



**Tech Bros on The Range**  
Why are coders dressing like cowboys? **D3**

# OFF DUTY

**Spring Sequins**  
It's April. You need a bag. Have fun. **D4**



FASHION | FOOD | DESIGN | TRAVEL | GEAR

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

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ELIZABETH COETZEE/WSJ. FOOD STYLING BY KAITLIN WAYNE. PROP. STYLING BY MARINA BEVILACQUA

**THE WAY THEY STACK UP** High in butterfat and cultured for complexity, European-style butters remain a relative bargain compared with caviar, single-malt Scotch and other consumable luxuries.

Not long ago, supermarket butter options were fairly pedestrian. The choices have since proliferated, and the quality is off the charts. Here, a guide to the revolution in good butter—an accessible luxury, even as tariffs loom.

BY ALEKSANDRA CRAPANZANO

**I**N 2001, Vermont dairy farmer Diane St. Clair sent a Ziploc bag of hand-churned butter across the country to Thomas Keller at the French Laundry, his seminal restaurant in California's Napa Valley. At the time, St. Clair was selling her flavorful, labor-intensive, European-style butter for \$4 a pound at her local market under the Animal Farm Creamery label and was about to go belly-up. "Her lush, creamy, canary-yellow butter changed the way I viewed butter permanently," Keller said. "It was truly the most extraordinary one I had ever tasted. I ordered every ounce she had in

stock, and it has remained on my menu ever since."

Animal Farm butter now retails for \$60 a pound. Fans of the TV series "The Bear" may recall the obsessive chef Carmy spending \$11,268 to get it for his fledgling restaurant in season 3. But the fever for European-style butter is hardly limited to top-tier chefs.

In the U.S. today, supermarket butter cases offer a giddy proliferation of options. Imports from France, Ireland, Denmark and Finland mingle with mass-produced domestic butters labeled "European-style," and, often, local artisan butters. A butter boom has been building steadily for a couple of decades, with U.S. butter consumption jumping from 4.5 pounds per capita in 2003 to 6.5 pounds in 2023 (the most recent year for which U.S. De-

partment of Agriculture data is available). As planned tariffs threaten to spike prices, now is a great time to consider what makes a quality butter worth buying and determine how to get the most out of the investment.

#### In the European Style

When St. Clair began making butter in the 1990s, most U.S. supermarkets sold mass-produced "sweet cream" butter. Significantly lower in butterfat than European butters, this smooth, neutral-tasting product was machine-churned from fresh cream. St. Clair sought something with more character. "I had to buy books from the late 1800s to learn how butter had

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## Inside



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# Secondhand in Marriage

Modern brides increasingly turn to vintage wedding dresses for higher-quality designs that aren’t spit out by a trend algorithm—and have enigmatic pasts



TO HAVE AND NOT TOO OLD Sami Watts (left) chose a '90s silk gown to wed Cheyanna Duran, in a 1966 dress.

By FIORELLA VALDESOLO

**W**HEN Hunter Claire Rogers, 36, head of membership at Soho House in Nashville, was looking for something to wear to her 2024 wedding in Edinburgh, Scotland, she initially hit the local Nashville bridal salons, again and again. “I’m from the South so I felt obligated to try on all these modern looks, but none of them felt exciting or different enough,” said Rogers.

Margaux Aquino, 30, a director of human resources for Van Leeuwen Ice Cream, similarly struggled to find a sartorial soul mate for her big day earlier this year. “Everything started to look the



Hunter Claire Rogers in a lilac Thierry Mugler suit from the 1980s.

same,” said Aquino of her rounds of New York bridal stores. “I felt like I’d already seen all these dresses on my Instagram feed.”

The search ultimately brought both Rogers and Aquino to the Brooklyn boutique Cha Cha Linda Vintage, where they decided on secondhand wedding looks—a \$2,000 1980s Thierry Mugler suit and a \$2,000 1980s silk taffeta dress, respectively.

For a lot of modern brides, walking down the aisle in a pre-loved wedding ensemble is the new ‘I do.’

Lily Kaizer, owner of Los Angeles vintage wedding shop Happy Isles, cites one reason for the shift: brides’ desire to find a wedding look that hasn’t been served to them by an algorithm. “Con-

temporary gowns are so exposed on social media that they lack the personal connection that brides are looking for,” said Kaizer.

Cost and sustainability also factor in. The bubble for over-the-top, \$10k-plus wedding dresses has burst for a lot of brides, says Leah Blake of Century Girl Vintage in New Orleans. Spending that much on a dress feels out of step with the times and the tenor of today’s increasingly intimate celebrations, she adds.

“Every choice you make planning a wedding is a reminder of how much you’re consuming,” said Cheyanna Duran, 26. For her nuptials in Henry Cowell Redwoods State Park in Felton, Calif., last year, Duran chose an approximately \$3,000 vintage 1966 hourglass silhouette with crystal and pearl detailing. Her bride, Sami Watts, 25, wore a ’90s silk gown with a drop waist (price tag:

have endured decades, not all are equipped for a present-day celebration. That 1930s or 1940s delicate lace number might not make it through the “Cupid Shuffle.”

Robyn Goldberg, owner of the Kit Vintage in Los Angeles, runs through a checklist of practical consideration with prospective used-gown buyers. For instance, beware overly tight sleeves and armpits (lifting your arms to clutch your betrothed might be a struggle). Weigh the issue of excessive numbers of tiny buttons (a downside of certain vintage designs) and whether you prefer zippers or a slip-on silhouette. She suggests brides who wear fragile fabrics for their wedding change into something else for the reception.

Happily-ever-after hopefuls should consider sizing, too. Don’t expect a vintage size 10 to equal a modern-day size 10. “Size labels don’t mean anything so don’t even

‘Contemporary gowns are so exposed on social media that they lack the personal connection that brides are looking for.’

around \$2,000). In an industry that can feel very wasteful, choosing a used dress is a way to be mindful, says Cha Cha Linda owner, Eva Maria Lopez.

And then there’s the often-higher quality of vintage dresses. Their new counterparts might not last through the seven-year itch, let alone a lifetime.

“In today’s market even luxury wedding-dress manufacturers are using polyester fabrics and imitation laces,” said Monet Brewerton-Palmer, owner of Atlanta’s Vionnette Bridal. If you’re buying a new dress, she says, you might need to pay astronomically high couture prices to get the sort of details associated with high-end, pre-2000 wedding attire. Think: fabrics like pure silks and authentic French laces and embellishments like tambour embroidery or handmade fabric rosettes.

While many cherished dresses

look at the tag,” said Lopez. You must be open to tailoring, says Laura Laubach, the founder of Transplant Vintage in Los Angeles. “With the right tailor, things like extending waistlines, changing sleeves, shortening hems and lowering necklines are all possible,” she added.

According to Kaizer, women who visit her store are rarely turned off by the thought that another bride has likely walked in their vintage gown. Instead, there is always curiosity. Brides often appreciate the enigma that comes with a vintage dress, she said: “So many of these dresses are mystery gals which adds its own kind of appeal.”

“It is an honor to build bridges between generations of brides,” said Brewerton-Palmer. As Watts put it: “It feels really special to wear something that already had its own life and now gets to play a part in mine.”



Eva Maria Lopez at her Brooklyn boutique, Cha Cha Linda Vintage.



Macrene Active High Performance Tinted Moisturizer, from \$85

## The Multitask Force

Forget 2-in-1 makeup. Today’s beauty products are promising multiuse benefits you need both hands to count. We put some to the test.

**THE NOVELIST** Isabel Allende once said: “You spend the first part of your life collecting things...and the second half getting rid of them.” Replace “things” with “mascara” and you’ve got me there, Isabel. My makeup collection has been expanding like a grizzly heading into hibernation.

To bring sanity back to the smoky eye, I decided to purge the excess, restricting my makeup to what would fit into a single (re-

spectably sized) toiletry pouch.

I found a friend in multipurpose beauty products. Five years ago, 2-in-1 makeup was still a novelty. (A lip tint and blush in one? Revolutionary.) But today, products flexing 3-4- or even 8-in-1 beauty chops are almost routine.

“With life increasingly hectic and overwhelming at times, the simplicity of a multiuse product has become more popular,” said Lisa Aha-

ron, a makeup artist who counts Gwyneth Paltrow among her clients.

Foundation is one of the categories where “multiuse products make the most sense,” Aharon said, advising me to look for one that offers hydration and SPF and moonlights capably as a highlighter.

My search for an overachieving base layer led to Macrene Actives High Performance Tinted Moisturizer (left). This makeup-skincare hybrid promises to pull quintuple duty as a foundation, moisturizer, antiaging treatment, mineral sunscreen and highlighter.

