



When a Blazer Feels Too Formal
Less-officious jackets for the office **D3**

OFF DUTY

Has the Prius Met Its Match?
This 2025 hybrid Honda Civic sure thinks so **D6**



FASHION | FOOD | DESIGN | TRAVEL | GEAR

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

Saturday/Sunday, February 15 - 16, 2025 | **D1**



NO BOLOGNA At Wildweed in Cincinnati, the 'Ranger' chicken tortelli sports chile-red stripes, a smoked-shrimp sauce and a confetti of fresh herbs.



Shock of the Noodle

Catnip for diners and an economical delivery system for high-ticket ingredients, creative pasta dishes are driving business and letting chefs around the country say 'arrivederci' to the expected

By **JOSHUA DAVID STEIN**

IT'S ANOTHER frigid night in Cincinnati, but the seats are full at Wildweed, a new restaurant from chef David Jackman. Among the dishes on offer: oysters with mulled pear foam and spicebush oil; a mountain of kumquat-studded clams in a pool of neon orange 'nduja butter; and a pawpaw semi-freddo sandwich. But the main attraction, the dish on nearly every one of the tables, is a dozen red-chile-striped tortelli, undulating across their shallow bowl like candy-cane landforms. Jackman is among a cadre of

American chefs thumbing their noses at tradition, creating pastas of Wonkaesque invention far from what anyone would describe as strictly Italian.

In Chicago, chef Erling Wu-Bower presents soup-dumpling tortellini and a leek-and-crawfish pappardelle with Tabasco at his restaurant Maxwells Trading. In Minneapolis, Joe Rolle of Dario crafts doppio ravioli—conjoined dumplings filled on one side with sunchoke purée and on the other with ricotta—drizzled with a brown butter emulsion and honey, and scattered with chopped hazelnuts. In San Francisco, the tasting menu of chefs David Fisher and Serena Chow Fisher at 7 Adams offers a jet-black charcoal tagliatelle

Please turn to page D10



From top: tortelli in progress in Wildweed's pasta room, dedicated to producing the ever-evolving lineup of pastas on the seasonal menu; the restaurant's mezzaluna with wild mushrooms, crispy garlic, chile oil, Parmesan and mushroom XO sauce; in Wildweed's pasta room, Megan Harmeyer, a member of the pasta production team, rolls out sheets of pasta, to be shaped into tortelli filled with a sausage made of heritage-breed chicken from a local farm.



CHRIS VON HOLLE FOR WSJ

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STYLE & FASHION

\$500 for a T-Shirt? Hear Us Out.

Today's luxury T-shirts are routinely ringing up at unheard-of prices. Why are style-savvy women buying in?

By ESTHER ACHARA

FOR JILLIAN Simpson, 41, wedding season once meant panic-buying flouncy dresses that didn't suit her style. But last June, the New Yorker bucked convention and paired a floor-grazing black skirt with a white T-shirt from the Row for a friend's Philadelphia nuptials. "Certain occasions used to pull me out of character—I don't even like dresses," Simpson said. "But a luxury T-shirt always feels totally me, whether I wear it with a black-tie skirt or jeans."

Welcome to the new era of boundary-defying power tees that boast refined fab-

'Spending more makes sense if it ultimately means greater cost-per-wear value.'

rics, subtle details and hefty price tags. (The Row's Chiara tee, for instance, with its signature vertical back seam, rings up at \$420.) These not-so-little luxuries are working hard in women's wardrobes, replacing starchy button-downs for the office and going-out tops at night.

For business lunch meetings, Natasha Poniatowski, 40, the founder of a meal-delivery company, relies on a rotation of downy-soft cashmere tees by the Elder Statesmen, Proenza Schouler and the Row. How does she justify the cost? "I don't like shopping or figuring out what to wear—investing in these saves so much time," Poniatowski said. "The concept of spending more for something that might appear basic makes sense if it ultimately means greater cost-per-wear value," said Sara Maggioni, head of womenswear at trend forecasting agency WGSN.

Alejandra Echeverria, the

designer behind the cult-favorite T-shirt brand Frances De Lourdes, says the trend reflects the priorities of postpandemic dressing. Both lounge-like and elegant, opulent tees represent a refined continuation of stuck-at-home loungewear. "Comfortable trends are the hardest to break out of, which is why we're seeing so much oversize tailoring," she said. "Everyone's looking for classic pieces that are effortless but polished."

Kelsey Lyle, a senior buyer at Moda Operandi, shares Echeverria's sentiment. Women are relying less on transient fast fashion, she said, instead "choosing pieces that reflect their appreciation for craftsmanship." Simpson also points to the drop in quality of mass-market clothing, as affordable mainstream brands use lower-level fabrics (and swap cotton for polyester). But a long-lasting tee in a luxurious fabric blend such as silk- or cashmere-cotton doesn't come cheap.

"When it comes to making luxury pieces in relatively small quantities like we do, that's just what it costs," said Echeverria of her T-shirts, which offer blends of cashmere, silk jersey and organic cotton in various formulas, and sell for around \$230 to \$290. It's the "natural fibers [that] give a piece longevity and make it feel special," she added.

Still, even serious tee-devotees can balk at eye-watering prices that run between \$200 and \$1,000. "Some of the prices are absurd," Simpson admits. "But I'll make [the] investment if the white stays white, the neckline won't stretch and I can put it on a delicate cycle in the machine." To guarantee that her precious pieces last, Simpson swears by DedCool's biodegradable laundry detergent.



Opt for a dark neutral for extra longevity—this boyfriend-fit style is a blend of 50% cotton, 50% cashmere. Frances de Lourdes Johnny Tee, \$290



Machine-washable cashmere! Majestic Filatures T-shirt, \$325 at Moda Operandi



This ultralight, sheer tee—85% silk, 15% elastane—is ideal for layering year-round. Fforme Ames Fitted T-shirt, \$695



A modal-cashmere blend amps up a not-so-basic white tee with a longer sleeve. Partow Parker T-shirt, \$550

The key to a smart investment, Maggioni says, is evading the marketing traps she believes many subpar brands are setting (such as putting high markups on cheaply produced pieces) in hopes of capitalizing on the wider 'elevated basics' trend. Weigh any potential splurges carefully, Lyle says, and look out for the details that set these T-shirts apart: thick bindings, quality medium-

weight fabrics and considered silhouettes.

Her own criteria when contemplating an investment? "If an item truly has great wearability and durability—it washes well, is low maintenance and seamlessly flexes across functions—then you can justify the spend."

Another argument for handing over your credit card? "Basics hold great resale value, which is something

savvy customers are considering," Maggioni said.

When styling these tees (beyond the obvious denim matchups), Echeverria suggests pairing them with a structured blazer or a pencil skirt. Lyle slips premium tees under V-neck sweaters to show off neckline details. "Distinctive features are part of what you're paying for."

If costly tees feel woefully excessive, says Lyle, keep in

mind the pivotal new role they can play in your closet strategy—and their staying power. The idea is to treat your T-shirt like a "leather jacket or cashmere sweater."

And forget disposable Hanes six-packs. You needn't stock up on these tees. Lyle advises buying just one or two. "While the initial investment may be higher, the best ones will form the cornerstone of your wardrobe."

FAST FIVE

Briefer Encounters

This spring, forget long, khaki trench coats. The newest crop, in black leather, is making shorter waves, and adding a cinch of sultry allure to everyday outfits.



