

FRIDAY-SUNDAY, DECEMBER 11-13, 2009

WEEKEND JOURNAL.

EUROPE

Marrakech works its magic

A luxury renaissance in Morocco

Wine: The best of Christmas drinking | European Web habits revealed

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WEEKEND JOURNAL

EUROPE

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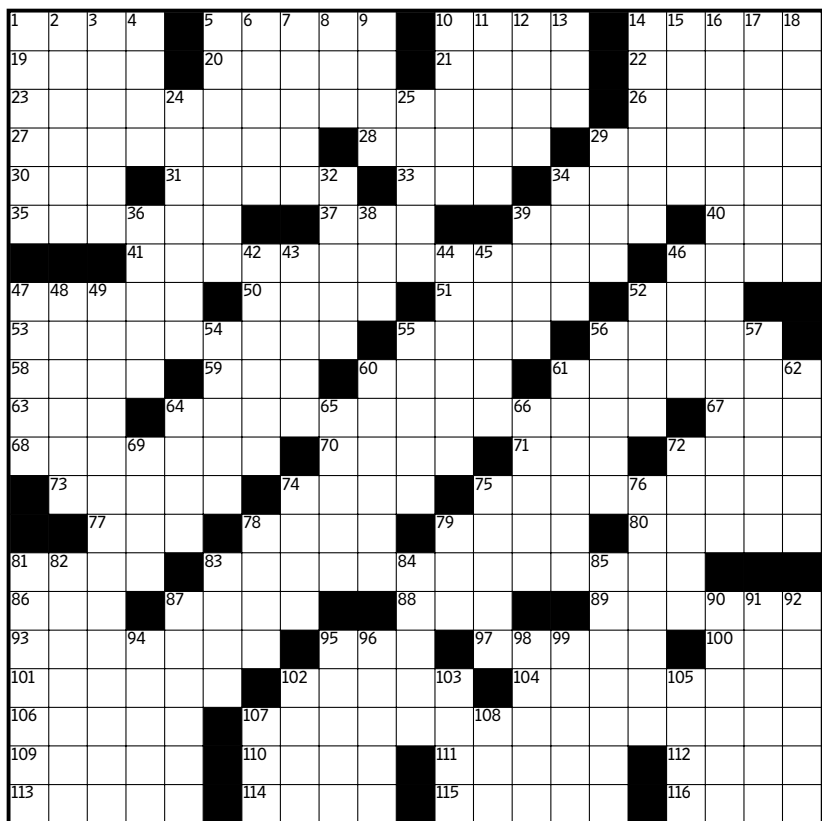
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For the sake of argument

Big ideas are back in fashion, as the rise of debating societies shows

BY HELEN KIRWAN-TAYLOR

London

IT'S AN UNLIKELY draw for London's well-heeled. The wine is served lukewarm and evenings often end up in screaming matches. At a debate called "Winston Churchill was more a liability than an asset to the free world," a man stood up and shouted: "How dare you question the reputation of the greatest leader on earth!" He was escorted out by security immediately.

This is Intelligence Squared, a debating forum now operating in several world cities that hosts ticketed events in which notables square off on loaded questions. The project is the brainchild of media gurus John Gordon and Jeremy O'Grady, and seats, which cost £25 each and are also available as season tickets, often sell out immediately. Mr. Gordon initially built the Intelligence Squared database on the back of his contacts and those of his friends.

Debates now take place monthly and feature intellectual big hitters like former French President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, Richard Dawkins, Gore Vidal, Martin Amis and Bernard-Henri Lévy on motions varying from "Georgia and Ukraine should not be allowed to join NATO" to "Tax the rich more" and "America has lost its moral authority."

At an October debate where the motion was "The Catholic Church is a force for good in the world," members of the auditorium were visibly uncomfortable as the highly articulate debater, British actor Stephen Fry, attacked the Catholic Church, standing only a few yards away from Archbishop Onaiyekan of Nigeria. The affable Archbishop, clearly on the panel for the first time, had addressed members of the audience as though he were at a religious conference. He was clearly shaken to find he was participating in the closest thing London has to a gladiatorial sport (the organizers say he was forewarned and not "set up").

There was another uncomfortable moment that night when moderator Zeinab Badawi, the BBC presenter known for her abrasive style, abruptly cut a Nigerian nun short in the question-and-answer session. The nun looked confused when she was told her remarks were not to the point. A few times, the entertaining author and panelist Christopher Hitchens was seen leaning down to take some brownish fluid from a bottle under the podium, which he poured into his water glass.

The Dec. 10 debate entitled "Everything a man does he does to get laid" sold out within days of being listed on the Web site. The debating series is televised and shown to 72 million people on BBC World News. Debates have also been staged in the Ukraine, Australia and Hong Kong, and licensed to stations elsewhere, including some in the U.S.

It's an impressive end to an idea that was born between two drinking buddies. "I said to John (Gordon) that there's something we're missing," says Mr. O'Grady, the editor-in-chief of the *Week* magazine. "All public school kids debate but apart from a few events organized by the Guardian, where you sit on hard seats in cold auditoriums, there is nothing. We thought, why not offer comfortable seats and wine to peo-

ple, create an intellectual and gladiatorial evening that is irresistible?"

This was back in 1994. In 2001, Mr. Gordon called Mr. O'Grady up and suggested they rekindle the idea. Speakers are paid an undisclosed amount to take part, though neither Mr. Gordon nor Mr. O'Grady are paid and the organization operates at a break-even level.

Launching the forum hasn't been easy. The first debate, entitled "Hunting with hounds should be banned," held in 2002 at the Royal Geographical Society, was anything but sold out. "After we exhausted all of our friends, we literally walked down Exhibition Road asking tramps and ne'er-do-wells to come in and fill the seats," Mr. O'Grady said. "It's hard to believe that we have gone from a handful of friends to a database of 50,000 names competing for seats."

The format follows that of Oxford and Cambridge debating societies. At the beginning of the hour-and-a-half evening, guests are asked to vote on a motion (for, against, undecided). The votes are then counted and announced to the audience. At the end of the evening, after all members of the panel have summarized their arguments, the audience votes again. In the meantime, there's a question session that is often more heated than the actual debate is. In the case of the Catholicism debate in October, many of the "don't knows" suddenly did know, leaving only 268 (compared to 1,862) in favor of the motion that the Catholic Church is a force for good.

At his day job, Mr. Gordon runs a media information company called Xtreme Information, but it is his debate-forum hobby that keeps him awake at night. He often can be seen nervously pacing the foyer of the Royal Geographical Society before climbing onto the stage to introduce the evening's participants. "Initially I was popping several beta blockers just to get through it," he admits.

Occasionally it does go very wrong. At a debate on French culture, Agnès Catherine Poirier, political and arts correspondent for *Libération* and author of a book comparing French and English culture, declared that she had nothing more to say. The audience started to heckle her and several people walked out, making her opponent, the fiercely witty food critic A.A. Gill, dig in his heels even further.

Mr. Gordon, however, maintains that French speakers are the best debaters. "They are taught to maintain three points on every subject at all times," he said. "The Americans are confident and speak more slowly, but the best on the entertainment front are still the British-public-school-spawn orators, such as London Mayor Boris Johnson."

After years of practice, the two founders have a pretty reliable crew of entertaining, expert debaters who, as in the case of the *Times* columnist Oliver Kamm, can take a political position they disagree with and still win the evening's vote.

Several other debating societies, such as the *Spectator* Debates and the School of Life, are now competing with Intelligence Squared. The trend is clear: big ideas are back and more entertaining than ever.

—Helen Kirwan-Taylor is a writer based in London.



Above, Archbishop John Onaiyekan, Ann Widdecombe MP, Christopher Hitchens and Stephen Fry face off in an October Intelligence Squared debate, entitled 'The Catholic Church is a force for good in the world.'

Right, German director Werner Herzog speaks with New York Public Library Public Programs Director Paul Holdengraber at Royal Festival Hall on Oct. 3 as part of a new Intelligence Squared series.'



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BY PAUL SONNE

London

JAMIE BYNG, THE 40-year-old managing director of the Scottish independent publisher Canongate Books, sidled up to the bar at London's Southbank Centre after a book reading last month and, with a bit of prompting, belted out some old-school American funk.

"They still call it the White House, but that's a temporary condition, can you dig it?" Mr. Byng sang, mouthing the lyrics to the band Parliament's 1975 tune "Chocolate City," a song he knows well because he once managed an Edinburgh nightclub of the same name.

Mr. Byng, who has published books by street writer Iceberg Slim and jazz bassist Charles Mingus, and whose undergraduate English thesis at Edinburgh University was "A Development of the Black Oral Tradition: The Hip-Hop Lyric," has reason to be singing. Despite a recessionary sales slump that has sent most of Britain's big commercial publishers reeling, his small company is having a breakout year.

Canongate nearly tripled its revenue from a year earlier in the 24 weeks that ended June 13, largely because Mr. Byng picked up the rights to the first black president's books six months before Barack Obama announced he would run. For each book, he paid a five-figure sterling sum. Then, much to Mr. Byng's surprise, he says, Parliament's prediction about a black American occupying the White House came true.

The timing was impeccable. As Mr. Byng noted at the end of a recent London dinner, in which he ruminated about Borges and Bulgakov while slurping down raw oysters and devouring an equally uncooked steak tartare: "Ripeness is all." That's Edgar, Act V, "King Lear," but also Mr. Byng's publishing philosophy, which despite its unorthodoxy, has steered Canongate from receivership to success since 1994.

Another notch in the young publisher's belt was picking up the rights to Yann Martel's "Life of Pi" for £15,000 in 2001, which resulted in a £3 million windfall and doubled the company's revenue after the book won the Man Booker Prize the following year. A few years earlier, he published the Bible as individual books called Pocket Canons, with introductions by notables like Doris Lessing (Ecclesiastes), Bono (Psalms) and Will Self (Revelations). Now, with the Obama books, he has reified his image as British publishing's ram-bunctious rising star.