Of the thinking behind the concoction, the brand’s founder Dr. Macrene Alexiades said, “I firmly believe in the one-and-done philosophy in every aspect of life.” Fittingly, she’s also devoted to Mrs. Meyer’s all-purpose cleaners.

After dabbing a few drops across my face daily for a month, I was impressed with the results—natural-looking, subtle coverage with a solid “I slept eight hours” glow. As a moisturizer, it went on smoothly and sank in luxuriously, which might be thanks to its 45 plant-based active ingredients. Perhaps the best part? What wasn’t part of the multi-mix: parabens, phthalates, talc or fragrance, to name a few.

Sorry Isabel, this one’s going in my collection.

—Antonina Jedrzejczak

### Testing, Testing...1,2,3

**TO KEEP** the multi experiment going, I recruited three fellow staffers to review and rate a newly released tint from LH Cosmetics that pulls triple-duty as a lipstick, blush and eye shadow. Here, their findings.



The test subject: LH Cosmetics Artstick, \$30

<b>Caitie Kelly</b> <i>Fashion Market Editor</i> <b>Lips</b> 2/10 <b>Cheeks</b> 9/10 <b>Eyes</b> 8/10 <b>Overall</b> 6/10	On lips, I didn’t love the powdery finish.	<b>Kelly Peck</b> <i>Assistant Art Director</i> <b>Lips</b> 9/10 <b>Cheeks</b> 7/10 <b>Eyes</b> 6/10 <b>Overall</b> 7/10	“The size was perfect for a small handbag. This product is really great for lips—with its buildability, I had options
			to go from soft to bold. My greasy lids seem to eat anything that is not waterproof liquid liner so it didn’t last very long on my eyes.”

“I’d buy this again for cheek purposes alone—it layered really nicely and stuck around for most of the workday. On my unprimed eyelids the color slipped away by the time I finished my morning walk with my dog. Before the pigment disappeared, I was surprised by how much I liked the look of the three together: eyes, cheeks, lips. I expected it to be clownish, but it actually looked very balanced and pretty.”

ELIZABETH COETZEE/WSJ. PROP STYLING BY JORDAN MIXON

STYLE & FASHION

By JAMIE WATERS

VISIT THE AUSTIN, TEXAS, flagship of Tecovas, a buzzy western-wear brand known for relatively minimal designs, and you might encounter something more terrifying than a coiled rattlesnake: a tech bro trying on \$300 cowboy boots with his tight, stretch chinos.

Patrick Shehane, Tecovas’ central regional manager, said sometimes a fit guy turns up in full athleisure and winds up “standing there in broad, square-toe boots with his pants tucked into them.” Once the eager customer has settled on shoes, the staff recommends jeans wide enough to swallow the top of the boots and stop Jesse James’s spinning in his grave. (For those who haven’t binged “Yellowstone,” tucking pants into cowboy boots is bad.) Sometimes, a tech guy tags along with his girlfriend. “We get him out of the Allbirds and put him in our boots,” said Shehane. “Word got out through the tech community that Tecovas is where to go.”

**A typical tech-cowboy look: brown boots, slimmish jeans and fitted snap-button shirts.**

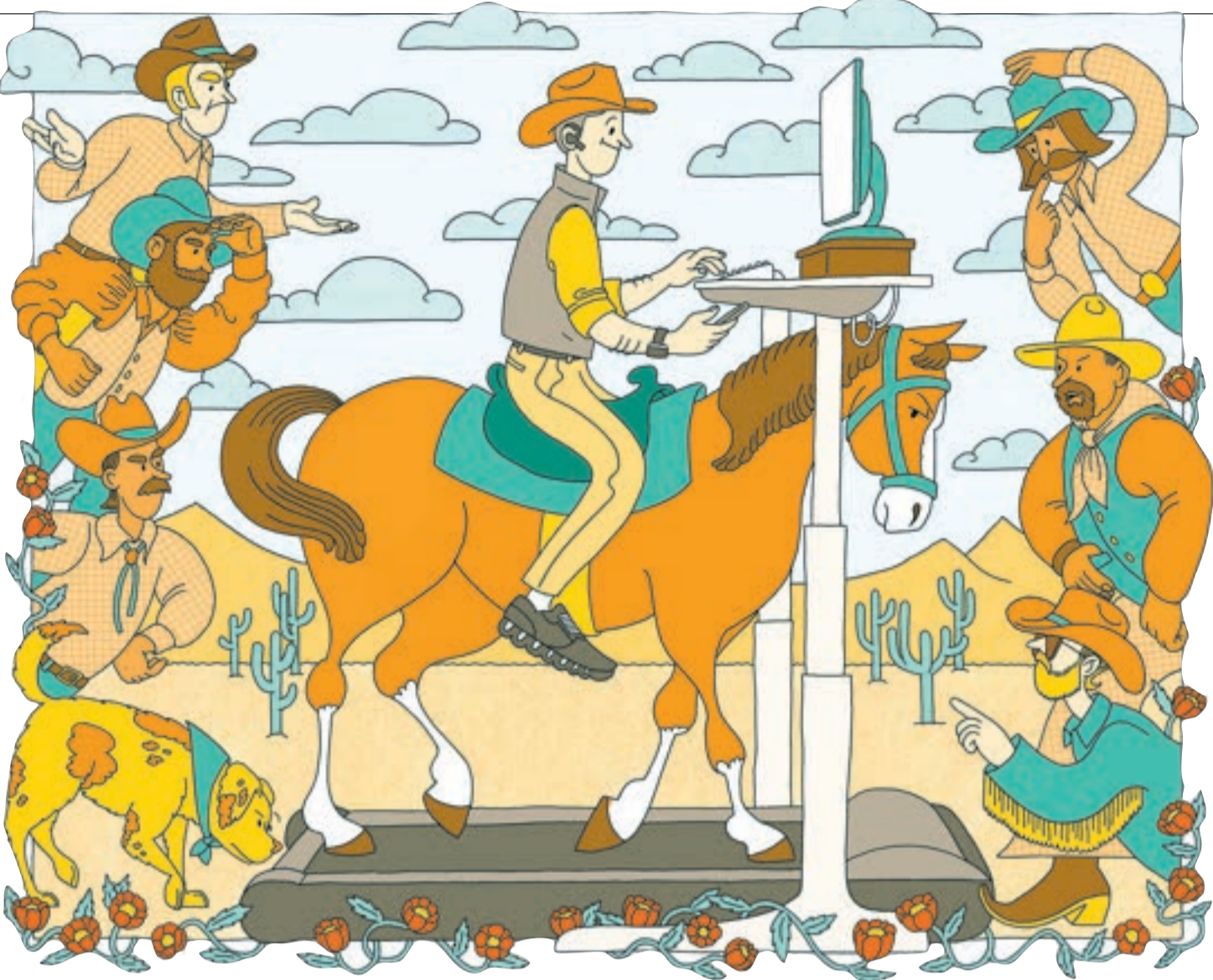
In the past five years or so, this kind of tech-bro makeover has gathered steam. During the pandemic, a gigabyte of entrepreneurs and coders migrated from Silicon Valley and New York to places with fresh air, lower taxes and a Wild West spirit, like Austin, Scottsdale, Ariz., and Denver, Colo. Many transplants revised their wardrobes to better assimilate, according to people like Patrick Kenger, a personal stylist with clients in Arizona and Texas. Tech guys who move say, “I want to look the part here—this isn’t Silicon Valley anymore,” said Kenger.

The cowboyish attire of certain tech billionaires has raised eyebrows over the years, from Elon Musk’s big black hat to the hat ‘n’ boots that topped ‘n’ tailed Jeff Bezos’ spacesuit for Blue Origin’s 2021 launch. But they’re just the tip of the croc-skin belt.

In Austin, the main techie corral, a typical tech-guy look includes brown cowboy boots, slimmish jeans and fitted snap-button shirts, said Ben LoSasso, a product manager at a big tech company who moved from Seattle in 2022 and dresses this way himself. At night, showy bros step out in ostrich boots and pink snap-button shirts with cartoon cactus prints, said LoSasso, 38.

Many guys favor modern versions of traditional rancher clothes. In addition to Tecovas boots, that includes shirts by Poncho, a direct-to-consumer brand making pearl-snap designs in sporty fabrics (imagine if cattle-drivers took over Lululemon). “Poncho is the new Patagonia” among Austin techies, said Joshua Schultz, whose company does AI and automations for small businesses. The 39-year-old, who moved from upstate New York in 2020, has clocked the sub-\$100 shirts at offices and fire-pit drinks. “They’re built for the weather. I can sweat profusely, walk into a restaurant and within 15 seconds, I’m dry.”

Some brave or confused souls combine Texan and Bay Area staples at the office. LoSasso has seen guys layer Patagonia vests over pearl snaps. “People do bring some of their old style,” he said. Others go full John Wayne. “Since moving to Austin, I’ve pretty much got a new wardrobe,” said Zach Hay, 29, founding engineer at AI company Humata. “It’s fun and kind of exciting,” said the former San Franciscan, who traded hoodies for denim jackets and Birkenstocks for Tecovas boots.



