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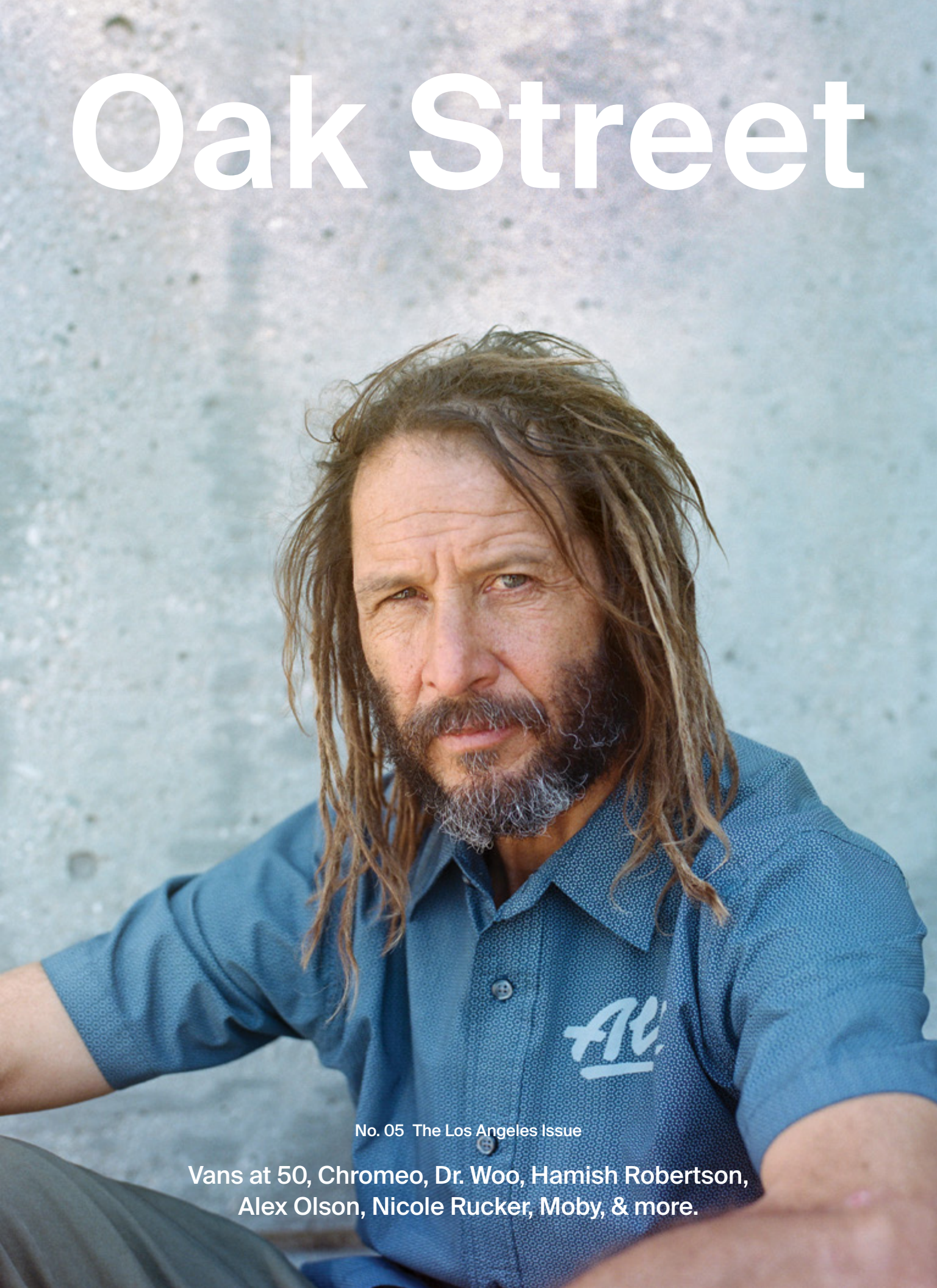

No. 05 The Los Angeles Issue

Vans at 50, Chromeo, Dr. Woo, Hamish Robertson, Alex Olson, Nicole Rucker, Moby, & more.

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The Los Angeles Issue

Ten years ago, I took part in an exchange program offered by my college in Montreal. Paris, Rio de Janeiro, and Shanghai were popular destinations. I was the only student who chose Los Angeles.

At the time of my application, I was going through a dark chapter in my life and knew that leaving Montreal would be best. Though my sister lived in LA and I had spent a few family vacations visiting her as a teenager, I was only vaguely familiar with the city. But my gut said to go, and it's a good thing I listened.

Cities, like people, can bring out the best or worst in you. For me and for the people in this issue, LA inspires self-awareness, healing, and happiness. For example, famous New Yorker Moby (page 45) shocked his fans when he moved to LA. Today, he proudly calls the city home and describes it as a gentle place that promotes creation over consumption. How ironic to find such depth in a city so often associated with vapid culture.

Since my exchange, Los Angeles has become my home away from home, and I've often had to defend it to residents of the city in which I currently live, New York. But, lately, more and more people have agreed with me. *The New York Times* hit a cultural nerve when it published an article in 2015 about New York's creative class heading to LA. And in the last year, many of my friends have made the move west. One is Jeffrey Laub, co-founder of Blind Barber, who, with his wife, Gabrielle, left New York earlier this year to focus on his shop in Culver City (page 118).

I'm thrilled to dedicate our fifth issue entirely to LA, not only to pay homage to a city I hold in high regard, but to investigate what the hype is about. Our report on media and tech industries moving to LA (page 16), along with profiles on transplants who now call it home (page 20), offer insight into what the city has to offer creative professionals. Our conversations with Hamish Robertson (page 62), Nicole Rucker (page 68), and Chromeo (page 86) delve into the art, food, and music scenes, and our cover story (page 74) examines how Vans, a brand born out of LA's skateboarding culture, has maintained its relevance for 50 years. In that piece, we get to hear directly from some of the company's most important personalities, including our cover star, skate legend Tony Alva.

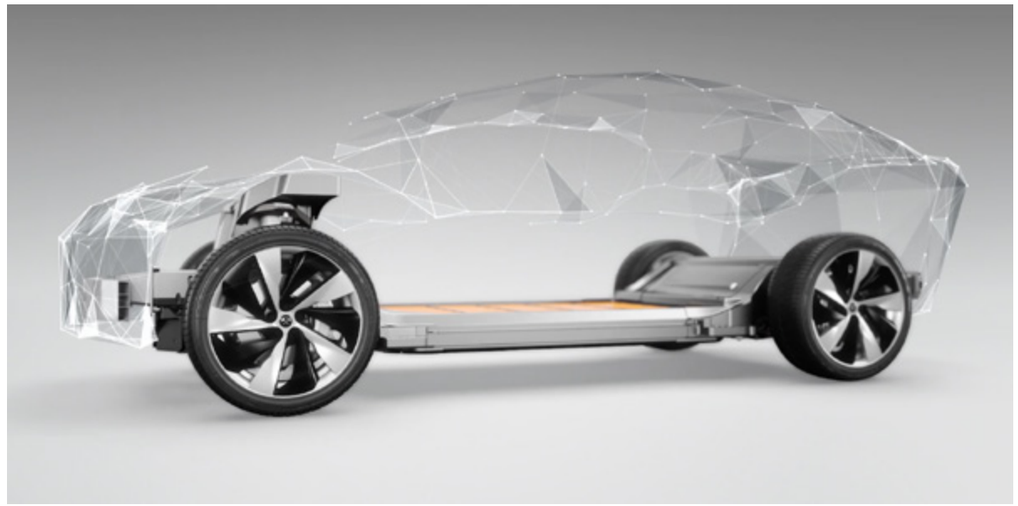
I wanted this issue to capture the essence of the city today, and what I discovered, put simply, is that it's a very good time to be in LA. See you there.

–Sachin Bhola
Editorial Director

The Future of Driving

In Los Angeles, a mysterious company could change the automotive industry as we know it.

Words by **Ben Kriz**



Faraday's Variable Platform Architecture will allow the company to produce cars in a matter of months, not years.

We've been waiting for the car of the future since the Model T rolled off the line. Many have come and gone (the DeLorean, the PT Cruiser, Vector Motors), but the next best thing—electric, self-driving vehicles—may be what sticks.

From tech giants to traditional automakers, the race toward this groundbreaking technology is on, with one newcomer gunning for first place.

Founded in 2014, Faraday Future is a Los Angeles-based startup that wants to launch a fully electric vehicle as early as 2017. One with more bells and whistles than Tesla can shake a stick at, like on-demand service, subscription models, autonomous driving, smartphone-integrated steering wheels, aromatherapy technology, ergonomic interior designs, exciting in-vehicle content, and more.

Since its inception, the company has gone to great lengths to protect its plans from the prying eyes of media. I reached out for commentary, but Faraday spokespeople just pointed me to a website and press kit with vague statements like, "Our goal was to build a car with a sixth sense for its driver's intentions and needs." So what is it hiding?

Let's start with what we know. Faraday is the brainchild of Chinese media mogul Jia Yueting, the billionaire entrepreneur who founded the Chinese version of Netflix, Leshi Internet Information & Technology (also known as LeEco and, formerly, Letv). Yueting has publicly stated his desire to compete with Tesla, writing on his blog, "We will build the best electric cars to solve the problems of air pollution and traffic jams in China." (China has overtaken the U.S. as the world's larg-

The Faraday team inspecting their infamous concept car.

est electric car market, thanks to government initiatives that encourage eco-car manufacturing.)

The company is also betting large stateside, having negotiated $335 million in tax breaks with the government of Nevada to build a billion-dollar factory (it promised the state 4,500 jobs). It's been able to poach an impressive array of talent from rival companies, and it currently boasts Nick Sampson (formerly the director of vehicle and chassis engineering for Tesla) as senior vice-president, Richard Kim (formerly of BMW) as head of design, and a host of other former Tesla engineers and designers on its roster. It's a group so impressive that Faraday was widely thought to be a shadow company for Apple's supposedly nonexistent "iCar" until that rumor was debunked during Faraday's presentation at the Consumer Electronics Show (CES) earlier this year.

A glitzy Las Vegas consumer electronics and tech trade show, CES is better known for unveiling Playstations than cars. But last winter, word on the street was that Faraday was going to unveil something revolutionary. (It should be noted that, despite all the buzz, the company has not yet publicly identified a CEO.)

What it presented instead was the FFZERO1, a concept car with 1,000 hp, a top speed of 200 mph, autonomous driving, and a single-seat Batmobile-esque design. But Faraday says it has no plans to produce it.

"Anyone with some cash can design a concept [car], but many stop there when they realize how amazingly hard it is to bring to market," says Jeremy White, an editor at *WIRED* UK. "The rumor is that Faraday had another car altogether to show at CES, a proper prototype rather than a complete flight of fancy, but something went wrong with the car and they were forced to roll out the sci-fi concept that has little to no grounding in reality."

James Temperton, another *WIRED* UK editor who attended CES, was also disappointed that no working version of the car was available. "That's a trick a lot of big technology companies have learned: If you announce something, either have it ready to use there and then or make sure it'll be ready pretty soon. Faraday put on a good show, but it all falls a bit flat if nobody can actually try out the technology," he says.

While the FFZERO1 presentation was a disappointment, Faraday does seem to have some promising technology, like its Variable Platform Architecture, which allows products to scale across different sizes of vehicle and layouts. It traditionally takes about five years to produce a car from the drawing board in Detroit. Faraday is talking about doing it in a matter of months.

In a video interview posted on the company's website, Sampson explains that Faraday's cars will not only navigate themselves but also learn about passengers via their smartphones and by analyzing their habits. He also suggests the cars could pick up on the kind of music riders prefer and make restaurant recommendations.

Faraday has hinted at the production of autonomous, taxi-like vehicles that can be requested à la Uber or learn your work schedule and arrive based on your planner. (This is allegedly what the company was planning on rolling out at CES.) Alex Roy of *The Drive*, Time Inc.'s automotive digital vertical, reported that he saw the real concepts and prototypes in person and it's more like "a megapod family transporter, or a Megavan—fully electrified and autonomous." Faraday, however, has been notoriously silent about how it plans to produce a roadworthy, autonomous electric vehicle.

But who said the company will do it alone? Karl Brauer, a senior analyst for LA-based automotive research firm Kelley Blue Book, believes Faraday could apply its technology elsewhere. "This can range anywhere from their own vehicle that's badged with their name on it, fully developed and executed within the company, to assisting other companies that are attempting to future-proof themselves in the personal transportation world," he says.

That brings us to Aston Martin. Sure enough, a deal was announced in mid-February between the British automaker and LeEco, Faraday's Chinese backer, to help it develop a production version of its RapidE concept car by 2018. In a press release announcing the partnership, Aston Martin CEO Andy Palmer is quoted as saying there is the "potential" to team with Faraday on other "next-generation connected electric vehicles" by the end of the decade.