Though Mr. Byng may be an "evangelist for his authors" who is "handing out publishing lessons left, right and center," as Faber and Faber sales director Will Atkinson put it, Canongate isn't the only British independent publisher recording revenue growth amid the recession. Atlantic Books' revenue more than doubled from a year earlier in the 24 weeks that ended June 13, thanks largely to Aravind Adiga's Booker Prize-winning "The White Tiger," while Quercus reported 49% growth, and Faber and Faber notched a 48% revenue jump. Meanwhile, big commercial houses like Bloomsbury, Random House and



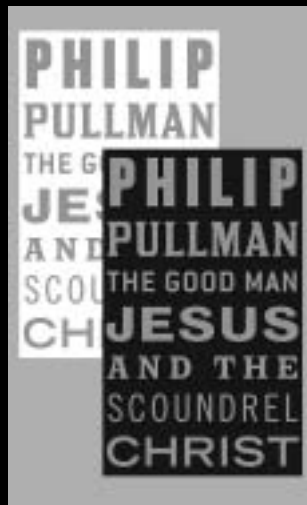
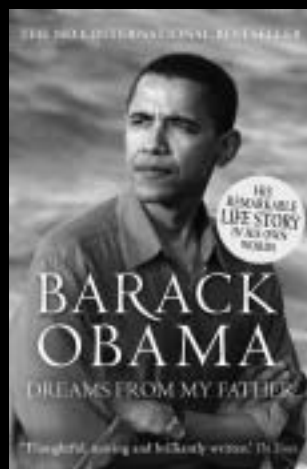
Jamie Byng

Here come the indies

U.K. revenue for 24 weeks ending June 13

Independent publishers	Change from the previous year	Revenue, in millions
Canongate	196%	£5.4
Atlantic	117	3.5
Quercus	49	2.6
Faber	48	7.9
Profile/Serpent's Tail	23	2.1
Short	19	0.4
Big commercial houses		
Bloomsbury	-26%	£13.1
Random House	-15	89.4
Harper Collins	-12	50.1
Penguin	-8	63.2
Simon and Schuster	-6	9.8
Hachette UK	4	109.9

Source: The Bookseller



Independent Publishers Guild, noted, small independent houses tend to be more personality-driven, with bright people at the helm who know what they want, stick close to their customer base and take risks.

That is the case at Canongate, which is inseparable from the sense and sensibility of the talented Mr. Byng. He joined the staff of the then-ailing Scottish publisher as an unpaid intern in 1992 at the age of 23, and two years later bought it off the receivers, thanks to guidance from founder Stephanie Wolfe Murray and investments from his stepfather, former BBC and BT Group PLC Chairman Christopher Bland, and his then-father-in-law, banker Charles McVeigh. The total cost was £95,000, Mr. Byng said, and before the buyout, the miffed proprietor scoffed: "Cut your hair."

Some 15 years later, it's clear that Mr. Byng's voluminous brown locks haven't tied him down. His partying ways and straight-talking attitude have led the British press to dub him the "bad boy of books" and the "wild child" of U.K. publishing (when asked about his cocaine usage in a 2002 interview with the Guardian, he said, "I don't do it that often, but it's the drug I like most at the moment"). But he says he has moved on, having just welcomed his third child and quit smoking this summer. That is to say, Mr. Byng is growing up.

So is his publishing house. He has used the windfall from the Obama books to buy the freehold on Canongate's offices on Edinburgh's Royal Mile, and he has arranged for the publisher's afterlife in the form of a document archive, at the University of Dundee, which will include his email exchanges with writers like Mr. Pullman. Canongate has also been experimenting with digital production, releasing musician Nick Cave's new book, "The Death of Bunny Munro," in a version for the iPhone and selling individual stories from David Eagleman's "Sum" as single audio tracks on iTunes.

Mr. Byng wants to continue pushing the boundaries: One of the next books in the Canongate Myth Series, a succession of books that asks contemporary authors to retell ancient myths, is atheist Mr. Pullman's "The Good Man Jesus and the Scoundrel Christ," which recasts the story of Jesus. "It may be the most important book Canongate has ever published," Mr. Byng says.

Canongate is also planning to launch a new young-adult line with Walker Books, which will include a number of "crossover" books such as "Life of Pi." "We can be messing with kids' heads in a good way, the way we like messing with adults' heads," Mr. Byng says.

He also believes it's still early days for Canongate, which picked up publisher of the year at the British Book Industry awards in June: "We still feel like an underdog in a way, which is good because it makes you really hustle." Indeed, for Mr. Byng, the son of the 8th Earl of Strathford, who says he has little time for "formality or protocol or the way things are meant to be done," it's all about the struggle. He even has a new fitting mantra: "Yes we Canongate."

'Yes we Canongate'

Small publisher skirts recession along with other indies, rides Obama wave

Harper Collins posted double-digit percentage declines in U.K. revenues over the same period, the trade magazine The Bookseller reported.

One reason the British indies are shining is that they have scale on their side. Whereas big houses rely on recently disrupted supermarket sales for as much as 35% or 40% of their business, even the most mainstream U.K. independents like Faber count on supermarket retailing for less than 10% of sales, Mr. Atkinson said. (Faber sells more than half its books at commercial and independent book shops and about 20% online). What is more, independent

publishers have much lower overheads; they don't target chance buyers of paperback thrillers and celebrity biographies, but rather rely on ardent bookworms who care deeply about reading and buy novels regardless of the economic climate.

As the big houses struggle, independents in Britain are wooing big-name authors and embarking on more creative initiatives. Canongate, for instance, is publishing Philip Pullman and considering acquiring an audio-book company using profits from the Obama bounce. Meanwhile, many big publishers have recoiled in search of safe bets.

"There are some big publishers who can't go to the toilet without looking at BookScan. They simply will not do anything without looking at what has happened in the past," Mr. Atkinson says. "In cautious times, why wouldn't you look for the last best thing? For us, to be glib, we're looking for the next best thing."

Mr. Atkinson says Faber's shareholders don't necessarily expect market-rate profits each year, which allows the company to avoid becoming slave to earnings or trends. Moreover, as Bridget Shine, executive director of the U.K.-based

Rex Features

Fine wine for the holidays

Columnist Will Lyons picks out the perfect bottle for every budget during the festive season

FOR MANY OF us this weekend marks the beginning of the holiday season—that end-of-year gastronomic marathon replete with parties, dinners, celebratory drinks and extended lunches culminating in the feast of Christmas Day itself.

By the time New Year arrives, the danger of palate fatigue is very real. With this in

mind, for my holiday drinking I prefer to serve wines that offer a lighter style, compliment food and, dare I say, inspire reflection and conversation rather than immediate gustatory pleasure. It is with increasing frequency that I return to the vineyards of France, Germany and Italy for wines that express a sense of place, what the French describe as *terroir*. But

that is not to say I have closed my eyes to the delights of California, New Zealand and South Africa, which all find a place in this year's list.

Moreover, I have attempted to cater for every budget, and menu choice, with a range of festive wine suggestions that are all suited for enjoying Christmas lunch, entertaining friends or sharing with the family.

Sparkling

Below £10

Prosecco di Valdobbiadene NV
Trevisiol L. e Figli, Italy
12%
What better way to start Christmas Day than with a glass of this light, crisp, apple-scented Prosecco. Its lively, fruity nose will lift the spirits.



Below £25

Pelorus NV
Cloudy Bay, New Zealand
12.5%
This gloriously rich, creamy sparkling wine owned by the proprietors of Veuve Clicquot has been a constant on my Christmas list for more than a decade. The quality hasn't dropped and its nuttiness still astounds.



Below £50

Pol Roger Pure
Champagne, France
12%
Christmas Day can exhaust the palate. Pol Roger Pure doesn't have the customary addition of a sweetening dosage, which means it is bone-dry and providing a very welcome cleaner, lighter, drier style.



Above £65

Krug 1988
Champagne, France
12%
Krug's 1988 possesses a fresh, vivacious character with enormous energy and vitality. A decadent pick-me-up, it is silky with lots of floral notes and a long length.



Whites

Below £10

Klein Constantia Riesling 2007
Constantia, South Africa
13%
A refreshing, generous wine with an off dry, zippy twang under a heavily perfumed nose. Superb value from the Western Cape.



Below £25

Château Carbonnieux 2005
Pessac-Léognan, Bordeaux, France
12.5%
Often overlooked is the head-turning quality of Bordeaux's white wine. A blend of Sauvignon Blanc, Sémillon and Muscadelle, Carbonnieux is characterized by a nutty, lemony character with a hint of vanilla oak.



Below £50

2005 DuMol Chardonnay Clare
Carneros, California
14.5%
Scotland-born Andy Smith is making a big noise in California with his classic Chardonnay. Gently oaked, this has a clean, mineral concentrated character and a delightful flickering acidity.



Above £65

Chevalier-Montrachet 1998
Domaine Leflaive, Côte-d'Or, France
13.5%
Drinking superbly this Christmas. Round and fat with nice acidity, it is always a treat to sip Monsieur Leflaive's white Burgundy.



Reds

Below £10

2004 Chianti Riserva, Bonacchi
Tuscany, Italy
12.5%
A wonderful rich, gamey nose with Christmas spice and a heavy, dark fruit character on the palate. This has all the class and swagger of a wine that is a great deal more expensive.



Below £25

Château du Cèdre 2006
Cahors, Southwest France
13.5%
Made from 90% Malbec with a touch of Tannat, this will appeal to lovers of dark, dense, earthy wines. More than a match for the Malbec's emanating from Argentina.



Below £50

Pinot Noir 2006, Dry River
Martinborough, New Zealand
13%
Neil McCallum's Pinot Noir is one of the finest outside of Burgundy. The nose is very concentrated with notes of baked cherries, ripe sloes with a vegetal and mushroom character on the palate.



Above £65

Château Sociando-Mallet 1986
Haut-Médoc, Bordeaux
12%
For red Bordeaux lovers this is one of the most outstanding estates in the Médoc, outperforming its rivals years after year. The '86, tasted in August, has classic notes of cedar, cassis, blackcurrants and minerals.



Sweet & Fortified

Below £10

Hidalgo La Gitana Manzanilla
Sherry
Spain
15%
A reliable sherry is a must for Christmas when warming aperitifs are required. This has a refreshing salty, bone-dry taste with a slight nutty character.



Below £25

Graham's 'The Tawny' Port
Douro, Portugal
20%
Outstanding value from one of the great names in Port. Ideal to have on the sideboard to sip away with a good book. Enjoy its nutty, raisin, dried-fruit complexity.



Below £50

1999 Royal Tokaji Betsek
Hungary
10.3%
Nothing quite matches the scintillating acidity of Tokaji. Emanating from the largest of Tokaji's first growths, Betsek, this has a startling depth of flavor with notes of tangy marmalade and dried apricots, and a long, syrupy finish.



Above £65

Château d'Yquem 1997
Sauternes, Bordeaux
14%
The finest vintage from this great house I have ever tasted, with layer upon layer of complex, rich flavors. Top notes portray a honeyed, treacle pudding character before a creamy, vanillin, sweet fruit flavor.



Online, offline, no line

Our survey reveals how people in Europe and the U.S. use the Internet

BY ADAM COHEN

THE DOT-COM BUBBLE might seem like a distant memory after the recent financial crisis, but around the world, the Internet continues to fuel hopes for innovation, wealth and economic expansion.

That's why the Internet has sparked something of an arms race between the U.S. and Europe over the past decade, with governments vying to expand its availability and use, hoping that the next technology billionaires spring from somewhere outside of Silicon Valley.

In Europe, politicians have tried to engineer catch-up programs to rival U.S. dominance of the Internet. France and Germany jointly started Quaero in 2005, a state-funded search engine designed to rival Google, Yahoo and Microsoft offerings. European Union governments keep a particularly close eye on Internet usage and have been pushing to make Web access available in all corners of the bloc.

