BY **MATT FARWELL**

During my 16 months as a U.S. Army combat infantryman in Afghanistan, the enemy lived outside the wire and had no face. He hid in plain sight and used IEDs or indirect fire. Back in the States, the enemy also hid in plain sight. The thing is, he wore my face and occupied my brain. This isn't a war story. This is a postwar story.

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Let's break it down by the numbers.

America has been at war for more than 14 years since September 11, 2001. This is the longest war in American history and the least debated. Most of the U.S. isn't really at war. It is spaced-out in front of glowing rectangles. At any given time, only about one half of one percent of Americans are in the military. That's about the same number who identify as New Age or Hindu. This number includes all members of the military—from stateside desk jockeys to foul-smelling infantry privates—and most are serving in soft jobs, whether or not they're deployed. The infantry makes up only 15 percent of the Army; by comparison, elderly people make up 14 percent of the general population.

Of post-9/11 veterans, 20 percent suffer from PTSD. Only 50 percent say the war in Afghanistan was worth it. And in 2012, 45 percent of the 1.6 million veterans of Afghanistan and Iraq applied for disability benefits from the Department of Veterans Affairs.

"The mental health of our troops is very much a national security issue," says Dr. Elspeth Ritchie, a former military psychiatrist who held the top mental-health job in the Army. "If we don't take care of our veterans, people aren't going to want to sign up and join the military."

Of the approximately 2.7 million Americans who have been deployed to Iraq or Afghanistan, 17,000 earned Combat Medical Badges, 78,000 earned Combat Infantry Badges and 121,000 earned Combat Action Badges—signifying that these soldiers have faced a degree of

ILLUSTRATION BY JUSTIN METZ

HERE I WAS, A TRAINED KILLER, AND I COULDN'T EVEN MANAGE TO KILL MYSELF.

mortal danger. As with any award, these numbers may be somewhat inflated, but they still serve as a good metric: About eight percent of those deployed overseas are actually "in the shit," as they say in the movies. So what happens when they come home? I can only go by my own experiences and what I know from the guys in my old unit, but man, are we fucked-up.

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My friend Charlie killed himself a year ago, four days before Christmas. There was no life insurance, nothing to take care of his wife and children after his death. Then there was Kris, a super-squared-away platoon sergeant I knew in Afghanistan. He shot himself in the heart last year so he could still have an open-casket funeral; he left a note for his mother to make sure he was wearing his dress uniform in the casket. Mike overdosed on pills, booze and heroin when I was still in the Army. Those are the first three men who come to mind, but there are many more. Roughly 30 out of 100,000 recent veterans commit suicide, nearly double the civilian rate. It's one of the top problems facing vets, among other serious issues, including chronic homelessness.

I tried to kill myself in 2009. I was drunk as hell and driving my brother's immaculately maintained 1988 Jeep Comanche, which he'd left in my safekeeping while he was stationed in Germany. I tried to flip the truck into a river, make it look like an accident. It didn't work, and I wound up in jail for three days (I'd been difficult for the police to subdue) and then the psych ward on the fifth floor of the Naval Medical Center Portsmouth for 12 days. One day in group, they asked why I'd tried to kill myself.

I asked if I could use the whiteboard. I drew a simple utility graph: This line represented living; this line represented dying. The benefits of dying outweighed those of living. I felt only anger, rage and shame and that I wasn't doing anything but hurting other people. They put me on suicide watch for the rest of the day.

Farwell spent 16 months in Afghanistan as a U.S. Army combat infantryman; above, patrolling in Naka district, Paktika province, summer 2006.

I would have spent more time in the locked ward but for the intervention of Baddr, a friend from college who was in med school and by sheer coincidence serving his psych rotation on my floor. The first thing he said to me was "Matt, when I said we should get lunch, I didn't mean here and I didn't mean every day." After 12 days of wearing scrubs and working on puzzles, I was finally discharged. It was Baddr who turned the tide. He told the doctors, who were reluctant to release me, that if I said I wouldn't try to kill myself again, I was telling the truth. I haven't attempted suicide since.

For a long time, though, I wished my attempt had been successful. Here I was, a trained killer, and I couldn't even manage to kill myself.

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I bounced around for a couple of years, living a less than stable life. The last time I was psychiatrically hospitalized was at a civilian psych hospital in Idaho, from December 25, 2013 until just after New Year's. On Christmas Eve I had jumped out of my dad's truck while he was driving it 45 miles per hour just north of Jackpot, Nevada. ER doctors treated me for light abrasions and wanted to send me to the VA hospital in Boise, but my dad insisted I be taken to Canyon View, the local psychiatric ward in Twin Falls, Idaho. I'd spent the previous month unraveling spectacularly in Berkeley, California, where my ex-girlfriend was a student. When she'd had enough, she called my dad, and he wanted answers.

My dad had already lost a son—my older brother, Chief Warrant Officer Gary Marc Farwell, who was killed in a helicopter crash on February 3, 2010. He wasn't about to lose another. Plus, he'd already gained some grim experience in this, having twice driven from Arkansas to Virginia to medevac my sorry ass. The first time was when I broke my back crashing into a tree. I was drunk, which was bad, but I had been on my way to help an Army buddy who was in a bad way, so I considered it a karmic wash. The second time was after we buried my brother and his helicopter crew's "commingled remains" at Arlington National Cemetery, a year after burying most of his body in Idaho. I don't know why it took almost a year for the Army to figure out they had pieces left over, but sometimes things go wrong in large organizations.

After the burial, my folks went back to Arkansas, my brother's wife and kids went back to Idaho, and I went to jail for 10 days for a previous drunk-driving charge, wearing the same

suit I'd worn to the funeral—in fact, the guards thought I was a lawyer and were about to call in a warrant on me for not checking myself into jail. That was an odd experience.

After I got out, I went to a bunch of bars in northern Virginia. The next few days are spotty, but I know for sure that I got arrested twice in two days at Reagan National Airport, both times for being drunk. For running out on a bar tab, I was charged with defrauding an innkeeper; the charge was later dropped. I think I still owe a bail bondsman $20. I spent at least one night in a hospital, leaving without being discharged, fight-or-flight reflex on full alert. I can't say I recommend it. I definitely don't recommend pulling out one's own catheter.

I showed up on a childhood friend's doorstep, and she helped me more than I deserved, bringing me to her parents' place in Yorktown, Virginia, drying me out and calling my dad to come pick me up. Her father, a Vietnam cavalryman, seemed to understand and offered some wise words I'm still trying to follow. (Thank you, sir.)

My point is, I had been on quite a few cross-country journeys with my father already, not always under the best circumstances. But the one in 2013 was different, and not just because I had jumped out of the truck airborne-style. This one scared the hell out of me, and I started to get serious about getting help. Life was pain. The therapy I had received while still in the military was a tourniquet on a bleeding wound—it kept me from dying right away, but it sure as hell wasn't a permanent solution. The therapy I got from the VA wasn't much better. The VA recognizes two treatments for PTSD as "evidence-based" and "gold standard": talk-based protocols and medication.

They didn't work so well for me. I was kicked out of one of the VA's flagship PTSD programs in Menlo Park, California, and my medication history spans nearly the whole alphabet, missing only four letters. "Most studies show that if you get the treatment and stick through it, about two thirds get better," says Ritchie. "But only one third sticks to the treatment."

I knew I was part of the problem—I had trouble conforming to the brand of middle-of-the-road flowchart medicine that seemed most effective on older Vietnam veterans who were so beaten down they'd take anything. There had to be something else. I looked into MDMA trials in Charleston, South Carolina and noted that psilocybin also showed promise. Then I started calling around.

I first heard about the stellate ganglion block in 2014 from Dr. Frank Ochberg, a leading expert on posttraumatic stress injury. He and many others, including former president George W. Bush and retired Army vice chief of staff Peter Chiarelli, are working to replace the term *posttraumatic stress disorder* with *posttraumatic stress injury,* which better reflects the very real neurological and biological changes that occur in the body after trauma. Ochberg introduced me to an informal group of psychiatrists, psychologists, therapists and journalists. Years later, one of my closest friends would refer to Ochberg as my guardian angel.

I didn't get the shot then, but I should have. Instead I hunkered down for the next year and a half, trying to keep myself out of jail and out of the mental hospital, trying to keep myself normal. I moved out of my parents' house in Arkansas and rented a place a few miles away. My girlfriend moved from California to be with me, and I tried to live like a normal person. It worked, sort of. I mowed my lawn, grew a garden, stayed out of trouble and the nuthouse. Still, I couldn't sleep, couldn't focus, couldn't give my girlfriend the attention or love she deserved, couldn't get my shit together on anything but the most basic level. After almost nine months of enduring all the awful crap that living with me entailed, she made the best decision for us both. She left me.

Sleep was still hard to come by. When I did sleep my sheets were soaked in sweat by the time I woke up. I moved into a smaller apartment, got a cat and worked on my writing. While researching another story in 2015, I spoke with a genuine hero of the war in Afghanistan. His name is Jason Amerine, and he was a lieutenant colonel in the Special Forces. In 2001 he led the first team into Afghanistan, saved Hamid Karzai's life and lost three Americans and more than 20 Afghan allies under his command when a 2,000-pound bomb dropped from a U.S. plane hit their position. Our conversation drifted to PTSD, and he told me he'd gotten the stellate ganglion block. He admitted to having reservations about giving up the familiar pain PTSD provides.

"The sum of all my experiences was meaningful to me, and I didn't regard them

Farwell and other soldiers playing soccer with children in Terwa district, Paktika province, Afghanistan. Nearly 20 percent of post-9/11 soldiers suffer from PTSD. Only 50 percent say the war was worth it.

Left: Farwell, hooked up to an IV, in front of his Humvee in Ghazni, Afghanistan. **Right:** A medical team at the Ashton Center for Day Surgery outside Chicago preps Farwell for a stellate ganglion block injection, which has shown promise in treating PTSD.

negatively, even though my body was screwed up, even though I undoubtedly had a degree of PTSD," Amerine said. "I didn't want it to all magically go away, because that was who I was. If I was gonna think about my men who died, I wanted to feel that, and I just didn't know what the shot would do."

My interest piqued, I decided maybe it was time for me to get the shot. After all, what harm could it do?

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First I asked my psychiatrist at the VA if she could refer me for a stellate ganglion block. Then I had to tell her what it was and explain that it's commonly used in pain management. She didn't know of any VAs that offered the procedure, so she put in a note to my primary care doctor, whom I visit once a year or so, to see if I could get the block for pain management. My medical records show that this request was denied, though no one ever called to let me know. So I called Ochberg. He called Lipov, and Lipov called me and invited me to get the shot and write about it. A couple of days later, he asked if I would be interested in going on a daytime TV show on which a panel of doctors discuss medical issues with guests. I flew to Los Angeles and did the pre-show, and met a guy who'd had the shot. His wife claimed it was magic. I went on the show and basically acted like a bummed-out weirdo, but I met Lipov for the first time. He was there with a documentary filmmaker and the TV show crew. Which is how, a couple of weeks later, I had the odd experience of watching rough-cut video of myself at the exact moment I gained some measure of my life back and left the last sweat-stained sheets on a hospital gurney.

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Dr. Eugene Lipov is in the frame. He's giving me the injection. He's wearing light blue scrubs and a surgical cap with an American flag pattern, looking vaguely like a doctor who has swapped heads with a biker. Behind the lens is Kris, a tall, broad-shouldered Californian by way of Pennsylvania who acts as field producer, cameraman, editor and all-around virtuoso for the show. This whole thing is meta, an out-of-body experience.

"We are treating Matt today. So Matt has had PTSD," Lipov says, pausing to ask, "Do I look at you or the lens?" Kris prompts Lipov to act natural. "Matt is here today because he has severe PTSD. He's tried multiple therapies that have failed, and he wanted to see if the stellate ganglion block works. I found in about 2006 that a stellate ganglion block returns the brain to its pre-trauma state."

"Why?" Kris asks from behind the camera. It's a leading question, but the narrator inside me is grateful. I haven't done as much research as I should have going into this; I'm impulsive by nature.

