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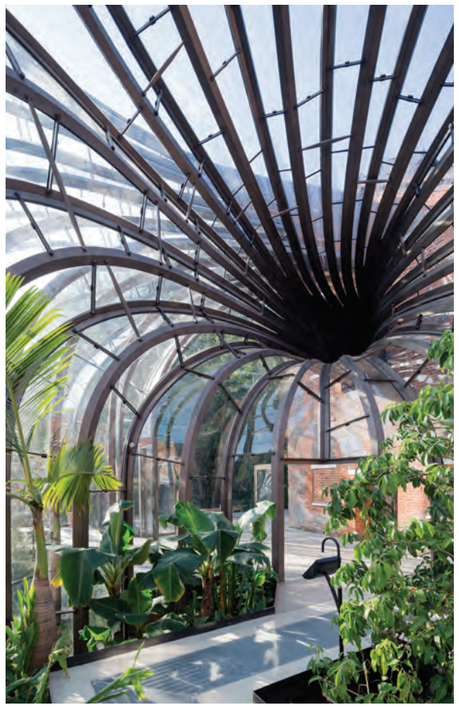

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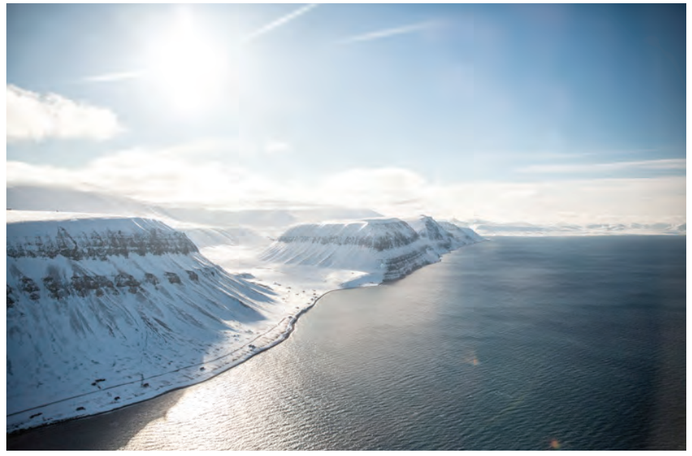

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Launches

Rolls-Royce unveils Parisian Phantom

Rolls-Royce unveiled the latest in its Phantom Metropolitan Collection at the Mondial de L'Automobile in Paris last November.

The cars feature hand-crafted design inspired by the world's great cities and a mere 20 will be available to commission.

The vehicles are distinguished in particular by their use of marquetry – the art of inlaying small pieces of wood veneer to form decorative motifs.

For example, the Phantom's signature picnic table – when opened – provides an elevated view of a particular city, created through the expert application of 500 individual wood veneer pieces. On closing the table, a different view of the city emerges.

Rolls-Royce Motor Cars' chief executive officer, Torsten Müller-Ötvös, said: 'Our customers across the globe delight in challenging our designers and craftspeople to create true, one-of-a-kind pieces of automotive art. This latest collection serves to showcase the extraordinary scope for bespoke personalisation afforded to every patron of the marque.'

The cityscape theme extends beyond the car's wooden surfaces. A specially developed leather colour (termed Aetherius grey) was created to create an urban feel, while 6,800 two-tone stitches within the central rear seat depict the abstract image of a skyscraper. A specially developed clock references 24 of the world's major cities and their time zones.

Anyone commissioning a Phantom Metropolitan can choose its external hue from a palette of 44,000 colours. Should that not be enough, Rolls-Royce craftspeople will create a match of any colour or object a customer may wish to replicate.

www.rolls-roycemotorcars.com

The bespoke Rolls-Royce Phantom and its city-focused clock (above)

The Diary

Robert Ellsworth in China (above); his Manhattan residence (top)

Auctions

Legendary Asian art collection on sale

The largest private collection of Asian art ever to come to auction is scheduled to go under the hammer in March 2015.

The group, which numbers in excess of 2,000 pieces, was gathered together by Robert Hatfield Ellsworth, a distinguished American scholar and collector and includes objects from China, Japan, India, Tibet and Vietnam.

Christie's will be publicising the sale by staging public exhibitions of the collection in a number of cities including Hong Kong, Tokyo, Beijing and London, prior to the final sale at New York's Rockefeller Center.

Ellsworth was a pioneer of Asian art at a time when its popularity was less pronounced than it is today. He displayed much of his collection within his 22-room Manhattan residence and his home became a gathering place for clients, academics and anyone with an interest in the subject.

He built a reputation for his expertise in Chinese furniture and for his ability to identify often overlooked Himalayan and Southeast Asian artworks. He was also a champion of the merits of 19th- and 20th-century Chinese painting.

www.christies.com

The Diary

Hotels

Crystal-shaped eco-lodgings planned for Tromsø

Europe's first-ever floating hotel is due to be built in northern Norway over the next two years. The 86-room Krystall hotel will be located just outside Tromsø – one of the world's best places for enjoying the Northern Lights.

The property will be designed to look rather like an ice crystal and its largely glass structure will allow guests to enjoy the world's greatest lightshow from the comfort of its five-star rooms and suites.

Featuring conference rooms, spa and wellness facilities the hotel will be designed to be self-supporting and self-sustainable. Its construction is due to begin in summer 2015 and the hotel is expected to open towards the end of 2016.

The hotel's developers, Dutch Docklands, say it will have minimal impact on its surroundings. The Holland-based company is a world leader in producing water-borne hotels. It is also looking at the possibility of a floating city (in China) complete with museums and parks.

www.dutchdocklands.com

Two artists' impressions of the hotel as it may look on opening in 2016

Moroni's works show an ability to capture expression and textures

Exhibitions

Giovanni Battista Moroni at the RA

Giovanni Battista Moroni is a relatively unsung hero of Renaissance art. He was born and lived in the northern Italian city of Bergamo and never set foot outside his native land, but his pictures have an eye for detail and a human touch that is remarkable and well worth a reappraisal.

Step forward, then, London's Royal Academy, which is staging a major retrospective of the artist's work – the first ever to be put on in the UK. The show focuses particularly on the artist's strong suit – his portraiture. Few painters before or since have had Moroni's ability to capture the intricacies of clothing – his portrayals of starched ruffs, velvet trousers or leather jerkins are astonishingly realistic and well observed.

The artist was also unusual for his period because he painted not only aristocrats and high officials, but also members of the middle classes. Two of the most striking portraits in the Royal Academy's show, for example, depict a tailor at his bench – complete with scissors and cloth – and a kindly looking doctor. *Giovanni Battista Moroni is at the Royal Academy, London, until 25 January 2015, royalacademy.org.uk*

Exhibitions

The current show at The Queen's Gallery focuses on the remarkable photographs that recorded a prince's tour of the Middle East

Sitting beneath a spreading fig tree, the group of men has that air of careful, serious calm distinctive of Victorian photography. Their riding boots and oriental headgear hint at some sort of intrepid adventure, their suntans suggest a hot climate. In the middle is a young man with an air of privilege, sensual lips and a rather weak chin.

The image was taken at Capernaum, on the northern bank of the Sea of Galilee in April 1862. It depicts a 20-year-old Prince of Wales (later King Edward VII) and his entourage midway through a Middle Eastern tour that had already taken them to Egypt and would soon see them visiting Syria, Lebanon and Turkey.

Behind the lens was Francis Bedford, a professional photographer who had been commissioned by Queen Victoria to record her son's travels.

This image is one of an impressive selection currently on show at The Queen's Gallery, Buckingham Palace, as part of an exhibition entitled *Cairo to Constantinople: Early Photographs of the Middle East*. They depict the four-month trip taken by the prince and his entourage, chronicling the places they visited during a tour that, at the time, caught the imagination of the British public.

Bedford was primarily a landscape photographer. The majority of his images depict the ancient ruins that formed the major part of the royal party's itinerary. In Turkey and Egypt the photographs depict religious and cultural sites. Egyptians are caught lounging on the sphinx or holding camels in the shadow of the pyramids. Outside one of the temples in Luxor a local man peers out between the sand-shrouded heads of two huge statues that today have been totally excavated.

In Syria, however, Bedford focused on rather more recent history. A couple of years previously – and in an echo of more recent events – the area had seen a massacre of Maronite Christians by members of the Druze community. At Habaya, the photographer captured the image of the Christian district of the town that remained charred and derelict, its houses devoid of roofs. At Rashaya he did the same and the prince recorded in his journal: 'We saw still the remains of burnt houses.'

At Damascus the royal party visited the streets where around 3,000 Christians had been murdered. Moved by what he saw, Edward picked up a souvenir in the shape of a marble block. Still visible today is the message he inscribed on it in neat, slanting writing: 'From the remains of the Christian quarter at Damascus, May 1862'.

Cairo to Constantinople: Early Photographs of the Middle East is at The Queen's Gallery, Buckingham Palace until 22 February 2015.

Edward, Prince of Wales and his entourage at Capernaum (far right) and by the pyramids of Giza (right)

On the shortlist

The past 12 months have seen some world-beating launches on the London restaurant and club scene

Words: Nick Savage

London is not a city to rest on its laurels and, looking back on 2014, there have been an unprecedented number of launches among its restaurants and clubs. Many of these are pretty special, but the following are really not to be missed.

M Restaurant
Helmed by Martin Williams, former MD of the Gaucho Group, M will major in its restaurateur's strong suit – steak. The giant venue is located off Threadneedle Street and spreads over 15,000sq ft. It comprises two restaurants, a wine bar, a cocktail bar, private dining rooms and a secret den.

M RAW will serve up a selection of tartars, sashimi and stone-smoked yakitori, while M GRILL will dole out some of the most difficult to procure, and expensive, steaks in the world; with intricately marbled Kobe beef selling at a cool £150 (though steaks start at a more affordable £18 a cut). Chiltern Firehouse alumnus Jarad McCarroll will take the role of head chef, so expect food fit for a celeb (or top hedge-funder, given the location).

Heddon Street Kitchen
Over the past few years, Gordon Ramsay's most triumphant London opening has been arguably Bread Street Kitchen in St Paul's, which won plaudits across the board. It is unsurprising, then, that he has extended the concept, with Heddon Street Kitchen in Mayfair and another Bread Street en route to Hong Kong. The former is located at the eponymous address and is captained by head chef Maria Tampakis, who previously plied her trade at three-Michelin-starred Jean-Georges in New York City.

The dining room has been executed with aplomb, featuring an abundance of beige banquettes, industrial pipes, herringbone flooring, neon and specially curated artworks. The American grill-style food can be perfectly paired with a glass from HSK's unique wine preservation system or a craft cocktail from its lounge bar.

Mondrian
Morgans Hotel Group revolutionised London with Sanderson and St Martin's Lane, so there were big expectations surrounding the establishment of its flagship Mondrian on the South Bank. Designed by Tom Dixon, Mondrian has been given his signature neo-disco design mashed up with a transatlantic conceit, to honour the hospitality brand's first journey out of the US and across the ocean. Guests will have all their desires met, whether for

From left: large windows at M Restaurant; examples of dishes and the dining room at Heddon Street Kitchen; the interior of Mondrian

From left: the dramatic colours of Le Peep Boutique, Roka temptations and the Japanese influence at Ramusake

Revellers enter through a giant, wrought-iron birdcage with performances in a window alcove and aerial dancers suspended from its apex

accomplished gastronomy in ground-floor restaurant Sea Containers, ground-breaking mixology in cocktail lounge Dandelyan, or unbelievable views of the capital from terrace bar Rumpus Room.

Le Peep Boutique

Hidden behind heavy black doors on Park Lane, Le Peep Boutique was opened by Mark Alexiou, the man behind Pangaea and Verbier's famous Coco Club. His newest project borrows inspiration from bohemian, *fin-de-siècle* Paris. Revellers enter through a giant, wrought-iron birdcage with themed performances in a window alcove and aerial dancers suspended from its apex.

Once entering the club, it is impossible to ignore the ceiling, which has been installed with an LED screen portraying iconic scenes from the City of Light.

Roka Aldwych

To mark the 10th anniversary of Roka's original opening on Charlotte Street, the group has launched two more establishments in the same year. The version that's situated on Aldwych is the largest to date, accommodating over 150 guests with a design scheme from Claudio Silvestrin, the man behind Oblix at The Shard, who has given the room a sophisticated feel using natural materials such as dried green oak, stained grey timber, slate and porphyry.

The room is imbued with warmth from the robata grill, where a special menu devised by Hamish Brown is prepared featuring iconic Roka dishes as well as a few signature options.

The exquisite wagyu beef tartare with smoked soya sauce, wasabi and nori crackers is proving particularly popular among diners, apparently.

Ramusake

Launched by former Nobu head chef and serial restaurateur Scott Hallsworth, alongside nightlife impresarios Piers Adam and David Phelps of Mahiki and Bodo's Schloss, Ramusake is one of the first Japanese-influenced members' clubs in London. It dishes out superlative Asian fare and late night merriment in equal parts. The venue is tucked away on Old Brompton Road, with dark leathers, hanging crystal pendant lighting and a wall replete with recessed lanterns.

Hallsworth has brought over the cuisine that has made his Kurobuta izakayas so popular. It's Japanese with a light-hearted western influence and lends itself perfectly to a night of dinner and dancing.

Nick Savage is editor at London concierge service Innerplace. www.innerplace.co.uk

Henry Wyndham

The chairman of Sotheby's talks about his career, booming art markets and a close encounter with a shotgun cartridge

Words: Eugene Costello

What led you into the art world?
I had always had a love of art, but it was a fairly uninformed, geeky sort of thing when I was young. I started collecting drawings when I was around 13 or so, so I began young. As a collector, what I acquired was the most terrible rubbish. I had no money, of course, so I went for these rubbishy, derivative 19th-century drawings.

But it meant that I knew that the art world was the place for me from about the age of 16. I just didn't really know how to go about it. I took advice and the advice was not to bother going to university, but to travel around Europe looking at great art for a year, which is what I did. So there was some method in my madness and I learnt on the job, as a kind of apprentice, you could say.

Tell us about your career
I started at Christie's on 24 October 1974 and I stayed for 13 years. I started on the front desk. I then migrated into the Old Masters department, then at 24 I was sent off to New York, where I ran the 19th-century picture department. When I came back I ran the 20th-century British department, also known as the Modern British department.

I left in 1987 and started my own business as a dealer, in Jermyn Street. I had three good years and three bad. The recession hit in the early 1990s, everything went south and the lights went out in the art world.

Thankfully, the cavalry arrived in the form of [then Sotheby's chief executive] Dede Brooks and Grey Gowrie [Lord Gowrie, then Sotheby's chairman] who wooed me and I succumbed to their charms. Being headhunted was terribly flattering and being the decisive sort of chap I am I only took a year to make up my mind. I finally said yes, and I've been here ever since.

How would you summarise your role as Sotheby's chairman?
I suppose I am the main auctioneer. I am the business-getter, I network to get business, I build relationships with art dealers and wealthy individuals who own collections. It's very much a front-facing role. I expect there are some chairmanships where the gin and tonic comes out quite early in the day, but my role is not like that, I am still a deal-maker and business-getter – and auctioneer, of course.

How is the market at the moment?
I'm glad you've asked me that because it just so happens we have had a very good time following an Impressionist sale in New York. We achieved a record price for any sale – $422m. That was made up of Alberto Giacometti's sculpture, *Chariot*, for $101m, and a Modigliani carving for about $70m and a Van Gogh for around $63m. Naturally, after that, I feel the art market is booming. And recently in Geneva we sold a watch, a Patek Phillippe heritage model, for £24m.