Clockwise from top left: The Frankie Shop Medora Faux Leather Trench, \$299; Armarium Emma Jacket, \$2,800; Pixie Market Cropped Leather Trench, \$179; Favorite Daughter The Cropped Leather Charles Trench, \$895; Khaite Dolores Jacket, \$4,500

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STYLE & FASHION



EASIER DOES IT From left: Actor Logan Lerman opts for a refined zip-up on the red carpet earlier this year; this jacket, from Paris's Officine Générale, gives polished-yet-casual vibes; in a recent campaign, U.K. brand Drake's styled a man in a shawl-collar cardigan, dress shirt and tie.

BUH-BYE BLAZER! / FOUR POLISHED YET UNSTUFFY REPLACEMENTS



▶ L.L.Bean Classic Ragg Wool Sweater Cardigan, \$109



▶ 100Hands Travellers Jacket, about \$2,200



▶ Berluti Double Face Forestière, \$3,900



▶ Massimo Dutti 100% Wool Twill Zip-Up Jacket, \$280

Sub Me In, Coach!

A blazer feels too stuffy and formal for many offices today. Men seeking a cooler, breezier replacement that still reads 'put together' are in luck.

By CHARLIE TEASDALE

IT MAKES SENSE that C-Suite types would be drawn to premium Dutch menswear brand 100Hands. Its co-founder—once a mergers & acquisitions VP himself—knows what these men want. And what these men want now, said Akshat Jain, is his 10-year-old brand's "travellers" jackets—soft, buttoned styles that are cut from fabrics like virgin wool, linen and vicuña, and come with various collars and pocket configurations.

His brand reports that sales of the travellers jackets, which start around \$1,000-plus, have multiplied by more than eight times since 2021. Jain said men value the jackets' ability to replace a blazer or suit jacket in the office (the precise goal behind the designs). The unstuffy, unstructured styles, he noted, drape nicely thanks to weighty cloths. Sharper and sturdier than an overshirt, they play nice with a business shirt and tailored pants. That makes them just the thing in the current work climate.

In a postpandemic soup of khakis, quarter-zip knits and—god forbid—vests bearing a corporate logo, many guys see a suit or blazer as overkill, but wonder if there's a suitable, smart-casual alternative. "People are struggling with what makes an outfit feel put-together," said Rebecca Klein of New York personal styling service,

Beckie+Martina, which caters to many executive men. You can't just keep the suit and lose the tie, she adds—that jacket unfinished.

The solution, says Klein, is what stylists often call the "third piece": a special garment that lifts an otherwise straightforward outfit. (In offices, trousers and some kind of button-down often serve as the first two items.) That third piece could be a 100Hands jacket—or a number of other relaxed, current styles.

The mandarin-collared Forestière jacket exudes 'more character than an overshirt.'

Another close, equally unstuffy cousin to a classic blazer? The Teba jacket style, says Simon Crompton, the London-based founder of classic menswear website Permanent Style. Originating from Spain, the bare-bones Teba boasts a soft, notch-less lapel that's designed to sit flat or be popped against the elements. Crompton praises the City Hunter model by tailoring brand the Armoury. Just beware of length: Tebas can come up short, and too much posterior on show can read casual. Crompton suggests finding a take that ends mid-backside.

A reliably longer option: the Forestière jacket. Created in the 1940s by French clothier Arnys for architect Le Corbusier, this mandarin-collared style has been updated in silk mixes, slubby linens, tweeds and more by brands including Berluti (above right), Drake's and Private White V.C. Certainly breezier than a blazer, the Forestière exudes "more character than an overshirt or chore jacket, which can be a bit boring," said Crompton.

An elevated bomber or other zippered style can zap some cool into a work look. Defined by neat hemlines, minimal detailing and sumptuous fabrics like wool bouclé, baby camel wool or buttery suede, these designs can be nabbed at brands such as Massimo Dutti and Aimé Leon Dore. Thirty-one-year-old Ignacio Inestal, an international civil servant at the U.N. in New York, often styles his sharp navy bomber by Maison Kitsuné with a shirt. "It's super light, so I can even wear it under a coat," he said. Though he saves this look for weekends, it would impress in casual offices.

Contrarians could ditch jackets altogether and reach for knitwear instead. Martina Gordon, the other co-founder of Beckie+Martina, said clients have embraced a shawl-collar cardigan as a "main staple." Its chunky, rounded collar imitates the lines of a blazer's lapel, and looks great against a crisp business shirt, Gordon notes. She adds that this thick, hip-length knit should feel snug but not tight—

and be substantial enough to hold its shape. "If it's floppy, it's sloppy."

Men who run hot may prefer a lighter-gauge crewneck cardigan, a trending style popping up at both midtier brands, like Arket, and luxury labels, like Prada. To the office, Inestal wears his green lamb's wool Noah cardigan with a pale blue or white shirt, tailored pants and loafers. "It's discreet and comfortable," he said. "Someone into fashion might have appreciation for it," he continued, "but those who have no idea probably think I inherited it from my grandfather." (Cautionary note: In a cardigan, you can risk looking like the office grandpa.)

Whether you're trying out a memorable knit or the kind of jacket Le Corbusier once wore, Gordon suggests starting with navy. "Once you have that down," you can dabble in shades such as camel, she said.

Jain, of 100Hands, is happy to stick with his navy travellers jacket for the foreseeable. "Sometimes I wear it 10 days in a row," he said. "As long as I'm not meeting the same guy, I'm perfectly dressed."

GETTY IMAGES (LOGAN)

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CAREY MULLIGAN ACTS LIKE PRADA

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STYLE & FASHION

Where Fashion's Going...in Five Looks

From Calvin Klein's throwback suits to Kendrick Lamar's flare jeans at the Super Bowl, it's been a week of fashion bellwethers. Rory Satran reports on five prescient outfits that indicate what we'll be wearing—and even thinking about—come fall.



Audacious Originality

THE BRAND
Forty years in, Marc Jacobs's ready-to-wear collections have become increasingly avant-garde, with cartoonish shoes and exaggerated proportions.

THE LOOK
Alex Consani, the first transgender woman to win model of the year at London's Fashion Awards in 2024, wore a pillowy ruby-red velvet dress to close the show. With her hands on her hips and her lips studded with red crystals applied by makeup legend Pat McGrath, Consani was a Gen-Z version of Betty Boop. It's a classic cocktail look, thrown through the blender of Japanese design influence and contemporary culture.

WHY IT MATTERS
Jacobs no longer speaks to the press after his shows but releases cryptic show notes, this time on the theme of courage. "Guided by heart, humility and gratitude, I have come to understand that fear is not my enemy—it is a necessary companion to creativity, authenticity, integrity and life," he wrote. It's as though he's daring himself to enter the leagues of his experimental design idols Miuccia Prada and Rei Kawakubo. (Kawakubo's 1997 "lumps and bumps" Comme des Garçons collection clearly inspired this dress.) While most of us will not wear a bulging cocktail dress to our next event, its audacity might inspire us to think originally.



Simplicity Meets Craft

THE BRAND
Fforme, a minimalist startup launched in 2022, has quickly developed a cult following for its pure luxury pieces for working women.



