

The National's Luxury
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The

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As Manuel Rabaté's time as director of Louvre Abu Dhabi comes to an end, he reflects on the legacy he leaves behind and what will stay with him from the city he's called home for more than a decade

frame

RED, ONLY RED,
NOTHING BUT RED

ROSE HACIENDA
BEAUTY IS A GESTURE







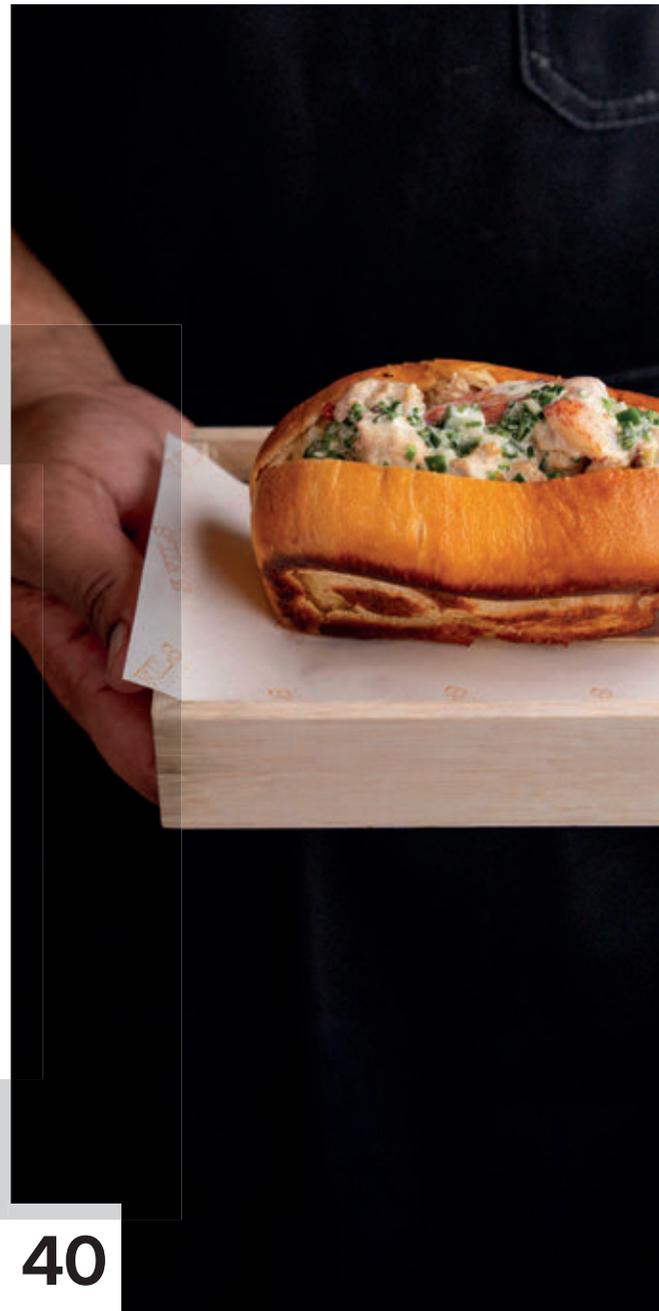
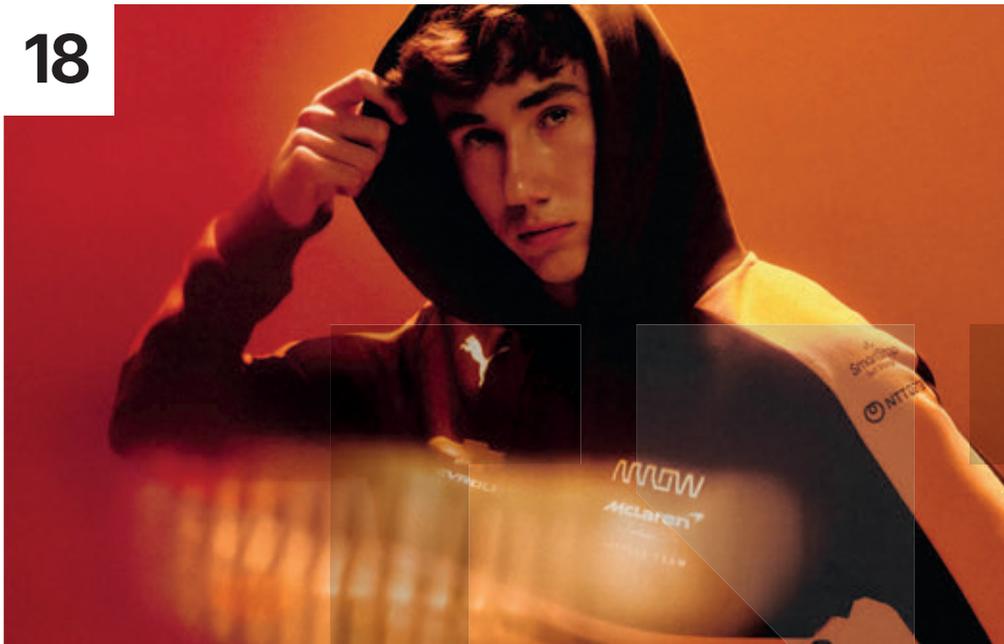
ZEGNA



SECONDSKIN LEATHER

CONTENTS

18



10



40

10 PLANTED IN ELEGANCE

Dressed in caramel tones for Zegna's latest collection, the calm and contained Danish actor Mads Mikkelsen is the kind of man the Italian maison designs for

12 CREATIVE COURAGE

Marie Geneviève Cyr, director of education at Istituto Marangoni Dubai, is building more than a fashion programme – she is designing an ecosystem rooted in regional identity

14 LISTEN CAREFULLY

Valextra has made it its mission to whisper rather than shout in the luxury handbag industry, according to chief executive Xavier Rougeaux

16 THE CURRENCY OF TRUST

As president of Kering Middle East and Africa, Miral Youssef is in charge of some of the fashion world's biggest brands – and trust has been her secret to success

18 OFF THE GRID

F1 teams have mastered the art of going fast, but dressing well is a different race

22 THE BRIDGE BUILDER

As Louvre Abu Dhabi director Manuel Rabaté reaches the end of his tenure, he looks back on the legacy of the institution he has helped build

28 SCENE STEALERS

Movie props carry a charge that few other collectibles can match – and market value is catching up with the intensity of the fandom

32 ARCHIVE DIGGERS

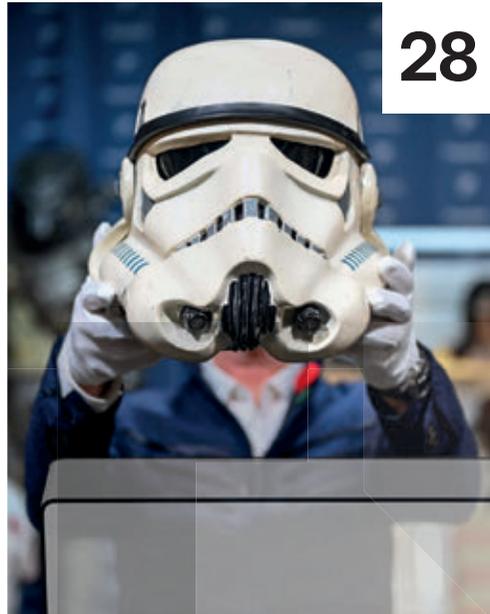
In a world of watch trend cycles, looking back at vintage pieces and revivals might just be the most innovative thing you can do

34 NO APOLOGIES

The Rolls-Royce Cullinan knows it is one of the most extravagant cars on the road

36 ACCESS ALL AREAS

We head out in search of exclusive access, exceptional service and ultra-private tours that are driving a new trend in luxury travel



28



46



54



22

VICTOR BESA / THE NATIONAL

40 FIRST SITTING

From limited-time menus by Michelin-recognised chefs to hot new openings and a stellar Sunday brunch, we round up all the culinary news you need to know

42 ON ART

Columnist Sultan Sooud Al Qassemi explores our relationship to technology through Threshold 3 (2025), a painting by Iyad Rahwan

44 UNDER OATH

With his trilogy that began with *Presumed Innocent* now complete, novelist Scott Turow explains how he found the secret to shifting 30 million copies.

46 A SHOW OF VULNERABILITY

For avant-garde photographer Abdulla Elmaz, his first solo exhibition – 13 Cents – doubles as a therapy session

50 MAKE IT LAST

In a world of viral sensations, here is our selection of physical media to enjoy slowly

52 THE WATCHLIST

The best in film and television coming your way this month, from Guy Ritchie's *Young Sherlock* and season two of *Daredevil*, to a new documentary on the manosphere from Louis Theroux and a sci-fi adaptation starring Ryan Gosling

53 TECHNOLOGY

Five devices that help monitor and optimise your well-being, from a smart water bottle and earbuds fitted with bio-sensing technology to Huawei's latest running watch unveiled at an exclusive launch party in Madrid

54 BLACK BOOK

Our round-up of the most interesting and noteworthy arrivals in the world of fashion, beauty, watches and jewellery: think Schiaparelli's Secret bag; Eleganza jewels by Dolce & Gabbana; and a limited-edition scent from Omani house Amouage

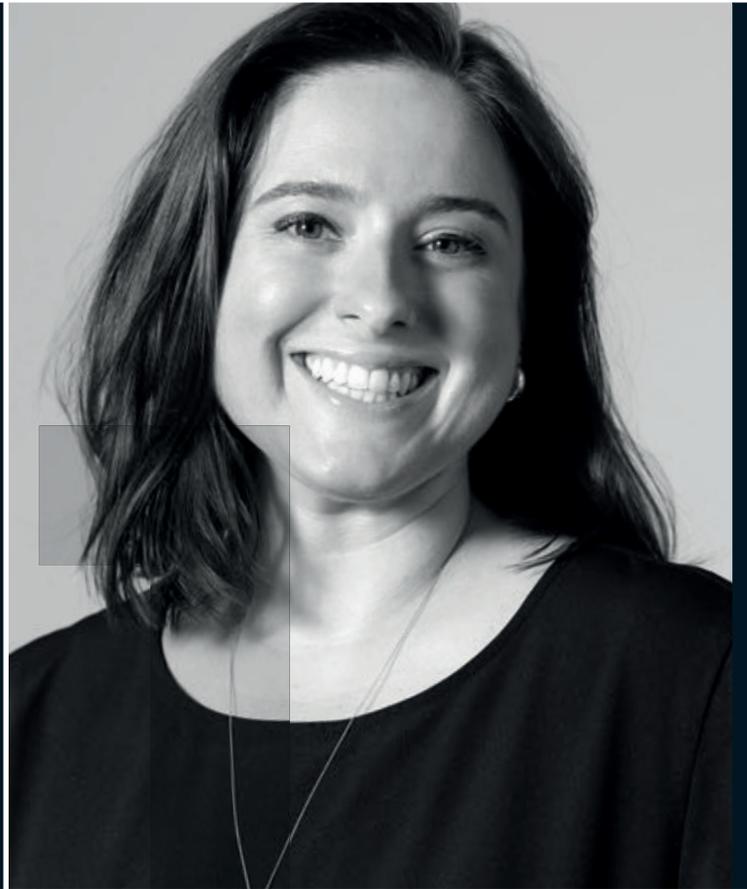
58 ONE LAST THING

Iraqi artist and publisher Neel Jassani, founder of the avant-garde *Gunk* art journal, answers our quick-fire questionnaire



Podcasts

culture bites



A lively conversation
focused on the arts
scene in the UAE and the
ever-evolving landscape
of global entertainment



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The National

EDITOR'S LETTER

There are moments when the world seems to tighten around us. The news arrives faster than our ability to make sense of it. Recent weeks have given us many of those moments.

I don't need to remind you of what we have been living through. My colleagues at *The National* have proved they are part of an award-winning newsroom through their coverage – from breaking news to in-depth analysis of the situation – often while navigating their own anxieties here and concern for loved ones across the Middle East.



Our job in running a lifestyle magazine is precisely to take you away from the day-to-day difficulties of life. It is to highlight the beauty of our planet – dream destinations, intricate craftsmanship, cultural events, people working to make the world a more enjoyable place. That task is made more complicated when the difficulties we are taking you away from are less run-of-the-mill. But it is still our job.

It is worth noting that much of this issue was planned months before the events of the first weeks of March – such is the life cycle of a good old print magazine. Like many of our colleagues in the wider industry, we have thought long and hard about what feels appropriate right now.

The semblance of a conclusion we have come to is that creativity and culture has always existed in precisely these conditions. They are not made in calm seas, but in the determination to keep building something meaningful, no matter the weather.

Nigerian novelist Chinua Achebe once wrote in his essay collection *Hopes and Impediments*: “Art is man’s constant effort to create for himself a different order of reality from that which is given to him.” It is a simple line, but one that feels particularly resonant. Art, architecture, literature, museums – these are not luxuries of stable times. They are among the ways societies steady themselves.

It is, then, a beautiful bit of happenstance that our cover story this month is a profile of Manuel Rabaté, the outgoing director of Louvre Abu Dhabi – one of this nation’s most potent cultural symbols. For nearly a decade, Rabaté has led the museum through its formative years, establishing it as one of the region’s defining institutions. Before that, he spent years in Paris helping shape the project itself, among the architects of a museum born of an ambitious cultural partnership between France and the UAE.

Institutions such as Louvre Abu Dhabi do not simply appear. They are the result of long horizons and the persistence of individuals who believe culture can create common ground. Under Rabaté’s stewardship, the museum has welcomed millions of visitors and introduced audiences to new ways of seeing the shared histories of world civilisations.

Now, after nearly 20 years dedicated to the project, Rabaté is moving on to his next chapter. As he reflects in our cover story in conversation with *The National’s* editor-in-chief Mina Al-Oraibi and arts editor William Mullally, the experience has been about far more than exhibitions and collections. It has been about shaping a place where ideas, histories and people meet. In times of uncertainty, those kinds of places matter more than ever. Culture cannot resolve the conflicts of the world. But it can be a reminder of what connects us, and of the enduring human instinct to make meaning, beauty and understanding.

Nasri Atallah



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Planted in elegance

Dressed in caramel tones for Zegna's latest collection, Mads Mikkelsen is the kind of man the house designs for, writes Sarah Maisey

In the 1930s, the king of Italy Vittorio Emanuele III bestowed industrialist Ermenegildo Zegna with an unusual honour: the title Count of Monte Rubello, in recognition of his land stewardship and entrepreneurial and philanthropic achievements.

For the founder of Zegna, it marked a defining chapter in both his life and his company's history. Almost a century on, that legacy endures in the Il Conte chore jacket, rendered in buttery-soft leather. The latest version, from the spring/summer 2026 collection, debuted at Dubai Opera last June. A first for a house that had previously shown almost exclusively in Italy, the presentation in Dubai introduced men's and women's wardrobes built on laid-back elegance: unhurried separates, cut with precision.

The Conte jacket embodies that philosophy. Traditionally inspired by a workman's jacket, which was a boxy, utilitarian staple cut from heavy canvas, it has been recast as an effortless essential under creative director Alessandro Sartori. The silhouette is clean – straight hem, stand collar – while the leather is so light and supple, it is usually reserved for gloves.

Elevated yet easy, the Conte stands as shorthand for Zegna's sartorial language. Over the past decade, Sartori has refined a vision of menswear that privileges function and comfort over headline-grabbing trends, doubling down on the impeccable quality that forged the house's reputation. The same thinking informs a cashmere bomber: suede panels across the front meet honeycomb-woven cashmere through the sleeves and back, a study in texture and restraint.

For the campaign, Danish actor Mads Mikkelsen – house ambassador since 2023 – was photographed in the Winter Garden at Oasi Zegna, the vast natural reserve in northern Italy's Piedmont region created by the Zegna family. Conceived in the 1960s as a cold-weather extension of the estate, the Winter Garden was designed by Italian landscape architect Pietro Porcinai.

Zegna's spring/summer 2026 campaign with actor Mads Mikkelsen, right, is shot in the Winter Garden at Oasi Zegna, a natural reserve, far right



ALESSIO GUARINO; ZEGNA



Porcinai's reputation was formidable. His projects included the landscaping of Place Beaubourg near the Pompidou Centre in Paris; work connected to the relocation of Abu Simbel temples in Egypt; and the Mondadori headquarters in Milan alongside Brazilian architect Oscar Niemeyer. Unlike many of his contemporaries, Porcinai believed that humans and nature should "never be separated", and bemoaned fellow architects who "abandoned out of cowardice or for money, the world of things built in harmony with nature, giving way to the birth of ugly ville and horrible suburbs".