And what about your life-changing experience?
I was shot on a grouse shoot, and was riddled with 52 pellets in my arm, throat and face and was incredibly lucky not to be blinded — I was saved by my glasses. Anyway, I survived, and that's the main thing. I decided to do something positive so I raised money for [eye charity] Orbis by walking coast-to-coast across England.

So far I have raised £812,000 and that money is going to save the sight of people in places such as Ethiopia. I'm told the money will save the sight of around 75,000 people. I'm trying to raise more to get it up to a million, so if anyone out there would like to help, I would be delighted. In fact, I couldn't be happier.
www.orbis.org

Unsung *heroes*

Their names may not be familiar, but these supercars have got plenty of bite – and they're hoping to take a chunk out of some of the big boys

Words: Simon Heptinstall

Just look at the gorgeous cars on the next few pages. The styling is a mix of sophisticated racing pedigree and elegant contemporary design. If you could hear them, the engines have a spine-tingling roar and if you could drive them, you would find the performance eye-watering. But however long you stare at the badge on the bonnet of these cars, the marque will probably be completely unknown to you.

Welcome to the world of the secret supercars: the booming world of boutique manufacturers, often based in remote, unfashionable locations, producing tiny numbers of exclusive supercars for very discerning clients. They usually do not need advertising, marketing or promotion. Although these brands you have probably never heard of are certainly costly, they are also remarkably capable.

How capable? Well, one example is a little known hand-built two-seater made in a small workshop in the desert of Texas, which has recently broken two global speed records.

At the time of writing, the Hennessey Venom GT is the fastest accelerating car you can buy anywhere in the world (0-200mph/(322kph) in 14.5 seconds) and has the highest top speed (270.5mph). The Venom is fitted with a highly tuned Chevrolet 6.2-litre twin-turbo V8 engine, meaning the benchmark 0-60mph acceleration takes around 2.5 seconds.

These records have not been validated because Hennessey does not make the total of 30 cars a year necessary to be officially recognised as a manufacturer. Instead, Hennessey is an established engine tuning company that builds a small number of cars as a sideline. Not surprisingly, it seems to have no problem selling them. Some reports say Aerosmith singer Steve Tyler has recently bought a $1m Venom.

Small, but effective: SSC produces a handful of cars at its premises in rural Washington State

Thanks to its staggering performance Hennessey may soon appear on car enthusiasts' radar. In fact the tiny Texan brand is already famous compared to an unheard-of newcomer from the unlikely supercar birthplace of Denmark.

The Zenvo ST1 is built in a small building to the south of the island of Zealand… but there's nothing small about its performance. This two-seater has Zenvo's own 7.0-litre turbocharged and supercharged engine, which produces a massive 1,250 horsepower. The 0-60mph sprint takes just 2.9 seconds and it has a top speed of 233mph. The design is

The Zenvo STI (left and below) comes with its own team of specialist mechanics. SSC has already been among the record breakers (above)

The Tramontana R (far left), with its in-line seating arrangement. Holland's Vencer Sarthe (above and left) is capable of a top speed of 210mph

The proliferation of auto technology means more and more small operators such as Austrian company Tushek & Spigel are joining the field

aggressively modern and memorable. A price tag of $1.1m makes the ST1 among the world's most expensive cars, although that bill does include the attention of a team of specialist mechanics who will fly to your location anywhere in the world if you have a problem. It also pays for a certain degree of exclusivity. There are only believed to be just five Zenvos on the world's roads.

Five may sound a very small figure, but in comparison to some Zenvo is quite well represented out and about. In the world of ultra-exclusive supercars, even more unusual vehicles can have a distinct appeal for some buyers.

Take, for example, the Tushek & Spigel; created in the small town of Mureck in Austria. The Tushek & Spigel TS600 was first glimpsed at a prestigious auto salon event in Monaco in 2014. It is not known whether a single car has been sold yet. For the price of $600,000 this convertible offers a mix of track technology and contemporary luxury: the chassis is made of carbon and titanium, there are scissor-opening doors, and the interior is decked out in leather and aluminum. The manufacturers claim it can manage 0-60mph in 2.9 seconds and has a 218mph top speed.

While everyone from schoolboys to professional racing drivers knows the iconic branding of leading luxury manufacturers such as Ferrari, Lamborghini, Bugatti and McLaren, the proliferation of auto technology means more and more small operators such as Tushek & Spigel are joining the field.

Those in the know could add a second tier of budding supercar builders. Names such as Gumpert, Noble, Koenigsegg, Spyker, Marussia and Pagani regularly appear at car displays, in the pages of motoring magazines and at track days. But even those are as multinational corporations compared to some of the world's smallest manufacturers.

In the small town of West Richland, Washington State, is a supercar company based in Jarod Shelby's back yard. Shelby Supercars, or SSC, has nothing to do with American motoring legend Carol Shelby, but instead makes specialist sports coupes. For three years its Ultimate Aero even claimed the title of the world's fastest production car after reaching 256mph in 2007. Despite this, SSC only built and sold a handful of Aeros.

In 2014 SSC unveiled a new car, the $1.3m Tuatara. It will not go on sale until 2015, by which time the firm hopes to have actually built its own small, modern factory. A few details about the Tuatara have been leaked. This sleek road-going two-seater is built almost entirely of carbon fibre (even the wheels) making it extremely light. The unprecedented engine output (without emissions controls) is 1,700 horsepower, enough to power the Tuatara from 0-60mph in just 2.3 seconds and on to a maximum speed of 276mph. Figures like this should propel the Tuatara into record books if independently verified. SSC say its normally slim order book is bulging – with 14 definite buyers already signed up.

Back in Europe, another mini-manufacturer has also been

Tramontana's race-influenced design also includes exposed wheels and suspension

building exotic supercars for a decade. Yet Advanced Design Tramontana, based near Girona in Spain, is still almost unheard of. A maximum of 12 cars are built a year. Its most recent offering, the Tramontana R, is a mid-engined, high-performance coupe in which the two occupants sit in line rather than side by side. The race-influenced design also includes exposed wheels and suspension extending from a central cockpit made of a sophisticated mix of carbon, magnesium and aluminum. The bonnet badge may be unfamiliar but it is in solid white gold. The Tramontana R costs over $500,000.

A similar story is repeated all over the world. For example, in another tiny factory in Holland, a small team of skilled engineers are hand-building Vencer Sarthe supercars. This $350,000 beautifully styled Ferrari rival is to be released in 2015, with a 6.3-litre supercharged V8 powering it to a 210mph maximum.

Similar dedicated specialist teams are building their hyper-cars with little fanfare in New Zealand (the Hulme F1), in Germany

(the Weismann GT) and in Britain (Radical SR8 LM). From Australia (the Elfin Streamliner to Morocco (Laraki Epitome), increasing numbers of companies are trying to demonstrate that, in the world of the supercar builders, small can be beautiful.

Finally, a special mention is due to two of the new wave of little-known dream cars. These are extremely fast, luxury sports cars but are also a glimpse of the next generation of supercars.

The Icona Vulcano is definitely the most appealing car ever to appear from China. It is a powerful hybrid with a claimed top speed of 220mph from its forward-thinking combination of petrol V12 and electric motor. The manufacturer claims this classic-looking sportscar is capable of blasting from 0-60mph in under two seconds.

And from Croatia comes the all-electric Concept One from battery specialists Rimac. The design is slippery, sleek and stylish and it also has extraordinary performance for a battery-powered vehicle: 0-60mph takes just 2.8 seconds and top speed is 190mph.

Amazingly, the Concept has a range of 373 miles with a 30-minute recharge. This £1m supercar is due to be on sale in 2015 and, as the world's fastest production electric car, should feature on motoring TV shows and magazine covers. Perhaps even one day Rimac's badge (an 'R' within a shield) will be as recognizable as Ferrari's prancing horse, Aston Martin's spreading wings or Lamborghini's raging bull.

The Icona Vulcano is definitely the most appealing car ever to appear from China. It is a powerful hybrid with a claimed top speed of 220mph

Rimac's Concept One (left and below): it possesses extraordinary performance for a battery-powered car

The Road Test

The Aston Martin Rapide S: a sports car and saloon car rolled into one

Best of both worlds

The Aston Martin Rapide S combines impressive performance with a comfortable ride and elegant looks

Words: Tim Griffiths

Call it hard-nosed professionalism or maybe simply innate cynicism, but we at *Halcyon* magazine see a lot of very expensive high-performance vehicles and often find ourselves somewhat underwhelmed. Stepping outside our fly-bitten hard carapace however and some cars actually do have the capacity to warm the cockles of our hearts.

So it is with the Aston Martin Rapide S – one of the very few to be handed back to the manufacturer with a genuine feeling of loss.

At first we struggled to identify the true identity of this elongated cruiser. Why would you design two extra doors (and seats) into a vehicle with a 6-litre V12 behemoth under the hood? Is this two-ton Rapide S, with its new rear-mounted ZF transaxle, eight-speed gearbox (from the Vanquish), retuned dampers and springs, stiffer anti-roll bars and upgraded Bridgestone tires a performance sports car or a high-testosterone family saloon?

When you combine the above with a 0-60 speed of just 4.2 seconds and a top speed of 203mph you can see where the confusion lies. And just what could all this mean when you're sitting in the back?

Happily things soon resolved themselves. Barely half a mile down the road and the Rapide S's identity landed in our minds with all the clarity of the impressive Bose sound system.

She is most definitely a sports car.

She is most definitely a saloon car.

This might sound like a dichotomy or a hedging of bets and that the confusion remains unresolvable, but it's not. Let us assure you that the rear seats can accommodate the larger gentleman (we tried) and, while you wouldn't necessarily want to travel from London to Edinburgh in the back, there is a feeling of snug comfort rather than claustrophobia which is ameliorated by some nice touches such as the DVD screens with remote control and wireless-branded headphones.

Getting in and out of the back was an exercise in biological origami, but still… you'll be behind the wheel. If you're a family man you just know that putting the kids in the back for an extended journey would not result in incessant questions of 'are we there yet?'. The little darlings will be silent all the way from A to B.

Up front is where it's at. Cruising along Britain's highways and byways with the volcanic amounts of torque available under your right foot produced a wonderful glow of unexpectedly satisfied circumspection. Knowing that, should you have even a vague inclination of such a desire, you could blow that tailgating boy racer in his souped-up hot hatch into the middle of the week after next allows you to raise a lazy eyebrow in derision and let him by.

Sitting in your ergonomically contoured pilot's seat surrounded by swathes of hand-sewn leather could distract from the performance potential while you luxuriate in what was described to us as 'the intoxicating scent of the saddlery.' But nothing really detracts from what this car can do.

At around five metres long she really shouldn't float over bumpy roads nor turn into corners with the alacrity of a mayfly. But she does. And she leaves a grin on your face with the joy of it all.

There is the odd niggle, though. The infotainment system is infuriatingly 'yesterday' and user-unfriendly. We don't see ourselves as world-defining experts in digital interfaces by any extremes but we do have a reasonable competency. And yet it took us 120 miles to work out (Aston didn't provide us with a user guide) how to change the input source from the radio to the CD player.

Ally this to a coffee cup holder that is irritatingly sited slap bang in front of the plethora of console buttons meant that, while the resulting wall of sound was impressive, the journey to it was frustrating. At least we got to listen to that gorgeous engine while waiting for our dubious musical choice.

The final niggle was with the indicator column. The looseness of this meant that turning left often allowed us to blind any oncoming traffic with our high beams. However, we'll ascribe this to the heavy-handedness of ham-fisted journalists not being overly concerned with delicacy in a vehicle they would soon return to the manufacturer rather than to build quality.

And that's it really. Two and a half niggles in the whole experience speaks to us of a car that is pretty robust both internally and externally.

All in all this is a car we're sad to hand back. An automobile with a starting price of around £150,000 could surely never be considered a daily driver. But this one can be and the smile it engenders brightens up even the rainiest of days. If the electronic interfaces and centre console issues can be ironed out then we would have to consider which limb to sell in order to own one.

Actually that's easy. The left leg – it's the one part of you that isn't engaged in the Rapide S experience.

Inside and out, the Aston Martin delivers quality and performance

At around five metres long she really shouldn't float over bumpy roads nor turn into corners with the alacrity of a mayfly. But she does

Bigger, badder, darker and meaner than your average timepiece – there's a growing detachment of watches out there that are not unafraid of their overt masculinity

Weights and measures

Words: Steve Morrissey

Romain Jerome Titanic-DNA

You know how sometimes the salad, the vegetables done just *al dente*, the smoothies and the green tea served with a dab of manuka honey just isn't cutting it? How sometimes you fancy something a bit meatier? Well the same applies to watches. Occasionally, restraint has to be sent on holiday, taking tastefulness and elegance with it. George Clooney has to be sacrificed in favour of Russell Crowe. If you're hankering for a timepiece with a large, legible face, a strap made of leather or rubber – and not some thin spaghetti strap either, but a proper band of a thing. If you're feeling the need for technical complications and a dial that looks like a Swiss army knife, there is only one cure. You need a proper masculine watch, the sort of thing that can happily pass five time zones and survive a drop-kick. Here are six worth considering.

Romain Jerome Titanic-DNA

The strap is rubber or croc, the movement is a robust Swiss Concepto (calibre C22RJ51), the case is black steel or red gold. But what you really want to know is how much of the famous doomed liner *Titanic* there is in the Romain Jerome Titanic-DNA? Because that is the USP of this remarkable watch, whose bezel is made from what the company describe as 'stabilised *Titanic* Extreme rusted steel'.

This means that steel from the Titanic's hull, and also steel from the Harland and Wolf shipyard in Belfast where she was built, are incorporated into the bezel, along with other steel, before the whole lot is oxidised in a water bath for several days to deliver that distressed look.

So exactly how much original hull steel are we talking? A vanishingly small amount, probably. See the finished item as a tribute, rather than a morbid reminder, though if it really isn't doing it for you, there is also a Moon-DNA (containing fragments of Apollo spacecraft, moon dust and fibres from ISS spacesuits) and an Eyjafjallajökull-DNA (the dials are slices of cooled lava, the bezel contains ash from the Icelandic volcano that erupted in 2010).

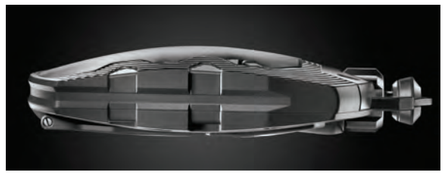
Hublot Classic Fusion Tourbillon Skull

A watch that looks immensely rugged, Hublot's Classic Fusion Tourbillon Skull doesn't just have the obvious skull and bones motif to make any aspiring pirate's heart swell with joy. It is also a truly tough piece of kit, being made from ceramic-coated aluminium – the case, crown and dial, at any rate – twice as light as traditional ceramic and just as hard.

The tourbillon bridges are 3-D machined, so they do not have the usual flat surfaces and are then rhodium-plated and micro-blasted in a treatment called Microarc Oxidation, which involves a plasma discharge in an electrolyte bath, the result being that hard, dense and adhesive ceramic layer.

After that there is more sanding, this time by hand, making each piece unique. The material is remarkably tough – 1,000 Vickers, in fact (for reference, stainless steel is about 150 Vickers). The stark Roman numerals used for hour indices, a first for any Hublot, and the industrial design touches – those h-type screws on the bezel, not forgetting the skeletisation – make this a formidable looking timepiece.

Hublot Classic Fusion Tourbillon Skull



Urwerk Ur-1001 Zeit Device;
Ressence Type 3 (right)

The Ur-1001 also ticks off the centuries, tick-tocking away right up to a full millennium

Urwerk Ur-1001 Zeit Device

Since it was founded in 1995, Urwerk has come to specialise in watches that look as though they could do a passable job as farm machinery. Only unveiled last year and running on 51 jewels, the Urwerk Ur-1001 Zeit Device counts off seconds and minutes, days and nights, weeks and months on the front, via an ingenious array of gears powering cubes which carry the numbers. There are no dials.