# Howdy, Tech Cowboy

Meet the new tech bro. He wears Tecovas cowboy boots and pearl-snap shirts in performance fabrics.

**WILD WEST STARTER PACK /**  
ITEMS FAVORED BY TECHIES IN TEXAS



Clockwise from top: Poncho Pedernales Shirt, \$80; Levi’s 501 Original Jeans, \$98; Tecovas The Dean Boots, \$295

vas boots. His Tecovas hat comes in handy for Cowboy Hat Fridays at Capital Factory, the startup hub where he works.

Schultz, who wears a cowboy hat and boots with his short-sleeve Ponchos, said he “wanted to go all in on this culture that I respect. I love the people, I love the community.” Plus, he added, “It’s so f—ing hot down here.”

In the wider fashion landscape, these guys are right on trend. Thanks in part to “Yellowstone” and “Landman” co-creator Taylor Sheridan, interest in western-wear has intensified among men across the U.S. who couldn’t even lasso the bull on Wall Street.

Coding cowboys also align with a broad shift toward a macho techie look, noted Austin Nasso, a New York comedian who specializes in “tech bro” material. Consider these guys rugged cousins to Mark Zuckerberg in his new slick-bro uniform of gold chains and oversize tees. “I’m probably going to use the wrong term, so forgive me,” said Schultz, “but there is something about tech geeks wanting to be like, ‘I’m a real man, I’m not just a computer nerd.’ Like, what is more real manly in our folklore than cowboys?”

Nasso, a former software engineer, lampooned Austin tech bros in a recent social-media video. His character, fresh from Palo Alto, wears Bose headphones around his neck and a towering rancher hat. “Howdy ya all,” he drawls over four, insufferable syllables. On a call, Nasso said he wishes these guys would stop with the cowboy clothes. “It’s like,



Austin techie Ben LoSasso

what? I don’t know, it’s not natural.”

For a less-laughable look, Kenger advises tech guys start with “roper” boots, distinguished by a shorter shaft and heel. He’d go for suede or, for manageable pizzazz, lizard. Shehane said first-timers like Tecovas’ zippered Dean model—its narrow opening accommodates slimmer pants.

Steve Shuck, co-owner of Stag, a menswear store in Austin, wouldn’t worry about bootcut jeans; classic straight-leg styles like Levi’s 501s fall nicely over boots. In general, he reckons the only cowboyish hat non-ranchers can pull off is the Stetson Open Road, a narrower-brimmed take beloved by LBJ. If, however, you’re determined to advertise that you’ve just moved to Texas and are, indisputably and forevermore, A Cowboy, by all means get yourself a 10-gallon showstopper.

Another newbie giveaway: short jeans. “In Texas, your jeans should be long enough that they ‘stack’ when you’re standing,” said Will Roman, founder of Chisos, an Austin boot brand popular with some tech CEOs. That means some bunching on the front of the boot. (This derives from jeans needing to be sufficiently long that they don’t ride up egregiously when you’re in stirrups.)

“I did not do the stack at first,” confessed Schultz, who is friends with Roman. “And then Will is like, ‘You’re a f—ing New Yorker in those jeans!’” he added, laughing. Schultz now wears bootcuts that bunch.

FIRENZE

CLAUDIA CAMPANA PHOTOGRAPHED BY JUERGEN TELLER IN TUSCANY



FERRAGAMO

STYLE & FASHION

OFF BRAND / RORY SATRAN



# Hot and Disheveled? The Rise of ‘Trashcore’

**RAW** From left: Justin Bieber and Timothée Chalamet are embracing outfits that are aggressively distressed and uniquely messy.



VICTORIA ROSSELLI/WSJ, BLAYZENPHOTOS, BACKGRID, GETTY IMAGES

**THE COMEDY** “Zoolander” skewered the fashion industry in 2001 when it featured a designer collection called “Dere-licte,” inspired by the homeless. Just a year prior, a real-life version had hit the runway: a John Galliano couture collection for Christian Dior that included giant destroyed cargo pants with miniature empty booze bottles slung from the waist. Offensive? Perhaps. But 25 years later, celebrities are embracing the same spirit of chaos. Actors including Timothée

Chalamet and Kristen Stewart and pop stars like Justin Bieber and Addison Rae are dressing in wildly unexpected and disheveled ways. Their outfits are artfully mismatched. Their garments are distressed to the point of appearing destroyed. And they seem to wear it all with a pinch (or more) of irony. Say hello to Hollywood Trashcore. It’s Chalamet wearing burgundy True Religion denim and green prayer beads on his “A Complete Unknown”

press tour. It’s Rae in denim cutoffs and a white tank, a look that resembles something Britney Spears would have worn to a gas station 20 years ago. “It’s about celebrities being themselves again,” said Biz Sherbert, who consults on digital and youth culture and writes the fashion newsletter American Style. After years of “quiet luxury” and the calculated on-theme dressing of recent press tours for “Wicked,” “Challengers” and “Barbie,” stars

are unleashing their edge. Sherbert said the anarchic look effectively draws in young fans, adding that Rae’s followers were “addicted to her outfits.” Perhaps no one incarnates the style more than Bieber, who’s morphed slowly from a clean-cut, Jesus-loving teen pop star into an erratically dressed dad with neck tattoos. A handful of years ago, with the help of stylist Karla Welch, he began wearing

ever looser pants and shorts, ever stranger prints and ever more unexpected accessories (pink beanies, smiley-face slippers, diamond necklaces). In a 2019 interview, Welch told the New Yorker magazine the look was “full Hunter S. Thompson.” Last year, Bieber began working with Jenna Tyson, a stylist who’s dressed hip-hop artists like Flo Milli. His pants got even bigger. “Somebody like Justin Bieber—love or hate what he’s wearing right now, he looks quite singular,” said Lexi Tollefsen, the global director of brand marketing at resale site Grailed. “I think that kind of messiness adds a degree of individuality that I think people are really craving, especially younger kids.” Bieber paved the way for other celebrities to break out of their tidy tropes—gowns for the red carpet, Lululemons and beige basics for Erewhon outings.

leen Sorbara, the owner of Sorbara’s vintage store in Brooklyn. Around the 2008 recession, she noted, flashy brand logos appeared alongside denim shorts and Uggs. Now she notices a similar over-the-top sleaziness popping up again. While Sorbara gravitates toward a quieter look, she’s seen an uptick in interest in destroyed pieces. She has shopped with Taylor McNeill, a known vintage hound who styles Chalamet and Kendrick Lamar. “I think people are looking for ways to express themselves,” mused Sorbara. On the more extreme end of that search for individuality is Distressed Fest, a roving vintage market that has popped up in Los Angeles and Brooklyn. Connor Gres-sitt, the festival’s director of operations who posts videos on TikTok as “legarbaage,” recently touted a 1940s sweatshirt he was selling for

**‘It’s Addison Rae in a white tank that resembles something Britney Spears would have worn to a gas station 20 years ago.’**

The rebellious Stewart has loosened up her event dressing to include shorts and bummed around Los Angeles in increasingly torn jean shorts that reveal her tattooed legs and dusty Converse. When actors Shailene Woodley and Lucas Bravo were photographed recently in Paris, their rumpled outfits were as noteworthy as their public displays of affection. The Los Angeles Times called them “unkempt and enamored.” The style—also called “slacker core” and “idiot core”—is trickling down to the masses. “For someone who’s trying to emulate the hodgepodge, effortless, intentionally disheveled look, it’s convenient,” said Tollefsen. Young people, she said, could throw the style together by pulling pieces from resale sites and thrift stores and buying new items from brands like Balenciaga. She said Grailed had definitely noticed the effects of this trend on its business: “Vintage” is now the top category on its site, and searches for distressed and unique brands like Enfants Riches Déprimés and Willy Chavarria are up. “I think people dress louder when there’s potentially a recession,” said Kath-

\$2,500. “I think most people would consider this unwearable,” he admitted, but not him. No, he admired the piece’s “rust-stained patina.” The piece hasn’t sold yet, but he recently sold a similarly destroyed sweatshirt for the same price. Abe Lange, the founder of Distressed Fest, sees a “flex element” in dressing way, way down. He mentioned Mary-Kate Olsen’s battered Hermès Birkin bag, and Led Zeppelin’s open shirts, captured when the band posed in the ’70s in front of their private jet. Lange, who also runs the Brooklyn vintage showroom Sumshitifound, admits that high fashion has a “complicated history” when it comes to treading into purposefully shredded clothing. You need to be aware, he said, “if you’re going extreme with it and really looking homeless.” However, he continued, “Clearly I don’t have too much of a problem with it, depending on what it is, because I love this stuff.” It all comes down to a desire for individuality. Lange said quiet, contemporary fashion can rarely be unique anymore. “I’ll get coffee and I’ll see three of me and it’s like, ‘Man, am I really doing anything that cool?’”

