

FRIDAY - SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 27 - MARCH 1, 2009

WEEKEND JOURNAL.

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Browsing Brussels

Hidden treasures at the city's art and antiques auctions

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Browsing Brussels

Hidden treasures at the city's art and antiques auctions

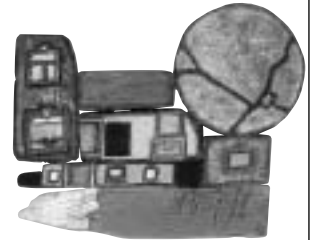


On cover: A 16th-century oak carving of St. Luke at Galerie Moderne (estimated at €1,500-€2,000; sale price, €8,500).

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Despite the downturn, restaurateurs are opening new high-end establishments. WSJ.com/Lifestyle

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Wine-tasting luxury cruises, from the Caribbean to the Mediterranean. WSJ.com/Lifestyle

WEEKEND JOURNAL

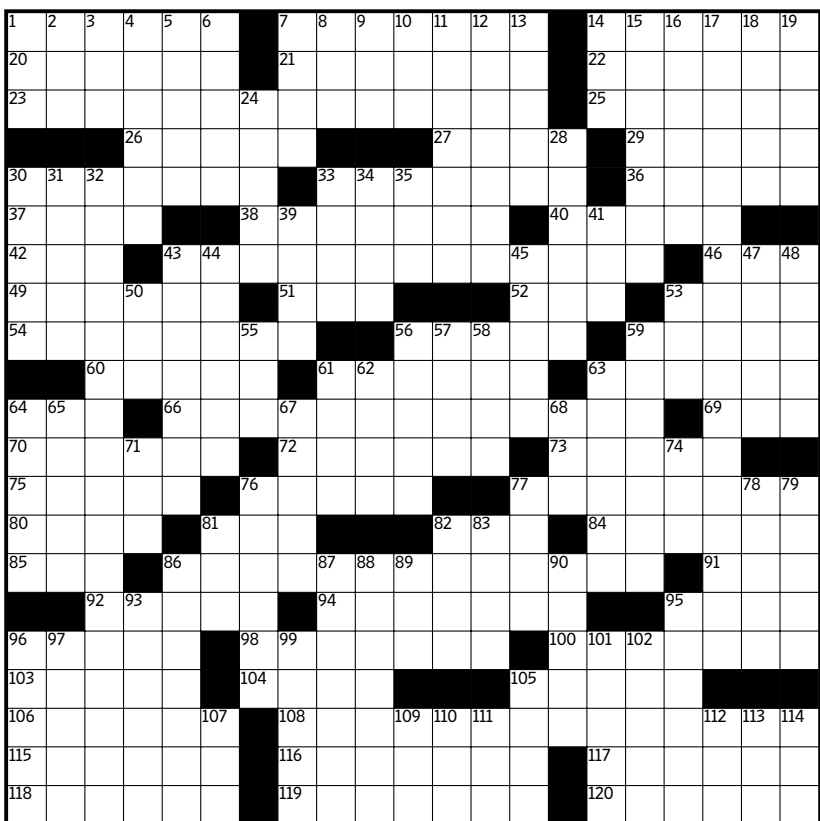
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Last Week's Solution



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 Crossword online
 For an interactive version of The Wall Street Journal Crossword, WSJ.com subscribers can go to WSJ.com/WeekendJournal

Proportion is power for shorter men

ONE OUT OF THREE men in the United States is under 5 feet 8 inches (or 1.72 meters) tall. You'd never guess the magnitude of the demographic from menswear.

"They have stores for big and tall men, so why not for shorter men?" asks Josh Lefkowitz, who describes his height as "five-foot-three and a half." A New York public-relations executive, Mr. Lefkowitz likes to buy a jacket in size 36 short and take

On Style

CHRISTINA BINKLEY

it to a tailor. To make a size seven shoe fit, he buys inserts to fill out the extra space.

Yet when standard-size clothes are altered for a man like Mr. Lefkowitz, the final proportions can come out all wrong. Simply shortening a suit's hems and sleeves can leave the collar too broad, the pockets oversized, the armholes gargantuan, the elbow curves too low and the rear droopy.

All this can make a small man look even smaller. "Taller men can get away with having things look a little baggy," says Mr. Lefkowitz. But the wrong fit "can make us look schlumpy."

Height, for a man, is the ultimate power marker. An added inch of height is equivalent to an extra \$30,000 a year of salary, on average, when it comes to attracting a mate, says Andrew Trees, author of "Decoding Love," a book about the science of attraction. Height also affects earnings—though less dramatically: Each inch earns you about \$600 more per year in salary after controlling for variables like education, he says.

Yet there is one thing that supercedes height: The perception of height. Men who got early growth spurts but wound up short are often perceived to be taller than they are, says Mr. Trees, suggesting that the reason lies in their carriage. The reverse is also true: Men who became tall later on are often perceived as shorter than they are—possibly because they learned early to think of themselves as short.

This suggests that short men can seem taller or shorter, depending on how they present themselves. A key element is wearing clothes with the right proportions. A small man wearing oversized clothes risks looking like he's dressing up in Dad's clothes—emphasizing his diminutive stature.

Tom Hevey, a real-estate investor in Belmont, Mass., discovered the power of the right fit last August when he stumbled across one of the few stores in the U.S. that cuts clothes proportionately small for short men—"Jimmy Au's For Men 5'8" and Under." Sizes at the store, which is located on a side street in Beverly Hills, start at 34 extra-short.

Jimmy Au's is a rarity—a niche store that caters to shorter men. While small men can find suitable sizes online at places like Forthefit.



Jimmy Au (right) owns a Beverly Hills store that sells clothes cut to fit shorter men.

Evan's Vestal Ward for The Wall Street Journal

com, most of the big retailers I spoke with—including Saks Fifth Avenue—said it doesn't pay to cater to small men. It's more profitable to focus on the bulge in the bell curve, sending their shorter clients to tailors.

Moreover, it's hard to sell clothes to a group that some people prefer not to be identified with. Mr. Hevey, who is 47, says he very nearly

didn't go into Jimmy Au's because he resented the name's reference to height.

At 5-foot-5 (1.65 meters), he says, he doesn't consider himself short. "I guess I'm sensitive about that, and I don't want to be labeled that way," Mr. Hevey says.

Mr. Au carries smaller sock sizes, shoes down to a men's size five and styles that run the gamut from jeans

to tuxedos. His sizes take into consideration all sorts of body types, such as "Portly Short," "Athletic Short" and "Extra Short." The key, he says, is in the proportions—his clothes are designed with smaller pockets, slightly narrower collars and sleeves, and higher crotches.

"If a man is five-foot-seven in my store, he shops in the tall section," says Mr. Au, who is 5-foot-2 (1.57 meters).

Racks in the store are five centimeters lower than they are in most stores, and shorter sizes are thoughtfully placed on bottom shelves. Many men's stores, oddly, place shorter sizes on top.

The bias against short men is apparent even in Mr. Au's store windows. Unable to buy shorter mannequins, Mr. Au turned to a Hollywood special-effects studio that makes crash dummies for action movies—the kind that get blown up in chase scenes.

I noticed a resemblance to one famous A-list action-movie star who is under 1.7 meters—but Mr. Au wouldn't name names.

Mr. Au's clientele is a who's who of professionals from careers that favor the short of height, with jockeys, astronauts and jet pilots among them. The store's publicity materials list the stars it has dressed for film and television—though the stars themselves aren't always comfortable with being publicly identified as short. On a recent day, Mr. Au and his son, Alan Au, were discussing outfits that they were sending over to participants at the Grammy awards.

After his visit to the store in August, Mr. Hevey left with a suit, three sport coats, five shirts, two pairs of jeans and seven pairs of khakis. Finally, he had clothes that "fit like clothes fit a six-foot-two-inch guy," he says. The difference was "huge," he says. "When I tried on a pair of pants, my wife got teary-eyed."

Mr. Hevey has since ordered two more big shipments from Mr. Au, including having a winter wardrobe shipped to Massachusetts sight unseen. "I get compliments from people who say, 'something's different about you.'"

Email Christina.Binkley@wsj.com



Randall Christensen creates outfits for 'Dancing With the Stars.'

Design for the dance floor

BY CHERYL LU-LIEN TAN

COSTUME DESIGNER Randall Christensen spends his days creating glitzy ensembles for celebrities competing on the television show "Dancing With The Stars." When he himself goes out dancing, however, he takes a more practical approach. Mr. Christensen dances—either salsa or ballroom—at least twice a week when he's not working on the show. When hitting the clubs, he says, he chooses comfort over flair. The designer says he enjoys dancing because "it's a great way to keep in shape," and so he makes sure his clothing works well for vigorous kicks and swivels.

He always chooses fitted pants that have a little stretch, favoring wool or polyester blends that contain about 3% Lycra. He prefers the rise, or the distance from the waistband to the crotch seam, to be on the high side, as he believes this helps the pants sit better on him.

The designer, who sells a line of dance apparel under the label Randall Designs, is careful in his choice of shirts. He usually goes with a buttoned-up dress shirt that's made of cotton or a cotton-polyester blend, both of which are fairly breathable. Mr. Christensen avoids even the lightest knit shirts ("too hot"), as well as those made of silk. "You'll spot when you start perspiring," he explains.

While he likes colorful shirts, he always wears dark-colored pants when dancing. For one thing, they hide dirt better. Also, he says, "a lot of dancers now like to use tanning products on their legs," which can rub off on their partners.

For optimum comfort, he chooses shoes with thin, flexible leather soles. He prefers ones that are so supple that he can make the heel and toe touch: "They help prevent foot fatigue."

Advice on dressing (and acting) your age

BY TERI AGINS

I AM A 47-YEAR-OLD man going on a first date to dinner with a woman who is 26, and I am worried about what to wear. Normally, I might wear nice jeans and a sport coat, but I don't want to appear old—or too young. At a casual bar, a sport coat would look out of place. I'm sure I own the right clothes, but I just need a little guidance to strike the right balance.

—P.Y., New York City

When you're over 40, you should try not to dress too old or too young—no matter what age your mate happens to be. First, here's hoping that you're staying in decent shape, so that you can

wear clothes with a modern cut—closer to the body but not tight. Such well-tailored clothes will make you look taller and impart a youthful appearance all around.

I think you are right to lean toward a casual, polished style for your date. Narrow jeans in a dark denim—instead of dress slacks—would fit the bill. Pair them with a fine-gauge silk-blend polo knit sweater with long sleeves or with a solid-colored cotton shirt, with or without a sport coat. If your style is more downtown, try a hip short leather or suede zip-front jacket. Avoid oversized tops, shirts with busy prints and baggy pants, which will add years to your appearance, as well as making you look heavy.

Wear thin-soled driving loafers instead of athletic shoes, please! I hope you have a stylish haircut—no combers—and please leave your baseball cap at home. Update your glasses with modern frames. Go light on the cologne, or skip it altogether.

What will impress your younger date as much as your appearance is an upbeat, confident attitude that shows off your honest, authentic self. Don't dwell on your health or former relationships. Relax and treat her like a peer; ask thoughtful questions and listen to her answers. That advice should hold true for all your prospective dates—regardless of their age. Good luck!

Email askteri@wsj.com



Brian Aljar

WSJ.com

The right fit

Get tips for short dressers and share style secrets for men under 1.70 meters, at WSJ.com/OnStyle

'Slumdog' tour guide

Fueled by the movie, new Mumbai tours promise an authentic view of the city

BY STAN SESSER

SMUMDOG MILLIONAIRE," the Oscar-winning story of a young man from the slums of Mumbai, opened here late last month, but Mayur Dixit, a 29-year-old who speaks fluent English and holds a degree in economics, isn't interested. "I don't need to see it," he says. "I've lived in the slums for seven years."

There may be no greater symbol of the old India, the India of too much poverty and too few jobs, than the 2,000 slum communities of the former Bombay. The new India, of billionaires and buzzing technology companies, pushed the old India aside years ago. But now, thanks largely to "Slumdog," the old India has inched back into the spotlight. And that suits Mr. Dixit fine. He plans to benefit, by leading visitors around his neighborhood and catering to the international appetite for slum tourism.

Travelers often complain that the world is becoming homogenized, but India is an exception, its crumbling infrastructure, constant chaos and in-your-face poverty coexisting with trendy nightclubs and Bollywood glitz. Tourism here has fallen off precipitously, and airfares and hotel rates have plummeted. But among the trickle of international tourists are a striking number eager to see Mumbai's now-famous slums, home to an estimated 10 million of the city's 18 million residents.

A factor behind the popularity of slum tours is that Mumbai, India's financial capital and lately a premiere luxury destination, is once again accessible to middle-class vacationers. Victor Biswas, president of Ventures and Travels Inc., in New York, which specializes in tours to India, says he is sending clients to India for a high-season round-trip airfare of around \$1,000, compared with \$1,800 a year ago. The flight I took last month from my home in Bangkok to Mumbai cost me 10,000 baht, or \$285, less than half what I paid four years ago.

"There is hardly any leisure traffic to India at the moment," says Mr. Biswas, the travel agent. "Everyone is waiting to see what happens with the economy."