THE LOOK
This floor-length navy wool-silk opera coat, with 60 meters of hand-frayed ribbon, is the kind of forever piece that's both modest and sensational. It would be a beautiful gift for a high-school graduate or her grandmother. "Comfort is luxurious," said the brand's new creative director Frances Howie of the piece. It could be worn as easily over a T-shirt and jeans as an evening gown.

WHY IT MATTERS
As the luxury-to-Zara pipeline gets ever quicker and more clever, many luxury brands trumpet their commitment to craft. Up close, Fforme's structured blazers and pleated trench coats are thoughtfully constructed. Howie perfects the handmade feel at generations-deep Italian factories, challenging them to leave some bits unfinished. "These things are not completely perfect because women are not perfect," she said. Convincing craftsmanship may be the best argument for luxury today.

Howie perfects the handmade feel at generations-deep Italian factories, challenging them to leave some bits unfinished. "These things are not completely perfect because women are not perfect," she said. Convincing craftsmanship may be the best argument for luxury today.



Intellectually Sexy

THE BRAND
While Calvin Klein has pumped out viral underwear and denim campaigns in recent years, its high-end Collection business has been dormant since designer Raf Simons left six years ago. The Italian designer Veronica Leoni, an alum of Phoebe Philo's Celine and the Row, came in to wake up the Sleeping Beauty.



THE LOOK
When's the last time you saw someone wear a skirt suit in real life? The staple of Klein's time appears ready for its comeback. Leoni, whose debut was full of accessible tailoring, said this structured light-gray wool jacket and pencil skirt, with matching gray pumps, was one of her favorite moments of the show. She said the "office-girl vibe" was "intellectually sexy."

WHY IT MATTERS
Return-to-office mandates are coming fast and furious to American workplaces from Amazon to the federal government. The "office siren" and "corpcore" trends are making traditional workwear suddenly intriguing to young worker bees who've spent much of the past five years scrolling TikTok in soft pants. Could the skirt suit signal a return to formality, or will the skirt half gather dust when women pair their blazers with jeans?



A Perfect Pinch Of Peculiar

THE BRAND
Tory Burch is still a go-to for Greenwich matriarchs' gold-crested "Reva" flats and utterly correct tennis skirts—but the brand has also become a destination for their hip daughters to buy off-kilter separates and slightly strange accessories.



THE LOOK
This ensemble takes classics like a wool cardigan, track pants and monk-strap shoes, and flips them around. As Burch said, "I started with the concept of twisted American sportswear, literally and figuratively." The sweater is twisted around a top and fastened with a brooch, while the track pants are made of fluffy Japanese brushed jersey. In shades of brown, it's an eclectic mix of Upper and Lower East Side.

WHY IT MATTERS
"It was an exploration of classic ideas that aren't what you first perceive them to be," Burch said of her collection. So a pair of high-end track pants like these, when combined with a deconstructed cardigan and granny accessories, becomes an outfit that deserves a second look. The collection also echoes the popularity of fashion Substack newsletters, where unique personal style is almost a competition. Pulled apart, these outfits offer interesting updates for most wardrobes. Saying that there's "something for everyone" is a bit of a cliché, but that concept was really driven home by the many mother-daughter duos attending the show, including "Saturday Night Live" cast member Chloe Fineman and her mom.

GETTY IMAGES (2); GIOVANNI GANNONI (FORMER); ANDREW J.S. (HOWIE)



DARE TO FLARE / KENDRICK LAMAR'S VIRAL SUPER-BOWL JEANS

NOT ALL culture-quaking looks come from the runway. On Super Bowl Sunday, during the thick of fashion week, Kendrick Lamar performed his halftime show in flared jeans that got more airtime than quarterback Patrick Mahomes. The \$1,300 pants, long enough to pool around his

(also viral) Nike Air DT Max '96 sneakers, were made by French luxury brand Celine and are now sold out. Hedi Slimane, who instituted the 1970s-evoking style before he left the LVMH fashion house late last year, has long been a proponent of painstakingly recreated vintage jeans styles. While ex-

pensive, they're considered the ne plus ultra of denim by aficionados. Lamar's jeans are sure to be copied ad infinitum by young men—and women eager to break free from the dominant straight-cut and skinny jeans. The flare may be the first truly breakout trend of 2025.



MEANT TO BE WORN



Quite literally, a book on style that makes you smarter—and that's not the norm. Amy Smilovic's *The Creative Pragmatist* speaks to the critical thinker, revealing the first principles for unpacking personal style. Through her groundbreaking approach, Smilovic demonstrates how to communicate personal style effectively, reframing how we build a wardrobe that aligns. The thesis is Creative Pragmatism—a philosophy for the curious, modern, and balanced individual. Through this lens, the entirely original

yet inherently intuitive strategy and processes presented cut through the noise of the fashion echo chamber. Smilovic is an entrepreneur in fashion who founded designer brand Tibi in Hong Kong almost 30 years ago. Real-world experience has honed her theses, going far deeper than the too-familiar driveline of "creating the perfect outfit". This book is the pre-eminent tool for cultivating a style that is authentically your own. You will read it at least twice, dog ear its pages, and reference it often.

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GEAR & GADGETS

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This Affordable, Efficient Compact Fills Me With Joy



HOT WHEELS The Honda Civic's 11th design generation is the bestselling car in the U.S. with young buyers.

son-cycle engine thrums quietly, speeding and slowing, following throttle demand as if it were connected to a conventional transmission. If you stand on it, the revs will rise and the system will punctuate the acceleration curve with imitative upshifts. In Sport mode, the illusion gets a bit of aural reinforcement from the audio system.

But at all times the electric's heavy bottom end—232 lb-ft from 0-2,000 rpm—gives the Civic the right-now, wide-awake temperament and punchy acceleration of a dedicated EV. Look, when a car combines 0-60 mph acceleration in the low sixes with an EPA average fuel economy of 48 mpg, that's net plus extra, *n'est pas?*

What a unit this little car is. Go ahead, wind it up and throw it into a tight corner—and be sure to drop the inside rear 18-inch wheel into that chuckhole. WHAM! The Civic's rear end gathered itself instantly and stayed on track, registering the insult with only a well-damped twitch at the steering wheel. The body structure feels stiff as a hammer.

The Civic has been among the top three bestselling passenger cars in the U.S. over the past 50 years. The competitive set ain't what it used to be, now down to just a few old rivals, including the Toyota Corolla and the Volkswagen Golf. Newcomers Hyundai Elantra and Kia K4 are also in the mix.

The point is, the Civic hybrid didn't have to be as good as it is to hang in with that lot. No. Honda specifically targeted the one, the only, the mother of all automotive benchmarks, the Toyota Prius.

Whodya rather? It is close. The finely drawn and futuristic Prius wins the swimsuit competition, obviously. The Civic hatchback is dressed like it's got a court appearance. The story is much the same inside: The Prius' sensibility is sleek and future-curious; the Civic's interior leans on legacy. The switches, you know.

I HAVE PREPARED a thorough brief on the 2025 Honda Civic Sport Touring Hybrid, an updated version of the 11th design generation that debuted in 2022, which finally gets the hybrid power plant it deserves. For the benefit of those with early tee times, here are the takeaways: This is the best, most overachieving Civic in the

nameplate's 50-year history; it's a technical marvel; it's a genuinely excellent small car for a reasonable price. I have data points.