At Zegna, Porcinai's solution was to bring the outside in. It was, he argued, the "task of the landscape architect" to remedy the widening gap between society and nature. The thinking chimed with Ermenegildo Zegna himself, who instinctively understood that people thrive among trees, soil and fresh air. While building his factories and home – what would become Oasi Zegna – he planted millions of trees, restoring denuded hills to dense forest.

The Winter Garden is both a physical and metaphorical extension of that vision. Beneath its vaulted glass roof, reminiscent of a greenhouse, monstera and banana palms dominate. In a subtle inversion of design hierarchy, Porcinai did not arrange foliage around furniture; instead, low-slung sofas and dining tables are set between planted beds cut directly into the studio floor.

It is here that Mikkelsen stands for the spring/summer campaign, dressed all in warm caramel tones. Alongside the suede-panelled bomber, he wears a cashmere and silk polo, beige cotton jeans and the house's Triple Stitch leather trainers, paired with a linen-cashmere-silk crew neck that is knotted casually over his shoulders. The effect is one of considered ease – style without strain – shaped by Sartori and rooted in a century-long vision.

With his calm, contained presence, the actor feels precisely the man the house of Zegna designs for: composed, unhurried, at ease in his surroundings. Cool as a cucumber, perhaps. Or, more fittingly, as poised as a winter garden.

MARIE GENEVEVE CYR



Marie Geneviève Cyr
previously led the
fashion design
programme at
Parsons School of
Design in New York

Creative courage

The new director of education at Dubai's Istituto Marangoni is building more than a fashion programme – she is designing an ecosystem rooted in regional identity, discovers **Sarah Maisey**

The Dubai International Financial Centre is an unlikely setting for a fashion school, yet, take the lift in Building 8 and you arrive at the front desk of Istituto Marangoni.

This is the Dubai outpost of the Milan-founded institution, the network of which now stretches from Asia to the Gulf. Since opening in 2022, the campus has become a meeting point for youthful design and the peculiar energy of a city still inventing itself.

At its centre is Marie Geneviève Cyr, the newly appointed director of education, who has recently arrived from New York. For 15 years, she led the fashion design programme at Parsons School of Design, one of the industry's most formidable talent factories, whose alumni include Steven Meisel, Tom Ford, Marc Jacobs, Jasper Johns and Edward Hopper. It is the sort of pedigree that usually arrives with a master plan. Cyr, however, came determined to abandon hers.

"I'm not interested in duplicating old patterns or old systems that already exist," she says. "I think I am here to create completely new systems and ecosystems for the fashion and design field."

When we meet, she has been in the UAE for barely eight weeks. The shift from Manhattan's relentless theatre to Dubai's ordered calm has been, she admits, disarming. "Dubai is so quiet and chill. It's not like New York, where you have people screaming in the subway," she laughs. "Here it's calm and safe. It's a completely different feeling."

That contrast intrigues her. Her students come from India, Russia, North Africa and across the Middle East. Rather than impose an American-centric framework, Cyr wants to build an ecosystem of ideas, industries and disciplines rooted in and for the region.

In practice, that has meant listening. Her first weeks in Dubai have been spent meeting designers, retailers and jewellery houses, building a grounding of knowledge, expertise and industry mentorship that will ultimately support her students. She is already seeking out UAE innovators developing textiles from marine algae and experimenting with advanced upcycling.

Her role, she says, is to weave these threads into infrastructure as much as inspiration. "I want the students to not only design products, but also design their own system because that's what's special about Dubai. They can implement their way of working on sustainability and technology, and innovate with a new way of thinking about materials."

"We want them to have a really strong point of view as well. They don't have to fit into an established system. They can just create their own."

At the heart of this philosophy is what Cyr calls "creative courage" and a refusal to equate design with decoration. Work that is merely pretty is pointless, she argues. "It has to communicate something, and be aware of identity, culture, modesty and climate. It needs a point of view. I am

coming from Parsons, so it's ingrained within me, not only social justice, but interdisciplinary culture. I believe innovation happens when you cross-pollinate."

That ethos shapes the school's approach to technology. Artificial intelligence, Cyr argues, is simply another tool in the designer's evolving kit. "People probably got scared of the sewing machine when it came out, so I see AI as a tool. Here at Marangoni, we need to make sure that students learn the practicalities of how to cut a pattern; understand how to create depth in their work; and to do research. They need to learn the foundation of research methodologies and design technology. They need to understand the iterative process and this system of making before we even use AI," she explains.

It should never replace emotional connection, either. "It is never going to be your voice. AI is not replacing that. We're finding a way to enhance the visualisation of an idea, but the final design decision is always ours."

Equally important is Marangoni's mentorship model, which Cyr describes as a constellation around each student. Industry guests, visiting tutors, peers and programme leaders form a fluid framework designed to mirror contemporary design practice.

"When I say mentors, I don't like to think about a single mentor. This is not what we are. It should be your programme leader, your tutors, your classmates, an industry guest lecturer, someone who comes in to give a masterclass," she says. "We have flying tutors as well, who visit from different parts of the world to give intensive short courses. And to me, this is the amazing exposure that students have."

She often returns to the idea of "education tourism" and the notion that learning should be mobile. Having built her own career across continents, Cyr sees Marangoni's global campuses as an opportunity for students to move between cultures, absorbing different creative languages.

"One great initiative we started in Dubai is having someone who is head of research. And we're thinking of actually building from the ground up, like a culture of research here at Marangoni Dubai. The other campuses don't have that, so Dubai would become more of an innovative hub as well," she says.

Plans are already under way to expand the successful conference held at Museum of the Future last year. "We're planning another one that will travel to Milan because that was such a success."

"Recently, we also started student assistantships, almost like research assistants, to have students work with programme leaders on different research projects. This just ingrains research in academia a little more, so we can up the quality of everything."

For Cyr, Dubai's greatest strength is its openness to reinvention. "We're building that culture slowly, but we're leading the pilot as well."

The metal clasp on Valextra's Iside bag closes with an almost imperceptible click – a sound so soft, it is easy to overlook. It is deliberately engineered and entirely in keeping with the Milanese house's long-held philosophy. "It's whispered luxury, even the sound," says chief executive Xavier Rougeaux. "A sense of something that you have to listen for carefully, and there is a double meaning. There is a human interaction that brings a sense of intimacy, but also a sense of humanity too."

Pronounced "ee-see-day", the bag has a neat rectangular lock that is intentionally understated. Made in metal, and camouflaged with the same material as the rest of the bag to be left barely visible, its edges soften into the clean geometry of the bag itself.

That kind of intimacy is central to the brand's DNA. Founded in 1937 in Milan by Giovanni Fontana, Valextra has always occupied an unusual space between engineering and artistry. Fontana did not train as a fashion designer, but rather approached leather goods like an architect, explorer and entrepreneur, stripping away excess until only function and proportion remained. The name itself – a fusion of "valigia" (Italian for suitcase) and "extra" – hints at that pragmatic ambition.

The result is a design language that feels disciplined, with architectural lines, minimal hardware and no visible logos. There is nothing ornamental for its own sake. Yet, within that stripped-back design is a distinct sensuality, such as the softness of Millepunte calfskin, the quiet pleasure of perfect construction, the distinct tric-trac closure sound of the bag of the same name and the private delight of details visible only to the owner.

It is, perhaps, no coincidence that the brand reflects its birthplace so closely. Milan does not flaunt its beauty like Rome or Florence. Its façades are austere – until you step inside, and then you are greeted by interiors and courtyards hidden from everyone on the outside. Rougeaux sees a direct parallel. "Our founder was very much incarnating that sense of restraint. The tension between the two is something that really incarnates Milan: restraint and, at the same time, warmth and opulence. I feel this is exciting because if there is tension, there is thrill, and if there is thrill, there is passion."

That tension resonates far beyond Italy. In the Gulf, family homes often conceal lavish interiors behind plain walls, with the same instinct for privacy shaping daily life. Luxury here is often designed as a private experience.

Few objects capture Valextra's philosophy more succinctly than the Iside itself. With its trapezoidal structure and precise geometry, it has become the brand's most recognisable design. With edges all finished with Valextra's signature glossy black Costa paint, yet devoid of any branding, its pieces are firmly in the if-you-know-you-know realm, alongside similarly discreet houses such as The Row or Zegna.

Rougeaux, who joined Valextra in 2021 after senior roles at Smythson and Loro Piana, is determined to preserve its quiet authority while ensuring a natural evolution. Innovation, he argues, has always been intrinsic to Valextra. "Our founder was a designer and an architect, so there's always been a sense of looking forward and thinking about what will be relevant. That's why we're talking about products that are timeless or timely because we are trying to create something that makes sense





Listen carefully

Valextra has made it its mission to whisper rather than shout in the luxury fashion industry, as chief executive Xavier Rougeaux tells Sarah Maisey



VALEXTRA

One iteration of the Iside bag, left, integrates fragile bamboo with rigid leather, says Xavier Rougeaux, above

for the client that wears it today, but that will still be of the moment in 10 years.”

In 2025, this coalesced into a programme called The Journey of Craftsmanship, as part of which Valextra partnered with artisans around the world, such as Japanese indigo artist Riku Matsuzaki, to create the Iside Indigo decorated with a distinctive polka-dot pattern. Or the Iside Bamboo, made in collaboration with Chinese artist Qian Lihuai, who used the ancient technique of bamboo marquetry to create unique patterning.

“Bamboo, by definition, is something that is quite rigid and fragile. So, how do you integrate that into leather? It has to be sewn together,” explains Rougeaux.

Another bag in the project was the Sportami Via, made with two artisans using the ancient art of merletto a tombolo (bobbin lace) from the Italian city of Cantù to create a woven bag. “They have reassessed the way of using this tombolo technique on modern things. They designed a bag using historic techniques to make something relevant today,” says Rougeaux.

Technology, too, plays a role in the Valextra universe. During Milan Design Week, visitors watched an Iside bag slowly emerge from a 3-D printer using sustainable corn-based fibre, during a 26-hour process monitored not by engineers, but by artisans. The experiment was not about replacing craft, Rougeaux insists, but expanding it. “Craftsmanship is happening now. The search for excellence doesn’t mean we need to look at the past and do things like we were doing 50 or 60 years ago. It’s looking at how we make it relevant today and tomorrow.”

That future-mindedness extends to people as well as processes. Valextra operates its own training programmes in Milan, recruiting young artisans and pairing them with experienced makers. The aim is continuity, by inviting new ideas in, as part of natural evolution. “We call it engineering beauty,” Rougeaux says. “It’s about keeping skill alive by keeping it exciting.”

Back in the boutique – the brand opened its first UAE store in 2024 at Dubai Mall – I click the Iside’s clasp shut again, softly as before. It is a tiny sound, easily missed amid the noise of contemporary luxury. Which, of course, is precisely the point.

The currency of trust

As president of Kering Middle East and Africa, Miral Youssef is in charge of some of the fashion world's biggest names across the region – and trust has been her secret to success. By **Sarah Maisey**

At the inaugural Shoptalk Luxe in Abu Dhabi in January – a three-day summit that drew figures such as Vera Wang, Harrods's Michael Ward and Michael Chalhoub – the conversation moved beyond trends into leadership and the evolving soul of luxury. Few were better placed to speak than Miral Youssef, president of Kering Middle East and Africa, and one of the Gulf's defining fashion executives.

As regional head of the French group behind Gucci, Saint Laurent, Bottega Veneta, Balenciaga and Alexander McQueen, Youssef operates where global vision meets local nuance. Her journey has been anything but linear, however. "There isn't one defining moment within my journey," she explains. "Sometimes I actually think: 'Gosh, I can't believe I've gone through all these different series.'"

From buyer to general manager, she has moved fluidly across the industry, gathering experience at every turn. She has worked alongside Vivienne Westwood – an experience she still calls transformative – and was at Ralph Lauren during the era when its preppy aesthetic became the global uniform.

Youssef cites a "sequence of micro-opportunities" rather than a singular plan for her career growth, with each decision opening the door to the next. Moving to the UAE in 2012 to join the Chalhoub Group marked one such turning point, eventually leading her to Kering in 2019, where she helped relaunch Balenciaga in the region.

What distinguishes her leadership philosophy is not simply ambition. Youssef credits her rise to leaders who believed in her long before she felt ready. "I think the most impactful leaders are the ones who trusted me, who really amplified my voice, and gave me the room to be creative and to innovate. I think when you've been entrusted with that, you flourish." Now, she is determined to offer the same support to others. "It's important to pay that forward," Youssef explains. "I learnt to find that strength in others and to trust in others."

Mentorship, in her view, is rarely formal and can come from anywhere – colleagues, peers and even her daughter. The aim is to create environments where people feel seen and are given permission to stretch outside their comfort zones. That philosophy aligns with Kering's culture. Women form the majority of its workforce and hold a significant share of leadership roles, supported by initiatives such as the Kering Generation Award and Women in Motion, designed to elevate female voices across arts and business.

Youssef acknowledges that while progress is welcome, too many women still grapple with deeply ingrained self-

doubt, with many hesitant to pursue opportunities unless they feel fully qualified. "The key part is, we don't go for things if we feel that we're not ready, but I think growth happens in the uncomfortable."

Her advice is simple. Growth is rarely easy and, instead, women should see discomfort as a mark of progress. "Don't fear being stretched. Even when we talk about things like growth spurts as a teen, it's not a smooth process, it hurts. Growth is never something linear or tidy. Instead, believing in one's own ability is key," she says.

For Youssef, leadership ultimately comes down to presence and she makes a deliberate effort to remain accessible, often scheduling brief conversations with young professionals who reach out.

What may seem like a few minutes of her time, can have profound ripple effects. "If someone asks to have a quick chat with me, I really do pencil it in. I've learnt that even those 15 minutes can actively change someone's career trajectory," Youssef says.

Her strategic perspective also extends beyond people, to the shifting nature of luxury itself. Today's Middle Eastern consumer, she explains, is highly informed and increasingly driven by meaning over logos. Craftsmanship, authenticity and emotional resonance now outweigh showy displays of status.

Brands must adapt with cultural sensitivity. She cites a Balenciaga campaign that was reshot with Lebanese singer Dana Hourani to better reflect regional values. The decision meant the house "was able to maintain the visibility, momentum, and buzz of the new creative director without compromising culturally".

she explains. Her team's role is "constantly looking at ways that we can find that balance between the global creative direction with a sound, deep, local understanding."

As clients seek experience over transaction, storytelling has become central. In late 2024, Bottega Veneta staged an immersive sound exhibition at Alserkal Avenue with architect Carl Gerges and former creative director Matthieu Blazy. Nothing was for sale. "The return on investment doesn't always have to be transactional, right? This was an event that had no product," says Youssef.

For her, the significance of such moments lies precisely in their lack of commercialism. "The room was dark and we were sitting on sand dunes honouring local artists. It was a moment we will remember forever."