Before the November terrorist attacks on the Taj Mahal Palace & Tower and other targets in Mumbai, luxury hotels were operating at near-capacity, but now they are slashing prices. The Four Seasons here is giving three nights for the price of two. Rooms at the Taj Mahal, which reopened its tower wing Dec. 21, less than four weeks after the attack, used to start as high as \$458 a night. When I called the reservations number in early January, they offered me a room for \$258. I called again an hour later, and this time the room was \$205, including breakfast.

I ended up staying down the street at the Harbour View Hotel. On the phone, I got a rate quote of \$92 for a room with a sweeping view of Bombay's harbor and the Gateway of India monument. But the reservations clerk quickly added that the price would be negotiable when I arrived. It was—they took off an additional 10%.

"Slumdog" has met with more controversy than enthusiasm since



Passengers on a suburban commuter train in Mumbai; below left, a street in Dharavi, where metal barrels are stacked for recycling; below right, roommates with friends in the Murti Nagar slum.

opening here in late January; in Bihar, one of India's poorest states, protesters ransacked a theater showing it. At the Mumbai cinema where I went to see it, the crowd was subdued and displayed no enthusiasm for the feel-good ending. Immediately afterward, I took a taxi to Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus, better known as Victoria Terminus, or VT, where the movie's hero joyously embraces the woman he loves. The VT, a World Heritage site and another target of the November terrorists, is an architectural masterpiece among railway stations, but it has been allowed to fall into disrepair. Commuters hang perilously out of the dilapidated, doorless trains.

The next morning, I went with Mr. Dixit on a tour of the Murti Nagar slum, wedged between an army and navy base in the far south of Mumbai. I'd met him on the Colaba waterfront promenade, where he approached me with the offer of a tour—something he does occasionally and hopes to build into a formal business. Mr. Dixit told me about his past. He grew up in a rural area near Bhopal, studied economics in Mumbai and then seven years ago, with a

degree but no job, moved to Murti Nagar. First he shared a large room with 20 construction workers for the equivalent of \$20 a month; now, for \$80 a month, he lives with three other men in a small room with no bathroom. Such circumstances are common in Murti Nagar, I found, but so is the residents' striking friendliness. Dozens of people greeted Mr. Dixit as he showed me around. A few even tried out greetings in English. At the end of the 90-minute tour, I paid him \$20.

Later that afternoon, I went with an agency on a more formal tour of Dharavi, near the airport, Mumbai's biggest slum with one million inhabitants. "Initially no one was happy with us," says Krishna Pujari, owner of Reality Tours & Travel. "They accused us of selling poverty." But Mr. Pujari won over the Dharavi inhabitants by financing educational projects, and he has shown sensitivity, limiting tour groups to six people and forbidding photography. Reality Tours says it returns 80% of its profits to Dharavi.

When I called Mr. Pujari to sign up, he was watching "Slumdog" on his laptop. The movie, he said, was

lighting a fire under his business. "I'm getting 10 to 15 calls a day from the media all over the world," he said. During the four-hour tour, he told me that Dharavi's 10,000 "small-scale industries" produce an estimated \$665 million in annual revenues. Open drains ran through the streets, and children played in a trash-strewn lot that others used as a toilet. But the houses were clean and neat inside. "There is less crime in a slum than in the rest of the city because there is more of a sense of community," he said.

But that didn't cushion the shock I felt seeing the small-scale industries first hand. Almost all were devoted to recycling First World detritus, from plastics to electronic products to chemicals. People disassemble, burn and clean the hazardous material without the slightest protection. I saw a man using filthy water and his bare hands to clean metal barrels that once held industrial chemicals. Mr. Pujari says the government is trying to close the Dharavi recycling operations for health reasons, but residents are resisting fiercely because it is their only income source.



Trip planner: Another side of Mumbai

Where to stay: Mumbai offers a number of five-star hotels, including the Four Seasons and the Oberoi. The iconic Taj Mahal Palace & Tower on the Colaba waterfront, attacked by terrorists last November, has reopened its tower wing and has never looked more beautiful (www.tajhotels.com; from about \$205).

The nearby Harbour View Hotel, although spartan, is clean and offers sweeping views (www.viewhotelsinc.com; around \$90).

Where to eat: Trishna looks like a tourist trap, but it's one of the world's great seafood restaurants; located on Sai Barba Marg, ☎ 91-22-2261-4991, about \$20 a person. Swati Snacks offers superb small dishes that aren't available outside India; 248 Karal Estate Rd. across from Bhatia Hospital, ☎ 91-22-5660-8405, about \$5. For a superb thali plate try Rajdhani; 361 Sheikh Memon St. across from the Crawford Market clock tower, ☎ 91-22-2342-6919, \$4.

Slum tours: Reality Tours & Travel gives daily tours of the huge Dharavi slum, ranging from a \$10 half-day group tour to a \$135 full-day private tour of the slum and city; www.realitytoursandtravel.com.

Mayur Dixit gives informal tours of the Murti Nagar slum where he lives; rate negotiable. Reach him at ☎ 91-989-274-2219, mayur_142@hotmail.com.



Stan Sesser/The Wall Street Journal (2)

Making tracks through Spain's Pyrenees

BY PAULA PARK

Ansó, Spain
THE SUN CREEPS toward a corona of rock turrets above me as I kick the edges of my skis into the bank and sidle up a hill to a small shepherd's shed in the Ansó Valley of the Aragon Pyrenees in northern Spain. As my guide and I make tea and eat the avocado and cheese sandwiches he prepared, we startle a flock of Citril Finch, which fly off in a powder of gray and yellow. Below us, shadows wrap an ancient beech tree forest.

It's the last day of a weeklong winter adventure in Spain that has taken me on prepared cross-country ski pistes, untouched mountain passes and valley tracks like today's, which has been used for centuries by Aragon shepherds herding their animals to the high edge of the rock towers in the summer, when the grass is abundant. My stay in the Ansó Valley has also sent me on a trip into the history of one of the most storied regions in Europe, evident today in the little villages like Ansó, its stone houses built atop a hill with a view nearly 32 kilometers to the French border, and its 16th-century fortress church, San Pedro. But this is Spain: I also enjoy a few nights of carnival and festival. Food and wine alone could keep me returning here.

When I told my friends I was heading to northern Spain for skiing, they were skeptical. One warned me there'd be no snow—saying it all falls on the French side of the mountains. Another worried out loud that I'd be going off alone with a guide I found on the Internet. If either had known about my secret fear of speeding down hills on skis, they might have been even more concerned.

The mountains are deep in snow—crystals that sparkle in the Spanish sunlight, powder that scatters as the skis slice through it, flakes that fall only in the late afternoon and evening. The guide, Richard Cash, owner of a Spain and U.K.-based company called Alto Aragón, has spent more than 20 years studying the birds, trees and rocks of these mountains in the western Pyrenees, which skirt Navarre and Aragon, and nose up to France.

After one day of skiing, Richard knows just what kind of trail I can handle. He scouts out a few that make me work just above my frustration level as well.

Alto Aragón is one of the area's many guide services and mountaineering companies. Interest in Northern Spain as a winter travel destination has been growing in the past decade or so as development in the entire country has picked up. Apartment complexes for weekend visitors now ring Ansó's center, built of stone like the older homes, with well-crafted wood balconies and doors. Scaffolding on several streets suggests more are in the making. Increased interest in the mountains has engendered a cottage industry of guides and ski-equipment companies.

But the region is not nearly as crowded, or contrived, as some of the other Nordic ski areas I've been to in Europe, where high-traffic tracks lead from the wilderness to resorts, hotels and restaurants, and the shouts of gleeful Alpine skiers are never quite out of earshot. It's amazingly easy even for a risk-averse skier like me to glide into a



Clockwise from above, the Spanish town of Ansó; cross-country skiers near the Linza refuge in Ansó Valley; guide Richard Cash.

pristine place of rock towers and finches, Alpine chough and vultures. We stumble into a mountaineering class at the Linza refuge, 14 kilometers north of Ansó, on my first day of skiing. The refuge is run by a company called Talon Libre, which maintains five kilometers of ski trails for intermediate skiers and a further 2.5 kilometers for beginners, as well as a nearly flat lesson area. The pistes are so well-prepared, as one skier says, it's "*nieve casi virgen*," nearly virgin snow, even on a weekend.

Granted, the distances are small compared with a big Nordic ski area in Scandinavia or in the Alps. But acres of pure snow surround the refuge, and Richard and I will spend most of the week off-piste in the slopes of narrow valleys.

The largest ranges of the Pyrenees are further east, as are most of Spain's ski resorts. But



these soft western hills are transected by valleys, Roncal in Navarre, and Ansó and Echo in Aragon, with just enough change in altitude to make them ideal for cross-country skiing.

For more aggressive skiers who ski-tour—exploring mountainous back country on wider skis with sharper edges and napped fabric attached—there are straight-angled mountains and ridges that soar into the sky. Groups of Spanish skiers



climb past us toward the high peaks of Petrachema or Txamantxoia. Many of the peaks have Basque or even Catalan names, as the area has been crisscrossed by different Spanish groups throughout history. On my second night in Ansó, I take part in a festival unique to these Aragon villages and their neighbors across the Pyrenees. Juan Enrique Ipas Ornat, the owner of Posada Magoria, the inn where I'm staying, dons a burlap bag, and hangs a child's soft black shoes on his ears before he tops it all with a beret and strolls out into the street. His children follow. The whole village is trembling with the sound of horns and drums.

The occasion is the Carnaval Biarnés, the revival of a Pyrenean festival that is said to predate the Romans and the political separation of Spain and France. On this day, busloads of French people arrive in Ansó, costumes and two giant papier-mâché effigies in tow.

As the story goes, in pre-Roman times, a man named Biarnés Zanpanzar, or Sant Pançard, was hauled in a cage in Pau, southern France to be burned at the stake. His sins: carousing and seducing women. But his friends did a quick change, putting a mannequin to be burned in his place, and he fled across the mountains into what is now Spain.

Fire-throwers skip and twirl. The drums and horns play while people kick their heels. A man in a clown suit addresses the crowd at the main plaza, which is covered with a thin sheet of ice, causing a few dancers to lose their footing. As the crowd gets whipped into a bit of a drunken fury, the town people offer them migas, a traditional shepherd's meal of torn bread dunked in a kind of soup. The music and laughter fades. By midnight, most of the French have climbed into their buses to return to Pau. The whole ceremony would be repeated each

week in different villages until Feb. 13, when it culminated with a two-week carnival in Pau.

Despite a few such late-night adventures, later in the week I try ski-touring in Belagua, a snowy basin off the Roncal Valley in eastern Navarre. The ski station is closed on a weekday, but the more than 36 kilometers of ski trails are pristine. We ski them for a bit before Richard fastens some plastic strips along the bottom of my skis. The skin makes walking uphill on snow as easy as walking in boots on dry ground. We climb a little more than 1,000 meters. Across the valley, the snowy top of the mountain called Mesa del Tres Reyes, or Table of the Three Kings, glistens in the sun. The pistes below are empty. We can hear the wind sighing through the peaks, but it's calm and quiet here.

The calm quickly abandons me when we start the long descent. Richard has shown me how to transverse the slope to smooth the sharpest declines and how to fall without slamming my knees into the mountainside or cracking my wrist. But before I can start gliding down, my knees bend, I tug the skis into a v-shape and snowplow down the hill, achingly slow.

As we're sipping tea on the last day of the trip at the shepherd's shed, I glance above at two skiers whose skis jut precariously into thin air as they gracefully turn and glide down a ridge. "I'll do that in about five years," I tell Richard.

After lunch, I get ready to go down, but Richard is looking up. We ski up to the high ridge the two skiers had reached. There's nothing above us except rock and snow-covered scree. Richard insists that I not use a single snowplow all the way down. I don't float like a boat on water. But I keep my feet parallel as I slide softly around corners and through the beech forest to the river valley. It's quiet with acres of snow.

Trip planner: Ski guides

Where to stay

Posada Magoria: The hotel's service makes guests feel like family. It features wood-paneled rooms next to the village church and delicious organic vegetarian food. A double room costs €55 per person.

☎ 34-974-370-049

posadamagoria.com

Kimboa Hostel: The hotel has a beautiful sundeck, with a view over the village and Verol river valley. ☎ 34-974-370-130

www.hostalkimboa.com

Hostal Aisa: This big inn on Ansó's main plaza features a terrace restaurant at the center of the town's festivals. A double room costs €42 per person.

☎ 34-974-370-009

www.hostalaisa.es

Where to eat

Bar O Cubilá: I ate a bocadito, or sandwich, as big as a mountain here; full-course meals are also served, and the place is always hopping.

☎ 34-974-370-050

Casa Blasquico: This restaurant in the valley east of Ansó



has mushroom crêpes and stuffed vegetables among its specialties. ☎ 34-974-375-007

Guides

Alto Aragón

☎ 44-1869-3373-39

www.altoaragon.co.uk

PirineoSur

☎ 34-620-931-782

www.pirineosur.es

Aragón Aventura

☎ 34-974-362-996

www.aragonaventura.es

Casteret Actividades en la Montaña

☎ 34-974-486-432

www.grupoexplora.com/casteret/esqui.html

A burst of spring from every bottle

Beat the winter blues with a sunny white wine: Sauvignon Blanc from New Zealand

AREN'T YOU JUST sick of winter? For less than \$20, you can bring spring into your home—or at least into your heart—today. It's as easy as unscrewing the top of a bottle of wine.