But first I can't help sharing a moment. You see, I get in and out of a lot of new cars. Over time, one begins to recognize a sameness in them, a shared and leveling mediocrity just below the sur-

face. This jaded industry average, this joy-killing threshold is the benchmark.

Don't get me wrong. I look for the good in every car, no matter how rote, redundant and built to the penny it may be. But there are just so many bad cars. Being a car critic these days is like being a waiter at a terrible restaurant. May I recommend

yesterday's warmed-over nothing burger?

Any car that escapes the oppression of the benchmark makes me unreasonably happy. Which brings me to the 2025 Civic Sport Touring Hybrid. Hell, yeah. For \$34,300 delivered, this thing is trying harder. We might as well start with the softer-than-strictly-necessary leather on the seats, steering wheel and shifter. I wish I had pants like that.

While we're in the cabin please groove on the band of filigreed metal bisecting the upholstered dash and concealing the HVAC outlets—also considerably cut-above. The driver position is surrounded with conspicuously sturdy, metal-capped switchgear on the doors, steering wheel and console. The materials are substantial, the cabin layout sober, serene and cerebral, just like me.

If the center-mounted touch screen looks dated, the Google built in software behind it is fresh as paint. The Civic wirelessly groks Apple CarPlay and Android Auto. Wireless charging, too. The Sport Touring Hybrid packs a Bose audio system with 12 speakers. In the Toyota Prius, eight is enough.

It appears that, yes, Honda really, really misses my business. I couldn't help but be touched. *Verklemt*, even.

The 11th-gen Civic debuted with a choice of 1.5- or 2.0-liter engines, with output ranging from 158-315 hp. For 2025, the lineup gets an en-

gine overhaul. Henceforth, LX and Sport models will be powered by the 2.0-liter I4, with direct injection, variable intake/exhaust timing and a 13.0:1 compression ratio. Output: 150 hp and 133 lb-ft.

Here's where it gets interesting: The new Sport and Sport Touring Hybrids use a different 2.0-liter four and in an utterly different way. In the hybrid models, a 2.0-liter Atkinson-cycle four drives a starter/generator, which powers a 181-hp permanent-magnet traction motor, with a 1.1 kWh-battery in the loop to buffer current. This is the same series-parallel arrangement as Honda's CR-V and

Let's start with the softer-than-necessary leather on the seats, steering wheel and shifter. I wish I had pants like that.

Accord hybrids, with some modifications. The Civic's small size required reorienting the twin-motor unit.

Much like the Chevy Volt back in the day (2008), the Civic's engine output is entrained directly to the front wheels usually only at higher speeds, at times of high demand or high load, bringing the system max to 200 hp.

While the LX and Sport post adequate EPA fuel economy (36 and 34 mpg, combined) the hybrid models soar to 48 mpg.

Underway, the hybridized Civic is a smooth operator, a trickster. Typically, the Atkin-

The Toyota is still the benchmark in fuel efficiency, averaging 52 mpg, combined, for the front-drive Prius XLE. The Prius LE does even better, scoring a whopping 57 mpg.

But the joy factor certainly favors the Honda. It's not just the hybrid's elastic acceleration. The sport tuned suspension gives the Civic surprisingly good handles for a little family sedan. The mostly electric Civic also edges the Prius in cabin isolation and quiet.

At least I think it does. It was hard to tell. I had tears of joy in my ears.

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TRAVELER'S TALE / OLIVER SMITH ON THE ANCIENT SITE THAT WAS HIS CHILDHOOD PLAYGROUND



Chasing Wonder in The Ancient Past

I SPENT MANY childhood holidays with my grandparents, in a pebble-dashed house in Llanfairpwllgwyngyllgogerychwyrndrobwlllantysilioogogoch, North Wales. The village has the second-longest place name in the world (losing out to a hill in New Zealand), and one can often find tourists at the train station, posing for photos next to the station sign, which is almost as long as the trains that stop there.

Fewer visitors make their way to a curious mound a few fields southwest of the village, not far

from a narrow sea strait: a place which once served as a kind of childhood playground for me.

The mound had a grassy slope you could roll down until you felt nauseous. A gloomy tunnel mouth, lined with slabs, revealed nooks where you could hide from parents or grandparents who were insisting it was time to come home. If you dared proceed farther down the tunnel, you saw the mound was hollow: inside was a small, damp chamber, filled with spider webs, crooked stones and other prompts

for childhood nightmares. To a 6-year-old, it seemed like a human-sized version of a badger's den.

Absorbed as I was then in childhood make-believe, I was uncertain what the mound really was and who built it. But I knew it was old—possibly even older, I thought incredulously, than my grandparents and the antique furniture that filled their house.

I paid another visit to this little hillock a few months ago, late one fall afternoon. A cold wind blew off the strait, shaking the last leaves

from the trees. A muddy path led to an information board—installed since my early visits—which explained that this was Bryn Celli Ddu (meaning “the hill of the dark grove”), a 5,000-year-old tomb.

It's one of the best preserved of the Neolithic “long barrows” that line Europe's Atlantic coast, cited as the world's oldest widespread tradition of stone architecture. Archaeologists have found human bones inside, along with arrowheads, mussel shells and other flotsam of prehistoric lives. The mound is a relic of an age when humans chose to settle down and farm the land, a place connected with the invention of “home.” For me, the mound and its surrounds represent home on a personal level. My mother has traced her family tree back to villages nearby, where the trail runs cold.

Over the past few years I have been drawn to places like this. I have stomped across farmland and moorlands, in England, Ireland and France, to visit standing stones, henges and other prehistoric sites. In bookstores, I have sought out British Ordnance Survey maps, on which such remains are marked in a deliciously sinister Gothic script. The places I've visited have origins that straddle many millennia, but they typically share a few common features. A half-legible information board. A silence interrupted by the creak of an iron gate, or the chug of a distant tractor.

I have also lured my young family, on various pretexts, to ancient sites. One summer afternoon, at the Nympsfield Long Barrow in southern England, my 3-year-old son injured himself climbing a stone structure. Later, at the hospital, one nurse pressed ice on a ping-pong ball-sized bump on his forehead. Another wrote “Neolithic Megalith” on the paperwork describing the injury.

There's a reason I keep returning. Prehistoric sites, by definition, date from a time before written history. Bryn Celli Ddu, Nympsfield and others were almost certainly sacred places—and yet they come with no scripture, insist on no ritual. They accommodate pilgrims like me who struggle with the rigidities of organized faith, but suspect answers can be discerned in the soil and stone.

Indeed, they make no demands of their congregation of dog walkers and picnickers. Only that your imagination fills the blanks that archaeology cannot, and animates the scene with the ghosts of the pious, present here long ago. The quietness of these places can be kindling for spells of deep thought.

I encountered just a few other visitors when I visited Bryn Celli Ddu as an adult that fall afternoon. I suspected they were making a detour from the station with the long sign. Someone was chasing a Labrador doing laps of the mound. Another was taking a selfie. I waited until they were gone, and then stepped again into the murk of the chamber. It seemed smaller now than it had decades before, but with the same oppressive dampness. I detected a faint foretaste of being buried alive. I wanted an excuse to leave, but no one was there to summon me home now.

Let your imagination to fill in the blanks that archaeology cannot.