It doesn't stop there, the Ur-1001 also ticks off the centuries. On the flipside of what looks rather like Darth Vader's helmet is a 100-year dial that activates a second linear calendar once it has hit the century mark, the whole thing tick-tocking away right up to a full millennium. What happens then? You give this manual-wind 4.17 inch x 2.44 inch x 0.9 inch grand complication to your great-great-great-great (and a few more greats) grandchild...

Ressence Type 3

We've all heard of Renaissance Man, but what about Ressence Man? The sort of guy who isn't just fascinated by technology, but is happy to explain to interested enquirers how this unique looking watch works. Here, in short, is what he'll say. 'What you're looking at is a watch made of two chambers. The lower chamber contains the movement, the upper chamber contains the hands and dials. They appear to float inside the crystal because that entire top chamber is filled with naphtha, which has the same refractive index as the crystal enclosing it.'

'This is all very well,' says our curious enquirer, 'but how do Ressence stop the naphtha from leaking into the lower chamber?' Ressence Man answers, as if pulling a rabbit from a hat, that there is no physical connection between lower and upper chambers – magnets transmit the information from one to the other through a titanium plate. And with that, Ressence Man enigmatically disappears.

Timemachinist Mark 8 Naval Destroyer

Looking rather like a mine, or the bathyscaphe that Jacques Piccard took to the bottom of the Mariana Trench, the Mark 8 Naval Destroyer appears indestructible. It is certainly unmissable – 55mm wide, 28mm tall and weighing 368 grams – and it is delivered in either a waterproof pelican case, or a porthole box.

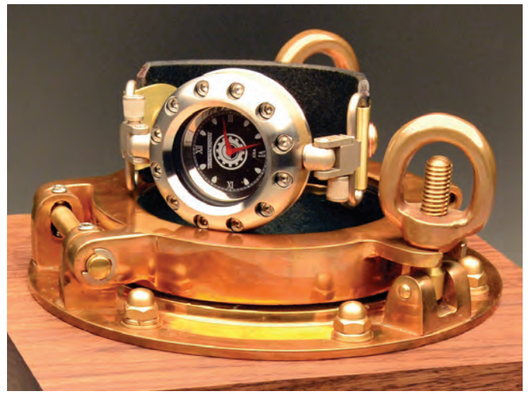
Its manufacturers, Timemachinist, claim it is the toughest watch in the world, a claim bolstered by the fact that the case is made by the weapons division of a US military defence contractor. That case is double hulled and the dual polycarbonate crystals are held in place by 24 individual, socket-head bolts. Perhaps

surprisingly, there is no winding, the whole thing being powered by a Citizen Quartz movement that is so accurate that it will simply never need to be corrected, it is claimed. And that is why there is no crown. 'Virtually indestructible' is how Timemachinist describes it. Or as a commenter on the firm's Facebook page puts it – 'Dude, your timepieces rock!'

Armin Strom Gravity Date

Armin Strom watches tend to look as if they know how to handle themselves – as befits a brand that sounds like it is named after a Bond villain. The Gravity Date, with its distinctive asymmetrical dial (what there is of it), comes in four liveries, with the Earth (black PVD finish) looking like the one packing the most testosterone (Air goes large on white appliqués, Fire on rose gold, Water on stainless steel).

Skeletisation is Armin Strom's big thing, and the company does not disappoint with the Gravity Date, a robust combination of the aesthetic with the functional which, thanks to the voids in the baseplate, allows a clear view of the mainspring and winding mechanism micro-rotor, plus the gear train to the hour and minute hands. Turn the watch over and there are even more of the internal workings on display. With a steel case at 43.4mm, it is definitely on the large side for a watch. Even so, the internal workings demand to be viewed. Reading glasses might be a handy supplementary purchase.



Timemachinist Mark 8 Naval Destroyer
Armin Strom Gravity Date (below)

The Gravity Date is a robust combination of the aesthetic and the functional that allows a clear view of the mainspring and winding mechanism

Making movements

After a hard day at the office designing jet engines for planes, Frank Heydrich likes to unwind by formulating and making watches. Now his hobby, like his day job, is taking off

Words: Steve Morrissey

Heydrich's Crusty No49, featuring a piece of meteorite

'It started innocently enough,' says Frank Heydrich about the moment he got hooked on watches. 'A co-worker left a couple of print magazines lying around and I was instantly intrigued by the Swiss movements.

'Prior to that I had only owned battery powered watches with an ugly chunk of electronic plastic inside. After, I realised there was still an industry supported by people that appreciated the beauty of mechanical things. I bought some vintage Swiss movements and began taking them apart to see how they ticked. Eventually I had the nerve to start making my own watches, in 2008.'

Born 50 years ago, to a German engineer father who met his Chinese mother at university in Adelaide, Australia, Frank Heydrich is a member of a group whose numbers can be

counted on the thumb of one hand – jet-engine designers with a sideline in watch design. And, thanks to his exotic watch faces – there being nothing like a slice of the Moon or a sliver of a meteorite older than planet Earth to lend a watch cachet – he is becoming increasingly well known.

'My story is pretty typical,' says Heydrich from his home in Phoenix, Arizona, not realising his story couldn't be less typical if it tried. For a start he has no formal training. 'Not in watchmaking. I was trained as a mechanical engineer and I have spent the past three decades designing turbine engines for business jets and passenger aircraft.'

But there are plenty of similarities between engines and watches, he adds. 'When I cracked open my first Swiss mechanical watch, I was astounded to find a very tiny gearbox staring back at me! I was sure I just had to swap my wrenches for tweezers and this would be easy. Not so fast…' he laughs at the memory.

'I was not used to working under magnification and the parts are far too small to pick up and manipulate with fingers. Many tiny screws have escaped my tweezers never to be seen again. After many fruitless searches, I have since concluded that they have the ability to jump into other dimensions.'

So why not a bit of bowling, or fishing – the sort of hobby average people go in for? 'Designers like myself suffer from some sort of obsessive compulsion that drives us to create new things. So although I spend my day designing things in 3-D CAD, I am not completely fulfilled. The results of the day job get built by others after many millions have been spent in tooling and materials. My watch designs are self-produced so the no-expense-spared philosophy is gone.'

'Many tiny screws have escaped my tweezers never to be seen again.'

Heydrich in his day-job context (left). He has now produced more than 70 unique watches

And initially it was just meant to be a hobby. 'At first, I made a watch I liked, so I could wear it. Then a friend saw it and talked it off of my arm and onto his somehow. This cycle has repeated itself many times so now there are 70 unique watches out there.

'I prefer to make watches that I like, for myself,' he says, outlining a design philosophy that's the complete opposite of most watch designers. And then if I get a few that are not claimed, I offer them for sale on my website.'

To this hyper-exclusivity can be added Heydrich's peculiar specialisation – meteorites and the odd chunk of the moon. 'Most expensive watches contain a painted brass dial; I could

‘I have another lunar watch in progress and have now made two Mars watches as well. The next rare exotic will likely be Mercury or Venus.’

never sell one and ask for payment with a straight face. I have been a rock collector since childhood so it is no surprise that I would someday seek out meteorites.’

How does one go about getting a piece of the moon anyway? ‘NASA has a pretty good stock of moon rock, but they are not selling and they are not going back any time soon. The only other way is to find a lunar meteorite that got blasted off the moon and deorbited onto Earth. Because only 200 of these have ever been confirmed, they sell for $700 per gram – which makes precious metals seem like a bargain.’

How did the moon watch (No 60 ‘Bella Luna’) come about? ‘I got an inquiry from a meteorite collector who had not been able to get a custom watch built in Switzerland incorporating a piece of Mars meteorite. He asked me to attempt to build a watch with it. He was pleased with the result so he bought a large slice of lunar meteorite and sent it to me. Some months later, he had the world’s first moon dial watch.’

And what if someone reading this wants one? ‘Well, we start with a conversation and a budget. And then the colour, hands, movement, case and bands – they are all chosen by the client in stages and I send them mock-up pictures to help them make their decisions.

‘I have another lunar watch in progress and have now made two Mars watches as well. The next rare exotic will likely be Mercury or Venus, depending on which suspected meteorite gets its origin confirmed first.’

Can we talk about anything as mundane as movements? ‘I do not reveal my preservation methods (to keep the iron meteorites from rusting too quickly), so I cannot have anyone else service my watches for me. My solution is to offer a lifetime guarantee where I do all future lubrication servicing for free. In this scenario, it makes sense to use very reliable movements. Generally I prefer to use the ETA 2892 for automatics that are to be worn daily and the skeletonised ETA 6498 when the aesthetics are more important. Up until now I have been buying and modifying Swiss-made cases, but I have been taking the steps this year to learn CNC machining so I can carve out my own titanium cases. Finally I will be able to control the complete aesthetic package and make much more creative watches.’

Sounds like a case of look out, world. Not to mention Mars, Venus, Mercury…

A selection of Heydrich’s work, including the Bella Luna (top right), featuring a segment of moon rock

The Information
There’s more about Heydrich’s work on his website: www.frankheydrich.com

A tale to tell

The arms and armour market can provide potential investors with a host of unique items with remarkable backgrounds

Words: Dan Hayes

The Information
Bonhams.com
Thomasdelmar.com

At first glance, you would be forgiven for thinking there was nothing particularly special about this pair of pistols. They seem fairly workaday items, with solid wooden grips and large, practical trigger guards.

These weapons, though, were witnesses to a particularly rare moment in history.

They belonged to a Georgian gentleman by the name of John Colby who had the relatively mundane jobs of lieutenant-colonel of a part-time military unit called the Pembrokeshire Militia and governor of Haverfordwest Castle in Wales.

Colby, however, was in the right place at the right time – at least in terms of guaranteeing his place among the footnotes of British history.

In 1795 he – and his pistols – witnessed the last invasion of Britain, an event now known as the Battle of Fishguard. For a few days 1,400 French soldiers – rejoicing in the nickname La Légion Noire or Black Legion – tramped around West Wales getting increasingly wet and disorientated before they were bluffed into surrender by Colby (carrying his pistols) and a few others.

The weapons were recently sold at Bonhams' arms and armour sale and created much interest among collectors.

The sector – which includes antique edged weapons, muzzle-loading firearms and helmets – has witnessed a gradual rise in interest in recent years and historical provenance such as the story of colonel Colby's pistols – is a factor that focuses collector's minds.

David Williams, Head of Bonhams' Antique Arms and Armour Department, says: 'These pistols are a reminder of the last invasion of Britain and as such are of great interest to collectors and historians even though they were not fired in anger and a bluff prevented a bloodbath.'

This is also a sector where superbly crafted items can be picked up at auction for relatively modest sums. 'Arms and

A pair of pistols that witnessed the Battle of Fishguard in 1795 (left); a painting depicts the French 'Black Legion' surrendering after the so-called battle (bottom); this German powder flask from circa 1650 would fetch around £4,000-£5,000 at auction (right)

‘The bicentenary of the Battle of Waterloo is taking place in 2015 so there would potentially be plenty of interest in items that were used there.’

armour’s not expensive compared to other areas of the applied arts,’ says Williams. ‘It’s still a very popular area, though, and there are a lot of people looking for items all the time. But it’s also quite a specialist area and one that not everyone’s aware of.’

This is partly because while many cities – such as Paris, Madrid and Stockholm – have museums dedicated to the subject such places are comparatively rare.

A Napoleonic-era Russian officer’s sword inlaid with lapis lazuli (left) and a pair of ornate, South American blunderbuss pistols from the late 18th century (above) were part of the Bonhams November sale of antique arms and armour

London has the peerless Wallace Collection, in Marylebone, but the Victoria & Albert Museum closed its dedicated arms and armour gallery in 2003 and most of its impressive collection is now not on show.

Even so, new collectors are attracted to the market in search of the unique. ‘We source objects from all over the world and from all sorts of people,’ says Williams. ‘In our November sale, for example, there was a collection of guns that had belonged to an English family called Burnham – one of whom had been president of a group called the Muzzle-Loading Association.

‘Condition and quality are really important to an object’s value. So is provenance. Those pistols that were used during the last invasion of Britain are really brought to life by that association. They have a brilliant story.’

It is also often difficult to link objects with specific battles or events. Adds Williams: ‘The bicentenary of the Battle of Waterloo is taking place in 2015 so there would potentially be plenty of interest in items that were used there, but it’s generally very hard to prove that a particular weapon was at a particular battle.’

Other types of background are easier to verify, however. Thomas del Mar is an arms and armour auction expert who was recently charged with selling a group of items from the armoury of the German princely house of Hohenlohe-Langenburg. ‘It’s a highly decorative selection from the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries,’ he says. ‘It’s also very varied – with armour, edged weapons and artillery pieces that include a field gun.’ The latter is a full-sized cannon that would require a considerable space to display to its full potential.

As to what might make a good investment, del Mar suggests a preliminary trip to a place such as the Wallace Collection or the Royal Armouries to gauge the market. ‘Then it’s very much a question of taste and deciding what appeals to you. Condition is also very important. For example, you will sometimes see items such as pistols in superb condition, still in their original cases.’

It can also be an eclectic market. A glance at the catalogue for del Mar’s most recent sale reveals a wide variety of items from a 17th century infantryman’s helmet, to a German general’s jacket, to a collection of 24, lethal-looking African spears.

Bonhams’ Williams adds: ‘Arms and armour pieces are often remarkable as works of art. They were often worked on by

This French-made howitzer, built in 1828, was part of the Hohenlohe-Langenburg collection (above). A wheel-lock pistol that was made in Nuremburg in around 1585 (below). It would be expected to raise around £15,000 at auction

extremely talented craftsmen and were a vehicle for their skills in engraving and detailing.

'The market is very vibrant, with anything with a military background proving particularly popular in recent years. Having said that, this has never really been an area that's seen very much speculation, so it's remained comparatively static, but we've seen a gradual rise in prices over the years.

'The rise of the internet has definitely opened up the market to a wider audience. For example, even before the catalogues for our sales are printed they're available online and that increases the awareness and the numbers of potential bidders.'

In Bonhams' last sale focused on this sector, interest in particular focused on another item that proved the importance of a good backstory.

The items in question were a pair of flintlock holster pistols made in around 1660-70.

Splendid works of art in their own right, the weapons were in the Rothschild family's collection in Austria until 1939 when they were seized by the security forces of the Third Reich. During World War II they were stored in a salt mine, before entering the collection of the Austrian state museums where they remained until 1999 when they were returned to the family.

The pistols feature chiselled decoration including bearded grotesque masks, monkeys playing a cornet and various monsters. They're the work of craftsman Pietro Manani, considered of one of the greats of his time.

Williams adds: 'There can be few pistols with a more interesting history than these magnificent survivors. They're artistic and technological marvels of their time and they're still a window into the superb craftsmanship of the past.'

And it's the opportunity of opening that window that means the arms and armour market will remain an intriguing place to build up a collection of unique witnesses to history, particularly those that were present for as rare an event as an invasion of Britain.

From left: these 17th-century pistols were once in the collection of the Rothschild family and would sell for around £70,000 at auction. A piece of finely engraved armour that dates to around 1540; a very fine 14th-century knight's sword

'The market is very vibrant, with anything with a military background proving particularly popular in recent years.'

Two wheels good

Hazan motorbikes are custom made to meet a client's every need – and the end result is a roadworthy piece of art

Words: Jonathan Ames

Hazan's bespoke Ironhead on show in the workshop

Max Hazan spent three months lying on his sofa recuperating from a serious motorcycle accident that had left him badly bruised and for some time incapable of walking.