We're talking here about New Zealand Sauvignon Blanc, a wine that's so exciting and alive that we're surprised the bottles don't vibrate on shelves. We thought a tasting of New Zealand's signature wine would be a good idea right

Tastings

DOROTHY J. GAITER
AND JOHN BRECHER

now, both so that we could get an early blast of spring and because the brand-new, fresh-as-can-be 2008 vintage is arriving on shelves. New Zealand's harvest takes place early in the year—in fact, the 2009 harvest should be kicking off any day now—so many of the 2008 wines are already here.

The story thus far: Just 15 years ago, New Zealand's most-planted grape was Müller-Thurgau. But when the country decided that it wanted to compete in the international wine market, it planted better, more-commercial grapes. It placed a big bet on Sauvignon Blanc and it really did change the wine world.

Not only did New Zealand's Sauvignon Blanc become famous, but it woke up wine drinkers and winemakers everywhere to what this grape could be when allowed to express its varietal character: fresh and clean, with exceptionally juicy smells and tastes of kiwi, bell pepper, fresh-mowed grass, grapefruit and other mouth-watering things. Sauvignon Blanc has been one of the world's great grapes forever and now outstanding, affordable examples—often based on the clean New Zealand model—are coming from California, Chile, South Africa and just about everywhere else.

As recently as 2001, when we conducted a broad blind tasting of New Zealand Sauvignon Blanc, we cautioned that they weren't avail-



Shira Krczon for The Wall Street Journal

able everywhere. That has changed. Now there are dozens of labels prominently displayed at wine stores everywhere. There is also a greater variety of other New Zealand wines, especially its signature red, Pinot Noir, which is worth trying, although we've found it's not, in general, a great value.

In the past, we have considered New Zealand Sauvignon Blanc consistently flavorful and well-priced. Has that happy trend continued? We bought more than 50 from the 2007 and 2008 vintages to find out. We did not set a price limit, but we paid more than \$30 for just one of the wines, and most cost less than \$15. At a time when consumers are looking for friendly, consistently reliable wines at good prices, is this a keeper?

Our answer: yes.

In flight after flight, we discussed how fresh, pure and true these wines tasted, with all sorts of just-picked, tropical fruit tastes. They were not afraid to be varietal—"OK, I smell like a fresh bell pepper; take me as I am"—and, time after time, offered mouth-watering, juicy and very long finishes

that demanded another sip (and some seafood). That's not to say they were all the same, but their differences were subtle. We had an interesting—and delicious—illustration of that in one flight when we had two wines, back to back, that had much in common, and yet....

No. 1: "True green-pepper nose. Vibrant, alive, pure. 'Seems so simple,' Dottie says. 'Just press great fruit.' A purity about it that makes it easy. There's a lightness about it, yet also a long, juicy finish."

No. 2: "Green-pepper nose. Has some weight. Round and full, with a certain stature. Full, even fluffy in mouth, with an ephemeral finish. Really interesting. White peaches and a shake of pepper. Fleshy. Has the presence of a white Bordeaux."

No. 1 turned out to be a long-time favorite, Brancott, from the 2008 vintage. The price: about \$11. Wow. No. 2 was Drylands Estate 2007 and it costs around \$15. What a deal.

By the way, the best-known Sauvignon Blanc from New Zealand, Cloudy Bay, was not among our favorites this time (we had the 2008 in two flights). Our best of tasting, as it turned out, was a repeat from our last tasting, in 2005: Kim Crawford, which melded the best of both of the styles above into a delicious whole. It costs around \$16.

These wines are meant to be enjoyed while they're young and fresh, which is why almost all of them are sealed with screwcaps. So today, go out and pick one up. Or, better yet, pick up two different ones. When you taste them side-by-side, you may think they're pretty much identical at first. But the more you taste, and the more they get air and warmth, the more you will sense differences. Keep sipping and we guarantee that it will feel like spring to you before you know it.

WSJ.com

Essence of kiwi
Watch John and Dottie taste and talk about New Zealand Sauvignon Blanc, at
WSJ.com/Tastings

The New Zealand Sauvignon Blanc index

In a tasting of New Zealand Sauvignon Blanc from the 2007 and 2008 vintages, these were our favorites. These are great with seafood. All of these are from the Marlborough region except as marked.

| VINEYARD | PRICE | RATING | COMMENTS |
|--|----------|---------------------|---|
| Kim Crawford Wines 2008 | \$15.99* | Very Good/Delicious | Best of tasting. Remarkable balance of cleanliness and intensity. Makes you smile with its mouth-popping vibrancy and sunshine-like, exuberant, lime-kiwi tastes, but it also has minerals underneath and some weight. |
| Drylands Estate Wines 2007 | \$14.99 | Very Good/Delicious | Best value. Rounder and fuller than most, with some extra stature. A dash of pepper. Soulful. Reminded us of white Bordeaux in its classiness—amazing at the price. |
| Isabel Vineyard 2007 | \$15.99 | Very Good/Delicious | Ripe, juicy grapefruit with a touch of something deeper. Warming, friendly, happy and very satisfying. |
| Mt. Difficulty Wines 2007 (Central Otago) | \$18.99 | Very Good/Delicious | Exceptionally clean, vibrant and alive. Seems to leap from the glass with gooseberries, melon, pineapple and other fruits. |
| Brancott (Montana Wines) 2008 | \$10.99* | Very Good | Pure wine, pure taste and pure joy. Tastes like very ripe grapes picked and squeezed right into our mouths. Longtime favorite. |
| Vavasour Wines 2007 (Awatere Valley) | \$16.29 | Very Good | Tastes true. Juicy, with some weight and a long, grapefruit/green-pepper finish. |
| Allan Scott Wines & Estates 2008 | \$13.99 | Good/Very Good | Think of sorbet: cleansing and pure. Plenty of grapefruit taste, but an austerity and restraint that make it especially easy to enjoy. |
| Mount Nelson (Tenuta Campo di Sasso) 2007 | \$19.99 | Good/Very Good | Restrained and calm, more refined and relaxed than many and therefore perhaps better with food. Nice combination of bell peppers and grapefruit. |
| Oyster Bay Wines 2008 | \$12.50* | Good/Very Good | Just plain fun. Clean and fresh, with plenty of kiwi and a particularly lively finish. Lacks much intensity and depth, but makes up for it in charm and fresh fruit. |

Note: Wines are rated on a scale that ranges: Yech, OK, Good, Very Good, Delicious and Delicious! These came from California, New Jersey and New York. *We paid \$17.99 for Kim Crawford, \$9.99 for Brancott and \$10.49 for Oyster Bay, but these prices appear to be more representative. Prices vary widely.

Arbitrage

The price of a local Sunday newspaper

| City | Local currency | € |
|-----------|----------------|-------|
| Hong Kong | HK\$8 | €0.80 |
| Rome | €1.00 | €1.00 |
| London | £0.95 | €1.07 |
| Tokyo | ¥130 | €1.05 |
| Frankfurt | €1.50 | €1.50 |
| Paris | €1.50 | €1.50 |
| New York | \$4.00 | €3.12 |

Note: Highest-circulation paper; prices, including taxes, as provided by retailers in each city, averaged and converted into euros.



Some cocktails are supposed to taste funny

Great fictional drinks, from the Pan Galactic Gargle Blaster to the Flaming Homer

HAVING GROWN UP in a dry household, my first introduction to the concept of the cocktail came, as so much essential cultural knowledge does, by way of Looney Tunes. Saturday mornings in front of the tube, I learned the basic cartoon conventions—such as the understanding that gravity kicks in not when Wile E. Coyote goes off the edge of a cliff, but only when he looks

How's Your Drink?

ERIC FELTEN

down and realizes it. Also among the animated verities: Mixed drinks are outrageously potent, and their debilitating effects kick in (like gravity) only after a comic pause.

The instance I remember best comes from a 1951 cartoon, "Drip-Along Daffy," in which the duck and his sidekick, Porky Pig, try to whip a lawless Western town into shape. Sheriff Daffy steps up to the bar and orders a bracer, only to find himself challenged by outlaw Nasty Canasta to join him in his "usual," a mix of cobra fang juice, hydrogen bitters and Old Panther. ("Panther-sweat"—and other panther-related fluids—was Prohibition slang for rot-gut whiskey.)

The bartender dons a welding mask and asbestos gloves, and grips the bottles with iron tongs. He assembles the red, yellow and purple concoction, which fizzes and pops with atomic instability. Canasta glugs his down with no worse effects than a little flip of his cowboy hat. Daffy fobs his off on Porky Pig, who enjoys the drink, at which point Daffy demands another and tosses it back. Comic pause. Daffy and Porky, now glassy-eyed, both burble nursery rhymes.

The tough guy with the punishing original cocktail is a reliable gag, and one that serves as the introduction to Jerry Lewis's Rat Pack persona in the 1963 movie "The Nutty Professor." Having changed himself into a Mr. Hyde called Buddy Love, the professor



proceeds to a swinging off-campus bar called the Purple Pit. He demonstrates his bad-boy bona-fides by grabbing the bartender and demanding an Alaskan Polar Bear Heater, which he specifies to the stumped barman: two shots of vodka, a little rum, bitters, a smidgen of vinegar, a shot of vermouth, a shot of gin, a shot of Scotch, a little brandy, lemon peel, orange peel, cherry, and some more Scotch. "Mix it nice," Love demands. The bartender takes a tiny sip . . . comic pause . . . cationia. The Alaskan Polar Bear Heater isn't particularly drinkable, but its place in popular culture is such that it has earned a spot in no small number of actual bartending books.

The same goes for the Pan Ga-

lactic Gargle Blaster, from Douglas Adams's "Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy." Drinking it is said to be like having your brain bashed in with a slice of lemon peel wrapped around a gold brick. (But the effect, of course, takes place only after a comic pause.) The "Hitchhiker's Guide" version relies on a stellar (and the term is used not in the superlative sense) liquor called Ol' Janx. But half a dozen or more concoctions have been contrived by enthusiasts using terrestrial spirits. There is a Gargle Blaster made of vodka, Tia Maria, cherry brandy, cider, lime juice and 7 Up. There's even a German version, the Pangalaktischer Donnergergler, which involves tequila, gin, vodka, blue curaçao, lemon juice and Champagne.

More recently, "The Simpsons" is responsible for a host of comic cocktails. A dedicated drinker of Duff Beer, Homer Simpson has nonetheless found time to invent a couple of original drinks, including the Lawnmower (wheatgrass juice and vodka) and the Flaming Homer (the dregs of every liqueur bottle in the liquor cabinet, plus a splash of Krusty the Clown brand Non-Narkotik Kough Syrup, flambé). When Moe the bartender steals the recipe and starts to make a fortune serving it, Homer learns the hard truth that there are no patents or copyrights for cocktails.

Not that such limitations stop the series' production company from doing its best to control the cocktails its characters have con-

Flanders Planters Punch

3 shots of rum
1 jigger of bourbon
A little daberoo of crème de cassis for flavor
Combine with ice in a tumbler.

trived, such as Ned Flanders's version of the classic Planters Punch. To get permission to use an image of neighborino Ned pouring Homer a Flanders Planters Punch, the "Simpsons" rights shop required that we print the drink recipe exactly the way Ned describes it to Homer—"three shots of rum, a jigger of bourbon, and just a little daberoo of crème de cassis for flavor." Alas, the drink just isn't that good according to the original Flanders specifications. Also, as a lampshade-crowned Homer discovers, the pour is dangerously over-generous. I couldn't in good conscience recommend it.

What would it take to fix the Flanders Planters Punch? Not much. A traditional Planters Punch is made of rum, fresh lime juice and sugar syrup. The Ned Flanders version adds bourbon, which is an interesting variation, and then substitutes a sweet fruit liqueur (the crème de cassis) for the sugar syrup, which is a standard strategy for personalizing a classic. But what's missing from Ned's concoction is the lime juice necessary to balance the sweetness of the cassis. That, and sensible portions.

As much as I would like to, I can't specify that you make the drink with 45 ml of rum, 15 ml of bourbon, 7 ml of crème de cassis, and a squeeze of juice from a wedge of lime. It wouldn't be an authentic Flanders Planters Punch. (Come to think of it, I would hate to contradict Ned's expertise in any way—he claims to have "a Ph.D. in mixology.") And though the cartoon quaff may be too boozy by far, at least it's no Gargle Blaster.

Return engagement

The Grammy-winning singer-songwriter on her new album

Albums, unlike movies, typically don't have sequels. But when India.Arie's 2006 album, "Testimony: Vol. 1, Life & Relationship," premiered on the Billboard album charts at No. 1, its success suggested her audience was hungry for more. Now she's back with a follow-up—"Testimony: Vol. 2, Love & Politics." "I always intended to do more than one," she says. "There was too much material to put on a single release." Here, Ms. Arie talks about three tracks from her new album.