"It's an old anesthetic process used since 1925 for pain management," Lipov says. "I found in 2006 it seems to reboot the brain, and a very common question is: Why can an anesthetic block that lasts eight to 12 hours give years of relief? All I can offer is a hypothesis. PTSD is a biological condition. When somebody has severe trauma, military or otherwise, it promotes something called NGF—nerve growth factor. Turns out when NGF is secreted from the brain and then turns off, it leads to nerve fibers sprouting in the neck. With the stellate ganglion block, those nerve fibers die off."

He holds up a medical demonstration skull

with part of a spinal column running under the white bubble that would normally hold brains. I've already made the "poor Yorick" jokes. Lipov points at the neck bones.

"The first injections are done on the right side of the neck near the C6 and the C7 vertebrae. These are safer. If it works at this point, we stop. If it doesn't, then we go for a block at about the C3. How do we judge if it works? The body gives clues in the form of a Horner syndrome." This is when the right eyelid gets droopy. A few patients need a booster shot a year later, but most never do.

Then Lipov gets right to the point. Before the procedure, he asks patients to think of the worst thing they've ever seen and feel it. Then he asks the patient to do the same after the shot.

After the first injection, Lipov asks, "How do you feel?"

"Kind of awake, a little bit loopy," I reply.

"Can't tell any difference?" Lipov asks.

I reply, "Hard to tell." He'd given the injection in the correct spot, using an X-ray and a dye to guide the .22-gauge needle. My memory of this is spotty because for most of the time I was racked out and strapped down on a gurney, snug under the somatic blanket provided by propofol, Michael Jackson's favorite drug. My dad calls it "milk of amnesia."

Lipov puts me under and administers the second injection. Later he and Kris come back to wake me up. Lipov lightly taps me while I snore under the thin white hospital blanket. "Matt, Mr. Sleeping Beauty," Lipov croons in his Ukrainian accent. I startle briefly and then ask if I am done. Yes, Lipov affirms. Yes, finished with the second shot.

"Oh...hey," I say weakly.

"Feel any different?" Lipov asks.

"Yeah, uh...," I'm trying to think of how to frame my thoughts, and the fact that a camera is pointed at me isn't helping.

"Feeling chilled?" Lipov prompts.

"Yeah!" I reply, noticing how relaxed I am. It's a weird feeling, one I'm not used to, and I'm grateful. Lipov turns to Kris and says, "Same response as the other guy." The other guy is a former marine I met in the waiting room. His mom and my dad became fast friends, swapping their own war stories of dealing with unhinged children.

Lipov asks if this second injection feels any different. Again my response is lame. "Yeah, I woke up and smiled with this one." Lipov and I high-five.

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I noticed the difference the day after my injection. My dad—an enlisted submariner who'd sailed on a World War II–era diesel electric boat—and I toured Chicago, including a visit to the Museum of Science and Industry.

I was able to tour the museum's German U-boat, which was crowded and loaded with loud noises and flashing lights, without freaking out, without my blood pressure rising. It wasn't until halfway through the tour that I realized that nothing about it—the lights, the sounds, the claustrophobia, the crowd—was freaking me out.

In Chicago I also saw my friend Baddr, the med student who'd seen me the very first time I'd gone to a psych ward, back in 2009. Now a surgeon, he'd read more on the shot and despite initial skepticism thought it held promise. "Quacks don't publish," he said.

I slept great that night. And I've slept well almost every night since.

BEFORE THE PROCEDURE, LIPOV ASKS PATIENTS TO THINK OF THE WORST THING THEY'VE EVER SEEN.

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A month after receiving the stellate ganglion block, I traveled to Washington, D.C. to talk to some people for a book I'm writing. It was early December. I hate Washington. I didn't always, but that changed with the war and my brother and his crew's burial across the river at Arlington. Ripped open some scabs, that did.

Now, four years later, I was at the cemetery again. It was a Monday. I wanted to get it out of the way, as callous as that sounds. I brought some flowers, pins and mementos and stood in front of the grave for a while. Looking at the new rows of tombstones and tilled earth that had grown in since the last time I'd visited, I thought about the fact that sharks continue to grow teeth throughout their life. After a few minutes, I figured I'd paid my respects. I had another appointment. My body moved to the position of attention, and I saluted. Tears formed. I moved to the position of parade rest and studied how I felt. I was sad. I missed my brother. I was angry he was dead. But I wasn't going to pick a fight or slam back 20 shots of Jameson. It was far different from how I'd felt four years before.

It was December 7, the anniversary of Pearl Harbor. That night I was still keyed up, so I went walking through D.C.'s Adams Morgan neighborhood. I followed a bunch of kids dressed in ugly Christmas sweaters with short shorts and tight bodies into a random bar in Georgetown. Bars, sober, are hilarious for me now; I like to go and observe the action. It's a way, I suppose, of understanding what I was like for many years, without the group-therapy revival narratives of AA, which drive me nearly as insane as group therapy at the VA.

I watched these kids. They were celebrating a friend's 21st birthday with the requisite 21 shots. They were rich kids. Not a care in the world. I sat down at the bar, drank a Diet Coke and tried to figure out how I felt. White-hot anger would previously have been my default setting: They were sitting here, celebrating, at the same age I was shitting myself in a fortified compound that was crumbling in Ghazni province. But now it didn't make me angry.

It made me a little sad. That's true. But mostly it just made me feel separate. Not isolated. Separate. That's a distinction, one that makes me think back to my Mormon roots, when elders used to "set us apart" for religious callings. After Afghanistan, I left the church, and now I really don't know what I believe, beyond that if a god or ether exists, it has a sense of humor.

I felt set apart. Priestly, perhaps. I had carried out extreme violence. I had suffered for it. And yet I didn't have to. It was my choice to make, and I made it. I felt possessed of some special knowledge, essential to life, that these naifs had yet to grasp.

I wasn't angry. And I could sleep. And that was a start. ■

Additional reporting by Elsa Givan.

Insipidities

Joni longs for a life of the mind but settles for illicit visits with married men and sweaty hotel hookups with clients

ILLUSTRATION BY **SIMON PEMBERTON**

David: In order to understand quantitative easing you have to understand what a bubble is. Basically, a bubble happens when the value of assets—that's stocks or houses or something—just starts going up so much that people feel like they're wealthier. They haven't actually gotten any more income, but the assets they own are worth more and more. Say you have a house and it triples in value and so you think of yourself—your net worth—as being a lot higher, so you go out and spend more money. That's called the wealth effect. Have you heard of that?

BY **MARIE CALLOWAY**

Joni kicks her shoe so that it skims right past David's ankle and lands beneath the blackboard where he's standing.

David turns to look at her. Their eyes meet briefly before each turns away, Joni's face flushing. She bites her bottom lip.

Joni: No.

They are in an empty classroom at Columbia, where David is a graduate student, a transplant from South Africa.

David: So the wealth effect is the fact that when the value of your assets rises you spend more of your income. You save less money because you feel like your house is doing the saving for you. So, asset bubbles, wealth effect. What happened in these recent bubbles was based in housing. A really high percentage of GDP growth in the 2000s was from people borrowing against the value of their homes, taking out loans on their homes and spending the money. Like if you bought....

David continues, but Joni does not hear. His voice is a sound that pleases her, that enters her and leaves her just the same.

She had genuinely wanted to learn when she asked David to tutor her—paid him $100 for his time and companionship—but she finds herself unable to follow. Impressive-sounding, incomprehensible words flow in and out of her ears, as if she were listening to a lecture in French. She focuses on the things she likes, sensual things: the sound of his accent, the tap of the chalk as he writes, the silhouette of his tall, slender body, the air of authority that being at the front of a classroom gives him.

And she likes the feeling of breaking a rule, of sneaking into an empty school she isn't even enrolled in after midnight, the sense of camaraderie she felt gliding through the large empty hallways in the dark with David. Perhaps it is the air of the illicit that makes her unable to focus on economics.

David: Do you have any questions?

David fetches the champagne she brought for them and the mugs he stole from the staff break room and sets them next to her. She slides her bottom across the black table, reaches up and gently places her arms around David's neck, softly kissing the sides.

He doesn't stop her, but he hesitates. He is looking straight ahead, seeming not to know what to do. Joni runs her chubby fingers through his blond hair and continues to kiss his neck and ears. He kisses Joni's mouth lightly.

David's eyes reveal a trace of something he is normally able to suppress. He places his hand on Joni's thigh.

David: I'm going to get in trouble for kissing my students.

They gather the champagne and mugs and walk to the staff room. The mood changes. Joni cannot keep the momentum going, does not know what to say to David now. He washes the mugs silently. When he is finished he looks past her as if to say it is the end of her lesson, time to go home now, school is done for the day.

As they walk by David's office, Joni places her hand on the doorknob and turns to face it. She does not want to leave him. Joni looks over her shoulder at David.

Joni: I have to show you something.

She walks into his office and sits at his desk, which is covered in a flurry of books and student papers.

David follows her, closing the door behind him but for an inch.

David: What do you have to show me?

He sounds as if he knows she is up to something.

Joni stares shyly at the dull linoleum floor. She thinks about calling the whole game off, but she does not want to give up so easily. She thinks, I have to answer his question—he is the teacher, after all—and so she lifts her black dress to reveal large white breasts, sagging out of a purely decorative quarter-cup red lace bra.

David: Oh, those are impressive.

Joni: See, it's cute. Because of the lace.

David: Yeah.

He nods absentmindedly.

Wordlessly, mindlessly, he approaches her, and his slender hand, ringed finger and all, reaches out and touches her breasts delicately, cups them. David always handles her so gently. He is the only man ever to have touched her in a way that was always pleasant. But six months after they met, friends of friends, she wonders if it is that same gentleness (timidity perhaps) that makes him run away after just a kiss. Will he finally give in tonight?

She places her fingers on his belt buckle and snakes toward the clasp. He sighs wearily.

David: It's getting late. You should probably go home.

She has been too rash, and David has panicked and sent her away.

David is married, afraid of taking advantage, afraid of intimacy. But Joni doesn't care. She wants him to get over it. She wants him to fuck her in his office. She has long fantasized about a professor or TA like David leaning her against the bookcases full of Marx and Ricardo and taking her. The fact that he is married and 15 years her senior only adds to it. His guilt is getting in the way of her pleasure, yet it is also indirectly part of the cause of her desire for him. How much longer will it be until she can feel pleasure? Or is it actually just the chase, the anticipation that she enjoys? It doesn't seem to matter. Time is running out. She is 23, too old—in her mind—to be a schoolgirl. Too old to be thrilled by sleeping with older men, married men.

A long cab ride home to her Alphabet City apartment. She stares out the window. New York is hideous, with gray dilapidated buildings and filthy streets mottled with failed asphalt and garbage heaps. And the people are even worse. It's like living inside an eternal cocaine comedown. Why does anyone live here?

In New York she always wants to break the rules because she can't fit in, isn't capable of it. She wants to want to learn about economics, but all she can focus on is sex with the man who is supposed to tutor her. She is a bimbo, and true to bimbo form she cannot accept it. Even though she always ends up like this, vaguely humiliated after his polite rejection. "Misery and the Bimbo Form." Yet she will continue to surround herself with smart people like David.

• • •

It is unsurprising but eye-opening how it follows, from the statement (often incorrectly attributed to Primo Levi) that Palestinians are the Jews' Jews, that whores are women's women. Textbook.

Honestly, one reason I sense that sex workers who aren't forced into the trade are subject to so much hatred is that the implication of their work is that the patriarchy doesn't spoil general heterosexual relations. And that a woman can use sex to her own ends. I don't mean that in an idealizing way regarding how sex work actually operates; I mean that there's a fundamental refusal of the premise that "sexual access" in itself is a kind of harm or wrong, which is what is absolutely implied when you hear about patriarchy being all about sexual access to women. It certainly is, in part, but that doesn't mean you confront the patriarchy when you deny sexual access.

I'm not sure I'm expressing this with the requisite nuance.

Put another way, it's the structures of sexual access, rather than the desire for it, that get conflated. And the latter usually supplants the former in critiques of sex work, porn and so on, and it tends to focus on women who find their sexuality viable. Not unproblematic, not painless, just viable. And not because they're brainwashed by patriarchy, but because they happen to be well-adjusted against the ubiquitous sexual conservatism.