FAST FIVE

## Bring Back the Compact Disk

Flappers and disco queens understood sequins’ ability to catch the eye. Now their shine is flickering and, in mega-versions, flashing on spring bags—best worn against a canvas of neutral-toned outfits.



Staud Timmy Shoulder Bag, \$350



Dries Van Noten Micro Leather Bag, \$1,130 at Net-a-Porter



Zara Metallic Bag, \$56



Jimmy Choo Bon Biscuit Mesh Paillette Bag, \$2,150



Tory Burch Mini Hobo, \$598

# ADVENTURE & TRAVEL

By ERIN GIFFORD

WHEN Damian Nichols of Chandler, Ariz., craves fajitas from his favorite Mexican restaurant, D’Corazon in Denver, he doesn’t just dream about it—he and his wife book a two-hour flight. “We go up for lunch and just turn around and come back,” Nichols said matter-of-factly, as if this is a totally reasonable thing to do. The kicker? At about \$70, the whole trip rings up for less than a typical dinner in Scottsdale.

What’s the trick? Nichols’s escapades are aided by Frontier Airlines’ GoWild! Annual Pass, an all-you-can-fly subscription service that launched in late 2022 for travel starting in the spring of 2023. For an annual fee starting at \$599, the deal lets members book domestic flights for one penny (plus taxes)—provided they book no earlier than the day before departure.

Extreme day trips—in which travelers fly out in the morning, sightsee (or just grab a leisurely meal), then fly home—might seem outrageous, but the concept has been popular in the U.K. for years. A bounty of low-cost airlines and relatively short distances between European cities make such quick-hit getaways surprisingly doable. Now, as user-friendly flight-tracking sites and programs like the GoWild! pass proliferate stateside, a growing number of American travelers have embraced the “notel” (short for “no hotel required”) lifestyle.

Social media fuels the buzz. New York City-based traveler Kevin Droniak, who chronicles his extreme day trips—some to places as far-flung as London and Paris—has racked up more than 190,000 Instagram followers. Droniak scours Expedia and Google Flights for cheap round-trip fares, aiming to pay less than \$250 for domestic trips and under \$500 for international. While he prefers Delta for reliability, ultimately, “I really tend to go with just whatever’s cheapest. I just love to get on a plane and go somewhere new.”

Nichols, who has taken nearly 60 such jaunts to cities like Hous-



## The 8-Hour Vacation

Forget slow travel. A growing number of ‘extreme day trippers’ are choosing trips that let them fly out in the morning, see the sights, and fly home.

ton and San Diego from his home airport in Phoenix, routinely wakes by 5 a.m. on a Saturday, sees where he can go and books a flight on the spot.

Websites like the 1491 Club ease planning. A subscription service that pinpoints same-day return flights on Frontier, it also tracks

offerings from a handful of other budget carriers. “When you can visit a place for the day for 30 bucks, it’s kind of like, why not?” said co-founder Brad Nelson. “People are addicted to it.”

Across the pond, “notel” trips can seem even more routine. The Facebook group Extreme Day Trips

counts 314,000 members, many of whom regularly hop around Europe on budget carriers like Ryanair and easyJet. The group was founded by Michael Cracknell, a UPS driver from Brighton, U.K., who started it “to show people that you can do more in a day than you think,” he said.

Software developer Rick Blyth launched the unaffiliated website and mobile app Extreme Day Trips in late 2024 to help U.K.-based travelers discover same-day flight options. Though it’s currently free, Blyth plans to introduce a premium version later this year, featuring upgrades like advanced search filters and real-time price alerts.

Want to give it a whirl? To hedge your bets, experienced extreme day-trippers suggest choosing destinations with several same-day return flights—think major hubs like Chicago or Houston. Frontier’s GoWild! Pass works best for travelers based in cities like Denver and Atlanta, where that airline has a strong presence, maximizing options.

**Hopping a flight to another city for lunch might seem outrageous, but when you can do it for \$30, why not?**

Droniak readily admits that his adventures can fall short of glamorous. A day trip to a Puerto Rico beach might sound dreamy, but in reality, it can mean spending hours in a sopping wet shirt after a morning rainstorm; then, with no access to a real shower, squeezing, still soggy, into an economy seat in the back of the plane to get home.

“When it comes to day trips, you have to embrace any kind of weather,” he noted in a recent Instagram video. Flight delays can also torpedo the best-laid plans, and if you miss your return flight, you might have to shell out for a hotel—defeating the whole “notel” premise.

But then, there are bragging rights. Cracknell once took his 80-year-old dad and two brothers to Athens for the day. “We went to the Acropolis, had a three-course lunch, and everything came to 147 pounds each—about \$160,” he recalled. “If I’d just bought a train ticket to Athens, that alone would have cost about \$200.”

### BAGGAGE CLAIM

## A Queen’s Ransom for a Carry-On

Why luggage with handmade details might offset the harshness of air travel today

MODERN TRAVEL is filled with indignities—endless delays, sullen service and unruly passengers. Each time I head to the airport, I hope for a more elegant experience. That’s out of my hands, but if I arrived with an extravagant carry-on from Globe-Trotter, a British company that’s made trunks and suitcases since 1897, at least my luggage would exude elegance. In their time, Queen Elizabeth II and Winston Churchill were fans; Daniel Craig and Kate Moss have also lugged the pricey bags—as stylish a quartet of Brits as you’re likely to find in one sentence.

When entrepreneur David Nelken founded the company in the late 1800s, he introduced the use of vulcanized—i.e., heat-treated—fiberboard instead of weighty canvas or bulky leather to construct lighter but no-less-sturdy luggage. It’s a practice Globe-Trotter continues today, even using the original centuries-old equipment at its factory in Hertfordshire.

“The process is truly artisanal, with machines that make me think of the Middle Ages,” said Couli Jobert, Globe-Trotter’s artistic director. She points out an old ad depicting an elephant standing on a Globe-Trotter suitcase, the so-called “one-ton test” carried out at the Hamburg Zoo in 1912.



**DISCREET CHARM**  
Globe-Trotter  
Metropolis  
Carry On,  
4-Wheels, \$2,195

#### Distinguishing Features

I appreciate the brand’s traditional aesthetic as much as its *bona fides*. Its leather-capped corners, stalwart straps and metal studs look bold and authoritative. The serial-numbered plaque signals it’s yours and yours alone. These handcrafted details are costly and contribute to the high quality, as well as to the high price of \$2,195.

#### The Latest Model

Newly introduced, the no-strap Metropolis line is even lighter than previous collections. An aluminum frame replaces the earlier wood frame, shaving off around a pound (500 g) of the

weight. Matching rivets fasten the body to the frame and ensure the lid fits securely when you’re closing it.

Stylistically, Jobert characterizes the Metropolis’ streamlined look as “feminine but classic,” which is certainly true of the “Fog Blue” version. On a more mundane note, it’s satisfying to hear the smooth, synchronized click when opening or closing the carbon-steel locks.

#### Packing Tip

Two new zippered compartments keep belongings neat and organized inside.

—Nancy MacDonell



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## The Early Bird Gets the Poplin. 2 for \$499

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Reg. \$395 ea., **Buy 1 Suit \$295**

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ADVENTURE & TRAVEL



MAGNIFICENT OBSESSION Rawla Narlai, a former hunting lodge, sits in the Aravalli hills, an hour’s drive from Ranakpur’s Jain temples.