—Christopher John Farley



'Therapy'

In this ebullient track, Ms. Arie says she was trying to connect the idea of the "laying on of hands" in religious experiences to the emotional healing that can be found in a lover's touch when a relationship is going well. "I wrote that because I felt that about someone," she says. Roy "Gramps" Morgan, of the veteran reggae band Morgan Heritage, provides backing vocals on the song.

'Ghetto'

Ms. Arie says she's had a long-running discussion with her touring musical director, Shannon Sanders, about the fact that many areas in impoverished regions of the world have an eerie similarity to places in the U.S. "We talked about how places in Kenya really look like the backwoods of Tennessee," she says. Ms. Arie, Mr. Sanders and Drew Ramsey co-wrote a song on the subject, with the lyrics "There are places in Havana that remind me of Savannah." The song is flavored by Latin-tinged acoustic guitar.

'Chocolate High'

Co-written with Musiq Soulchild and Andrew Castro, this romantic soul song was born in a rush. Ms. Arie invited Musiq Soulchild over to her house in Atlanta to write. "I said, 'You say a word and I say a word and that'll be the song,'" says Ms. Arie. "And he said 'Chocolate' and I said 'High!' And we stayed up all night and wrote it and recorded it."

WSJ Café: Watch India.Arie perform selections from her new album, at WSJ.com/Lifestyle.

Browsing Brussels: The city's hidden

By Brigid Grauman

Special to *The Wall Street Journal*

BUYING ART AND antiques at auction is almost like gambling: You spot the object you want, you size up your rivals, and then an adrenaline-soaring rush of figures forces you to decide whether to stay with an item you love at all costs or let it go.

Brussels may not be a world center for antiques on a par with Paris or London but it is a great place to find interesting art, furniture and objects at good prices. The selection at its auction houses and shops is varied and unpredictable. Belgium—a global economic power from the 1880s to the 1930s thanks to its colony in the Congo—still has a great deal of private wealth and a long tradition of collecting by astute buyers. “The Belgian bourgeoisie likes to accumulate things,” says Henri Bounameaux, secretary general of the Belgian Chamber of Art Experts, “so we have a lot of sellers and a lot of buyers. And the prices are reasonable.”

Belgians also like to trade and sell; many small villages have weekend flea markets where buyers can find worthwhile things to pick up.

Major auction houses like Christie's, Sotheby's, Bonhams, Vienna's Dorotheum and Cologne's Lempertz all have offices in Brussels, though they don't hold sales here; the only international house to do so is the Paris-based Pierre Bergé & Associés. Yet the city is home to a large number of local houses that do a brisk business.

“Belgium—and particularly Flanders—has many collectors of 20th-century and contemporary art who have a very international outlook,” says Roland de Lathuy, director of Christie's Brussels. “We give them access to the international market.”

As auction houses in Paris and London are being hit by the economic crisis, Brussels dealers main-

tain that quality art is still selling well. “It's the medium quality pieces that aren't selling,” says Mon Bernaerts, who has his own auction house in Antwerp and heads the Belgian-Luxembourg Auctioneers' Confederation. “The professionals have faith in the best pieces.”

Auctioneer Serge Hutry puts it this way: “It's like restaurants. People still go out but they don't order a first course and they don't have coffee. We still have as many sellers and buyers, but they spend more prudently.”

Belgium has long been a center for quality art. There's no country in the world, according to Mr. Hutry, that can claim such a high density of artists between the 19th and mid-20th centuries. “Eighty percent of them were Sunday painters,” he says, “but the others included some very great artists, like Rik Wouters and Permeke.” That's why Belgium is particularly appreciated as a market for fine arts, with specialists from around the world scouring the catalogs of Belgian auction houses.

The real bargains, Mr. Hutry and other experts say, are at the unfashionable end of the market. Heavy 18th-century oak cupboards go for a song: They're too big for most houses and the prevalent taste is for light-colored wood, but they're handsome and well crafted. Popular sellers include smaller antiques, like side-tables, modern furniture from Art Deco to contemporary design and paintings.

The catalogued sales at Brussels auction houses take place in the evening, but in the daytime a few of them hold “ventes bourgeoises,” at which they sell the less desirable or damaged pieces from a particular estate, which can include attractive dishes, paintings by minor artists, carpets and furniture that doesn't qualify as top-end antique.

Here, a look at five of Brussels' top auction houses.



The exhibition room at Horta, with 'Jeune femme à la rose' (1928), by Maurice De Korte, in the foreground (estimate: €1,200-€1,500); below right, 'Young Woman,' a late 19th-century alabaster bust from Florence, sold for €600 at the auction house.



Flagey

A more casual auction house much loved by the surprise-hunter, Flagey also deals with estates. Its viewing days are brief and informal, but many a minor discovery—Art Deco dishes and objets d'art, for instance—can be made by the diligent searcher. It pays to return here often, to rummage through the wooden boxes alongside the antique dealers who come from the surrounding area in search of hidden treasures.

“You have complete Chinese dinner sets that Brussels people can't bear the sight of anymore,” says collector Bruno Morelli. “Persian carpets are passé, and you can find splendid pieces from Shiraz for €80 to €150.”

Self-described compulsive collector Edouard Nihoul, a former politician and pastry-shop owner, remembers spotting a black-and-white drawing of Beirut by David Hockney. “The catalogue attributed the work to someone called Beirut and priced it at €20.” But Mr. Nihoul wasn't the only person to have spotted the mistake and he was quickly outbid by another buyer, who won the item for €3,000.

Flagey also sells antique toys, including lead soldiers, Märklin trains and Dinky Toys models.

Coming sales: March 23-24, arts and antiques; March 25, militaria and lead soldiers.

4 Rue du Nid
☎ 32-2-644-9767
www.flagey.com



At Galerie Moderne, a ceramic vase (left) by Jean-Michel Folon (estimate: €2,600-€3,400) and a bronze Cryptocube (below) by Pierre Alechinsky (estimate: €3,800-€4,400); right, a pre-sale viewing at the auction house.

Galerie Moderne

This family-run auction house deals almost entirely in estates. Here you'll find items from families who typically want to sell everything except the most valuable pieces; quality varies, as the auction house is relatively unselective, but sometimes the pickings are first-rate. Their coming sale includes some fine Belgian paintings, including Jean Laudy still lifes and two portraits of women by Fernand Toussaint.

The Moderne's main buyers used to be antique dealers, who would then sell a few weeks later in fairs or flea markets for four or five times the price. But the number of private buyers has increased over the years.

The sales are monthly, and quite unpredictable in what they offer. They can bring in high prices. Auctioneer Maurice Lemercinier shows me an early 20th-century portrait

of a Congolese woman by Belgian artist Fernand Allard L'Olivier that went to a seller in Dubai for €36,000. The house also recently sold an anonymous 17th-century painting of the Deposition of Christ for €320,000 that had been estimated at €7,000. “Even if it wasn't attributed, it was just a very good painting,” says Mr. Lemercinier.

“Belgium is full of antiques,” he says, and even if you don't necessarily find extraordinary bargains, you can often find things you wouldn't find elsewhere. Moderne has a reputation for quality Persian carpets at more than affordable prices. They also hold occasional sales of Belgian first-edition or rare comic strips.

Coming sales: March 17-18
3 Rue du Parnasse
☎ 32-2-511-5415
www.galeriemoderne.be

n art treasures



Horta

"Belgium is a country of individualists," says Dominique de Villegas, who bought Hôtel de Ventes Horta in 2004 after having worked at the auction house for 18 years. "A Belgian likes to take advice, make up his own mind and then settle his own price. He hates to be told how much to pay. That's why auction houses are such a hit in this country."

Located inside a striking Art Deco-style steel-fronted building in the Brussels borough of Schaerbeek (and named after the visionary Art Nouveau architect Victor Horta), this house's selection is rigorous, and the furniture and art on offer are in good shape, ready for use. The pre-sale viewings are well-organized affairs, with the pieces attractively displayed amid bouquets of flowers. A coming sale includes a few Russian paintings, including works by modern artists Piotr Gorounov and Larissa Naoumova, valued between €5,000 to €25,000.

Sales are conducted in French, with screens dotted around the room featuring the object up for sale and prices in euros, dollars and pounds.

Horta holds monthly art and antique sales, and separate annual auctions of wine and comic strips, including first editions and memora-

bilia. Dealer Henri Gots sells his antiquarian books here three or four times a year. Jewelry sales take place regularly, and the house refuses direct sales to customers before or after the auction. "That guarantees that I do my very best during the auction," says Mr. de Villegas.

Mr. de Villegas says he has recently seen a marked rejuvenation of his clientèle, a change he ascribes to the Internet. "Our customers used to be retired people who had plenty of time to come around and look at the pieces," he says. "Now everyone can surf." But he firmly recommends dropping by. "With the Internet, you have no sense of volume and it's hard to imagine what the piece would look like at home," he says.

Occasionally, a buyer has been known to snap up a bargain. Retired geologist Bruno Morelli recently discovered a work by Cornish landscape painter Garstin Cox. "I like this painter," says Mr. Morelli. "He did a lot of portraits of ordinary folk. I got it for €200, when in the U.K. it's easily worth €3,000. But they hadn't spotted him. If you're sharp-eyed, you can catch items that have slipped through the net."

Coming sales: March 16-17
70-74 Avenue de Roodebeek
☎ 32-2-741-6060
www.horta.be

Above, an early 20th-century mask from the Democratic Republic of Congo sold for €1,200 at Vanderkindere; top, 'Skater' chairs (1968), estimated at €10,000-€15,000 at Bergé.

Pierre Bergé & Associés

Brussels' only international auction house is also its most chic, with white stuccoed walls and velvety black carpeting, located in an 18th-century post office building in the city's prettiest square, the Place du Grand Sablon. Exclusive showings are organized for the country's wealthiest collectors; other buyers wander in during the day to admire beautifully displayed vintage Scandinavian furniture or African sculpture.

It's a satellite of the main Pierre Bergé office in Paris, where sales concentrate on books, archaeology, classical and modern art, and 20th-century design. (Last week, the house scored a triumph with the sale of Yves Saint Laurent and Pierre Bergé's private art collection, co-organized with Christie's. The weekend before, a few of the pieces had been exhibited in the Brussels branch.) A branch in Geneva sells jewelry, and the Brussels salesroom, which opened in 2006, concentrates on contemporary art and design and ethnographic arts—African, Asian and pre-Columbian.

"We're more focused on the 20th century here and on contemporary art," says Frédéric Chambre, the branch's vice president, "but we have the same clients in all three locations."

The auction house holds several sales a month. Expect quality but no bargains. A Zaha Hadid sculptural vase, for instance, recently went for €67,650.

Downstairs, a gallery exhibits and sells vintage American arts & crafts and contemporary design. "We hunt around for pieces and sell like any gallery," says Olivia Roussev, who runs the space. "We produce designer shows from scratch." So far, they have featured the trendy Arne Quinze, Jurgen Bey, Pol Quadens and Edward Wormley.

Coming sales: March 22, Scandinavian vintage design; March 29-30, Belgian art, including Félicien Rops; April 26, contemporary art and design.

40 Place du Grand Sablon
☎ 32-2-504-8030
www.pba-auctions.com



Vanderkindere

This gallery, run by Stéphane Nicaise since 1989, has a reputation for seriousness. "When we select modern art, we never take dubious pieces," Mr. Nicaise says. "We don't want to sell at any cost."

Many of the customers are professionals, communicating their bids with a wink or an almost imperceptible flick of the fingers.

The coming March auction will focus on Art Nouveau and Art Deco, with pieces that once belonged to Belgium's star Art Nouveau architect, Henry Van de Velde, including jewelry he designed and two cupboards by Gustave Serrurier-Bovy.

With whole estates, the quality pieces are sold in the catalogued evening sales and the more pedestrian items at the daytime "ventes bourgeoises," where there can be some surprises.

"We priced a Ming dish at €30 because it had been shattered into 30 pieces," Mr. Nicaise says, "and it went for €6,000. It was bought by a professional who knew where he could get it mended."

Mr. Nicaise says the Internet has attracted more buyers from abroad. "Before that we used intermediaries for our overseas sales and it was all a lot more complicated," he says.

Coming sales: March 17-18
685-687 Chaussée d'Alseberg
☎ 32-2-344-5446
www.vanderkindere.com



A pre-sale viewing at the Vanderkindere auction house.

Photos: Jolits Luyten for The Wall Street Journal (6); Brice Vandermeeren (Pierre Bergé)

See more photos from Brussels' art auction houses, at WSJ.com/Europe



Picasso's 'Les Femmes d'Alger,' from 1955 (above), and 'Portrait de Jaime Sabartes en Grand Espagne,' 1939 (below).

© Libby Howie/Succession Picasso

Rare stamps at auction

FOR MORE THAN 40 years, British collector David Barton (1941-2008) scoured the world for his favorite stamps, building an enviable collection.

On March 6, Sotheby's will offer the David Barton Collection in a 491-lot sale, the proceeds of which

Collecting

MARGARET STUDER

will go to two charities in Israel, the Shaare Zedek Medical Center and the Weizmann Institute of Science.