"That's exactly the kind of role I started feeling they were going to play after talking to Nick [Sampson] at CES," Brauer says. "Everyone wants to call them the next Tesla, but Tesla has been a fairly self-contained automaker among other things. I think Faraday is not ever going to be that self-contained. I'm not sure they'll ever even make their own car." It will be interesting to see what an experienced automaker like Aston Martin can do with access to hybrid and electric power. But we may never get to see the fruit of that effort—no one in the industry is sure that Faraday can deliver.

All photos courtesy of Faraday Future.

The FFZERO1 concept car, which many have likened to a futuristic Batmobile, will never see the light of day.

Nevada isn't even convinced Faraday has the cash it claims. Regarding the expensive plant, the state is asking for $70 million in security in return for government investment. *Automotive News* recently reported that the state's treasurer has doubts after a recent visit to China.

But suppose Faraday reinvents the auto industry and electric, self-driving cars become the norm. It would be the biggest thing since the Model T (or even Uber). And how would that change the way we drive?

The fact is, we're already experiencing the shift. A recent study from the University of Michigan shows that young people today are less likely to have a driver's license than in generations past, with the percentage of license holders decreasing across all age groups between 2011 and 2014. Personal-driver apps like Uber and Lyft are also more prominent than ever.

The future also promises fewer accidents. According to a report by audit, tax, and advisory services firm KPMG, in 2010, "there were approximately six million vehicle crashes leading to 32,788 traffic deaths, or approximately 15 deaths per 100,000 people. And of the six million crashes, 93% are attributable to human error." Automated, driverless cars could drastically reduce those grim figures.

Still, driving will never truly disappear. "You're not going to have people living in ranches outside of Jackson Hole, Wyoming, driving around in Google Cars," Brauer says. "They certainly wouldn't pull cattle very well. [Transportation] will be more region-based, more income-based, and more lifestyle-based instead of everyone using one or two or three systems, which is what we've done for the last 130 years."

But what could a major city like LA look like with a system of transportation pods run by computers? Brauer takes off his analyst hat and puts on his Angeleno one. "It's really unfortunate. You look at a city like LA, and there are all these cool, fun things to go do, but I've hardly done any of them because it's never worth the annoyance driving. But, if I had an autonomous vehicle that I could call up to drive me to and from things, it would transform my opinion of life in the city."

"[Faraday] have assembled a good team, and supposedly there is money behind them—but this still leaves them a long way from taking on the existing players," says White. "But I hope they manage it." Despite all the secrecy, Faraday may hold the key to redefining our relationship with personal transportation. For now, we'll wait and see if it can give Tesla and the Detroit establishment a run for their money. One thing, however, is clear: The car of the future is closer than we think. ◻

Droves of creatives are leaving New York and San Francisco for LA, and changing the city in the process.

Is Los Angeles the New Center for Media & Tech?

Words by **Kathryn Jezer-Morton**
Illustration by **Edith Morin**

In 1991, Steve Martin wrote and starred in *L.A. Story*, a romantic comedy that uses Los Angeles stereotypes as a comedic backdrop. Traffic, narcissistic actors, insane health fads—it's all there. There's a painfully exclusive restaurant called L'Idiot, where a customer database tracks the net worth and car of all the regulars. A young Sarah Jessica Parker appears as Martin's airhead love interest, SanDeE, a solid decade before people started getting crazy with the capital letters on their Myspace profiles. The movie is pretty great, and for about 20 years, its representation of LA held up.

But the LA of 2016 bears little resemblance to Martin's vision. Sure, people are still juicing as hard as ever, and the per-capita ratio of actor-barbacks remains high. But changes in the media and technology industries have attracted droves of new creative workers to the city, and the city's professional culture is shifting as a result. While the cost of living rose out of control in New York City and San Francisco, it stayed reasonable in LA. (Inevitably, this is changing, but so far at a slower pace.) According to *LA Weekly*, the city's average rent is $1,890 for a two-bedroom apartment. That may not seem cheap, but compare it to $3,770, the average monthly cost of a two-bedroom within 10 miles of San Francisco, as reported by RentJungle.com, and you'll get a sobering dose of perspective.

There are three major drivers behind the arrival of LA's newest creative class. First is the new golden age of TV, which has been drawing a steady stream of New York City writers for the past few years.

Second is the increased demand for web video production. According to Cisco, video will account for 69% of all consumer internet traffic by 2017. With video-friendly platforms like Snapchat and Instagram becoming valuable parts of every media company's content strategy, there is an unprecedented demand for image- and video-based content. And where do you go for the best image makers on earth? You go to LA, like *BuzzFeed* founder Jonah Peretti, who reportedly moved his family to the city to be closer to the company's fast-growing BuzzFeed Motion Pictures studios.

The third reason for the influx is Silicon Beach, a swath of LA's west side stretching from Santa Monica to Manhattan Beach, and still expanding. Silicon Beach is the second-largest tech and startup hub on earth. In 2014, the LA County Economic Development Corporation reported that tech companies employed 368,500 people in the LA metropolitan area—that's more people working in tech than in any other metro region in the U.S. Tinder, Hulu, StubHub, the Honest Company, Tradesy, Whisper, and hundreds of other startups are headquartered in this zone.

Johnny Woods, a video producer at *BuzzFeed*, moved to LA five years ago after spending the first 30 years of his life in and around New York City. "The most obvious thing [that makes living in LA unique] is space, which is helpful on so many different levels," he wrote in an email. "For shooting videos, LA has every location you could ever want, from beaches to mountains, from suburban streets to art deco skyscrapers, deserts, meadows, and forests, all within an hour's drive. Additionally, the overhead is far more affordable for companies, and I think that goes a long way to encourage risk-taking for creative industries."

The theme of creative possibility—whether taking risks, working collaboratively, or just experimenting—came up with everyone I spoke to for this piece. Lila Byock is a writer for the HBO show *The Leftovers*. She moved from New York, where she was a fiction writer.

"The LA writing scene feels much less lonely than it does in a lot of other places, because the nature of the work tends to be collaborative," she says. "When you're writing for a TV show, you typically spend most of your time in a room with a bunch of other writers, hacking away at story problems and inventing characters. I love that. I gave up fiction writing because I couldn't stand spending so much time alone with my own brain."

In addition to his day job at *BuzzFeed*, Woods makes animated films and remarked that cross-pollination between industries seems to happen naturally in LA. "Things are open here in a way that I never experienced in New York City. So, if I want to organize or participate in an event or a screening, it's super easy to make it happen. Having creative outlets outside of my day job is extremely important to me, and it feels more achievable here."

Kevin McShane, a native of Bethesda, Maryland, is a 37-year-old supervising producer of scripted content at BuzzFeed Motion Pictures. He also writes, directs, shoots, and edits his own series, *Weird Things Couples Do*. He describes the evolution of the tech and media industries in LA as a symbiotic relationship. "As new distribution channels like YouTube, Netflix, Amazon, and more gain momentum, the need for quality content has skyrocketed," he wrote in an email. "Conversely, as the production of quality content has risen, so, too, has the need for more distribution channels to showcase it all. When I first moved out here 15 years ago, your two main job options in the media industry were film and television. Now there's a vast number of venues to create for—each with its own niche audience and industry."

LA may still worship the surface of things, but working as a creative producer there does not mean dumbing yourself down. "LA is a place that takes writers seriously, and very often grants them a lot of power," says Byock. "I have my issues with the city, but it can be an incredible place to make a career as a writer."

"I think LA is a melting pot of creative talent," says McShane. "Here, you'll find writers, directors, producers, and DPs working alongside coders, developers, and other technicians to create new kinds of media. And as the technology of entertainment evolves, the lines between these traditional roles are blurring. My current job didn't even exist five years ago."

Silicon Beach is a catalyst for jobs that didn't exist five years ago, and the two big players in the tech employee numbers game are Google and Snapchat. In 2011, Google opened a flagship 100,000-square-foot campus designed by Frank Gehry a few blocks from Venice Beach, signaling a sea change in LA's tech job market, an opening bell of sorts. In an interview with *Fast Company*, Matt Mickiewicz, cofounder of Hired, another local player, is quoted as saying, "Five years ago, if you got recruited away to Google [in LA] and it didn't work out, you'd have to move back to San Francisco. Now, if it doesn't work out, you can do the next thing here."

Although Google doesn't release its employee numbers, it employs an army of programmers and innovators—more in LA than anywhere outside its Mountain View, California, headquarters. Venice Beach is also home to Snapchat, which *Curbed LA* called "the biggest space-gobbling tech company in Venice." In late 2015, Snapchat had a valuation of $15 billion and only 330 employees, making its employees the most valuable on earth, worth $48 million each.

But even as tech megaliths alter LA's jobs and real estate landscape, they try to let the LA work ethos seep into their culture. Google's LA campus has an onsite dog park, climbing wall, and surfboards for employees who want to catch a few waves during their lunch breaks. Snapchat started out in a small Venice bungalow, but as it's grown to occupy more than 40,000 square feet of Venice Beach real estate, it's also marketed itself to prospective programmers as a workplace with a laid-back beach vibe. In late 2015, Snapchat acquired the lease to a palatial beachfront penthouse, featuring a 5,000-square-foot glass-enclosed deck with a fire pit, Jacuzzi, and a geodesic dome. Although Snapchat hasn't commented publicly on how it plans to use the penthouse, it's safe to say it won't be renovated into a cubicle farm.

Amy Johnson is an interior designer for Breather, a company that rents out spaces by the hour for working, meeting, or simply taking a break. Breather is a product of the creative economy because it caters to people who don't work at an office but have occasional needs for small, stylish places for meetings or sustained focus. Basically, Breather goes where the freelancers are, and its latest location is LA. Johnson, who is based in Montreal, had just returned from a month-long work trip to LA when I spoke to her. "I think Breather will be huge [in LA], but with a slightly different user base. In San Francisco and New York, we have a lot of young companies just getting off the ground using our spaces, and I think in LA it will be much more the creative industries that benefit from part-time workspaces or simply ones they don't need to drive all the way across town for."

The work culture emerging out of the LA boom is distinctive. "People really do seem to have a better work-life balance, if you forget about all the time you spend in the car," says Johnson. "Obviously there are exceptions depending on your profession, but people seem to wrap up the workday at a very reasonable time." Is the explanation as simple as the weather? It makes sense if you consider that while other professionals are bound by their workplace, people who make their own schedules can either be complete shut-ins or be living the dream, depending on what the weather's like. They can stay in sweatpants and eat nothing but takeout for days at a time, or take a midday hike and spend the afternoon working at an outdoor cafe. Five months of the year—that's the difference between working in New York and LA.

"Buzzfeed Motion Pictures has a pretty sizable campus here in Hollywood, and a couple of weeks ago, we had one of those beautiful summer days that will inexplicably happen in early February. Instantly, the morale of the entire company was lifted, and it just felt good to be working. Having comfortably accessible outdoor space 325 days a year is pretty amazing," says Woods. For people who work in front of computers all day but who could, weather permitting, take the laptop outside, the weather is a critical quality-of-life factor.

Will the dizzying spiral into post-boom unaffordability that befell New York and San Francisco land in LA? It seems unlikely, if only thanks to the city's sprawling geography. But changes are afoot, and anyone who's lived in the city over the past five years can feel them. "Even though I've only been here for four years, the city has changed so much," says Woods. "The move toward higher-density living is threatening to ruin a lot of the things I loved about LA when I first moved here. The apartment below mine just rented for almost twice what I pay, and I'm scared the rents are already getting close to NYC or SF levels. I completely fell in love with this place when I moved here, and it's sad to see it changing so rapidly. But with such an expansive geography, it still has a ton of room on the margins, and creative industries will be able to find a home for decades to come."

Since the start of the 21st century, if you wanted to make a movie—a romantic comedy, say, with a young, stylish protagonist—you'd have set the movie in New York or San Francisco. LA was too weird, too film noir, too much of a character in and of itself. *Drive* is set in LA. *Boyz n the Hood*. *Point Break*. *Magnolia*. But LA's transition into the heart of mainstream storytelling is well underway. Case in point: *Love*, the hit Netflix series produced by Judd Apatow and written by Paul Rust (who also stars) and his wife, Lesley Arfin. Before long, LA will be the backdrop of romantic comedies on the big screen, too. And the wise-cracking supporting cast, sun-filled coworking spaces, and endless iced-coffee breaks will be there, too. Art imitates life, after all. ◻

Why I Moved to LOS ANGELES

Los Angeles' burgeoning buzz hasn't just attracted the attention of media companies and tech startups—it's also ushered in a wave of individuals who now call LA home. For insight into what working and living in LA is really like, we surveyed six creatives on why they made the move.

Interviews by **Sachin Bhola**
Photography by **James Andrew Rosen**

Lee Tilghman, shot outside of Cookbook Los Angeles.

Lee Tilghman

The birthplace of so many culinary trends, Los Angeles is home to countless food-industry workers. One is food stylist Lee Tilghman, whose career has taken off since she moved from New York to LA last year.

Describe what you do.
I'm a food stylist and recipe developer. Also, a workshop teacher, a consultant, and a caterer. I deal with plant-based foods. Throughout all of those mediums, food is my art. I have a blog where I share recipes and talk about food; I'm particularly into the clean-food movement and plant-based foods.