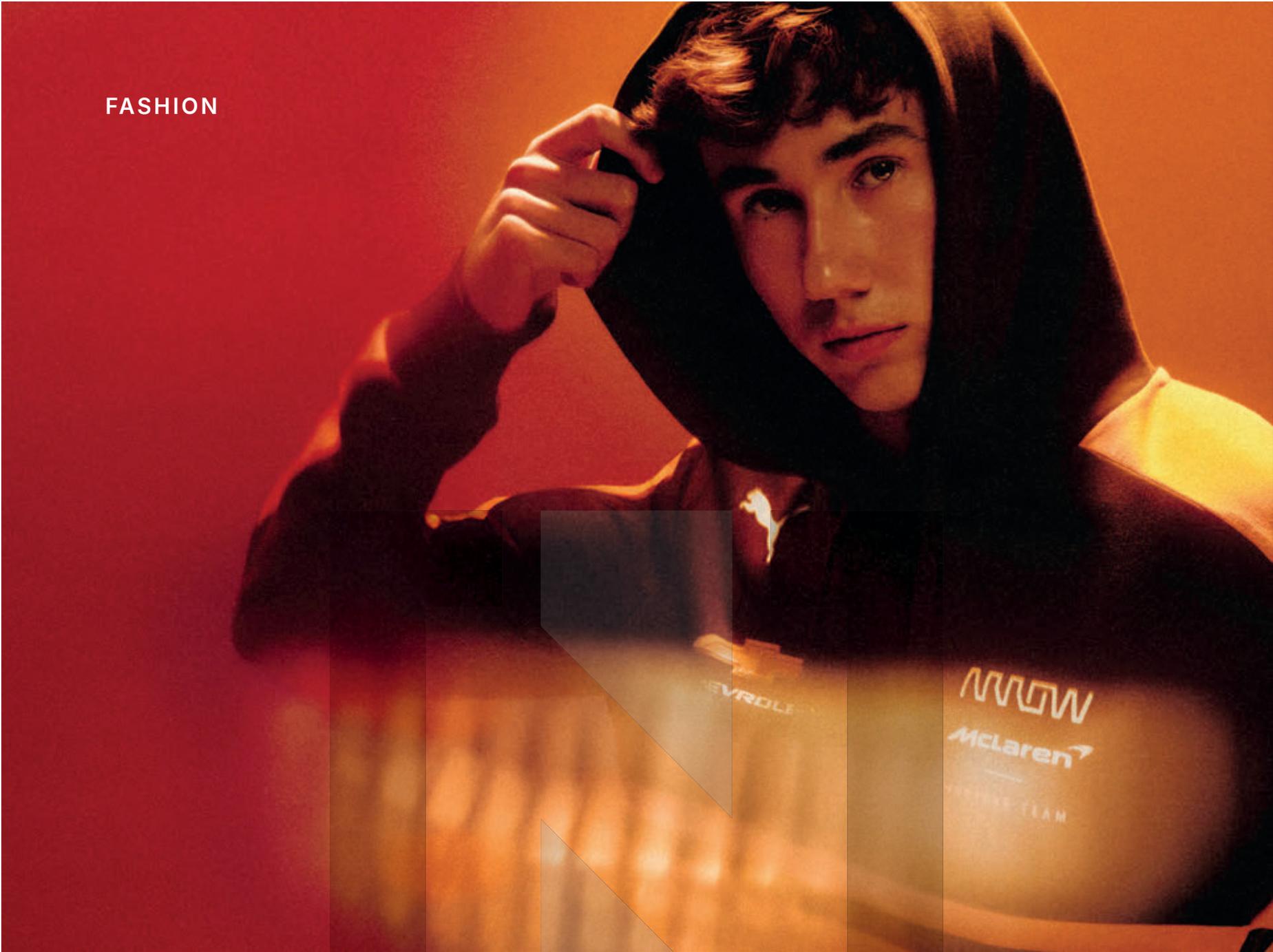
It mirrors Youssef's approach to leadership. In an increasingly automated world, relationships, mentorship and authenticity remain the ultimate differentiators.





Miral Youssef joined Kering in 2019, and relaunched Balenciaga in the Middle East. Opposite page, Kering brand Bottega Veneta staged an immersive sound exhibition at Dubai's Alserkal Avenue with architect Carl Gerges in 2024.

FASHION



OFF THE

Formula One has always sold glamour as much as speed. Increasingly, that identity is worn on sleeves, as team kit and fan collections become a significant part of the sport's culture and business. Merchandise has evolved far beyond the basic logo T-shirt. Teams now produce full seasonal ranges that blend performance sportswear with lifestyle fashion – from replica race polos and team jackets to casual streetwear designed for everyday wear.

As Formula One's global audience grows, merchandise has become another competitive arena. Teams partner with major sportswear companies and fashion labels to shape how supporters present themselves in the grandstands and beyond.

Despite the 11 teams on the grid this year, a handful of apparel companies dominate the paddock. Castore supplies Red Bull Racing, Alpine and Haas, while Puma outfits Ferrari, Aston Martin and McLaren. Adidas, meanwhile, has entered the sport through partnerships with Mercedes and Audi.

Alongside the sportswear brands, fashion labels are also stepping in. Racing Bulls works with Hugo Boss, while Cadillac is collaborating with Tommy Hilfiger.

MCLAREN

McLaren enters a new era this season with Puma as its official team kit and apparel partner. The multiyear agreement replaces

Castore and extends across the team's wider racing programmes.

The new range builds on the famed team's distinctive papaya orange identity, combining replica teamwear with casual lifestyle pieces. After the team's championship success last year, the arrival of Puma is likely welcome news for fans.

Castore's previous offerings often felt lacklustre, leading many supporters to show their allegiance through McLaren-branded collections from high-street labels such as Reiss and Hollister.

With Puma now in charge, fans can wear their colours with papaya hoodies, shoes and caps that feel far more suited to everyday wear.



Puma creates collections for the McLaren, left, and Scuderia Ferrari, right, Formula One teams
 Above left, Mercedes-AMG Petronas F1 team collaborates with Adidas
 Above right, BWT Alpine works with Castore as its official team kit partner



GRID

Formula One teams have mastered the art of going fast, but dressing well is a different race altogether. Faisal Al Zaabi runs through the sharpest looks and those that don't quite hit the mark

SCUDERIA FERRARI

Ferrari's long-standing partnership with Puma continues into 2026, with the German sportswear brand producing the team's full merchandise programme. This includes the replica race kit worn by mechanics and engineers, as well as a wide range of fanwear.

Ferrari merchandise remains one of the most recognisable in the sport, built around the team's iconic Rosso Corsa colours and prancing horse emblem. Few brands in motorsport carry the same global appeal, particularly when it comes to clothing.

In many ways, Puma has the easiest job in Formula One: the Ferrari logo largely sells itself. Even so, the brand has introduced some

variety through race-exclusive caps for each driver, such as special designs for Charles Leclerc's home race in Monaco and Lewis Hamilton's at Silverstone. The 2026 collection continues to lean into the prancing horse's heritage, making use of Ferrari's signature red across staples such as hoodies and T-shirts.

MERCEDES-AMG PETRONAS

The Mercedes Formula One team began a partnership with Adidas last year, marking the brand's first full Formula One teamwear programme. Adidas now produces the team's official race kit alongside a fanwear collection built around Mercedes's striking black and teal colour scheme.

In the first year of the collaboration, fans saw a more accessible and sport-focused range compared with the Tommy Hilfinger collections of previous seasons. Hoodies, racing shoes and team shirts quickly became popular choices on race weekends.

For this year, the range has been expanded with a wider lifestyle line that draws on the Silver Arrows heritage of Mercedes. The designs are clean and understated, making for Formula One apparel that feels wearable, relying on subtle branding rather than oversized logos.

BWT ALPINE

Alpine works with Castore as its official team kit partner. The collaboration began last

PUMA: BWT ALPINE F1 TEAM; ADIDAS

FASHION

year, replacing long-time supplier Kappa. Castore now oversees Alpine's full teamwear programme, including the apparel worn by the racers, as well as replica merchandise for fans. Like Alpine's performance on the track, their clothes and merchandise offerings leave much to be desired.

Alpine as a carmaker has clout among petrolheads, yet the F1 team has been unable to translate that into a desirable lifestyle brand for their clothing. It could be the haphazard use of blues and pinks for their colours, or it could simply be that the team is struggling, but one thing is true: there's very little reason to sport Alpine merch.

AUDI

Audi enters Formula One in 2026 with Adidas as its official apparel partner. The collaboration includes teamwear, footwear and fan merchandise tied to the German manufacturer's debut in the championship.

One of two new teams on the grid this year, Audi have come out swinging their first season with Adidas. Taking lessons from what they did well with Mercedes, the German sport brand has created a visual identity in its clothes that communicates the sleek and menacing look of the car.

Expect Audi's clothes and merch to become a popular fixture as casualwear this year.

ORACLE RED BULL RACING

Red Bull Racing's official teamwear and fan merchandise are produced by British sportswear brand Castore. The partnership covers the apparel worn by team personnel on race weekends, as well as the replica pieces sold to supporters.

The range centres on the team's navy and red colours and includes polos, jackets, caps and lifestyle pieces designed for everyday wear. This season's collection introduces one notable change: the Ford logo.

Red Bull has ended its engine partnership with Honda and started a new programme with the American carmaker. The Ford badge carries immense prestige in the racing world, and its appearance on an F1 team's merchandise adds an extra layer of appeal for fans.

Unfortunately, Castore's offering falls short in both quality and design variety. Beyond the addition of the Ford logo, there is little reason to wear these pieces casually. The collection feels overly corporate and logo-heavy – a look that might work trackside, but doesn't translate particularly well to everyday streetwear.

ASTON MARTIN ARAMCO

Puma supplies Aston Martin's official teamwear and fan merchandise, focusing on performance sportswear in the team's signature British Racing Green.

Fashion label Hugo Boss remains involved through separate lifestyle collaborations, giving Aston Martin one of the paddock's most fashion-forward identities.

The combination of British Racing Green and the prestige of the Aston Martin logo has made

the team's apparel popular among casual and dedicated fans alike. For 2026, the range sticks to the winning formula, offering pieces fans can wear proudly.

ATLASSIAN WILLIAMS RACING

This year, Williams entered a new partnership with American brand New Era. The agreement covers apparel, headwear and accessories.

Best known for its caps, New Era brings a lifestyle and streetwear perspective to the team's merchandise programme. Fans of Williams, a long-time pillar of F1, enjoyed the team's streetwear last year from Puma.

Fans have expressed some uncertainties about New Era as the brand's clothing partner, but they can rest assured that if nothing else, they will have the best-looking baseball caps on the grid. The team makes use of its white and blue colour identity, and produces clean and simple hoodies and T-shirts that can easily be chosen as casualwear.

HAAS

Haas has also joined Castore's growing Formula One portfolio. The partnership positions the British brand as the team's official kit and retail partner. There was much anticipation as to who Haas would partner with for this season, particularly after the team announced last year that they would carry the Toyota Gazoo Racing name and logo in their branding.

Toyota Gazoo Racing is very popular among racing fans around the world, and their presence in Formula One brings with it the attention and respect of fans of other racing divisions such as rally and endurance. The collection hasn't lived up to the expectation, but there's always next season.

VISA CASH APP RACING BULLS

Racing Bulls partners with Hugo Boss for its official teamwear programme. The collaboration places a stronger emphasis on fashion and youth culture compared with traditional motorsport merchandise. While Austrian energy drink Red Bull's main team boasts success on the track, its junior team seems to do much better off it with their clothes selection. The team's white, navy blue and silver colourway is desirable and Hugo Boss makes the most out of it to produce stylish streetwear.

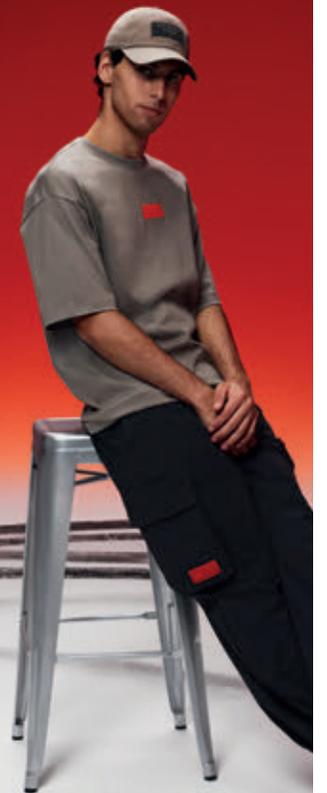
CADILLAC

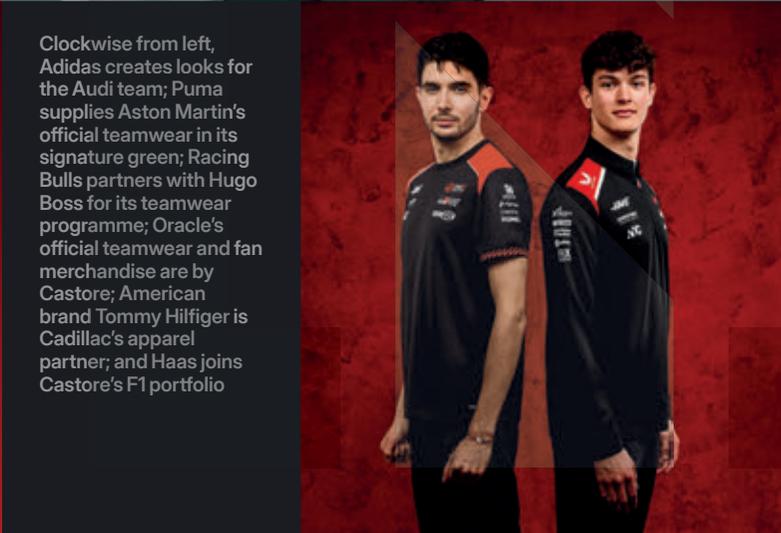
Cadillac arrives on the grid with Tommy Hilfiger as its apparel partner. The American fashion giant has a long history of motorsport involvement and will produce the team's official merchandise and fanwear.

Much like Audi, team Cadillac have nailed it with their clothing in their first season. The team chose a perfect clothing partner in Tommy Hilfiger, which accentuates the American team's character.

The presence of the Cadillac brand name alongside Tommy Hilfiger on teamwear will make the merch popular among fans of casualwear, as both brands have resonance far beyond motorsport.

PUMA; TGR HAAS F1 TEAM; TOMMY HILFIGER; AUDI REVOLUT F1 TEAM; RED BULL CONTENT POOL





Clockwise from left, Adidas creates looks for the Audi team; Puma supplies Aston Martin's official teamwear in its signature green; Racing Bulls partners with Hugo Boss for its teamwear programme; Oracle's official teamwear and fan merchandise are by Castore; American brand Tommy Hilfger is Cadillac's apparel partner; and Haas joins Castore's F1 portfolio

COVER STORY



Manuel Rabaté moved to the UAE with his family in 2014 and became director of Louvre Abu Dhabi two years later

Manuel Rabaté is not ready to say goodbye just yet. For close to a decade, he has overseen Louvre Abu Dhabi from its earliest preparations to its emergence as one of the region's defining cultural institutions. Now he is preparing for a new chapter, carrying forward a philosophy shaped by his years in the UAE.

The French museum head, who has led the institution since its opening in 2017, is stepping down to become director and chief executive of the Kiran Nadar Museum of Art in New Delhi. The move brings to a close a period that has shaped both his professional life and the cultural landscape of Abu Dhabi.

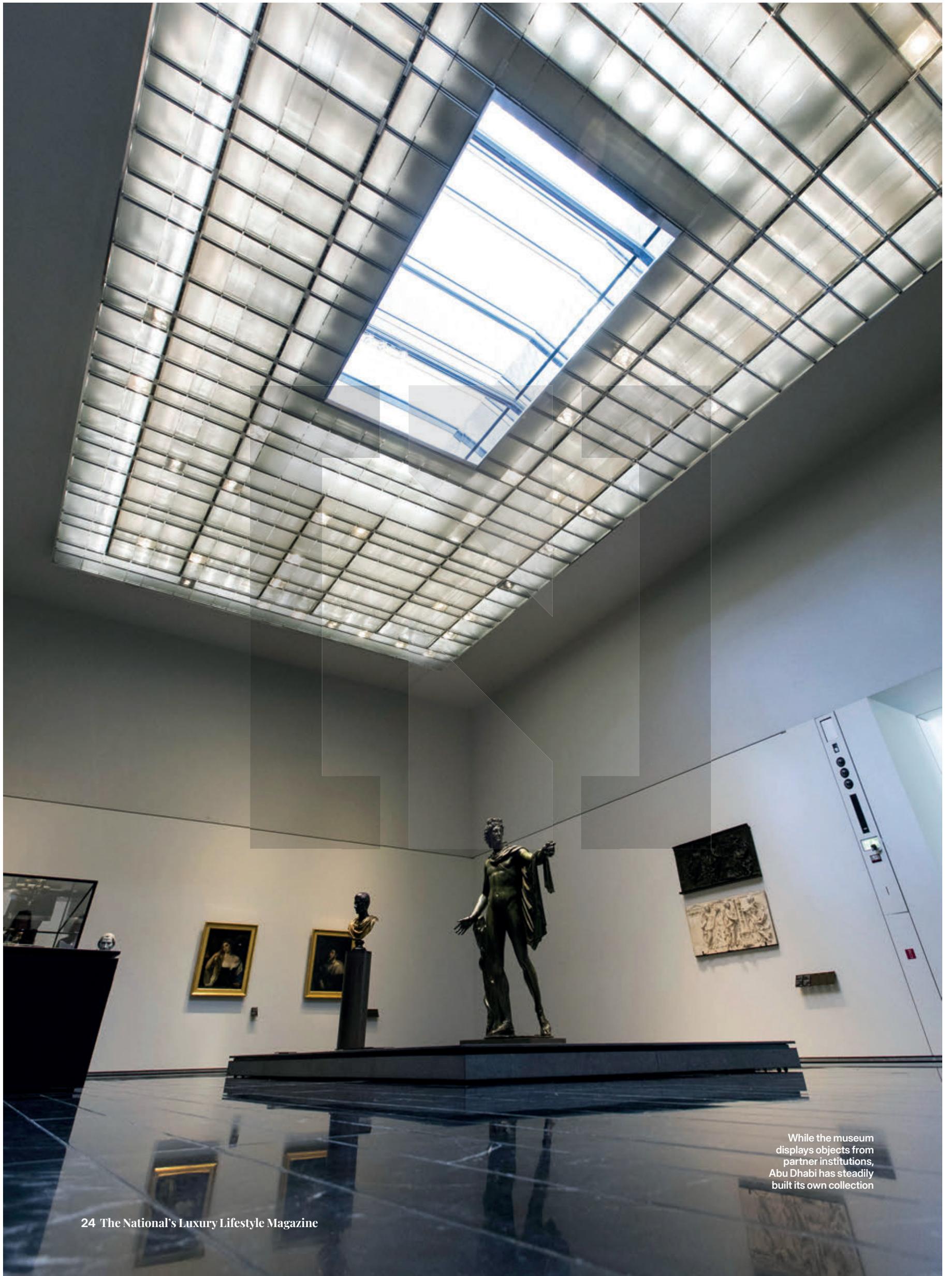
"It's actually the closure of 18 years of my life," Rabaté says. In 2008, he began working on Louvre Abu Dhabi project in Paris as head of Agence France-Muséums, the organisation created to realise the landmark partnership between France and the UAE. In 2014, he moved to Abu Dhabi with his family to prepare for the museum's opening. Two years later, he officially became director.