"Stamp collecting was David's consuming passion," says Sotheby's philatelic consultant Richard Ashton, whose friendship with the collector began 46 years ago. To catch Mr. Barton's attention, a stamp had to be mint and in the best possible condition (premium quality).

Mr. Ashton remembers Mr. Barton's eye for detail as he sought items that were "fresh, brilliant and perfectly centered" (meaning the image's details are located where they should be). He adds that Mr. Barton had no interest in quantity, but would acquire just one piece based on a collecting strategy of only "buying what is perfect."

The collection includes stamps principally from Great Britain, the British Empire, the U.S. and Switzerland.

The first lot to come under the hammer will be a mint-condition example of the world's first adhesive postage stamp from a public postal system, the Penny Black with the head of Queen Victoria issued in the U.K. on May 1, 1840 (estimate: £10,000-£12,000).

The next item in the sale will be a lot with a pair of mint Two-Penny Blues, a vivid blue stamp of two pence with the queen's profile that was issued in 1840 only days after the Penny Black.

Two-Penny Blues are much rarer than the Penny Black, making this the most highly valued item on offer (estimate: £40,000-£50,000).

From the Bahamas comes an exceptionally rare block of 12 six-pence stamps in pale lilac from 1861-62, featuring Queen Victoria (estimate: £35,000-£40,000).

Among the American stamps is a group of 20 from 1893, commemorating the landing of Christopher Columbus. Leading the group will be a four-dollar crimson stamp depicting Queen Isabella of Spain and Columbus (estimate: £6,000-£8,000).

A one-dollar American stamp from the 1898 Trans-Mississippi Exposition in Omaha, Neb., an event showcasing the developed West from the Mississippi River to the Pacific Coast, is a miniature work of art. This dramatic stamp—considered an icon of American philately—depicts black cattle in a storm (estimate: £10,000-£12,000).

The sale also offers many items estimated in the hundreds of pounds such as a lovely set of stamps from Cyprus issued in 1934, showing a wide landscape with a tree in the forefront estimated at £400-£500.

Stamps with well-known flaws were also an attraction for Mr. Barton. A pair of U.K. chestnut and mauve stamps from 1910-1913 depicting King George V and his queen is famous for the gash in her ear (estimate: £2,000-£2,500).

Rethinking Picasso for London

A blockbuster show on the painter's influences gets tweaked after Paris run

BY KELLY CROW

THE NATIONAL GALLERY in London is trying to give Pablo Picasso something rare in the museum world: A do-over.

The museum best known for displaying Italian Old Masters is making its first major foray into 20th-century art with "Picasso: Challenging the Past." The exhibit, which opened on Feb. 25, explores how Picasso wrestled with traditional European painting genres like the self-portrait and the still life. The show also attempts to rework a Picasso exhibit that was savaged by art critics but still drew blockbuster crowds during its run at the Grand Palais in Paris earlier this season.

Traveling art exhibits rarely alter much from stop to stop, but the Picasso show in London boasts a different title (the Paris version was called "Picasso and the Masters") and a new catalogue written by British and American academics (the previous catalogue was written by the curators of the Paris show). About half the Picassos in the London show are also new to the exhibit roster, including "The Kiss," a portrait of a couple that belongs to Jeff Koons.

Smaller space and budget constraints account for most of these alterations, says Christopher Riopelle, curator of post-1800 paintings at the National Gallery. He hopes the changes allow the show to be judged on its own merits, not those of its predecessor. "It's wonderful that the crowds in Paris went [to the show] even though the critics told them not to like it," Mr. Riopelle says. "Our show is also very different." ("Portrait of a Woman After Cranach the Younger" is in both shows.)

The move represents a gamble for London, which wants the paying masses to turn up as they did in Paris without turning off reviewers like the one at the Daily Tele-



© Museu Picasso de Barcelona/Succession Picasso

graph who called the original incarnation "an expensive turkey."

France's nonprofit arts agency, the Réunion des Musées Nationaux, spent five years and €4.5 million securing art loans and gallery space for "Picasso and the Masters," its survey of 200-plus artworks that compared Picasso to the artists who directly influenced him, like Rembrandt, Goya and El Greco. (The Louvre and Orsay museums also did complementary Picasso shows.)

When the exhibit opened in October, critics primarily faulted the show for forcing parallels between some of the works. For example, a stylized Picasso portrait of a smug absinthe drinker was juxtaposed with Degas' realistic portrait of a downcast drinker. The pieces share a title, "L'absinthe," but little else visually.

Even so, the exhibit quickly turned into a cultural phenomenon, with more than

783,000 people filing through before the show closed Feb. 2. People waited daily outside the exhibit hall, sometimes for up to five hours. Others waited until the exhibit's final weekend when its doors stayed open around the clock, a first for the Grand Palais. Whenever the waiting crowd got restless, exhibit volunteers handed out mandarin oranges.

Jean-Philippe Catonné, an art teacher in Paris, loved the show so much he visited twice, including once during the exhibit's final night. Pointing to the line snaking up to the entry, Mr. Catonné marveled, "It's an hour before closing time, and there are people still here!" Thomas Grenon, the director of the French arts agency, says the public outpouring in Paris mattered more than any bad reviews because it proved how much "the French public is interested in confronting genius."

In London, museum officials are preparing for a crowd of around 250,000 people to visit by the time the exhibit ends in June. If lines get long, Mr. Riopelle says museum staff will distribute free exhibition guides as well as "dry, English biscuits."

Jani Franck, who runs a gallery and café in Southampton called the Art House, has an even better suggestion: umbrellas. Ms. Franck says she doesn't relish the idea of making the hour-plus trip into London to see the Picassos only to be directed to the back of a long line. "But if the French can stand out in the rain," she says, "the British can certainly weather it for just as long." —Max Colchester contributed to this article.

WSJ.com

Museum makeover
See more artwork from the 'Picasso: Challenging the Past' exhibition, at
WSJ.com/Lifestyle

❖ Top Picks

A new look at the old Iran

London ■ history

"Shah 'Abbas: The Remaking of Iran" is the third in a series of emperor shows in the British Museum's magnificent Round Reading Room. Though 'Abbas lacks the charisma of the subjects of the previous two shows—the first emperor of China and the Roman emperor Hadrian—he is like them in at least one way: He inherited (at the early age of 16) a country in dazzling disarray, with enemies everywhere. In his case, it was Ottomans to the west and Uzbeks in the east.

The display itself is capacious, designed to take advantage of the space under the Reading Room's great dome to make you feel as though you're in the Maidan, the enormous piazza of Isfahan developed by 'Abbas, the fifth Safavid ruler and great unifier of Iran, who ruled from 1587 to 1629 (and thus a contemporary of England's Elizabeth I).

This exhibition is a diplomatic coup for Neil MacGregor, the director of the BM, and for Sheila Canby, its curator, as eight separate Iranian institutions have made loans to it. The high quality of the objects is so evident that many of them—especially the paintings, many from the BM's own collection—stop you in your tracks.

Shah 'Abbas was also the reformer who made Shiism, with its cult of martyrdom, the state religion, and so separated Iran from the Sunni Muslim majority. Despite his own Sufi pedigree of mystical, moderate Islam, 'Abbas executed Sufis who doubted his authority, and established the power of the Shiite clerisy.

'Abbas was not an attractive character. He had a nasty temper and routinely killed off his rivals, including one of his own five sons (and he blinded another two). His religiosity was self-serving and perhaps superficial.

A good number of the exquisite pictures in this exhibition show un-Islamic drinking; the very size of the wine jars shows how little attention was paid to its prohibition. And the most striking (and very beautiful) image in the show depicts the 56-year-old Shah 'Abbas caressing a beardless, round-cheeked, almond-eyed pageboy, who is holding an exaggeratedly phallic wine flask between his knees.

But the contrary-minded, mercurial shah made several magnificent charitable religious donations, called waqf, to support shrines, from which the present exhibition benefits.

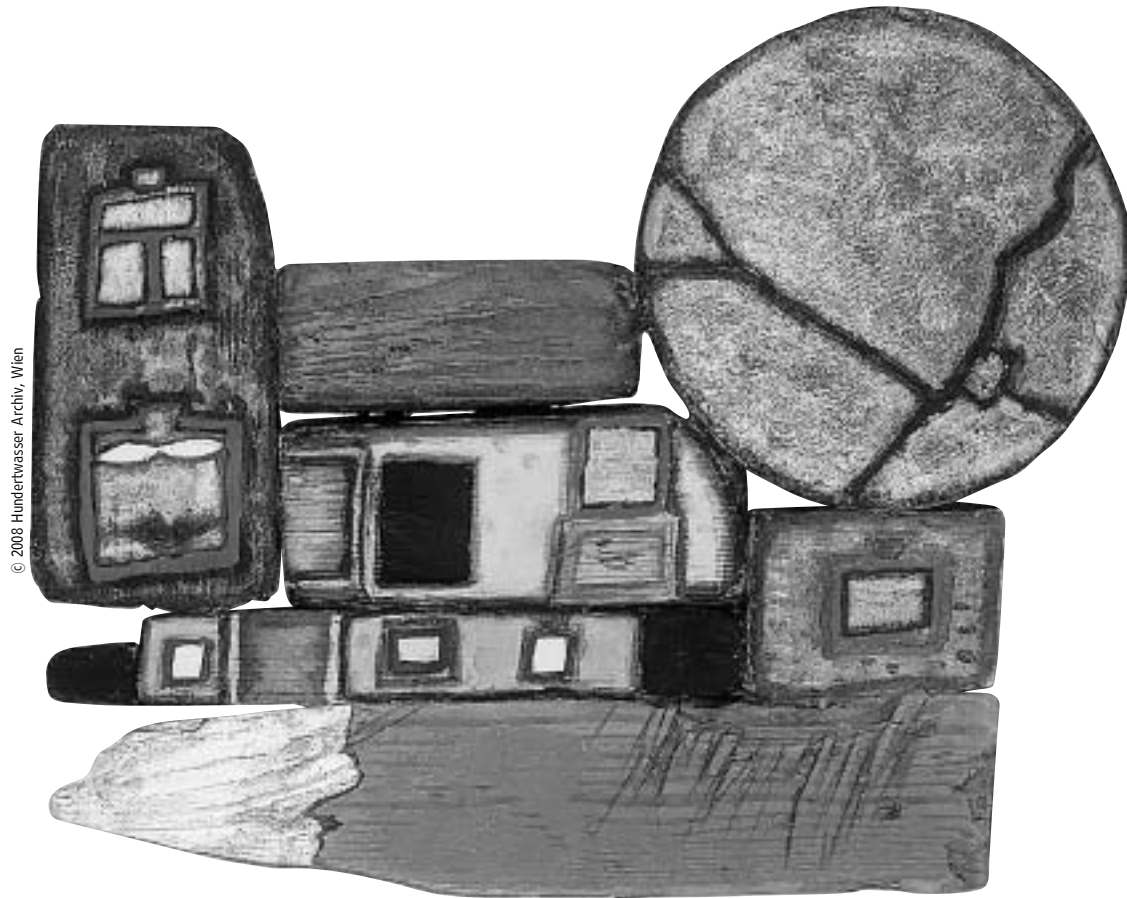
Will this show make us think of Shia Islam in a context other than the one we hear on the news, when it is so often associated with querulous mullahs? Perhaps, as what you take away from the show is a sense of complexity. There are even some Christian artifacts on display, for Shah 'Abbas was enlightened enough not just to tolerate, but to welcome foreigners (the best known of whom were the English Sherley brothers; Robert Sherley and his wife Teresia were famously painted by Van Dyck in 1622, and another portrait by an unknown artist appears in this show).

Under Shah 'Abbas a new artistic style developed in all the decorative arts, including the metalwork, textiles, carpets, glorious calligraphy and book-binding shown at the BM. He also commissioned many public buildings.

Does this show rip away the veil that hides Iran from the West? Maybe, but it's exceedingly difficult to describe the true face behind it.

—Paul Levy

Until June 14
☎ 44-7323-8000



© 2008 Hundertwasser Archiv, Wien

Above, '904 Pelestrina Wood' (1988), by Friedensreich Hundertwasser, in Vienna; top, portrait of Sir Robert Sherley from before 1628, artist unknown, in London; below, a scene from 'La Bohème' at English National Opera, in London.

www.britishmuseum.org

Vienna ■ art

"The Yet Unknown Hundertwasser" delivers both more and less than it promises. Rarely seen works, made over the course of five decades by the eccentric Austrian painter and architect Friedensreich Hundertwasser (1928-2000), aim to divulge his less familiar side. But Hundertwasser's saturated colors, unexpected hues and irregular lines—which impart a vibrational energy to his paintings—were already evident by the time he was 20. The show's biggest epiphany, it seems, is how much of an outsider the artist had always intended to be.

While most of his Viennese contemporaries frolicked in blood and animal entrails during the Actionist 1960s, Hundertwasser preferred more genteel methods, as a series of photographs from 1967 show. Slipping into a long-sleeved, satin shirt in fuschia, he applied soft, spiraling pink stripes on a nude model, the paint winding down her body like a ribbon.