I work with a lot of brands and do a lot of consulting. I also food style commercials. I love to work with food to make it something that's appealing to people. Food porn, but healthy. That's my thing. It's tasteful food porn. This started in New York as a hobby, but it really took off and turned into a career when I moved out here.

You've been in LA for a year now—why did you decide to move?
When I visited LA, I felt a movement happening here of young creative professionals thriving, instead of just surviving like they do in New York. I wanted to thrive, and I felt like I would be able to, especially in this community I am surrounded by in Echo Park. I know a lot of people in food here—people have community gardens, are members of their local CSAs, everyone's just really involved with their food. So I was like, "I really want to be a part of that [movement]."

Do you ever feel like you're missing out by not being in another city?
I think with the food scene in New York, people are more interested in high-end gastro-cuisine; people are looking for a gourmet, fine-dining experience. Whereas people here, when they go out to eat, they're looking for food that's sourced ethically, that's healthy and good for them. And if they're eating meat, that the meat's been treated with respect. Angelenos want to feel good after they eat, because LA is a day-based city. What I mean by that is people are really active during the day, and the city kind of shuts off at night. Then you have a place like New York, a city that never sleeps. People are looking for different things in different places.

I don't have that fear of missing out at all. I think with social media I can still keep in touch with everything that's going on in New York. It's funny: When I was living in New York, I had that fear of missing out if I didn't go out. But when I left, it all went away.

What do you think you can achieve by being in LA versus another city?
First of all, it's a little bit more affordable than New York. People out here are able to pursue their dreams because it's a bit more affordable. People are taking risks out here. People are chasing their dreams out here. So much more, I think, than in New York.

A lot of people in New York are stuck in a job that they don't love or whatever because they're on a path that's like—the risks are higher. There's less space, there's fewer apartments, there's less disposable income. Out here it's more relaxed. You can get away with having a studio, you can have a house. The pace is slower. People are able to pursue their dreams. And they're surrounded by people who are doing the same thing. I'm so inspired by it.

What are some of your favorite hangouts in LA?
I'm closest to Woodcat Coffee, but I also love going to Fix. Cookbook is a great place for me to get my veggies. They have really good produce when I'm in a pinch.

I go to the Santa Monica's farmers' market in the summer. I go there every Wednesday from April until September. I'm also a yoga addict and a frequent hiker, and I love midweek getaways to Joshua Tree and Ojai. I need nature in my life.

What's your favorite thing about living in LA?
Everywhere you turn, you can just get away and either go on a hike or go to the beach. You can drive your car and, in two hours, you're in Joshua Tree. You really can do it all. Everyone works really hard, but everyone also relaxes really hard. People are just a little bit more mindful and conscious here. It's a healthy mindset.

Derek Wood, shot in his home in Cypress Park.

Derek Wood

Derek Wood has the kind of life that makes you want to quit your job, move to Los Angeles, and pick up photography professionally. He's a fashion and lifestyle photographer whose clients include everyone from *Nylon* to Nike. Here's what he's learned about living and working in LA.

Describe what you do.
I'm a fashion and lifestyle photographer. I grew up on the East Coast in Maine and have been living out here for about eight years now. I shoot everything from portraits to fashion, lifestyle, some skateboarding, and a little bit of adventure.

What brought you to LA?
Growing up skateboarding. It's always been the mecca of skateboarding in the U.S., so it was always something in the back of my mind. I hadn't really spent any time out here before, so I just packed up all my stuff and decided to try it. I didn't have a place to live; I just moved straight out here.

What's your experience been like working in LA?
I think it's a really great city to start your career and to do photography in because there's a really strong photo and creative community here. I don't think New York is as much like that–I think it's a lot more competitive, and it's a lot more dog eat dog. You're not going to give a job to a friend, if you're, say, double booked. Whereas here, oftentimes, if I have a client who's coming to me and I'm already shooting that day, I'm going to give it to another friend, and we all work off of each other. So there's a supportive community here.

Do you ever feel like you're missing out by not being in another city?
I think there's different work in each city. I feel like New York is a lot more commercial and editorial; here it's more lifestyle driven. I think I'm in the right city for me. I like everything that's going on here. I think it's a really good time to be living in this city.

Also, I like to be able to get out of the city just as much as staying in it, so I need that balance. In a lot of other cities you are kind of stuck. I need to be able to jump in my car and hang out in the mountains and desert whenever I want to.

Speaking of which, what are the most unique things LA has to offer?
I go camping and exploring almost every other weekend, so I need to be able to have that quick drive out there. I think LA is really unique in that you can feel like you are a million miles outside of the city, and it only takes a half hour, 45 minutes, hour-and-a-half, and you are out 7,000 feet up in a mountain by yourself. And I still have the city life whenever I want that.

Tell me about your neighborhood and some of your favorite spots.
This is considered Cypress Park, which is a really small neighborhood in between Echo Park and Highland Park. It's a Mexican working-class neighborhood for the most part. It's really interesting, and there's a lot of flavor. It's nice being really close to Downtown and Echo Park and Silver Lake. As far as the art scene and everything, it's definitely over here.

My favorite bar is across the street. It's called Footsies. It's a nice, awesome dive bar. There's a pool table, it's dark, they play good music. When I'm staying in Cypress Park, I'm basically skateboarding around the corner at the Home Depot with my friends or I'm at Footsies drinking and playing pool. Otherwise I'm going to Highland Park, Silver Lake, Echo Park–just hanging out over there.

And what would be your advice for someone thinking about moving to LA?
Say yes to everything when you first move here. Because LA is such a big city, it takes a while to find your place in it. Oftentimes you can get stuck in one spot or another, especially if you're not going out.

Also, get involved with the community. With social media and everything, it's so easy to meet people now. My roommates–sounds really creepy–but I met them through the different social platforms and stuff. Sounds weird, but it's just the world that we live in now.

Rebecca Pieper and Matthew LaCasse, shot at Kitchen Mouse.

Rebecca Pieper & Matthew LaCasse

Since moving to Los Angeles two-and-a-half years ago, Rebecca Pieper and Matthew LaCasse have opened two vintage clothing stores in East Los Angeles (Highland Park and Los Feliz) that have quickly become go-tos.

Describe what you do.
Rebecca Pieper (RP): We buy and sell vintage clothing. It's not really about whether it's vintage-vintage or a certain designer. It's more about what we like and things we think people will like.

What made you decide to move to LA?
RP: We were living in Olympia, Washington, and I'm from LA. I was like, "I don't want to give up on having a life and a career and stuff yet." My family's here, and a lot of my friends are here now. I fell in love with it again when I was visiting.

Matthew LaCasse (ML): I was a little skeptical, because I lived here circa 2001. I was living in Burbank, just moved from Michigan to Los Angeles. It was an eye opener, and I wasn't quite ready for it at the time.

What would you say is the most challenging thing about working in LA?
RP: The heat. It's really hot all the time. Seasons don't exist, so we're constantly shopping for the same season.

ML: But people in LA want to make believe like there's seasons. So we still have to merchandise things like, "Hey, it's fall, it's spring." Even though it very well is like shorts-and-a-T-shirt weather, we're still trying to sell our sweaters and stuff. So you have to be really creative with the way you merchandise things.

Do you ever feel like you're missing out by not being in another city?
RP: No. I miss New York sometimes. I was working in fashion there, and I just felt like it was really insincere. I like the people here. [They're] more bubbly and a little bit more open-minded.

ML: I don't think I'm missing out on anything. There are a lot of things that I miss about each city I've lived in. I miss being able to get any kind of food I want at any hour, which New York City life has to offer. But I'm totally content.

RP: The thing is, cities are constantly changing. What I feel like I'm missing out on in San Francisco doesn't exist anymore. What I feel like I'm missing out on in Brooklyn doesn't exist anymore. It's all changing so rapidly, but I feel like right now we're in a time and place in LA where we're getting the most out of it.

ML: We just rode the wave, and now it feels like everybody's flocking here.

Talk to me about Highland Park, the neighborhood you live in.
RP: It's a neighborhood that's changing. Every day, there's a new thing popping up. There's a business that's going out of business every day that's been here for maybe, like, 20 years or longer. For a while, there was a lot of controversy about new businesses coming into the area. Even though they're bringing money into the area, a lot of locals were fighting back. We got an eviction notice on our door. They put up a poster that said, "You're evicted because you are driving up prices in the neighborhood." I think it's one of those neighborhoods that was neglected for so long because there was a lot of gang violence here for most of the 1990s and the 2000s. But it's really beautiful, it's very scenic, you have views of Downtown from the tops of all the mountains. There's nice trees, nice parks.

What are your favorite spots in LA?
RP: Kitchen Mouse is good. They have great food that's vegan and gluten-free, which really suits the demographic here.

What's your go-to there?
ML: Dill quinoa. But we eat everything there, the whole menu. We eat there every day pretty much. La Fuente is this little Mexican restaurant we like to go to. It's super old-school.

Do you guys throw events in the Highland Park store?
ML: We've only had three, but each one has been really successful. The last one had over 350 people. We had DJs, we had bands, and it was insane. Since then, we get people asking every single day, "When are you doing another event?" A lot of the musicians and all the people in the neighborhood are yearning for that. A place where they can all go.

Hrishikesh Hirway, shot at Secret Headquarters.

Hrishikesh Hirway

Thanks to Hrishikesh Hirway, we have a podcast actually worth listening to. He produces and edits “Song Exploder,” which invites artists to dissect their songs and has included discussions with Björk, Joey Bada$$, and Toro Y Moi. Hirway is a musician himself (The One AM Radio and Moors) and has also scored films. He credits Los Angeles for his success.

Tell me about your journey to LA.
I was born in Massachusetts, and I went to school out there. I was playing in bands and started putting out records and playing shows on the East Coast. But I always wanted to score films. I was trying to figure out how to do it, and there was a part of me that knew I had to move to LA to do it. But it was a scary idea; I didn’t know anybody out here. I originally tried to go to New York and see if I could do it there. I lived in New York for a year, and it wasn’t really happening. So then I packed it in and decided, "OK, I'm going to give LA a shot."

Why LA?
I wanted to do film, and there was a lot of music coming out of LA at the time that I really admired. There were a couple of record labels, like Plug Research and Stones Throw, that were putting out some of the best electronic and instrumental hip-hop. I thought by being near that and by being near film I might be able to figure out the next step of my career.

What advice do you have for someone who's considering moving to LA?
I would say not to be discouraged when you visit. LA is a really hard place to visit but a really great place to live. Because it's so big and there's so much to see, it can be overwhelming. But as soon as I moved to LA, I loved it. I loved it more than when I visited.

I visited and was like, "OK, I think I can do this." I was a little bit skeptical, but as soon as I moved here, I fell in love with the place. Because the neighborhoods are really important, and you really establish your life in a neighborhood more so than the city in general.

So if somebody's moving here, I would say don’t get discouraged by a visit. Find a neighborhood that you know you can be comfortable in.

Speaking of neighborhoods, tell me about yours.
I live in Eagle Rock, which is a little bit further flung from the sort of heart of things. But it's a place where I can have a little house with a little studio. It's really nice; it's quiet. It's a growing neighborhood.

What are your favorite places in LA?
My favorite places are in my neighborhood. I love CaCao Mexicatessen. It's this taco place that combines a very traditional approach to Mexican food, because they hand-make the tortilla right there, with a little bit more of a gourmet twist on them. I love Scoops, the ice cream place that's in Highland Park. And Secret Headquarters is my place to get comics.

I love Secret Headquarters, because it has the styling—it's almost like a cigar shop or something. It feels like the classy place for aficionados. Having been a longtime reader of comics, I love the idea of framing comics in kind of a classy, more literary way.

What would you say is the most challenging thing about working in LA?
The city is really big and so people are spread out. Especially for creative people—it's a little bit hard sometimes to connect with people. You are not going to an office and seeing the same people every day. I work in my studio.

Is it common for people to work from home?
Yes, a lot of people work from home. And so what you end up doing is kind of solitary. Especially in my world—a lot of people who work on music or work on podcasts—it's just them and a pair of headphones. You are cutting yourself off from the world. The trickiest part is making sure you can still stay connected outside of the internet.

How do you do that?
There are times in my life when I institute the “say yes” policy. That means that any time I'm invited by a friend to go do something, I have to say yes. Regardless of what I think I have going on or whatever else my priorities might be. I have to make sure I go out and do that thing. Sometimes you won't feel like it, and you'll be like, "Oh, I could just stay in and watch Netflix." But then I go out and do it, and I always feel good in the end.

Interview by **Sacha Jackson**
Photography by **Michael Anthony Hernandez**

Alicia Zumback, shot at Breather's flagship in Los Angeles.

Alicia Zumback

There's nothing quite as satisfying as working for yourself, which is why producer Alicia Zumback started CAMP Productions, her Los Angeles-based company. Though the ex-New Yorker calls LA home, she's a frequent flyer who's at ease on either coast.

Describe your work.
I run CAMP Productions, a stills production company I started about two years ago. We're a team of producers who coordinate jobs for everything from music to fashion to movie posters.