On a personal level, Abu Dhabi has become Rabaté's home, the city where two of his daughters were born and a multitude of friendships formed. He learnt Arabic – an ongoing project – and embraced Emirati and Arab culture. The project also reshaped his understanding of the place it was built to serve and rewired him in ways he is still discovering. "I touched the soul of this country," he says. "I came here as a professional working on a museum project. But when you live here, when your children grow up here, when you experience the diversity of people who call this place home, it changes you."

His tenure also coincided with the city's emergence as a global cultural destination, with Louvre Abu Dhabi opening as the first completed museum in the still-growing and uniquely placed Saadiyat Cultural District.

THE BRIDGE BUILDER

After close to a decade at the helm of Louvre Abu Dhabi, Manuel Rabaté tells **Mina Al-Oraibi** and **William Mullally** about his life-changing experience with the institution and the city



While the museum displays objects from partner institutions, Abu Dhabi has steadily built its own collection

When the museum opened beneath French architect Jean Nouvel's vast dome, it represented something unprecedented: a global museum in the Arab world organised around the idea of a "connected history of art", where objects from different cultures appear side by side, rather than separated by geography.

For Rabaté, in retrospect, that approach was inevitable. "The name of the museum is Louvre Abu Dhabi," he says. "With that name come two very demanding promises. One is the Louvre, one of the most famous museums in the world. The other is Abu Dhabi, a capital of the Arab world and a hub where people from many cultures meet."

The idea has resonated with audiences. Last year, the site welcomed about 1.4 million visitors, placing it among the most visited museums in the Middle East and confirming its position as one of the UAE's most prominent cultural landmarks.

"The idea is a connected history of art," Rabaté says. "It crosses more than 10,000 years of history through objects. But to reach that simplicity took nearly a decade of work between the teams."

In its early days, many of those objects came from loans provided by partner institutions in France, including the Louvre, Musée d'Orsay and Centre Pompidou. Masterpieces such as Leonardo da Vinci's *La Belle Ferronnière*, Jacques-Louis David's *Napoleon Crossing the Alps* and works by Dutch artist Vincent van Gogh helped introduce the museum to international audiences.

Since then, the balance has shifted steadily as Abu Dhabi has built its own permanent collection. "When we opened, about 60 or 70 per cent of the galleries relied on loans from French museums," Rabaté explains. "Thirty or 40 per cent came from the Abu Dhabi collection. Today, the Abu Dhabi collection is strong enough to structure the narrative itself."

Acquisitions have ranged from ancient artefacts and Islamic manuscripts to modern paintings and contemporary works. At the same time, Louvre Abu Dhabi has expanded partnerships with institutions beyond France, bringing objects from their countries of origin directly to the UAE capital.

Rabaté refers to these as "ambassador objects" – works that travel temporarily to participate in the museum's global narrative. "This is something we wanted to create here," he says. "Objects coming directly from different cultures and presented together."

Alongside the permanent galleries, Louvre Abu Dhabi's exhibition programme has played a central role in defining its identity. Early shows explored subjects such as trade routes across Arabia, and the exchange of artistic ideas between East and West.



CHRISTOPHER PIKE; VICTOR BESA / THE NATIONAL



We became a benchmark. The architecture is strong, the teams are excellent, the collection is growing and the district is taking shape

COVER STORY

Later exhibitions brought works by artists including Rembrandt, Monet and Jackson Pollock to audiences in the UAE.

More recent projects have pushed that dialogue further. Rabaté points to the museum's current exhibition – Picasso, the Figure – as an example of how the institution approaches art history. "This Picasso exhibition is one of the archetypes of what we wanted to achieve," he says. "You can explore Picasso's creative process and the historical layers of his work. But because we are Louvre Abu Dhabi, we also show the roots that inspired him – African art, Oceanic art, Greek and Roman works. And then the connections with the Arab world as well. This mix is definitely Louvre Abu Dhabi DNA."

Beyond exhibitions, the museum has also experimented with new ways of engaging visitors through technology – from virtual reality experiences to digital tools that allow audiences to explore artworks in greater depth.

But Rabaté sees a museum's purpose as extending beyond the objects themselves. "A museum is like a small city," he says. "You have curators, conservators, educators, security teams, technicians, marketers. All these professions work together."

When Rabaté walks the museum's grounds, he stops to speak to various colleagues, from curators to security officers. He spoke to *TN Magazine* during his last week in Louvre Abu Dhabi. During the interview, several members of his team stopped Rabaté to ask for a photo or to give him a heartfelt hug.

Over the past decade, many of those roles have been filled by Emirati professionals who began their careers as the museum was taking shape. "What I am most proud of is seeing people who started here and who are now leading departments or working across the region," Rabaté says.

When asked what the secret is to a museum's success, Rabaté speaks of the importance of partnerships and building a community. He is quick to point out that Louvre Abu Dhabi's success was the result of collaboration, with colleagues at the Department of Culture and Tourism – Abu Dhabi, as well as the curators, scholars and staff who shaped the institution day after day.

When asked what is needed from a museum director, he pauses before saying a director is like an architect, putting different parts together. "I'm not an art historian," he says. "My role is to build the machine that allows this encounter – between artworks, ideas and people."

At a time when much of people's time is spent online, Rabaté reflects on the role of physical spaces and physical objects. While the knowledge of art history can be learnt through vast online resources, "a museum organises the encounter of physical collection and physical visitors in a setting that amplifies the understanding and magnification of beauty", he says, adding that "it is all about a balance" between informing and sparking emotions.

Rabaté's departure comes as the broader cultural district around the museum is beginning to take form. Within walking distance, Zayed National Museum, Natural History Museum Abu Dhabi and TeamLab Phenomena is each forging their own complementary identities since their opening last year, with Guggenheim Abu Dhabi set to join them in the coming months.

From the beginning, Rabaté says Louvre Abu Dhabi was intended to be part of a much larger cultural ecosystem. "It was a gift to the world ... with

a new narrative of exchange and connectivity," he explains. "It was always a collective vision. The museum was one step in a wider cultural project."

But its influence already extends far wider than just its sister institutions on Saadiyat Island. Rabaté believes Louvre Abu Dhabi has already begun influencing how scores of museums think about their role in a globalised world. Institutions across Europe, Asia and North America have increasingly experimented with cross-cultural narratives that highlight connections between civilisations, rather than presenting them in isolation.

"We became a benchmark," Rabaté says. The director who succeeds him, which is still under discussion, will inherit an institution that has moved well beyond its early experimental phase. "The architecture is very strong," Rabaté says. "The teams are excellent, the collection is growing and the district is taking shape. Whoever comes next will bring their own perspective."

However, he acknowledges that the moment of handing over the reins at Louvre Abu Dhabi is "bittersweet" as he prepares for "the closure of 18 years of my life".

Rabaté's next chapter will unfold thousands of kilometres away in India. The Kiran Nadar Museum of Art is set to become the largest private museum in the country, with a vast new cultural campus designed by architect Sir David Adjaye under development.



My role is to build the machine that allows this encounter – between artworks, ideas and people

The move also reflects a historical connection between the Gulf and the Indian subcontinent – regions that have long been linked through trade, migration and cultural exchange.

The challenge, he says, carries echoes of the work he undertook in Abu Dhabi. "I'm taking with me the methodology and the ambition of what we built here," he says, reflecting on his learnings from Abu Dhabi. "But every project begins with understanding the place – the

people, the culture, the city around it."

As he walks the galleries of Louvre Abu Dhabi – still among the first to arrive each morning and the last to leave – he thinks about the millions who have passed through its doors since it opened.

He thinks back to the morning of November 11, 2017 – the first day the museum opened to the public. He was standing by the door with a gift in his hand for the first visitor when security informed him it was actually two little girls. Unable to offer them both the gift, he instead gave them a welcoming bow as someone snapped a photograph – an image he still treasures.

The moment took on new meaning last year. "They came back to visit," Rabaté says. "And they told me, with emotion in their voices, that Louvre Abu Dhabi had changed their life."

His departure, he says, does not feel like an ending. "It is a continuity move," he remarks. The role of museum director is about "building bridges" – between cultures, across time, and throughout the global art world. That mission continues – and Louvre Abu Dhabi will remain a central part of that for him moving forward.

"This is not a goodbye," Rabaté says. "It's more an 'au revoir'. The connection remains."



VICTOR BESA / THE NATIONAL

Louvre Abu Dhabi was the first completed museum to open in the still-growing Saadiyat Cultural District

FEATURE

Scene stealers



GETTY IMAGES



A stormtrooper helmet from Star Wars: Episode IV – A New Hope (1977) sold at auction for \$434,755 in 2024

Movie props such as the axe from *The Shining* and the Superman cape worn by Christopher Reeve carry a charge that few collectibles can match – and market value is catching up with the intensity of the fandom, writes **Josh Sims**

Auctioneer **Alastair McCrea** recently sold an adapted First World War rifle. It didn't work and was, as he puts it, "incredibly heavy". He got Dh2.4 million for it anyway – because it was the prop carried by Boba Fett in the original *Star Wars* trilogy. "He was considered more of a background character," McCrea adds, "which meant they only made one of that prop."

Science fiction, fantasy and horror may not be everyone's passion, but it is precisely others' obsession with these visually arresting, pop-culture-defining genres that is driving what is fast becoming a popular asset class: movie props – costumes, clapper boards, scripts, posters and original artwork. "For a lot of collectors, the value lies in a film taking them back to their childhood," says McCrea, a consignment specialist at UK auction house Propstore. "Films from the 1980s are in a sweet spot right now – people who grew up then are nostalgic and now have a bit of cash."

Some will need quite a lot of it. Blue-chip movie memorabilia – typically a prop central to a film's plot – can leave much of the art world in the dust, both in price and rate of return. The axe wielded by Jack Nicholson in *The Shining* sold a few years ago for the equivalent of Dh734,500. The most expensive movie prop ever sold, though, is a pair of ruby slippers worn by Judy Garland in *The Wizard of Oz*, which went for \$28 million. Other headline sales have included Marilyn Monroe's dress from *The Seven Year Itch* and Steve McQueen's racing suit from *Le Mans*.

Truly iconic props are, as McCrea stresses, few and far between – many now locked away in private or museum collections. "One customer bought Christopher Reeve's *Superman* cape from us and said he was going to display it, which made me very pleased. Some collectors lock everything away, which is a bit sad." It is, after all, one of the great pleasures of this particular market: movie memorabilia is inherently entertaining, free from the po-faced seriousness of art or watches.

Some superstar props remain tantalisingly unaccounted for, including Elliot's pushbike from *ET*, the gilded gun from *The Man With the Golden Gun* and an entire *Iron Man* suit. Many auction highlights have sometimes surfaced unexpectedly, often from a production hand's attic: the blaster Harrison Ford used in *Blade Runner*, for example. "You'd be amazed at how little people know about the value of what they've got sitting at home," says McCrea.

That said, as Catherine Williamson, a specialist at Julien's – Hollywood's leading mobile memorabilia auction house – explains, there is still a steep sliding scale of prices, and genuine fun to be had well below Dh25,000. Much depends on the specifics. Was a prop a one-off or produced in multiples? Was it built for stuntwork – likely less detailed, made from now-brittle foam latex – or for close-ups? Was it "production used" or "screen used", meaning did it actually made the final cut? Was it any

FEATURE



“
For a lot of collectors, the value lies in a film taking them back to their childhood

lightsabre, or the one Darth Vader wielded when he told Luke, “I am your father”? The latter case explains why Propstore sold that one for \$3.6 million last year.

As with art, provenance is everything. “If an item is going to sell for half a million dollars, we have to get it right,” says McCrea. Specialist auction houses now painstakingly screen-match props against high-definition film stills, hunting for telltale scratches and surface details. Even props that arrive with period-consistent materials, clean paperwork, receipts, Polaroids from the shoot and original tags can fail the final test. Sometimes, Williamson explains, the veracity of a piece simply cannot be guaranteed – and Julien’s has to walk away.

Occasionally, though, the source is impeccable – Julien’s handled David Lynch’s estate last year. In 2024, Propstore helped Anthony Daniels – the

actor who played C-3PO – sell off a trove of personal mementos. Daniels had accumulated them during an era when studios largely turned a blind eye to actors pocketing props, seeing little value in holding on to them. Times have changed.

The movie memorabilia market’s origin story is, in retrospect, astonishing – in 1970, MGM sold off the contents of seven sound stages to auctioneer David Weisz for only \$1.5 million. The lot included cars, aircraft, the full-sized sailing ship from *Mutiny on the Bounty* and about 350,000 costumes. Weisz made his money back eightfold. Studios are considerably more clear-eyed about their assets today, for their own archives or sometimes to sell to offset production costs.

“People who work on movies tend to know the people who collect, and that can bring more desirable props out of the woodwork,” explains



Clockwise from above, the axe from *The Shining* sold for Dh734,500; Darth Vader's lightsaber was auctioned for \$3.6 million; the dress worn by Judy Garland in *The Wizard of Oz* fetched \$1.5 million; the Superman cape worn by Christopher Reeve sold for \$193,750; and Steve McQueen's Le Mans racing suit was auctioned for \$984,000

GETTY IMAGES/AFP

McCrea. "But the fact is that studios are much more protective of their assets now. They know they can raise money with them themselves."

Which is why forward-thinking collectors are already hunting for the market's next frontier. That might mean props from films that flopped on release, but have since acquired cult status – *Ghost World* and *Big Trouble in Little China*, for example.

So far, the market has been dominated by Hollywood productions that either reshaped film history or conquered a global audience. But other cinemas are gaining ground.

"While we haven't seen much demand for memorabilia from Bollywood films in our auctions yet, that will likely be a growth area in the future," says Williamson. "Especially if the films receive a more widespread distribution and if the Bollywood studios begin dispersing the property.

We're already seeing growth in the US in memorabilia sales from Hong Kong, Korean and Japanese film productions."

Bollywood's failure to have its own MGM moment was, some years ago, cause for frustration among critics – its over-the-top hand-painted posters, in particular, were, as film critic Khalid Mohamed put it, "very badly archived". Despite ongoing efforts by the National Film Archive of India, demand for Bollywood memorabilia remains niche. For now.

Demand for film memorabilia more broadly is only expected to expand, reckons Williamson. "That growth is definitely more with more contemporary films than the classics, even as streaming means that younger cinephiles now enjoy films without respect to timeline," she says. And, she adds, with film arguably still the single most dominant form of global media, the desire to own just a piece of its story still resonates.