Rajasthan’s Penny-Wise Palaces

On a nostalgic return to India, a traveler seeks the authentic grandeur she recalled, but—here’s the tricky part—on a budget

By SOPHY ROBERTS

IN 1992, I went back-packing for six months in India and wrote weekly letters to my father to stay in touch with home. Rereading them now, I can trace the start of my love affair with Rajasthan, a state in northwest India with a bejeweled history. When it achieved independence in 1947, India had over 560 princely states, each

more extravagant than the next with strings of polo ponies, caparisoned elephants and lavish palaces. That legacy lingers in the stops many tourists make when visiting Rajasthan for the first time: Travelers go from the “pink” city of Jaipur (painted that hue in 1876 to welcome Queen Victoria’s son) to the “blue” city of Jodhpur (the paint color used by the Brahmin caste) then on to the “lake” city of Udaipur (its

swan-white palace seemingly afloat on the water), with an occasional detour to the desert city of Jaisalmer. I did not follow this route back then and often strayed. My letters described, for instance, poking around Deeg Palace near Bharatpur, far from the popular spots. Still, I did wait for a night train with a \$6 pot of tea and sandwiches in Jodhpur’s Umaid Bhawan Palace. And there was a sojourn in Udaipur and a \$10 dinner of poached fish and profiteroles at the Lake Palace hotel. Three decades later, my credit card limit would prevent me from retracing my steps. Deeg Palace retains its charm but a room at Umaid Bhawan now goes for \$540 to \$1,370, depending on the season. Top suites at the Taj Lake Palace start at a nightly rate of \$16,200. Nor could I afford one of Rajasthan’s newly built five-star venues. Oberoi Resorts’ luxury “Vilas” palaces emulate the old ones, minus the poetic patina of past centuries. At Jaipur’s Oberoi Rajvillas, designed as a Rajput fort, rates for two people sharing begin at \$2,200. De-



In Jaipur’s Old Town, the 225-year-old Samode Haveli townhouse has mirror-work walls.

scribed as a “reincarnation of the royal mahals,” the Leela Palaces, Hotels and Resorts’ Jaipur property features a ballroom and lawn ideal for an opulent wedding. The parties there are sparkling (I’ve been to one), the service exceptional, but I have to wonder: Is big-brand inflation and the desire for luxury and amenities diminishing the soul of the Rajasthan palace experience? When I booked a return trip to Rajasthan in January, my goal was clear: I wanted to hunt down that textured authenticity I remembered, places that were charmingly imperfect, yet quintessentially regal. And not too extravagantly priced. I first considered Jaipur’s Samode Haveli (“haveli”

means mansion). Descendants of the former royal family of Samode still own and run the 225-year-old townhouse, but good luck booking one of its 50 rooms in high season (December to February) when doubles

discovery: a newly loved architectural masterpiece and former home of Sikar’s last Maharajah. When I arrived, it fulfilled my imperfect-perfect criterion. There were moments when I did my best to hide

I wanted to hunt down that textured authenticity of India, a place charmingly imperfect yet quintessentially regal

start at \$515. Its decor has been refined, but its spirit remains in details like its glass-mirrored “Sheesh Mahal” walls. Samode Haveli makes no attempt to escape its context, the hum and chaos of Jaipur’s Old Town. Unable to ensconce myself there, I pondered a return to Ranvas in Nagaur, where I’d visited in 2017; doubles now start at \$295 (see “More ‘Royal’ Hotels with a Soul”). Owned by Jodhpur’s former royal family, it is out of the way, en route from Jaipur to Bikaner, but worth a detour. I was all set until I spoke with Alice Daunt, a British travel agent, who tipped me off about Deeppura Garh, an over 200-year-old royal haveli about a three-hour drive from Jaipur with doubles starting at \$340. In 2005, when Italian jewelry designer Maria Grazia Baldan first came across Deeppura Garh, it was abandoned: crumbling courtyards, frescoes almost lost, a camel grazing under the neem tree. Baldan bought it 10 years later. Following five years of renovations by Rajasthani craftspeople, she opened it as a 10-room hotel in 2020, but was forced to close it a month later because of the Covid-19 pandemic. This back story made Deeppura Garh feel like a

from a loquacious waiter and, on the first night, a village wedding rocked the haveli’s very foundations. The overprotective peacocks strutting its ramparts gave me a fright when they swooped onto the lawns. And yet? I was utterly enchanted, watching rural life from the rooftop, wandering the grounds’ fruit and flower beds thick with bees and marigolds, observing the owner overseeing the pruning of the poolside frangipani trees. I felt at peace in the saffron-colored meditation room, the writing room hand-painted with the scenes of an Indian jungle and the “secret garden” I found on day two. My room, with its white lime plaster “araish” floors and walls, was cool and welcoming. The pillared veranda became my reading space. When evening fell, I ate in front of an open fire: homemade Italian pastas, roasted garden vegetables and delicious Indian curries. Since the thoughtful meals require slow cooking, orders are placed at breakfast. On my last night, a crescent moon half-hung in an indigo sky, I felt like I’d gone back to those Jaisalmer ramparts of 30 years ago. So I wrote an email to my father, suggesting he should book it for next winter.



The author’s pick: Deeppura Garh, a royal haveli outside Jaipur.

More ‘Royal’ Hotels With a Soul

For historic digs full of character, try these former lavish residences that lie outside the typical Rajasthan route

- **Rawla Narlai** is in the Aravalli Hills, a magical area between Jaipur and Udaipur that is under an hour’s drive from Ranakpur’s Jain temples. Owned by an offshoot of the Jodhpur royals, this former hunting lodge immerses you in village life and organizes dining “experiences”—on a rooftop, by a campfire or in a lakeside tent. Doubles from \$235.
- **Ranvas, Nagaur** is a wonderfully atmospheric maze of 10 havelis (originally the inner sanctum for the women of the royal household), each of which contains up to four rooms and a courtyard. Set inside Ahichhatragarh Fort, the palace-garden complex is under restoration with help from London’s Courtauld Institute of Art and the Getty Foundation. Each February, for the Sufi Festival, the hotel sets up an encampment of royal shikar hunting tents. Doubles from \$295.

■ **Ahilya Fort**, which rises up dramatically from the Narmada River, is owned and run by Richard Holkar, the son of the last Maharajah of Indore. The 18th-century fort holds 19 rooms set in six buildings in Madhya Pradesh, a 2½-hour drive from the Indore airport. There is no restaurant, but guests can order from the daily “fixed menu” and have food served in a scenic area on site. Full board from \$350 per person per night.



An elegant room at Ranvas, Nagaur



Tasty offerings at Ahilya Fort

■ **The Rajbari Bawali** is a 300-year-old Bengali palace that is a 90-minute drive south of Kolkata. Interiors have been refurbished with traditional bricks, wooden shutters and recycled Burmese teak from antique furniture, and the plaster walls retain the building’s nostalgic character. Two rooms overlook a pond; roomier bungalows accommodate a family of four. Doubles from \$150.

## DESIGN & DECORATING

By HOLLY PETERSON

**I**F YOU'RE a strong-looking dude and I'm flirting with you in an airplane aisle, it's not what you think. I cannot lift my rolling bag into the overhead compartment and I require your brawn. Inside my carry-on: a bounty of ceramic platters, plates and hefty pitchers—all cushioned by mushed-up pajamas.

Those like me who battle fiercely in the competitive art of table setting abide by certain rules. It's not how much money you spend; it's how much you don't spend. We set out unique painted plates, found objects and colored glasses unearthed in back alleys and market fairs here and abroad. It's a sport scored on originality and style. All over this country, among people of various incomes and backgrounds, you'll find a breed of sweaty table-setting freaks like myself who get a tad

**You can't just walk into Bergdorf's and say, 'Just send me everything on that table.' That's cheating.**

too excited about unique finds. No traditional Wedgwood labels on our tables. Whether by placing antique jars on vintage cloths in the countryside or divine violet Venetian glasses on a snooty urban tablescape, the feeling we aim to project is, *I'm cooler than you*. The goal on Manhattan's Upper East Side, where I live: Mix and match a cohesive still life on your dining table that would stop Henri Matisse in his tracks.

You can't walk into the seventh-floor housewares department at Bergdorf's, fondle the napkins of a highly curated tablescape and say, "I'm late for my blowout. Just send me everything on that table. Sixteen of each." That's cheating. On so many tragic levels.

The stakes always rise around major holidays. Easter is just around the corner, and one champion Fifth Avenue friend has already had the florist put patches of sod into her husband's Yale and Andover sailing regatta chalices on tables around her home. You shake your head in disbelief as you take in little colonies of Herend china bunnies and painted eggs from Hungary she has set afloat grass strands. She's a Ph.D.-level table setter with honorary degrees from all seven Ivies.

My treasures include place cards that are 3-inch shards of dark-gray slate, each with a bit of weathered twine to loop around a napkin, and white chalk for writing names. Or, sourced at a shop in Rome, cone-shaped water tumblers with little glass flowers stuck to the sides. You want your rapacious competitors to ask, "Where did you find these?" Then you can answer, "Oh, some island off Croatia."

# Hosting as Blood Sport

Competition for the most remarkably chic table setting is savage, especially in rarefied pockets of society. Here, one obsessed player takes us inside.



**PAST TRIUMPHS** Above, on the author's table, a unique cone-shaped tumbler with glass-flower appliqué holds a Bloody Mary. Left, gray slate place cards.

guest who inspected it looked like she'd just sucked on a lemon.

"Even if all the plates have a pattern, the way we set the table has to have some sort of improvisation. Cut some branches and pile clementines in a dish if you haven't got flowers. Imagine Renaissance paintings with garlands of figs," advised table-setting style-meister Carolina Irving, of Carolina Irving and Daughters, her textile and tabletop brand. "Candles are essential. A warm mood transpires in a table collected over the years. It's the feeling of 'Time is going to stand still, and we are going to have this wonderful time and conversation.'"