But many people are deluded that we live in a world of sexual liberation. The mainline feminist argument is that women are not sexually liberated but men are—at women's expense. Not in my view. Men sexually exploit women all over the place. That's not a product of liberation but of the ongoing conservative organization of sexual exchange. The fact that women can't access men sexually in anything like a public and impersonal way says everything about this.[1]

• • •

George: You know, you remind me of...an actress from a French film.

Comparing a doughy ginger like Joni to a Karina or a Bardot is laughable. No, she is more reminiscent of a Todd Solondz character. But he knows that, and he knows how to flatter her. Still, she has never been able to fully suspend her disbelief.

He had asked her to meet him in front of Coffee Shop on 16th Street near his office in Union Square, where he works as a bespoke shoemaker. She feels embarrassed standing in front of such a place, with its garish blinking neon sign and NYU freshmen clientele and fried plantains covered in off-puttingly red ketchup.

They have not seen each other in eight months. She likes his well-fitting corduroy suits, his blond hair and the thick-framed glasses he wore specifically because he's aware of Joni's infatuation with intellectuals.

George is Joni's older married friend. She remembers part of their very first conversation:

Joni: Do you have a wife?

George: Yes, but I don't have a girlfriend.

But now, he tells her, he has five of them.

George: Sometimes I feel bad, cream-pie-ing these 21-year-old Jewish girls on the floor of my office. But I'm like Don Draper. I'm thinking of pitching a column about my sexcapades to somewhere like *Esquire* or PLAYBOY, somewhere with real money.

Sensing Joni's disapproval, he defends himself.

George: In New York there are so many beautiful girls, it's like a buffet! I mean, wouldn't you?

Joni smiles, unsure of what to say.

George: Nah, you'd just have a bite of potato and go to bed.

They walk in silence. Joni does not want to go to his office but follows him there anyway.

George: I remember you being quiet. I don't remember you saying nothing.

It's true. She has still not forgiven him for the night after the Verso party.

• • •

Who goes to a Verso party?

Bitchy East Coast girls who grew up in an idyllic Boston suburb and went to Sarah Lawrence, who have parents who read books (instead of growing up in a cultural wasteland that exists solely to provide casino service and labor, in a family where avoiding teenage motherhood and

1. Anonymous.

attending a third-tier state college were almost unattainable achievements). Pompous girls who desperately want to be boys or—lower in the hierarchy—catering girls who serve a purely aesthetic and/or care role to the boys.

Mediocre, mean, arrogant boys. So many of them. More boys than subway rats. Rat Bastard who had twice (twice!) soberly hit and humiliated his girlfriend in public apropos of nothing. Now he is held up by New York as an example of a good male feminist—in contrast to all the bad ones, and there are so many bad ones—but he's good, he says, because he critiques his own overwhelming but problematic instinct to protect women.

Joni heard a blonde catering girl squeal to him, "Your dog is such a Situationist!" and climbed out on the fire escape. Or tried to. Her sock caught the corner of the frame and she fell on her knees. ("Fuck!") Partygoers saw her and scoffed. She climbed down to the street and called George, not knowing who else.

They were in his office then too. She sat on that rug—the cream-pie rug, apparently—legs crossed, revealing pink panties, eating a rare steak with her bare hands. Chewing deeply into thick sinew, ripping it apart, myoglobin trickling between fleshy fingers—she licked it off like berry juice.

An "old-fashioned meat-and-potatoes British affair" is what George called it.

He gave the black delivery boy a 50 percent tip to impress her and she did feel happy, yet slightly embarrassed, when the kid jumped for joy.

She excused herself to go to the bathroom down the hall. She needed to expel the six tall boys of Bud Light, whose brackish taste she did not like but which she chose knowing they would sneer at her at the Verso party for drinking it. Those quiet looks that said so much. Sitting on the toilet in the dim gray bathroom, Joni imagined their disgust: *Very tacky. She seems to pile on the carbs as heavily as her makeup. Graceless. Graceless.*

She certainly felt graceless when she returned to find George holding her phone, looking through her e-mail.

George: Isn't that funny! You're having sex with everyone but me. Can get all these hot JAPs but can't get a hooker to do it with me.

Despite all the clammy, unwashed body parts that had been jammed inside her, she had never felt so violated by a man.

Joni's mind reels; why did she agree to meet with him today? She once liked him because he had taken her to see the delicate *My Night at Maud's* at Film Forum, had eaten steak tartare out of the palm of her hand at Balthazar ("like a good boy") and because she had sat in his office on calm summer afternoons sipping $4 iced tea, admiring the jovial, charming way he interacted with clients and how he gently, meticulously spent hours perfecting a child's tiny leather shoe.

But that seems long gone. Now there's just this. There is only ever this moment. An obnoxious alcoholic who trolls Tinder for girls (age range 18 to 25), too cowardly to admit to himself what he is doing (see: his wife's supposed "tacit agreement") yet too much of an asshole to be ashamed and not brag about it. He is a man who calls himself Super Dad for taking off one afternoon a week from cheating on his pregnant wife to bring his son to the park. He embraces no conclusion, no role entirely.

Joni's rule is that if you do something, you should do it completely. She would like to say that no matter how many flaws she has, she wants to fully experience the consequences of her actions. Her favorite example is how she tells herself she is an escort and so she is the most high-end escort one can be. At least when one weighs 162 pounds. She ignores the ways in which she does not measure up. She loves to make generalizations, black and white. It makes life more comprehensible. Amy, her old friend, had told her that relationships are a "dynamic process." But she wants a right party (Joni) and a wrong party (whomever she disagrees with), determined by completely static rules. Amy was now convinced she could not enable Joni to do evil things like date a married man. ("We don't do that!")

Joni hates moralizing. "Let us have a bit of fun first." She often thinks about Molly Bloom's soliloquy—has read it many times, listened to it being performed—but has not bothered with any other Joyce, does not care. She likes to read it at face value, feels validated by it. A bad feminist looking for a good time.

Of course, here she was with George, but did it count if she didn't verbalize it? Just flash a smile and play with her hair, forming the mosaic of George in her brain. After all, she was neither sleeping with George and having a torrid love affair nor ignoring him and, what—maybe telling his wife?

His wife. George's favorite pastime is justifying cheating on his pregnant wife.

George: I'm not saying I deserve a medal for what I did. Cleaning piss out of the sheets, rubbing vomit out of the carpet. And once when she was drunk, we were fighting and she was standing in the door of our bedroom and said, "You're not man enough to hit me." So, so I did. And I was made out to be the bad guy, when she started it! What was I supposed to do, Joni?

As he says this he staggers toward Joni, grabs her wrists and presses his body to hers. His pungent whiskey smell nauseates Joni. He cannot stop telling her about his penis.

George: Do you think I'm a scumbag for having sex with a hooker? It was a classy $600 one. And I think I was quite a change of pace for her. First I thought, She's faking it, she's faking it, whatever, but then at the end I started to really give it to her and she says, "You are like a passionate Italian man, not British!" Some Russian girl who could barely speak English.

SHE ISN'T ASHAMED OF THE THINGS SHE DOES FOR MONEY; SHE'S DONE WORSE FOR FREE.

He hiccups.

George: Now I'm going to sit down and you're going to sit on your Uncle George's lap.

As he moves to sit she pushes him off her so that he falls to the floor, and she escapes. She cannot stand to talk to that kind of man for free.

• • •

Why is my life so lurid these days? she wonders as she begins to cycle—her thick, firm legs the only solid part of her, the only powerful part of her. Those legs that turn the wheels of the vintage banana-pudding-yellow cruiser, the one she bought for $60 on Long Island three months ago. The one her friends laugh at due to its rust and bodiless pedals but which she loves, truly loves.

• • •

The leftist reading group meets every Wednesday night at six. A different kind of left than the Verso party crowd. People who've spent

their lives working and avoiding work and sneaking away at work to read obscure Turkish communist texts, people whose parents couldn't pay for them to go to Harvard or Brown and who go on to intern at *n+1*. People who didn't secretly aspire to become socialites among *The Nation*'s readership.

Sarah: —moved away from the Communist Party, put out things that were kind of crucial to the commie left in the 1960s and of course the 1970s and Bologna was also a leading intellectual working on oper...oprerr...*workerism*—and some of the other things that are important at this time is a movement away from the traditional labor movements and the women's movement, the student movement coming in and having to redefine what the workers' movement was, now that it had been sort of starting to separate from the traditional labor movement. And so a lot of these articles are attempting to reiterate, like, what to do with that split. And the way that Tronti describes that I find really nice, that the moment of discovery has returned, that the time of political vanguards is over and that gives us a new way to discover political organization——

A circle of chairs in a classroom.

Joni is late; she is always late. Late or not, it doesn't matter. She is never present. She drifts in and out of listening, does not care about any of this. Even her wish to care is vain and insincere. She wants to be an impressive orator, wants to destroy rat boys in political debates and wants someone to declare her intelligent. She wants to hang around now as much as she did when she first met them and thought to herself, These people are intelligent and compelling and I want to be them.

She nods at sophisticated-sounding remarks her fellow readers make and waits impatiently to gossip with the more socially competent members afterward. And they certainly gossip. Two hours later at a nearby bar, of a long-haired particularly odious and bespectacled Stalinist boy:

Paul: He wrote this shitty article and in the comments section, a scan of a kill order from his beloved Italian CP against leftcoms and Trots, and said, "Is this what is aspired to?" They write these shitty soc-dem papers. So boring. You can even tell who their Ph.D. advisors are 'cause they'll, like, wheel out the hobbyhorse of their advisor's old papers at any opportunity. [*breathlessly*] "This calls for guaranteed minimum income!" I don't get people who think leftist politics are about, like, somehow for 40 years we've failed to market these reforms right and we have to find some magic formula to sell them to people. If history hinges on these cretins' amateur-hour PR, then that's the most depressing thing ever——

And so on. She doesn't understand but loves the gossip, the tone, the ability to feel like an insider, as if she has some special knowledge (even if only superficially by association) that makes her privy to something no one else in New York knows. But she doesn't really know. Joni has been a part of the group for only four months. Joni decides that she can leave, that there is no chance of having anything to contribute, that she lacks all context. She has to leave, actually, because she must work tonight.

"Are you going to be okay?"

• • •

The warm Manhattan night makes her feel calm but sickly. She breathes deeply. She is not drunk, yet the air will make her sober.

She hails a cab to the Renaissance Hotel.

Yes, she has to work. Unlike the real Marxists, Joni does not hate work. She only dreads everything leading up to work: how she must jam her legs into forever-running stockings and fasten unhookable hooks before finally throwing it all on the floor, telling herself that men don't even like lingerie anyway; the car sickness she feels as she clumsily attempts to apply eyeliner in the back of a cab; the lotion she rubs on the patches of missed leg hair before scraping it away with a pink disposable Bic. A boy once told her he understood the uneven division of affective labor and that's why he doesn't mind paying for girls on dates. If only clients were so understanding, paying her her hourly rate for the time it takes to get ready.

But tonight she does not do any of that. It does not feel necessary.

She stumbles into the elevator and presses her head against the metal for support. With her eyes closed and the cool, sticky feeling of the metal pressed against her swollen face, she thinks back to several months before.

• • •

The day after her 23rd birthday, David had suddenly, cryptically asked her over Facebook Chat if she'd like to meet for coffee at Ninth Street Espresso. It's true that the night before they had shared a first kiss, and it's also true that they had held hands, running, laughing, pleasantly warm air in their faces, Joni's comically stocky legs pumping, trying to keep up with David's long slender ones. And it's even true that when they had stopped and David announced he couldn't go to the bar because he had to work, she had slapped him. He sputtered indignantly as she ran away, wide-eyed, manic and giggling. And it's true that when they met at Ninth Street Espresso she had cheerfully shown him the photos of her stumbling around half-naked in the bar the night before, near-blackout intoxicated.

David: Joni—I think you're very beautiful and sexy and really interesting. You're just my type.

Joni could not contain the smile her joyful expectations created, clutching her hand to her racing heart, thinking, Oh, he's complimenting me—he's going to ask me out!

David: But I'm not ready. I freaked out when you kissed me.

Stupefied silence.

Joni: I'm not good at these conversations.

David: I'm not either.

A lull.

Joni: [*Pleadingly*] I'm not...socially...adept...enough...to navigate...this conversation!