To take a closer look at this issue and how people in Europe and the U.S. use the Internet, the Wall Street Journal asked market-research firm GfK to poll people in 15 EU countries, Turkey and the U.S., asking whether they have readily available access to the Internet and to describe how they use it. A total of almost 17,000 people were polled.

It turns out that Western Europe lags behind the U.S. in terms of using the Internet for private purposes. Across Western Europe, 61% of people say they have access to the Web, either from home, work, an Internet cafe or a mobile device. In the U.S., 75% of respondents

said they had similar access. Europe as a whole, including five Central and Eastern European states, lags even farther behind, with only 59% of those surveyed saying they have personal access to the Internet.

There are two countries in Europe that stand out for having particularly high Web access: the Netherlands (91%) and Sweden (86%). It's not a surprise that they are two of the most advanced economies in the world and on a per-capita basis, among the richest, too.

Many European countries fall far short of these figures. In Italy, only 39% of respondents said they have access to the Internet for private purposes. That puts Italy in the same league as Romania (36%) and Bulgaria (37%), two formerly communist countries that rank as the EU's poorest member states.

"In Italy and some other countries it might be a cultural thing, in addition to the economic issue. The Mediterranean countries are a lot more mobile-phone oriented and people there are more used to talking to each other," said Mark Hofmans, a managing director in GfK's Brussels office, who analyzed the survey results. He added that some governments, including Italy, have been slower to push broad Internet access than Sweden and the Netherlands.

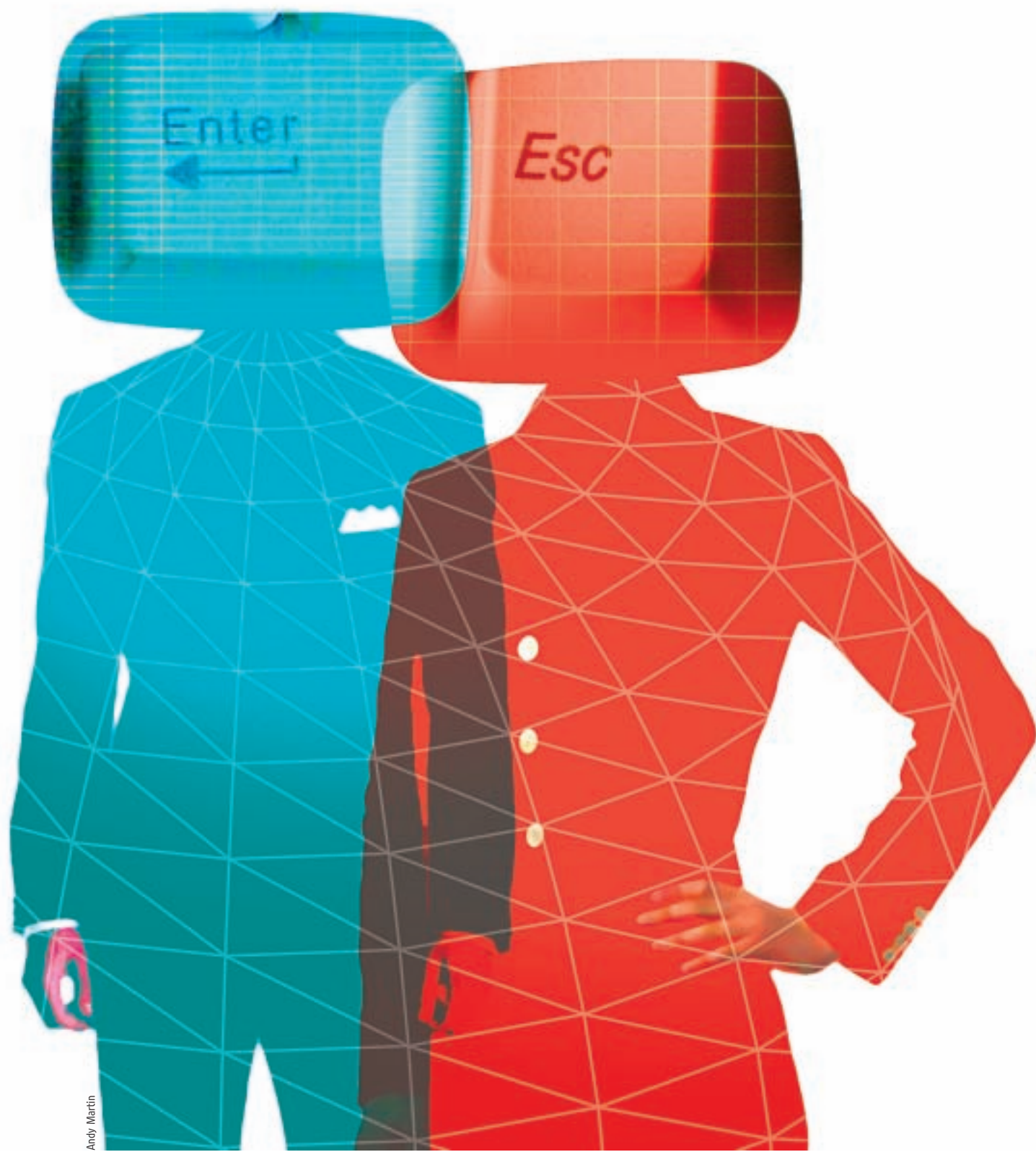
When it comes to the digital economy, attitudes vary sharply on either side of the Atlantic. Content providers, who depend on subscriptions and advertisements to make money, are facing an uphill battle in Europe, while e-commerce, online banking and Web-based services seem to have established a ded-

icated following.

Asked whether all Internet content should be free, 42% of European respondents said "yes," compared with 21% in the U.S. Also, more Americans (57%) than Europeans (40%) said Internet content should be free with the understanding that advertisements and other marketing tools might be included. This means it might be harder for Internet ventures such as social-networking sites or online newspapers to find success in Europe. The richer the country, the more people seem willing to pay for Internet content. In Sweden, 23% of respondents said they were willing to pay for some form of Web content, followed by the Netherlands (19%) and the U.K. (18%).

Europeans do seem willing to do business online. Asked to name their single top use for the Internet outside of work, 13% of Western European respondents cited e-commerce, such as shopping on Amazon.com or eBay, compared with 12% of Americans. In the U.K., 26% of respondents named this as their top use for the Web.

"The U.K. does have a high prevalence of people who are prepared to spend money online," said Alexander Grous, an expert on technology and the Internet at the London School of Economics and Political Science. Dr. Grous cited a range of factors supporting this phenomenon, including growing trust in the security of Web-based transactions, companies pushing consumers online to pare costs, and lousy British weather, which makes shopping from the comfort of home seem like an attractive idea.



Andy Martin

- 1. 26%** of Americans do not use the Internet for private purposes.

41% of Europeans do not use the Internet for private purposes. The younger Europeans are, the more likely they are to be found online.

88% of Internet users are between the age of 14 and 29

33% of Internet users are between the age of 50 and 99
- The country with the largest percentage of Internet users is the Netherlands, whereas only half the Spanish population surfs the Net and a little over a third of Romanians do.

Netherlands	91%
Spain	49%
Romania	36%
- Most Europeans access the Internet from the comfort of their homes; some Europeans have fewer qualms than others about using the office computer for private purposes.

4% of Europeans access the Web for private use from the office:
10% Greeks access the Web for private use from the office:
9% Britons access the Web for private use from the office:
2% Belgians access the Web for private use from the office:
- When ranking the ways they use the Internet most for private purposes, Europeans picked **email** as their **number one choice**, followed by searching for general information, reading news and social networking like Facebook.

► See the complete survey results and methodology at WSJ.com/Lifestyle



Andy Martin

5. While on the Net...
Social networking is **most popular** in Turkey, U.K. and Greece

Social networking is **least popular** in Germany, Bulgaria and Rumania

Email occupies a **lot of time** for the Portuguese, Germans, Britons and Spaniards

Email occupies **less time** for Italians, Bulgarians and Swedes

6. Most Europeans expect the Internet to be free, but don't mind providers selling advertisements. A small percentage is even willing to pay for content that has advertisements.

42% Believe all content should be free, without advertisements

40% Believe all content should be free, but don't mind advertisements

4% Willing to pay for certain online content, even with advertisements

7. The willingness to pay for content varies greatly by country, with the Swedes being more eager to cough up cash than other Europeans are.

12% of Swedes will pay for content

1% of French, Italians and Germans will pay for content

8. Is the Internet good or bad for society? Most Europeans believe it is good for them, while some even consider it a very good thing. Italians and Turks believe the Internet has a "very bad" influence more so than other Europeans. Romanians, Poles and Spaniards think the Internet has a "very good" influence more so than other Europeans.

42% Total Europeans who say it has quite a good influence

36% Total Europeans who say it has neither a bad nor good influence

12% Total Europeans who say it has a very good influence

9. Most Europeans can be found using the Internet about two hours a day for private purposes. A quarter don't even go online every day.

Spend 1-2 hours online daily **36%**

Less than an hour daily **26%**

Not every day **25%**

10. The Turks are the most hooked on the Net for personal use, while the Germans are more likely to stay away from the computer screen.