For an example of the most unhinged table setters of our time, look no further than my dear friend the jewelry designer Joan Hornig. A woman who never repeats a table twice, she creates a huge reveal for her dinner guests and rents storage bins (yes, plural) for her plates and glasses.

When I told Joan about the bunnies-in-the-grass lady, she answered, "That doesn't sound like Ph.D. level sh-t to me. I get real stuff. You know, those egg-shaped ecospheres with live shrimp in

them that last for two years?"

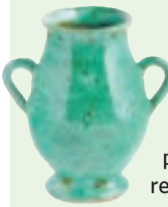
No, Joan, I don't, but please go on.

"Put miniature lady apples in piles," Joan said. "Replant long vines temporarily in wine glasses, artichokes in shot glasses so they stay straight, Brussels sprouts laid out, but only if still on long stems." Where the hell do you buy them still attached to stems? Joan's go-to is unusual fruit and vegetables, in groupings of three. Never the same flower arrangements, even if the same vases are on the table. (And by the way, days after our interview Joan was still texting me her favorites.)

Perhaps, like for me, real life limits your ability to express your decor talents and energies. For true table champions, it's uncouth to sweat it too much. So, my apartment doesn't carry an aroma of fresh-cut grass around Easter. My outfits and hairdos on airplanes project the care and flair of a hockey mom at 5 a.m. rink time.

But friends leave my dinners smiling, and my flirting does the trick when I need a hand with luggage. When it comes to my table settings, I care, but not so much that it loses the fun.

### INSIDER TROVES / THE AUTHOR'S GO-TO SOURCES



London-based **Carolina Irving and Daughters** specializes in products that reimagine ancient motifs—as does this Greek-inspired, nearly 5-inch tall Mini Attica Vase—made by family-owned ateliers. \$30



British brand **Mrs. Alice** sells entire tablescapes by themes, such as "Rattan Meadow," and pieces a la carte, like these melamine Green Swirl Outdoor Glasses. \$89 for six.



This 13-inch Hand-Painted Oval Iron Tray, \$170, typifies the diverse offerings of English purveyor **Courthouse**. By Turkish-design-inspired brand Les Ottomans, it's made of durable iron.



An international brand created by a nostalgic Portuguese expat, **Luísa Paixão** sells well-priced ceramics such as this Coimbra Ceramic 9-Inch Salad Bowl, \$109

## Your Border Collie as a Tile?

Custom Delft ceramics, once the privilege of Old World royalty, can be yours with just a click

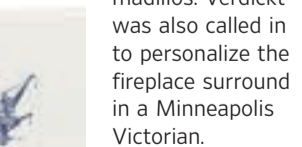
**LAST YEAR**, Christian Shea envisioned a novel gift for his wife: a Delft tile depicting their beloved Border Collie, Abbey. He commissioned Aviva Halter, an English artist in rural Dorset, via Instagram, and the hand-rolled, hand-painted ceramic arrived in two weeks. "It's an incredible memento," said Shea, a real estate lawyer in Helena, Mont., "a million times more tangible than a photograph." It's a present befitting a queen.

Indeed, in the 17th and 18th centuries, while 200 factories in the Netherlands churned out blue-and-white tiles hand-brushed with standard motifs from windmills to farm animals, royalty expected more. Queen Mary II and Louis XIV, as well as wealthy merchants, ordered up custom tableaus depicting their own castles, ships or favorite mythological creatures.

Today, with custom Delft tiles running between \$18 and \$100 each, every home can get the castle treatment. Katherine



Verdict—whose Connecticut custom-tile business counts clients across the U.S. and Europe, including the Netherlands—is producing backsplash tiles patterned with Lone Star imagery for a Dallas client. Think oil rigs, cowboys and armadillos. Verdict was also called in to personalize the fireplace surround in a Minneapolis Victorian.



An oil rig motif on one of the tiles Verdict made for a Dallas backsplash.



**FEATS OF CLAY** From left: a canine portrait by Aviva Halter; the model; fireplace tiles by Katherine Verdict, with sketches of animals important to the family.

the family. "Katherine's work brought in the element of history we needed and the visible artist's hand that we wanted, while keeping the overall look tonal and modern," said Julia Miller, founder of Yond Interiors, the designers on the project.

Among other sources, Regts, a family-owned Netherlands company that has dealt in antique and reproduc-

tion Delft since 1949, now makes personalized custom pieces designed to be mingled with their antique sets. Not Quite Past, a company founded in London last year, offers perhaps the most accessible bespoke Delft. It lets customers use its online AI model to design their own motifs. The handmade, hand-painted tiles cost \$18 each.

—Alexis Mainland

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# EATING & DRINKING



LUSA JUNG

ON WINE / LETTIE TEAGUE



## Everybody Knows Josh. What Brand Can Match Its Success?

**“I LOVE THAT IT’S CALLED Josh,”** says Mrs. K (played by Kate McKinnon) in a Saturday Night Live skit from a few years back. Regarding her wineglass wonderingly, she adds, “It’s a neat name for a wine!” The joke: How could anyone, anywhere possibly be encountering Josh for the very first time.

Not only one of this country’s best-known wine brands but also one of its bestselling wines, Josh currently has a total annual production of some 7.5 million cases. Winemakers everywhere are trying to figure out how to produce “the next Josh.” But how, I wondered, did it happen in the first place? And is the making of this mega-brand replicable?

My first call was to Joseph Carr, the 65-year-old founder of Josh Cellars, at his home in Cape Cod. Carr revealed that the idea to call the brand Josh, which had been his father’s nickname, came from his mother, Jean.

Carr described his father as “a lumberjack,” noting that he was raised in a small working-class town in upstate New York, in a

family that did not drink wine. The message was clear: Josh isn’t some Napa billionaire’s vanity project but an everyman drink named after a blue-collar guy who actually preferred beer.

When Carr first conceived of Josh Cellars in 2005, he was no amateur but a savvy wine professional with years in the trade, including a stint as president of Mildara Blass, the wine division of Foster Brewing Company. Carr was also producing two modestly successful Joseph Carr wines: a Sonoma Coast Chardonnay and a Cabernet from Napa. But sourcing fruit in Napa had become a challenge. “The price of grapes doubled and I was going broke,” he recalled.

Carr began looking for a Cabernet source outside of Napa. He met Sonoma-based winemaker Tom Larson, who was able to source much less expensive fruit from Sonoma and the Red Hills district of Lake County for what became the first bottles of Josh. “I wanted to make a Napa wine but Tom really opened my eyes,” said Carr.

With \$70,000 from his 401(k) and

a second mortgage on his house, Carr launched the 2007 Josh Cellars Cabernet Sauvignon, priced at \$15 a bottle, in 2009. The support of his late wife Dee was crucial, Carr noted, especially when it came to remortgaging the house. In a cost-saving move, he decided to try selling the 1,200 cases of wine himself. He drove all over the East Coast with cases in the back of his 2000 Land Rover Discovery. “It took a year to sell out the wine,” Carr recalled.

Carr recalled one such drive, from his home in Cape Cod to a wine shop in Nyack, N.Y.—an eight-hour round trip—to sell one case of wine. But in-person appearances gave Carr the chance to tell his story. He began signing every wine bottle he sold, a clever sales tactic that turned the emptied bottle into a souvenir.

### Making a Megabrand

By 2011, sales and production had increased tenfold. There was a Josh Cellars Cabernet and a Josh Cellars Chardonnay, and Josh was now a nationally distributed brand. That year, William (Bill) Deutsch, founder and chairman of Deutsch Family

Wine & Spirits (now based in Stamford, Conn.), and his son Peter Deutsch, the company’s CEO, reached out to Carr about a potential partnership.

The Deutsches thought the brand had potential. “We saw an interesting story—he was honoring his dad—and thought he designed a beautiful label,” said Bill Deutsch. But they saw room for improvement too: “We had to fix the wine-making—we liked the wine but didn’t love it.”

The Deutsch family already had an impressive wine-marketing track record. They made the French brand Georges Duboeuf’s Beaujolais and Beaujolais Nouveau famous stateside in the 1980s and 1990s, and had even greater success with Yellow Tail Shiraz, the Australian sensation of the early 2000s.

When Deutsch partnered with Carr in 2011, it acquired half the Josh trademark. A year later Deutsch bought Carr out but retained him as the face of the brand. His title is founder. “They put me in a commercial wearing flannel,” said Carr. “Now I have a nice Brioni

suit.” By 2016 annual production of Josh had reached 1 million cases.

### A Singular Sensation

Today, Josh Cellars’ total annual production of just over 7.5 million cases extends to 23 different labels, including multiple iterations of Josh Cabernet as well as Josh Chardonnay, Josh Sauvignon Blanc and Josh Prosecco, to name a few. The latest addition, Josh Seaswept, a blend of Pinot Grigio and Sauvignon Blanc aimed at a younger generation of drinkers, debuted in 2024.