That is a lot of time to think, when not reading the newspaper or watching hours of mind-numbing daytime television. And think Hazan did – ultimately having a light-bulb moment of rather profound proportions.

Sitting in his Manhattan flat, Hazan cogitated: why not start building motorbikes from scratch?

'I had one of those classic Schwinn bicycles,' Hazan recalls of the iconic marque that dominated the US market from the 1950s to the late 1970s.

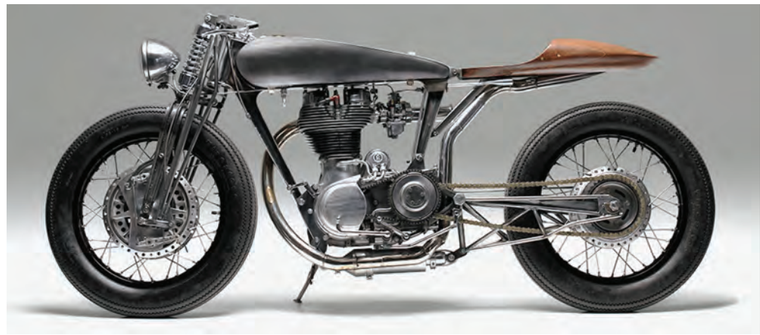
'The top of the frame looks a bit like the fuel tank on the top of a motorcycle. I was staring at it for months and when I finally was able to walk I threw the bike in the back of my truck and drove it out to my dad's house and added an engine. I cut it up so it didn't look like a bicycle with an engine in it – and it turned out to be really cool and vintage looking.'

That was some four years ago and provided the origin of a new business that now crafts highly stylised bespoke motorcycles for connoisseurs. The first was sold to daredevil Felix Baumgartner, the Austrian extreme skydiver, who set a world record in October 2012 by donning a spacesuit and jumping from a helium balloon an impressive 21 miles above the New Mexico desert.

Having studied psychology and architecture at Tulane University in New Orleans, Hazan did not initially appear to be destined for a career building luxury motorcycles from scratch. His first move on graduating from university was to join an up-market interior design company based on New York's Long Island.

From there he set up his own similar business, but by the time he tumbled off his racing bike and was consigned to the sofa, the interior design lark was leaving Hazan distinctly cold. Building bespoke motorbikes, however, reinvigorated him, although initially he could only engage in the practice as a sideline to his main business.

'But bit by bit I gravitated more towards the bikes,' he says. 'I was having lunch with my dad one day and he asked me if I was happy doing what I was doing. I said I was miserable; and he suggested that I just build bikes, so I decided to give it a shot on the basis that I could always go back to doing what I had been doing before.'



Hazan creations display distinctive lines, but their creator treats every project as a blank page

Max Hazan with a Ducati-based creation (above) and the bike in all its glory (left)

‘It’s a bit of an intimidating process because I try to do something completely different each time.’

Hazan’s first custom-made bikes were sold from a clothing shop in Malibu in California, which originally installed them as an innovative window display. But along came Baumgartner who spotted and bought the first, triggering a rush on Hazan’s other efforts.

‘After the Baumgartner sale I sent another bike out to the shop, which sold before it was even unloaded from the truck. So I sent them a couple more and that’s when the light came on and I started to build bikes full time.’

Until then, Hazan was building bikes from a converted warehouse on the Brooklyn waterfront, which afforded spectacular views of the Manhattan skyline. But as that part of the New York City borough became increasingly trendy, rents went through the roof, so Hazan upped sticks and headed west. He’s now based in a former sewing factory in central Los Angeles’ old fashion district.

The operation is definitely focused on the bespoke, producing no more than two or three custom-made motorbikes annually as they are effectively built from scratch.

‘It’s a bit of an intimidating process because I try to do something completely different each time,’ says Hazan. ‘I find I do the best work when I’m going into the unknown – it forces me to concentrate – to look closely at the engine and to see what type of lines I want to build round it, as opposed to repeating and tweaking something I’ve done before.

‘I try to approach the process in a humble way, as though I’m experiencing it for the first time. If you go in with a mindset of I’ve done this before, then you can overlook design possibilities.’

And while Hazan generally assembles his creations from the ground up, that doesn’t mean he’s not grateful when occasionally a pre-made part that works pops up. ‘I love it when I find an existing part that fits. But that almost never happens.’

Prices depend on the overall levels of customisation. Hazan’s semi-bespoke Ducati, for example, while a heavily modified bike, is not as customised as others and therefore sells for around $30,000 (£19,000).

At the other end of the range, his Royal Enfield and Harley Ironhead are in the $80,000 bracket, with the most customised – a supercharged Ironhead that runs to eight and a half feet of aluminium and was built entirely from scratch – has a price tag of about $100,000.

‘The most expensive bikes take the longest time to build,’ says Hazan. ‘The last three fully customised bikes started life as a pile of steel and took about six months to complete, with an additional month of testing.’

Indeed, that testing is crucial. While Hazan’s motorbikes look like pieces of art, he insists they are all fully functional, albeit not always offering the most comfortable of rides.

Testing is time consuming, he explains. ‘When every single piece is built from scratch, there are certain frictions and distortions that have to be worked out. You have to ride the bikes to find the problems, fix the problems and then ride them again.’

What about smoothness of ride? ‘Everyone always says they don’t look very comfortable – and they are not super-comfortable bikes,’ Hazan acknowledges. ‘But they are fully ride-able. You can ride them for an afternoon but I wouldn’t ride them long distance.’

But then it might be difficult for clients to complain directly to Hazan about the bumpy rides as he does not have a huge amount of contact with those buying his bikes.

‘I’ve never met any of the buyers,’ he says, pointing out that all his highest priced bikes have been sold through brokers. He is aware that some of his customers may be somewhat unpredictable in their tastes.

One recently bought a bike to put in the middle of the living room of a southern California house. At a later date he bought an expansive beach house, which he decided would be better suited for the bespoke motorbike motif, but he didn’t want to risk moving his recent purchase. So the customer ordered another bike.

While many of Hazan’s clients don’t ride his motorcycles, their creator himself remains keen on two-wheeled motorised transport. And as such, like so many others, he has fallen victim to the perils of urban bike ownership.

‘I had to go to Las Vegas for a show recently and someone stole my bike from right outside my house,’ he says. It was a dual sport and road Suzuki Supermoto bike. ‘It’s a fun commuter bike, but not too valuable. I told myself I wasn’t going to touch it, but of course, I did, so it was a little modified.’

As for his assembly-line bikes of preference, Hazan is not a big fan of the newer breed of Harley-Davidson, preferring the older models, along with Britain’s Triumph. But primarily he’s a keen supporter of smaller modern manufacturers, such as Johnny Pag Motorcycles.

As for the British bikes, while a fan, Hazan maintains their image has been sullied by modern fashion. ‘A lot of the English bikes got ruined by the whole hipster movement, with people trying to look like they’re from a Ralph Lauren catalogue – the three-quarter helmet and Ray-Bans look while sitting on a Triumph. It’s all a bit clichéd.’

THE MACALLAN: CAPTURE THE MOMENT

Great partnerships can create the ultimate party, illustrated by the recent launch of The Macallan and Mario Testino partnership at The Ritz on November 12th. When the world's most iconic whisky joins together with world renowned fashion photographer Mario Testino to create the Masters of Photography: Mario Testino edition, you know the end result is going to be outstanding.

With only 1,000 available, each edition comprises a different Mario Testino print, an exclusive photo-archival booklet featuring a total of 20 images, shot by Testino during the process, one bottle of the single malt whisky and six miniatures from each of the six casks specially selected by Master Whisky Maker, Bob Dalgarno. The Macallan Masters of Photography: Mario Testino edition is available from specialist whisky retailers, priced at £2215.

"Whisky was the choice of drink in my country during the years I was growing up...When I was approached by The Macallan to take part in the Masters of Photography Series, I decided to capture the moment when people get together to celebrate in the atmosphere of a whisky environment – a whisky club."

Mario Testino. Originally from Peru.

For a wider whisky loving audience The 1824 Series celebrates two of The Macallan's greatest strengths: exceptional oak casks and natural colour. The series consists of four expressions – Gold, Amber, Sienna and Ruby which become richer in flavour and colour as you progress through the series. Grounded in an unwavering commitment to sourcing the very best sherry seasoned oak casks, the most expensive in the industry, The 1824 Series showcases the signature style of The Macallan, embracing the defining elements which have made it one of the world's truly great single malts.

With the festive season gathering pace whisky is the perfect drink for the winter occasion whether you prefer it straight, over ice or even in a refreshing cocktail.

The Macallan Gold, Amber, Sienna and Ruby are available at selected whisky specialists.

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drinkaware.co.uk for the facts

THE AMBER GLOW

THE MACALLAN AMBER MIXED WITH BOLS DRY ORANGE WITH A DASH OF BITTERS

Glass: Tumbler **Method:** Stirred

Ingredients:
50ml The Macallan Amber
20ml Bols Dry Orange
A dash of barrel aged Bitters

The Designer

Out of the blue

When Bombay Sapphire needed a new centrepiece distillery it signed up star designer Thomas Heatherwick to transform a derelict paper mill

Words: George de Grey

A flavour of steampunk: Heatherwick's glasshouses

A heron waits like a vigilant, grey sentry in a shaded spot amid the shallows of the River Test. As it fixedly watches the water a gust of wind dislodges a handful of yellow-brown leaves that swirl away with the current.

It is an idyllic country scene, but one set against a surprisingly long-lasting industrial background. On the opposite bank of the Test, a collection of red-brick buildings tell a tale that is one of centuries-old international trade that goes far beyond this leafy corner of rural Hampshire.

Laverstoke Mill was once a place where banknotes were produced, not only for Britain, but for the countries of its one-time empire. Time moved on and the mill fell into dereliction for around 20 years, but now – after a multi-million pound refurbishment – it is enjoying a new lease of life as the flagship distillery of Bombay Sapphire gin.

Estate manager Will Brix says: 'The site was discovered almost by accident when one of our team, on the hunt for a suitable destination, jumped over a wall and explored the out of use redbrick buildings.'

There was more to the mill's appeal than its rugged good looks, however. Adds the appropriately named Brix: 'The history of Laverstoke Mill can be traced back to the Domesday Book of 1086. The heritage of Bombay Sapphire began in 1761, when

‘We wanted to give the water much more visual prominence and to allow the stream to act as navigational device drawing the public through the site.’

An aerial view of the site and its Victorian-era buildings (above); the architects made sure that the nearby River Test becomes a feature (left); huge copper stills provide a focus (far right)

distiller Thomas Dakin created the original recipe for the gin. It was already well established by the start of Queen Victoria’s reign – when these buildings were producing banknotes for the countries across the Empire.’

Bombay Sapphire’s HQ prior to it opening up the Laverstoke development was on an industrial estate in Cheshire, lacking something of the charm of the current site. The mill’s transformation was entrusted to Thomas Heatherwick, the much-acclaimed designer of London’s new Routemaster bus and the London Olympic cauldron.

Adds Brix: ‘The five-year project started with Heatherwick Studio stripping the site back to reveal the red-brick Victorian buildings and the River Test. The majority of the buildings on site are listed and have become a real focus of the distillery, with 18th-century structures now home to the traditional copper stills we use in our distillation process.

‘Our renovation work led to the site being the first distillery to be awarded the prestigious Breeam Award for Industrial Design.’

Heatherwick’s team also planted native plant and tree species on site, temporarily relocated more than 400 fish (by hand) and created habitats for bats, woodland birds and otters.

Eliot Postma, project architect at Heatherwick Studios says: ‘The brief was fairly broad, it was essentially to design a state-of-the-art production facility able to distil the worldwide supply of the gin, while creating a home for the brand and a place for the public to come and experience what it is that makes Bombay Sapphire special.

‘The original site was a sprawling complex of more than 40 individual buildings, including corrugated iron workshops, cluttered over the river and accumulated over the past two centuries. Much of our early work involved understanding which of the buildings held the most historic value and were essential to the original Victorian charm of the mill, as well as those that had less historical significance and could be removed to allow other buildings and the wider site to breathe.

‘Removing those buildings allowed us to open up the River Test. From our first visit it was clear what a beautiful asset this was. We wanted to give the water much more visual prominence and to allow the stream to act as a navigational device drawing the public through the site, into the new courtyard at its heart.’

Walking around the site today, one of the most striking features is the group of curving glasshouses. As Postma explains: ‘The

design for these was inspired by historical greenhouses, such as the palm house at Kew Gardens or the Crystal Palace. The opportunity to use the excess heat from the distillation process meant that we wanted to connect the glasshouses back to the still buildings. By expressing these links in the architecture itself, it's almost like the glass is being blown from the still building down to the river below.'

Postma is clearly proud of what his team has achieved on the site. 'A large part of the design process was turning the Victorian buildings into a state of the art, highly sustainable production facility. Green elements in the build include that waste heat from the distilling process used to warm the glasshouses, a hydroelectric generator and waste botanicals [plants used in the flavouring process such as angelica and cubeb] used partially to power the biomass boiler.

'Pushing glass technology innovation, the design of the glasshouses adopted curved glass technology that took a phenomenal level of craftsmanship and pushed the possibilities of glass engineering technology. The finished structures are made from 793 individually shaped and curved pieces of glass, and required more than 10,000 bespoke components.'

Brix thinks visitors will be impressed by the end result: 'People can explore the 10 botanicals nurtured in the glasshouses and discover the aromas and unique flavour profile of each in the Botanical Dry Room.

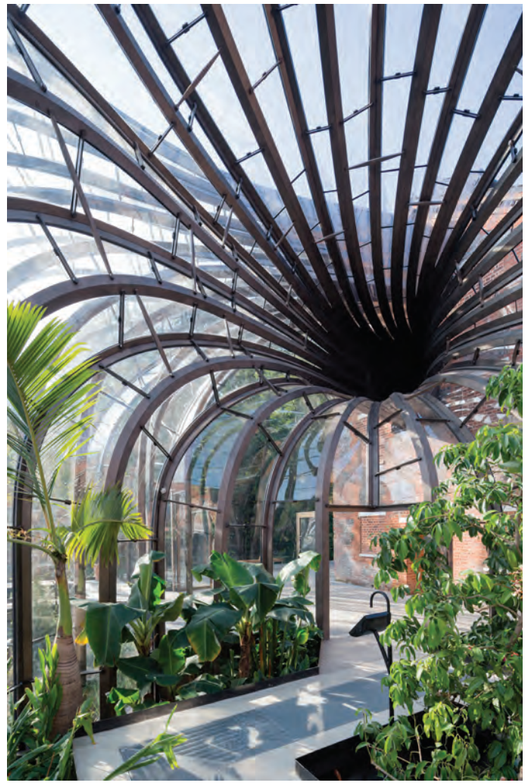
'Visitors will also enjoy finding out about the rich history of both Laverstoke Mill and Bombay Sapphire within the heritage room and gallery.'

Standing in the central courtyard, shaded by classical facades, it is hard not to be impressed by Heatherwick's work. The glasshouses have a suggestion of gardeners' cloches – traditionally used to protect plants from the cold – and Wardian cases, Victorian glass jars that were used to cultivate and display exotic specimens in genteel drawing rooms.

There is also a certain steampunk charm to the site, emphasised not only by the glasswork but also by those large copper stills that are key to the whole process. It's an impressive place and made all the more so by the tangible presence of the river and its readily viewable wildlife – going about its business as it has since the days of Queen Victoria, Domesday Book and beyond.

'The finished structures are made from 793 individually shaped and curved pieces of glass and needed more than 10,000 components.'