What motivated you to start your own business?
Production has a pretty basic formula that all companies use to arrive at an end product, which is having a photoshoot that runs smoothly and beautiful images. I had a vision of how production could be a little different. I wanted to create an environment that made people feel like they were coming into a fun, enjoyable, communicative space for the duration of our shoot. I also felt that creating the same space for the prep and wrap of jobs for our producers and coordinators was important.

Working alongside producers and coordinators who do amazing side projects, like making movies, creating homemade leather goods, playing in touring bands, brings a uniqueness to CAMP. We want to encourage creativity and individuality as a company.

What's the setup like when you're on set?
Locations are always changing, so one minute we're prepping in a beautiful mansion or rolling fields or by the beach, then we'll do a production meeting in an RV and wind up in a Breather [beautiful, on-demand workspaces] for fittings and castings.

How long have you lived in LA?
I moved to LA eight years ago, partly because I wanted to try something different, but mainly because of '80s hair metal bands like Poison and Guns N' Roses.

Was it love at first sight?
Oh, no. I hated LA when I moved here. I hated it for about the first two years. And everyone from New York was telling me, "You're going to regret this. It's going to be the biggest mistake of your life!" Then, after the two-year mark, I started to make friends and find the hidden gems of LA, and that's when I finally fell in love with it.

What do you miss most about your hometown?
I grew up in Saratoga Springs, which edges on the Adirondacks. I miss the nothingness to a place like that. It also has a huge horse-racing season in the summer, so I miss five-foot-tall men offering to buy my drinks.

What neighborhood do you call home?
I recently moved to Mount Washington/Eagle Rock. It places me within 10 minutes of my favorite hikes, which I do daily with my dogs, and the neighborhood lends a great deal of diversity. Everyone in the area is doing something creative, which allows you to step into that mindset as well.

How has LA changed over the time that you've been here?
LA is transforming into a bigger city. It's become big in the sense that it's setting fashion trends alongside the likes of New York, and creativity is becoming more visible and spilling onto the streets, as opposed to having to open doors to find it.

There's definitely a wave of creatives moving to the city.
There has been a spike that has hit LA, and I feel like I am part of the wave and really enjoying it, along with the people on it. I do feel I will always be bi-coastal and have a heartbeat in New York. Yet I am so happy to be immersed in the LA arteries.

What are the challenges of traveling between New York and LA?
I don't find many challenges other than no cell service on flights.

Favorite place in the city?
LA is so ever-changing that each day has a uniqueness that allows for a new adventure. As long as my dogs are there, that's my favorite place. □

Words by **Deepak Sethi**
Illustration by **Antoine Tava**

My Life as a Stand-Up Comedian

Deepak Sethi reveals what the business of comedy is really like in the entertainment capital of the world.

I'm in Las Vegas on a Tuesday. It's the day most Los Angeles comedians arrive to do a week of shows. Sin City is like comfort food for LA comics—only a four-hour drive away, and you can work paid gigs every night.

I finish my set and am sitting on a couch backstage. My heart's beating fast; the set went great. A packed house of drunk tourists. I can hear them laughing at the comedian currently onstage. It's always been my dream to do stand-up comedy in Las Vegas, and here I am: the Strip, the bright lights, the city that Frank made. It's happening.

Except I'm in a spice closet.

The couch I'm sitting on is in the middle of an 8'x10' spice closet that doubles as a green room. It smells pungent, and I've already sneezed six times.

The theater is in a casino I won't name, but the show is no-frills. Comedians from LA come here to work out material, because where else can you find a better crowd? People from all across America—even the world—come here. If your set works here, it will work everywhere.

I'm doing what my heroes did before me. George Carlin, Jerry Seinfeld, Don Rickles, you name it—they've probably sat in a spice closet, too. They've probably sat in worse. I'm paying my dues.

The comedian finishes, the crowd gives him loud applause, and he joins me in the spice closet, smiling ear to ear. "That tweet I posted is blowing up," he tells me. He shows me his phone, proudly. His tweet has more than 50 likes. He's more happy about that than the set he just completed.

"There's no better time for a comedian than right now," says Jamie Flam. Flam is the artistic director of the Hollywood Improv. Nearly every big name has played the Improv, and many comedians got their start there. Eddie Murphy performed there when he was 15, Jim Carrey when he was 19. Tonight, Dane Cook and Kevin Nealon are on the lineup. I talk to Flam in the attic of the Improv, which has been converted to a lush podcast studio and green room. Two years ago, Flam gave me my first shot at doing the Improv. I like to call him the "power broker of fortune" in LA comedy because getting a spot here is so tough, which is why, he says, comedians in the city are trying other venues.

"The number of venues in LA has grown. Now you have 15, 20, or 25 comedy shows happening in the city every night," he explains. It's true, and comedians here try anything to put on a show, including hosting their own. A friend of mine performed a show on a school bus. Another friend hosts one in his backyard. "People are doing shows out of their own houses, living rooms, taco stands. There's so many more niche shows now because the audience has become savvier," says Flam. I'd like to see the Yelp review of that taco stand.

With the spike in demand for stand-up comes greater expectations that didn't exist a decade ago. For example, social media.

When you try to get booked at a club in LA, you can be sure as hell the booker is going to review your Twitter and Instagram profiles. Followings matter. What you say matters. “Everything is a reflection of you, especially if you’re an unknown comic. [Bookers] immediately have access to so much information,” Flam says.

Today, social media can spark a comedy career. I’m living proof. Five years ago, I was a chickpea salesman in Toronto, Canada. I moonlighted as a blogger, tweeted dumb thoughts, and got noticed. A year later, I was in LA working as a staff writer for *Family Guy*, my first job in entertainment. I tell people all the time that if it weren’t for social media, I’d still be selling chickpeas. (Which, by the way, is not a hard sell. They’re delicious.)

As Flam chats with me, Dr. Drew Pinsky walks in to grab food. He’s hosting a show downstairs that is broadcast like a podcast. Podcasts are the essential ingredient in the LA comedy scene. Nearly all of my comedian friends have either been a guest on one or have hosted their own. Podcasts have upped the comedy game by giving fans a behind-the-scenes look at the business.

It’s so much a phenomenon of the present that I had to get my own. I host a podcast called “The O-1” in which I interview Canadian comedians (who are on O-1 visas in the U.S., hence the name). We do it in the attic of the Hollywood Improv. I’ve learned a lot from my colleagues, and the one person I’ve had on more than anyone is the guy who gave me my start, Christopher “Kid” Reid.

Kid, as everyone calls him, forms half of the famous hip-hop duo Kid ’n Play. His movie credits include *House Party* and *Class Act*. It might surprise you that Kid does stand-up, but it’s no surprise in LA, where Kid does spots all the time.

I did my first spot at the Comedy Palace in San Diego. It was a sold-out show on a Friday night, and I had never been onstage before. Most comics will tell you that’s a bad way to start, but not Kid. He was the one who set it up for me. I remember being so nervous and hearing Kid’s advice: “Look, nothing I can say is gonna help you right now. So just get a glass of wine and relax. You look like a nerdy Indian writer. People will like that.” I got a Sauvignon Blanc, but it didn’t help.

I did four minutes and got a good response. Kid, in describing this to our friends, recalls, “Deepak got onstage and said the first joke off-mic. Nobody heard him. So he got a little scared. But then he said the second one into the mic, and they laughed. That’s when his balls grew 30 pounds, and he said, ‘I got this shit.’”

That’s a flattering account, but I really didn’t “get it”—and I still don’t. I do shows every week and some go well, some not. But it’s a process.

Even OGs like Kid are still working—still hustling—amid changes in the comedy biz. “When I came up in the 2000s, the Improvs were something you aspired to, but that wasn’t always an option,” says Kid. “These bars-turned-comedy clubs were the key. You had to earn the comedy club.”

I meet Kid backstage at a Mexican restaurant in Pico Rivera that has transformed into a comedy club for the night. We’re waiting to go on, and there are about 200 people outside. Kid starts to explain the genesis of the scene: “This is born out of being excluded. When the traditional clubs don’t include Latin comedians, they say, ‘Let’s do our own thing and let’s fill this need.’ There weren’t any Latin comedy clubs, but they’ll flip their bars into a comedy club, and they created a circuit. What it’s done is it gives stage time to a lot of great comedians so they can get better, get good.

Latin clubs are awesome, because Latin crowds come to laugh. It’s not like going to a Black club. In the Black clubs, it’s kill or be killed. Black people want you to be polished. Don’t be ‘working shit out’ in front of Black people, because they will crush your spirit. I specifically did not come up from the Black clubs, and I’m me. They don’t cut anyone some slack. Being famous will buy you about five minutes, and then they’re coming with torches.”

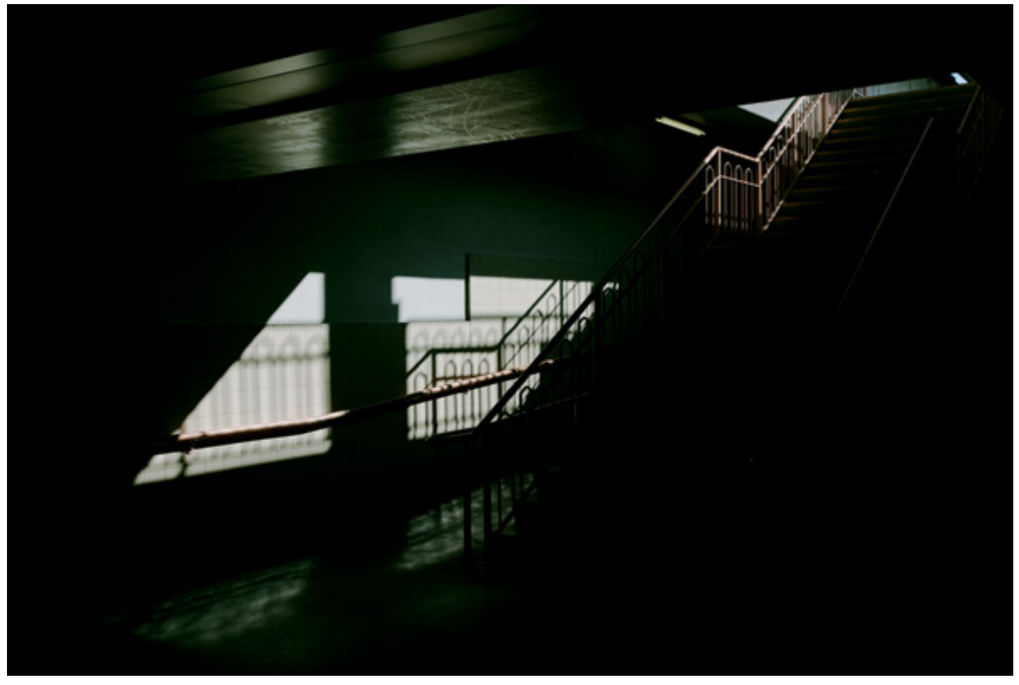
I like to brag that I got Kid on social media. I showed him Twitter a few years ago and urged him to give it a try. Now he loves it. And like many comedians in LA, he’s using it to share jokes and continue to build his audience. But he believes that even though social media has added to stand-up here in LA, it’s the same as it was back in the day. “I can appreciate any comedian who takes advantage of social media to improve their brand. But, at the end of the day, when you hit the stage, you still have to deliver. That never changes,” he says.

Here at the Mexican restaurant, I see a throng of his fans assembling to meet him. They love him. But backstage before showtime, Kid is all business. “Even if you’re famous, that will buy you some time, but it will not be a substitute for talent. There’s the show and there’s the business. Now the business is social media and the show is the show. If you don’t got no show, you ain’t gonna have a business.”

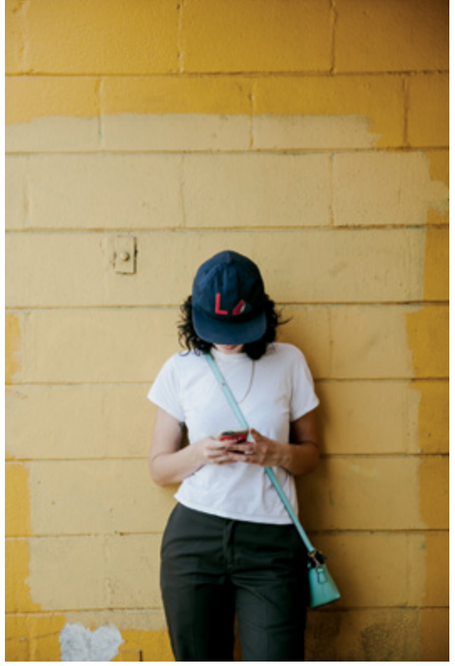
I go onstage and do about 15 to 20 minutes. Kid does an hour and a half. After the show, in the green room, he tweets a joke about the upcoming election. He’s happy, both with his set and his social media. And I’m happy, too, because this green room isn’t a spice closet. ◻

Why Take Public Transit in Los Angeles

For one LA native, a day riding buses and subways proves novel, arduous, and humanizing.