Instead of focusing on Carr (as much of the Josh campaign has), Deutsch markets Seaswept via a band of influencers, including “people who embody the ‘coastal lifestyle,’” according to Dan Kleinman, chief brand officer of Deutsch. Kleinman oversees Josh Cellars’ marketing, with a budget he said runs “in the eight figures” annually.

Why did the Deutsch family decide that out of all the modest, midtier Cabernets in the world, Josh Cellars was the one they wanted to own? Beyond the interesting story

**Winemakers everywhere are trying to figure out how to produce ‘the next Josh.’ But how did it happen in the first place?**

and the attractive label, Bill Deutsch also saw potential for growth. For Peter Deutsch, the brand was “the right intersection between elegant and approachable.” And for Kleinman there was the appeal of Carr himself: “The bet was that Joe’s story would resonate with Josh drinkers: boomers and Gen X.”

### The Next Josh?

The Deutsches have yet to discover another Josh. For Bill Deutsch it’s a matter of finding a wine that truly stands out. “You have to have something unique: a blue ocean item,” he said, using a term for creating an opportunity where one does not exist. There is also the matter of the market, Deutsch noted: Wine consumption is down; planned tariffs only increase concern.

I wondered if Rodolphe Boulanger, vice president of wine and the New World wine buyer for Total Wine and More, had thoughts about the “next Josh.” Josh is, after all, the bestselling table wine brand under \$20 at the chain’s 280 stores nationwide. “There are a couple of remarkable things about Josh,” he said. “It’s a breakout in multiple aisles of the store, with line extensions that all worked. It’s unique to have a brand that pumps in all categories.”

So, if the timing is right (and the market improves), I think I have the formula down: a pronounceable name, an appealing backstory, a decent flavor profile, a charismatic entrepreneur with a sturdy truck—plus a dash of promotional pixie dust.

► Email Lettie at [wine@wsj.com](mailto:wine@wsj.com)

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## The Kitchen Cure

This story of a writer reclaiming her appetite will definitely spark yours

**EVERYONE’S HEARD** of writer’s block—but what about cook’s block? In her new book, “Dinner,” the British cookbook author Meera Sodha chronicles her comeback from just that sort of culinary rut.

After years of feeding a family and creating recipes for a living, she writes, the spark petered out: “I lost my love for food. I didn’t want to shop. I didn’t want to cook. I ate for necessity, not pleasure.”

How did Sodha reclaim her kitchen mojo? The cure, it turns out, didn’t come from pursuing flashy new ingredients or virtuoso techniques. What saved her, she explains, was returning to the daily practice of preparing an easy family dinner. Nothing fancy, just simple meals that felt companionable and sustaining.

Luckily for readers, Sodha had the foresight to record in a notebook the hits from that period—crowd-pleasing meals that got her culinary muscles moving again. Now “Dinner” collects

them, cleaned up and organized into categories by seasons, effort level and staple ingredients like “Eggs and Cheese” and “Roots and Shoots.”

Reflecting the way Sodha prefers to eat, most of the recipes happen to be vegan or vegetarian, though the book’s tone is anything but ascetic. Cooking through its pages in the past few weeks, I’ve already dog-eared some keepers. Punchy with garlic and enriched with Korean chile paste, Sodha’s Vodka Gochujang Pasta has an adult edge in a package that’s comforting enough to please even picky kids. A lime-brightened, herb-flecked riff on Indian dal simmers up quickly and stretches easily to a week of springtime desk lunches.

As my household’s food czar, I’m all too familiar with sup-pertime ennui. But the wisdom of Sodha’s “Dinner” is that the joy of sharing food needn’t be overcomplicated. Sometimes we all need a reminder.

—Sarah Karnasiewicz

### Fennel and Dill Dal

*Fresh dill and lime lend this dal a brightness that’s welcome in warmer months. Mung dal—the split insides of mung beans—can be sourced from South Asian markets or online. Make the rice ahead if you plan to serve it alongside.*

**Total Time** 45 minutes **Serves** 4

**1½ cups yellow split mung dal**  
**1 teaspoon ground turmeric**  
**5 cups water**  
**1½ teaspoon salt**  
**¼ cup canola oil**  
**1 teaspoon cumin seeds**  
**1½ teaspoons black mustard seeds**  
**1 yellow onion, finely chopped**  
**1 large fennel bulb, finely chopped**  
**¾ ounces fresh dill, leaves roughly chopped, plus more to garnish**  
**2 green finger chiles or serrano chiles,**

**finely chopped**  
**4 cloves garlic, crushed**  
**7 ounces (half a 14-ounce can) coconut milk**  
**1½ tablespoons fresh lime juice, from 1 lime**  
**Cooked basmati rice, to serve**

**1.** Rinse mung dal until water runs clear. In a large pot, combine rinsed mung dal and turmeric, and cover with water. Bring to a boil over high heat, then reduce heat to medium and simmer until dal starts to break down, 20-25 minutes. Stir in salt and set aside.  
**2.** While mung dal cooks, add oil to a large frying pan over medium heat. Once oil is hot, add cumin and mustard seeds and sauté until they sizzle and pop, about 30 seconds. Add onions, fennel and half the chopped dill. Cook, stirring now and then, until soft and caramelized,



**SPRING FLING** This Fennel and Dill Dal may just be the ideal shoulder-season dish—fresh yet warming, filling and delicious.

about 20 minutes.  
**3.** Set aside a couple tablespoons of cooked fennel mixture for garnish. Add chiles and garlic to remaining fennel mixture, and stir-fry for 3 minutes more, then transfer to pot

of mung dal along with coconut milk. (If mixture looks as if it could be a bit looser, add a splash of water.) Bring dal mixture to a bubble, then take off heat and stir in lime juice. Season to taste with more

salt, lime and/or chile. To serve, ladle dal over rice, if using, and scatter with reserved fennel mixture and more chopped dill.

—Adapted from “Dinner” by Meera Sodha (Flatiron Books)

DAVID LOFTUS, FLATIRON BOOKS

EATING & DRINKING

Better Butter: A Guide

*Continued from page D1*

been made before it became a mass-produced item,” she recalled. She also bought Jersey cows, which provide “the highest butterfat of all milking cows.” In 2022 she sold her dairy business to neighbors Hilary and Ben Haigh of Rolling Bale Farm, who still care for her Jersey herd and make Animal Farm butter just as St. Clair painstakingly instructed them to, consistently yielding a butterfat content of 87%.

That falls comfortably within the 82-90% butterfat required of EU makers, whereas the USDA dictates a meager minimum of 80%. Like European and other European-style butters, Animal Farm’s is made with cultured milk—a preservation technique that predates refrigeration and produces a delicious lactic-acid tang and a notably complex flavor.

A little of the good stuff goes a long way. Savor artisanal butter as you would a great cheese or tranche of foie gras.

The celebrated French butter-maker Jean-Yves Bordier has discovered that a little massage doesn’t hurt, either. In 1985, when Bordier bought a creamery in the town of Saint Malo, on Brittany’s coast, he found a butter-kneading machine akin to one his grandparents used and quickly realized that kneading butter yields a luxuriously dense consistency and a far richer flavor. Spread out in a kneader, the butter oxygenates, and its aromas blossom. Bordier likens this alchemy to letting a complex red wine breathe.

Today, Bordier’s is the butter that French-trained, U.S.-based chefs Daniel Boulud and Jean-Georges Vongerichten seek out. Julie Sugliani, a senior manager at Maison Bordier, reports “spectacular” U.S. sales—especially given that the company doesn’t advertise. A 4.4-ounce bar currently goes for around \$15.

**An Affordable Luxury**

Long “obsessed” by Bordier, American cheesemaker Marisa Mauro bought a 50-acre hilltop farm in Mad River Valley, Vt., in 2012 and began making hand-churned, hand-kneaded cultured butter under the label Ploughgate Creamery. Today, it’s sold in shops from Vermont to Alaska. At the Manhattan restaurant Frenchette, it comes to the table in a broad, rustic slab, “on the cool side of room temperature, not quite soft,” said co-chef Riad Nasr. At sister establishment Frenchette Bakery, Ploughgate butter stars in the jambon beurre sandwich, and 4-ounce bars are available for purchase at a price of \$8.50—for now.

“The dairy industries both in the U.S. and abroad are very anxious as impending tariffs stress their already lean business models,” said Matthew Rubiner of Rubiner’s Cheesemongers in Great Barrington, Mass. He imports 11-pound wooden vessels of Rodolphe Le Meunier butter from France, and slices it to order, currently charging \$30 a pound. It’s the only butter he sells, but he’s monitoring the price of domestic products too.

“The closer you get to the Canadian border, the more complicated it becomes,” Rubiner explained. American butter-makers often source cream from Canadian dairies and cattle feed from Canadian producers. “What this means is, while the price of imported butter might well skyrocket, so could that of American-made butter.”