She stared at the ground, sucking on her thumb, and brushed her hair in front of her face.

David sighed softly. She hoped he saw her then: vacuous, struggling, not just unwilling but actually incapable of responding. His eyes stopped scanning; he changed into someone easier. The superficial but courteous and patient person she imagined he became when he interacted with his younger, slower students.

David: So did you read those books I gave you?

Joni: Yes, I really like *Women as Lovers*. But I didn't start the other one yet. Um.

JONI GUZZLES THE CHAMPAGNE AND EATS STEAK WITH HER BARE HANDS.

They both stared at the adjacent wall.

Joni trembled. She could not stand sitting in uncomfortable silence—a situation she was intimately familiar with, one that never stopped feeling like suffocation. She suddenly nodded.

Joni: Will you walk me home, please?

Soon they stood in front of Joni's building.

David: So, see you around?

Joni nodded again, thinking, Not all boys can handle being slapped. Even though they all deserve it.

In her apartment complex's elevator she pressed her cheek against the metal doors, trying to cool her burning face.

• • •

Yes, that day was so humiliating. She isn't ashamed of the things she does for money; she knows she has done worse for free.

But now she is being paid. She is on a different date. A four-hour dinner date with an investment banker.

He does not comment on Joni's intoxication.

She holds him, strokes and gently pecks the top of his fat bald head. She feels genuine affection for her clients, but only in a customer-loyalty-program kind of way. (Thanks so much for coming!) Their intercourse is nothing much. Joni wonders how it is that this man, like so many men, arrived in middle age without ever learning how to touch a woman.

She guzzles the champagne the banker offers her. And again she eats room service steak with her bare hands, lifting the fillet to her mouth and ripping it apart with her hands. Still, out of habit her mouth is closed, she chews primly. She sees but does not understand the banker's nonplussed expression.

She wipes her mouth on her arm and curls up next to the banker.

• • •

It speaks volumes, though, that men don't achieve any sustained insight into how to have good sex. It's an indication of how back-to-front things are when sexual activity is an unpleasurable site of experience. Certain strains of feminism seem to take this awfulness as indicative of women's libidinal structure or something, like the inherent unpleasantness of sex. It's odd. I don't know. Sex should be a site of pleasure. Not in some natural Edenic sense but because it can be. Is that so naive? Obviously it's difficult, if not impossible, to extract sex from the asymmetries of patriarchal society, so sex is unpleasant perhaps to the degree that it exacerbates or makes manifest those inequalities. But in that sense, sex is no different from any social activity, including pleasant activities.[2]

• • •

She wakes up.

She sees bright light—white light.

She feels heavy in a white bed—a hotel bed.

She's curled up next to someone—her client.

She springs up like a Bobo doll, clutching the white comforter to her breasts.

Joni: Oh my God! I'm so sorry!

Bizarre, haunted, empty. Containing the desire to panic, to scream, to destroy. To confront herself: *How could you?*

Client: It's all right. You were sleeping so soundly, I didn't want to wake you.

Her body feels, looks untouched. She wants to stick her fingers into herself to examine if there is any blood or semen, but her body is frozen with shame. All she feels capable of doing is fixating on the TV screen. It is suddenly captivating.

A long, smooth, panning shot of a sleek black gliding SUV cuts to another shot of a white father and son duo, wearing camouflage, saying, "Rebecca has been in the wrong Los Angeles."

Client: It's not fair they suspended that guy. Whatever happened to free speech?

Joni: You're so right! Right, right, right, right, right.

In stinging, shaming fluorescent light, heart racing, she assesses herself, pink clammy fingers spread on pink dry flesh. Finds nothing amiss. Nothing new. Same old, same old.

Thank God he did not take advantage, she thinks.

Guilty and grateful, Joni tries to throw $500 of the $2,000 onto the counter but it lands on the floor.

She slinks away head down, walks self-consciously in the way one does when trying not to look drunk.

She tumbles headfirst into a cab. Feeling the cool leather seat stick against her face, feeling her drunkenly pliable body sway with the movement of the car, she thinks of Coetzee's protagonist in *Disgrace,* who in the back of his car has sex with an intoxicated streetwalker ("street worker," she corrects herself), one so intoxicated she cannot manage a single coherent word. To think she—Joni—had gotten upset, wanted Coetzee to have a more enlightened view of sex workers. I'm not like that, she thought.

Joni does not want to think of what she actually is like. When her co-workers tell stories, they are not like hers, and they would cringe and say "Oh honey" if they knew. The bad whores have to be shamed, for they make the others look bad. She instead focuses on her indignation at Coetzee.

At home she lies on her now blackened bed, bought secondhand from a discount mattress retailer out of Queens via Craigslist. It is, as it has been for the past three months, strewn with cigarette butts (Marlboro Lights). At first she tried to contain the butts to her bed, but now they soil the things she keeps on her floor: clothes (Forever 21), three thoroughly worn pairs of identical black shoes (Toms), 14 empty tall boys (Miller Lite), the book she has been semi-honestly telling people she's "reading right now" for the past seven months (Ann Rower), a broken $250 netbook (Acer) and an open tube of lipstick (Duane Reade). Her room is otherwise vacant. ■

2. Anonymous.

PLAYMATE

PHOTOGRAPHY BY GUY AROCH

"Camille Rowe isn't just a model. It's not who I am." It's a brisk Sunday night in the City of Lights, and Miss April is in her Le Marais apartment, preparing a dinner of fish, fennel and Moroccan carrots. "I'm grateful for all I have," she continues, "but I've also had sleepless nights of feeling misunderstood. I had to learn how to separate myself from my job." She pauses and puts her focus back on dinner. "The thing is, my entire family is in the restaurant business. My siblings, my father and my grandparents all started as chefs and got their own restaurants. I'm a good cook, but in relation to them, I'm terrible," she says, laughing. Indeed, Camille, a native Parisian, veered from her family's rich history as restaurateurs when a modeling scout discovered her at a café. Next came campaigns for Louis Vuitton and Dior, numerous magazine covers and a move to New York City when she turned 21. But tonight, she's back in her hometown to shoot her first major film role—and like the delicate cuisine she prepares, the film is a toast to her roots. "I can't reveal the title yet, which is annoying, but I can say it's a comedy by a popular, respected French director. And yes, I speak French in it." Camille hopes acting, along with her PLAYBOY cover, will propel her into a higher stratum where her voice is as recognized as her face. "You're in the public eye as a model, but you're rarely asked to speak—and even then, they ask only about your beauty routines. Now, though, people are starting to care what I have to say. It's why I wore my own clothes and styled myself for this shoot," she says. "This was my vision, and it's a proud moment for me."


AKE IT HARD
PROTECT·IT
PRESERVERS THREE

MISS APRIL 2016

CAMILLE ROWE

AGE: 26 **BIRTHPLACE:** Paris, France **CURRENT CITY:** Chinatown, New York

MY PATH TO PLAYBOY

I've collected PLAYBOY magazines from the 1960s and 1970s since I was a teenager. The entire aesthetic and the girls themselves are so classically beautiful, which is what we tried to imitate with my pictorial. I gave my opinion on everything; I'm so happy it happened this way.

THE BIGGEST MISCONCEPTION ABOUT ME

I've definitely been branded in the modeling industry as a Franco-American. As such, for the longest time people assumed I didn't speak English or that I spoke with an accent. I'm kind of sick of people asking whether I feel more French or more American.

WHAT I STUDIED IN COLLEGE

I attended film school at the American University of Paris, where I studied screenwriting. In high school I watched Jim Jarmusch's *Down by Law* for the first time; I knew then I wanted to write movies.

MY FAVORITE SEX SCENE

I love how free Brigitte Bardot is, and I used to obsessively watch that tragic, tragic movie *Contempt* on repeat. Brigitte's name in the movie is also Camille, so I guess I weirdly related to her. But the sex scene between her and Michel Piccoli is so beautiful. When she asks him if he loves her totally, he replies, "Totally, tenderly, tragically." I love that quote so much I got a tattoo of it.

MY FAVORITE SPORT

My mom is from southern California and was mortified by the thought of raising children who didn't know how to surf. So every summer we were sent to surf camp. I'm no expert, but I love it. I love that it's a sport that relies on your understanding of nature.

AN INSIDER'S TIP FOR VISITING PARIS

My favorite bookstore is San Francisco Book Company on Rue Monsieur le Prince. It has a lot of first editions, rare books and obscure paperbacks from the 1960s and 1970s. It's tiny, but you'll spend hours there. The place is a treasure chest. Plus, the owner is this sassy American man who is hilarious.

@FingerMonkey @CamilleRowe

IS LAGOS THE MOST DANGEROUS PARTY CITY ON THE PLANET?

With Nigerian music influencing American hip-hop and EDM, Adam Skolnick travels to the world capital of Afropop and finds a city that's both captivating and conflicted

PHOTOGRAPHY BY **GLENNA GORDON**

Cova, a club in Victoria Island, pops on a Sunday night.

It was midnight on Saturday and the club was heating up. Some men were decked out in black tie, others in Ankara print caftans and matching fezzes. They leaned on the bar in double-breasted sports coats and Windsor knots, and glided across the dance floor in high-dollar sneakers, draped in silver and gold chains, eyeballing women of all shapes and shades who dazzled in designer gowns, slinky dresses, short shorts or miniskirts, by turns accentuating or revealing ample curves, long legs or an elegant neckline.

BY **ADAM SKOLNICK**

It was my second night in Lagos, Nigeria, and once more I was in a room of clinking glasses and rumbling bass, a room filled with Nigeria's upper crust bouncing to indigenous Afropop. Everything was washed in hot pink. Beams from a bank of rotating lights glinted off gaslight chandeliers and mirrored ornaments behind the bar. Bottles of Dom Pérignon set in buckets of dry ice left vapor trails as they streamed from the bar in the arms of statuesque African beauties conveying them to booths manned by oil or telecom executives, real estate developers, entrepreneurs and their guests.

Many of them, still in their 20s and 30s, were already millionaires, and all of them were hustlers. This was Lagos (pronounced "*lay*-gos") after all, and one conceit is that everybody here has three hustles: An oil mogul may also own a restaurant while bankrolling a recording session with an up-and-coming MC. On the street

level it's no different. In this export-dependent, corrupt, dangerous city, whether you're living high or low, one job never feels like enough.

And the never enough is why I was there. The truth is, I was the jaded traveler incarnate. I'd been to 45 countries on six continents, reporting, adventuring and partying. The road was alive, and each destination had its own distinct flavor. Whenever I'd sacrificed comfort, I typically earned a double shot of authenticity and inspiration.