It wasn't long after that Hundertwasser stopped showing his work in museums and galleries, preferring to

champion his vision of life in harmony with nature through the mass media, and simplifying his visual language along the way. A logo for Vienna's "Mehr Grün" (More Green) campaign, for example, featured two sets of eyes peering directly out from a canopy of leaves—an immediate public appeal for more greenery in the city that ran in newspaper ads.

Architectural models displayed for the first time include Hundertwasser's 1987 design for a Ronald McDonald House, which was realized in the Netherlands in 2007 (seven years after the artist's death). There is also a yellow-streaked proposal for the re-design of a Boeing B-757 Condor, from 1995. Both these might be labeled kitsch by Hundertwasser's detractors, but they also clearly demonstrate the artist's belief in a life leavened with beauty and dignity.

The show is housed in Hundertwasser's own KunstHausWien, with his trademark uneven floors, jaunty windows and indoor trees, and has the feel of re-discovering an old friend.

—Helen Chang

Until March 15
☎ 43-1-712-04-91

www.kunsthauwien.com

London ■ opera

The English National Opera owes a huge debt to Jonathan Miller. Revivals of his bankable productions of "Rigoletto," "The Mikado," "Carmen" and "The Barber of Seville" have helped pack the house over the years. Still, this new production of "La Bohème" is his first commission from them in 20 years.

Visually and dramatically, it is a triumph for Sir Jonathan, his regular designer, Isabella Bywater, and lighting designer, Jean Kalman. They have embraced Puccini's Parisian setting, but brought it forward to the early 1930s, giving it the look so familiar to us from the photographs of Cartier-Bresson, Kertész and especially Brassai.

These are among the most beautiful, affecting sets I've ever seen. With few touches of color, the sets and costumes capture utterly the nuanced contrasts of those memorable black-and-white pictures in which the effects of shadow and depth can supply more subtle emotional content than the saturation and hue of color ever do.

In the program, Sir Jonathan says he was also thinking of another medium: "Puccini's operas are ... like movies, and 'La Bohème' is the most natural and believable of them all. I want to make it as much like a movie as it could possibly be."

His idea of the relationships among the artists has also been taken from a film, "Withnail and I," so they are "shabby, upper class boys who think squalor is very romantic," and their bohemian existence just an interlude before they take up the jobs intended for them all along by their parents.

Tenor Alfie Boe had his big moment holding Mimi's frozen hand (Mimi was played on the night I saw it by understudy Michelle Walton), but only because conductor Miguel Harth-Bedoya kept the orchestra hushed enough for Mr. Boe's small, sweet voice to be heard in the vast Coliseum. He shared vocal honors with Pauls Putnins Rimbaud-look-alike Colline and Roland



Tristram Kenton



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Wood's Marcello, but both of them out-acted Mr. Boe's Rodolfo, as did Hanan Alattar as Musetta. With a stronger cast and more vigorous conductor this sumptuous, intelligent production could be ENO's breadwinner for the next 20 years.

—Paul Levy

Until March 8
☎ 44-871-911-0200
www.eno.org

Rome ■ art

A new exhibition covering more than 30 years in the career of Bertrand Lavier showcases the eclectic thinking of the 60-year-old French artist against the setting of the late-16th-century Villa Medici in Rome, which sits just at the top of the Spanish Steps and is home to the French Academy.

"Bertrand Lavier at Villa Medici" makes wise and humorous use of the Villa's spaces, beginning in front of the entrance, where visitors are greeted by a lip-shaped couch set on top of a large white freezer. It's one of the two works that pair a freezer with another object; the other places an upright piano on a white cooler.

What once was the water tank for the Villa, a tall room with bare walls, hosts "Nautiriad," a red-and-black kayak marked by holes, tears and scratches. Water leaks from the ceiling high above it, and drops resonate constantly as they hit the kayak and the floor around it, where pools form. "Moby-matic," a small motorcycle whose front is crushed in a collision, hangs from the ceiling at about a meter from the floor at the end of a small corridor.

In the Villa's garden, the artist has adorned a classically designed fountain with more than a hundred colored hoses, which are spraying water upward and occasionally wet bystanders on a windy day.

Mr. Lavier even uses the Villa's internal façade, more opulent than the external one, for his art, displaying eight colored ceramic panels in the nooks between windows and bas-reliefs. Each panel bears the logo of a large bank, rid of any words and stripped down to its simplest elements. Deutsche Bank and Bank of China stand out and are easily recognizable, as is the French bank that gives name to the work, titled "Sociétés Générales."

An emphasis on brands, whether they represent a bank or a home appliance, runs through the exhibit. A black grand piano painted in thick strokes of black acrylic is titled "Steinway & sons," a hedge trimmer is simply "Black & Decker," and three large paintings of colorful, geometric patterns mimic and take names from Ikea bed linens. Pulled from street signs or department store shelves, Mr. Lavier's brands lose their power and meaning, becoming merely names attached to objects or images that can then be admired in their own right.

—Davide Berretta

Until March 8
☎ 39-06-67-61-1
www.villamedici.it

'Confessions': Prescient, or irrelevant?

CONFESSIONS OF A Shopaholic" sounds like it might have been rendered totally irrelevant by the economic turnaround. But no, this silly chick flick starring Isla Fisher has a base or two covered and could even be seen—this is a stretch, but I'm bending over backward here—as a Cassandra-like warning from the pre-September 15th era.

The young shopper in question, Rebecca Bloomwood, packs a

Film

JOE MORGENSTERN

dozen credit cards in her purse and courts disaster with her free-spending, free-charging, ways. The disaster occurs when she becomes, by preposterous inadvertence, a nationally famous financial sage who counsels credit-card restraint.

The production renders totally irrelevant all hopes for a well-made movie. It's one of those ragged, pandemonious studio comedies that hammers at plot points in every contrived scene.

But Ms. Fisher has a few moments worthy of her abundant comedic gifts—my favorite is a fan dance—and the cast includes Hugh Dancy, who is calm and engaging as the editor of a financial magazine, and Kristin Scott Thomas, who visits a ripe French accent on a more-than-vaguely Vogueish version of Anna Wintour.

'The Pink Panther 2'

If "The Pink Panther 2" were merely a minimalist approach to the classic series, it might have been in keeping with Steve Martin's own aesthetic; he's a past master of subtle comedy. But the movie is minimalist—as bare-bones as a "Panther" can be and still get away with it.

This time the ever-bumbling Inspector Clouseau is on the ever-



Above, Isla Fisher in 'Confessions of a Shopaholic'; top right, Steve Martin in 'Pink Panther 2.'



© Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Pictures and Columbia Pictures

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Opening this week in Europe

- Confessions of a Shopaholic Greece, Finland
- Defiance Belgium, Germany
- Gran Torino Germany, Iceland, Spain
- He's Just Not That Into You Croatia, Romania
- Last Chance Harvey Belgium, France
- Marley and Me France, Germany, Iceland, Netherlands, Poland
- Slumdog Millionaire Denmark, Sweden
- The International Denmark, Estonia
- The Pink Panther 2 Italy
- The Reader Norway
- The Wrestler Italy

Source: IMDb

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meandering trail of a thief who steals such priceless artifacts as the Magna Carta (nothing is made of that theft), the Shroud of Turin (Clouseau calls the pontiff Mr. Pope and detects that he's very spiritual) and the Pink Panther Diamond, whose re-disappearance—it was stolen in the previous film too—may have been required for the perfunctory script to fill 90 minutes.

That film gave Steve Martin his first crack at a character famously played by Peter Sellers and Alan Arkin, and he pulled the role off with beguiling panache. This time

he goes through the motions, plus a few gyrations as a flamenco dancer, with a dogged sense of duty that's shared by other prisoners of the shabby production: Jean Reno, Emily Mortimer, John Cleese and Lily Tomlin, who plays a strident enforcer of political correctness.

The soundtrack makes generous use of trombones to indicate humor.

'Coraline'

"Coraline" is Henry Selick's stop-motion, 3-D version of Neil Gaiman's fantasy novel about a

young girl who discovers, on the other side of a brick wall, an alternate version of her happy home, with an Other Mother who seems more loving than her own.

Anyone who has seen Mr. Selick's earlier animated features, "James and the Giant Peach" and "The Nightmare Before Christmas," knows of his abundant gifts for graphic design.

But "Coraline" is distinguished, if you can call it that, by a creepiness so deep as to seem perverse, and the film finally succumbs to terminal deficits in dramatic energy, narrative coherence and

plain old heart.

Even the 3-D effects fall into a no-puppet's-land between art and technical oddity; some figures pop out from the screen fully modeled, others stay stubbornly flat. That's a relatively minor issue, however, in a children's entertainment that's much too scary for little kids (ugly insects provide a pervasive visual motif) and too lifeless to enchant older audiences.

It's as if Mr. Selick reached a brick wall on the way to feeling what his characters might feel, and never found a way to punch through.

Actress Isla Fisher on entering the mind of a 'Shopaholic'

BY JAMIN BROPHY-WARREN

WHEN ISLA FISHER signed on for the lead of the film adaptation of the novel "Confessions of a Shopaholic," she had little idea how prescient the film would be. Written more than eight years ago during healthier economic times by British author Sophie Kinsella, the series follows a young woman, Rebecca Bloomwood, who is addicted to shopping—and is living beyond her means. For the 33-year-old Ms. Fisher, one of the biggest challenges was trying to understand a practice that consumes so many others. "I shop rarely and poorly," she says.

With millions suffering under the weight of debt, she hopes "Shopaholic" is warning about the consequences of over-consumption, albeit one wrapped in a love story set in New York City. Ms. Fisher (who is engaged to "Borat" creator Sacha Baron Cohen) says her training in clowning and miming at the Jacques Lecoq School in Paris helped her add an element of

comedy to the cautionary film.

Q: How did you prepare for the role?

I attended a few groups for addicted shoppers. There's all types—image shopping, bulimic shopping, bargain shopping. It's something that affects both men and women. It was very sad to go to groups like that and like any addictive nature, it makes your life unmanageable.

Q: It seemed very timely.

This movie was conceived during a different economic period. We started shooting in early February [2008]. There's even a line in the movie where her father talks about debt and how if the American economy can stay afloat, Becky can too. But it's a redemption story, so we're all learning about consumption.

Q: Ms. Kinsella's books were already popular before you took the role. Was it easier or harder to work within a pre-established



Icon International

universe?

I would have said it was harder, but I had Sophie on set. Just being able to go and check and say "Becky Bloomwood's thinking this. Is that right?" She never

tired of me having a discussion.

Q: How often was she on set?

About two-thirds of the movie. In real life, she's Rebecca Bloomwood. I stole her mannerisms.

Q: What inspired you about Ms. Bloomwood?

I found the nature of her denial—and her creativity in it—appealing. She's constantly getting into scrapes because she panics on the spot and it comes back to bite her. It's so rare as a woman when you read comedic films that the lead is both a funny woman and is flawed. Normally, you're just the girlfriend who laughs at everything.

Q: Was it indulgent to live out this role since you're not a big shopper?

Absolutely. The pageantry of getting your hair curled and then all these beautiful clothes put on you—it was totally different. It was an escape. In Hollywood, you feel a responsibility to look less disheveled than you are. But I'm a mom and I'm not good at putting time into prepping. I tell my girlfriends—imagine if all the time you put into waxing and primping, you took all of that energy and put it into something useful.

Mr. Darwin regrets

Why the great English naturalist would be dismayed by the bicentenary hoopla

BY MICHAEL NEVE

A GEOLOGY ENTHUSIAST in his early life, Charles Darwin would have surely reached for the word “deluge” or “explosion” to describe the sheer amount of activity that we are all witnessing to celebrate his birth in 1809 and the 1859 publication of “The Origin of Species.” Even as you read this, another 747 has flown overhead, crammed with historians, scientists and commentators, all en route to some exotic locale, all hoping that they have something new to say about Darwin and his work.

Amid all the mayhem, the meetings, the publications, the circus of radio and television programs, it might be worth a moment of our time to speculate on how Darwin himself might have dealt with all this. On April 22, 1882, he was buried in Westminster Abbey in London, close to the monument of Sir Isaac Newton. Without intruding on his peaceful state, are there aspects to his life and character that give us clues?

One is already at hand: where he is buried. It was entirely part of Darwin’s deep need for privacy that he expected to be buried in the churchyard at Downe, the village in Kent where he and his family lived the majority of their lives together. His beloved wife Emma is buried there. But no: A press campaign and the scientific elite of the day insisted his burial be on par with that of the great Newton. And so, Darwin was put to rest in the national shrine, public in death in ways that he had resisted in life.

Darwin’s tirelessness as a letter writer was matched only by his indebtedness to his correspondents, so long as they stayed at arm’s length. Darwin on a mobile phone? No. Darwin on email? Reluctantly. Darwin texting complex observations on barnacles? You must be joking. But Darwin as a prompt correspondent to all interested parties? You bet. Anonymity and knowledge combined and shared. No celebrity.

Dodging the rays of publicity was necessary for another reason. After his return from his world travels, Darwin was plagued by ill health. As with so many aspects of his life and work, there are a million expert opinions as to why. Tropical infection picked up in South America? Psychosomatic anxiety about the implications of his theory? Gastro-intestinal troubles?