9% of Turks are online more than 6 hours a day

42% of Germans are not going online every day

Magical Marrakech

Bruce Palling explores why the Moroccan city is seeing a luxury renaissance

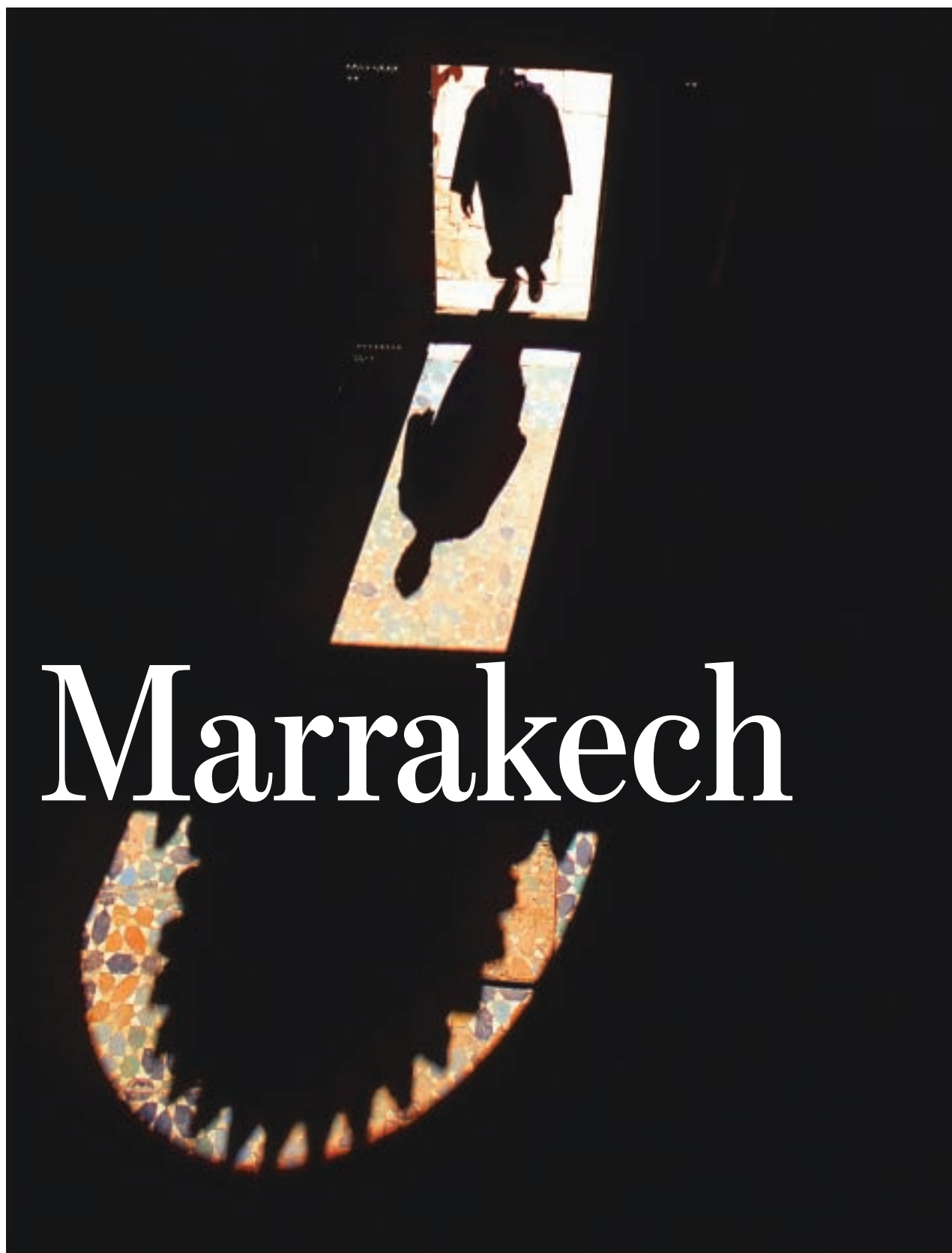
Photographs by Robert Leslie

IN 1938, GEORGE Orwell and his wife made their way to a Marrakech villa for the winter to help improve the author's health. Located in the fashionable Palmeraie district, the rent was £3 a month. Even then, the high-minded Orwell thought the population has "been hopelessly debauched by tourism," though he later confessed to a friend that he had "seldom tasted such bliss" as with the young Berber girls.

At the other end of the political spectrum, Winston Churchill was also seduced by the charms of Marrakech, though in his case it was La Mamounia Hotel. He described the hotel, with its 17 acres of gardens and views over the Atlas Mountains, as "the most lovely spot in the entire world." Half a century on, the Mamounia has just undergone a €100 million refit—and other major international hotel groups are flocking to the Moroccan city. Last month, Prince Albert of Monaco flew in to lay the inauguration stone for the €95 million Jawhar Estate development, which will be managed by the prestigious Société des Bains de Mer, which controls the Monte Carlo Casino. The Samanah Country Club, designed by Jack Nicklaus, also just opened and will offer private villas starting at €2 million. Perhaps the most lavish new hotel of all will be the Royal Mansour, owned by King Mohammed VI, with suites from €1,500 a day.

Amanresorts was the first upmarket hotel group to open here a decade ago. The Four Seasons, Mandarin-Oriental and Raffles, plus boutique groups such as Rocco Forte and Gordon Campbell Gray, are all expecting to open in the next two years. At the same time, the Medina, a Unesco World Heritage medieval walled city, has seen hundreds of foreigners purchase and restore riads, the traditional high-walled residences with internal courtyards or gardens. What makes this sprawling city within a city so appealing is the complete lack of any modern buildings, the burying of all overheard electricity and other cabling, and the rigorous implementation of a law stipulating that structures can't be more than two stories high, save for the occasional traditional mosque towers. The only blight on this compelling vista are the thousands of television dishes, all obediently pointing toward their satellite transmitters in the sky. The most vital component, though, is the existing culture to be found throughout the Medina and the vast Djemaa el Fna, Africa's largest open-air square, with its fire eaters, storytellers, snake charmers and musicians.

Individuals have also created comfortable hideaway hotels in the Medina, with the most renowned one being Vanessa Branson's Riad El Fenn. Ms. Branson, sister of Sir Richard, recently hosted the third Marrakech Arts Festival, with guests such as artist Julian Schnabel, film Director John Boorman and actress Kim Cattrall. Other part-time residents of the Medina and the Palmeraie now include Paloma Picasso, International Monetary Fund Managing Director Dominique Strauss-Kahn, French philosopher Bernard-Henri Lévy and fashion entrepreneur Pierre Bergé. This new generation of expatriates and travelers has helped establish Marrakech's status as the most sought after and stylish destination in all of North Africa. The growing



influx of Europeans and Americans into Marrakech and Morocco is all the more impressive given that this Islamic kingdom suffered al Qaeda inspired suicide bombings in Casablanca in 2003 and 2007.

Apart from the mystique and excitement of the Medina, there are several other reasons that explain the growing appeal of Marrakech: It is the most accessible exotic destination for European travelers, reachable in little more than three hours by plane; it has a variety of accommodations ranging from €50 riads to luxurious hotels and private villas in the Palmeraie that can cost €15,000 a week; and it offers a carefree lifestyle with perfect winter weather, where foreigners can own property relatively easily.

A mélange of these factors enticed Meryanne Loum-Martin to come here nearly 25 years ago, when she helped her family develop a holiday home in the Palmeraie. Her father was a Senegalese lawyer and diplomat, and her mother was from the French West Indies. At that time, the Palmeraie was merely a huge green belt of scrub and palm trees in a swathe to the north and east of Marrakech with a few dirt tracks intersecting it. Before the arrival of heavy pollution it was possible to see the snow-covered High Atlas Mountains throughout the year. Some adventurous European aristocrats and bohemians had built elegant adobe villas in the Palmeraie but it was quite remote from the rest of Marrakech. "What struck me during this period, was how this legendary city merely had La Mamounia, a Club Med and a few backpacker hotels to stay in, so I convinced my parents to let me construct a second villa to rent out," Ms. Loum-Martin says. This was merely the beginning of her expansion to her present complex of five large villas on an 20-acre plot. "People thought I was out of my mind but you have to go where your heart takes you."

The complex is heavily wooded with olive trees, palms and other shrubs and herbs, which are chosen because of their suitability to the arid conditions. A conscious decision was taken not to grow lawns because of their heavy thirst—instead the canopies of vegetation make efficient use of the well water pumped from the dwindling water table. Residents such as Ms. Loum-Martin are concerned about the unbridled development of irrigated golf courses because of the scarcity of water. "The problem is that while the

Please turn to next page



Left, the 16th-century Ben Youssef Medersa school, attached to the Ben Youssef Mosque; clockwise from top left, the roof work at Mamounia Hotel; Jnane Tamsna Villas in the Palmeraie; the about to be opened Mandarin Oriental; a carpet souk in the Medina; Riad El Farnatch in the heart of the Medina; the first-floor corridor of Riad El Fenn.





Clockwise, Julian Schnabel and Rula Jebreal, the writer of his new film based on her book 'Miral'; Vanessa Branson, the co-proprietor of Riad El Fenn; Meryanne Loum-Martin at her villa in the Palmeraie; Riad El Fenn.



Continued from previous page

vast influx of foreigners and wealthy Moroccans into the Palmeraie has brought much needed employment, it has been at the expense of natural resources, which are rapidly running down," she says. As a consequence, Ms. Loum-Martin is developing a 150-acre eco complex half an hour further out from Marrakech toward the Atlas Mountains called Jnane Ylane, which is set to open at the end of 2010.

Straddling both the resort nature of the Palmeraie and the intensity of the Medina, there is the zone called Guéliz, or the New Town, which French colonials developed in the Thirties. Despite the recent erection of rows of apartment buildings, it still has elements of French provincial charm, with its wide tree-lined avenues and a sprinkling of attractive bistros and quality retail outlets. A meeting place for Moroccans and the foreign community is Café du Livre, a pleasantly relaxed Internet café cum second-hand bookshop next to a three-star hotel that is run by Dutch born Sandra Zwollo, whose husband was headmaster of the American School in Marrakech.

Close to the Guéliz central market, Italian Lucien Viola has opened Galerie Rê, one of the most sophisticated art galleries in Marrakech. He exhibits local artists and normally has six or seven major exhibitions a year; he also runs a Berber textiles museum on the outskirts of Marrakech. He says that on his arrival 20 years ago, Marrakech was an entirely different expatriate scene, dominated by the Rothschilds, the Hermès and the Agnellis. Foreigners tended to drive around in Rolls-Royces and had scant interest in the local culture. "Now people are interested in good art and good living—and the gallery also has concerts, book signings, music evenings," he says. "Next year we are having a yoga performance with accompanying musicians."

Many Western artists or members of the so-called cultural crowd tend to live in the Medina, where they have purchased run-down riads for relatively cheap prices and made them into their own fantasy residences. One of the most spectacular modernist ones is owned by Dietrich Becker, the prominent London-based German banker, while nearby artist and writer Danny Moynihan and his wife, actress Katrina Boorman, have created their own local residence. "The Moroccans all want to move out of here to the leafy suburbs because they consider the Medina to be cold and damp," Mr. Moynihan says.

Next door to the Moynihans, Wasfi Kani, the British Opera impresario, has carved her house out of a section of the old pasha's palace. "I love the fact that there are still amazing craftsmen working in the *souk* and a feeling that the local culture is incredibly strong and vibrant," she says. "There is also the rather appealing way that store owners will only beseech you to buy their wares when you are directly in front of their shops and not otherwise."

The recent five-day Marrakech Arts Festival held a series of exhibitions, discussions and film screenings throughout the city. Apart from the screenings of participating film directors such as Mr. Schnabel and James Marsh, the literary gatherings and poetry readings had an intimate house-party feel to them. James Fenton, the former Oxford professor of poetry, read his work in the small courtyard of an ancient riad along with Moroccan and French poets. Novelists Raffaella Barker, Ahdaf Soueif and Andrew O'Hagan held literary gatherings while restaurateur Mourad Mazouz from London's Momo and Sketch cooked lunch on the roof of Riad El Fenn.

As for the future of Marrakech, some residents have voiced concern, saying that they have observed more drunkenness and bad behaviour since the advent of the ultra-budget airlines, such as Ryanair and easyJet in the past two years. On the outskirts of Marrakech, a huge nightclub disco called Pacha has been created where up to 3,000 people fly in from France and elsewhere for weekends of nonstop dancing to music played by leading European disc jockeys. There have been few specific complaints because the revellers are relatively isolated from Marrakech itself, but residents fear it could lead to the growth of more all-night events.