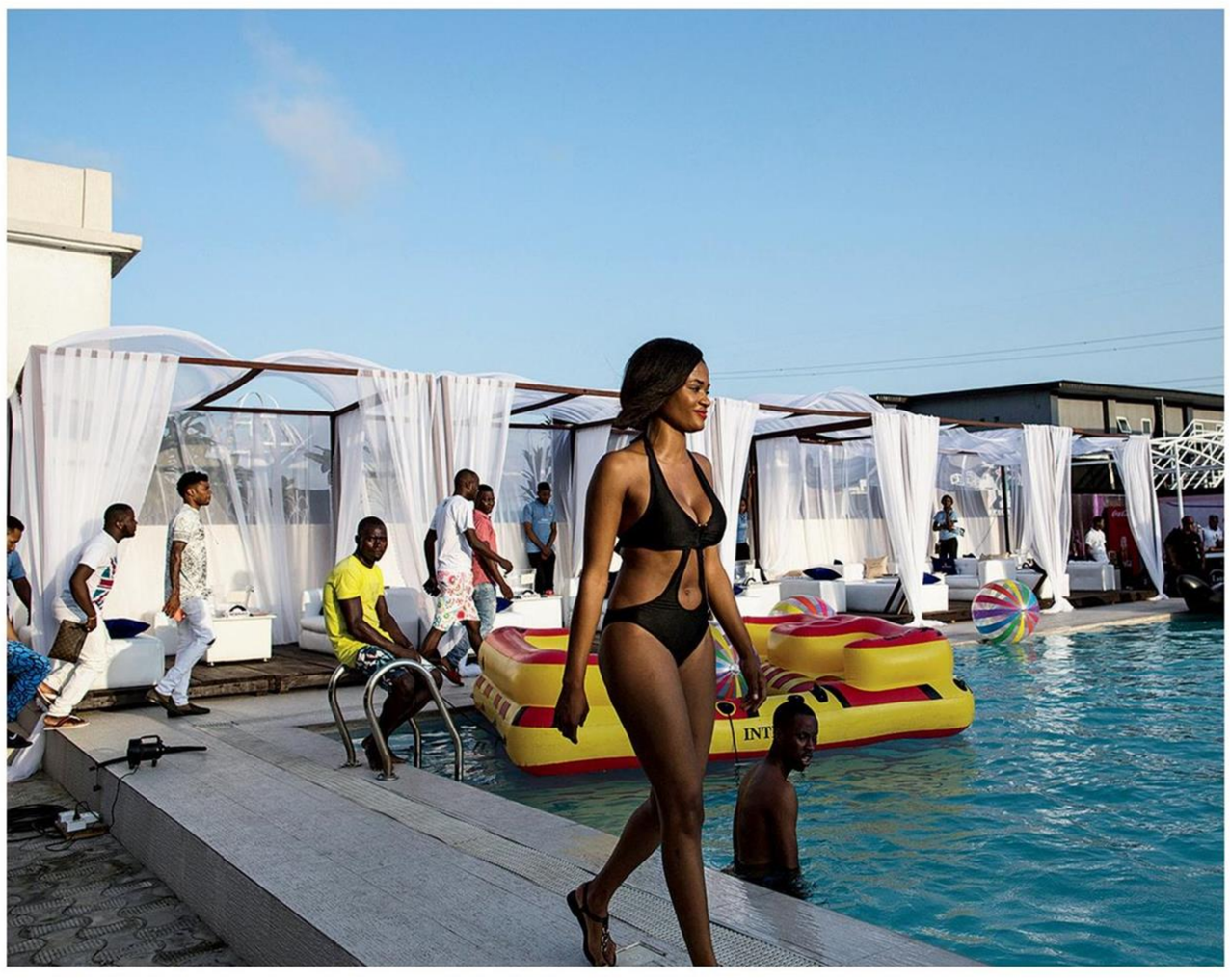
Then, sometime in the past decade, authentic flavor became hard to find. The 21st century travel landscape has morphed into a dreaded sameness in the form of ubiquitous craft cocktails, gourmet small plates and high-tech hostels designed to look and feel like an MTV wonderland. Canopy walks are no longer an exotic promise from a singular lush rain forest but an expectation too easily realized. The bars, the beaches, the hotels, the city streets, the adventures seem attuned to the collective globalized culture rather than rooted in their own timeless traditions and natural gifts. All of which is only augmented by too many Google Earth views and TripAdvisor consultations.

But Lagos, for all its money, glamour and status as the world capital of Afropop, seems immune to all that. Thanks to its crime-riddled reputation, it has become the dark frontier of the global party circuit, a place of cognac-washed clubs, B-boy block parties and Afrobeat root systems. There are no carbon-copy full-moon raves or overly organized pop festivals featuring homogenous EDM robots with $100 haircuts. Instead Lagos offers the elusive electrical charge that all travelers crave: the authentic, even if that means having to watch your back on the street at all times.

LAGOS OFFERS THE AUTHENTIC, EVEN IF THAT MEANS HAVING TO WATCH YOUR BACK ON THE STREET.

Out in front of Sip Lounge, blinged-out revelers, the *ajebotas* ("butter eaters," Yoruba slang for rich kids) stepped from tinted Range Rovers and Lexus SUVs amid nearly invisible beggars—the disabled, the orphaned, the displaced. Along the way they kept their eyes peeled. It wasn't the beggars they were concerned about, nor was it the overt presence of danger that raised their antennae. It was the *potential* for mayhem.

Every privileged soul I met in Lagos had at least one story about staring down the barrel of a gun or the edge of a knife (the poor and working class are mugged and robbed just as often), and there were few better targets than the players heading to Industry Night at Sip Lounge. Lagos is a city of approximately 20 million people where some 9,000 millionaires float upon a sprawling mass of *ajepakos* (Yoruba slang that roughly translates as "twig eaters"). According to estimates, more than 4 million are unemployed and millions more earn low wages on the black market, which means lurking on the poorly lit streets are countless desperate people who may resort to home break-ins, carjacking and kidnapping rather than beg for spare change to make ends meet. Precious few of the established players in Nigeria's booming music industry offered any penance as they streamed in to mingle with the gilded business class and an occasional hopeful Afropop upstart.



A woman walks by the pool at a party hosted by Quilox and promoted by Bizzle.

In recent years, a handful of Afropop artists have hit the popular charts in the U.S. and Europe, and remixes and collaborations—Wizkid with Drake and Skepta, and P-Square with Rick Ross—pop up on YouTube and SoundCloud. Major Lazer may sample a polyrhythm and a Yoruba lyric from Burna Boy, while Wizkid adopts a Lil Wayne swagger. But in Africa the music is everywhere. Lagos is the laboratory and the loudspeaker, conjuring and blaring Africa's continental soundtrack to all 54 countries of the motherland.

At two A.M. one of the biggest stars in the room, Burna Boy, stood in his booth, wearing a straw hat and a gold medallion over his white T-shirt. He took a long pull from the Hennessy bottle in his right hand and reached for the mike with his left. The hype man set the mood. All heads turned. DJ Obi, a Lagos mainstay, laid down a beat, and Burna Boy launched into his hit "Like to Party."

Imagine hitting the clubs in Toronto or New

York and seeing Drake or Jay Z grab the mike. That rarely happens, but in Lagos clubs, when artists turn up—which they often do—they almost always deliver. The promise of priceless impromptu performances and ostentatious displays of wealth are two reasons the Lagos club scene is world-class.

As the giddy clubbers moved en masse to the dance floor, many of them holding up their phone to capture their Burna Boy moment, mine vibrated in my pocket. It was Bizzle, the most unlikely of industry power players and a respected influencer in the Afropop multiverse. All around me his colleagues trickled in; the party was peaking, but he told me to meet him at Club 57.

I found him there at three A.M. in his peach Ankara outfit, laser lights darting over his head, women everywhere. The music was so loud it was hard to hear, but every few minutes another old friend or acquaintance, or a music manager with a demo, stopped by to deliver a pitch or offer an invitation.

"He's got a good spirit," said musician Seun Kuti, who was dancing in a nearby booth and is the youngest son of the legendary Fela Kuti. "Everybody who has come across him has something good to say about him, but most of them say hello because they need him."

Bizzle, born Abiodun Osikoya, is the 30-year-old A&R manager for Mavin Records, and like so many successful Lagosians, he was born rich. When he was in high school, a wave of "returnees"—children of the Nigerian diaspora educated overseas and tired of bashing their heads against the European and American glass ceilings—came home in search of real opportunity and a chance to shake off the anxiety of racism.

As far as many of the returnees were concerned, the old stories of Africa—the ones about war, poverty and corruption—were outdated. It was a new Africa now. Mobile-phone technology wired the continent, investment and entrepreneurship were flourishing, and Nigeria, with its oil wealth and energetic population—a significant portion of which was under 35—was poised for unprecedented growth. Lagos even had a new sound.

If you were to track Nigerian music on a historical graph, you would see a spike in international interest and record sales around the heyday of legendary highlife acts such as King Sunny Adé, defined by joyful guitar licks, and Fela Kuti—the rebellious political activist and progenitor of the infectious, brass-heavy Afrobeat sound. Both became international stars in the 1970s, but beginning in the 1980s, Nigerians gravitated toward Western music. By the time

A posh wedding in Lekki filled with guests from the music and film industries and complete with "spraying"—throwing money in the air in the bride and groom's direction.

Bizzle was in college, however, not long after the millennium, Nigerian music was back on the upswing. Independent record labels flourished, and MTV took notice, setting up a cable channel that streamed primarily Nigerian music videos 24/7. Copycat channels soon followed, and Bizzle and his contemporaries were hooked on the new Nigerian sound. When he went to Liverpool for college, he brought the music with him. A superfan, he combed the internet each night, and whenever he discovered a fresh track or video, he'd post it on Facebook, where he grew a cult following. His time came after he graduated from college, and Storm Records, one of Lagos's top independent labels at the time, offered him a job. He moved back home to become the label's social media and road manager.

"In the past six years, the music has changed a lot. People came back, bringing new influences and a new lifestyle," Bizzle said, citing Burna Boy, Davido and Tiwa Savage as examples. But it is the power of social media that has made Nigerian music the sound of the African continent and helped it find listeners in Europe and the Americas.

Of course, Lagos being Lagos, Bizzle has his own hustles. In addition to his work with Mavin, he has become a successful club promoter and co-hosts three club nights a week. He does well, but he isn't satisfied. The trappings of true wealth in Lagos include a fat yacht and a mansion in Ikoyi. Bizzle craves both and is angling to open his own clubs to get there. "*Owo ni koko,*" he said. "That's Yoruba for 'Money is the main thing.' "

What's true for Bizzle is true for Lagos.

The next day I met him at a late-afternoon pool party hosted by another of Bizzle's partners, Quilox nightclub. The pool, set in a private entertainment facility, was lined with curtained cabanas—the type you see in Las Vegas—and the event lured heavyweights from across the spectrum of Lagosian arts and industry. Despite the flash, though, the venue itself was unfinished. The view from the bathroom overlooked construction rubble. We were partying steps from a dirt parking lot off the thrumming Lekki-Epe Expressway, which connects the residential neighborhood of Lekki with Victoria Island—home to hotels, restaurants, banks and oil company offices. Somewhere beyond the party, countless Lagosians dealt with hunger, maddening traffic, corrupt cops and intermittent electricity—not to mention an ominous existential bogeyman, the Islamist insurgency in northern Nigeria led by bloodthirsty Boko Haram.

Well after dark, everyone reconvened at Cova, a nightclub on the top floor of a mall

in Victoria Island. In the small hours I found myself pinned in a VIP space next to the sound booth where DJ Caise, Lagos's premier Afrohouse man, was on the decks. A spliff was sparked. It found me, and I inhaled new African Zen while a big hitter across the room ordered bottle after bottle of champagne. The hype man counted them off but had trouble keeping up. A procession of waitresses passed by as the number climbed into the teens.

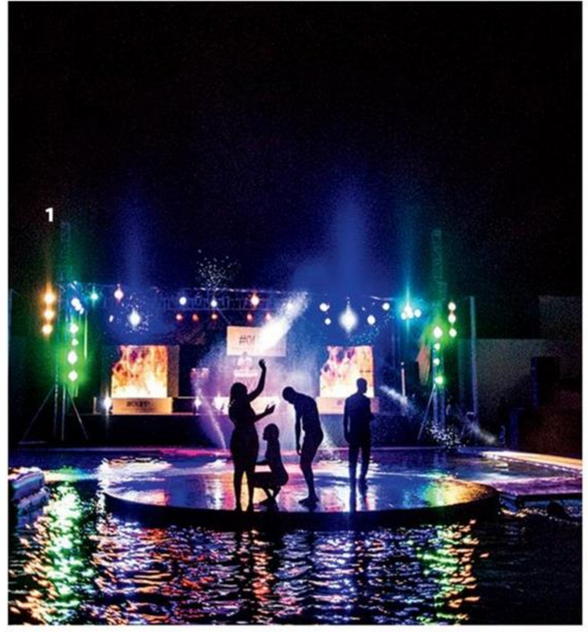
"Seventeen bottles, 18, 19 bottles! Twenty mothafuckin' bottles!" DJ Caise cut the music. "What the fuck, nigga?" The hype man paused, momentarily speechless. The crowd laughed in collective disbelief. "This ain't a party. This is a mothafuckin' movie!"