What we do know is that he



Hulton Archive/Getty Images



An engraving of Charles Darwin in his study at Down House; below, a circa-1880 photo of the naturalist.

vomited, sometimes for 10 or 12 days in a row; that he felt exhausted if he conversed even with his own children for too long; that he excused himself early from the dining table all the time because of flatulence; that he had appalling eczema. He felt dreadful and dreadfully awkward about the whole business. He tried spas, among other things, but by his 50s he looked and felt like an old man.

From the 1860s onwards, the idea of leading a glitzy social life, attending balls in distant London or whatever, was out of the question. He became a hermit, moving from study to drawing room to garden to lounge to bed, day after day. In the words of one of his biographers his wife Emma “transformed Down House into a sanatorium.”

There were weeks when he hardly saw anyone. His steadfast companion was work. He rarely saw visitors. Even his forte—his correspondence—was partly dealt with by his wife and daughter when things were really bad.

How on earth would such a sufferer have managed to rise to the demands of 2009 celebrity? Darwin was fiercely partisan about his work, his theory, about the need for adherents and followers. Assuming the all-too-real physical basis of the illness and its bodily manifestations, he would have prepared an automatic answer to almost all the requests coming his way: “Mr. Darwin regrets...”—the apology almost certainly being signed by Emma.

Privately, of course, the impact of the natural-selection work would have been incredibly pleasing, as much as the evangelical hostility to it would have been infuriating. But attending conferences on his own work? In distant cities? To be reached by airplane? Probably by himself, with no wife? Why would he do such a thing, invalid that he was, away from the

private world of work and the private world of support and safety? He was already ill; such breaks in the domestic round would have been impossible. If it had to be Hamlet without the “Prince” title, so be it.

A final speculation: Darwin would surely have been offered any number of trips back to the Galapagos Islands, where he might be a “guest speaker” on a “Darwin in the Galapagos” tour. All ex-

penses paid, and none of the discomfort of HMS Beagle.

Darwin also would have read the various accounts of his life and work now in existence and would be familiar with the claim that he first hatched his theory of evolution, variation and common ancestry—the whole deal—in the Galapagos. Now, he would know that he hadn’t done that, not there and not then, and that this claim had become part of the my-

thology surrounding his work as penned by a few historians and biologists. So, might that have tempted him? If the “guest speaker” niche was a little demeaning perhaps he could go anonymously, leaving the main party to visit other islands in the group to do the work that he hadn’t properly done in 1835? He might be that odd, slightly unfriendly member of a touring party, politely keeping his distance from the main group.

But wait. Before deciding to accept such an offer, Darwin would check out the Galapagos situation. He would hear of ruin, of tourism bringing imminent eco-death to this extraordinary world, an eco-death only heightened by the technology of getting there, let alone trampling all over it. Because of him! Because he had written about the islands in his journal. Because the world longs for the Big Breakthrough in Science, and this was someone’s version of him.

How could he possibly return? It would be the final travesty, the destruction of a world so strange and pristine that even he could not fathom it while actually there. Leave the tortoises alone. Leave the iguanas alone. Leave the finches alone. Let isolation and silence do their natural magic or—now he would start to feel sick—there won’t be anything left. This time he would reach for the card with a renewed extremity of feeling. “Mr. Darwin regrets...”

Michael Neve is a senior lecturer in the history of medicine at University College London. He co-edited the Penguin Classics editions of Charles Darwin’s “Voyage of the Beagle” and “Autobiographies.”

Downturn debuts

Like much of the rest of the economy, the publishing industry is in a downturn—but some first-time novelists are hoping to break out. It’s always a challenge to market a new, untested author. The three novelists below, however, have been drawing early attention and positive notices for their freshman efforts. All three writers took different paths on the way to becoming fiction writers. A look at three buzz-worthy debut novels, and the authors behind them.

—Rebecca R. Markovitz



AUTHOR/TITLE/ PUB DATE

PLOT

BEFORE THEY WERE NOVELISTS

Kathryn Stockett
‘The Help’
Feb. 10, 2009

Three women, each trying to break free of social expectations, band together to challenge racial and class barriers in 1960s Mississippi.

After college, Ms. Stockett moved to New York to follow her father’s footsteps into culinary school. When being a chef didn’t work out for her, she found work as a consultant for a food magazine.

Philipp Meyer
‘American Rust’
Feb. 24, 2009

In a dying steel town, two friends attempt to flee their dismal lives, but are derailed by an act of violence that sends them both in very different directions.

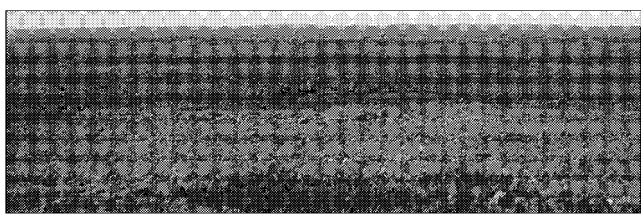
Mr. Meyer, who once worked as an emergency medical technician, was living in Texas when Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans. He drove to Louisiana after the storm and volunteered as a relief worker.

Robert Goolrick
‘A Reliable Wife’
June 4, 2009

When Catherine responds to Ralph’s ad looking for “a reliable wife,” both parties are hiding dark secrets which guarantee this love story will not have a fairy-tale ending.

In 2007, Mr. Goolrick published a memoir, “The End of the World As We Know It,” which begins with the burial of his father and eventually reconciles the impact of a childhood assault with the troubled reality of his adult life.

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❖ Sports

Nothing to 'choke' about

GOLFERS TREMBLE before the word "choke" the way characters in the Harry Potter novels tremble before Lord Voldemort, or He Who Must Not Be Named. Harvey Penick, in his classic "Little Red Book," typifies the wary, superstitious attitude many have about the word. He insists that his students "grip down" on a club rather than "choke down" on it. "You should never use the word 'choke' in connection with your golf game," he warns.

Tour pros can be especially testy about the word. Johnny

Golf Journal

JOHN PAUL NEWPORT

Miller, in the first tournament he announced for NBC in 1990, sized up the shot his friend Peter Jacobsen was facing on the final hole—225 yards to the green, from a downhill lie, over water—and said, "This is absolutely the easiest shot to choke I've ever seen in my life."

Mr. Jacobsen pulled off the shot beautifully and won the tournament, but he was so furious with Mr. Miller for having used the word "choke" in his commentary that the two didn't speak for eight months. Mr. Miller, a former player himself, caught so much additional flak for the remark that he questioned his career move.

"The way some Tour players react to the suggestion they choked, you'd think they'd run out of a burning building and left their family behind," he wrote in his 2004 book "I Call the Shots." "My feeling is, there is a lot to be learned by studying choking."

I agree. Gagging under pressure is painful to watch and miserable to experience. Anyone who shared Greg Norman's pain as he choked away his six-stroke lead over Nick Faldo in the final round of the 1996 Masters knows what I mean. The same holds for viewers of other notorious choke jobs, such as Mark Calcavecchia's shocking slide from five up at the turn to tie his match against Colin Montgomerie at the 1991 Ryder Cup at Kiawah Island, S.C. Or Jean Van de Velde at the 1999 British Open.

Or any number of less epochal collapses by young players vying for their first big win. Earlier this month, Michelle Wie choked, although not horribly, at the SBS Open in Hawaii. On the brink of what would have been her first LPGA victory, she blew a three-stroke lead with eight holes to play and finished second behind Angela Stanford.

But these cases, far from being shameful, are an essential part of the game. Scientific research in the last few years has helped us get a better handle on what choking is, and suggests strategies for avoiding it.

Choking occurs when we pay too much conscious attention to a well-rehearsed routine that would play out better on autopilot. It is essentially the opposite of panic, which occurs when sudden, fearful circumstances shut down conscious thought and cause us to revert almost entirely to instinct.

Choking is only natural. At the big moment, with our anxieties high, our thinking mind, which we



Greg Norman in the throes of his 1996 Masters collapse.

ALLSPORT/Getty Images

can control, usurps command of our swing from our nonthinking, instinctual side, which we cannot control. This is unfortunate because for skilled players the fine-tuned, rhythmic action of the swing is almost all instinct. The plodding conscious mind can't hope to keep up.

Sian L. Beilock, an associate professor of psychology at the University of Chicago, has been studying performance under pressure for more than a decade. As with most researchers in this field, her interest extends beyond golf to such challenges as taking university entrance exams and making crucial presentations to clients. "But golf is a really nice test bed to examine why people fail. The subjects have a highly learned skill, you can introduce simple methods to increase pressure, and a putting green fits easily into the lab," she said.

In an experiment last year, she and her colleagues examined the impact that time pressure had on the putting of novice and skilled golfers. When forced to putt quickly, the low-handicap players performed far better than when they were encouraged to take their time. But for the beginners, the opposite was true. Without deeply learned putting skills to draw on, they putted worse when goaded to do so quickly and better when they had more time to puzzle things out. The takeaway, for experienced players, is to question that old saw about slowing everything down when pressure mounts.

Another study, led by a professor now at the University of St. Andrews in Scotland, revealed a

dramatic decline in performance when skilled players were asked to spend five minutes explaining their putting technique before they made a stroke. This and a raft of other recent studies point in the same direction: Under pressure, the goal should be to disengage the conscious mind as much as possible.

That isn't easy, pressure being what it is, but Tom Dorsel, a sport psychologist and author of "Golf: The Mind Game," suggests a half-dozen ways to defend against choking. One is to distract yourself, perhaps by humming a tune or chatting between shots. Another (which seems to show up on every instructional list, no matter the issue) is to develop a rock-solid pre-shot routine and never vary from it. Yet another is to favor shots, when the heat is on, that are simple and straightforward, while avoiding those that require delicate skills. For example, lay up to full-wedge distance rather than a half-wedge distance.

But certainly the best way to fight choking is to put yourself frequently in choke-inducing situations, including artificially during practice, and monitor your reactions. That's why young Tour pros, in explaining their late-round collapses, are often not as heartbroken as we might expect. "If I keep putting myself in these situations, sooner or later I'll win one," they tell the media, and they are right.

Or, as Mr. Miller writes, you can't beat a choking problem unless you admit you have one in the first place. As almost everyone does.

Email me at golfjournal@wsj.com.

'A Simple Jew' Who Gets Orthodox Crowds Rollicking

Rabbi Israel ben Eliezer, the 18th-century founder of modern Hasidism, was once asked why his followers worshipped in an ecstatic style full of singing and dancing. He responded with a parable about a street-corner fiddler who played with such skill that everyone who heard him began whirling and leaping. A deaf man walked by and wondered if the world had gone mad. "Why are they jumping up and down, waving their arms and turning in circles in the middle of the street?" he asked.

"My disciples are moved by the melody that issues forth from each and everything that God, blessed be He, has created," said the rabbi. "If so, how can they keep from dancing?"

Just such an exultant spirit infuses the performances of Lipa Schmeltzer, a wildly popular Hasidic performer who will be headlining a concert at the WaMu Theater of Madison Square Garden in New York on Sunday. Mr. Schmeltzer, who is 30, grew up in New Square, a village in Rockland County, N.Y., founded in the 1950s by the strict Skverer Hasidic movement. He was born into a culture that required its young to devote long hours to intensive study. Young Lipa wasn't cut out for it.

"I always liked to hum in the class and knock on the table and do some songs," he tells me in his Yiddish-inflected English. "I couldn't concentrate on Torah. It brought me a lot of pain from kids who didn't understand how I am. Sometimes I got smacked. I

had nicknames." One of the nicer ones was "*baal ha-chalomot*," or "big dreamer," a pejorative used to describe Joseph in the Book of Genesis (37:18-20).

It was only after his marriage at age 20—to a woman he had known for 20 minutes—that Mr. Schmeltzer found an outlet, performing at weddings and bar mitzvahs. He earned a reputation as a natural performer, as gifted with comedic routines as with devotional songs.

"I was at a celebration in Brooklyn, and he got up to sing," says Sheya Mendlowitz, a manager, producer and promoter who is the Sam Phillips of the Jewish music scene. "I felt that he had something that was unique. It was very raw. But he has an incredible ear. And his mind is so fast—it's lucky you don't get pulled over for talking that fast."

Mr. Schmeltzer began producing videos and releasing CDs, singing in Yiddish with the occasional Hebrew or English phrase. "I know what to do with a lot of traditional stuff," he says in describing his music. "But I am also very up to date." During a 2005 concert at Brooklyn College, released on DVD as "*The Lipa Experience*," he performed hard-driving pop tunes, jazzy shuffles, pseudo-rap numbers, solemn prayers, rollicking klezmer dances, and jokey skits, accompanied by a nine-piece band and a troupe of actors.

"I try to bring out positive

messages in every song," he says. "I wrote a song about money—*gelt*. In the secular world if you write a song about money, it's [just] a nice song about money. But what I am trying to bring out is that money can become pure if you do the right thing with it, if you are helping people, if you are giving to charity."