Ironically, the success of the budget airlines appears to have driven other carriers off the route. Currently there are no direct flights from British Airways or Air France while Royal Air Maroc only flies via Casablanca. With the coming explosion in luxury accommodation, partially inspired by the modernist King Mohammed VI, there threatens to be a shortage of flight capacity to Marrakech. One luxury-travel specialist in London says many of its clients refuse to travel on budget airlines to hotels that cost upward of €1,000 a night. "People have to make up their mind because it really comes down to either easyJet or private jet," travel consultant Alice Daunt of Earth London said.

Marrakech however, has shown impressive resilience, regardless of all the development in the past decade. Despite the thousands of expatriates who have arrived, traditional cohesive values are strong and the markets still retain their original allure. Vanessa Branson says she began the Marrakech Arts Festival as a bridge between Islamic and Western cultures—and also as a way of paying back the city for being so generous to her. "You have to be careful not to get too nostalgic about the disappearance of the wizened old men on their donkeys or complain because a KFC opens for the Moroccan market. Infant mortality is falling and literacy is rising with a lot more women graduating as doctors and lawyers. People love to moan, but you can't stand still—I really respect Marrakech for that."

—Bruce Palling is a writer based in London.

WHERE TO STAY

Riad Farnatchi

A small and stylish riad created by a prominent British hotelier hidden away in the Medina.
www.riadfarnatchi.com

La Mamounia

One of the international grand dames, it just emerged from a €100 million facelift and now includes a French restaurant from the Michelin-starred Jean-Pierre Vigato.
www.mamounia.com

Riad el Fenn

Vanessa Branson's hip hotel with two pools and a rooftop restaurant.
www.riadelfenn.com

Amanjena

A retreat on the edge of Marrakech for guests who want to unwind and relax in a perfectly run resort.
www.amanresorts.com

Jnane Tamsna

A series of five beautiful villas in the Palmeraie that can be rented in their entirety or on a room-by-room basis.
www.jnanetamsna.com

WHERE TO EAT

Dar Yacout

The most stylish traditional Moroccan restaurant; be sure you have an appetite as portions are large and endless. +212 52438 2929

Le Comptoir

The most fashionable French/Moroccan restaurant in the Medina.
www.comptoirdarna.com

Le Grand Café de la Poste

A left bank bistro experience in Gueliz with shades of 'Casablanca' (the film, not the city).
+212 52443 3038

The rise of Lebanese fashion

BY BROOKE ANDERSON

THE NOMINATIONS HAVEN'T been announced yet, but Lebanese designers are already busy making dresses that will likely appear on celebrities during next year's award season.

"This is the time of year we start our [haute] couture collection for Paris fashion week in January," says George Chakra, who designed Helen Mirren's dress when she won the 2007 Oscar for best actress. "It's usually from these fashion shows that celebrities pick their dresses."

At the beginning of the year, Lebanese designers Elie Saab and Rabih Kayrouz participated in the semi-annual weeklong haute-couture fashion show in Paris as part of the prestigious Chambre Syndicale de la Haute Couture. Zuhair Murad, Mr. Chakra and Georges Hobeika showed their collections on their own during the same week, making the total of Lebanese designers who debuted their work in Paris at least five. Mr. Chakra calls this phenomenon "the Lebanese invasion," similar to the 1980s when Japanese designers burst onto the scene.

Beirut's emergence as a fashion city is relatively recent. When Halle Berry won for best actress in 2002, Mr. Saab became the first Lebanese to dress an Oscar winner, making him an overnight sensation. Today, the clothes of Mr. Saab and other Lebanese designers are regularly spotted at red-carpet events.

Lebanese evening gowns vary in style, from clean and simple to fully studded. But what they seem to have in common is their "wearability" and the fact that they find inspiration from their cultural heritage, often long and flowing, and with intricate stitching.

"When you see an Arab dress on the red carpet, you know it," says Amine Jreissati, fashion editor for Marie Claire Arabia. "The culture is in the dress, in the cut and the shape, with layers and movement. And there's also the embroidery. It's these small details that make a difference."

The Lebanese have a long tradition of clothes-making and embroidery. In the old neighborhoods of Beirut, one can still find small ready-to-wear clothing stores operated by local designers, textile shops selling materials for the country's thriving custom-made suit business, and tailors on nearly every street repairing clothes on-the-spot at their shops, often the size of closets.

Designer Reem Acra has spent most of her life outside of her native Lebanon, but she remembers with nostalgia the Saturday afternoon shopping trips she took with her mother downtown to buy fabric at the souks of Beirut. Today, at her office in New York, she still has the first piece she designed at age seven, a white empire dress made of guipere lace. "I understood fashion at a young age," says Ms. Acra, crediting her upbringing in Beirut for her design savvy. "I would have designed the dress the same way today."

A walk through the streets of Beirut, which is a Mecca for people-watching with its outdoor cafes and vibrant nightlife, shows how Lebanese styles are influenced by their country's French connection and their own tradition as the most liberal city in the Arab world. It was in this setting that Mr. Saab was raised,

during the pre-war, Lebanese golden era of the 1960s and 70s, in a city that inspired him to become a fashion designer, despite the fact that there were no prominent haute-couture designers at the time.

"I grew up surrounded by beautiful women. Lebanese women are always elegant, and they're an example for the rest of the Arab world," says Mr. Saab, wide-eyed and smiling as he sketches a dress on a pad of paper at his boutique in downtown Beirut, the first neighborhood to be nearly fully restored following the end of the country's civil war nearly 20 years ago. (During the 2006 summer war, downtown Beirut wasn't hit.)

Today, across the street from Elie Saab is the showroom of Zuhair Murad, a relative newcomer, whose gowns have appeared on Miley Cyrus, among other celebrities. In a country that is known more for war than anything else, and where the most talented professionals tend to settle abroad, the presence of these fashion house headquarters in the middle of Beirut is significant.

Designer Rabih Kayrouz admits that he never expected to return to his home country after finishing his studies in Paris. "I came back to Beirut for an exhibition, and then decided to stay," recalls Mr. Kayrouz, who returned in 1990, the year Lebanon's civil war ended. "It was the post-war period, and something amazing was happening. A lot of people were coming back, and everyone wanted to contribute."

His homecoming also coincided with the success of the then-budding Mr. Saab. "Elie Saab opened the door," says Mr. Kayrouz, at his boutique near downtown Beirut. "He really launched Lebanese fashion everywhere. When I say I'm from Lebanon, everyone answers 'Elie Saab.' I'm really happy that he paved the way for me and put Lebanon on the map."

Now, Mr. Kayrouz believes it is his turn to encourage a new generation of Lebanese fashion designers. Through a nonprofit organization called Starch that he established last year, young designers have a venue downtown to showcase their collections for six months, and then get support in launching their own brands. "I have experience, and I can share that with people getting started," says Mr. Kayrouz. "I believe this industry should evolve and rejuvenate."

Ronald Abdala, a young designer who graduated from St. Martin's College in London in 2004, is grateful for the mentorship in his field, but would also like to see Lebanese designers take more risks. "Lebanese designers have done everything right. Now we're in demand," says Mr. Abdala. "But we need to push the envelope."

Linda Selwood Choueiri, who launched Lebanon's first BA in fashion design in 2006 at Notre Dame University in Louaize, agrees. She is hoping the course will encourage young designers to launch careers in their home country. She says, "Give us another five years, and there will be a real boom."

—Brooke Anderson is a writer based in Beirut.



From the top: Elie Saab's spring/summer 2010 ready-to-wear collection in Paris; Georges Chakra's couture spring/summer 2009 runway look; a dress from Mr. Chakra's autumn/winter 2007-08 couture collection.

Elie Saab, Georges Chakra (2)

Arbitrage



Dior ladies' wallet

Note: Prices of black patent Lady Dior Voyageur, plus taxes, as provided by retailers in each city, averaged and converted into euros.

City	Local currency	€
New York	\$574	€389
London	£360	€397
Paris	€400	€400
Rome	€420	€420
Brussels	€445	€445
Hong Kong	HK\$5,100	€446



A different sort of adventure

Wealthy travelers seek out alternative holidays such as volunteering trips, retreats and slum tours

BY DAVID BAIN

WHEN IT COMES to their holidays, the wealthy are slumming it—literally.

Switzerland-based luxury-holiday company Kuoni plans to role out a host of slum visits next spring for educational and philanthropic interest to its wealthiest customers.

“Based on the popularity of our trips to Dharavi, Asia’s biggest slum, many of our wealthiest clients are asking for similar trips,” said Peter Rothwell, chief executive of the Kuoni Group.

The travel group is currently

planning itineraries to slums in Southeast Asia and Africa. Even trips to deprived housing areas in the U.S. are being considered.

“Since the downturn, demand has been strong for ‘giving back’ and volunteering holidays,” said Mr. Rothwell.

“We are witnessing many more requests to get under the skin of a country and to engage with locals or traditional and authentic experiences unique to the destination being visited.”

Trips to slums and other offbeat locations—especially those in areas

of the world that are still difficult to get to—are increasingly popular among the wealthy. Geoff Kent, founder of luxury travel company Abercrombie & Kent, said so-called “experiential” travel have become a much more important part of his business in the last year, with bookings up 10%. He says: “Our clients want experiences. They want to acquire knowledge when traveling.”

The 67-year-old veteran of the luxury-travel industry says many of the people that go on the bespoke holidays his company organizes also want to feel they are putting something back into the communities they are visiting.

Abercrombie & Kent has launched A&K Philanthropy, which organizes trips to projects supported by the travel company. Clients often commit their own money to these charitable endeavours and follow their progress for years afterward, says Mr. Kent. He adds: “This has been one of the biggest growth areas for us in the last few years.”

The wealthy may be giving a little back when they go on holiday but they certainly don’t appear to be skimping on what they spend on themselves. A recent survey by accountancy firm PricewaterhouseCoopers showed that, despite the global recession, very few of the wealthy are cutting back on their annual holiday.

Of the 7,000 wealthy individuals asked about what they would save money on during the downturn, only 18% said their main holiday. Designer labels and restaurant meals fared much worse in the poll.

Guy Gillon, leisure director at PricewaterhouseCoopers, says: “Despite being a big-ticket item, this consumer preference has partially insulated luxury-travel operators from the discretionary spending cull felt elsewhere in the market.”

Mr. Gillon says that it is the merely well off travelers rather than the high net worth travelers who have been most affected by the downturn. Kuoni recently orga-

nized a three-week holiday for two people in the Caribbean costing \$250,000. Mr. Rothwell says: “There’s little downturn at the very top. These clients have booked again for this year.”

But, although the wealthy are still spending plenty of money on holidays, luxury travelers appear to be going on different types of holidays in a variety of new destinations. The recession has fueled demand in yoga retreats, especially those involving some form of deprivation.