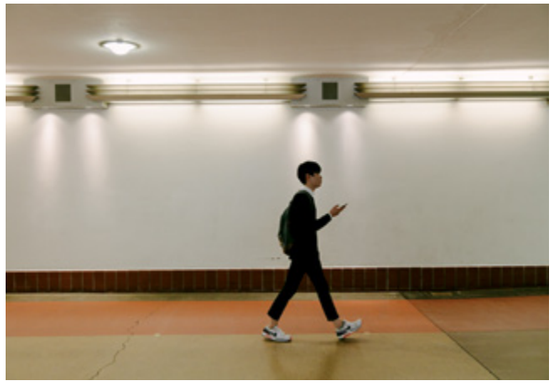
Words by **Yasi Salek**
Photography by **Farhad Samari**



Joan Didion famously wrote that the freeway system is “the only secular communion Los Angeles has.” It was one of Didion’s many musings on the state of California and its “sense of Chekhovian loss.” I can’t say I haven’t felt a little Uncle Vanya here from time to time, but it’s Didion’s view of driving on the city of Angels’ vast system of interconnected, often congested roads that speaks most directly to me.

I was born and raised in Southern California’s cult of car worship. (They let you cut your hair, so that part is chill.) Specifically, I came of age in the South Bay during a time when you were nobody if you didn’t drive a lowered custom-color painted SUV. The point is, I’ve used the public transportation system in LA exactly once, in 1993, when the Red Line first opened after seven years of construction. I was 11, and my whole family drove to the station (in our perfectly respectable white Honda Accord), parked, and then rode the shiny new Metro line two stops west from Downtown, got off, and rode two stops back. We did this for the novelty. It was fun, the way you laugh when you throw back a handful of bacon-flavored popcorn—it’s interesting, sure, but you certainly won’t be eating it every day.

So when I was asked to write a piece about experiencing the LA public transit system firsthand, I was tickled but also wary. The indoctrination of single-occupant automobile life runs deep, and it speaks to more than just a shortsighted take on urban planning. The way we drive here in LA is indeed communion: It’s worship at the altar of solitariness, of insulation

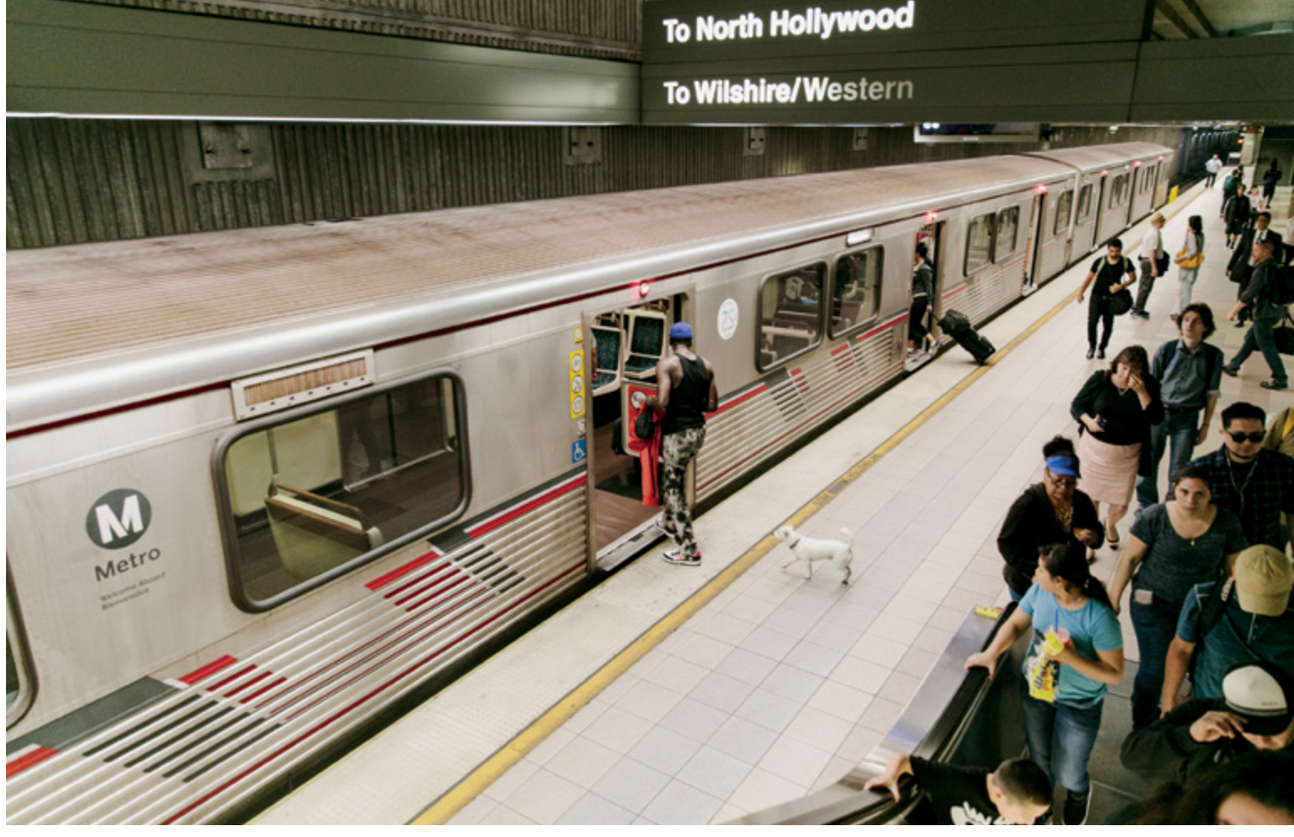


from the outside world, from the other. To leave the safety and isolation of my car for a more social (but also liberating) experience was such a test of my psyche that, for a moment, I wondered if this whole idea was cooked up by my therapist.

Though it goes against the very neurotic core of my being, I didn’t do much planning. I wanted this experience to have a spontaneous feel. After all, LA is a city where anything can happen (or is that New York? Or Las Vegas? Who can say, really?). It’s also a city where a certain bus might only come, say, once an hour. This is true of the bus that runs along the route closest to my home in Lake Hollywood, which I discovered when our photographer, Farhad, arrived at my house roughly 15 minutes late (he had been communing in traffic).

After killing time for 40 minutes, we set off for the road where the bus stop is located. There’s not even a sidewalk there, so I was surprised to see another woman already waiting at the stop on Barham Boulevard. We didn’t have a strict plan for the day, but we knew we wanted to get Downtown and go from there. The 222 pulled up about 15 minutes later than the time indicated on my trusty Google Maps app, and we hopped on with clear eyes, full hearts, and an inability to fathom what losing at public transportation could possibly mean.

Then we learned our first important lesson of the day: The bus only accepts exact change. That’s not to say they won’t accept your money if it’s not in the correct denomination (in this case, $1.25). What it does mean is that if you happen to



only have a $5 bill, like this intrepid journalist, you have now paid $5 for a $1.25 bus trip. Accepting this small setback and the bus driver's conciliatory shrug, we made our way to the back to take a seat. The bus was full but not crowded, clean, and fairly quiet. Fifteen minutes and something like 14 stops later, we got off at the Hollywood/Vine stop, directly into the hustle and bustle of the Walk of Fame, where a homeless man promptly informed me that before his sex change, he "would have given me a real run for my money." I smiled and silently congratulated myself for having applied mascara that morning, and we headed across the street to the Metro station entrance directly in front of the glittering W Hotel.

The cost of an unlimited one-day TAP card is $7, and we each purchased one at user-friendly self-serve kiosks. The station looks like it could be the lobby of a Hollywood-themed Las Vegas hotel: There are sculptures of retro cameras, reels of film in homage to the movie industry, and columns that have been fashioned into brightly colored palm trees. It's a nice nod to the city's cultural history and adds a sense of whimsy to a mundane structure. The city has poured millions of dollars into the Metro system since I rode it when I was 11, and it shows. The trains here run promptly and often, and we boarded one headed toward Union Station.

I stood at the end of the car, holding a nearby pole. To my left was a young man with a dog in his lap, a scrappy white terrier of sorts. To my right a middle-aged woman in a pink T-shirt sat in a wheelchair, facing the window. "I have an emotional support cat. I could bring him on here if I wanted to, sit him right in my lap," she tells me. She says she is bipolar and HIV positive, and her children got her the cat as a Christmas gift several years ago. She loves him very much. When the train slowed to a stop at the Wilshire/Vermont stop, she exited and shouted, "Charlie Chan—that's his name, the cat!" and disappeared in the station.

This is the other kind of communion, the exchange of intimate thoughts and feelings. She gave me her thoughts, and I had feelings. It was unsettling but also lovely. Buoyed by the interaction, I approached a cool-looking young woman with dreadlocks sitting a few feet away from me on the train. She didn't seem too taken aback when I hit her with a perky, "Hi!" Most of my friends can't imagine a fate worse than an Uber driver striking up a conversation with them, but talking with this stranger was nice. She told me her name (Melissa), age (22), and that she recently moved here from New York. I asked what she thinks of our train system. She said she's pretty happy with it overall, especially with how cheap it is, but she wishes it ran later (the trains in LA stop at midnight). She was on her way to her job in Beverly Hills about 6.5 miles away from her home in Koreatown. She had a longboard with her, and when she got off the train, she hopped on and rode off.

We continued on the Red Line and arrived at Union Station at 11:50 a.m. The building is a mix of Art Deco and Spanish Colonial, and the station features intricately tiled floors,

soaring ceilings, and enclosed gardens just off the waiting area. People scurry through the long hall, heading to trains or to the bus depot outside. I met a young couple from London who tell me they flew into San Francisco and took the train down to Santa Barbara, then to LA. They were headed to the Red Line to go to Hollywood. “I think we're the only people in America who don't drive,” the man said with a chuckle, before he and his girlfriend grabbed their impressively small rolling suitcases and each other’s hands and walked away.

In the waiting area where passengers lounge in comfy-looking leather armchairs, there is a black piano protected by a velvet rope barrier. There’s something so lovely, so charming, so handsome-man-in-a-tuxedo-playing-Christmas-carols-in-the-mall-during-the-holidays about this that I snapped a photo. Later I learned that Union Station often hosts live events, such as Bach in the Subways, when Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra musicians play free concerts in this room.

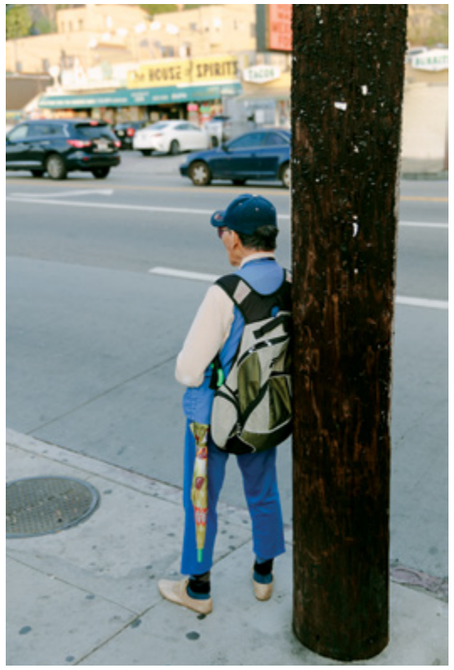
We left Union Station and came out into El Pueblo, a historic area in the oldest part of Downtown. It was sunny, and we walked through Olvera Street, a tree-lined marketplace where vendors sell a mix of traditional and modern wares, like piñatas, Mexican blankets, and iPhone cases. I hadn’t been there since I was in elementary school, when I bought a tiny set of worry dolls that I promptly lost. This time I scored a pink baseball cap emblazoned with the letters “L” and “A.” We reached the end of the tiled walkway and found ourselves at Cesar Chavez Avenue, just near Main. We had planned on

taking the bus to Chinatown, but it’s so close that the time difference between taking the bus and walking was about two minutes, so we opted to walk.

Like most Chinatowns, the one in LA is filled with traditional Chinese foods and goods (and smells). Walking up Broadway, I stumbled upon a small shop brimming with bootleg band T-shirts and made quick work of snagging a black Misfits one for a cool $7. We wandered into the courtyard that houses one of my favorite bars, Hop Louie. It was a little early in the day for a stiff Mai Tai, but, luckily, I remembered that Burgerlords had opened up in the same courtyard. We ran into the owners, Max and Fred Guerrero, having lunch with the crew from their gallery, Slow Culture, which happened to have relocated to Chinatown just a few weeks earlier. I was starving and was glad to commune with a delicious cheeseburger and fries.

After lunch, Farhad and I found ourselves full and sleepy, so we decided to walk to the Yellow Line station a few blocks away to make our way to the Arts District for a coffee. Our day hadn’t exactly been a model of efficient transportation; I felt more like a tourist in my own city than a savvy commuter.

On the platform, I spotted a handsome young man with bright pink hair and a flower tucked behind his ear. He told us his name is Abe Shaffer and that he moved to LA from Arkansas six years ago at the age of 16 to pursue his dream of breaking into the entertainment industry. He raps and sings, and for a while he used to model, but not anymore. He likes the freedom



of the train and that it's fast. He has a monthly unlimited TAP card and spends a lot of time using it just to "check out new places." The Little Tokyo stop is closed, so we all got off at Union Station and said our farewells.

The fact that we were back at the station we had been in only a few hours earlier is probably not that unusual for LA commuters. The train system, in particular, covers a fairly limited section of the sprawling, massive monster that is LA County. Dulled by our déjà vu moment, we caught a shuttle bus to the Arts District.