The happy news? A little of the good stuff goes a long way. Savor artisanal butter on a slice of bread, as you would a great cheese or tranche of foie gras. Mix imported and European-style supermarket butters with herbs to make compound butters that elevate everything from steaks to omelets. (See “Use Your Investment Wisely,” at right.) The best way to understand a good butter? Place a sliver on your tongue and let it melt. Don’t rush this small indulgence. Allow the flavor to develop and relish every nuance.



EXTRA CREDIT This compound butter with garlic and rosemary makes steaks sing.

Use Your Investment Wisely

A good butter can stand on its own. But to fully exploit this ingredient’s flavor potential, chefs put the following delicious spins on it.

- EASY TO MAKE**, compound butters let you add a luxurious finishing touch to so many dishes. Herbaceous versions burst with flavor that complements savory meat, fish or poultry. Consider a compound butter, too, on top of an omelet, or one with cinnamon sugar or maple syrup to melt over pancakes, French toast and biscuits.

The basic recipe: Mix room-tempera-
- ture butter thoroughly with flavorful additions, roll into a log, wrap in parchment paper, twist tightly at the ends and refrigerate until firm. Just before serving, place a ¼- to ½-inch-thick slice of cold compound butter atop a hot dish and unleash its richness and flavor.

Compound butters last a week in the refrigerator and 3 months frozen—your insurance policy against dull meals.
- A Garlicky Compound Butter for Steak** Mix 6 tablespoons room-temperature salted butter with 2 finely grated garlic cloves, 1 tablespoon minced parsley, 1 tea-

spoon minced thyme, zest of half a lemon, and salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste.

**A French-Style Compound Butter for Chicken** Mix 6 table-
- spoons room-temperature salted butter with 1 tablespoon minced tarragon, 2 teaspoons minced shallots, the zest of half a lemon, salt and freshly ground white pepper to taste.

- A Punchy Compound Butter for Fish** Mix 6 tablespoons room temperature salted butter with 1 tablespoon minced chives, 1 tablespoon minced parsley and 2 teaspoons minced shallots.

**A Savory-Sweet Compound Butter for Pork** Mix 6 tablespoons room temperature unsalted butter with 2 teaspoons minced ginger root, 2 minced cloves of garlic, 1 tablespoon maple syrup and 1 teaspoon soy sauce.

**A Citrus-Maple Compound Butter for Pancakes and French Toast** Mix 6 tablespoons room temperature lightly salted butter with 3 tablespoons maple syrup, the zest of an organic orange and ¼ teaspoon ground cinnamon.

**An Herbal Compound Butter for Omelets** Mix 6 tablespoons room temperature lightly salted butter with 3 tablespoons of a combination of minced parsley, chives, tarragon and chervil.

**A Mexican-Style Compound Butter for Grilled Corn** Mix 6 tablespoons room-temperature salted butter with 1 teaspoon achiote powder or paste, the zest and juice of 2 limes, and 1 tablespoon minced cilantro.

Other Essentials

- Brown Butter (Beurre Noisette)**

Chop unsalted butter into large chunks and melt in a frying pan over low heat. Increase heat to medium and bring to a lively simmer, stirring. Watch it foam and subside, then begin to color. When it is a deep golden brown, remove from heat. Use the butter and also the
- flavorful brown bits on the bottom of the pan to bring a surprising umami depth to everything from chocolate-chip cookies to layer cakes. Add a handful of sage leaves as the butter simmers, and you have a very nice sauce for squash ravioli.

**An Emulsion to Toss With Pasta**

Melt 6 tablespoons salted butter in a 9-inch skillet over low heat.
- Increase heat to medium and add ¼ cup boiling salted water left from cooking pasta. Simmer, whisking, 2 minutes. If you like, add garlic as the butter melts.

**Jam Butter** Mix 6 tablespoons room-temperature unsalted butter with 6 tablespoons jam or marmalade. Lavish on popovers, hot biscuits or toast.

The Butters to Buy

**FROM SUPERLATIVE**

special-occasion sticks to kitchen workhorses, here’s a list of butters to suit most purposes. All are available nationally—some at supermarkets, others online or at your local cheesemonger.

The high-end British and French butters included here are for savoring when a small splurge is in order, perhaps on good bread without anything to mask their luxurious flavor and texture. For a delicious, creamy, mid-price French butter, a

good choice we didn’t have room to include below is Isigny Sainte Mère, available in good supermarkets in most states; on the list you’ll find mass-produced imports from Denmark, Ireland and Finland. For a European-style, higher-butterfat option at a reasonable price, try Plugrà and Vermont Creamery, both American made. For an American artisan butter that’s widely available, there’s Ploughgate Creamery, but it’s also worth seeking out local artisan but-



These are the butters worth your money.

ters in your city’s cheese stores, gourmet markets and farmers’ markets.

Butter freezes well, wrapped in parchment or plastic, then sealed in freezer bags, for at least three months. In the fridge, keep butter covered so it doesn’t absorb odors. Cultured butters keep well at room temperature, too, if covered and kept away from the heat of the stove and direct sunlight. For serving, a cool room temperature is best.

**Rodolphe Le Meunier Beurre de Barratte Salé**

Le Meunier received France’s most prestigious craftsmanship honor, Meilleur Ouvrier de France, and for good reason. This butter is made from Norman cream, allowed to ferment for several hours to acquire the sought-after lactic-acid tang only cultured butters have, and churned and molded by hand. *\$15 for 9 ounces*

**Le Beurre Bordier Demi-Sel**

Kneading gives Bordier butters their unparalleled smoothness and density and lets the butter oxygenate so its flavors bloom. This butter is creamy and nuanced with both subtle savory and sweet notes. In the yuzu version, the citrus is added during the kneading process, so a small amount infuses the butter wholly without overpowering it. *\$15 for 4.5 ounces*

**Finlandia Imported Salted Butter**

Mass-produced in Finland from the cream of pasture-fed cows, this butter has an almost nutty sweetness to it. The company emphasizes its commitment to sustainability and animal welfare—at a price and a production volume that makes this butter easy to find in supermarkets and a solid kitchen staple. *\$5 for 8 ounces*

**Kerrygold Pure Irish Butter Salted**

Known for its yellow hue and slightly grassy flavor, Kerrygold is made in Ireland from the cream of grass-fed cows. It’s a great all-purpose butter to stock: easy to find, at a good price, with a delicious 82-83% butterfat that gives it a creamy texture great for baking everything from pie crusts to shortbread, as well as in cooked dishes. *\$5 for 8 ounces*

**Plugrà Premium European Style Salted Butter**

Favored by pastry chefs, this 82% butterfat, American-made butter is slow-churned, which is credited for its smoothness. Creamy and mild, widely available and well-priced, it’s a go-to for butter cookies, shortbread, pie crusts, icing and toast with jam, when you want richness but no noticeable tang or grassiness. *\$5 for 8 ounces*

**Lurpak Salted Butter**

Also available in a Slightly Salted version, Lurpak is remarkably versatile. This Danish cultured butter has a lovely whiff of lactic acid, a slightly grassy aroma and just enough salt to make it interesting but still good with jam. Like Finlandia, it’s mass-produced, but the company has made quantifiable strides in sustainability. *\$10 for 8 ounces*

**Vermont Creamery Cultured Butter With Sea Salt**

Allowed to ferment overnight, Vermont Creamery butter is thick, a little tangy, a little nutty and contains 82% butterfat. This butter was created by cheesemakers and reflects their attention to craft and good farming in its flavor. It happens to pair well with cheese and is a great option for making compound butter. *\$5 for 8 ounces*

**Devon Cream Company Creamy British Butter Lightly Salted**

Devon, in the lush southwest of England, is known for producing some of the very best cream in the world. So it is perhaps no wonder that this Devonshire butter is exceptionally creamy and pliable—the ideal match for scones and hot biscuits. Wrapped in gold foil, it makes a great gift for fellow butter-lovers. *\$14 for 8 ounces*

**Ploughgate Creamery Cultured Unsalted Butter**

This American artisan cultured butter from the cream of grass-fed cows has a wonderful intensity of flavor. Great on a baguette, it also has the character to stand up to sourdough, rye, spelt or walnut bread. Try Ploughgate’s flavored butters to add an easy last-minute flavor boost to all sorts of dishes. *\$15 for 8 ounces*

**Les Prés Salés Beurre au Gros Sel Marin de Camargue**

With cream from the Belgian Ardennes plateau and sea-salt crystals from the Camargue region of France’s Rhône delta, this butter is an absolute pleasure to eat. The crystals briefly retain their subtle crunch before dissolving on the tongue, surprising the palate and accentuating the creaminess of the butter. *\$4 for 9 ounces*

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