Archive
DIGGERS

In a world of watch trend cycles, looking back might just be the most innovative thing you can do,
writes Mehdi Mabrouk



From left, American 1921 by Vacheron Constantin; the Tank by Cartier; and the Carrera Chronograph by Tag Heuer are vintage watches that are still in demand today

Some time in the past decade, watches got loud. Not only in size or price, but also in posture. They became a style statement with a capital S. Limited-edition everything, influencers' wrists angled identically for the camera, the same predictable "grail" vocabulary, the same sterile unboxing rituals that make grown adults look like they're unwrapping a sacred artefact.

Meanwhile, the best part of watch culture – the part with long debates punctuated by the smell of leather – was quietly sitting in the background, not going anywhere. And now, it's coming back. You can feel it heading into April's Watches and Wonders, the Swiss watch fair that dominates the horological calendar.

Brands are digging into their own archives, and not because nostalgia is appealing right now, but because the archive is where the truth lives. Where proportions actually make sense. Where a dial can be restrained without being called minimalist. And where these pieces don't need to be explained through a press release or a "storytelling universe".

Some of the most visible maisons have already made this shift and will be well-positioned when the broader market returns to a form of classicism. Take Vacheron Constantin, for example. It has spent years quietly reminding the market that you don't need to invent a new language when you've had centuries to develop one. Its Historiques collection is the clearest expression of this: reviving specific past proportions and dial logic with modern movement execution underneath.

The American 1921, with its offset crown and tilted dial, remains the cult example: a design that feels genuinely archival without feeling like it should be hidden in a safe or behind glass. What the Historiques' direction tells the market is that measured design, clear lineage and the confidence to let old work stand on its own are all legitimate product strategies.

Cartier is probably the most naturally "vintage-fluent" major brand today. The Tank and the Santos aren't throwbacks; they're living templates that haven't needed retiring because the proportions were right to begin with. What Cartier does well is lean into the design codes collectors associate with its best decades, often through the Privé line and through proportion decisions across the broader collection that feel more like editing than designing. That's why it reads as genuine heritage rather than anniversary marketing.

Tag Heuer has been more deliberate about reconnecting with its chronograph and racing DNA, which makes sense given that this identity had drifted for a while. The Carrera has become the main vehicle for that return, with recent references borrowing visibly from mid-century and 1970s design language: the domed "glassbox"

crystal profiles, cleaner subdial layouts, a dialling back of the visual noise that accumulated in the 2000s. The Monaco is the icon, but the Carrera work is what actually signals the broader intention: using what the archive got right to rebuild a clearer identity in the present.

I believe we'll see a lot of this at Watches and Wonders: quiet watches that show restraint. The reason vintage makes sense in 2026 is straightforward – we've hit the ceiling on performative novelty. New case material. New blue. A collaboration with someone who's never changed a strap in their life. A "reinterpretation" that is more or less the original watch with a different font and an extra zero on the price. After enough of this, collectors have realised they are not engaging with objects, they're engaging with marketing cycles.

Of course, you could just go straight for an actual vintage reference from decades gone. It'll have already lived through several years of people being wrong about what matters, survived shifting tastes and recessions and worse. Plus, it will have the patina to prove it.

There's also something about the difference in how new versus old things sit on the wrist. A watch fresh from the boutique has the quality of potential. That can be exciting,

but it's also fragile. You catch yourself thinking about the micro-scratches before you've even left the building, wondering whether you should actually wear it or save it for some special occasion that never quite arrives.

A good vintage piece already has history: the slightly softened case edges, a dial that has shifted from stark white to something closer to eggshell, lume aged into a warm uneven glow that no manufacturer has ever convincingly replicated on purpose. Even bracelet stretch, which purists treat like a personal insult, is just evidence that someone wore the thing hard enough over enough years to make it loosen.

So this seems like the way things are going. The industry is doing the equivalent of an individual digging out a vintage watch. It's borrowing the credibility of old work to make new work feel grounded, while collectors use modern pieces for reliability and vintage pieces for texture. Sometimes the archive-led approach is sincere. Sometimes it's surface-level. The difference tends to be obvious once the watch is actually on your wrist. The good revivals respect what made the originals worth reviving – thinner profiles, cleaner dials, legible proportions.

Vintage, this year, is the answer to the endless release calendar. It's a reminder that watches can outlast hype. And the best new release might already be 50 years old.

The good revivals respect what made the original watch designs worth reviving

No

The first thing to understand about the Rolls-Royce Cullinan is that it has never apologised for existing. When it arrived in 2018, it did so with the sort of confidence only a Rolls-Royce can muster.

It was, depending on your perspective, either the most luxurious SUV ever made or a Dh2 million monument to automotive excess – one that went all the way to Dh3.8 million for bespoke and Black Badge versions. Quite possibly both.

Rolls-Royce itself framed the Cullinan as a machine for explorers and adventurers – which is amusing when you consider that most of them have spent their lives idling outside five-star hotels rather than crossing deserts. Yet, that contradiction has always sat at the centre of the modern SUV phenomenon. These are vehicles engineered for extreme capability, but purchased overwhelmingly by people who will never truly need it – even in countries such as the UAE, where some owners do love to put an off-roader through its paces.

The 2026 Cullinan has the presence of a private yacht arriving in a fishing harbour

off-road capability. It also gains permanent all-wheel drive and four-wheel steering – two features that would once have seemed faintly unimaginable for the marque.

But the Cullinan was never conceived as a practical SUV in the conventional sense. Like a Ferrari Purosangue or Lamborghini Urus, it is a Rolls-Royce first and a utility vehicle second.

Passenger comfort matters far more than outright versatility. In some configurations – namely the four-seat set-up – the rear seats do not fold at all. Instead, luggage sits behind a glass partition, travelling in what feels like a separate carriage. If you require folding seats and family practicality, I think the nice people at Rolls-Royce might suggest you would be happier in a Jeep Grand Cherokee.

Power comes from the brand's familiar 6.75-litre twin-turbocharged V12, producing 563bhp and 850Nm of torque. The latter arrives at just 1,600rpm, meaning the Cullinan never really accelerates so much as gathers momentum.

Underneath the imposing bodywork sits Rolls-Royce's aluminium spaceframe chassis – a version of the modular "architecture of luxury" platform that underpins the Phantom.

The structure is exceptionally stiff, allowing the Cullinan to combine limousine refinement with genuine

ROLLS-ROYCE



Rolls-Royce's Cullinan SUVs start at Dh2 million and can go up to Dh3.8 million for bespoke models and the Black Badge version, seen here

Despite weighing about 2.7 tonnes, it reaches 100kph in 5.2 seconds, while top speed is electronically limited to 250kph. Fuel consumption is as high as you'd expect it. But, in reality, this is the sort of statistic Cullinan buyers tend to ignore entirely.

Where this model has always polarised opinion is its design. It is an enormous thing: more than 5.3 metres long, nearly two metres tall and with the visual subtlety of a medieval fortress in fancy dress.

Some admire the theatricality of the vehicle. Others have likened it to a London taxi on steroids. That criticism was perhaps fairer for the original car. In 2024, Rolls-Royce introduced the Cullinan Series II update – the version that carries through to the 2026 model year – and it has subtly softened the design.

The front end now features slimmer, vertically arranged daytime running lights and a more sculpted bumper treatment, visually linking the Cullinan to newer Rolls-Royce models such as the Spectre and Ghost. The grille and air intakes have also been reshaped, giving the car a slightly more proportional and contemporary face.

But, don't worry, it still has the presence of a private yacht arriving in a fishing harbour.

Inside, the changes are similarly measured but meaningful. The dashboard now incorporates the marque's latest digital interface,

apologies

The Rolls-Royce Cullinan knows it is one of the most extravagant cars on the road – and that’s what makes it magnificent. By Nasri Atallah



derived from the Spectre, along with updated materials, new steering wheel designs and expanded personalisation options. From the driver’s seat, the view remains commanding.

Like all Rolls-Royces, it possesses a composure that borders on the supernatural. The ride is extraordinarily smooth, the cabin silent and the controls weighted with calm precision.

In this respect, it occupies a different category from rivals such as the Bentley Bentayga, Aston Martin DBX or even a lavishly specified Range Rover SV.

Those cars may offer more technology, more screens and occasionally more outright performance. However, none quite replicate the Cullinan’s sense of imperviousness – the feeling that the outside world has simply been turned down a few notches.

The Cullinan remains one of the strangest luxury cars ever built: a vehicle that combines the refinement of a limousine with the proportions of a small apartment block.

Yet, beneath the spectacle lies something extraordinary – a machine that moves through the world with a calmness and dignity no other SUV quite manages to do.

It is unhinged, perhaps. But then Rolls-Royce has never really been in the business of being sensible.



TRAVEL

The sound of our footsteps echoes through the cavernous hallways of Rome's Capitoline Museums, at least an hour before the doors open to the public. I'm on a private group tour, organised exclusively by Hotel de la Ville, where I'm staying during my time in the Eternal City, and to say I'm impressed would be an understatement. Our knowledgeable guide recounts the fascinating highlights of Rome's history in front of ancient relics and intricately chiselled statues while there's absolutely no one else around – incredibly rare for one of the city's most-visited attractions.

We're then taken through underground hallways connecting two of three buildings, leading us to an exhibition by Cartier in the museums' Palazzo Nuovo. Here, glittering tiaras, ornate brooches and elaborate

necklaces sit next to age-old Roman artefacts and marble sculptures that inspired each piece of jewellery.

This isn't something you can book unless you're staying at the hotel, and it's this kind of exclusive access – experiences you simply wouldn't get any other way – that's driving a new trend in luxury hospitality.

Beyond contactless check-in and technology-driven innovations, travel today is about forging meaningful, authentic connections in real time. In a world of social media saturation and overtourism, it's no longer only about thread counts, square footage and star ratings, but an insider's view of a destination that is, often, not even available to the locals. "Today's conscious, hyperconnected traveller seeks emotional value, well-being

ACCESS ALL



A view of the famed Roman Forum from Capitoline Hill, home to the museum of the same name

and a sense of belonging,” says Barbara Lo Giudice, cluster PR manager for Rocco Forte Hotels, the group behind Hotel de la Ville. “Hotels become a true home away from home, spaces of relationship, purpose and lasting authenticity. The journey is evolving from the ‘where’ to the ‘why.’”

That feeling of everything being bookable has made rarity a new currency. Where once luxury was about grand hotels and visible opulence, followed by bespoke service and personalisation, now it’s about opening hidden doors.

This is why Lo Giudice has designed a collaboration with Cinecitta Studios, Rome’s home for Italian and international cinema, allowing guests to get a behind-the-scenes peek at the studios, which are usually

closed to outsiders. This is also offered to guests at nearby sister property Hotel de Russie, a five-star stay beloved by celebrities that made an appearance on the latest season of *Emily in Paris*.

“Luxury travel is now measured in the access it unlocks,” says Matteo Atti, global chief marketing officer at VistaJet, which organises a range of experiences for its members, including dinner at Andrea Bocelli’s family residence in the tenor’s hometown of Lajatico. “What we see consistently is that today’s ultra-high-net-worth travellers value trust, continuity and anticipation. They want a single partner who understands their rhythm, can support multi-stop, multipurpose travel and deliver exceptional service without adding complexity. Hospitality is no longer

Katy Gillett heads out in search of exclusive access and ultra-private tours that are driving a new trend in luxury travel

AREAS



GETTY IMAGES



EPA; ROCCO FORTE HOTELS; SIX SENSES FORT BARWARA



Ultra-high-net-worth individuals value trust, continuity and anticipation. They want exceptional service without added complexity

about individual touchpoints – it is about who can unlock access, remove friction and create the impossible at every stage of the journey.”

It's not only hospitality brands that are getting in on the trend, as even Visa has teamed up with Emirati tour operator dnata to offer curated resort and hotel offers, including bespoke experiences with the likes of Paris-headquartered Club Med, Vietnam's Villa Le Corail and Seehof Davos in Switzerland.

Six Senses is another brand that's incorporating access into its resort offerings. For example, private tours are arranged with local estates at the property in Portugal's Douro Valley. In India, Six Senses Fort Barwara organises access to areas of a 14th-century fort that aren't otherwise open to the public. In Thailand, meanwhile, Six Senses Yao Noi offers bioluminescent night safaris with marine experts in the waters of Phang Nga Bay after dark.

Exclusivity is no longer characterised by premium settings, says travel content creator Yvonne Mtengwa. “We are witnessing a strong delivery for curating moments that are standout as much as they invoke emotion, connection to people and a sense of place,” she says, giving the example of enjoying sundowners while getting up close with wildlife in Africa. She's also slept on a “skybed” – a raised platform – under the African sky surrounded by the sounds of elephants, hippos and lions.

True exclusivity, she says, is less theatre and more connection with the guest. “Luxury for me, when it comes to hospitality, is abundance of choice, with experiences tailored to suit my asks, however small or elaborate.” Sometimes, it's just about having that story to tell when you get home; one that's unique and, for many, simply unattainable, she adds.

That little something special now comes from what's removed rather than what's added. Fewer people, fewer barriers and less noise. Access



Above, Six Senses Fort Barwara in India organises access to areas of a 14th-century fort that aren't otherwise open to the public. Left, Hotel de la Ville in Rome organises private tours such as access to a Cartier exhibition in the Capitoline Museums' Palazzo Nuovo, far left

strips away the mechanics of tourism and leaves behind something closer to immersion; there's no sense of being processed, hurried along or funnelled through a highlight reel designed for mass consumption.

This shift also reflects a growing fatigue with spectacle. In an era where landmarks are endlessly photographed, tagged and reviewed, the appeal lies in moments that can't be replicated.

They exist more privately, valued not for how they look online, but for how they feel in the moment. The most memorable experiences aren't always the most extravagant, but rather the most intimate – when a place reveals itself subtly.

This is as long as exclusivity doesn't turn into performance, and brands continue to work with local experts, historians or conservationists, shining a light on the destination's most treasured secrets. If hoteliers and tour operators can nail that, then it's a trend that's only set to grow.

For me in Rome, there's nothing performative about it. There are no queues, no timed slots, no security shuffle and no technology. Just seamless discovery and the opportunity to slowly witness up close and mull over historic beauty.

As we snake through the Capitoline Museums' labyrinthine halls, we arrive at the upper terrace. The sun is peeking through the clouds, shining on the Roman Forum, which I look over from my vantage point. The doors have only just opened, so there's still no one else around. There's no one bustling me out of the way and spoiling the view. I can hear every bird tweet, every car horn in the distance and I can see the Eternal City stretch out for miles towards the horizon, undisturbed. If you ask me, this is what true luxury is all about – escaping the crowds, slowing down and having the time to appreciate what's in front of you. And that, increasingly, is what travellers are paying – and hoping – for.



First

Sitting

From limited-time menus to hot new openings, Hayley Kadrou rounds up all the culinary news you need to know

SLO; OSTERIA MARIO; ORIZZONTA; FLOR; HANBOK; LENA DUBAI; 3FELS

SLO

The UAE is never short of ideas when it comes to dining concepts. Slo, which opened in Dubai in February, is taking the concept of wellness dining to the next level. Rather than leafy dishes or readily available macros, Slo is looking at food through a “microbiome-centred lens” and branding itself as an “avant-garde food lab”.

What does this mean for actual diners? The way your food is served is just as important as the dishes themselves. Before breaking bread, restaurant-goers will be offered a biombooster – a plant-based, fibre-rich starter crafted to prepare the body for digestion.

Open now; Al Quoz, Dubai



From top, 30-month aged Comté croquettes at Orizonta; Italian fare at Osteria Mario; biombooster at Slo; chef Matthijs Stinnissen of Hanbok; dish by chef Alex Dilling at Flor; tuna tartare at Lena Dubai

FLOR

Dining collaborations are always exciting, and there’s still plenty of time to catch Alex Dilling – head chef at London’s two-Michelin-starred favourite Hotel Cafe Royal – as he teams up with Flor Dubai for a limited menu that blends his imaginative style with the restaurant’s relaxed Mediterranean vibe. Think Scottish lobster pithivier served with Thai basil and ginger jus; and Welsh rarebit English muffins with black truffle. The four-course menu costs Dh345 per person, and there is also the option to order Dilling’s dishes à la carte.