Naturalistic lines within the glasshouses which are warmed by excess heat from the distillation process



The Information
The 300-year-old Laverstoke Mill provides distillery tours and tastings.
http://distillery.bombaysapphire.com/

There is no denying it: investing your money offshore does not have the greatest reputation. Whether it is being continually demonised in the media, or deemed unacceptable by British governments of whatever hue, sending your money over to a Caribbean island to shelter it from the tax-collecting authorities is widely viewed as bad form.

Of course, there will always be instances of doubtful offshore deals and money laundering, but the vast majority of offshore investment is perfectly legal. Depending on your situation, it can offer also considerable advantages. In fact, if you have a large amount of capital at your disposal, £10m or more say, investment advisers suggest it would be financially reckless not to find a home for it offshore.

Offshore investing refers to a wide range of investment strategies that capitalise on advantages offered outside an investor's home country.

There is no shortage of money-market, bond and equity assets offered by reputable offshore companies that are fiscally sound, time-tested and, most important of all, legal.

But it's worth bearing in mind a saying in casino gambling that winners should 'get it quietly' and should not make too much fuss about how much they have won at the tables. The same mantra seems to apply to those who choose the offshore route for their money.

The Boston Consulting Group puts the total investible assets of the world's wealthy at $122 trillion in 2011, almost enough to buy all the shares traded on the New York Stock Exchange 10 times over. However, Capgemini and Merrill Lynch come up with a more 'modest' estimate of about $43 trillion. Whichever number is right, it is certainly true that the size of this market has ballooned since the global financial crisis of 2007-08 threatened to bring down the international banking system.

Quietly does it

Since the global financial crisis so much money has been put into offshore jurisdictions that now 50% of the world's assets and investments are held in them

Words: James Hipwell

Waiting for the smart money…

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The Investor

The richest nations are still home to most of the world's money: about a third is in America and another third in Europe. But the fastest growth is in Asia, where the assets of the rich increased by almost a fifth in 2010.

One financial adviser to a clutch of ultra-high-net-worth individuals (UHNWIs) agrees to give me a brief explanation of why people retain his services. Speaking on condition of anonymity he says the time-honoured tradition of those with considerable monetary assets setting up international business companies (IBCs) is very much alive. An IBC is an offshore company formed under the laws of some jurisdictions as an untaxed company which is not permitted to engage in business within the jurisdiction in which it is incorporated.


Looking attractive to the big banks...

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> 'Our partners are able to choose which investments they want to make and don't have to pay fees on committed funds.'

'Imagine a company which is not required to file any public notice of who its officers and directors are,' he says. 'There is no need to reveal the identity of its shareholders, no need to file any financial statements or keep any accounts. Imagine that such a company can be incorporated in an economically and politically stable country which is a member of the British Commonwealth, and which imposes no income, capital gains, or inheritance tax. Bluntly, by setting up these companies for our clients we offer them a way they can hang on to their capital, pass it on to their children – and it is all perfectly legal.'

He tells me Anguilla, Bahamas, Belize, Dominica, Nevis, St Vincent and Seychelles are the offshore centres where IBCs are proving very popular at the moment.

'They're awash,' he says. 'A few years back the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and something called the Financial Action Task Force on Money Laundering (FATF) got pretty worked up about IBCs, and new rules were introduced, but it didn't make much difference and I'd say the IBC brand is still very much alive.'

What is interesting is that few banks have managed to carve out a sizeable chunk of the offshore market. Scorpio Partnership, which describes itself as the world's leading market research and strategy consultancy to the global wealth industry, says that the 20 biggest private banks and wealth managers look after little more than $11 trillion of offshore funds between them.

The fragmentation of the market makes it attractive to newcomers, which reckon they stand a fair chance of grabbing a slice of it, as well as to larger incumbents such as UBS, which are intent on getting more.

Most private banks or wealth managers try to strike a balance between cost and revenue, by giving different clients different amounts of service. Knowledgeable customers are increasingly going to the smaller players and newer entrants, who can focus on their needs with an intensity that the top 10 private banks may struggle to match.

One brand new entrant is Mayfair-based Codex Capital Partners, set up by David Currie, who used to head Investec Bank PLC's investment banking division. The company is specifically aimed at UHNWIs, family offices and entrepreneurs who have at least £25m to invest.

'Codex gives UHNWIs access to direct investments without having to invest in the infrastructure this normally requires and without the fees a fund may require. We source, evaluate, transact and then monitor deals allowing as much or as little involvement as the partner desires.

'Our partners are able to choose which investments they want to make and don't have to pay fees on committed funds. They generally prefer complete privacy and so we do not publicise their details without their consent,' says Currie.

While more than half of the world's assets and investments are held in offshore jurisdictions, and the likes of UBS and Goldman Sachs continue to offer legitimate investment opportunities in offshore centres, UHNWIs can and will continue to look for the best value and assess all the available options.

The Four Evangelists carved in limewood by Tilman Riemenschneider (c1460-1531) (left); a porcelain rhinoceros based on Albrecht Dürer's famous print and dating to the 1730s (below)

Spotlight on nation

To mark 25 years since the fall of the Berlin Wall, London's British Museum is focusing its attention on the intricacies of German art

Words: George de Grey

Albrecht Dürer never saw a rhinoceros. That did not stop him producing an image of the animal that was seen as definitive for hundreds of years and that, to this day, remain perhaps the best known artistic depiction of the creature.

Dürer's print is one of 200 objects to make an appearance in the British Museum's current exhibition entitled *Germany: Memories of a Nation*.

The show is timed to coincide with the 25th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall and provides an unavoidably condensed, but nonetheless fascinating snapshot of the highpoints of German culture and the salient points of its history over the past 600 years.

The famous rhinoceros was probably one of the first items on the list when the curators came to put together the displays – its creator's role as an artistic icon in his native land is second to none.

As the British Museum's director, Neil MacGregor, says: 'Dürer has become the great German artist. Just as English writers unconsciously quote from Shakespeare so German artists right up to the present day quote from Dürer almost without knowing it. He

From left: Goethe in the Roman Campagna by Johann Tischbein (1751-1829). A tankard made of carved amber from around 1650; *Dresden Trümmerfrau* – a sculpture made from rubble following the bombing of the city in 1945 – by Max Lachnit (1900-1972)

embodies the renaissance idea of artist as hero. He was the first artist to sell his work widely across the whole of Europe.'

Dürer was an innovator in more ways than one – seizing on the most advanced technology of the day as the way of selling as many of his artworks as possible.

MacGregor adds: 'He was without question a great painter, but it was print-making that by 1500 had made him a continental celebrity. These were the first great artworks in Europe to be mass-produced and Dürer was the first great artist to master the new technology of the printing press. He raised the status of the woodcut and engraving on copper sheets to a quite new level.

'His image of a rhinoceros was based on a journalist's description of an animal that was shipped to Lisbon in 1515. So successful was Dürer in reaching markets not just in Germany, but across Europe that his woodcut image of a rhino became stronger than reality. To such an extent that 200 years later when the Meissen porcelain factory near Dresden wanted to make as its show-off piece a rhino made out of porcelain it took as its model Dürer's image of the animal he had never seen.'

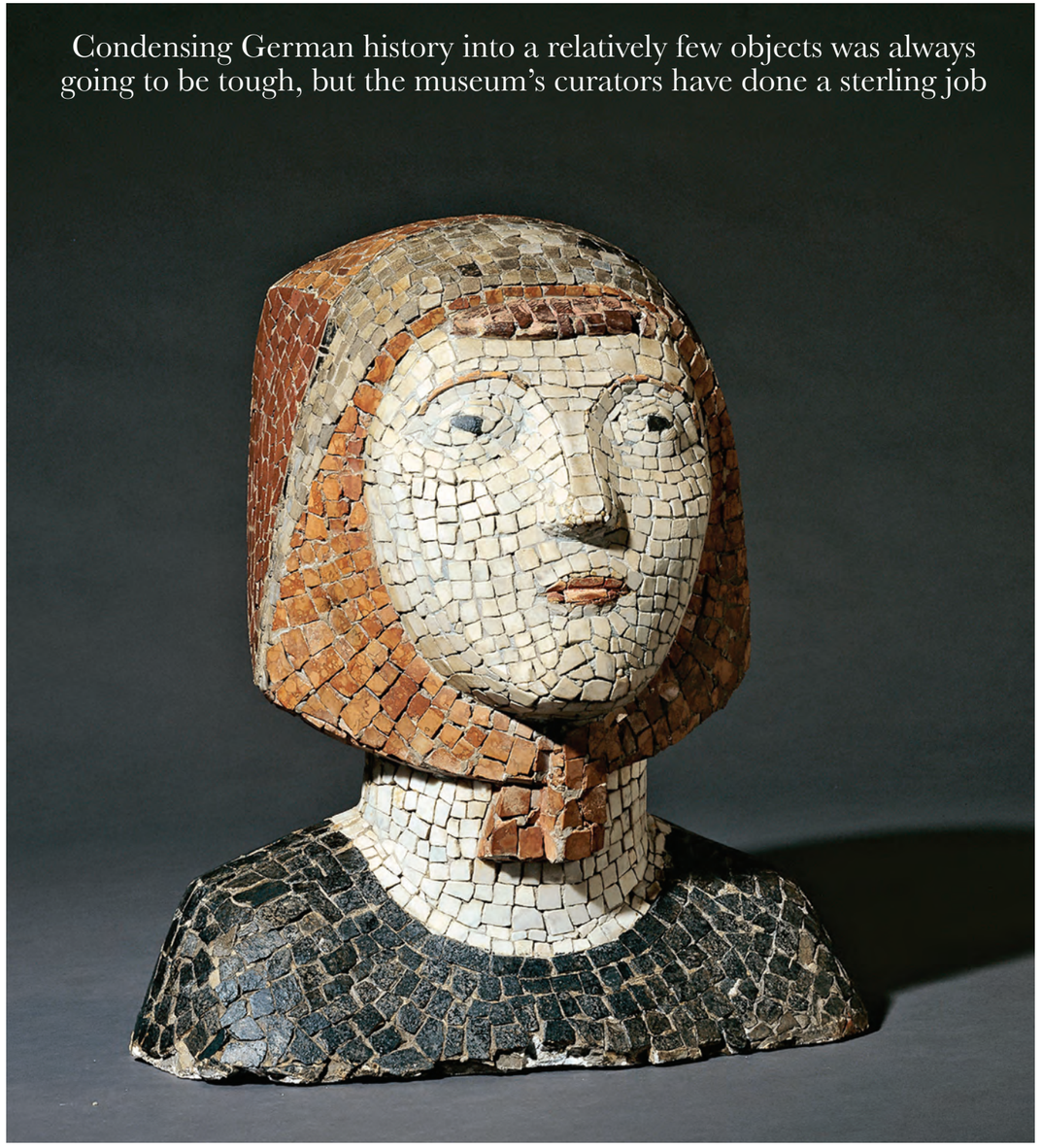
About the size of a large dog, this ceramic rhinoceros is placed next to Dürer's creation in the exhibition. Its provenance is quite clear – with its erroneous scales and a strange horn sited between its shoulders, it is essentially a three-dimensional version of Dürer's printed beast.

Condensing hundreds of years of German history into a relatively few objects was always going to be tough. But the British Museum's curators have done a sterling job at mingling historical narrative not only with the works of the all-time greats such as Dürer, but also with more unpredictable items.

Among the latter are a rather nightmarish leather plague-doctor's mask-cum-hood from the 17th century – complete with a long snout that was supposed to help fend off noxious vapours. Also on display is a hat that once belonged to the French Emperor Napoleon Bonaparte, removed from his abandoned carriage after the battle of Waterloo and very similar to one that recently sold at auction for €1.9m (£1.5m).

Another understated item is nearby. In this case it is an Iron Cross – the gallantry medal that was conceived in the early 19th century in the Kingdom of Prussia.

MacGregor says: 'In 1813 as the military tide [against Napoleon] began to turn in Prussia's favour, King Frederick William III commanded for all existing military decorations to be suspended and ordered a new one to be struck – the Iron Cross.



Most of the refugees had nowhere to go and the crisis that was created was immense, with families settled in places they'd often never even heard of

'This was to be awarded to men of all ranks – not just officers. It was a historic innovation and a brilliant PR stunt. All Prussians would now be able to join the fight to free the nation on equal terms, irrespective of wealth and status.

'As a decoration, the Iron Cross is strikingly simple. It's made of cast iron, black with a silver border. There is no inscription, no grandiose assertion of valour, just the king's initials, three oak leaves in the centre and the date of the great fight back – 1813.'

The medal was discontinued at the end of the Napoleonic wars, but returned in the 1870s and was widely awarded in two world wars.

The consequences of those conflicts predictably also make an appearance in the exhibition. On show are examples of anti-war prints by the artist and World War I veteran Otto Dix and banknotes issued by the German government during the hyperinflation of the 1920s. There is also a simple wooden handcart, one of many that was used by the ethnic Germans who had to flee eastern Europe following the end of World War II in 1945.

Says MacGregor: 'Before 1945 in what was then Pomerania, people could be shot on sight for using one of these carts. To flee to the West was weakness and capitulation. It was absolutely forbidden. But once even the German army began to pull back in the face of the Soviet advance, the civilians fled, millions of them just upped and left everything behind that they could not carry or pile onto these carts.'

Most of these people had nowhere to go and the refugee crisis that was created was immense, with families settled in places they'd often never even heard of. But, badly off as the refugees were, there were many more Germans who paid an even higher price for their leaders' behaviour during the 20th century.

The exhibition ends under a bronze figure that floats above the visitor's head – it's a barefoot angel with eyes closed and mouth shut. It's the work of sculptor Ernst Barlach and its usual function is as a war memorial at the cathedral in Güstrow .

A World War I veteran, Barlach became a pacifist following his experiences on the front line. And the angel has the face of another German artist, Kathe Kollwitz, whose son was killed in the early months of the war.

On 23 August 1937 the figure was taken down on the orders of the Nazi authorities. MacGregor adds: 'It was put into storage nearby and in the early 1940s it was melted down for its metal to be used in the war effort.'

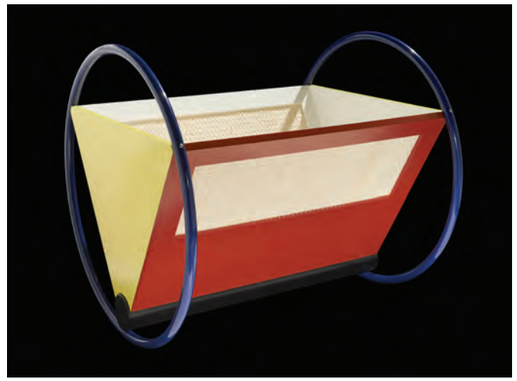
True colours: a demonstration placard from Berlin in 1989 (left). A print of writer Franz Kafka by artist Hans Fronius dating to 1937

But a copy had been taken and this survived the war, although in the 1950s it went on show in Cologne – as Güstrow was by then in East Germany. However, a further copy of the bronze was made and in 1953 this was finally returned to Güstrow.

'It was a rare vindication of dialogue in a divided Germany,' says MacGregor. 'On a bitterly cold day in December 1981 the West German chancellor Helmut Schmidt and East German leader Erich Honecker stood beneath Barlach's angel and talked of reconciliation.'

Almost exactly 10 years later, the two Germanies were reunited. Barlach's imposing angel has not left the city in 30 years, but marking both the centenary of the outbreak of World War I and 25 years since the fall of the Berlin Wall it is now adding a dramatic endpiece to the British Museum's exhibition.

Germany, Memories of a Nation, is on show at the British Museum until 25 January 2015.