Archaeologists and historians have offered many possible interpretations of tombs like Bryn Celli Ddu: that they were intended as marks of ownership over the landscape, that their entrances were symbolic portals to other worlds. But to me it seems likeliest they were shrines for ancestor worship, storehouses of inherited memory. I wondered if the dead had been placed inside to watch over and guide their descendants from a mound of earth.

I followed the trail back to my car. And then drove homeward to England—leaving behind the station with the long name, the old pebble-dashed house where someone else lives now and the cemetery where my grandparents are buried, not far from the mound, on the other side of the narrow strait.

Oliver Smith is the author of 'On This Holy Island: A Modern Pilgrimage Across Britain' (Pegasus, March 4).

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ADVENTURE & TRAVEL

By David Weiss

An Oasis of Desert Cool

Tucson's known for natural wonders. But for sun seekers after a different side of Arizona, the dynamic downtown is emerging as a destination in its own right.

COME WINTER, streams of snow-weary northerners pack their flip-flops and pickleball paddles and make for the Sonoran Desert. The Phoenix-Scottsdale area is the default escape hatch for many, but it can also seem like one endless gated community. No wonder those seeking a getaway with a bit more soul often set a course 100 miles south, to Tucson.

A human-scaled university town that retains a just-right amount of cowboy quirkiness, the city has long been lauded for its easy proximity to some of the Southwest's most spectacular natural wonders. Hikers and bikers flock to its desert trails and the city's outlying precincts boast plenty of manicured golf courses and full-service resorts. But that's just part of Tucson's story.

Lately, thanks to a burgeoning culinary scene and a well-attended roster of street fairs, festivals and other initiatives, visitors are also waking up to the city's considerable cosmopolitan charms—making downtown a destination in its own right.

Among Tucson's most compelling selling points is its cultural dynamism. With a metro area numbering nearly a million souls,

Traces of the city's layered colonial past are evident everywhere in the food, folkways and architecture

the city remains remarkably reflective of its distinct communities. Native Americans, mostly Pascua Yaqui and Tohono O'odham tribes, have called the southeast part of the state home for some 12 millennia. In the 1600s, Spanish missionaries arrived and the region was under Mexican rule until 1853.

Today, traces of that colonial past are evident everywhere in the city's folkways, architecture and food. Befitting Tucson's status as a Unesco City of Gastronomy, its markets abound with locally crafted cheese, bread and native ingredients like nopales, corn and chiles. But in this town of a thousand tacos, simple street food is an equal draw. One popular guilty pleasure: the bacon-wrapped Sonoran hot dog, crowned with tomatoes, beans and a slather of mayo and jalapeño sauce.

The historic Hotel Congress serves as a strategic launching point for exploring the modern downtown, while also offering a whiff of Tucson's lawless past. Bank robber and America's first Public Enemy Number One, John Dillinger, was captured while lodging there in 1934—an event the hotel celebrates annually during its "Dillinger Days" weekend, re-



FILLING STATION A charming Spanish-Colonial open-air market that sits near the end of the Sun Link Streetcar line, the Mercado San Agustín makes an ideal stop for a leisurely lunch and souvenir shopping.



Clockwise from above left: A Sonoran hot dog with the works from the James Beard Award-winning family restaurant El Güero Canelo; cactus-spotting in Saguaro National Park; known for its delectable Mexican pastries, La Estrella has long been a staple of Tucson's bustling Mercado district.

plete with whiskey tastings and a "gun trick" show.

The Congress also houses a 100-year-old watering hole called Tiger's Tap Room and the Century Room, which features live jazz seven nights a week.

A short stroll brings you back to the city's dusty colonial days. The pastel-tinted quarter of Barrio Viejo—literally, the old neighborhood—is best known for its post-Civil War adobe row houses, many of which have received a face-lift. Head to the district, now occupied by artists, hip boutiques, cantinas and cafes, to while away an afternoon.

Need to refuel? Swing by Exo Roast Co., a chic coffee shop committed to working with small producers in Mexico. Also of note: The Teatro Carmen, a landmark 106-year-old theater, which is being restored into a community arts center and cultural space.

But perhaps no site is as emblematic of the city's piety and pluck as its El Tiradito "wishing shrine." Built in the 1870s to commemorate the death of a local sinner-turned-folk-hero, the memorial prevented the building of a freeway project that would have displaced some 1,200 residents. To this day, pilgrims come to leave scrawled prayers and colorful votive candles at its makeshift altar.

When you're ready to give your feet a break, climb aboard the Sun Link Streetcar, a 3.9 mile route that passes through five of Tucson's buzziest downtown districts, from the University of Arizona to Mercado San Agustín. The latter's public market houses local stalwarts like La Estrella bakery, known for its tempting, traditional pan dulce and freshly made flour tortillas.

For a taste of local boho street life, hop out in the Fourth Avenue District, a thrumming hive of bistros, bookstores, vintage western-wear boutiques and secondhand shops. Vinyl collectors swear by the Wooden Tooth, a used-record store and live-music venue. Fourth Avenue also hosts a biannual street fair—March 21 through 23 this spring—that attracts more than a quarter-million revelers. Only Tucson's annual Gem and Mineral Show is a bigger deal here in mining country. Copper constitutes one of the "5 Cs" that pay the local bills alongside cotton, citrus, cattle and climate.

And cactus, of course. Even avowed urbanites will want to carve out time in their schedule for a detour to Saguaro National Park, parts of which hug the eastern and western edges of the city. The region's iconic bent-armed cactuses can top 50 feet and live for 200 years—and are also prime habitat for spotting woodpeckers and screech owls.

Prefer to do your nature-watching at night? Thanks to its dark sky protocols and ample open space, Tucson's newly-launched "Astro Trail" is quickly becoming a magnet for amateur astronomers and U.F.O. spotters alike.

THE LOWDOWN / A SNOWBIRD'S GUIDE TO DOWNTOWN TUCSON AND BEYOND

Getting There Tucson Airport (TUS), which is 8 miles from town, is served by major hubs like Chicago and Atlanta. The I-10 highway connects the city to Phoenix in under two hours. Thrice-weekly Amtrak service is available via the Sunset Limited train originating in Los Angeles or New Orleans.

Staying There An ideal roost from which to survey the city, downtown's over 100-year-old Hotel Congress oozes Old-West charm (rooms from \$134). The JW Marriott Tucson

Starr Pass Resort & Spa offers everything from golf to waterslides and the adjacent Sonoran Desert biking and hiking paths (rooms from \$577).

Eating There Head to El Güero Canelo to try a Sonoran hot dog with all the trimmings. In operation since 1922, El Charro Café is renowned for its carne seca (marinated-dried beef) that's aged the old-fashioned way—on the restaurant's roof. The tasting menu at upscale Bata features locavore, veggie-centered dishes.



Bata's sleek dining room makes a stylish backdrop for locally sourced small plates and craft cocktails.

CASSIDY ARAUZA FOR WSJ

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EATING & DRINKING



ANDREA MANZATI (2)

ON WINE / LETTIE TEAGUE



‘Aperitif’ Wines: No, That’s Not an Insult.

ON A RECENT evening I handed a friend a glass of a particularly crisp, cold Chablis. “This is a great aperitif,” I said. But what, exactly, did I mean by that term?

By labeling the wine as such, was I signaling some lack of seriousness—a wine fit only for the start of a meal but somehow unworthy of serving

along with it? And if so, how do an aperitif wine and a non-aperitif wine differ?