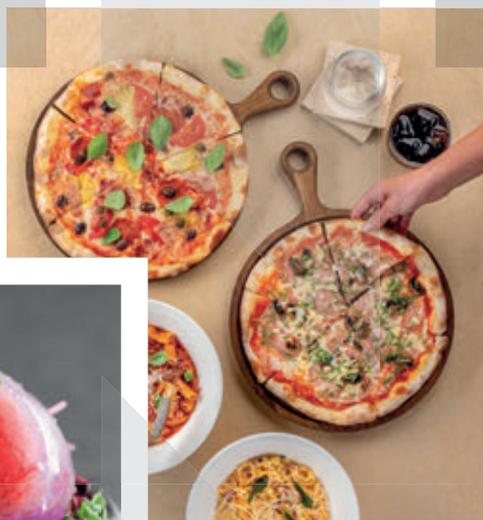
Until May 19; The Ritz-Carlton DIFC, Dubai

ORIZONTA

What are the Scandinavians known for? Minimalism crossed with cosiness, a love and respect for all things nature and consistently high ratings on global happiness charts. If you want a taste of that in the coming months, make a reservation at Orizonta.

Opening in Jumeirah’s newest hotel, Marsa Al Arab this month, the restaurant promises to blend Scandinavian philosophy – food guided by seasonality, sustainability and a deep respect for ingredients – with global flavours.

Opens March; Jumeirah Marsa Al Arab, Dubai



3FILS

3Fils has gone from being a hole-in-the-wall cafe to multistorey restaurant, earning a spot on the coveted Michelin Bib Gourmand list in the process. Its refreshed seasonal menu gives fans of the Dubai original plenty to return for, led by a gyoza lasagne that features a Wagyu-mushroom filling with ginger chicken broth and foie gras. The otoro and foie gras kamameshi pairs fatty bluefin tuna with dashi-porcini rice and nikiri sauce. In the Abu Dhabi outpost, lobster takes centre stage – whether with zaatar or a baked tail version finished with ponzu butter and umami spice. Across both venues, the A5 Wagyu claypot, built around Wagyu chashu and dashi-porcini rice, is the dish to order. A seasonal rosemary and blueberry drink rounds off the menu, which features bold combinations that have been well executed.

Available now; Jumeirah Fishing Harbour, Dubai; The Abu Dhabi Edition, Al Bateen

SHVILI AND OSTERIA MARIO

Two of the UAE’s more characterful dining institutions – Shvili, which introduced Georgian cuisine to the country, and Osteria Mario, a long-standing Italian favourite – have expanded their cooking classes to welcome adults. Sessions cover Georgian staples such as khinkali, the juicy meat or cheese dumplings, as well as khachapuri, the soft dough bread filled with cheese and topped with egg, alongside Italian classics such as pizza. Private group cooking classes are available for those who’d rather earn their dinner than simply order it.

Available now; various dates and locations across Abu Dhabi and Dubai



HANBOK

Dutch chef Matthijs Stinnissen, pictured above, trained in Michelin-starred kitchens across Europe – among them Hertog Jan in the Netherlands – before arriving in the UAE as sous chef at Jason Atherton’s Marina Social, followed by heading Boca DIFC. He will now move to Hanbok, which is opening soon in the capital, where he will bring his classical culinary rigour to contemporary Korean cuisine, informed by extensive research and travel through South Korea.

Opening early 2026; Galleria Al Maryah Island, Abu Dhabi



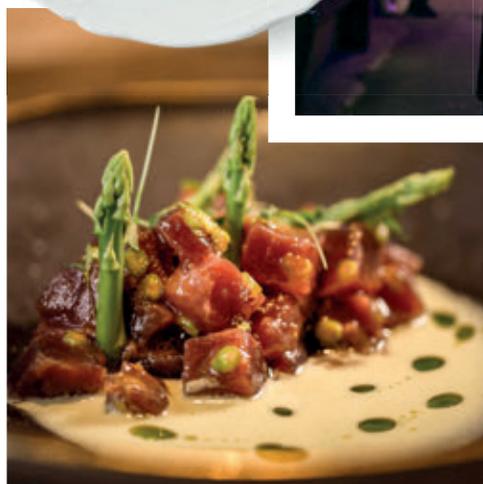
LENA DUBAI

Brunch made soulful is what Lena Dubai is offering up at its new Sunday get-together.

Guests can expect the restaurant’s famed fire-cooked classics with a Spanish twist from Michelin-lauded Andalusian chef Dani García, with local musicians De Cruz Jazz Duo filling the space with their trademark sounds.

Served as a Sunday special only, the brunch offers diners pans of paella, a tribute to the traditional end-of-week treat in Spain – a time for group gathering and sharing plates with loved ones. Options include Angus tomahawk and Spanish lamb paella. Elsewhere on the curated brunch menu are exotic starters such as tuna tartare with baby green asparagus salad, as well as classic mains such as grilled sea bream with seasonal veggies.

St Regis Hotel, Palm Jumeirah, Dubai

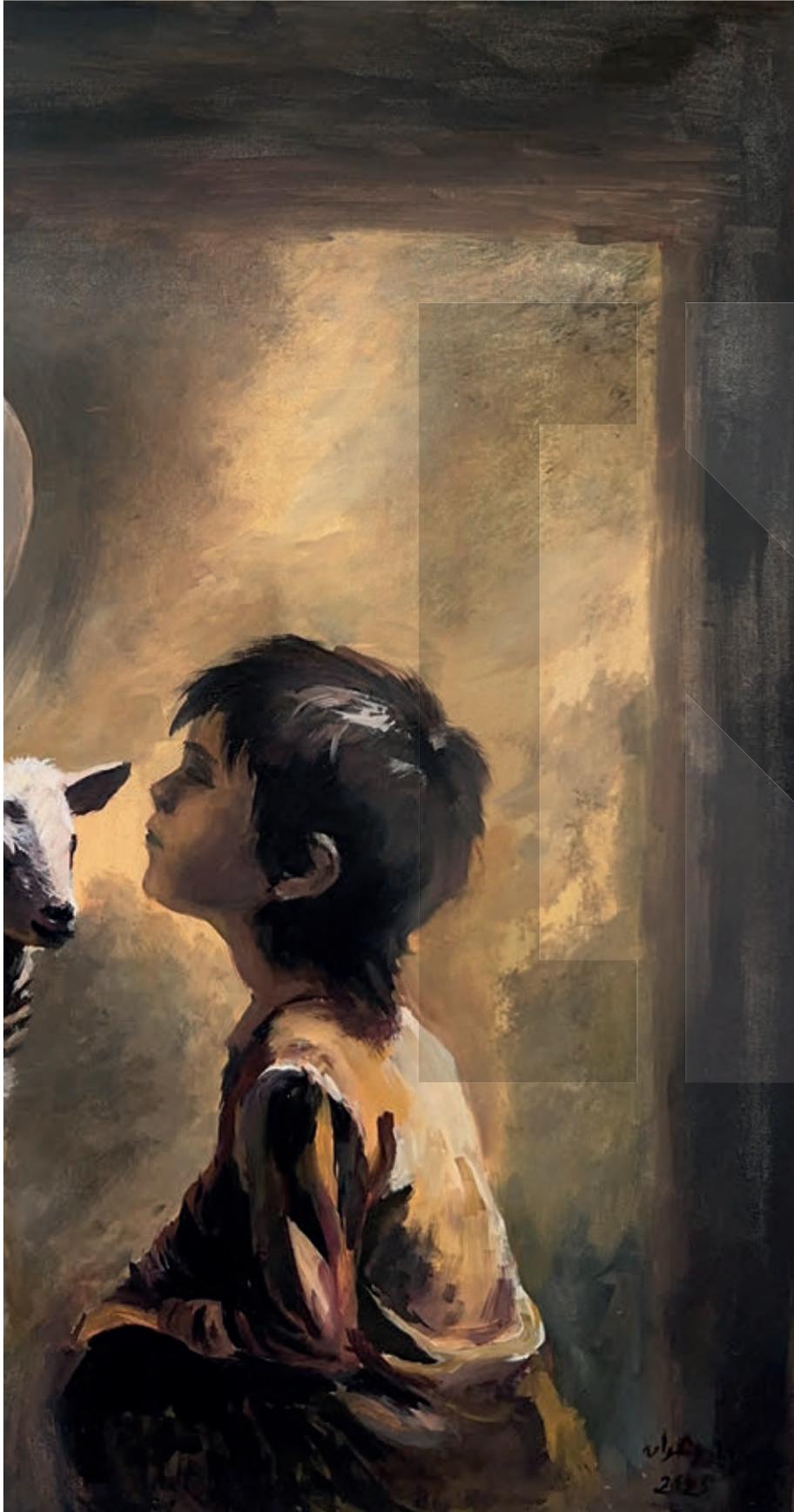


Sultan Sooud Al Qassemi ON ART

Threshold 3 (2025)
by Iyad Rahwan



IYAD RAHWAN



A young boy sits across from a robot holding a kid – a baby goat. His fascinated gaze meets the blankness of the machine’s obscured face; his eyes are shut, guard lowered, in a gesture of trust. But is that trust earned? Or even well-placed?

Today, the lives of adults and children alike are bound up with machines of all kinds and, increasingly, with artificial intelligence. We depend on them for everything: social connection, learning and, for some, even art. Many believe the dependency has gone a touch too far. Over the past few years, calls have grown louder for governments to ban social media for those under 16. Australia has already legislated and parts of Europe look set to follow. It is too early to judge how such restrictions will play out, but few dispute that young people need time for offline experience and in-person friendship.

As technology tightens its grip, something quieter is being crowded out. Young people no longer have the space to daydream, to let their imaginations wander without external stimulation. Plugged in through every waking hour, their thoughts have little room to form independently. A 2023 paper published by the National Centre for Biotechnology Information made the case plainly: boredom can drive people towards novel experiences, new interests and self-directed growth – whether that means picking up a book, learning an instrument, or simply taking a longer walk.

Then there is the question of art. Proponents of AI argue it will enrich the cultural experience – making research easier, encounters more



How do we protect nature – shown here by the goat – in the midst of the tech race?

interactive. Salim Alchurbaji, an AI start-up founder, envisions a future in which visitors “should be able to take a photo of a QR code and chat with the artwork and ask in what circumstances it was created and how the artist felt”. However, for this possibility to materialise, research needs to be conducted, trial runs made and visitor experiences measured. Thus, even when AI is let into the world of art, the role of humanity cannot be diminished, let

alone eliminated. Take Middle Eastern art – no algorithm can analyse or interpret what human scholars have not first uncovered from non-digitised archives and personal letters.

Which brings us back to the painting. What kind of relationship will this child have with technology, particularly technology as advanced as what he faces? How do we ensure that people of all ages can harness new tools effectively while managing the risks? And how do we protect nature – embodied here by the goat – in the midst of this technological race? The International Energy Agency projects that AI energy demand will reach 945 terawatts by 2030, about 3 per cent of total global energy consumption. The environmental consequences of that surge may not yet be imaginable.

The artist behind the painting, Iyad Rahwan, is well-placed to sit with these questions. Raised in Abu Dhabi, Rahwan is also director of the Max Planck Institute for Human Development in Berlin – a thinker who moves between the canvas and the research lab. “Our new generation will grow up in a world with not only nature,” he tells me, “but also AI entities that are equally fascinating. It will be up to them to figure out how to navigate such a world, and how to build it. They will face many ethical questions, and they may have to make trade-offs. At the moment, their imagination should guide them about what world we should create, so that the machines can help us – and nature – thrive.”

For that imagination to flourish, young people need time both with technology and without it. And, unlike the boy in the painting, they would do well to keep their eyes open.

UNDER OATH

With his trilogy that began with *Presumed Innocent* now complete, novelist Scott Turow explains how he found the secret to shifting 30 million copies. By Saeed Saeed

Scott Turow redefined legal thrillers by portraying the law as a means of pressure rather than principle.

The former US trial lawyer-turned author, known for his blockbuster 1987 debut *Presumed Innocent*, which spawned a trilogy and has sold more than 30 million copies worldwide, explains that the American justice system, with its narrow burden of proof, has a way of pushing people on both sides of the courtroom to their limits.

"I view it as a system of pressure," Turow says. "It presses characters, forces them into decisions and accelerates events. Against that pressure, you have the emotional lives of the people involved and that tension is what interests me."

It sounds almost Shakespearean, but when Turow, 76, emerged, the legal novel was rarely interested in that kind of emotional fallout. "It really was not a recognised category at that time," the author says.

"There were great books about legal cases." *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960) by Harper Lee, of course, in many ways is exactly that, a legal thriller. And there was another trial novel, *Anatomy of a Murder*, a huge bestseller in 1958, written by John Voelker, a Michigan appellate court judge, who, because of his judicial position, published the book under the pen name Robert Traver.

"I greatly admired the book, but it seemed to me to descend from the tradition of the hard-boiled noir fiction hero, who had little to say about his feelings, which was a far cry from what seemed essential to the books I was writing."

Presumed Innocent seemed familiar enough: it begins with a murder, a prosecutor accused and a trial that promises answers. What distinguished it was not the case itself, but the narrator, Rusty Sabich, a career prosecutor who recalls his experiences with a confidence that slowly gives way to doubt, self-justification and emotional blindness, even as the legal process grinds towards a resolution.

By the time the verdict arrives, the emotional damage is done, and it overshadows the outcome of the trial.

That emphasis on what survives the verdict has shaped not only Turow's work ever since, but also influenced a generation of future novelists, including John Grisham and David Baldacci.

"Every one of my books is essentially a family drama, because families are far more complicated than the law can ever be," Turow says.

"If all you are going to do is focus on the legal and not the emotional aspects of a story, then you are going to constantly confront the limitations of the law. But by exploring what it does to families and individuals, it gets more complicated in terms of the actual relationships. That's because it stands in contrast to the logic of the legal system, which goes from point A to point B and says: 'This is the rule.'"

Turow says this plays out every day in legal cases, both big and small. What it exposes is how moral certainty begins to fracture once it is embedded within a family structure.

That thinking carries through last year's *Presumed Guilty*, the third instalment following *Presumed Innocent* and *The Burden of Proof* (1992), in which Sabich, now in his mid-seventies, is drawn back into court to defend his future son-in-law in a murder trial.

Of course, by now the initial thrills and unsettling nature of Turow's ground-breaking novels may no longer surprise, but there is still much to enjoy in his mastery of wrapping up a complex case with a lucid narrative and brisk pacing.

Then again, he has never viewed himself as the father of the legal thriller. Instead, he attributes that success to a broader shift in American popular culture at the time.

"On television, you had drama series such as *LA Law*, which the creator David E Kelley went on to describe as not 'a law show but a greed show'. Then you had Court TV, which began broadcasting trials live. That created a peculiar change in the US," he says.

"The television cowboy was out and the spy became a less prominent figure because of the fall of the Berlin Wall, so lawyers became the new heroes because they were in the midst of all the drama playing out in American society," Turow explains.

"So I didn't invent the cultural change and I wasn't aware of it until the book really became an astronomical success."

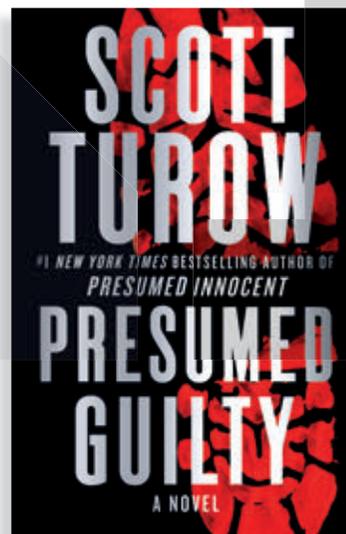
That sustained interest has seen his work repeatedly adapted for the screen, beginning with the blockbuster 1990 film *Presumed Innocent*, starring Harrison Ford, which grossed more than \$200 million worldwide. Other adaptations include *The Burden of Proof* (1992), a television miniseries starring Brian Dennehy, and television movie *Reversible Errors* (2004), led by William H Macy.

The latest remake of *Presumed Innocent* brought the story full circle with last year's Emmy-nominated Apple TV+ series starring Jake Gyllenhaal and created by *LA Law*'s Kelley.

An interesting aspect of both projects is that both Turow and Kelley are former lawyers who were frustrated by the grind of their day jobs. Kelley would go on to shape legal television dramas with series including *The Practice* and *Ally McBeal*.

When it comes to advising those hoping to make a similar transition, Turow is direct with his guidance. "My advice is pretty easy because it has always been the same. If you think you have something to write, you have to write it. You have to accept that it's hard work," he says.