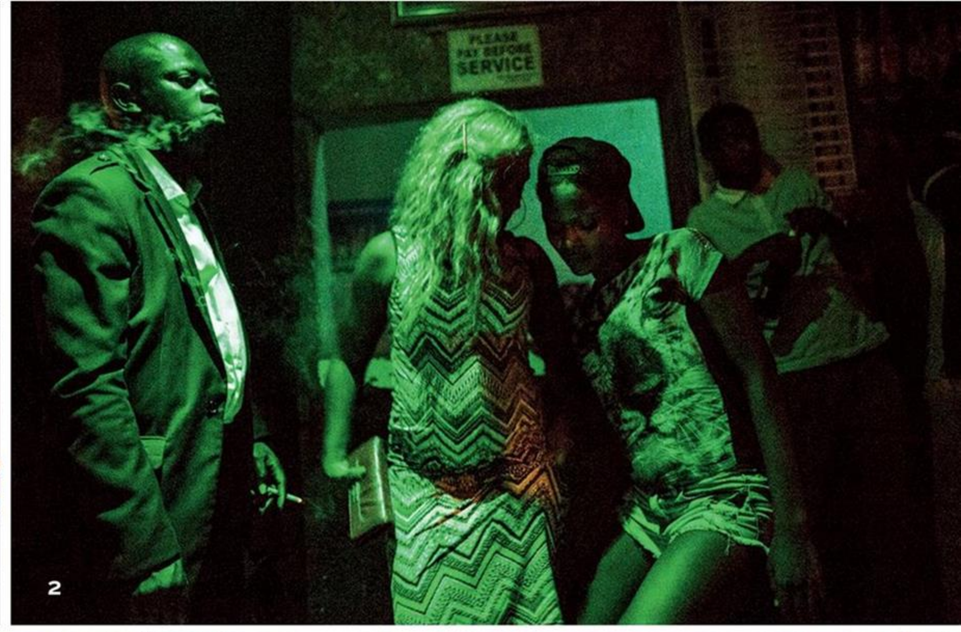
• • •

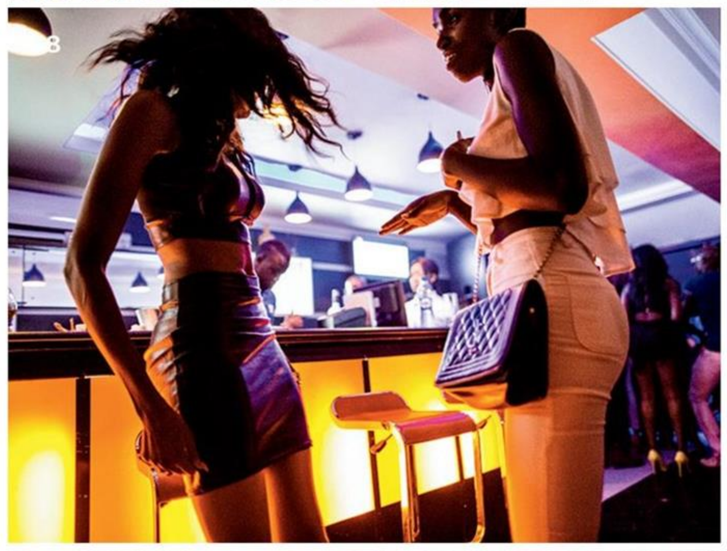
Lagos is certainly cinematic, but it isn't pretty. A massive jigsaw of moldering concrete with almost no greenery, it is the largest city in Africa by population. Although it incorporates dozens of neighborhoods, the city breaks into roughly two sections: the Island and the mainland. The Island is set across a wide brackish lagoon from the mainland and connected with three separate bridges. Although just one landmass, it's home to several neighborhoods, including Victoria Island, Lekki and Ikoyi, where the high-end nightlife and shopping happen, as well as some tough neighborhoods, including Lagos Island, home to the city's largest market and its roughest red light district.

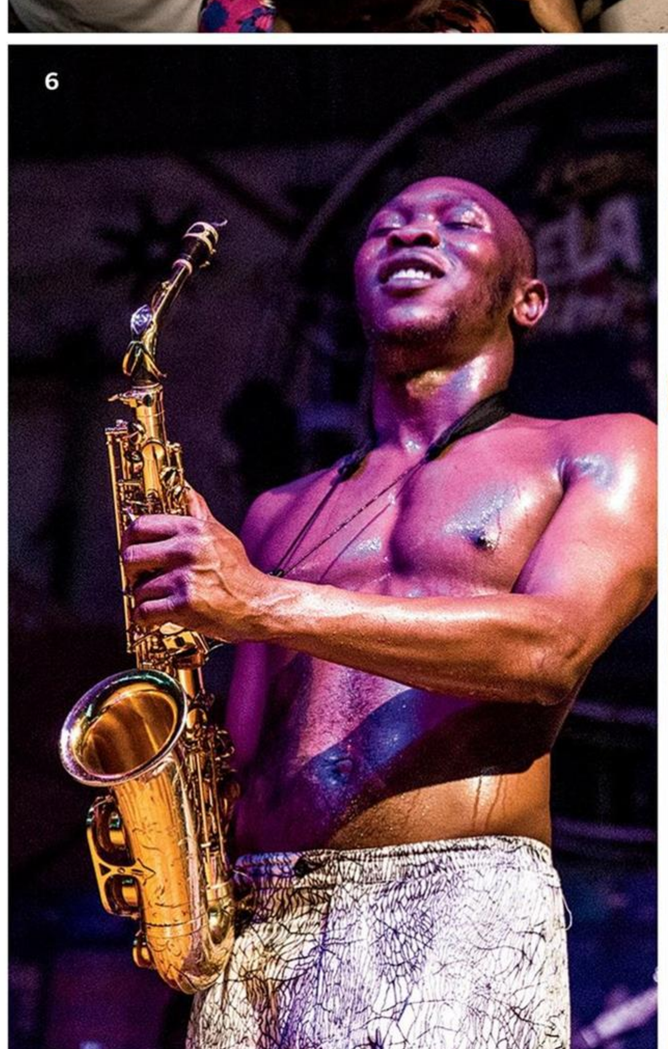
While the Island features steel-and-glass skyscrapers, posh boutiques, ample space and wide, paved roads, mainland ghettos are jumbles of tin-roofed cinder-block walk-ups and spiderweb electric lines sagging over often unpaved roads running parallel to open sewers. Unemployment is rampant, health services are woeful and emergency services are nonexistent. If someone collapses from heart failure or a robbery is in progress, Lagosians have no reliable number to call. People die every day from treatable illnesses and kids learn early that life on the mainland is cheap, which is why most grow up dreaming of one day making it to the Island to claim a piece of the good life.

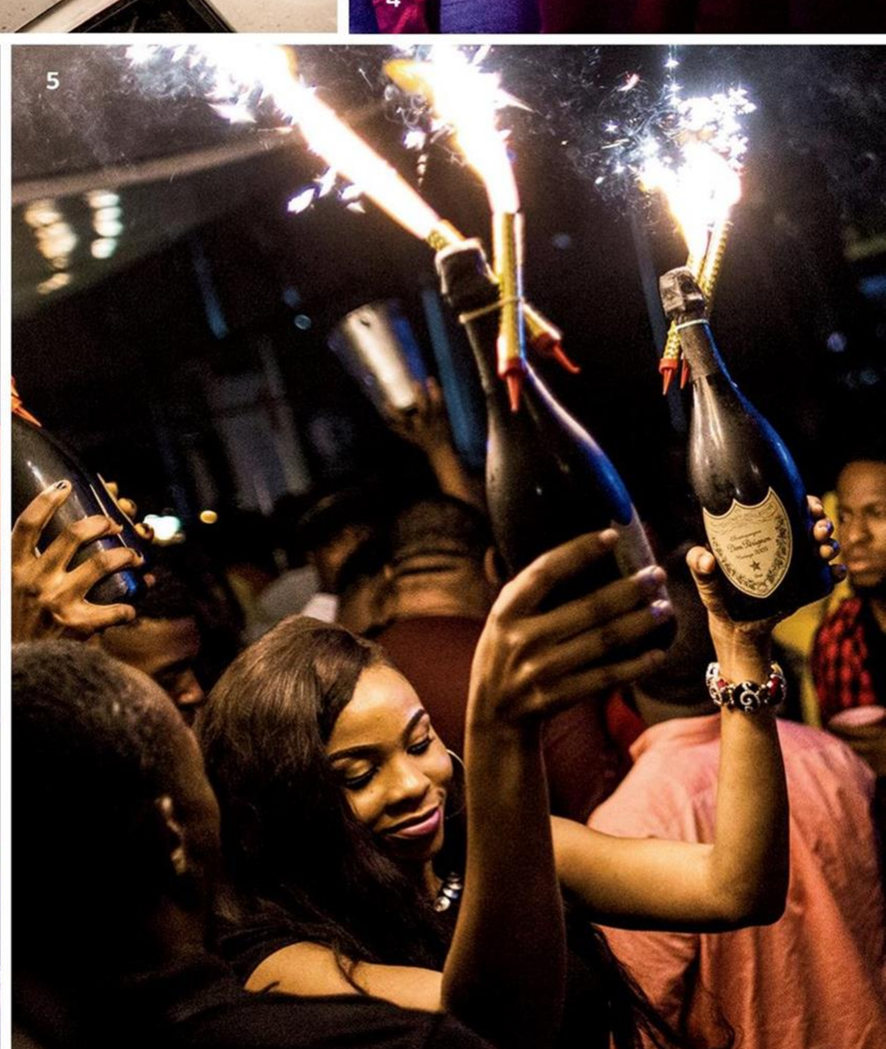
1. Clubgoers dance at a pool party hosted by Quilox nightclub. **2.** Locals mingle at a bar in Obalende, a rough neighborhood in Lagos. **3.** Abiodun Osikoya, a.k.a. Bizzle, is one of Nigeria's top music promoters. **4.** A couple dances at Quilox. **5.** Bottle service is a common part of club culture; here, women deliver bottles of Dom Pérignon, complete with sparklers, to waiting customers. **6.** Seun Kuti, Fela's youngest son, performs on a Saturday night. **7.** At a Friday night Lagos Island street party, musicians practice their songs and dancers practice their moves. **8.** Models dance near the bar at Club 57, a high-end nightspot in Lagos.











But if you trace the roots of the music that saturates Island nightclubs, they always lead back to the mainland—that vortex of struggle and wellspring of Lagosian soul. That's true in a spiritual sense as well as musically. What makes Afropop great is its foundational rhythms and melodies. Defiant and buoyant, they recall Nigerian music of decades ago, namely the works of the legendary Fela Kuti, pioneer of the Afrobeat sound and an icon on the level of Bob Marley and James Brown.

Fela's songs were anthems, his rhythms gathering storms of rebellion. He sang out against political corruption and in favor of social justice. At one point he created his own mainland commune, Kalakuta Republic, where his son Seun grew up.

"It was a community of people from every walk of life," Seun said, "from ex-cons to lawyers and accountants to electricians. It was a vibrant place. There was no seniority. Everybody was equal." What attracted them to Fela was his music. "Afrobeat is a voice for the people," Seun said.

It's also electrifying and funky. Fela lit up recording studios and dance halls from Lagos to London to Los Angeles, and if you listen closely to his tunes, you hear not the roots of Nigeria's future sound but the seeds of today's EDM trance anthems.

At his peak, Fela was as rich as any oilman in the city. He would carry around trash bags of money and buy multiple cars at a time. A marijuana enthusiast of the highest order and an early dab king, he made his own hash oil and carried a jar of it around with him. He built his own concert hall, the Shrine, and played inexpensive shows to audiences filled with the disenfranchised. Whenever he could he would challenge the generals, charging them with corruption in the streets, which explains why the military government considered him a problem. They arrested Fela multiple times and burned the Shrine and Kalakuta to the ground in a raid that killed Fela's mother.

Former General Muhammadu Buhari, one of Fela's jailers, was elected president in March 2015 after a campaign in which he promised to clean up government once and for all—a dubious claim from someone many citizens suspect bilked the country of oil wealth decades ago. Thanks in part to Buhari, Fela died broke in 1997.

The streets of Obalende, a rough neighborhood in Lagos, are packed at night with clubgoers.

Seun now lives in Ikeja, a mainland neighborhood not far from the old Kalakuta and the New Afrika Shrine, which his older brother, Grammy-nominated artist Femi Kuti, built and where he performs once a month. Seun rents a large townhouse, though it's not in great condition, and drives an eight-year-old Mercedes. Femi is a better earner and lives in the Lagos outskirts, but he supports a big family, and both artists must also provide for their large bands, which include as many as 16 musicians. They're celebrities, but they are also firmly entrenched in Nigeria's middle class. In a city as expensive as Lagos, that often means a paycheck-to-paycheck livelihood, and they are as unlikely to pop bottles in the clubs as they are to rave about the new Africa and all its progress and opportunity.