After a short stroll from the bus stop, we stumbled upon Blacktop Coffee, which is the kind of place you would really love if you have ever called yourself a "coffee snob" (but, also, please stop doing that—no one likes it). We sat with our drinks on the outside benches and enjoyed the afternoon weather. Renewed and fortified by the miracle of caffeine, Farhad and I set out to find our way to our final destination, Echo Park, where we wanted to watch the sun set over Echo Park Lake. Google Maps directed us to a bus stop a few blocks away to catch the 704. After 20 minutes of waiting, there was still no 704, and the sunset was nipping at our heels. Farhad and I exchanged a look and, at the same time, both burst out with, "Should we just take an Uber?" But just as I was about to whip out my iPhone, the 704 came rolling along, so we acquiesced and sheepishly climbed on board (with exact change in hand). We made it to the lake just as the gorgeous pink sunset was in full swing, and I took a nice photo of a well-lit goose.

After eight hours, three buses, and several trains, I was in an Uber heading home. My driver and I exchanged online-dating nightmare stories the whole way, and her tale of a man who asked her to meet him at Starbucks and tried to split the latte bill with her nearly had me in tears. We talked and laughed the whole way home, and I realized that communion—the kind that involves human connections, not the Jesus or Didion kind—can be found in places Angelenos often pass over: the bus, the train, or the sidewalk nobody walks on in LA. And, yes, even in an Uber, if you forsake the religion of isolation long enough to let yourself connect with another human being. □

Moby, shot in his backyard.

The native New Yorker on why he left for Los Angeles.

Moby

Interview by **Sachin Bhola**
Photography by **Ye Rin Mok**

Bordered by Los Feliz, Griffith Park, and the Hollywood Hills, Moby's home is engulfed by nature. Greenery—much of which he tends himself—fences the perimeter of his modest-looking home. For Moby, 50, this environment is a sanctuary and a far cry from his native New York.

Born and raised in and around the city, he became as emblematic of New York as he was of electronic dance music in the 1990s, which is why it came as a surprise to many that he decided to move to Los Angeles five years ago.

Today, Moby is outspoken in his criticism of the new New York, a place that he describes as a culture of consumption rather than creation. I visited Moby at his home to discuss, among other things, the two American cities that will forever be set in opposition.

Tell me about the first time you were in Los Angeles.
I was in the Los Angeles airport in 1988, but I'm not going to count that because I didn't leave the airport. The first time I was actually here, I think it would have been 1990 or 1991.

What was that like?
It was very interesting. I was born in New York; I lived most of my life either in New York or just near it. All I knew about LA as a New Yorker was that a lot of great punk rock bands had come from here, that a lot of vapid culture had come from here, and that there might be a beach and some palm trees. That was kind of the extent of it.

I was trying to reconcile those things, like how the Germs and X and Black Flag came from the same place as David Hasselhoff and Pamela Anderson. Also, up until very recently, the rest of the world kind of looked at LA with some patronizing disdain. Coming from New York, I had been exposed to that.

Did you share that opinion?
I had never been here so I couldn't take my opinion about it too seriously. Then I remember getting off the plane, going to the hotel, checking in, and I played a show at the Mayan Theater downtown. I loved every part of it. There was just a sort of cornucopia of oddness here.

Even from the first time I came here, I sort of understood that LA had all these disparate elements—geography, geology, climate, demographics, architecture—that on the surface were completely incohesive but when combined made a whole. I really appreciated it. It's odd, because most cities have a simple cohesion. When you're in New York, you know it's New York; every last millimeter feels like New York. LA doesn't have that. That was my first time here.

Now that you live here, how has your opinion changed?
Oddly enough, if there's one word—and I don't think anyone would agree with me—that I would use to describe LA, it's "gentle." There's just a gentleness to LA. Not always. Clearly, there's aggression, there's violence. There's lots of stuff that's not gentle. It's more the way in which people live here, for the most part, is kind of gentle. People go to the farmers' market. People put their kids in adorable, little preschools. People spend time with their families or

they sit in their backyards and play with their dogs.

Why do you think that is?
I think it's because, ultimately, Los Angeles isn't the city. It's a county with a few hundred different towns and small cities within a county. Traditionally, in an urban environment, you have people stacked on top of each other. That doesn't exist here. Everybody just has a little more breathing room. I think that has an inherent, calming effect on people. Especially the fact that you can be outside in January and February, and you can see green, and you can go hiking, and you can look at things that humans didn't create.

When and why did you move to Los Angeles?
I moved here five and a half years ago. I was born in New York, and I thought I'd live there forever. I changed, and New York changed. I became less interested in going out every night. I became less interested in that cult and culture of money. Also, I stopped drinking. New York became a very dynamic, compelling playground for the very, very wealthy.

When I was 20, New York was my city. I was a starving artist. All of my neighbors were starving artists. New York was a city for starving artists. At age 40, I was a musician in a city populated by Wall Street employees, which is not, in any way, to denigrate Wall Street employees. It's just not my people. I couldn't find anyone to go to brunch with. Sunday would roll around, and Sunday in 1990, I could find hundreds of people in my neighborhood to go to brunch with. Sunday in 2008, no one because they're all corporate attorneys and what not.

Do you visit New York a lot?
I go back maybe twice a year.

Do you miss living there?
No. I miss rain. I miss trees that can grow without irrigation. I love New York. It's where I was born, but I don't miss the crowdedness. I don't miss the lack of nature. I don't miss the pathological obsession with money. I don't miss the culture of consumption as opposed to creation.

LA and New York are both wonderful places. Pitting one against the other is silly because they're both progressive, wonderful places. I really just prefer the culture of people who wake up every day figuring out what they can make as opposed to what they can buy.

Do you ever feel like you're missing out by not being somewhere else?
As time passes, I become much less interested in the things that people make because people are kind of dull. Museums and consumer goods–it's all been done. I'm interested in humans who can map the human genome and the Large Hadron Collider or people who are concerned with issues of spirituality and philosophy. Cities where it's just pavement and people making things for rich people just has no interest.

If I'm missing out, it's about not being around more nature. I'm around a lot of nature, but if I were to move anywhere, it would be somewhere without a lot of people. To me, every city, even if it's cosmopolitan, is, by definition, so provincial. It's a super dangerous thing about cities: When you're in a big city, you think that the world is anthropocentric or anthropomorphized. People who live in a big city, they really think that humans matter. They really think that what they're doing matters. You forget that you're on a planet that's five billion years old and that, for the most part, what humans make is not very significant. I really like putting things in a more broad, nature-based context as opposed to hanging out with people in Brooklyn who make things for rich people.

A good friend once told me that just like people can bring out the best or worst in you, so too can cities or environments. Clearly, LA seems to be the right environment for you.
Yeah. This might sound a little esoteric, but I really like being in a place that has uneven surfaces. I think that humans, we didn't evolve to exist in places that only have right angles. Most cities only have right angles. That's really restrictive on our creativity. If you live in a place that's nothing but right angles, eventually your thinking becomes limited. There's something about going for a hike and walking over uneven surfaces and looking at uneven surfaces. It's just more imperfect and expansive. That's what I like about nature. Every last inch is uneven.

Talk to me about life in LA. What are some of your favorite hangouts?
Lately, I've been going to my own restaurant [Little Pine] a lot. I really like Trails Cafe just up the street.

Are there music venues that speak to you?
In terms of music venues, I like any that's close to home and not crowded. I don't know. I don't go to bars. I don't go to nightclubs. I don't go to concert venues unless I absolutely have to. I don't go to DJ things. I'd much rather go hiking and have dinner with friends.

What's been your most memorable experience in LA thus far?
When I first moved here, Benedikt Taschen, who owns TASCHEN, invited me to his house because he was having a dinner for Tadao Ando, the architect. He lives in–actually, he just owns it–this amazing John Lautner house called the Chemosphere, which is one of the most remarkable examples of modern, residential architecture on the planet.

I was in the Chemosphere having a broken-English conversation with Tadao Ando, looking out at all the lights of the Valley, perched on the side of a hill. It was the middle of winter, and it was warm. Sometimes it's easy to get caught up in the shortcomings here. People complain about the traffic. But it just struck me how, for all of its shortcomings, there are unique things in Los Angeles that don't exist anywhere else in the world.

LA is so big, you can never judge the entirety of it. Instead, you kind of have to curate your daily experience. You find your community. You find your people. That becomes your base. Of course, you leave your community, but you always come back to it. For me, that's this area. Los Feliz, Silver Lake, Echo Park–this is where most of my friends live. It's where Griffith Park is.

There's a universal understanding of New York. The New York you see in media is, more or less, what you get. I remember living in LA and having friends visit. They were always a little disappointed, because it wasn't what they imagined it to be–beaches, palm trees, and young Hollywood versus the countless strip malls and suburbia. People think there's a universal understanding of LA, but there really isn't.
Because LA's not a city. LA has a problem in how it's perceived. People come here and they expect LA to behave like a city. Whether you're in Milan or Paris or Sydney or London or New York or San Francisco, all those cities behave like cities. What that means is all the good stuff's in the middle. Maybe a couple of outskirts, but if you want to find the good stuff in Paris or New York, you go to the middle.

In LA, all the good stuff is scattered around the periphery. I feel like the best thing that could happen to LA in terms of how it's perceived is if it stopped calling itself a city and just called itself a county. If you think of it as a county that has 30 of the most amazing towns filled with the most amazing, creative people, then it makes sense to people.

What excites you in music these days?
Good music. When it comes to music, I don't really care who's making it. I don't care where it's from. I don't care when it's from. It's like the iPhone becomes the ultimate equalizer. If I'm listening to Spotify or whatever, whether it's a recording from 1970 or from 2016 or 1940, I don't really care about any of that. There's nice, new music. There's nice, old music.

What are you listening to these days?
Everything from Led Zeppelin to WC to James Blake to whatever gets played on KXLU and KCRW, Marc Bolan, The Clash. I mean, everything. I don't really think about it too much.

I read that you dislike touring. Do you think you'll ever do it again?
I hope not. I hate touring. I'm putting out a book in May, a memoir. It covers my life from 1989 to 1999. I have to do a book tour for that. That seems interesting because I've never done it before. To go on tour and stay in the same hotels and play at the same venues–I drive my manager crazy because all I want to do is stay home and make music.

Staying home and making music doesn't generate any money. Whereas if I went on tour, I'd make a lot of money. He just doesn't understand why I choose the creative pursuit that doesn't make money and ignore touring, which would. I feel like life is short. If you don't have to do the same thing over and over again, why would you? If you're a musician who's aging, you accept that you're aging. It's so sad when musicians pretend that they're not aging or musicians who pretend that they're still as relevant as they were 10 or 20 years ago. That's just not how it works.

What else do you have coming up this year?
I'm going to put out a new album in September. When it comes out, I'll be 51 years old. I don't really expect anyone to listen to it and certainly not buy it. If they do, that's fine. If they do, that's great. That's not the goal. The goal is to enjoy making it. Then, I put it out and see what happens.

I'm starting a bunch of different animal welfare initiatives and continuing to work on my restaurant. The restaurant is also a nonprofit. Any money that comes into the restaurant goes to animal welfare. In a very realistic way, making music is almost what I do for fun, and animal rights is my job. It's funny. When I encounter people in the music business who actually take the music business seriously, I'm like, "Music business is stupid. Music business is nonsensical." Music is beautiful, but the business of music is just a silly distraction. Whereas the philanthropy I'm involved in, to me, that's real work that could change the world and could change human health and could change animal welfare.

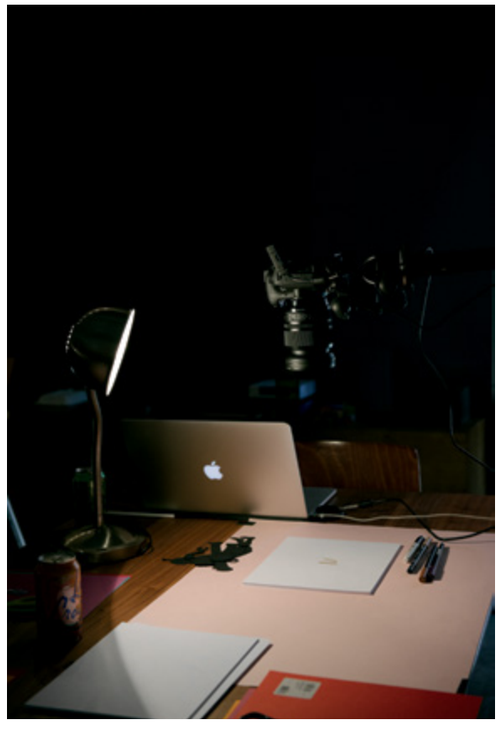
I just put out this weird four-hour-long ambient record. I basically made all this ambient music for myself to listen to when I do yoga and meditate. I had about four hours of it. I thought, "Why not just release it?" I'm giving it away for free on the Little Pine website. It's such a fun way to release music. The only publicity is an Instagram post.