When I describe a bottle as a good aperitif wine, I mean that it delivers on a specific set of criteria. For starters, it whets the appetite for whatever might follow. (The word aperitif derives from the Latin “to open,” af-

ter all.) For me, an aperitif wine isn’t styled to fully satisfy—and that’s no shortcoming. A wine of this kind is more like the trailer to the movie than the full film, compelling, even tantalizing, yet ultimately incomplete.

A great aperitif wine should be lively and fairly light-bodied with a brisk, refreshing acidity. Champagne typically fits this description; indeed, it’s the first wine that comes to my mind, most of the time, to open a meal. A Blanc de Blancs Champagne—a wine made entirely from white grapes—would be particularly good. Second place would be just about any other dry sparkling wine: a Crémant (the name for Champagne-method sparklers made in French wine regions that aren’t Champagne), or a good Cava from Spain.

Other wines on my aperitif shortlist include the kind that sommeliers frequently feature in the front pages of their wine lists: high-acid white wines like Sancerre,

Chablis, Etna Bianco or Grüner Veltliner; even a very dry Riesling. I would shy away from a white wine with oak aging or one with flamboyant aromas, such as

Gewürztraminer or dry Muscat. I’d also eschew a wine that’s high in alcohol, and I’ll even put a number on that: An aperitif wine should not exceed 13% ABV.

While I’d never say no to a rosé Champagne, I’m largely indifferent to the idea of opening with a pink wine. And I can’t think of many red wines I’d choose as an aperitif. It’s a matter of texture and flavor and, as often as not, the already cited, problematic oak. For me, red wines have too much muchness—though I have friends who drink red wines as aperitifs all the time, and some wine profes-

glass) and the Michel Mailiard “Cuvée Gregory” Champagne (\$35 a glass) as aperitifs, paired with the restaurant’s tasting menu. “To me, an aperitif wine is one that shows minerality and freshness—acid—without being overly complicated or nuanced,” he wrote in an email. As examples he offered extra-brut Blanc de Blancs Champagne, dry Riesling, a “salty citrusy” Albarino or unoaked Chardonnay.

One recommendation, from Jesse Carr, food and beverage director at the Virgin Hotel in New Orleans, struck me as downright radical. She often suggests kick-

This kind of wine is more like the trailer than the full film, compelling, even tantalizing, yet ultimately incomplete.

sionals I contacted told me they suggest red wines as aperitifs, too.

Wine director Lee Campbell of Borgo restaurant in New York favors “quaffable” and “fruit-forward” wines with softer tannins and minerality as aperitifs. She isn’t averse to a red wine if it’s light bodied, served chilled and low in alcohol. (She employs the French shorthand “apéro,” rather than “aperitif.”) One of Campbell’s favorite apéro wines, the 2023 Commonwealth Crush “Family Meal,” an 11.5% ABV red, contains a blend of several white grapes, including Chenin Blanc and Sauvignon Blanc, as well as the red grape Blaufränkisch. It’s produced at a winery in Virginia’s Shenandoah Valley in which Campbell is a partner and priced at \$18 a glass and \$72 a bottle on the Borgo list.

At Vida restaurant in Indianapolis, wine director and general manager Jared May offers the Domaine Rolet Crémant du Jura (\$18 a

ing off a meal with a tannic, high-alcohol Zinfandel. Carr explained that she likes to start out “a bit boozier, then move to lighter items.” A high-alcohol wine, she added, often makes diners “crave more food.”

Though that is perhaps a business-savvy move for a restaurant, I can’t imagine opening with a 16%-alcohol Zinfandel and still managing to drink another glass of anything. But then I don’t live in a town nicknamed the Big Easy.

Still, I was grateful for Carr’s perspective—more proof, if I needed it, that “aperitif” can mean different things to different drinkers. I’ve decided the term is ultimately neither insult nor praise, but simply, wonderfully promising. After all, if a good aperitif wine signals anything, it is more good wines—ideally even more interesting and complex—yet to come.

► Email Lettie at wine@wsj.com.



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\$308 at JB Prince

—Matthew Kronsberg



MATTHEW COOK

EATING & DRINKING

Why We All Want Pasta Now

Continued from page D1

as stark and striking as a Franz Kline canvas. In Philadelphia, a city where red sauce reigns supreme, pasta assumes radical new forms at Paffuto, where, for instance, a slice of pepperoni pizza is reimagined as a bowl of cavatelli napped in a rich, ruddy pepperoni butter.

Wildweed's tortelli could be considered the poster child for this new noodle wave. Big brother of tortellini and little brother of tortelloni, the purse-shaped stuffed pasta originated in Italy's Emilia-Romagna region—but don't go looking in a Bolognese trattoria for this one. Wildweed's striped tortelli sit in a shimmering smoked-shrimp stock spiked with a Vietnamese-style sauce combining fish sauce, celery vinegar and sugar. The dough, a mix of barley and semolina, is colored and flavored by gochugaru, the Korean pepper powder. Each pasta purse is filled with sausage made with heritage-breed chicken from a local farm, Shaoxing wine, shallots and bird's-eye chiles.

"The tortelli is inspired by the flavors of Vietnam," said Jackman, a Canadian who spent time at the Catbird Seat in Nashville before moving to Cincinnati with his wife and business partner, Lydia Jackman. Over several years, they staged a couple hundred pop-ups to build a reputation in their adopted city and raise capital to open their restaurant—developing a sense of

'Pasta allows me to provide big, bold flavors using higher priced ingredients in smaller portions.'

how to satisfy their clientele while eyeing the bottom line.

Using Their Noodles

According to Aaron Adalja, assistant professor of food and beverage management at Cornell University's Nolan School of Hotel Administration, pastas have historically been higher-margin menu items—made inexpensively, from little more than flour and water, yet consistently desirable. Customers perceive value in handmade pasta, Adalja said: "There's craftsmanship. That's an easy story to sell."

Right now, restaurants can use an easy sell: The Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that wholesale food costs keep rising, up 7% as of December over the previous year, while restaurant margins still hover between 3 and 5%. At the same time, according to the 2025 State of the Restaurant Industry report by the National Restaurant Association, 95% of consumers are increasingly value-conscious. Even a short rib pasta with a single short rib in it still "feels plentiful," said Elizabeth Blau, CEO of Blau & Associates, a global restaurant consultancy. "If you have a dish that's going to make people happy but you can control your costs, that's a magic formula," she explained.

Rolle, at Dario in Minneapolis, said that the familiarity of pasta lets him flex his creativity. "The goal is to give the customer something they can identify with while keeping me and the cooks in the kitchen happy," he explained. "Pasta allows me to provide big, bold flavors using higher priced ingredients in smaller portions. The guest is happy and I don't have to sacrifice quality, ever."

If today's chefs are using pasta as a wolf in sheep's-milk clothing, it wasn't so long ago that the opposite approach prevailed: making pasta new by going old, seeking novelty in arcane and ancient forms. Strangolapreti, creste di gallo, trofie: the more obscure the shape, the smaller the village it came from, the better. Chef Evan Funke's Los Angeles trattoria Felix led the way for these neo-traditionalists; New York's Rezdôra and Misi both exalted the uncommon forms. The sight of a team of sfo-gline (pasta makers) toiling away behind glass in a dedicated pasta-making room in an artisanal tableaux vivant became widespread.