The Ashram Health Retreat in California bans talking for five hours a day and costs more than \$4,000 a week, excluding travel. The retreat claims demand has never been as strong since the onset of the credit crisis. One recent guest from Europe, who didn’t want to be named, says: “You don’t drink, eat much or get to do much more than walk and yoga—the rich love it.”

Health spas involving punishing crash diet regimes are also popular. The Mayr Clinic in Austria, where clients can be expected to lose up to 40 pounds in a week if they adhere to the strict diet regime—and colonic irrigation—is busier than ever. Bespoke programs cost from around \$2,000 a week and they are popular among wealthy City of London bankers.

Mr. Kent says some of his other wealthy clients are renting villas to house several generations of their family on the holiday. He says: “They prefer villas to suites in hotels because they get to see the whole family more of the time. In a hotel, family members tend to do their own thing.”

Mr. Kent says villas tend to be used as holiday “headquarters,” from which the family goes on expeditions. Mr. Kent says that many of his clients are favoring experiences over relaxation, and rival luxury-travel operators are also reporting a fall in demand for traditional “sea and sun” holidays. A&K says bookings for beach holidays are down between 7%-10% in the last year.

“Beach holidays are no longer popular,” says Mr. Kent. “Many of our clients don’t want to sit around a beach all day anymore.”

Images of the slopes

BLOOMSBURY AUCTIONS IS holding its first ever sale of winter-sports posters on Monday in London. Meanwhile, Christie’s South Kensington, a long-time leader in the vintage poster market, will have its annual ski sale on Jan. 21.

Collecting

MARGARET STUDER

“The demand is there as people buy the resorts they love,” says Bloomsbury’s international poster consultant, Richard Barclay.

Switzerland is at the top of the league table, says Mr. Barclay, followed closely by France and Italy, and then Germany and Austria. Glamorous resorts led by Switzerland’s glitzy St. Moritz attract the most money.

Other major collector magnets include Switzerland’s fashionable Gstaad, Klosters and Zermatt, along with France’s Chamonix and Val d’Isère. A number of factors drive the market: the images tend to be striking because the posters were made for advertising. Posters were often destroyed after use, so rarity plays a role.

A powerful image at Bloomsbury will be “Montana” (1940), featuring a man in blue, racing for the finishing line against a backdrop of high mountains in Switzerland’s national ski championships (estimate: £2,500-£3,500). “St. Moritz” (1952) by Hugo Laubi is a spectacular image of horses thundering across the snow in the resort’s famous White Turf races (estimate: £1,400-£1,800). A wonderful poster by Albert Muret from circa 1910 shows a group of priests struggling on wooden skies as they come down the Grand Saint-Bernard, watched by their famous dogs (£2,500-£3,500). Mr. Barclay has this poster hanging in the entrance of the converted vicarage where he lives in France.

Christie’s January poster sale includes some remarkable images as well. “Zermatt” (1931) by Pierre Kramer shows a futuristic, blue-and-white picture with an elongated jumper, skis aloft and arms outstretched against the majestic Matterhorn (estimate: £3,000-£5,000). “Pontresina” (1959) by Martin Peikert is a picture of a woman in bright yellow ski gear stretching her legs across the mountain village toward a smiling, yellow sun (estimate: £1,500-£2,000).



‘Pontresina’ (1959) by Martin Peikert, estimated at £1,500-2,000.



Above, a canoeing safari in Zambia. Left, an expedition to the Arctic Circle.



DreamWorks Studios (2)

Heaven, earth and anguish in between

PETER JACKSON'S FILM version of "The Lovely Bones," like Alice Sebold's widely admired novel, is partly set in an "inbetween" that occupies an ethereal space between heaven and earth. I watched the film in an agitated space between engrossed and aghast.

Film

JOE MORGENSTERN

I don't know how you give yourself fully to a film or a book that turns on a young girl's death at the hands of a monstrous pervert. I mean that literally, not judgmentally. I don't know how to do it, I didn't do it and I'm not one of the millions who found the novel a moving expression of religious faith.

Still, there's much to admire in the film, starting with several superb performances: Saoirse Ronan as Susie, the anguishingly innocent victim; Stanley Tucci as Mr. Harvey, Susie's killer and a diabolical machine doing a convincing impersonation of a human being; Mark Wahlberg as Susie's father, Rachel Weisz as her mother and Rose McIver as her younger sister. (Susan Sarandon

plays Susie's lusty grandmother: It would have been better if she hadn't.)

"I loved the way a photo could capture a moment before it was gone," Susie says. She had wanted to be a photographer, and accidentally snapped a shot of her killer-to-be. Mr. Jackson and his cinematographer, Andrew Lesnie, capture some lovely moments: Susie watching her father build a ship in a bottle; the sweet expression on her face as she cycles past her home, Instamatic at the ready; her wonderment when, as a little girl, she contemplates a penguin inside a snow globe. But the details of her death are horrific, even though we're spared the worst of them. (The most terrifying shot may be the most placid; her killer enjoying a soak in a hot tub). The back-and-forth structure of the narrative—Susie living life, Susie observing life after her death—can be maddening. And the film doesn't sustain much interest as a detective story, even though it devotes a lot of time to solving the crime.

Then there's the problem of that inbetween. Reading the book, we create our own visions; that's the unique magic of literature. Watching the play that strongly influenced the book, Thornton Wilder's

"Our Town," we can do something of the same, since the stage is bare and the governing principle is simplicity verging on austerity. But simplicity is not exactly the principle that governs Peter Jackson's movie.

Mr. Jackson is, of course, our reigning master of fantasy; his "Lord of the Rings" trilogy is a landmark in the history of cinema. It's easy to see why he might have been attracted to "The Lovely Bones," which shares themes of fantasy and murder with "Heavenly Creatures," the brilliant 1994 feature that put him on the international map. And at this point in his working life he can use the prodigious resources of Weta, his production facility, to conjure up infinite worlds of special effects. Which, heaven help us, is exactly what he has done.

The result is dumbfounding and ludicrous in equal measure, a too-muchness that makes the excesses of "What Dreams May Come" seem like deft understatements. If the Reader's Digest did music videos they might look like this. The screen pulses with bathos and swirls with surreal images, some of them shamelessly intercut with the life of Susie's bereaved family on earth—giant ships in giant bottles, fields of daisies, butterflies, cute dogs, cherry

blossoms, baobab trees out of "The Little Prince," a hot-air balloon, ice sculptures, snow-covered mountains, a gazebo in a lake, the same gazebo in a corn field, the same field lit by a lighthouse. By the time Susie finally ascended to the highest realm, I was not only aghast but so exhausted by her surfeit of experience that I heard, as if touched by magic myself, those deathless lyrics from Talking Heads: "Heaven is a place where nothing ever happens..."

WSJ.com

Opening this week in Europe

- Adam Germany
- Bright Star Belgium
- Land of the Lost Italy
- Sin Nombre Sweden
- The Limits of Control U.K.
- The Road Greece
- The Soloist Germany
- Where the Wild Things Are Denmark, Lithuania, Norway, Turkey, U.K.
- Zombieland Germany, Greece

Source: IMDb

WSJ.com subscribers can read reviews of these films and others at WSJ.com/FilmReview

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Above and top, Oscar nominee Saoirse Ronan stars as Susie Salmon in 'The Lovely Bones.'

❖ Top Picks

In Paris, 'Andrea Chénier' dazzles, 'Platée' sparkles

PARIS: For opera lovers, the December double-header at the Opéra National de Paris is full of good tidings for the holidays.

At the Bastille, the new production of Umberto Giordano's "Andrea Chénier," a dramatic tale of doomed love set during the French Revolution, offers vocal fireworks in both major and minor roles, while the Palais Garnier sparkles with the effervescent fantasy of Jean-Philippe Rameau's 1745 "Platée," a mythological farce pairing Jupiter and a princess frog.

After the almost painfully old-fashioned "Mireille" that opened the 2009 season, the new "Andrea Chénier" offers further proof that Nicolas Joel, the new head of the

Paris opera, has ended the controversial era of heavy-handed, convention-flouting productions of his predecessor, Gérard Mortier.

Based loosely on a historic character, the opera recounts a fictional story of love, jealousy and betrayal as the idealistic young poet Chénier and the former servant-turned-revolutionary Gérard fight over the aristocratic Maddalena, while around them the Revolution descends into a bloodbath.

Staged by veteran Italian director Giancarlo del Monaco, the first two acts of the four-act opera are a return to the late 19th-century opulence of the old days, with elaborate decors and sumptuous period costumes. Old-fashioned, yes, but in this case the oversized chandeliers, painted faces and powdered wigs are a perfect parody of the excesses of the *Ancien Régime*. And while Act II goes overboard with revolutionary crowds wildly agitating blue-white-and-red banners that are not quite French flags, the last acts are simple, somber and subdued, allowing the music itself to shine.

Giordano's score provides each of the three principals with at least one superb, show-stopping aria, and the cast does them full justice. On opening night, Argentinian tenor Marcelo Alvarez brought the house down twice in the title role. Italian soprano Micaela Carosi, after a shaky start, brings a big, voluptuous voice to a touching portrayal of Maddalena, and Russian baritone Sergei Murazev manages to convey Gérard's ambivalence as he seeks to destroy his rival.



Mireille Delunsch (La Folie) and dancers in 'Platée'; below: Micaela Carosi (Maddalena di Coigny) and Marcelo Alvarez (Andrea Chénier) in Andrea Chénier.

Opera national de Paris/ Christian Leiber

'Platée'

First performed at Versailles in 1745 as part of the festivities surrounding the royal wedding of the Dauphin Louis de France, Platée created a revolution of a different sort—it was the first purely comic French opera, which up to then had been limited to tragedy, opera-ballets or gentle pastorales. Platée is a parody of all those traditional forms, starting with its goofy mythological plot: Mercury and Citheron cook up a ruse to help Jupiter cure his wife Juno's fiery jealousy, by setting up a mock romance with Platée, a famously unattractive but self-im-

portant marsh nymph.

Director Laurent Pelly turns the ruse into an endlessly inventive romp, with his own delirious costumes, clever sets by Chantal Thomas and perfectly integrated, precise, whirlwind choreography by Laura Scozzi, which seems to echo Rameau's wonderfully expressive music almost note for note. Wearing a gleaming silver rock-star suit with a silver punk hairstyle to match, tenor Yann Beuron is in better voice than ever as Mercury. François Lis is suitably arrogant as Jupiter, arriving via descending chandelier with an armful of explod-

ing fireworks. Soprano Mireille Delunsch steals several scenes as the allegorical La Folie, wearing a plumed white wig and a hoop-skirted gown made of music sheets, occasionally tearing one off to sing from it. And in the title role, Paul Agnew, wearing a greenery-printed bodysuit and a pouffy pink flower-petal skirt, is sensational in the title role—a perfectly "ridiculous nymph" as the libretto says, but a marvelous tenor when the nymph starts to sing. —Judy Fayard
"Andrea Chénier" until Dec. 24
"Platée" until Dec. 30
www.operadeparis.fr



Opera national de Paris/ Mirco Magliocco

Victoria & Albert Museum's important new galleries open

LONDON: The Victoria & Albert Museum's 10 new Medieval and Renaissance galleries have just opened, spanning the vast east wing of the museum. The sequence of displays is roughly chronological, from 300 to 1600, and their themes range from the domestic interior to sacred spaces; they show objects in their cultural context, and several of them haven't been on display for many years. The scale of the V&A's changes is breathtaking, as they incorporate the entire façade of a London house, a three-story carved wood stairway, archways, windows and balconies of buildings, and a multitude of monumental sculptures.