That's very telling of the time we live in.
If people find it, great. I understand lots of people don't want to approach their art or commerce the way I do, which is great. I mean, I'm lucky. I have no kids. I saved up enough money, so I don't really need to work that hard. Other people have kids or need to pay their rent. By all means, tour and have fun and take the music business seriously. To me, the ultimate luxury is to not take the music business seriously.

Well, you created this life for yourself and that in itself is inspiring.
Hopefully.

Can you share any details about the album that's coming up?
It's a really fun electronic new-wave record. It think it's really energetic and happy. That's what I hear when I listen to it. I was exercising one day. I realized that when I exercise I only listen to energetic music. At the same time, I was making more subtle, esoteric music. I was wondering, "Why not just make energetic music?" because it's what I like to listen to. It's that.

And gentle?
Gentle, and it's joyful. □



A Poketo workshop on stop-motion animation, instructed by Sean Pecknold and Adi Goodrich.

Poketo

Interview by **Sachin Bhola**
Photography by **Celia Spenard-Ko**

Ted Vadakan and Angie Myung have created one of Los Angeles' most interesting boutiques by focusing on community.

On a Monday morning in February, groups of tourists, cameras in hand, have descended upon Poketo's flagship on East Third Street in Los Angeles' Arts District. The shop is indeed photogenic and quintessentially LA, with bright, minimalist decor and wares (home goods, stationery, accessories, and more) that follow suit.

Since launching in 2003, Poketo has worked with countless artists and brands, including Nike, Target, and the SFMOMA, and opened a second location in LA's Line Hotel. But what makes it stand out from similar-minded shops is its commitment to creativity and community. The store organizes workshops throughout the year on everything from cake making to podcasting, attracting creatives and left-brainers alike. I spoke to Poketo's owners, Ted Vadakan and Angie Myung, to learn more.

How did Poketo start?
Ted Vadakan (TV): We met around the same time we started, around 2002 and 2003, and Poketo was really more of a side project than anything. It wasn't meant to be a business at all. I was working in film at the time, and Angie was going to school for graphic design. First and foremost, we wanted to have a big art show and to bring all of our friends together, and we wanted to make the show different. We had this idea like, "Why don't we bring our friends together that are amazing artists and actually create a product and throw a big show for it?"

And this was still with the mindset of it being a side project?
TV: Totally. We just got our close friends who were emerging artists themselves and asked them to be part of the show. We rented a community space in [San Francisco's] Mission District, and it was always a rotating space.

You guys began by making wallets in collaboration with artists. Why wallets?
TV: It was something that was easy for us to do, and it was really simple. I don't know why—just the barrier to entry was sort of low. And we wanted it to be something that was accessible. Not just art on the wall, but something that you could use and carry and have with you. So we had the show, and it was a major success.

Did you guys look at each other and think, "We're on to something?"
Angie Myung (AM): Yes, totally.

You were still in San Francisco at the time. When did LA factor into this?
TV: We had been in San Francisco for seven years, so just feeling like it was a bit closed. It's such a small city, which is part of its charm, but the ceiling was low for us. And so LA had this appeal because it was so big and it was so—it's so sprawling. There's so much to discover. We didn't really know too much about it.

AM: I think everyone has that seven-year itch to get out and move to New York or to LA. And we didn't want to move to New York, so we decided on LA. At the time, people were just starting to talk about it; right now, it's like LA is everywhere. LA is the place to be.

TV: We had never lived in LA. We would come down and visit. There was so much collaborative energy at the time.

This is around 2003?
TV: Yes, and at that time there was this great creative energy in terms of starting a business.

Were you seeing a lot of people launching businesses then?
AM: No. Apart from, say, tech people who were working for another company, we didn't know anyone that was starting their own. But when we came down here we met with a lot of people around our age who had opened up a store or opened a gallery or just started their own businesses. And I think that was really encouraging.

At what point did Poketo go from side project to business?
TV: Well, when we moved down in 2004, we were running it out of my parents' place in Long Beach. So we took that year at my parents'. That's when Angie was buckling down and trying to figure out how to get ourselves into these stores. How do we start to grow our product line? And that's when we started to put our energy just toward Poketo.

After wallets, we started to think about other things we wanted in our lives. We did our first run of plates with artists and stuff like that. We always thought about it as art for the everyday, which has been our tagline since day one.

It really translates. And it was an online business from day one.
TV: From day one, yes. Even from the very first art show. We built the website but also wanted to have this sort of real-world thing that we were doing, too. It was just online, and when we moved to LA, we started to really focus on how we can get it into other retail stores.

Are creatives in LA supportive of one another, or is it more competitive?
AM: Very supportive.

TV: As an example, this neighborhood in the Arts District, where we are, all of the business owners look out for each other. We're all friends. If we're doing an event or anything, everyone is included.

When did you move to this neighborhood?
AM: In 2007. We eventually found this place. This is, like, the first place we saw, and we thought, "Wow, this is 4,000 square feet and four times larger than where we were." We saw it as a storefront and it was great. We can do events here and people will come. But we didn't think that people would come just every day. We had no idea that it was going to be successful.

TV: There was such an excitement. We wanted to have a space where we can bring people together. All of the designers and all of the brands that we wanted to have in here. And it just became one of those things where we built it and then people started to come. It's so great. It's so cool having friends pop in and be like, "Hey, Ted and Angie."

Do you think it's fair for someone to walk into Poketo and think, "This is so LA"?
TV: I want people to feel that. Poketo can, of course, be beyond LA, because it is. We're not just LA centric, and we don't only focus on LA designers or artists. We're truly international. But I love that people can feel that sort of warm and accessible and fun LA vibe, but that's also elevated.

Is that LA vibe a conscious thing you consider when merchandising the store?
AM: Products come from all over the world. But I think our design sensibility and the lifestyle that we represent definitely feels LA to me. It is very colorful. It's bright, but at the same time it's minimal and clean.

What does Los Angeles mean to you?
AM: It's home and it's exploration and curiosity. My gosh, we've been here, like, 12 years. But I still feel like I don't know LA at all.

That's a good thing.
AM: No, that's a great thing. I'm always going to new places. I like to explore. I'm constantly discovering it. On weekends we try to go to Monterey Park. But there's all of these Chinese restaurants that I have not been to. There are, like, thousands and thousands of different kinds of cuisine from different parts of China, and I've only scratched the surface.

How would you compare what it's like to start a business in LA today to when you started?
AM: I definitely see more people opening than ever before. Back when we started, I think entrepreneurialism was still kind of like, "Why don't you find a job instead?" But I think because of the recession and seeing that there's no job security—also, people who are younger than us, I think they see that being an entrepreneur is, like, "the thing," you know?

I constantly meet people who are taking our workshops or coming here to interview us or they're all starting their own magazine or their coworking space or they want to someday open up their own shop, and then they kind of look up to us as role models.

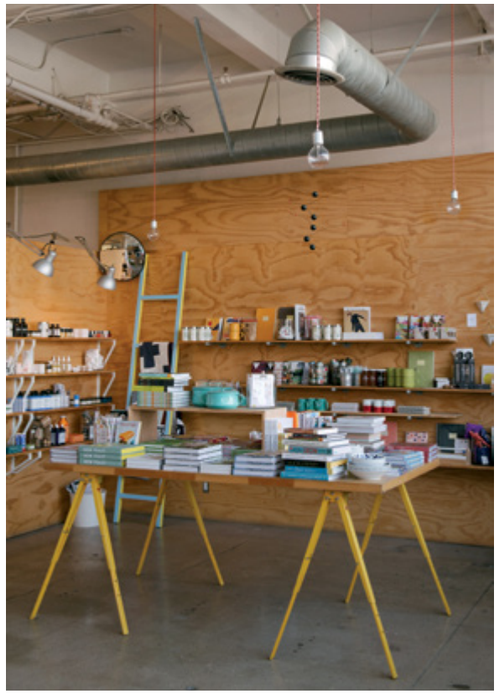
I think the reason why we weren't scared was because, one, we didn't know what it took to be a business owner. And, two, we didn't mean to start a business at all. It was completely accidental, and we just kind of went with it.

People think starting a business requires years of study.
AM: Right. I mean, there's no better way than just doing it on your own.

What have you learned about how to operate a small business in Los Angeles?
AM: Traffic really does have a big factor. During Christmas time, we see people from the west side of LA drive here and they say, "I drove all the way from Santa Monica to shop here." And it's a big deal. It is a big deal because of traffic. Traffic kind of stops you from doing anything that's further away.

TV: I think weather. As soon as it rains, people just don't know what to do. In LA, where you live is where you shop and where you go to eat.

Does LA support its artists commercially?
AM: Yes, definitely. I think that LA has the ability to support their own. I know some cities, like Portland—I know that when I talk to the artists in Portland, they say that most of their work is actually exported to different cities.



Ted Vadakan and Angie Myung, shot inside Poketo's flagship location in LA's Arts District.

Let's talk about the Poketo Workshops. How did that come about?
TV: We started it around 2012, around when we opened up the store. It was always something that was on our mind. You know, you take art and design and just being able to connect with people. To inspire people—it was a natural extension of being able to promote creativity and having a creative lifestyle, which is what so much of Poketo is.

We would actually do a lot of the workshops here in the very beginning. We would set an area up in the store as sort of a gallery, I guess a community space. It was rotating. It was a store Monday through Friday, and then we would have an art show or a workshop on a Saturday or Sunday. People were stoked that we were, like, making and creating and bringing people together. Like, when you were at the workshop yesterday, Sachin, everyone was just stoked to be there.

The energy was great. It made me want to participate. In fact, whenever I visit Poketo online, I always look at the Workshop section first, because I'm interested in doing something that's more hands-on.
AM: We just love that. And we also love working with the artists that we bring on.

How do you go about choosing the themes for the workshops?
AM: It's totally whatever speaks to me.

TV: Oftentimes, it even starts with your personal relationships. And knowing the work that they do and how amazing they are. Everyone is so down to collaborate and be creative in LA. And to share.

AM: So many of our workshop teachers have never taught before until we invited them to teach. They'll be like, "I've never taught before, and I'm not sure." And then we'll be like, "You'll be fine." And then it's just having that confidence, and it also gives them confidence. Yes, so much of it is like, "Who do we know?" And, like, our podcasting workshop. We're friends with Hrishi [Hrishikesh Hirway].

I spoke to him for this issue. That's a good example of how connected the creative community is in LA.
AM: Oh, how cool.

What are some of the most memorable experiences you've had from the workshops?
AM: We know several people who actually took our calligraphy workshop and started their own card line. And there is this one woman, we call her "the number one workshop person." She literally comes to every workshop and she drives all the way from Newport Beach, which is an hour and a half away. She's a single mom with four kids and she's a photographer. She would come to every single workshop just because. I don't know—I think it's her time of relaxation and no duties and to focus on herself.

Last summer, we taught a cake workshop, which we're doing again, a whole family came from Kuwait to take the workshop. We thought it was a fraud because we were like, "Who is coming from Kuwait?" We were almost about to cancel it, and we wrote them again. They were like, "Oh, no, no, no. We're taking a vacation to LA, and we want to take your workshop."

Wow. That's incredible. Do you guys see the workshops being taught in other cities?
AM: Yes.

TV: Generally, for Poketo on the retail end, we want to open up more locations, and so that's something that we want to do for sure. Not only in LA, but also in other cities.

AM: But first in LA. The thing is, we take risks, but we are careful. We don't just jump into it just because. I think that's one difference between us and some other people.

TV: Imagining a Poketo in all of the major cities in the U.S. and being able to have a home where you can have those workshops and do those things. I think it's incredible, and I think it's one of those things that is definitely something in our future.

You know, it's not a race for us. Even the way we've grown—it's organic.

AM: We're self-funded, you know. We don't have this huge backing behind us at all. So that's what makes it very slow, but very steady. It's very unexpected that we opened this door. And then it's unexpected that we started doing workshops and that we not only make our own products but carry other artists and designers. So, yes, it really comes from our heart and what we're interested in, and I think that's why it's authentic.

Are the workshops an important part of the revenue stream?
TV: It's definitely. It's one of those parts of business that just has continued to grow. So even when we started in 2012, I think we only started maybe one workshop a month. And then now, a couple of years later, we're doing almost one a week. It's great. Like you were saying, that's the first thing that you go to. On the business side, it's growing definitely.

I think about all of the different art shows that we did from the beginning. The workshops are kind of like that same energy. It's people who are having fun and who are together. It's like your friends are in the same room making life. □

The Gift of Sound

Photo by **Elizabeth Weinberg**

In Los Angeles' cutthroat music industry, one company is bucking the norm.

Interview by **Jenna Gottlieb**

Music is the lifeblood of Los Angeles. The entertainment capital of the world, the sprawling, sunshine-filled city is filled with record labels, historic studios, and emerging talent. It's also home to an impressive number of socially conscious entrepreneurs who have goals beyond spitting out the next Kendrick Lamar.

A leader of this movement is Bridget Hilton, whose company combines her passion for music and social change. Changing the world through music may sound like a lofty goal, but Hilton and her team are doing just that.