In some ways, however, said chef Tyler Akin of Bastia in Phila-



The Pastas to Order in 2025

Here, 6 dishes that offer outstanding value and sheer dining delight. Many of these menus are highly seasonal, so new and surprising pasta offerings will appear throughout the year.

1 Cavatelli With Pepperoni Butter

Paffuto, Philadelphia

At this small Italian tasting-menu spot, chefs Dan Griffiths, Sam Kalkut and Jake Loeffler remix Italian-American classics—turning a slice of a pepperoni pizza, say, into a cavatelli swimming in pepperoni-butter sauce.

More Pioneering Pasta House-made spaghetti alla chitarra with walnut, honey, shrimp, and a chile-cream sauce splits the difference between Little Italy and Chinatown.

And Don't Miss During the day, Paffuto turns out delicious fried envelopes of pizza dough called panzarotti in flavors like French onion soup and roast pork.

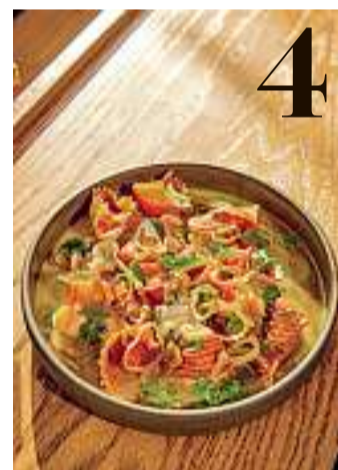
2 Charcoal Tagliatelle

7 Adams, San Francisco

At the Michelin-starred 7 Adams, married chef-owners David Fisher and Serena Chow Fisher serve a plate of jet-black tagliatelle made with charcoal powder, topped with a sauce of black garlic, black trumpet mushrooms and squid ink, plus a shower of smoked Parmesan.

More Pioneering Pasta In another of the chefs' pasta innovations, honeynut squash ravioli are formed into intricate rosettes, served with shavings of Alba truffle applied tableside.

And Don't Miss Serena Chow Fisher's desserts are a standout here. The satsuma parfait—a hollowed out orange filled with a yogurt mousse, honey brittle shortbread and sumac-caramelized apples, topped with satsuma snow and lemon thyme—is a winter signature.



3 Stuffed Pappardelle

Maxwells Trading, Chicago

Erling Wu-Bower grew up in Chicago, the son of a Cajun father and a Chinese chef and restaurant critic. Here he pays homage to both in a leek-and-crawfish pappardelle, with a sauce nantua (made with crawfish stock and brandy), finished with Tabasco.

More Pioneering Pasta Soup-dumpling tortellini made with maitake mushrooms and pork shoulder, in a mushroom broth.

And Don't Miss A thick tranche of roasted then brûléed Japanese sweet potato atop a fragrant northern-Thai-style curry sauce, scattered with fresh basil leaves.

4 Ranger Chicken Tortelli

Wildweed, Cincinnati

David Jackman's take on Vietnamese rice noodles features pasta purses striped with gochugaru (Korean red chile powder), served in a smoked-shrimp sauce amped up with Vietnamese fish sauce, celery vinegar and sugar.

More Pioneering Pasta Lasagna with heritage pork and fermented chile ragù; citrus-laced ri-

cotta and egg noodles finished with Parmesan and a "tagine" sauce of preserved summer tomatoes, warm spices and saffron.

And Don't Miss Steamed clams studded with kumquat in a pool of 'nduja butter, best sopped up with a freshly made whole-wheat miche loaf.

5 Stuffed Farfalle

San Sabino, New York

San Sabino hums with the strange and delicious. Inspired by crab salads from sushi joints, Angie Rito and Scott Tacinelli stuff these oversized farfalle with smoky crab and top it with tobiko (flying fish roe) and rice crackers.

More Pioneering Pasta Pillowy sheep's milk gnudi backed by an unusual second-line of clementine, mint and crispy peanuts.

And Don't Miss Shrimp parm has long been a dish that's at worst maligned, at best a red-sauce-joint curiosity, but here it gets a glow-up. Three huge shrimp swim in a sweet-and-sour-and-spicy arrabbiata sauce swirled with creamy stracchino cheese.

6 Doppio Ravioli

Dario, Minneapolis

This nods to a cheese course but in pasta form. Dario chef Joe Rolle fills one pocket of his ravioli with sunchoke purée, the other with ricotta, and tops the pasta with a rich butter sauce, honey, hazelnuts and rosemary.

More Pioneering Pasta Rolle loves a double. "Maybe it's my ADHD mind," he admits. In another hit from the pasta section, an agnolotti perfect for winter, one half contains succulent short-rib, the other, polenta.

And Don't Miss A zesty hiramasa crudo vibrates with acidity from calamansi, ponzu, gooseberry and yuzu kosho, balanced by the creaminess of avocado.

delphia, Italian cooking has always been ripe for disruption. "Unlike French cuisine, there's not a year zero, where everything became codified. There hasn't been an Escoffier moment," he said, referring to the French chef Auguste Escoffier, whose 1903 book "Le Guide Culinaire" became the ur-text for French gastronomy.

My Pasta, My Self

Pasta—once Italian, then Italian-American—has become a much more cosmopolitan affair. "We do city food by city kids," said Wu-Bower of Maxwells Trading in Chicago. His pappardelle, made with

leeks and crawfish in a creamy sauce nantua finished with Tabasco, was born of his experience growing up half Chinese, half Cajun. "When I think of winter, I think of New Orleans, where it's crawfish season," he said. "It's a pasta that sounds crazy, but when you eat it, it makes sense."

At Allora, a recent addition to Houston's dining scene, Peruvian chef and co-owner Diego Ponce worked with Vietnamese co-owner Ngoc Tran to rework Peruvian tallarines a la Huancaína, traditionally a cold pasta appetizer, into a hot fettuccine. Ponce stayed true to the Huancaína sauce of queso

fresco, saltines, aji amarillo and evaporated milk, but swapped out the lomo saltado (stir-fried beef) usually served with it for a chicken Milanese marinated in soy sauce, garlic and sugar and crisp-fried.

Even in Italian kitchens, pasta is stretching to new lengths. At Chicago's Monteverde, Sarah Gruneberg devotes an entire section of her menu to "atipica" pasta, including a take on penne all'arrabbiata in which she tosses the chile-spiked sauce with long, thin tagliolini in a hot wok.

And in New York's West Village, chefs Scott Tacinelli and Angie Rito continue to peddle pasta as

spectacle at Don Angie, home of the pinwheel pasta that went Instagram-viral in 2023, and at their new restaurant, San Sabino. There, they stuff farfalle with smoky crab and top it with tobiko (flying fish roe). Japanese rice crackers and a crème fraîche-buttermilk foam. "Don't get me wrong. We have the utmost respect for Italian traditions," said Rito. "But in our cooking, one of the main things we try to do is have fun and take risks and switch things up. At the end of the day, people have seen these super-authentic things a million times. It's time for something new."

DESIGN & DECORATING



JOHN W. TOMAC (ILLUSTRATION); MICHELLE SLATALLA (BAR CART)

A MATTER OF LIFE AND DECOR / MICHELLE SLATALLA



If I'm Sober-Curious, Do I Have to Toss My Bar Cart?

AFTER ALL the recent health news that's come out about how bad alcohol is for you, I have cut back on drinking.