As the V&A's brief covers art and design, there is almost no object

that is excluded from its embrace. But some of those dating from the historical period in the new galleries are of world importance—from the tiny, such as Leonardo's notebooks and Michaelangelo's wax sculpture, to the gigantic, such as the rood loft or choir screen from Saint John's Cathedral of 's-Hertogenbosch in the Netherlands.

The logical, but exhausting, way to view the collection is by starting at the chronological beginning on the lower ground floor with the fascinating exhibit that defines Europe from the beginning of this era to the dawn of the 17th century, and climbing the stairs up to Sir Paul Pindar's timber-framed, pre-Great Fire of London House. Along the way you will probably have reached the con-

clusion that the division of the period into Medieval and Renaissance is too slippery to be sustained, as the predominance and power of antiquity and Christian art weave in and out of what you're looking at. The opening of these new galleries is a major cultural event.

On the ground floor is one of those fun temporary shows the V&A does so well. "Decode: Digital Design Sensations" shows cutting-edge developments in digital and interactive design by 35 international artists and designers. The "code" in question is computer-programming code, which the artists have used to make patterns that are patently beautiful. —Paul Levy

Until April 11
www.vam.ac.uk/decode



'Flight Patterns' (2006) by Aaron Koblin.

image.net



Hugo Glendinning

A 'Rothko' tour de force at the Donmar in London

LONDON: This has been a vintage year for new plays, and John Logan's "Red" at the Donmar is high on the roll of honor. Mr. Logan zooms in on a key episode in the life of Mark Rothko, when one of the greatest painters of the last century decided to reject a high-prestige commission to make a series of paint-

Alfred Molina (Rothko) and Eddie Redmayne (Ken) in 'Red.'

ings to decorate the walls of the Four Seasons Restaurant in the Seagram Building.

Rothko abandoned the project in December 1959. Having gone with his second wife to the chic restaurant, he realized that it was impossible to display his intensely emotive color-field paintings in the elegant surroundings. Rothko had intended them to be subversive, to "ruin diners' appetites, stop the clink of knife and fork, force the gob-

blers to face the eternal," as Simon Schama's program essay says, but he realized it would never work.

Mr. Logan's play, set in Rothko's New York studio during 1958-59, is a two-hander for the Russian Jewish immigrant painter and his studio assistant, an aspiring painter called Ken, whose own back-story is gripping. Michael Grandage directs two of Britain's finest actors, Alfred Molina as Rothko and Eddie Redmayne as the assistant. In the 100-minute,

no-interval drama, the actors struggle magnificently with each other and the paintings. The scene in which they prepare a canvas, applying the brown ground in a choreographed frenzy, is orgasmic in its intensity.

The single flaw in the production are the replica paintings—but by the end of this miraculous evening, even that doesn't matter.

—Paul Levy

Until Feb. 6
www.donmarwarehouse.com

Winston Churchill, Distilled

By Jonathan Foreman

London

Paul Johnson has over three decades produced a series of serious best sellers, all of which present a refreshingly revisionist take on their subjects.

Now, at 81 and after years of producing enormous, compulsively readable history books, Mr. Johnson has just written what, at 192 pages, is probably the shortest biography of Winston Churchill ever published.

It came about, he says, because the head of Viking Penguin approached him "saying that young people are very interested in Winston Churchill but we find they are most reluctant to read long books. . . . She said do you think you could do a short biography, and I said, 'It's a cinch!'"

He gives credit to his success as a historian to his simultaneous and successful career in journalism. "You learn all sorts of tools as a journalist that come in extremely useful when you're writing history," he tells me as we sit in the drawing room of the West London house he shares with his wife, Marigold, "and one is the ability to condense quite complicated events into a few short sentences without being either inaccurate or boring. And of course a lot of the best historians were also journalists." He cites Thomas Babington Macaulay, the French historians François Guizot and Adolphe Thiers, and Churchill himself, "a very good journalist and in his

own way a superb historian. . . . One of the things I hope this little book will do is persuade people to read Churchill's own books. 'My Early Life' is one of the best volumes of autobiography ever written—it's an enchanting book, full of fun and humor."

Mr. Johnson's own journalistic career meant that he spent considerable time with other 20th-century leaders, ranging from Charles de Gaulle, Konrad Adenauer and Ronald Reagan to "that windbag" Fidel Castro, giving his Churchill portrait added depth.

Mr. Johnson met Churchill himself in October 1946 when he was a boy about to go up to Oxford. "He gave me one of his giant matches he used for lighting cigars. I was emboldened by that into saying, 'Mr. Winston Churchill, sir, to what do you attribute your success in life?' and he said without hesitating: 'Economy of effort. Never stand up when you can sit down, and never sit down when you can lie down.' And he then got into his limo."

The book includes refutations of many of the negative myths that

have grown up around Churchill. For instance, that he was drunk for much of World War II. "He ap-

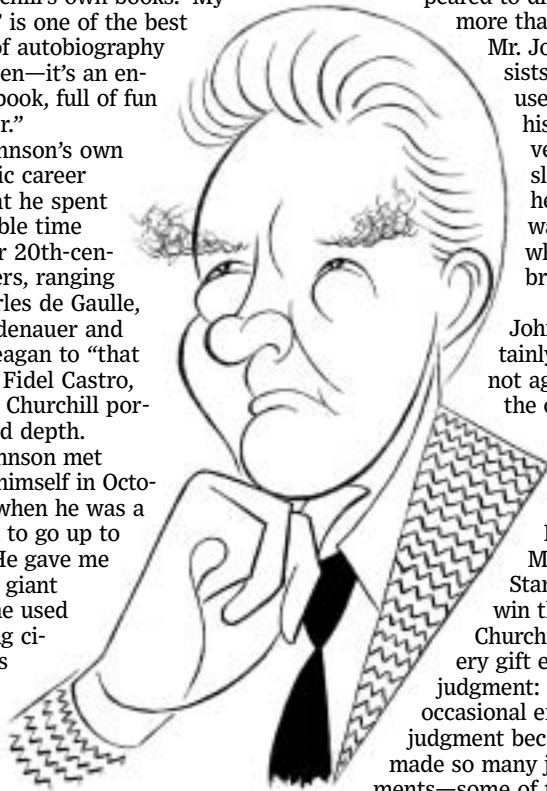
peared to drink much more than he did,"

Mr. Johnson insists. "He used to sip his drinks very, very slowly, and he always watered his whisky and brandy."

Mr. Johnson certainly does not agree with the often-echoed criticism

made by Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin that Churchill had every gift except judgment: "He made occasional errors of judgment because he made so many judgments—some of them

were bound to be wrong! . . . On the whole, his judgment was proved to be right. He was right before the First World War in backing a more decent civilized society when he and Lloyd George created the elements of old-age pensions and things like that. He was right about the need to face up to Hitler



Ken Fallin

and he was right about the Cold War that the Russians had to be resisted and we had to rearm."

He is convinced that "Churchill was more than half American . . . all of his real qualities generally come from his mother's side." And despite Mr. Johnson's own Oxford education (he was there with Margaret Thatcher), he believes that Churchill benefited from never having gone to college: "He never learned any of the bad intellectual habits you can pick up at university, and it explains the extraordinary freshness with which he came to all sorts of things, especially English literature."

Mr. Johnson also likes to emphasize the importance that painting played in Churchill's life. Churchill took up the brush after the Dardanelles disaster in World War I, and Mr. Johnson, an accomplished artist himself, believes that his prolific hobby helped him overcome depression for the rest of his life.

And the Dardanelles debacle taught Churchill about leadership in war. "Churchill got the blame, but in fact he never had the power to do it properly. He was determined in 1940, when he took over, to concentrate a great deal of power in himself. That's why he made himself minister of defense as well as prime minister."

Mr. Johnson says he learns something new about the craft of writing with every new book. This time, he found that "you can do a huge subject in a small num-

ber of words provided you are ruthless. You have to be as ruthless as Napoleon, who told Metternich that he didn't care if a million men were killed if he achieved his objective."

On a good day he can produce between 3,000 and 4,000 words, he says, all written in longhand, now that electric typewriters are no longer made. And he has "never employed research assistants of any kind," adding with a twinkle, "I am an old cottage industry."

And what did he learn about Churchill in writing his book? "He really created the Middle East in its modern form. Iraq and Jordan, he completely made them. And he made it possible for the state of Israel to exist."

At one point Mr. Johnson told me that "one of the marvelous things about Churchill is that whatever he was doing, whether fighting or arguing or despairing or bouncing about full of energy, jokes are never far away." And though Mr. Johnson believes his own best book is the highly praised "Birth of the Modern," his personal favorite is "Intellectuals," a collection of biting essays that take (mostly leftist) gurus like Voltaire and John Paul Sartre to task for personal failings ranging from adultery to incontinence. He likes it, he says, "because it has the best jokes. . . . Books must have jokes. People have to be amused because life is so sad."

Mr. Foreman is writer at large for *Standpoint* magazine.

Bookshelf / By Albert Pyle

A Few Clues From a Master

About to enter her 10th decade, Baroness James of Holland Park—known as P.D. James to millions of readers—steps back from writing her own suave, thoughtful detective novels to discuss the entire genre: what makes detective novels work, why they are so broadly appealing and which authors have written the best ones over the years. "Talking About Detective Fiction" is a short book, but it has heft, and little wonder, given Lady James's literary mastery and deep familiarity with her subject.

Talking About Detective Fiction

By P.D. James

(The Bodleian Library, 144 pages, £12.99)

P.D. James fits into the select group of British writers who long supported themselves by working at nonwriting jobs, a set that includes the postal employee Anthony Trollope and the civil servant C.P. Snow. Lady James spent three decades in the trenches of the British civil service, including stints at the criminal-law and police departments of the Home Office. The experience seems to have given her an understanding of cops, suspects and victims as real people leading real lives. And her long-ago instruction at the excellent Cambridge High School

(no university degree—take that, A.S. Byatt!) apparently instilled in her an admirably precise prose style. Her literary sensibility—calm observation and exact description—is on ample display in "Talking About Detective Fiction."