"Don't believe the hype," Seun said. "People who have been poor since I've been a kid are still poor today."

When I caught up with Femi in the recording studio, he told me he thinks people who talk about a new Africa and a growing economy "have sold their soul." He added, "Health care services are bad, the roads are still bad, the poverty level is bad, and just because a handful of people are benefitting from the stolen money"—referring to suspected government embezzlement—"you say the economy is improving? Yes, a few people are doing well, but generally speaking Nigeria is very sick."

Seun and Femi take after their father. Their music is political, entrancing and immersive, and has an audience both at home and abroad. But like Fela's, their songs can stretch to over 10 minutes, which means they aren't hit makers, and when young Nigerians dream about becoming pop stars, they don't imagine themselves as Fela's kids. They want to be Wizkid.

One of Nigeria's biggest pop stars, Wizkid grew up hanging out on the street corners of Ojuelegba—a working-class Lagosian transport hub teeming with beat-up canary yellow minivans and tricked-out three-wheeled *keke napep* (Nigerian tuk-tuks). It's an all-hours marketplace, rife with petty crime and

THE HYPE MAN PAUSED, THEN SAID, "THIS AIN'T A PARTY. THIS IS A MOTHAFUCKIN' MOVIE!"

prostitution. That's where he spent his free time, rhyming and dancing for hours on end, checking out the girls and absorbing the struggle. At night he hung out in low-rent recording studios and eventually laid down some tracks. His stardom was immediate, and local kids across the city don't just dream of following in his footsteps, they're hustling to get there.

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Over the 10 days and nights I spent in Lagos, I sought out every party I could find. One night I wandered down a narrow lane near city hall, in Lagos Island, and found a block party. A crude stage had been set up, flanked by enormous speakers and covered with a carpet remnant opposite a soundboard set against a wall of the local bar. The neighborhood, Campos, in the Brazilian quarter in Lagos Island, was so named by freed slaves who settled there after returning from Brazil and Cuba in the late 19th century. Lagos has a long history of returnees.

On this night, three generations of their descendants sat at plastic tables, drinking Orijin Bitters and oversize bottles of Star beer and watching the young people dance and perform original tunes. Toward the end of the night, Dreamchaser, a lean 26-year-old MC, let loose his infectious raspy flow. His Yoruba and pidgin English poetry was supported by an Afrobeat rhythm as teenagers and 20-somethings rushed the stage, break-dancing and twerking in the beams of oncoming headlights.

"It's all about a girl I want to love but cannot because I don't have the money," Dreamchaser said afterward. His song is his truth. A barman in Lagos Island, he's lucky if he earns $300 a month. Though talented, he has been hustling for more than eight years and hasn't made a dime. In fact, he saves his pennies for months to spend the necessary 50,000 naira (approximately $250) anytime he wishes to record a track, yet he remains undaunted. "I still believe I can make much money in what I am doing. I believe that for real."

His words echo those of Sanue Chemeka, 27, a college student I met in a fast-food restaurant in Lagos Island. He was working the register, and near closing time he and his buddy were entranced by an Ice Prince video strobing on the flatscreen in the dining area. Their eyes lit up as Ice Prince and his homeys posed around sexy dancers and drove high-end sports cars. It was aspirational eye candy for a couple of guys struggling to get by on less than $200 a month. While pursuing a degree in electrical engineering and holding down a job, Sanue's third hustle is his music.

"They call me Rude Boy," he said. "I have some tracks." I smiled because his vibe was more pie-

MY DRIVER SAID, "IF WE GO BACK, THERE WILL BE A MOB WHO WILL ROB US AND MAYBE KILL US."

eyed and warm than rude-boy cool. I asked him what he loved about Afropop. He paused to listen to Ice Prince and said, "The sound is sweet. It's ours, and they can't take it away from us."

So much of life in Lagos is a struggle for the average guy and even more difficult for poor Nigerian girls growing up in cramped confines where sexual violence is commonplace. Credit is extraordinarily difficult to obtain, and even my own credit cards were cut off after one or two charges in Lagos. As a result, the city runs on cash, which makes it almost impossible to transcend poverty. That's why you see Lagosians of all ages selling anything and everything they can find at roadside intersections and even on the expressways when traffic grinds to a halt. One industrious little girl alternated between doing her homework on the curbside as traffic roared and slaloming among moving cars to sell bags of groundnuts when it slowed enough for commerce. Meanwhile, plenty of Lagosians, caught in their city's unforgiving economic grip, stray toward crime instead.

"Put yourself in the shoes of those who are committing crime," Femi Kuti said. "I have two children, I have no money, I can't get a job, and someone invites me to steal a car. Maybe one of my children is sick. In this country, people die because of 1,000 naira"—approximately $5—"and you expect this guy not to rob and steal?"

Good middle-class jobs are so hard to come by in Nigeria that when the government announced it was hiring fewer than 5,000 people in March 2014, close to 500,000 showed up to apply. The resulting stampedes killed at least 16 people.

That cocktail of desperation, corruption and income disparity has earned Nigeria a reputation. I've traveled to my share of hazardous countries and reported from minefields and war zones, but I never received so many warnings as I did when I told friends who had never been to Nigeria that I was headed to Lagos. Yet despite

Wizkid is one of Nigeria's biggest names. His song "Ojuelegba," which he remixed with Drake and Skepta, describes this crowded Lagos neighborhood.

the city's crime and poverty, I rarely felt in danger. In fact, I felt taken care of, whether I was at a nightclub or a block party. I started to believe those well-meaning warnings were grounded more in unconscious racism than in reality.

The Lagosians I met were almost all hard-working, optimistic and warm, fueled by ingenuity and a belief that things can get better. For them, Afropop is a source of pride. It's home-grown, combining Nigerian roots music with hip-hop influences that were once banned from radio play and could only be heard underground.

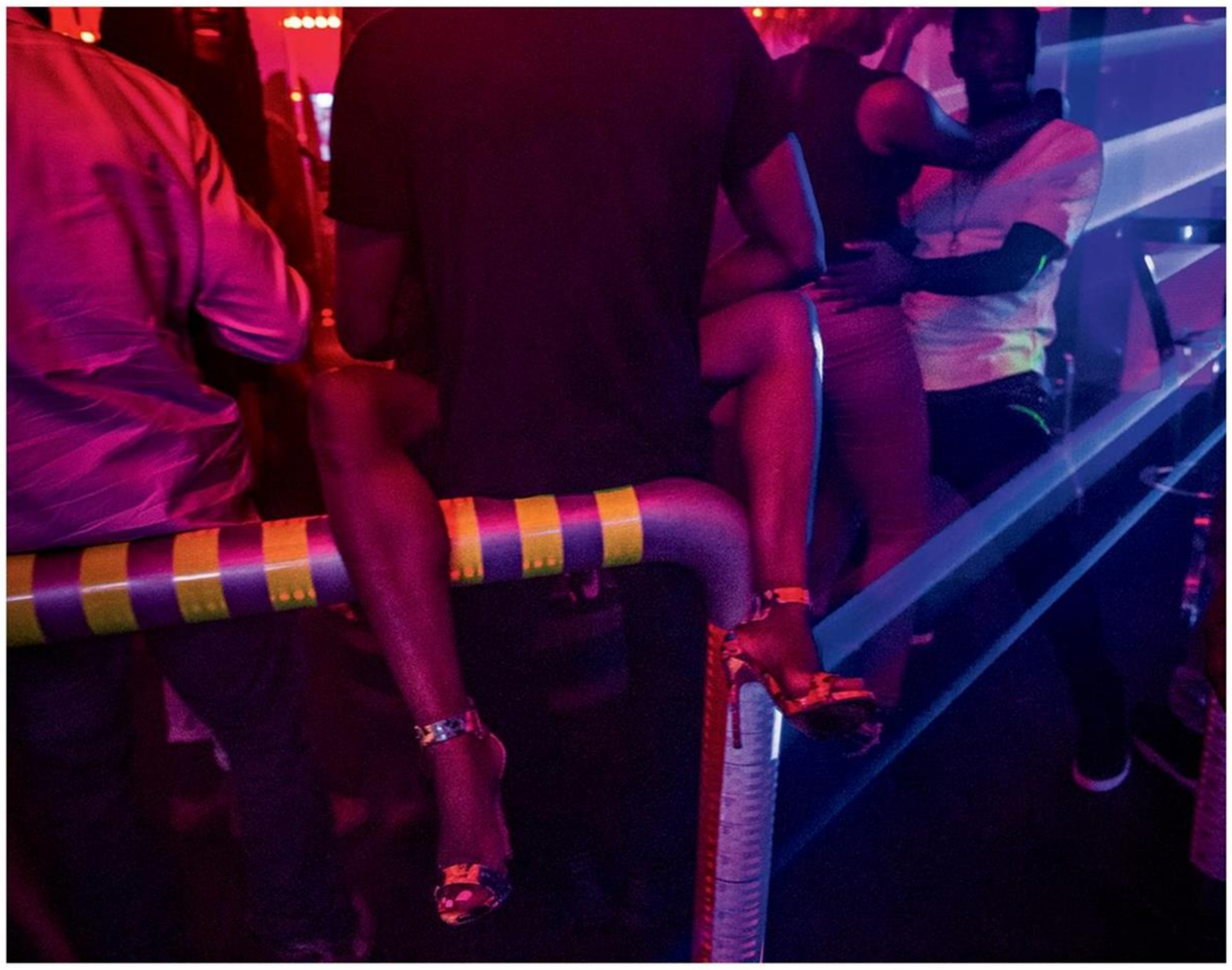
"The music symbolizes hope," said Nseobong Okon-Ekong, a lifestyle and entertainment editor for *ThisDay,* one of Lagos's top newspapers. "Hope that it is possible to transform from nobody to somebody."

Seun Kuti enjoys Afropop, especially when out with friends. "That's what the music is for," he said, "to go out and have fun, which is why the brand is growing." Still, he wonders whose dream the artists are selling and who it serves.

"I don't like to judge people," he said, "but it's a shame that most of our art in Africa is glorifying cheap consumerism. We cannot measure our own success by the amount of things we can afford. Everybody wants the status symbol of Gucci, of $250,000 cars and $2,000 shoes, basically giving up all we make to buy things we do not produce in Africa, and art in Africa is promoting this lifestyle. This makes it difficult in terms of development of Africa as a viable economic power. Our dream has to be the African dream—the dream of economic liberation, to control our resources how we want and develop our societies in a way that benefits us first."

Seun and Femi Kuti are doing their part to further their father's message rather than chase dollar signs. When I met them, Femi was in the studio finishing up his 11th record, independently financed, of course, and Seun was preparing for his Halloween show at the New Afrika Shrine with Egypt 80, which was his father's band. Seun has been leading it since he was 14 years old, when Fela died.

Not long before midnight on the night of the show, they took the stage, and the cavernous, tin-roofed, concrete-floored dive that is the Shrine filled with the soulful thunder of Afrobeat. Though not to a packed house, Seun's performance was masterful. Trim, glistening with sweat and with his FELA LIVES tattoo visible across his shoulder blades, he sounded eerily like his dad as he blew his alto sax and sang his raw vocals in call-and-response with two beautiful backup singers and dancers, their beaded hair, sashes and skirts flaring and shaking in time. By the end of the night, the crowd, almost all of whom lived on the mainland, was shouting and singing along with him. They high-fived him and threw their fists in the air, and I thought back to what Femi had told me in the recording studio a few days before.



People dance till four A.M. at Quilox nightclub.

"We have no education, no electricity. We can't put three square meals on the table," he said of his resilient countrymen. "After slavery, coming out of years of corruption, for us to have accepted and survived this turmoil, we must be a great people."

On the long drive back to my hotel, Femi's words and his brother's music lingered in my mind. It takes 45 minutes to get to the Island from Ikeja, without traffic. When gridlock snarls, which is often, it can take four hours. High on Nigerian kush and feeling perfectly at home as we cruised the dark empty streets at four A.M., I was dreading my flight out the next day. I wanted more music, more Lagos. Then, out of the shadows, she came toward the car. A slender mocha-skinned beauty in one broken heel and a tight white dress splattered in blood. Her lower lip was busted open, and she staggered toward the driver's side, banging on the window.