(From top) Simple, ingenious Bauhaus-style cradle; Margarete Marks vase from the 1920s; the flag of the German Confederation from the 1850s

Barlach's imposing angel has not left the city of Güstrow in 30 years

Prisse d'Avennes' depiction of an artwork showing Pharaoh Ramses II fighting the Hittites

Ancient Egypt *unveiled*

Barely remembered today outside his native France, Émile Prisse d'Avennes helped transform understanding and appreciation of ancient Egyptian art and architecture

Words: George de Grey

Outside his native France, Émile Prisse d'Avennes is a largely forgotten figure; his exploits in Egypt in the middle years of the 19th century all too often little more than a footnote in specialist books.

Despite this, Prisse can be credited with being one of the first Europeans to advance the study of what we today term Egyptology – and often at considerable risk to himself.

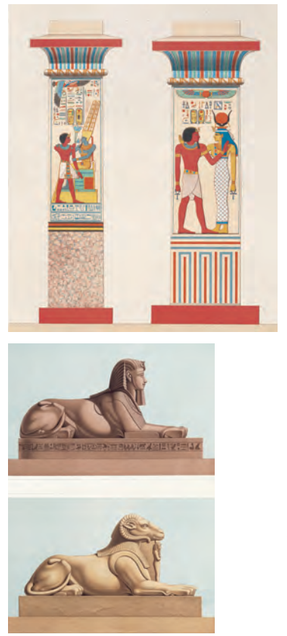
His travels throughout the Middle East were all a far cry from his rather prosaic roots. Born in 1807 in the northern French market town of Avesnes-sur-Helpe, he was to lose his father in 1814 – reportedly in battle against the invading Prussians in the last days of Napoleon Bonaparte's empire.

Whether that story is true or not, the young Prisse developed an early taste for adventure and risk-taking. After training at the Ecole d'Arts et Métiers at Chalons Sur Marne, and aged just 19, he set off to take part in the Greek War of Independence. From there he visited Palestine and India, before arriving in Egypt shortly afterwards.

There, he found a job at the court of Muhammad Ali Pasha, converted to Islam and took the name Idris Effendi. He learned Arabic and developed an, at the time remarkable, understanding of hieroglyphics, also for a short time using his architectural skills to teach fortification techniques to the Pasha's army officers.

From here it was a short step to the ancient sites of Egypt

From left: the great temple of Abshek; Pharaoh Amenophis II and his governess; ceiling patterns from Memphis and Thebes depicting birds



From top left: decorated pillars from Thebes; examples of sphinxes and a depiction of a hunting scene – again from a tomb at Thebes

Prisse could speak Arabic and regional dialects and would dress in the local style – meaning he could move around the area without arousing any unwanted attention

and an ever-gathering interest in archeology and the romantic legacies of a long-lost civilisation. In 1836, after almost 10 years in the royal service, he handed in his resignation and set out to do some serious exploring of the sites of antiquity.

Prisse drew almost incessantly in his notebooks, recording everything he saw and unearthed. In 1839 he arrived in Luxor to study the huge number of monuments that were preserved there. He spent six years acquiring many items that he sent back to his native France – including the Stele of Bakhtan that is now on show in the Louvre. He also travelled widely in the region, visiting Syria, Turkey, Palestine and what is today Ethiopia. Unlike most Western travellers of the time, Prisse could speak Arabic and regional dialects and would dress in the local style – meaning he could move around the area easily and without arousing any unwanted attention.

He also recorded everything he saw on paper – copying scenes from tombs and temples and completing a thorough study of Egyptian art. He was not overly reluctant about removing objects that he particularly liked the look of, although he would also step in to prevent others destroying items of historic value. He finally arrived back in France in 1844, having left Egypt under rather dubious circumstances – with crate-loads of what would today be seen as essentially looted treasure. He duly catalogued his finds and published a book entitled *Monuments Égyptiens*. It contained much hitherto unknown material – particularly concerning the reign of the pharaoh Akhenaten and the buildings he had created in and around Thebes.

Prisse returned to Egypt in the late 1850s. By now he was an established authority on antiquity and his expedition was sponsored by Emperor Napoleon III, financed by the Ministry of Education and lasted for three years (1858-1861).

By now, the Egyptian authorities were much more aware of the value of their heritage than they had been a decade previously, although Prisse was still able to source numerous items to take back with him to France. They included the skulls of 29 mummies that he identified by their era, position in society and individual name. His haul formed the basis of a second book, *Histoire de l'art Égyptien* – an impressive tome that covers architecture, drawing, sculpture and painting.

His keen eye, attention to detail and appreciation of colour have proved invaluable to legions of later Egyptologists – who arrived in the country years after many of the objects recorded by Prisse had either been looted or destroyed.

One case in point is the sarcophagus of King Menkaure, which the Frenchman carefully recorded in a meticulous watercolour. The object was later removed from the king's pyramid at Giza and shipped off to England, but the boat it was aboard sank in the Bay of Biscay and the priceless artifact sank to the bottom of the sea never to be seen again.

And Prisse not only focused his attention on the great objects related to the gods and pharaohs. He also recorded items such as satirical papyri, one example showing a donkey dressed as a pharaoh and a lion playing draughts with an antelope.

He made many of his drawings in carefully mixed colours, recording the exact shades he found and their appearance in depictions of people, animals and floral motifs. He was also a consummate draftsman; his drawings of temples, columns and tombs showing an almost photographic eye for detail.

Egyptian Art, by Émile Prisse D'Avennes, is published by Taschen, price $150. www.taschen.com

Gone, but not forgotten

The distilleries of Brora and Port Ellen have long since shut their doors, but their much sought-after spirit lives on

Words: Richard Woodard

The distillery buildings at Brora on the Sutherland coast lie empty, cold and silent now, more than 30 years after spirit last flowed from their stills. Scotch whisky may be thriving around the world – and the neighbouring Clynelish plant continues to feed that demand – but Brora's part in the tale is all but over.

Travel south and west, cross to the Hebrides and the whisky honeypot of Islay. At Port Ellen, even as the maltings labour to keep up supplies to the island's producers, all is quiet at the distillery of the same name next door. The Islay whisky boom that has enveloped Laphroaig, Ardbeg and Lagavulin has passed Port Ellen by.

The Sutherland coast (far left): its whisky endures. The famous Brora distillery back in the 1930s (left)

Shutterstock

The first Port Ellen Special Release more than a decade ago was priced at less than £100 per bottle; this year's 35-year-old sells for £2,200

The Information

Port Ellen 35 years old (14th annual release, £2,200)
Characteristic peat smoke, all but overshadowed by an unctuous, oily texture and richer flavours of coffee bean and fine chocolate. Ripe and edged with wood smoke.

Brora aged 35 years (£1,200)
Remarkably complex and multi-faceted, from a distinctly coastal salt tang to a brooding, understated smokiness, intertwined with slightly sour fruit and a velvety mouthfeel which seeps into every corner. Sumptuous.

The Glenlivet The Winchester Collection Vintage 1964 (£17,995, Harrods)
Welcoming flavours of ripe fruit, dark honey and sweet caramel hint at this whisky's impressive longevity but, remarkably, distillery character shines through: typical pear and more exotic hints of mandarin and cherry. Broad on the palate, endless on the finish; an unforgettable experience.

Well, not entirely. Both Brora and Port Ellen may have cooled their stills and closed their doors back in 1983, but the spirit they produced lives on – and is among the most sought-after whisky in the world. Like James Dean or Marilyn Monroe, their premature demise has only served to immortalise them.

When Brora was built in 1819, it was one of Scotland's earliest purpose-built malt distilleries, and construction cost £750. £750? That wouldn't buy you a single bottle of Brora in 2014.

Brora and Port Ellen have become the centrepieces of the annual Special Releases of single malts made by the multi-national which owns them, Diageo. The first Port Ellen Special Release more than a decade ago was priced at less than £100 per bottle; this year's 35-year-old, of which there are fewer than 3,000 bottles worldwide, sells for a cool £2,200. Meanwhile, 2014's Brora, also a 35-year-old, is £1,200. Collecting rare whisky is a bull market on the rampage.

'Diageo is effectively playing "catch-up" with its pricing,' says Andy Simpson, founder of Rare Whisky 101, a business which combines advice, consultancy and brokerage services to whisky collectors with a range of indices charting the performance of collectible bottlings. 'Port Ellen and Brora are closed distilleries, so there is very little on the market. The casks are running out.

'Port Ellen [pricing] in particular has gone loopy over the past 12 months. The volume of releases has just gone through the floor, because there are so few casks left.' Simpson reckons there were 56 new Port Ellen whiskies launched (by independent bottlers as well as by Diageo) in 2010; in 2013, that figure dropped to just six. It's nearly all gone.

Time, however, can take its toll when a distillery has been closed for more than three decades. That is a long time for whisky to spend in cask and, if it's not bottled in time, it becomes over-oaked, worn out and unpleasant to drink. Simpson says he has refused apparently attractive and rare casks on behalf of clients for that very reason.

Alcohol levels also drop with time – the fabled 'angels' share' lost through evaporation – and, should they dip below 40% abv, the liquid can no longer be sold as whisky.

Thankfully, the inaugural release from The Winchester Collection, a planned series of 50-year-old whiskies from The Glenlivet distillery on Speyside, clocks in at 42.3%. 'Vintage 1964' is a liquid time capsule, laid down by Captain Bill Smith-Grant – last distilling descendant of The Glenlivet's founder, George Smith – and there are just 100 bottles available, priced at roughly £18,000 each. Further releases will follow, with 'Vintage 1966' next in line.

Again, the hefty price-tag reflects the broader market: Simpson says just over 5,400 single bottle lots of malt whisky were auctioned in 2010. In 2013, the figure topped 20,000 and, by the end of October, 2014's total was above 26,000.

Similarly, Simpson's Apex 1,000 index – a kind of FTSE or Dow-Jones of rare whisky which, similar to Liv-Ex with fine wine, charts the performance of key bottles – registered increases of 23% in both 2012 and 2013, and is projected to record 15% growth in 2014. This year's slowdown is in part a reflection of the reduced number of historic rare bottles being traded – although Simpson does also anticipate a slight cooling in the market.

So is buying collectible whisky an infallible investment? Not if you do not know your stuff. Simpson's indices also chart the surprisingly large number of black sheep – the apparently collectible whiskies that prove that such investments can go down, as well as up.

For instance, you might think that a bottling of Glenlivet Atlantic

The Port Ellen distillery around 1900 (centre); 35-year-old offerings from Brora (left) and Port Ellen

Shutterstock

Taking its time: whisky barrels await their moment (left); the finished product (below)

If it's not bottled in time, it becomes over-oaked, worn out and unpleasant

Among producing distilleries, Balvenie is exceptionally collectible, particularly vintage single cask bottlings from the late 1960s and early 1970s

– a single cask whisky aged for 40 years – would be a sound choice; but one example fetched £1,750 at auction early in 2014, while another went for only £860 in early November.

'The index of the worst-performing collectibles is down by about 8% this year,' says Simpson. 'We are seeing a lot of bottles from a lot of distillers that are bombing.'

Navigating this minefield requires specialist knowledge or advice, but a few general tips can help. Simpson reckons independent bottlings of 'silent' distilleries are a good bet, but advises looking beyond the obvious Brora and Port Ellen to less-heralded names such as Rosebank, St Magdalene, Glenugie, Banff, Convalmore, Coleburn, Millburn and Glen Mhor. Rosebank, for instance, can be picked up at auction for less than £100.

Among producing distilleries, Balvenie is 'exceptionally collectible', he says, particularly vintage single cask bottlings from the late 1960s and early 1970s. Iconic distilleries with special anniversaries are also worth watching – for instance, Ardbeg's bicentenary in 2015, which is sure to prompt a special release or two.

But even the most unassuming-looking bottlings may provide opportunities. The Macallan is a blue-chip single malt with reliable returns, and even relatively recent bottlings of its common-or-garden, 10-year-old expression are beginning to fetch higher sums, mainly because the company recently relaunched its core range without age statements in the UK.

International interest in collecting rare whisky is growing all the time, but the market remains dwarfed by the world of fine wine investment: Simpson calculates the global value of the secondary whisky market at about £100m, compared to fine wine at about £2bn. The idea of investing, say, £50m in a 'whisky fund' is laughable – because there simply is not the stock available.

As such, few speculators have been drawn to whisky in the same way as to Lafite, Pétrus and Romanée-Conti. 'Out of the thousands of people I deal with, only one guy is teetotal,' says Simpson. 'He hates whisky and doesn't like alcohol in general. All of the others enjoy a dram.'

And most of them follow the golden rule of buying at least two bottles of each 'investment': one to enjoy while the other (hopefully) appreciates in value. Because this is the kind of liquid investment that brings more than just a financial return.

Taken to cask: whisky remains a relatively small investment market, but one with committed followers

Shutterstock

Time was, creating a statement development was relatively straightforward, especially for warehouse-style penthouses. A little exposed brick here, a zinc shelf there, something substantial and brightly coloured in a frame and all would be well.

Maybe once, but not any more. A key part of any prestigious build nowadays includes consideration of the matter of lighting. And that lighting can be a significant part of the cost, as the fashion is returning for huge, statement pieces.

We are talking about objects such as those being produced by lighting wünderkind, George Singer. The 34-year-old operates out of a studio in Shoreditch, east London, a district that is home to many artists and designers.

Singer is a graduate of the city's St Martin's College of Art. His boutique studio embraces innovative, cutting-edge techniques to breathe new life into what might be seen as a very traditional, aristocratic even, form of lighting – the chandelier.

Those techniques include 3D printing. Last year, Singer used this methodology to create his £42,000 work entitled *Big Sexy Diamond*, which was designed and made for the Strata Art Fair at the Saatchi Gallery. It is fabulously intricate – the attention to detail is phenomenal – and involves more than 5,000 LEDs encased by gold anodised aluminium 'ribs'. The 3D printing was crucial in building the intelligent joints.

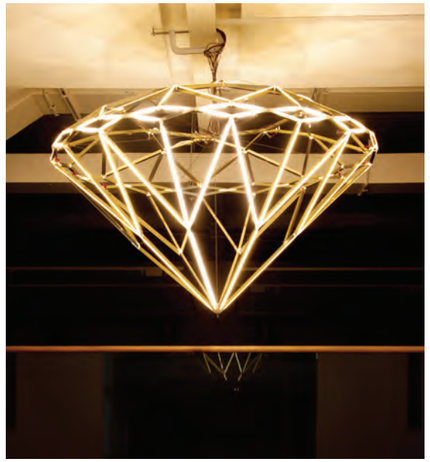
Says Singer: 'I had the idea years ago, but it was prohibitively expensive to cast the different joints in metal. Then I was walking

Light fantastic

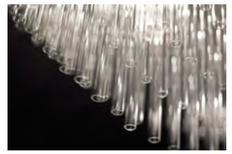
London-based George Singer has made a name for himself creating chandeliers of epic proportions and intricacy

Words: Eugene Costello

George Singer (far left). One of his creations called *Deco 2* (left) and a detail from that chandelier (above)



Singer creations: *Big Sexy Diamond* (above) and the *One Thousand Chandelier* (right)



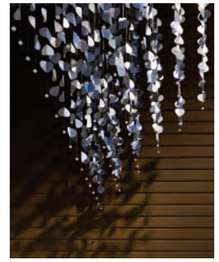
past the iMakr 3D printing store in Clerkenwell [in London] and realised that the technology to realise my idea now existed.'

Singer was born in Taunton, Somerset, and grew up on Exmoor. Asked what turned him onto light and lighting in the first instance, he says: 'When I was a child I distinctly remember the dappled sunlight through trees in Paris. I found it extremely beautiful and have been very interested in how light can be so influential and powerful. It's often the most important part in determining the feeling of a space. My major project at college was a chandelier that recreated this dappled light effect and I was subsequently commissioned to design three large chandeliers for the famous Bluebird restaurant in Chelsea. I haven't looked back since.' That job was a pretty major coup for someone who was still a student at the time.