In an opening chapter that brings in both Trollope and Charles Dickens, Lady James sends the reader speeding to the Austen shelf to pull down "the most interesting example of a mainstream novel which is also a detective story." That would be "Emma," Jane Austen's tale of the young, self-appointed matchmaker Emma Woodhouse, who is not as clever as she thinks. What is the secret in the novel? The "unrecognized relationships" between characters caught up in Emma's romantic machinations, says Lady James, adding: "The story is confined to a closed society in a rural setting, which was to become common in detective fiction, and Jane Austen deceives us with cleverly constructed clues."

Then it's on to Wilkie Collins, whose "The Moonstone" (1868)—about the theft of a diamond and attempts to solve the crime—gets her vote for being the first detective novel. Next is a chapter on Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes and G.K. Chesterton's Father Brown, the cleric-detective in "The Blue Cross" and dozens of other short stories. Conan Doyle has had nearly as much written about him as Tiger

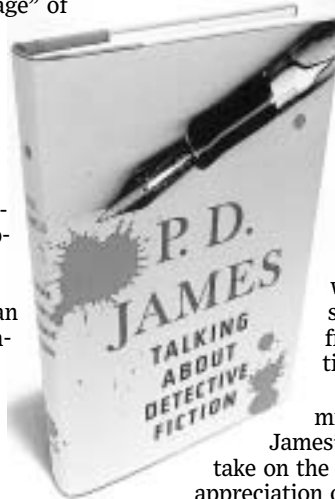
Woods, but the now unfashionable Chesterton is in danger of being lost to the mainstream, so it's nice to see attention being paid to a "novelist, essayist, critic, journalist and poet" who was also "one of the most brilliant writers of the short detective story."

The Victorian groundwork having been laid, Lady James moves on to the "golden age" of detective fiction, commonly defined as the era between the world wars. She notes, though, that one work generally regarded as a golden-age classic was published in 1913: E.C. Bentley's "Trent's Last Case," about an amateur sleuth's investigation of the murder of a financier at his country house. Bentley meant the book as a genre satire—Trent falls in love with the widow, and he doesn't solve the crime—but it ended up being vastly admired for its innovations by other detective-fiction writers. Lady James thinks that the book ushered in the great stuff.

For which there were rules. Ronald Knox, a Roman Catholic priest and detective-fiction author, laid out the genre's 10 commandments in the preface to "Best De-

detective Stories 1928-1929," a volume he edited. The most important stricture may be that all clues available to the detective must be made available to the reader. Without observance of that rule, it's an unfair game for the armchair detective. Nowadays, when most modern crime novels don't observe the fair-play rule, readers don't seem to mind—books sell in the millions even without offering the pleasure of matching wits with the central detective. Or with the humanities-department head. Or the Hopi shaman. Or whoever is doing the solving in the current free-for-all of detective fiction.

If there is anything missing from Lady James's carefully respectful take on the golden age, it is an appreciation of the great sense of fun that comes through in the work of writers such as Edmund Crispin ("The Moving Toyshop," about a dead body in a toyshop—both vanish) and the barrister Cyril Hare ("Tragedy at Law," about an investigation into threats against a pompous circuit-riding judge). But then one doesn't pick up P.D. James looking for a laugh. There's psychological insight aplenty, but no police jokes.



Lady James is at her most surgically analytical in discussing "Four Formidable Women," authors who were known as the "queens of crime" during the golden age. Dorothy L. Sayers and Agatha Christie will be familiar to many; they are linked with Margery Allingham, whose aristocratic detective Albert Campion solved mysteries from the 1930s to the 1960s, and Ngaio Marsh, who wove her interest in the theater and art into her tales about investigations by detective Roderick Alleyn. Taking a cool, clear look at the quartet as storytellers and illustrators of social history, Lady James pays homage to their craftsmanship but scrupulously notes such shortcomings as Christie's lack of psychological credibility and Marsh's persistent if forgivable snobbery.

In the final chapter, "Today and a Glimpse of Tomorrow," Lady James politely ignores the growing plague of recipe-based and chatty, dilettante-driven whodunits, focusing instead on the increase in psychological and social realism. She notes approvingly the concern for rendering believable portraits of people at work and play in modern detective fiction. As well she might. It is a realm she mastered and over which she graciously reigns.

Mr. Pyle is the executive director of the *Mercantile Library* in Cincinnati, Ohio.

time off

Amsterdam

photography

"Photography—in Reverse" presents work by five young Dutch photographers using the Internet, projections, film and installations.

Foam Fotografie Museum
Amsterdam
Until Feb. 21
☎ 31-20-5516-500
www.foam.nl

art

"Pub Life—Tavern Scenes in the Rijksmuseum" exhibits 18 prints and drawings featuring 16th- and 17th-century Dutch taverns by Pieter Bruegel, Cornelis Dusart, Rembrandt and others.

Rijksmuseum
Until March 1
☎ 31-20-6747-000
www.rijksmuseum.nl

Antwerp

art

"Mirror of the Tang Dynasty" illustrates life at the Chinese court during the Tang Dynasty with gold and silver jewels, terracotta statues and ceramics.

Provinciehuis Antwerpen
Dec. 19-March 14
☎ 32-3 240 64 11 - 3 240 66 30
www.provant.be /
www.europalia.be

Athens

archaeology

"Eros From Hesiod's Theogony to Late Antiquity" shows 280 artifacts dedicated to Eros, the Greek god of love.

Cycladic Art Museum
Until April 5
☎ 30-210-7228-321
www.cycladic.gr

Barcelona

art

"Guests of Honour: Commemoration of the 75th Anniversary of the MNAC" brings together 80 artworks of Catalan cultural heritage, including art by Joan Miró and Pablo Picasso.

Museu Nacional d'Arte de Catalunya
Until April 11
☎ 34-93-6220-360
www.mnac.cat

Berlin

art

"Cranach and Renaissance Art under

Hohenzollern Rule" displays 200 art objects by Lucas Cranach the Elder (1472-1553) and his son Lucas the Younger (1515-86).

Charlottenburg / St. Marienkirche
Until Jan. 24
☎ 49-331-9694-202
www.spsg.de

Bern

art

"Rolf Iseli—Layers of Time" is a retrospective exhibition of 100 works by the Swiss artist Rolf Iseli, including early oil paintings, objects, earth pictures and prints.

Kunstmuseum Bern
Dec. 18-March 21
☎ 41-31-3280-944
www.kunstmuseumbern.ch

Budapest

art

"Alchemy of Beauty" showcases 80 drawings and prints by the Italian Mannerist artist Girolamo Francesco Maria Mazzola, better known as Parmigianino, (1503-40).

Museum of Fine Arts Budapest
Until March 15
☎ 36-1469-7100
www.szepmuvezeti.hu

Cologne

art

"Franz West: Autotheater Koeln-Nepel-Graz" features 90 works by the Austrian artist, including prints, drawings, posters, furniture, installations and collaborations with other artists.

Museum Ludwig
Dec. 12-March 14
☎ 49-221-2212-6165
www.museum-ludwig.de

Dusseldorf

history

"Rulers, Power and War at the Niederrhein" exhibits paintings, prints and maps documenting the history of rulers at the German Niederrhein region in the 16th and 17th century.

Dusseldorf Stadtmuseum
Until Jan. 3
☎ 49-2118-9961-70
www.duesseldorf.de/stadtmuseum

Glasgow

music

"Depeche Mode—Tour of the Universe" offers the synthesizer sounds of one

of England's most successful bands, performing songs from their latest album, "Sounds of the Universe."

Dec. 12 - SECC Hall 4, Glasgow
Dec. 13 - LG Arena, Birmingham
Dec. 15, 16 - The O2, London
☎ 44-844-5765-483
www.depechemode.com

Hamburg

art

"Drawn with Light: Carl Blechen's Amalfi Sketchbook" presents sketches made at the Amalfi coast on 66 large-format sheets by the German artist (1798-1840).

Hamburger Kunsthalle
Until Jan. 17
☎ 49-4042-8131-200
www.hamburger-kunsthalle.de

London

theater

"The Misanthrope" stages Molière's 'Misanthrope' adapted by Martin Crimp, taking it from 17th-century Paris to modern-day London and starring Keira Knightley, Damian Lewis, Dominic Rowan and Tara Fitzgerald.

Comedy Theatre
Until March 13
☎ 44-844-8717-627
www.themisanthrope.london.com

design

"Less and More: The Design Ethos of Dieter Rams" showcases works by the German consumer-electronics designer.

Design museum
Until March 7
☎ 44-20-7403-6933
designmuseum.org

music

"Miley Cyrus" brings the pop music of the American singer, actress and author to U.K. arenas.

Dec. 13, 14 - The O2, London
Dec. 22, 23 - LG Arena, Birmingham
Dec. 27, 28 - M.E.N. Arena, Manchester
☎ 44-844-5765-483
www.mileycyrus.com

Madrid

art

"Dutch Painters at the Prado" showcases Dutch paintings from the Prado Museum's collection, including work by Rembrandt (1606-69).

Museo Nacional del Prado
Until April 11
☎ 34-9133-0280-0
www.museodelprado.es

Munich

art festival

"Tollwood Winter Festival 2009: Heaven and Hell" offers a Christmas market and cultural events ranging from opera to circus and cabaret.

Tollwood
Until Dec. 31
☎ 49-89-3838-500
www.tollwood.de

Oslo

art

"Going to Market" displays work by contemporary artists whose work comments on the art market.

Henie Onstad Kunstsenter
Until Feb. 7
☎ 47-6780-4880
www.hok.no

Paris

design

"Via.Design 3.0" presents 40 design prototypes celebrating 30 years of French design, including first creations by Philippe Starck and Jean-Paul Gaultier.

Centre Pompidou
Dec. 16-Feb. 1
☎ 33-1-4478-1233

Right, a dragon from the Tang dynasty (618 A.D.-907 A.D.) in Antwerp; below, Korean artist Shin Yong Gu at the Tollwood Winter Festival in Munich.



www.centrepompidou.fr

art

"A Passion for Delacroix: The Collection of Karen B. Cohen" shows sketchbooks, paintings and murals by French Romantic artist Eugène Delacroix (1798-1863).

Musée Eugène Delacroix
Dec. 16-April 5
☎ 33-1-4441-8650
www.musee-delacroix.fr

St. Petersburg

art

"Enamels of the World 1700-2000 from the Khalili Collections" displays 320 pieces of enamels, including work by Fabergé and Cartier.

The State Hermitage Museum
Until March 14
☎ 7-812-7109-079
www.hermitagemuseum.org

Vienna

art

"Endangered—Conserved—Presented" shows a cycle of 16th-century reliefs once installed at the treasury of the St. Stephen's Cathedral.

Palace Stables/Lower Belvedere
Until Feb. 7
☎ 43-1795-570
www.belvedere.at

Source: ArtBase Global Arts News Service, WSJE research.



Tollwood (B) ©Shaanxi Cultural Heritage Promotion Center (C)