Lipa Schmeltzer

Mr. Schmeltzer's popularity spread throughout *frum* (the Yiddish word for pious) communities in the U.S., Europe and Israel, particularly after a video for the song "*Gelt*" was released in 2004. "He comes from a very restricted, very Hasidic background, and everybody in the community sees him as the kid next door," says Paul Sherman, a Brooklyn internist who follows his career. "They have that

need for a release, and he allows them to let loose a little bit."

Even though Mr. Schmeltzer is loath to violate the strictest of standards—his concerts have separate seating for men and women—he has struggled against forces who see his bouncy pop tunes as carriers of impurity from the outside world. In March 2008, 33 rabbis signed a full-page ad in the ultra-Orthodox *Hamodia* newspaper condemning a concert he was to headline at the WaMu Theater, claiming that it would "strip the youth of every shred of fear of heaven." The ban represented "another skirmish in the ongoing culture war," between those who wish to embrace aspects of the wider world and those who fear its corrupting influence, says Samuel Heilman, a Queens College professor who has written widely on the ultra-Orthodox world. In the ensuing uproar, Mr. Schmeltzer backed out of the show.

But the controversy only enhanced his popularity. In the months after the ban, he released an album, "*A Poshiter Yid*" (*A Simple Jew*), with a title song that could serve as a Yiddish version of Gloria Gaynor's "*I Will Survive*." The chorus concludes, "I am still not a Tzadik [a righteous one], still I don't get tired/I am still not allowed to give up, I am a simple Jew." In the meantime he quietly met with several of the rabbis, seeking their blessing for another try at the WaMu Theater.

"The Event," as Sunday's show has been dubbed, is being heavily promoted in New York's Orthodox neighborhoods. "I would doubt very strongly that there would be a ban this year," said Zev Brenner, a popular radio host who says he has been told that several rabbis acted last year before "they had all the facts in front of them." One of the rabbis, Shmuel Kamenetzky, told the *Jewish Star* newspaper that he now had no problem with Mr. Schmeltzer: "As far as I know he is an *ehrlliche Yid* [a truly devout Jew]."

In some ways, another condemnation might be more harmful to the rabbis than to Mr. Schmeltzer. To an outsider, it is striking how popular he is in the community. Within seconds of hitting the sidewalk on 13th Avenue in Borough Park, Brooklyn, on a recent evening, he was approached by a man holding a small child. The 40-something Hasid, with sidelocks dangling underneath his black hat, gestured toward the singer and spoke to the boy in Yiddish. Later, Mr. Schmeltzer translated the words. "He says, 'You wouldn't believe who this is. Should I tell you who this is? This is Lipa Schmeltzer himself.'" "You saw that?" said Mr. Schmeltzer. "So that's how it is."

Mr. Duffy is the author of "*The Bielski Brothers*" (2003) and "*The Killing of Major Denis Mahon: A Mystery of Old Ireland*" (2007), both available in paperback from HarperCollins.

Masterpiece / By Morten Lauridsen

It's a Still Life That Runs Deep

Francisco de Zurbarán's "Still Life With Lemons, Oranges and a Rose" normally hangs on a back wall of one of the smaller rooms in the Norton Simon Museum of Art in Pasadena. Like a large black magnet, it draws its viewers from the entry into its space and deep into its mystical world. Completed in 1633, it is the only canvas the early Baroque Spanish master ever signed and dated.

We are shown a table set against a dark background on which are set three collections of objects: in the center, a basket containing oranges and orange blossoms; to the left, a silver saucer with four lemons; to the right, another silver saucer holding both a single rose in bloom and a fine china cup filled with water. Each collection is illuminated and placed with care on the table.

But it is more than a still life. For Zurbarán (1598-1664)—known primarily for his paintings of ascetics, angels, saints and the life of Christ—the objects in this work are symbolic offerings to the Virgin Mary. Her love, purity and chastity are signified by the rose and the cup of water. The lemons are an Easter fruit that, along with the oranges with blossoms, indicate renewed life. The table is a symbolic altar. The objects on it are set off in sharp contrast to the dark,

blurred backdrop and radiate with luminosity against the shadows.

The painting projects an aura of mystery, powerful in its simplicity, its mystical quality creating an atmosphere of deep contemplation. Its effect is immediate, transcendent and overpowering.

In 1993 Marshall Rutter, then president of the Los Angeles Master Chorale, commissioned me to write a piece, in honor of his wife and their second anniversary, that would have its premiere at the Master Chorale's Christmas concert in 1994.

The Latin text for the Christmas Day matins responsory, "*O Magnum Mysterium*," also celebrates the Virgin Mary as well as God's grace to the meek:

O great mystery and wondrous sacrament, that animals should see the new-born Lord lying in their Manger!

Blessed is the Virgin whose womb was worthy to bear the Lord Jesus Christ. Alleluia!

This brief text about the birth of Christ in the manger and the veneration of the Virgin Mary has inspired countless composers over the centuries. I knew at once that it should be my text as well.

At the core of my work as a composer over the past 45 years are seven multimovement vocal cycles, each centered on a single po-

etic theme, most often by one author—for example, "*Les Chansons des Roses*" on Rainer Maria Rilke's delightful poems penned in 1924. And for each cycle I've selected my musical materials—harmonies, melodies, rhythm, formal construction, orchestration, etc.—to complement aspects of the texts I've chosen, including their style, content, language and historical context. The musical settings range from accessible and direct to atonal, abstract and highly coloristic.

For "*O Magnum Mysterium*," I wanted to create, as Zurbarán had in paint, a deeply felt religious statement, at once uncomplicated and unadorned yet powerful and transformative in its effect upon the listener.

I also wanted to convey a sense of the text's long history and theological importance by referencing the constant purity of sacred music found in High Renaissance polyphony. The harmonic palette I chose, therefore, is simpler and direct. Further, both the musical themes and phrase shapes in "*O Magnum Mysterium*" have their

roots in Gregorian chant, with a constant metric flow and ebb.

The piece seems to hover in the air due to a predominant use of inverted chords, recalling the Renaissance practice of *fauxbourdon*. Inclusion of the "Alleluia" descant over sustained pedal tones references yet another characteristic of the era, and dynamics throughout are subdued, contributing to the aura of meditation and prayer.



The Norton Simon Foundation

sonant appoggiatura G-sharp. It's the only tone in the entire work that is foreign to the main key of D. That note stands out as if a sonic light has been focused upon it, edifying its meaning. It is the most important note in the piece.

In composing music to these inspirational words, I sought to impart, as Zurbarán did before me, a transforming spiritual experience within what I call "a quiet song of profound inner joy." I wanted this piece to resonate immediately and deeply into the core of the listener.

"*O Magnum Mysterium*" had its 1994 premiere by the Los Angeles Master Chorale. Widely recorded

with thousands of performances throughout the world since then, it owes much to its visual model, Zurbarán's magnificent painting.

This American composer, from across time and space, quietly tips his hat in gratitude.

Mr. Lauridsen is Distinguished Professor of Composition at the University of Southern California Thornton School of Music.

time off

Amsterdam

art

"Holland and Japan, 400 Years of Trade" exhibits more than 20 works, including lacquerware, porcelain and paintings, examining the privileges Dutch traders enjoyed on the Japanese island of Deshima.

Rijksmuseum Schiphol Airport
Until May 25
☎ 31-20-6747-000
www.rijksmuseum.nl

Athens

art

"M.C. Escher (1898-1972): From Drawing to Masterpiece" presents about 80 works from the Italian Period of Dutch artist M.C. Escher.

Herakleidon Museum
Until April 18
☎ 30-210-3461-981
www.herakleidon-art.gr

Barcelona

art

"Cildo Meireles" displays the work of the Brazilian conceptual artist Cildo Meireles (born 1948), including large-scale installations, drawings and objects created between 1967 and 2008.

Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona
Until April 26
☎ 34-93-4120-810
www.macba.cat

Berlin

art

"Walter Moroder—Alberto Giacometti: Secret World" presents work by German sculptor Walter Moroder (born 1963) alongside sketches by Swiss artist Alberto Giacometti (1901-66) that inspired him.

Käthe-Kollwitz-Museum Berlin
Until April 30
☎ 49-30-8825-210
www.kaethe-kollwitz.de

Brussels

art

"Dekadence: Bohemian Lands 1880-1914" presents art of apocalyptic fantasies by Bohemian artists at the end of the 19th century.

Brussels Town Hall
Until May 10
☎ 32-2-2796-435
www.brupass.be

Dresden

art

"Ideals: Yearning and Reality" exhibits paintings made in or commissioned by the city of Dresden.

Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister
Until June 2
☎ 49-351-4914-2000
www.skd.museum

Dublin

literature

"The Body in the Library—The Great Detectives 1841 to 1941" shows the origins of the detective story with classic publications such as a 1919 edition of Edgar Allan Poe's "Tales of Mystery and Imagination" illustrated by Harry Clarke.

Trinity College Library
Until June 14
☎ 353-1-896 1661
www.tcd.ie/Library

The Hague

art

"Love! Art! Passion!" features the art



"Wash and Go" hat, by Stephen Jones, on show in London.

of 17 famous artist couples, including Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera, Camille Claudel and Auguste Rodin, Robert and Sonia Delaunay, and others.

Gemeentemuseum
Until June 1
☎ 31-70-3381-111
www.gemeentemuseum.nl

Leipzig

music

"The Leipzig Mendelssohn" presents pictures, autographs, corrected manuscript, early prints and letters examining the life and work of composer Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy (1809-47).

Stadtgeschichtliches Museum Leipzig



Two untitled works by Asger Jorn, one from 1942-45 (left) and one from 1952, on show in Paris.

Until May 10
☎ 49-341-1270-294
www.mendelssohn-2009.org

London

theater

"Resident Alien" is a one-man play by Tim Fountain starring Bette Bourne. Based on the life and writings of English writer, actor and gay icon Quentin Crisp (1908-99), the play is set in New York as a 91-year-old Crisp reflects on his life.

New End Theatre
Until April 5
☎ 44-20-7472-5800
www.newendtheatre.co.uk

art

"Unveiled: New Art From the Middle East" shows contemporary art from the Middle East, Iraq, Iran, Syria, Lebanon and Palestine. Work by Ali Banisadr, Shirin Fakhim, Shadi Ghadirian, Barbad Golshiri and others is on display.

The Saatchi Gallery
Until May 9
☎ 44-20-7823-2363
www.saatchi-gallery.co.uk

fashion

"Hats: An Anthology by Stephen Jones" exhibits more than 300 hats ranging from a 600 B.C. Egyptian Anubis mask to a 1950s Balenciaga hat, compiled by British fashion designer Stephen Jones.

Victoria & Albert Museum
Until May 31
☎ 44-20-7942-2000
www.vam.ac.uk

Munich

art

"The Elector Johann Wilhelm's Paintings" presents Dutch, Flemish and Italian Baroque paintings from the art collection of Johann Wilhelm of Palatinate, including works by Rubens (1577-1640), Rembrandt (1606-69), Raphael (1483-1520) and others.

Alte Pinakothek

Until May 17
☎ 49-89-2380-5216
www.pinakothek.de/alte-pinakothek

art

"Frans Hals and the Haarlem Masters of the Golden Age" showcases masterpieces from the Dutch Golden Age in Haarlem, including art by Hendrick Goltzius (1558-1617), Frans Hals (1580-1666), Jacob van Ruysdael (1628-82) and others.

Kunsthalle der Hypo-Kulturstiftung
Until June 7
☎ 49-89-2244-12
www.hypo-kunsthalle.de

Paris

art

"Asger Jorn" presents about 100 drawings by Danish avant-garde artist and co-founder of the Cobra movement Asger Jorn (1914-73).

Centre Pompidou
Until May 11
☎ 33-1-4478-1233
www.centrepompidou.fr

photography

"Marc Riboud, The Instinct of the Moment—50 Years of Photography" shows 110 photographs by the French photographer (born 1923) including portraits taken in China in the 1950s.

Musée de la Vie Romantique
March 3-July 26
☎ 33-1-5531-9567
www.paris.fr

Rome

art

"Cy Twombly" presents about 100 works of art, including paintings, sculptures and drawings by the American painter (born 1928).

Galleria nazionale d'arte moderna e contemporanea
March 5-May 24
☎ 39-06-3229-81
www.gnam.beniculturali.it

Strasbourg

art

"Realities of a World" exhibits 200 Flemish and Dutch 15th, 16th and 17th century portrait and landscape paintings, including work by Rubens (1577-1640), Jordaens (1593-1678) and Van Dyck (1599-1641).

Musée des Beaux-Arts
Until July 12
☎ 33-3-8852-5000
www.musees-strasbourg.org

Vienna

art

"The Age of Rembrandt" brings together 140 works by 60 artists from the age of Rembrandt, including Hendrick Goltzius (1558-1617), Aert van der Neer (1603-77) and Aelbert Cuyp (1620-91).

Albertina
March 4-June 21
☎ 43-1-5348-30
www.albertina.at

design

"Hans Neumann: Pioneer of Advertising Agencies" showcases 35 poster designs and 20 advertisements by Austrian graphic artist Hans Neumann (1888-1960).

MAK Austrian Museum of Applied Arts
Until May 10
☎ 43-1-7113-60
www.mak.at

Source: ArtBase Global Arts News Service, WSJE research.