Following the Bluebird commission, Singer was asked to get involved with an Alpine project – a super-luxe ski chalet in Switzerland. Sir Norman Foster designed the blueprint for this and London-based interior design company Callender Howorth won the contract to ensure a luxurious finish. Mark Howorth, a partner at the latter company, knew of Singer's work for the Bluebird restaurant and was quick to commission him to create an imperiously bespoke chandelier.

He attests to Singer's determination to get every last detail right with the following anecdote: 'When George turned up with the piece he told us that he'd found it really difficult to get the finish right so he tied it to the back of his Land Rover and drove around with it for a few miles. That created the distressed look he was after.'

It is unusual for Singer to be commissioned directly by a client, he says; it is more likely for him to be appointed by an agency or design studio working on behalf of a particular customer. This brings with it the challenge of working out what the client wants through a third party who is acting on their behalf: 'I ask myself questions such as what's their taste? What's their job? What's their character? Are they fun and dynamic? Or are they very serious and professional, and want something very masculine and



Starlings – the work captures an idea of both the birds' shimmering plumage and a flock of them in flight

'He tied the piece to the back of his Land Rover and drove around with it for a few miles. That created the distressed look he was after.'

clinical to reflect that? I try to get under the skin of the client. Only then can I create something that I know they're going to truly love.'

One thinks of a chandelier as something elegantly classic, to be found in stately homes and French châteaux, not necessarily something that is imbued with the zeitgeist and the spirit of the moment yet, in Singer's hands, it is an art form that has little to do with tradition and, indeed, often inverts it.

He adds: 'I can't validate making a classical chandelier because the market is saturated with them and there's no point in trying to churn out something that's been done very well a million times before. So when people occasionally ask me to design something traditional I suggest it could be a classical form, but made using 3D-printing technology, fluid dynamics or 3D scans perhaps. I do like the aesthetic of traditional chandeliers, but it must be something exciting and contemporary.'

While accepting that he has been extremely successful, in a diffident and modest way, Singer is keen to emphasise that it is a success story not simply for him but for the UK. He adds: 'First of all, my logo says: George Singer, bespoke chandelier, London. This logo appears on every page of my website and is always present on all my presentation material and drawings.'

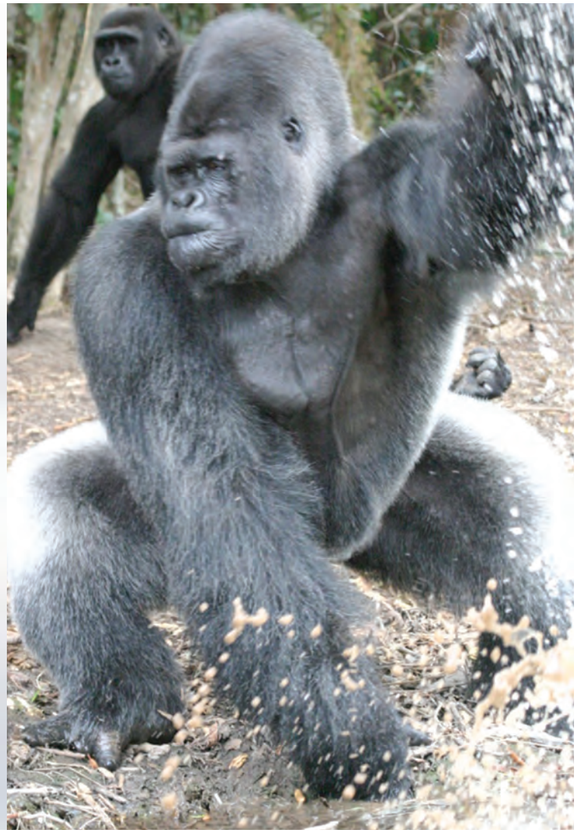
He adds that he always stresses the fact that all his products are UK-made and how much he prides himself in using British manufacturing skills.

'I love using UK factories to supply my materials and I carry out lots of factory visits throughout the year,' he says. He also features the processes that are undertaken during the fabrication process of his chandeliers in all his videos. These are used not only as promotional material, but to give clients and potential clients a behind-the-scenes look into the manufacturing process and an understanding of the degree of skill and expertise that goes into every aspect of the creation.

It is a powerful message, and one that puts pride of provenance at the heart of his work. Let there be light…

www.georgesinger.co.uk

The Philanthropist



Damian Aspinall (far left): one of his organisation's major successes has been the reintroduction of endangered gorillas back into the wild

A friend in need

Damian Aspinall is continuing a family tradition; championing the cause of conservation worldwide

Words: Robert Verkaik

Getty

The name of Aspinall is synonymous with wild animal conservation and in particular with the development of breeding programmes in the UK to reintroduce endangered species to some of the remotest parts of Africa.

It was John Aspinall, the casino tycoon, who in the 1970s established two pioneering wildlife sanctuaries in Kent. He gained a reputation for building close bonds with the animals, and was often filmed romping with gorillas and tigers at his home.

After John died in 2000, his oldest son Damian followed in his father's footsteps by continuing to use the family fortune to bankroll pioneering breeding projects for a rich variety of critically endangered species, including the western lowland gorilla, black rhino and greater bamboo lemur. This year marks 30 years since the Aspinall charity was founded. Last summer, partly to mark the anniversary, Aspinall and his daughter, Tansy, travelled to Gabon to try to make contact with two gorillas that had been born and raised at the Foundation's Howletts Zoo in Canterbury, nearly 25 years ago.

Tansy was just 18 months old when she first met Djalta and Bims. An old family film captures the moment the two young gorillas took the toddler in their arms and tenderly caressed her. Tansy and the gorillas developed close and touching bonds as they grew up together in the Kent wildlife park. In 2002, however, Djalta and Bims were sent thousands of miles away for release into the jungles of Gabon.

So when the Aspinalls took a boat down the jungle river to try to find the gorillas again they did not know what to expect.

Damian called many times from the boat hoping his calls would be recognised. Then as the pair began to give up hope of ever finding the ageing apes, two dark shapes emerged at the side of the river from a jungle clearing.

'We looked for many hours on the river to find them, and then they appeared after hearing my calls,' says Aspinall, in the video of the reunion. 'It's a privilege to go and see an animal that you've raised in captivity, you released, and you don't see for a few years, and then you find them in the forest and they greet you like long-lost brothers. I can see, the way they were playing with me, how pleased they were to see me. It was so gentle, the way they were playing.'

Despite the long gap Djalta and Bims not only recognised Aspinall but they also seemed to remember their childhood playmate Tansy.

'As Tansy approached, I could hear the gorilla gurgles, and I felt more and more confident that she would be accepted by them,' he says.

Afterwards Tansy said: 'My sister Clary and I often played with Djalta and Bims on the lawn and sometimes we went into the cages with other gorillas. I loved being around them all, but those two guys were really very special to us, like our relatives. I last saw them when I was 10 and they were being crated up for the trip to the conservation site in Gabon.

'When we set out to find them again I was a little apprehensive at first because I didn't know if they would remember me after all that time, or if they had become hardened by life and possibly dangerous. So, it was amazing to see that not only did they know me, but they had such gentle looks on their faces that I felt immediately safe and reassured. At

no point did I feel fear. They had some rough and tumble with dad, but were really very gentle with me.'

Although it is moments of conservation gold like these that grab the headlines, the Aspinall Foundation continues to work quietly behind the scenes to help save many different endangered species.

The foundation, in conjunction with Howletts and Port Lympne Wild Animal Parks in Kent, is one of the most successful breeders of captive endangered animals in the world.

With unrivalled achievements in captive breeding the conservation charity boasts 135 gorilla births, 33 black rhino, 123 clouded leopards, 33 Javan gibbons, 104 Javan langur and 20 African elephants.

Amos Courage is overseas project director for the Foundation. He says: 'By returning captive-bred animals from our wild animal parks in Kent to the wild, we can bolster wild populations by introducing new blood lines.'

Perhaps the best example of this is the Batéké Plateau region in Gabon, which was probably the first large wilderness area to see the extinction of gorillas. Between 1996 to 2006, a total of 51 Aspinall gorillas were released; 25 in Congo and 26 in Gabon. Last year an entire family of 11 gorillas bred at Port Lympne was returned to Africa.

Courage adds: 'The Aspinall Foundation is committed to real conservation. We not only protect wilderness areas in Africa, Java and Madagascar we also work closely with local communities in these areas. Saving endangered species is our mission and through successful breeding programmes at our wild animal parks, we aim to boost wild populations of endangered species by returning these captive-bred species to their native lands.'

But not all of the projects are centred on safeguarding exotic wildlife in far-flung parts of Africa and Asia. The Foundation is also working to save a much smaller endangered species whose existence is being threatened much closer to home.

The Foundation holds the studbook for the Scottish wildcat, or 'Highland tiger', and also has direct access to the latest wildcat genetic tests.

Members of its team are working closely with environmental groups in western Scotland in a bid to save Britain's very own big cat, now a highly endangered species.

The Aspinall Foundation is leading groups of conservationists to establish a custom-built wildcat breeding centre on the remote island of Carna off the west coast of Scotland. The centre will provide an important sanctuary where pure Scottish wildcats – which are now believed to number no more than 35 in the wild – can breed in safety before being reintroduced into their natural habitat of remote Scottish forests.

While in the past hunting has been a major issue, the threat to wildcats is today more prosaic. Warns Aspinall: 'With the hybridisation caused by hordes of domestic feral cats, the extinction of true wildcats in Scotland is imminent unless this direct and immediate action is taken.'

The Aspinall Foundation is focused on conservation both in parts of Africa and also in the UK – where it is working to save Scottish wildcats

The Information
As a registered charity, The Aspinall Foundation relies on donations from the public. Tel: (+44) 1303 234 199.

'We can bolster wild populations by introducing new blood lines.'

Life on the edge

The Arctic archipelago of Svalbard is a place with a dramatic climate and scenery that provides visitors with an unrivalled sense of adventure

Words: Dan Hayes. Photos: Tim White

Svalbard's dramatic, ice-shrouded coastline and mountains (far left and left)

I am faced by a yard full of excited huskies. In fact, the word 'excited' doesn't really do justice to these dogs' state of near-frenzied anticipation.

The venue is Svalbard, Norway's Arctic archipelago that is around a 600-mile flight north of the city of Tromsø at a line of latitude of 78°North, and I am about to try my hand at dog-sledding through the polar winter.

It is just before 4pm and it is dark. In fact, it has been dark all day. Around midday the sky flirted with a slightly bluer shade of black, but I don't think I would have even noticed if it hadn't been pointed out to me.

I have driven out from Longyearbyen, Svalbard's main settlement, to nearby Bolterdalen.

Here, adventure travel specialist Basecamp Spitsbergen has a dogsledding camp, rather poetically called Trappers' Lodge, where intrepid visitors can learn the rudiments of the art and, if they so desire, embark on sledge-borne expeditions of several days' duration across the island.

My time is somewhat shorter than that, but I am still going to be spending several hours out in the wilderness with six huskies for company.

Skies lighten over Longyearbyen, Svalbard's capital as the polar winter draws to a close. A dog team harnessed and ready to go (right)

It is quite dark; the lake is sensed rather than seen. The only noises are the swishing of the sledge's runners and the panting of the dogs

I must earn that right, however, by first harnessing the dogs to my sledge. There is an expert on hand to assist if necessary, but the idea is that I show the huskies who's boss.

That is easier said than done; the animals are not only highly excited, they're also extremely strong and have an uncanny ability to wrap their retaining chains around the legs of any amateur trying to gain the upper hand.

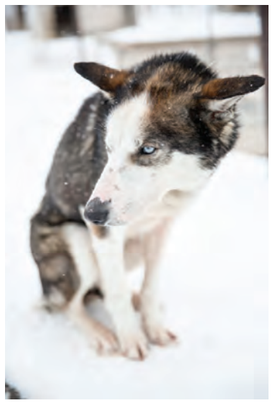
It's -9°C, but in my thick survival suit and hood I'm soon sweating as I gradually harness my six dogs. We're fifth in a line of six teams and I have barely time to get a grip of my sledge before we lurch off rapidly into the darkness.

With a blast of excited barking we hurtle through the compound's gate and turn sharp right down a snow-swathed hill. The slope is severe and I'm soon leaning frantically to the left to prevent the sledge overturning.

Thankfully, we are soon at the bottom and onto flat ground, the dogs setting a brisk pace around a frozen lake.

It is quite dark; to the left the lake is sensed rather than seen and to the right high ground looms as a grey shadow. The only noises are the swishing of the sledge's runners and the panting of the dogs. They are pulling hard and my foot keeps visiting the

Our guide has a rifle on her sledge, but she's some distance ahead should we back-markers find ourselves having to make an unscheduled stop



From left: a sign warns of polar bears; cozy dwellings for locals; a sled dog awaits a foray into the wilderness

brake to prevent us ramming the team in front. Taking a tumble out here would not be ideal, not only because separating tangled huskies can be a ticklish business, but also because Svalbard is a place where human beings are far from being the apex predator.

That title goes to the polar bear and any visitor here is unlikely to forget it. By the baggage carousel at the islands' tiny airport, a stuffed polar bear keeps a glassy eye on comings and goings and Longyearbyen's excellent museum is positively packed with episodes of human-bear 'interaction' over the centuries – many of which didn't end so well for the two-legged participants in the scenario.

To further emphasise the point, the road out of Longyearbyen features a much-photographed sign depicting a padding polar bear and the words 'Gjelder hele Svalbard' – 'Valid for the whole of Svalbard'.

For this reason, our guide has a rifle on her sledge, but she's some distance ahead should we back-markers find ourselves having to make an unscheduled stop.

Our journey this afternoon is a relatively brief introduction to dogsledding, but Basecamp's trips also set out from the Trappers' Lodge to other destinations, such as the remote radio station

Ijsfjord Radio and a 100-year-old schooner, known as the Ship in the Ice – both of which provide basic but cosy accommodation.

Such trips, however, also require overnight camping stops.

I'm told the huskies then perform another function: both scaring off any bears and also providing early warning should one be bold enough to approach the campsite.

This latter ability was something that was noted by the polar explorers of days gone by, and was seen as one of the many assets of huskies.

After an unforgettable outward-bound hour, I am well aware of another – the dogs' seemingly limitless energy.

Just over 100 years ago Europe was gripped by the drama of the race to the South Pole as a Norwegian expedition led by Roald Amundsen and a British team under Robert Falcon Scott sought to become the first to stand at the South Pole.

Amundsen, using dog sleighs, made it there and back safely; Scott and four of his companions, relying on horses, primitive tractors and manpower, did not. They died trying to get back to their base, in March 1912.

The polar regions were ultimately to prove fatal for Amundsen,

From left: an understated Svalbard church; a shop in Longyearbyen features some of the local wildlife; the elements close in around a team of huskies

The huskies scare off any prowling polar bears and also provide early warning should one be bold enough to approach the campsite

As my dog team turns for home, the temperature has slipped to -12°C. I am reminded of a comment of Roald Amundsen's: 'Adventure is just bad planning.'

Shutterstock

The Information

Longyearbyen, Svalbard's main settlement, is 593 miles from Tromsø and 1,287 miles from Oslo.
The Basecamp Group has a range of unique properties on Svalbard.
Trapper's Hotel in Longyearbyen is the most luxurious of these and simulates the idea of a traditional cabin with restored driftwood, sealskins and atmospheric lighting.
Tel: (+47) 7902 4600
www.basecampexplorer.com

too. Outside the research station at Ny Alesund, 100km to the north of Longyearbyen, there is both a statue of the explorer and a tall metal mast.