"Help me," she gasped. The driver swerved, narrowly missing her. She spun and fell to her knees on the asphalt.

"What the fuck," I yelled.

"It's a trap," the driver said, accelerating and leaving her in the dust. "I'm telling you, it's a trap. If we go back, there will be a mob of men who will rob us and maybe kill us." My driver had once been held up by a mob in the street and was eventually locked in his own trunk. "They could have automatic weapons, those guys."

I turned back. Aside from the girl, the street was completely empty. Was he right? Was she bait, or was she the one in danger? I'd like to say we went back to check, but this was Lagos after all, so we kept driving. ■

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AUREL SCHMIDT

Andy Warhol famously depicted a banana that peels back to reveal fleshy pink fruit on the cover of The Velvet Underground & Nico, but New York–based artist Aurel Schmidt doesn't play it so subtle when it comes to making winking reference to the phallus—or pretty much anything else, for that matter. In one of her exquisitely rendered drawings, the banana peel encases an anatomically perfect penis. Schmidt's work—which also includes ceramics and mixed-media pieces employing everything from coffee to wine to cum—wrestles with addiction, self-image, sex and the body, hashing together the sacred with the profane to achieve sometimes grotesque fun-house results. Her most recent series, Blast Furnace of Civilization, includes a colored-pencil drawing of a haloed, winged cherub whose body is a plucked and flayed chicken stuffed into a pair of Campbell's Soup–branded Converse All Stars. Schmidt is as adept at casting glazed porcelain statuettes as she is with works on paper, and her art seems most engaged when mining the trash stratum, both literally and figuratively. In the series Burnouts & Party Monsters, she presents crude and sad portraits of the high life with illustrations of used condoms, rolled dollars, cigarette butts and discarded panties as stand-ins for facial features built around actual cigarette burns. And in our favorite drawing, Schmidt toys with the iconic Playboy Rabbit Head, melding it with the austere image of an Indian Buddha head. Schmidt says the piece came from an affection for the Rabbit Head, a symbol she sees as both "posh" and "sexy." In this new bastardization, it becomes, as she describes it, a "Westernized Buddha, the bodhisattva who has maybe scored some high-quality cocaine while on a meditation vacation in the Sacred Valley of Peru and engaged in tantric sex on organic 1,000-thread-count sheets."—Eric Steinman

Above: Portrait of the artist. **Opposite page:** *Pink Eye.* Pencil, colored pencil and acrylic on paper, 15 x 15 inches, 2006.


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Opposite page: *Master of the Universe/Flexmaster 3000.* Pencil, colored pencil, acrylic, beer, dirt and blood on paper, 89.5 x 52.5 inches, 2010. **Top left:** *Sweetheart.* Pencil and colored pencil on paper, 9.5 x 7 inches, 2014. **Top right:** *Self Portrait 4.* Pastel on paper, 14 x 14 inches, 2013. **Bottom left:** *Untitled (Lettuce Vag).* Colored pencil on paper, 17 x 17 inches, 2013. **Bottom right:** *Buddha Bunny.* Colored pencil on paper, 11 x 9 inches, 2015.

CHICAGO, 1967

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Now bring the joy of the COCA-COLA Santa to your holidays each and every year!

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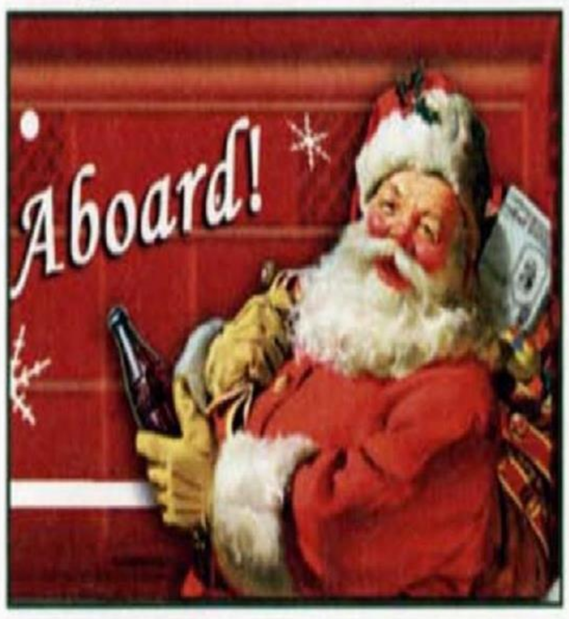

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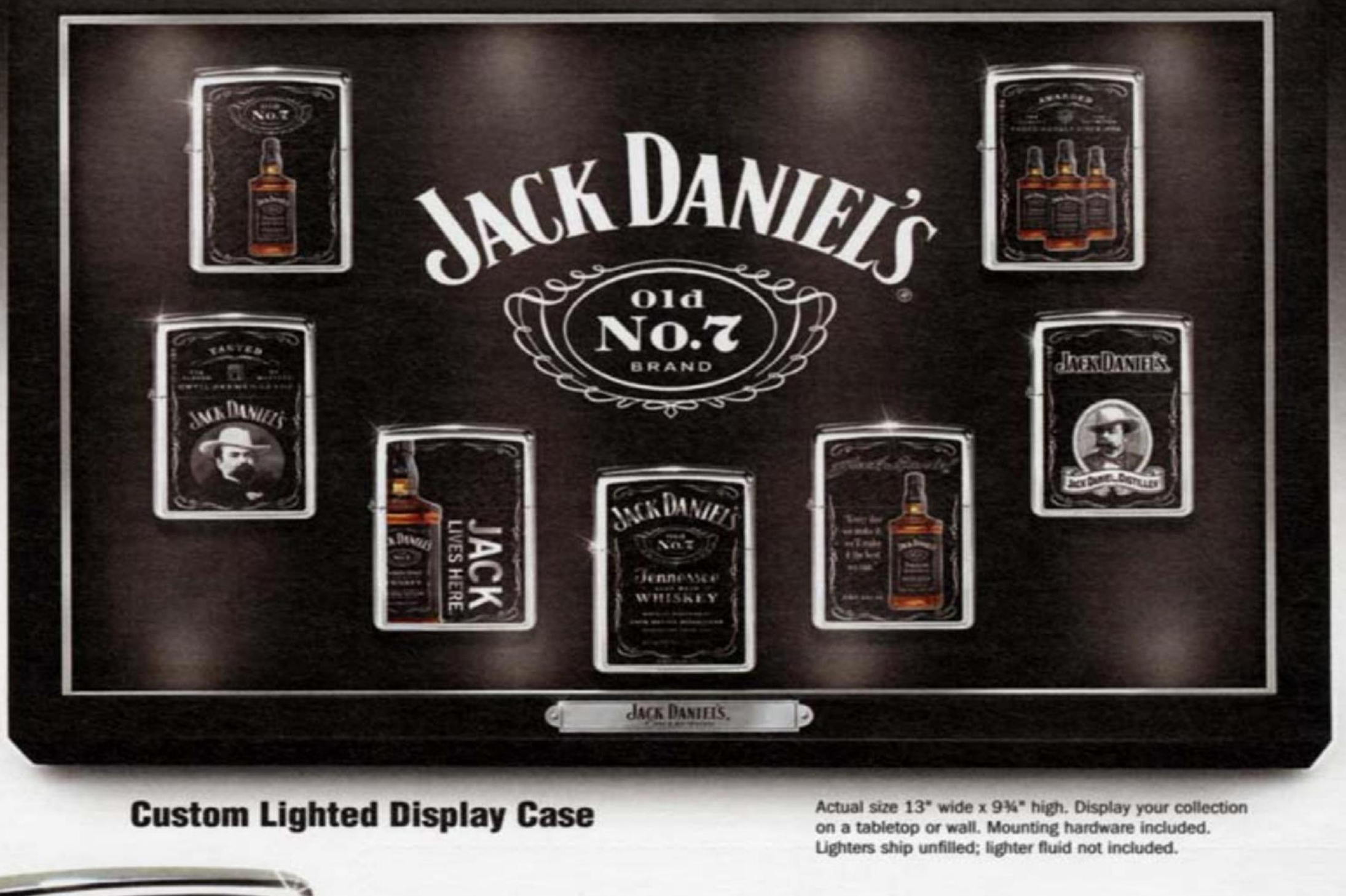

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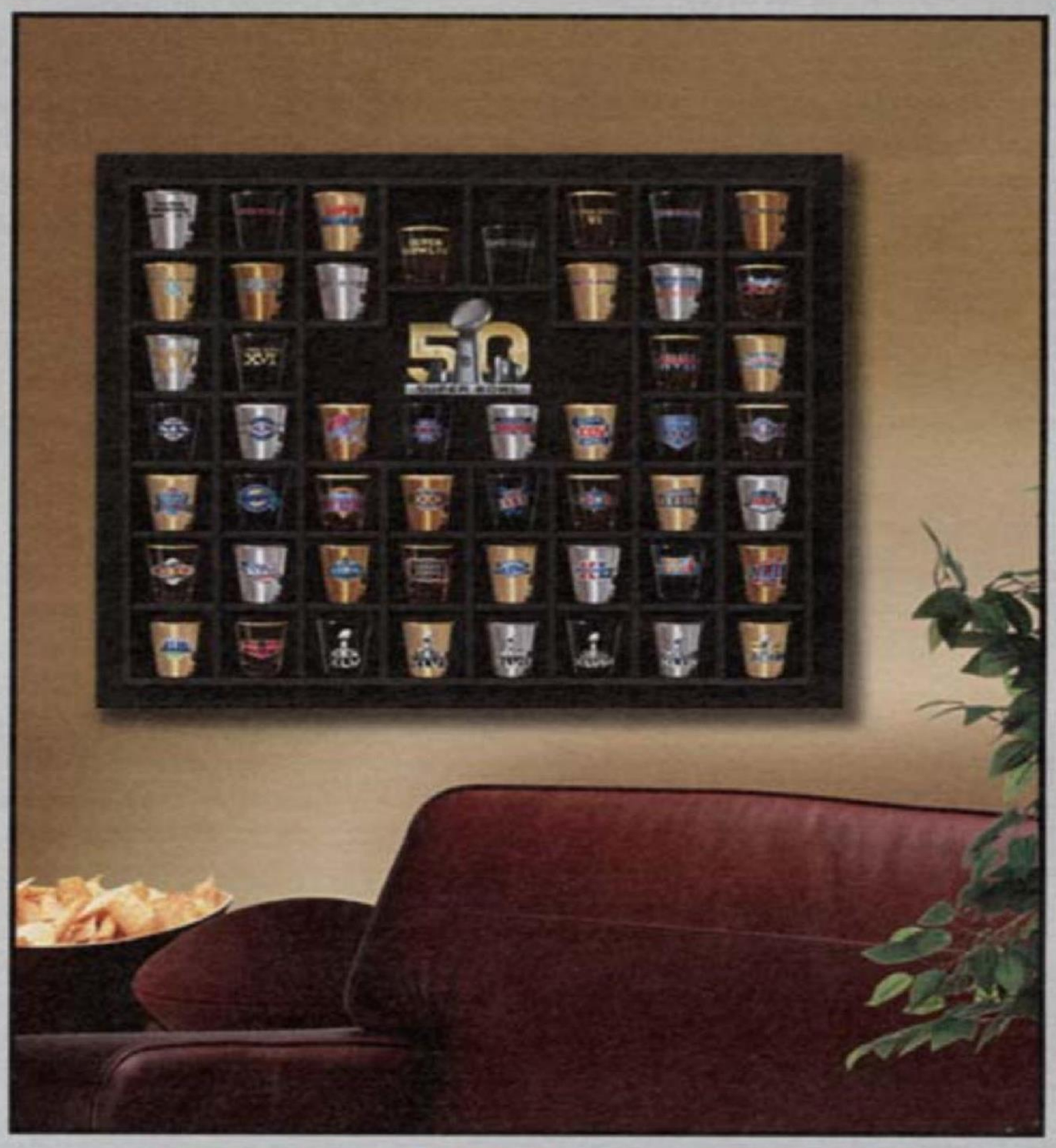

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