But my bar cart still whispers to me every day when I walk past it at 5 p.m., when the light falls just so on the gin bottle.

"Hi, stranger," Bar Cart coos seductively.

I avert my eyes from the brass-and-glass temptation, ignoring its come-hither display of shiny cocktail shakers and graceful, stemmed Nick-and-Nora martini glasses.

"Just looking?" it asks.

My bar cart used to be my favorite piece of furniture, with its curvy Deco frame and jaunty brass wheels. But now that I'm sober-ish?

"I feel like my old friend the bar cart has turned on me and become a bad influence," I told Keith Humphreys, a Stanford University psychologist whom I called for advice. "Can having a specific piece of furniture in my house be bad for my health?"

"Well, it is sending you a behavioral cue every time you see it," he said. "And humans are not much more advanced than Pavlov's dog when it comes to behavioral cues."

In other words, like a dog con-

ditioned to salivate at the prospect of food, I have been conditioned to crave a cocktail whenever I walk past my bar cart.

"When the light shines through the gin, it looks so...inviting," I admitted, fantasizing about a crisp Hendrick's martini with just a whiff of vermouth. And two olives. "Beautiful, isn't it?" he agreed.

"I see the cocktail shaker gleaming, and I think about the nice sound when it's full of ice and I'm shaking it up," I said.

"OK, that's two cues—the bottle and the cocktail shaker—and they can be hard to resist, despite best intentions, on days when you are tired or you are stressed," he said. "I recommend people who are trying not to drink don't keep alcohol in the house."

"Maybe I could get rid of the alcohol but keep the cart?" I asked.

"Try it," he said. "If the bar cart is still a cue, cover it up."

Like, throw a shroud over it?

There are better solutions, said Lori Morris, a Toronto interior designer and bar cart champion who recently decorated a room in a condo in Florida with three side-by-side bar carts because "three next to each other is an extrava-



The author's problematic cart..

ganza on wheels."

Morris thinks of a bar cart as a decor chameleon. "A bar cart is a treat in a room, and because it's small and on wheels, there are many ways you can use it," Morris said.

"I used one in a dining room for a gentleman who wanted the formality of chateaubriand being delivered to the table by a chef," she said. "Or it can be used as a flower

cart to create a vignette in a little-used corner of a room."

Other creative uses she's found include "putting toys on it in a playroom or art supplies on it in a crafts room. And it's easy to move it if you want to make Caesar salad on it at a dinner party."

When it comes to bar carts, she loves all shapes—rectangles, ovals and round carts—and sizes. If it's really tiny, put a chair next to it to give it more weight in the room, she suggests. If it's large, put it behind a sofa with a lamp to add depth to a room.

"But I do prefer a brass cart, because it adds sparkle," she said.

In fact, bar carts—and their bar-furniture ancestors from earlier centuries—have always been prized for their pizzazz, said Silke Berlinghof-Nielsen, furniture historian and owner of online vintage furniture shop Stylish.

"Ever since wealthy 18th-century European aristocrats started displaying their liquor collections in special cabinets with glass doors, bar furniture has been a luxurious statement piece," she said.

We can thank Prohibition for the birth of the mobile bar cart, Berlinghof-Nielsen said.

"It's ironic, but when alcohol was forbidden, people got more interested in finding new ways to serve it in their homes," she said. "A lot of bar carts from that era have funny design elements, like hidden compartments for alcohol bottles."

On Stylish, vintage bar cart styles run the gamut of 20th-century design: from midcentury Danish teak to '70s black-glass-and-chrome, to neoclassical brass filigree.

"What they have in common is that bar carts have a very social aspect—they signal you might be about to have friends over for a party," she said.

"They do add a certain grown-up-ness, a sophistication to a room," I said.

Of course we used to think that ashtrays were a design element that added sophistication. But then smoking got banned, and you never see ashtrays any more. With the surgeon general recently call-

I don't want mine to have a new purpose as toy storage or a flower cart.

ing for stronger health warnings about alcohol and new research indicating there's no "healthy" amount to drink, will bar carts also disappear from our lives?

"I don't think so," said Sally Augustin, a Chicago-based environmental psychologist. "They're too handy for too many purposes."

But I realized: I don't want mine to have a new purpose as toy storage or a flower cart. It looks beautiful as its maker intended, adorned with a brass tray and colorful bottles of liquor and an adorable brass shot glass.

"You can make other small changes in your environment—it's called nudging—that will make it less likely that you will indulge in a negative habit even if the bar cart is still in the room," Augustin said.

One example of nudging: Turn on bright lights as evening approaches because studies show that in general people have better self-control in a space where the light is brighter, she said.

Another way to boost self-control is to hang a mirror on a wall. "If you can see yourself in a mirror, research shows you are more likely to act in a socially appropriate way," she said.

"You know, a mirror would look really good hanging above my bar cart," I said.

After I hung up, I got out a measuring tape and took some notes. Twilight fell while I was browsing Etsy for vintage gilt mirrors and I didn't even notice the gin bottle. Maybe I am ready for change. How would my husband look in a chef's toque, pushing his famous chateaubriand into the dining room?

CHIC TRICK

Floors With Ye Olde Street Cred

Cobblestones and their ilk make their way indoors. Ouch?

"**WHOSE IDEA** was it to lay a walkway from 'Game of Thrones' inside a residential home?" opined one Reddit user discussing cobblestone flooring in a hallway. Turns out quite a few designers are installing materials once reserved for old-world streets—minus the hobbling unevenness and gaps that make touring European towns grueling.

The Appeal

Pros deploy the blocks and look-alikes in transitional spaces such as sunrooms and mudrooms,



French cobblestone ballasts a mudroom by Nashville firm Ellerslie Interiors.

linking outdoors and indoors with pavers that stand up to dripping Wellies and mucky paws. The application suits spill-prone kitchens, too. In a log cabin snuggled in forested, rocky hills outside Seattle, designer Jessica Nelson laid limestone kitchen tiles made to look like Belgian block, a cobblestone alternative. "This is a high-traffic area, and we wanted a rustic, vintage, natural-stone look because of the home's setting and the natural wood throughout," she said.

The Tips

Purely modern homes don't wear the stony style well. "I think it lends [itself] to any traditional space where classic elements come through," said Laura Lubin, of Nashville's Ellerslie Interiors. The designer chose a brown-tinted cobblestone to complement a traditionally trimmed mud room. Lubin also notes that cobblestone averages a chunky ½ to ¾ inches in thickness. Be aware that such a floor might not sit flush with an adjoining floor.

The Caveats

Installation of real stone can cost from \$28-\$145 a square foot. Contractor rates vary widely, says Corrin Thomas of Leestone Interiors, a design and contracting firm in New York. Genuine pavers will need resealing annually, which is why many pros go for ersatz. "We chose a damn good porcelain replica of authentic old Chicago bricks," said Krista Nye Nicholas, whose Ann Arbor, Mich., design firm, Cloth & Kind, laid the doppelgänger tiles in a mud room. "They look amazing and are easy to maintain, clean and live with." —*Abid Haque*



CLASSIC ROCKS Seattle designer Jessica Nelson lined a kitchen with Belgian-block look-alike tiles.

LAURA LUBIN (LEFT); CORINA SKOBECKI (RIGHT)



Poetic Complications
Lady Féerie

Van Cleef & Arpels

Haute Joaillerie, place Vendôme since 1906