In 1928, the latter was the mooring place of the airship of Italian explorer Umberto Nobile and his crew, who intended to use the craft to fly to the North Pole.

This they achieved, but ran into bad weather on the return journey and were left stranded on the Arctic ice. Amundsen was one of those dispatched to help the survivors, but somewhere between Tromsø and Svalbard his aircraft came down in the sea. His exact fate remains unknown.

As my dog team turns for home, the temperature has slipped to -12°C, nothing in polar terms, but cold enough to make me glad of my thick suit, goggles and gloves. I am reminded of a comment of Amundsen's: 'Adventure is just bad planning.'

The moon is shining down on the sledges whirring almost silently across the snow, and I can only feel tremendous admiration for those fearless polar explorers of 100 years ago – not to mention these endlessly enthusiastic and energetic dogs who keep trudging onwards as the wind begins to pick up across the wild expanses of this Arctic island.

The Northern Lights illuminate the sky over Svalbard (far left); a snowmobile expedition (left)

The Challenge

All in the same boat

How many sporting events take the best part of a year to complete? And how many require you to cover almost 40,000 nautical miles? It is small wonder that some consider the Volvo Ocean Race to be not just one of the toughest challenges in the sailing world, but in all sport.

The event started out in 1972 when the Whitbread brewery agreed to sponsor a race around the world organised by the Royal Navy. The Whitbread Round the World Yacht Race caught the imagination of sailors and adventurers in search of the experience of a lifetime.

In the early days it was not so much about the winning as the taking part, the pure achievement of getting safely around the world in one piece. Not everyone has managed this, with boats occasionally sinking or capsizing. A few people have been lost at sea, the last being young Dutch sailor Hans Horrevoets who was swept overboard in the Atlantic in 2006.

That you need courage to compete in an event like this goes without saying. The risks of racing around the world are obvious, but the rewards of spending days and weeks at sea are incredibly addictive for the ocean sailor; especially if you are sailing with a group of friends whom you respect and trust with your life.

There is no room for ego on board these damp, uncomfortable boats. You do whatever you can to help make the boat go faster at all times, and you grab sleep where you can. At night, you cannot see the waves or the changes in the wind, so you steer the boat by feel, by a sixth sense built up through all the years of sailing you have done closer to shore, perhaps on the Olympic circuit. And those icebergs that you see during the day in the Southern Ocean, well, you tell yourself that they disappear when

There's a new dimension to this year's Volvo Ocean Race. It's as challenging as ever, but this time around all the yachts are essentially the same

Words: Andy Rice

The Alvimedica boat feels the effects of a rough sea

the sun goes down. And then you hope for the best. While the raw ingredients of the race remain the same, over the past 40 years the 'Whitbread' has evolved from an adventure to a more competitive race, with Olympic champions and America's Cup winners applying a higher level of attention to detail than was usual in the early days.

Back in the 1970s, it was not uncommon for the crew to enjoy a full roast dinner with a few bottles of red wine around a big, heavy oak table. By the late 1990s, the best a crew could hope for was a freeze-dried meal, a high-tech Pot Noodle, eaten from a plastic bowl. It was all about saving weight, so much so that the sailors would cut the handles off their toothbrushes and heavily ration their provisions. In the middle of the ocean, when food was running low, it has not been unknown for a Mars Bar to change hands for $100.

At the end of the 1990s, Whitbread sold the race to car manufacturer Volvo, which changed the name to the Volvo Ocean Race. The race has since moved away from its traditional route around the world, which used to take the fleet down the Atlantic, along the bottom of the world through the Southern Ocean and back up past Cape Horn and up the Atlantic for the return trip. In recent editions it has become more complicated, as Volvo seeks to maximise the commercial return for itself and the participating teams, all of which are commercially sponsored these days.

With large multinationals always looking for ways to break into emerging markets, the focus is on Asia and to a lesser extent South America. The natural, round-the-world route always took the fleet past South America anyway, but a trip to China requires a massive detour from the traditional passage.

Initially some dismissed the new route as a 'trade tour', which in many ways it is. But the sailors have learned to embrace the new challenges of the altered course. This year the race goes: Alicante (Spain), Cape Town (South Africa), Abu Dhabi, Sanya (China), Auckland (New Zealand), Itajai (Brazil), Newport, Rhode Island (USA), Lisbon (Portugal), Lorient (France), a pitstop in The Hague (Netherlands), and finishing in Gothenburg, Sweden.

For the last race three years ago, on the leg from Cape Town to Abu Dhabi, the boats raced part of the way up the Indian Ocean to a secret rendezvous before being container shipped the rest of the way. The reason? Somali pirates. This time, the fleet will be racing the whole way there, with the organisers prepared to take the risk on the basis that the threat of piracy is considered to be less than it was. Fingers crossed that proves correct.

The biggest change for this edition of the race is the introduction of a one-design boat for the first time, a 65-footer called the Volvo Ocean 65. The VO65 is, in many ways, a smaller evolution of the Volvo Open 70 that has been the weapon of choice for the previous three editions. In speed terms, they are not dramatically different. But cost-wise, the VO65 is dramatically cheaper. This is because previous campaigns have required a team to employ its own designer and to build its own boat. It was an arms race, with a good deal of the race won before the start.

Much as sitting in the fastest car is half the battle (or more) of winning a Formula One motor racing championship, the same used to be true of the Volvo Ocean Race. Historically, more often than not, the team that has won the first leg down the Atlantic to Cape Town has gone on to win the race. With the introduction of a one-design VO65, where all the boats have been designed and built by a central team managed by the organisers, none of this year's seven teams has an inherent speed advantage.

The similarity in speed between the seven boats soon became apparent on the 6,000-mile leg from Alicante to Cape Town. All seven boats had their moments in the lead, before Abu Dhabi Ocean Racing broke away in the Southern Ocean. Even then, Dongfeng Race Team from China found an incredible turn of pace in the last few days to almost steal victory from Abu Dhabi right at the death. After more than 25 days at sea, Abu Dhabi beat the Chinese by just 12 minutes.

Another innovation in this race has been to encourage a

A helicopter passes over the Abu Dhabi Ocean Racing team (below); contestants check out each other's seamanship in the early stages

With the introduction of a one-design VO65, none of this year's seven teams has an inherent speed advantage

From top left: boats jostle for position; the Alvimedica team in harbour and on the high seas

The Challenge

‘We’re not just here to make up the numbers. We’re here to race around the world – and we’ve been training longer than any other team.’

women’s team to participate. There have been other all-female crews in the past, but none has been close to being able to compete for overall honours.

This time, the organisers have tried to stack the deck in the women’s favour, acknowledging that men are inherently stronger than women. So while the six men’s teams are limited to just eight sailors, Team SCA from Sweden is allowed to have 11 women on board. However their skipper, British round-the-world veteran Sam Davies, says: ‘We’re not just here to make up the numbers. We’re here to race around the world. We know we’re not as strong as the guys, but we’ve been training longer than any other team.’

The evidence from leg one is that the women are very competitive, but may still struggle to get on the podium. Team SCA was last for much of the leg but in the last few miles towards the finish, the women overtook the Spanish crew, Mapfre, who were stranded in a windless patch. It was a case of elation and consolation for Sam Davies and her crew, agony for Olympic gold medallist Iker Martinez and subsequent crew changes on the Spanish boat.

Getting the onboard chemistry right is absolutely critical, and it is not always about choosing the most accomplished sailors. Friendship counts too, as Abu Dhabi skipper Ian Walker says: ‘This is a big chunk of our lives, I want to do it with people whose company I enjoy. But one of the cool things about the Volvo Ocean Race – win, lose or draw – is you’ve still sailed around the world. There’s not many people who can say they’ve done that.’

The Information

If leg one is anything to go by, we are in for a thrilling race, much closer than we have seen in the past. The climax will come in Gothenburg in June 2015. To follow the fleet’s progress around the world go to volvooceanrace.com

The Abu Dhabi Ocean Racing team sailing past Table Mountain

Behind the lines

A new book brings together rare colour photographs of World War I

Words: George de Grey

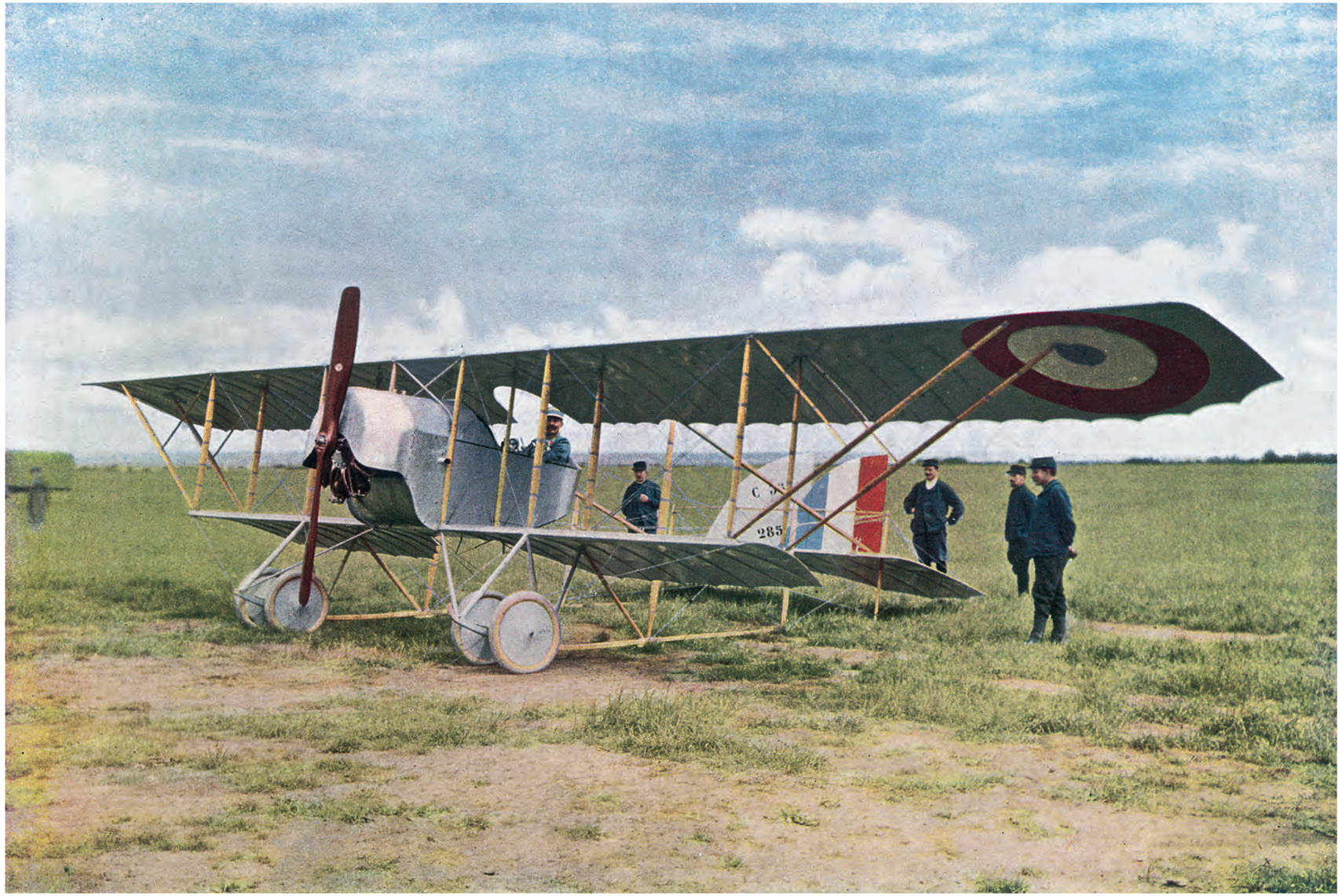
The First World War in Colour
By Peter Walther
Published by Taschen, price $59.99

The commemorations to mark the Centenary of World War I are gathering pace, so it is a timely moment for a publisher to remind us that this is an event that did not happen purely in monochrome.

The First World War in Colour brings together 320 colour images from the conflict, taken by a small number of photographers using what was, at the time, groundbreaking autochrome technology.

The process also required relatively long exposure times, so almost all the photos depict scenes that have been carefully staged. Partly for that reason they provide an unusual insight into the conflict. Soldiers are shown relaxing behind the lines, operating newly introduced machines such as the tank or aeroplane, or observing the destruction caused by war.

Some of the colours are remarkably bright; the reds and blues of caps and jackets for example having a lustre that belies our modern-day thinking that the war took place in shades of green, grey and brown. Much of the fascination is also in the details, items that the photographers may well have barely even noticed at the time, but which today add an extra poignancy to the scene – discarded tools, a cigarette packet or a nickname painted on an aircraft or tank. The photos are interspersed with extracts from poems of the day, providing an insight into the thinking of those for whom seeing the war in colour was no surprise.



French officers with a Caudron G3 reconnaissance aircraft in 1914

Life in your hands

It is 130 years since the Cresta Run was first unveiled and this most eccentric of Alpine challenges is still going strong

Words: Dan Hayes

Few things can send a frisson of fear down the spine of the Alpine sports enthusiast quicker than the words 'Cresta Run'.

For most of us the idea of hurtling down a smooth, bending, icy slope at speeds of around 80mph, with your face inches above the floor and your body placed atop something that looks hardly more protective than a drinks' tray seems totally insane.

People keep coming back for more, though, and the run has enjoyed an enviable longevity. It is now 130 years since it was built, in the hamlet of Cresta, near St Moritz. The driving force behind its creation was a English soldier who rejoiced in the name of Major William Bulpett and who had developed a taste for downhill tobogganing during winter stays at the nearby Kulm Hotel.

Today, the organisation started by Bulpett and his daredevil pals – the St Moritz Tobogganing Club – still owns and operates the run. Some of its rules have barely changed since the Major's day and, indeed, it could be argued at least one important regulation has regressed. Whereas in the early years women joined men in shooting down the Cresta Run, they were banned from the course in the 1920s, ostensibly because too many female participants had been injured. That story is not believed by all, however, and there are those who will tell you that it was actually the ladies' success on the slope that was their downfall. This version of the tale has it that they showed up the men once too often and were frozen out in a fit of bruised pride.

History lives on at every corner of the Cresta. The course has the predictable Bulpett's Bend and also Brabazon – named after the aviation pioneer Baron Brabazon of Tara, who was still doing the run at the age of 70.

When the latter finally retired from his andrenalin-fuelled pastime, he summed up its appeal as well as anyone has before or since: 'I was frightened to death on every single run. When exhilaration conquers fright, however, real men are compelled to continue. Only now, gentlemen, when terror totally overcomes rapture, can I contentedly give up the Cresta.'

Then there is Shuttlecock – the most terrifying of all the course's challenges. Get your angles wrong here and you risk being fired out of the course to land – if you're lucky – amid ice, snow and straw.

Anyone who gets down intact in less than a minute has done extremely well.

Most novices will be happy just to arrive at the bottom intact. Legend has it that one of the slowest-ever times on the Cresta was clocked by an unlikely person. Hollywood swashbuckler Errol Flynn tried his hand at the run in 1949 and found it not to his liking. It is said he inched down with the spiked toes of his boots grating into the ice for a full 180.49 seconds. His unlikely claim that he had stopped for a hug from a blonde admirer was treated with suitably polite insouciance by the denizens of the Cresta.

The Cresta Run season runs from December until early March – depending on snow conditions. www.cresta-run.com

Moonrise over the Cresta Run (above); a brave soul heads off in pursuit of glory – with a marked lack of helmet – in the 1950s

'When exhilaration conquers fright, however, real men are compelled to continue.'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