"When I was writing *Presumed Innocent*, I was struggling too. I would write on the morning commuter train and often on Sunday night after my family was in bed. I would start the week short of two hours of sleep, but I was doing it, and it mattered to me. At the end of the day, you're not going to be a writer without writing."





Every one of my books is a family drama, because families are far more complicated than the law can ever be

Former US trial lawyer-turned author Scott Turow, made his debut in 1987 with *Presumed Innocent* and released the final part in the trilogy, *Presumed Guilty*, far left, last year

For avant-garde
photographer Abdulla
Elmaz, his first solo
exhibition doubles as
a therapy session,
writes **William Mullally**

A

SHOW

OF

VULNERABILITY

Photographer Abdulla Elmaz, an Australian who lives in Dubai, did not begin his recent 13 Cents exhibition as a therapy session. He began it angry.

The anger followed a creative rupture, a stalled period, a rebuilding. When Elmaz finally pushed through a block four years ago, the first sketches came quickly – combustible, dramatic, heightened. Cars suspended mid-air. Figures drenched in red. Mud flung across sharply tailored jackets.

Then somewhere in the middle of building those explosive worlds, something shifted.

“It all stemmed from a lot of anger,” the artist says. “But that journey was like actual therapy. And that therapy turned into this vulnerability. I realised I never have to be angry to create. I just have to be vulnerable. It’s a fine line because they are very similar emotions.”

That realisation became the spine of 13 Cents, Elmaz’s debut solo exhibition which recently wrapped up its run at Foundry in Downtown Dubai. The show’s 24 photographs, each conceived as a single-



I realised I never have to be angry to create ... just vulnerable. It is a fine line

image narrative, trace a movement – from confrontation to reckoning to acceptance.

The title is deliberately modest. “I called it 13 Cents because it’s my two cents that nobody asked for,” says Elmaz. “And 13 has always been a lucky number for me work-wise.” It began as 13 sketches. It grew. It took four years and roughly Dh100,000 to produce. Elmaz assumed it would be simple. “I thought it was very easy. You just do it,” he says. “But I was naive.”

The scale of the work is difficult to ignore. Brick walls were constructed and retiled by hand after contractors walked away. Renaissance frames were sourced and altered. Security camera casings were shipped from abroad because the local versions were wrong. Resin armour had to be rebuilt after earlier attempts failed. Entire scenes were staged more than once, a year apart, to get the texture right.

When viewers see the finished images, Elmaz says, they often assume something else is responsible.

“Everyone thinks it’s all fake and artificial intelligence,” he says. “They have no idea what we have to do to make this happen.”

Digital tools appear where needed – a skyline extended beyond a window, a background refined – but he is clear about the distinction.

“What goes into some of these pieces is expensive, pure manual labour,” he says. “It’s costly in every sense of the word.”

That insistence on authorship is not incidental. Most of the work Elmaz has produced in Dubai has been commercial – editorials, campaigns,



ABDULLA ELMAZ

In Claim You, left, artist Abdulla Elmaz, above, portrays the plastic chair that defined his early career, reimaged as a patterned suit motif worn by a figure lying at rest

ART



ABDULLA ELMAZ

client-driven projects. For years, he tried to smuggle his artistic sensibilities into that space, pushing symbolism and ambiguity further than the brief or brand required.

Gradually, he realised the tension. “I stopped trying to make everyone like my art,” he says. “The clients don’t want that. They want to show their product and that’s it.”

The separation brought clarity. “Now I’m just happily a tripod,” he says. “Whatever you need, I will happily do. But when it comes to my own work, I’ll take control of it.”

The exhibition became the outlet for everything that did not fit inside a commercial frame. “I wanted people to understand that art is not dead,” he says. “I wanted that moment where people would look at a photo and ask: ‘What does it mean?’ Because I never do any more.”

The early images in the exhibition carry the residue of the anger he describes. In *All I See is Red*, a woman painted entirely crimson stands atop a floating Volvo.

“This is like, have you ever felt so angry you want to drive off a cliff?” he says. The image stages that impulse precisely – the moment of slamming the door and deciding not to “do this again”.

In *A Letter to the Industry*, the camera pulls back from a mud-splattered face to reveal a car driving away. “This is the industry,” he says. “It takes, it stains, it abandons.”

His own history sits beneath that statement. Elmaz began shooting conceptually when he was 17 years old. He moved from Australia to London as part of a creative duo. Five years in, the partnership ended abruptly. “One day he woke up and said: ‘I need to be on my own.’ And he left,” Elmaz recalls.

Elmaz returned to Australia, worked in retail, then relocated to Dubai in 2019. Three weeks before his first major solo shoot, he was still working in a suit shop. Each editorial project along the way became a chapter. This exhibition is the 13th.

As the work progressed, the focus shifted from professional fracture to family history. In *There’s No Place like Home*, fragments of a miniature



house hover around a woman’s face. “I feel like I came from a very broken home,” he says. “And I can see that I wasn’t a problem, but I was made to feel like one.”

In *Hey Mum*, a body lies beneath a bird’s nest suspended over a motorway – a metaphor that came to Elmaz while riding the Dubai Metro and spotting a nest built in an impossible place.

“Why didn’t you teach me a thing or two?” he says of the lyrics – from the song *Buses and Trains* by Australian pop duo Bachelor Girl – that inspired it. “Why didn’t you tell me about the world?”

The most personal work, *Dear Nana*, addresses his grandmother, who died when he was a year old. The explanation for her death shifted over the years, from cancer to a heart attack.

“My gut always said that this wasn’t true.”



Far left, *There's No Place like Home* channels broken families and childhood trauma. Left, *All I See is Red* represents the kind of rage that makes one want to drive off a cliff.



What clients need, I will do now. But when it comes to my own work, I'll take control of it

The image became a way of resolving what he felt long before he understood. "I want to say to her: 'I don't want you to die in me.'"

Towards the end of the exhibition, the emotional hinge arrives. In *Sad Day*, a woman stands in shallow waters surrounded by sharks.

"I wouldn't say this is intended to be tragic," Elmaz says carefully. "But it's almost like fight or not fight. Do I just let go? Or do I actually fight and try to get out of whatever I've overcome?"

In *Heal*, a hardened exterior peels away in the surf. In *Serenity* and *Claim You*, the plastic chair that once defined Elmaz's early career returns as a patterned suit worn by figures lying at rest.

"For eight years, I was using plastic chairs as my main motif," he says. Instead of abandoning that identity, as he once thought he needed to do, Elmaz absorbed it.

The exhibition closed with *December 2019* – friends sprawled across picnic blankets before the lockdowns that resulted from the pandemic altered the texture of closeness.

"I wish there were a way to know you're in the good old days before you leave them," he says. "I wanted to end it realising where it all began."

By the time the final image was shot, he says he barely recognised the person who started the work. "I'm very vulnerable," he says. "Less angry."

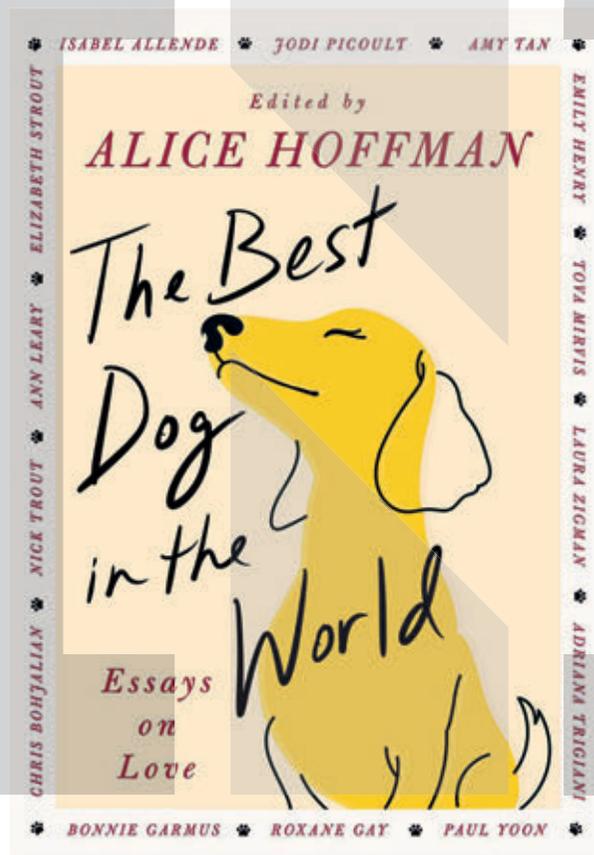
He repeats the line he now keeps in mind. "If I won't stress about it in five years, why stress about it now?"

The photographs in his debut exhibition were built with precision. The emotional shift behind them was slower, harder to stage.

It began in anger. It required vulnerability. And, for Elmaz, that was the real work.

MAKE IT LAST

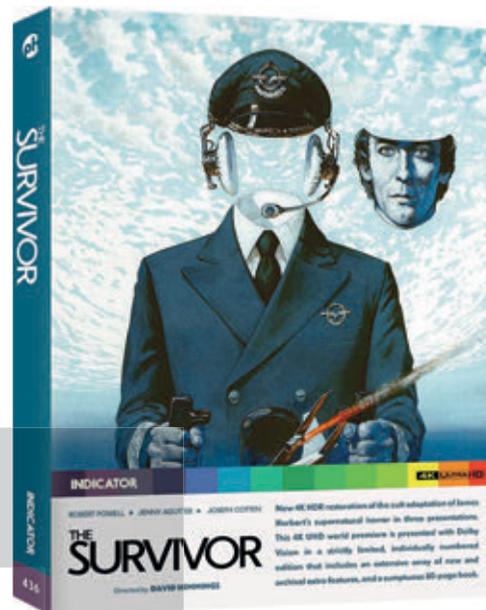
In a world of viral sensations and disposable media, here is our team's selection of physical media that deserves to be enjoyed slowly and thoughtfully



THE SURVIVOR (INDICATOR)

Everyone says don't judge a book by its cover. Mostly, that's sound advice. A cover's job is to persuade you the contents are worth your time and money. I've long treated book jackets, album sleeves and film posters as marketing: persuasive, but not proof of quality. But the cover art for the 1981 film *The Survivor*, released by British boutique distributor Indicator, has made me reconsider. I know almost nothing about the film. The synopsis sounds intriguing enough. Yet it is the artwork that has me sold. Beautiful and faintly uncanny, it depicts a pilot whose face has slipped from his body. It calls to mind René Magritte and Salvador Dalí. I find myself wanting to own it as an object and to discover whether the cinema lives up to the sleeve.

Faisal Al Zaabi, gaming journalist



THE BEST DOG IN THE WORLD BY ALICE HOFFMAN (SCRIBNER)

As the proud owner of the best dog in the world, I am very excited to read the aptly titled *The Best Dog in the World: Essays on Love*. Author Alice Hoffman has compiled a collection of 14 essays by fellow dog lovers, all written in tribute to man (and woman's) best friend. The list of contributors is as impressive as my dog's ability to shed enough fur to knit herself a companion, and includes Chilean author Isabel Allende, American writers Roxane Gay, Emily Henry and Jodi Picoult, as well as British celebrity vet Dr Nick Trout. The essays promise to "capture the full range of canine-human connection, from the joy of welcoming a new puppy to the heartache of saying goodbye to a beloved friend". I am looking forward to a series of very relatable reads, with some much-needed levity among the loving tributes.

Farah Andrews, head of features

ARIRANG BY BTS (BIGHIT MUSIC)

BTS's upcoming album *Arirang*, the band's first full studio release in four years, is set to be one of 2026's most anticipated arrivals. The popular K-pop group – made up of RM, Jin, Suga, J-Hope, Jimin, V and Jungkook – have consistently moved between pop, hip-hop and contemporary R&B, often pairing polished production with more personal themes as they've made their way up the charts. BTS have built a reputation for albums that feel cohesive rather than simply a run of singles, and *Arirang* appears to continue that approach. The title references the traditional South Korean folk song associated with longing and resilience, hinting at themes of separation, return and shared memory. In recent years, the group's sound has shifted between stripped-back arrangements and brighter, arena-ready pop, but this release is expected to sit somewhere in the middle, balancing restraint with soaring scale.

Evelyn Lau, assistant features editor



Son of Nobody



Author of *Life of Pi* WINNER OF THE BOOKER PRIZE

Yann Martel

SON OF NOBODY BY YANN MARTEL (W W NORTON & COMPANY)

Having won the Booker Prize in 2002 for his tiger's tale, *Life of Pi*, Yann Martel returns with *Son of Nobody*. Through two perspectives, the novel retells the Greek epic of the Trojan War on the page, while the real narrative unfurls in the footnotes. There, a modern classical scholar shadows the ancient story, creating a dialogue between past and present. I first saw Martel speak at the Emirates Airline Festival of Literature in 2010, still riding the long wake of that Booker Prize win. Now, with *Son of Nobody*, his characteristic inventiveness sees Martel reimagine myth through the dual eyes of a foot soldier in ancient Troy and a contemporary scholar determined to make sense of him.
Sarah Maisey, TN Magazine deputy editor



HOZAN YAMAMOTO & SHUNGO SAWADA QUINTET: SHAKUHACHI AND BOSSA NOVA VOL 2 (COBRAROSE/BEATBALL)

If you're drawn to music that defies easy categorisation, the new reissue of Hōzan Yamamoto's *Shakuhachi and Bossa Nova Vol 2* is essential listening. Recorded in 1969, it pairs Yamamoto's haunting shakuhachi – a Japanese bamboo flute – with the Shungo Sawada Quintet's fluid blend of Latin jazz, bebop and modal jazz – reimagining Japanese folk melodies in a way that feels both soothing and genuinely surprising. Yamamoto plays with quiet mastery, letting the shakuhachi's organic, mournful tone breathe within an unfamiliar setting. The vinyl reissue by South Korean label Cobrarose/Beatball sounds excellent, cut from the original master tapes. Beatball's original mission was to make hard-to-access music available to Korean listeners, but it has widened its scope to vinyl collectors around the world. With originals fetching hundreds of dollars, this is a great entry point into the genre.
Nasri Atallah, TN Magazine editor



THE WATCHLIST

From returning shows to a new documentary from Louis Theroux, David Tusing rounds up what's on our screens this month

1 YOUNG SHERLOCK (PRIME VIDEO)

Guy Ritchie, whose two *Sherlock Holmes* films were box-office hits, returns with a series adapted from Andrew Lane's *Young Sherlock Holmes* novels. Offering a more irreverent take on one of literature's best-known detectives, the show traces the detective's origin story as he attempts to solve his first murder mystery at 19, setting him off on a globe-trotting, action-packed adventure. Hero Fiennes Tiffin, the nephew of Ralph Fiennes, steps into the title role, joined by a strong supporting cast that includes Oscar-winner Colin Firth.

■ March 4

2 LOUIS THEROUX: INSIDE THE MANOSPHERE (NETFLIX)

Journalist and documentarian Louis Theroux has built a reputation for his explorations of taboo and unconventional subcultures. His latest documentary turns the spotlight on the so-called manosphere, examining an online ecosystem shaped by figures such as Andrew Tate. The film has been positioned as a thematic companion to Netflix's acclaimed series *Adolescence*, which spotlighted incel culture and toxic masculinity. Theroux speaks to a range of controversial voices, including TikToker Harrison Sullivan, also known as HSTikkyTokky; political commentator Sneako; and

podcaster Myron Gaines, among others. "It's sort of nothing like *Adolescence*, but it's in the precinct of what the boy in *Adolescence* might have been watching," Theroux said.

■ March 11

3 IMPERFECT WOMEN (APPLE TV)

Emmy-winners Elisabeth Moss and Kerry Washington executive-produce and star alongside Kate Mara in this psychological thriller, about three women whose decades-long friendship is shattered following a crime. Based on Araminta Hall's novel of the same name, the limited series explores guilt, retribution, love and betrayal, and the compromises we make that alter our lives irrevocably. The show also stars Joel Kinnaman, Leslie Odom Jr, Sheryl Lee Ralph and Ana Ortiz.

■ March 18

4 PROJECT HAIL MARY (CINEMAS)

Based on Andy Weir's 2021 science-fiction novel of the same name and set in the near future, the film stars Ryan Gosling as Ryland Grace, a molecular biologist who wakes up alone on a spaceship with no memory of who he is or why he's there. As his memories slowly return, he realises he is part of a desperate international mission to stop a mysterious space microorganism draining energy

from the Sun and threatening life on Earth. His journey takes him beyond the solar system to investigate a distant star that appears unaffected by the phenomenon. Along the way, he forms an unexpected partnership with an alien whose own planet is also at risk, and the pair embark on a high-stakes adventure to save their respective worlds.

■ March 19

5 DAREDEVIL: BORN AGAIN SEASON TWO (DISNEY+)

Daredevil: Born Again became one of Disney+'s most-watched shows when it debuted last March. A revival of the cancelled *Daredevil* series, which ran on Netflix until 2018, the show follows blind lawyer Matt Murdock (Charlie Cox) as he balances life in the courtroom with his vigilante alter ego, Daredevil. *Born Again* picks up where *Daredevil* left off, with former crime boss Wilson Fisk (Vincent D'Onofrio) elected mayor of New York City, setting him on a collision course with Murdock. The battle for the soul of the city continues in season two, as Mayor Fisk tightens his grip through an Anti-Vigilante Task Force while Murdock fights back in a bid to reclaim his home. Season two will also mark the long-awaited return of Krysten Ritter as fan-favourite Jessica Jones.

■ March 24

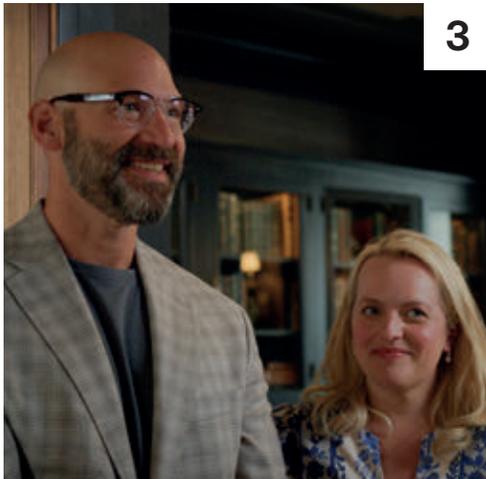
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STAY ON TRACK

Katy Gillett rounds up devices that help monitor and optimise well-being

1 HUAWEI WATCH GT RUNNER 2

This is one for the true athletes among us. At an exclusive launch party in Madrid last month, Huawei unveiled its latest running watch, born from five years of research and development, including input from world-class athletes and tested pre-release at the Burj2Burj Half Marathon. It features the brand's proprietary TruSense and Sunflower positioning technologies, offering a new level of accuracy on heart-rate zones, lactate threshold and GPS tracking in complex terrains. The watch comes with an AI running coach, which customises running plans and dynamically adjusts training courses, so you can reach your personal bests. You can also take calls and control music through the watch. Other features include route sharing and navigation, a built-in weather barometer and two-week battery life.

- Dh1,700

2 NUROPOD

Latest research shows the importance of the vagus nerve function to our overall well-being, highlighting it as a critical factor in managing systemic inflammation and stress resilience. That's where the Nuropod comes in. This wearable device, which slips on to your ear, sends

electrical signals to the brain via the vagus nerve using patented, scientifically validated neuromodulation technology, promising to help keep the wearer calm and consistently energised. It's also meant to counter post-viral symptoms such as brain fog, help maintain optimal heart-rate variability, improve digestive function and strengthen cognitive performance.

- Dh3,300

3 NEXTSENSE SMARTBUDS

These nifty earbuds combine advanced bio-sensing technology with an ultra-comfortable design, for a more restorative night's sleep. You can listen to your favourite sounds or NextSense's soundscapes to help drift off, while the clinical-grade EEG sensors monitor your brain's activity in real time. When they detect certain shifts in brain activity, adaptive sounds will play to allow return to the ideal state. Then, when you're in deep sleep, it will provide audio stimulation to boost the effects. It also offers a full sleep report every night.

- From Dh914

4 OURA RING 4

An alternative to bulky wristwatches, the Oura Ring 4 is a sleek and chic option for anyone looking for a wearable

to track vital measurements. For deeper insights into health, it offers the full works, by monitoring sleep, activity, stress heart health and more. Red and infrared LEDs measure blood oxygen levels, while green and infrared LEDs help track the heart rate and heart-rate variability, as well as respiration rate. There's also a digital sensor that takes the temperature, while the accelerometer keeps a record of movement and activity. The ring is water-resistant up to 100 metres and can be easily used for five to eight days before needing to be charged. Best of all, it has a neutral design, which allows it to be paired with a variety of outfit styles.

- From Dh1,399

5 HIDRATESPARK

Do you usually struggle to ensure you're drinking enough water? This BPA and lead-free smart bottle helps you stay hydrated with reminders to drink more water, as well as automatic tracking and app integration, so you don't feel dehydrated. It also glows when it knows you're thirsty, and you can keep track of where it is through the app. There are a range of options available, including flasks and tumblers, as well as different colours and sizes, which can hold from 600ml to 950ml.

- From Dh294



PAUL SMITH LOVES BARBOUR

The second collaboration between two storied British names, the Paul Smith Loves Barbour spring/summer 2026 collection has arrived in stores. Blending Paul Smith's colourful eccentricity with Barbour's maritime heritage, it channels the spirit of a UK coastal summer – think fish and chip shops, paper-wrapped pies and seaside balloons. Alongside its established line, the collection has expanded into womenswear for the first time.

BLACK BOOK

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



SCHIAPARELLI

With its signature fusion of fashion and surrealism, the French house of Schiaparelli once again adorns its bags with jewelled body parts. Most striking on the Secret bag – in both hard-sided and woven leather versions – gilt metallic features stand in bold relief against the surface. An ear, eye and nose appear as sculptural hardware, joined by a keyhole and a key, lending a surrealist twist to the everyday.

VANGUART

Unveiled at Dubai Watch Week, the Vanguard Black Hole with Arabic numerals is limited to only eight pieces. Its dial features concentric tiers that evoke a collapsing black hole, housed in a 45 millimetre Grade 5 titanium case that wears closer to 42mm thanks to its lugless design. Weighing 80g and offering a 42-hour

power reserve, it features a vertical reserve indicator and a joystick time-setting system with forward and reverse functions. The three automaton tiers are crafted from anthracite PVD-coated Grade 5 titanium with hand-painted indicators, while the exoskeleton is finished with microblasting and polished bevels.

JACQUEMUS

Jacquemus has opened its first store in the capital within Tryano in Yas Mall. The French label that helped ignite the micro-bag trend brings its distinct, art-led aesthetic to Abu Dhabi. The all-white boutique centres on a large antique wooden table showcasing jewellery, flanked by shelves of signature bags, including the micro Chiquito, the Bisou, the Rond Carré clutch and the Bambino. A curated selection of women's ready-to-wear is also stocked at the Abu Dhabi store.



L'ECOLE FESTIVAL

L'Ecole School of Jewellery Arts will host its second festival, supported by Van Cleef & Arpels, from March 27 to 29 at Dubai Design District. The three-day programme will feature workshops, talks, demonstrations and even open-air cinema in partnership with Cinema Akil. Events are tailored for both children and adults, while winners of the Talent Atelier Programme – held in collaboration with Dubai Culture under the Dubai Cultural Grants – will present work developed during their studies in Paris and Dubai. The winning design of the Admaf Jewellery Design Award will also be on display.



DOLCE & GABBANA

The Eleganza fine jewellery collection by Dolce & Gabbana features pieces that add a touch of glamour to everyday looks. Made in 18k white, yellow or rose gold, the pieces are studded with bold gemstones such as amethyst, aquamarine, peridot, rhodolite, sapphire, garnets and London blue topaz, each selected for its vivid colour. Spanning earrings, rings, bracelets and necklaces, the collection features designs inspired by 16th-century jewellery.





AMOUAGE

For Omani perfume house Amouage, the journey is as important as the final result, as proven by its limited-edition scent Oud Zuhai. Made using an innovative double infusion process, the GCC-only perfume draws inspiration from the ancient art of astronomy. Named for the Arabic word for Saturn, the fragrance features sandalwood infused with frankincense, cardamom and oud chips. The result is a peppery lift, where the subtle citrus of cardamom contrasts with oud. Amber brings a sense of timelessness, while oud Assam delivers a rounded, full-bodied complexity.

GIVENCHY

Givenchy's new Inséparables fragrance pays tribute to founder Hubert de Givenchy and his first haute couture collection, Les Séparables, unveiled in 1952. The show's focus on two-piece silhouettes inspires the scent's interplay of contrasts. At its heart is honeyed Centifolia rose, brightened by mandarin and petitgrain bigarade from bitter orange leaves and branches. Ylang-ylang adds

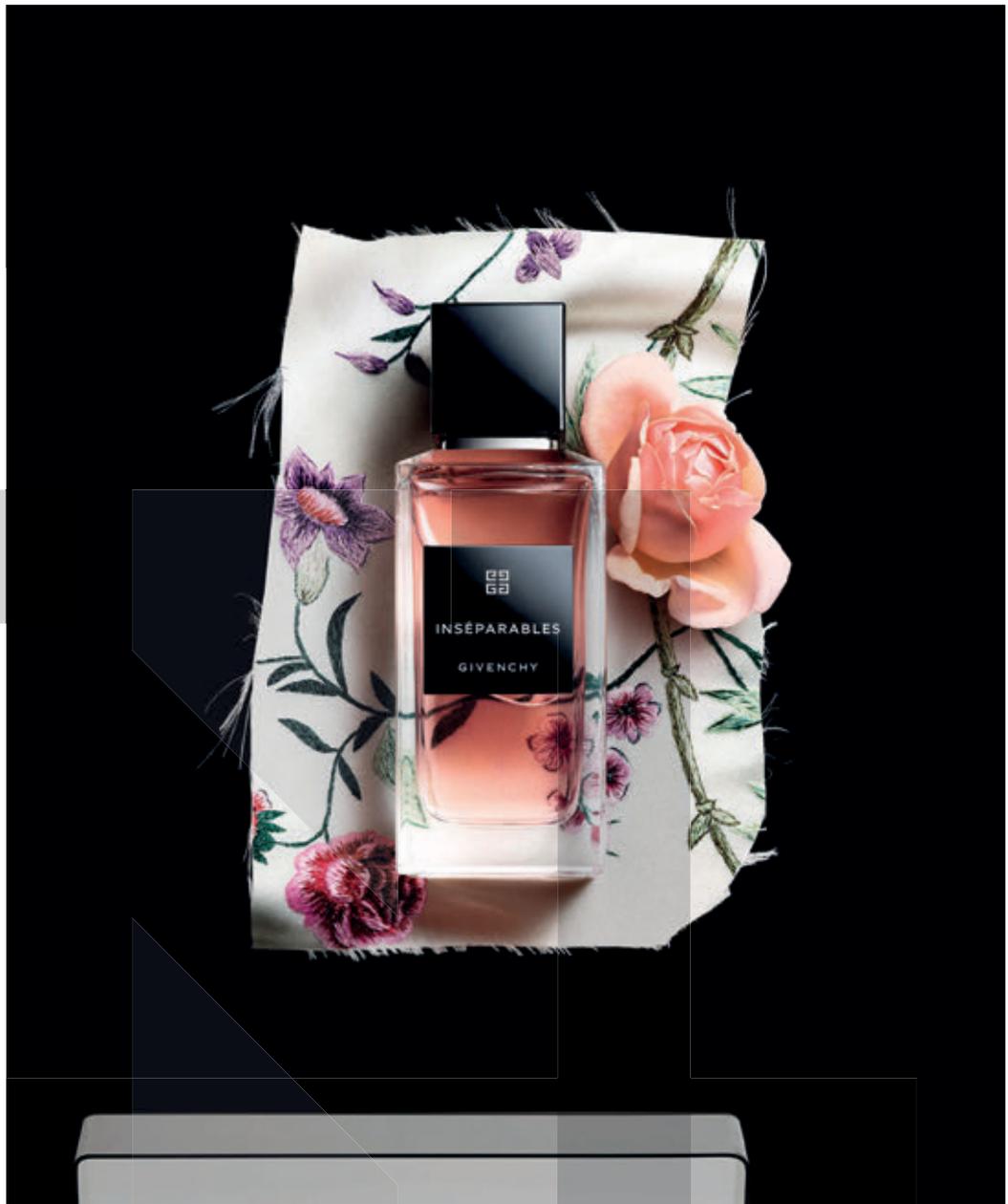
softness, while patchouli, vetiver and amber wood give Inséparables its deep, woody warmth.

BIL ARABI

Founded in 2006 by artist, photographer and designer Nadine Kanso, Bil Arabi was born after Kanso took part in the Arabize Me exhibition at the Victoria and Albert Museum. Expanding on Meen Ana calligraphy created for the show, she transformed Arabic script into bold jewellery in gold, dusted with diamonds. Today, the collection spans rings, bracelets, earrings, cuffs and anklets, extending to men's and children's pieces. Meaning "in Arabic", Bil Arabi reflects Kanso's pride in her cultural roots, with collections such as Hobb (love) and Oula (first) rendered in metallic calligraphy in her own hand.

HERMES

The house has unveiled the Hermès Turntable for spring/summer 2026. A reimagining of home audio, it pairs a clear lid and mirror-polished chrome with softly curved corners and calfskin trim. Available in black, limoncello, natural pop or orange juice, it delivers sharp and contemporary styling. The turntable's chrome platter is engraved, while the pickup arm features clou de selle detailing, anchoring it firmly in the Hermès universe. Inspired by vintage cameras, the piece has a single button that controls power, speed (33 or 45rpm) and volume.



ONE LAST THING

Neel Jassani

Imperfection is the point of *Gunk*. The art journal founded by Iraqi artist Neel Jassani, who lives in Dubai. The magazine embraces typos, rough edges and instinctive decisions, documenting the city's underground creative scene in all its humanity. In an era of glossy, algorithmic precision, the publication's third volume, *Survival Guide*, gathers reflections, creations and tools from artists navigating the UAE's independent creative life the old-fashioned way. Jassani answers our quick-fire questionnaire.

What is your favourite time of day?
Sunset – but only if the light hits the carpet. I do a lot of collage, and when the rays stretch across the floor, it's the perfect light.

What is your favourite restaurant in the world?
There's a man with a tiny food truck in Erbil. It's barely a nook on the street, but he grills the best lamb and beef I've ever had.

When was the first time you realised your parents were human?
My dad always said the worst thing I could do was lie to him. One day I realised it was because he's such an analytical person – lying meant I was giving him bad data. That made me cry.

Biggest pet peeve?
Bad data.

What do you want to be when you grow up?
Someone who changes the world in some way.
I'm just not sure how yet.

Do you have any hidden talents?
I'm double-jointed, but only in my thumbs.

Your favourite book?
I'm torn between *The People on the Street* by Linda Grant and *Notes from Underground* by Fyodor Dostoevsky.

What type of music can't you stand?
Pop music. It feels manufactured – like poison water – designed to make everyone conform rather than express individuality. I don't think anyone actually likes it.

What puts you in a bad mood?
When someone is being performative in a conversation. If I'm trying to have a genuine exchange and the other person is just trying to impress, it ruins the interaction.

What can you not live without?
Storytelling.

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

Dream dinner guests?
Fyodor Dostoevsky, Hieronymus Bosch, Khalid ibn al-Walid and JD Salinger. Maybe not Salinger, though – he would probably sit quietly and write about the dinner later.

What smell takes you back to childhood?
Lemons.

What food takes you back to childhood?
Crème brûlée – my dad used to make the boxed versions and torch the sugar on top.

Which city do you love, but would hate to live in?
Amsterdam. I love visiting – the people are open and you can strike up conversations with strangers – but I don't think I could live there.

Can you play a musical instrument?
No. I'm completely tone-deaf.

Have you ever been on a motorcycle?
Yes.

Any words to live by?
Accept the things you cannot change.

Do you believe in aliens?
Yes. Intelligent life must exist somewhere beyond Earth.

What is the most niche thing you watch on YouTube?
Videos about existential questions – philosophical, religious or quantum.

How do you take your tea?
Black, very strong, with lots of sugar.

What makes you cry?
Honestly, nothing much. I'm tough.

What do social algorithms think you're interested in?
Clothes. My Instagram feed is pretty shallow because I'm rarely on it.

TikTok or Instagram?
Neither.

What is it about you that would surprise people?
I'm less interesting than people think.

The last thing you did for the first time?
I started writing a bucket list. One idea is to take a corporate office job for a month, just to experience it.

As told to William Mullally



JAYR EDORA



DOLCE & GABBANA