After a career in the music industry, Hilton started LSTN, an LA-based company that produces high-quality, design-forward headphones. In collaboration with the Starkey Hearing Foundation, LSTN provides a hearing aid to a person in need for every pair of headphones sold.

There are an estimated 360 million people around the world with hearing loss, and many live in developing countries without resources to treat it. LSTN has given the gift of sound to more than 20,000 people in countries like Kenya, China, Sri Lanka, Uganda, Peru, and the United States.

I recently caught up with Hilton to talk about the development of LSTN, her partnership with Starkey, and what it's like to be a socially conscious entrepreneur in LA.

Why did you create this company, and why headphones?
I started working in the music business as a teenager, and I knew from a young age that music would be my path in life. At 16, I got my first job at a music venue in Detroit, and I eventually worked for Universal Music Group. I spent nine years there and worked with some of my favorite musicians. But I wanted to do something on my own. I didn't want to work for "the man."

I hated that in the typical corporate setting there are only two weeks a year to get out of town–I wanted to travel more. Music has been my biggest passion and I thought that music and charity was a natural combination. We started the company to change the world through the power of music. We chose headphones because there was nothing fashionable or cool on the market at the time. Our saying is: Our product sounds good, looks good, does good.

What makes your headphones different?
We wanted to focus on wood products from reclaimed wood. It makes the headphones look vintage and super unique. That's actually one of my favorite parts of the company. Each pair of headphones and earbuds is unique and provides a complex tonal signature to ensure that music is heard the way it was meant to be heard–with full bass, crisp highs, and everything in between. We use bamboo, cherry, zebra, ebony, and walnut wood for the products.

What was the trigger for starting LSTN?
I saw a video on YouTube of a woman hearing for the first time. She was around the same age as me, and it really inspired me. I couldn't imagine my life without music, and here was this woman who had never heard a single song. I did a ton of research and found that the Starkey Hearing Foundation was doing some great work. It's been such an incredible experience to be able to give the gift of hearing and play music for thousands of people who are experiencing it for the first time. Music is so important, and it shouldn't be something that's dependent on age, status, or location. I had to do something to help. My business partner, Joe Huff, and I would not have started the company without the hearing cause.

Tell us more about your work with the Starkey Hearing Foundation.
They travel around the world and help people hear. Since 1984, the foundation has given more than 1.8 million hearing aids to people around the world. When we started, I didn't have money to give them or anything to give them. I wanted a vehicle to help them help more people. We started in 2013 and have been working with Starkey ever since, traveling to Uganda, Sri Lanka, Peru, Mexico, Indonesia, Kenya, and all over the U.S. Based on the missions we have gone on, it's amazing to get to play music for kids who have never heard it before. It's really the best feeling in the world.

What was your first trip with Starkey like?
The travel part of this has definitely changed my life. The first trip we went on was in the summer of 2013, when we went to Peru. It's one thing to donate money, and that's great, but we wanted to be part of the experience, to see the look on people's faces when they hear for the first time.

What was the greatest challenge in starting LSTN?
Headphones is a pretty crowded market. Before we launched, we did our research and made a list of the top magazines, blogs, and newspapers, and we sent them the product to test. It was important that the sound quality was great and that the cause was the cherry on top. We needed to get it right and get people excited by the product first, then learn more about the cause.

What's it like to work in LA compared to other cities?
I was born and raised in Flint, Michigan, and I've been living in LA since 2007. This is a great city to work in, and not just because of the weather. There are so many people working on the social entrepreneurship side of business here. I'd say the majority of socially conscious businesses are located on the West Coast.

It's really hard to start a company and to maintain it; it can be pretty lonely. So it's great to have people who

LSTN Zebrawood Troubadours.

Hilton with 8-year-old Valentin in Toluca, Mexico, after he receives hearing aids.

Hilton and co-founder Joe Huff with 3-year-old Esther in Kampala, Uganda.

have gone through similar experiences. We could not have done any of this without others helping us out. Our network is everything to us, and LA does not disappoint.

What's the biggest challenge of working in LA?
There's a lot of traffic. And it's an expensive place to live. We could have done this in a cheaper location where we wouldn't have to pay super-high rents with a high cost of living. But it's all worth it to work in this community.

What's the LA entrepreneur scene like?
In LA, it's a little different. Cities can be pretty divided. San Francisco is very tech-based, New York is known for finance and media, and so on. In LA, we have the entertainment industry in our backyard. If we wanted to meet with Universal or Warner Bros., they're in the neighborhood.

And it's not only the music industry, but movies, television, comedy, art, and fashion. LA is such a creative city. When you meet someone new, it's typically, "I work in movies or music, art, I'm a writer..." There are so many interesting people here whom we get to meet. I see a certain motivation for creative aspirations and causes that I haven't seen in other cities.

Is it important to be involved in local community-building initiatives?
We have done LA-based events at USC, for example, where we give local kids hearing aids. It's important to give back locally. We have also hosted events for friends and colleagues who are local entrepreneurs. During those events, it's really a time to reflect on what's working and what isn't working. We're pretty involved in the local entrepreneur scene. It's important to talk and network with other LA-based businesses.

What advice do you have for people looking to start a business in LA?
Start small and test before you go big. That's what we did. A lot of people want to start something but never do because they think it's too hard. People always get held up in the beginning. But there's something to seeing your idea grow and getting excited every day working on something that you're passionate about. I've learned more in the last three years than I learned since I started working.

Also, don't be afraid to fail. Just get started. And be authentic. Having a cause you believe in is good for business, good for company morale, and good for personal reasons. □

Alex Olson

On being a Los Angeles expat in New York.

Interview by **Sachin Bhola**
Photography by **Noah Kalina**

Many come to Los Angeles to escape, but for some natives, it's a city they must leave to start anew. Such is the case with professional skateboarder Alex Olson, who moved to Greenpoint, Brooklyn, three years ago.

Olson, 30, has pursued various interests, including his unisex streetwear line, Bianca Chandôn, which is sold at Dover Street Market and Supreme. I spoke to Olson about life and business in the city.

What have you learned about yourself since moving to New York City?
Wow, let's go right in, huh? I guess so much. It's a hard one to answer. What excites me and what doesn't. What makes me motivated. But also learning what you don't like. From living in the city and being around people, kind of understanding how others tick and how you tick, and how you correlate with those people. People's motivations motivate you, and that's probably why a lot of people want to move [to New York], is to have that energy. It's a heavy question.

I've spent a great deal of time in Los Angeles. Whenever I'm there, I always feel more at ease. Not necessarily more motivated, but it definitely brings out a more peaceful side of me. City life, like New York's, can be chaotic. There's that great energy you speak of, but there's also a nervous one.
This gets my thoughts going. I definitely feel the same way with the nervous energy. I definitely feel like my generation, everyone's so focused on how they're going to survive, in the sense of how are they going to live and how are they going to make money. New York is somewhat of a... I mean, it's kind of lame to say this, but there's a huge thing of nepotism around us. And if you don't come from that, you kind of feel like, "Well, shit, I won't be able to live in New York forever." You know what I mean?

Oh, I do.
It's like, "I can live here for only X amount of time until I get sick of it." There's the very few and fortunate that come from money, that you're surrounded by, and it kind of makes you feel less worthy. Do you really want to feel like that as a person? Is that who you really want to be around, and why do you want that? Also, I think with bullshit media and everything, it's kicked up a lot of dust in a sense of making us question, "What are we doing?"

New York City has those transient vibes, as you mention. I've been here for a few years, and I've already seen people come and go, and come back again. Do you consider New York your home now?
I feel like I've planted my roots [in New York]. I always wanted to go there, and either one obstacle or another was stopping me, and I couldn't. My family is from LA, and I've been in LA for the last month. I call New York home now. There's just something about it that I want and I need. Also, I'm somewhat of a recluse. So going out and walking around and seeing people spontaneously makes me enjoy it, and I get that thing that I don't get in LA. In LA, you probably can go a month without bumping into someone.

That is a tragic side of LA.
I don't like to compare the two, because they're so different from each other. If anything, I'll probably move—after New York, it's not going to be America. I don't see myself staying here. If I can't stay in New York, then it's going to be somewhere, either a city like Paris, or somewhere very remote where it's the polar opposite of both cities.

Where does that come from?
I fantasize about surfing, and I can't surf very well. And living on a farm and just going out and surfing. I've watched too many Patagonia films. But, then, I know in reality if you actually had that you'd probably go stir crazy in some sense.

You've been skateboarding for a long time, and it's something you're passionate about. But even when you care deeply about your work, you sometimes fall out of love with it. That's something I've experienced before, and I almost feel bad about voicing it because it makes me think I'm ungrateful for doing what I love. I'm wondering if you've ever hit those walls. And if you have, how do you fall back in love with your work?
This is hard to explain. For me personally, I definitely have hit that wall. I'm not considering myself an artist when I say this, but most artists or creatives hit that wall after, maybe, six, seven, eight years of doing it. And they maybe want to be validated for something else. So, then, you kind of start searching. But once you start searching, you realize that all the things that you are searching for, you go back. Or everything that you search for relates back to the thing that you were trying to get away from. And then you start appreciating those things. So, for me, it was at a time when I was 24, 25, when I was wanting to experiment and go outside of my comfort zone and try new things and stuff, and didn't want to be known as a skateboarder.

And then I realized it's a really nice place, actually. It took me a long time to realize it, come back full circle, and fall in love with it again. And then removing the things that bothered you and building the walls around those, and enjoying the things you do like. So that's my take: You got to build the walls and understand what you don't like, and take the good from the bad.

It's important to build those boundaries and to voice them. People often don't do either. What are you working on these days?
Skateboarding, really. I mean, I've almost hit a second wind with—not hating skateboarding, but a second fall-

Alex Olson, shot in Greenpoint, Brooklyn.

ing in love or a third falling in love with it. Because now I'm 30. All the younger kids are so highly advanced, way better than I am. I feel like this is kind of my last little hurrah. If I have a moment to keep going, this is the time to do it.

I feel like this is my last window of being a professional skateboarder. My body is getting older. And I [can't] even keep up with what the kids are doing now, but I would like to try, at least.

Your posts on Instagram make me laugh, especially the ones where you're playing with gender norms. You've also been outspoken about homophobia in skateboarding. I'm wondering where all that comes from.
I think from my family, really. My father is pretty open and loose. My grandfather is a pretty warm person and likes to make jokes. So it runs in the family in some way or another, and just growing up with my friends. Also, skateboarding is—we communicate by making fun of each other, almost. More so than showing affection, actually. Making fun of each other is a way of showing your interest in that person. That definitely comes off wrong, because I do that to other people who don't come from that, and they're like, "Oh, this dude is an asshole. Fuck this guy."

What's the biggest challenge you're dealing with right now?
Trying to get my company afloat. That's really what the challenge is. Learning the business.

I spoke to Brendon Babenzien in the last issue about going from Supreme, where he had a larger team and more resources, to doing Noah on his own. What's your experience been like with Bianca?
We didn't really know what we were doing with it, and then it just kind of took shape and took off. I'm still somewhat in denial. I think with Brendon, he got investors and he was a little more wise and he had a vision. Whereas for [Bianca], the vision was like, "Oh, I skateboard, and I like dance music, and I like fashion, and I like old '90s fashion." Let's throw it at the wall and see what sticks. And, hopefully, it will work. And it did.

How big is your team?
Two people [laughs].

Wow. That's about the size of our team. It's not easy.
No, not at all. I would like to grow that. If I were to give someone advice on starting a business, I would say know what you're jumping into. Don't just do it for fun, because the backend is not fun.

I've learned so much in terms of cuts, designs, and fabrics, and what this does and what that does. It's opened a whole new chapter of my life. And figuring out the construction of things—that's been a lot of fun, going to a fabric house and looking at fabric.

It's product knowledge. And you probably now look at other people's clothing, and you have that insight.
Oh, yeah. I'm insane now. I'm somewhat of a picky person, but now I'm sick. "Oh, this is terrible." "This is bad."

Is there anything people don't know about you that you would like to share?
I'm pretty open. I try not to shy away from anything. I am shy. I have my insecurities. I'm trying to think of something that will sound inspiring. Fuck, I don't know, man. I wish I had something that I could think of.

You definitely strike me as an open person.
With Prince dying—there's so many things that he kept under cover. It's so interesting that he had all these other things. Sometimes, I wish I was more like that than being open. I usually put my foot in my mouth.

You said you really like dance music. Is there a particular kind?
I think dance music is literally anything that gets you going, moving. It depends on when it strikes and if the mood is right and what emotion you're feeling. But it's usually more upbeat and more happy. Right now, I've been really into looking for techno music and understanding the history of that and where everything comes from and where everything has gone.

But you know what? Here, I have something for the answer of what people don't know about me.

Tell me.
I was in special ed my whole life.

I had no idea.
Yeah, I'm sorry. I hope that wasn't awkward. □

Interview by **Sachin Bhola**
Photography by **Ye Rin Mok**

Hamish Robertson

On being a working artist in Los Angeles.

Hamish Robertson moved to Los Angeles from New York City four years ago and has since established himself as one of LA's leading artists. He works on a variety of projects but is perhaps best known for a hobby that launched two side businesses: Vacation Days, a line of accessories, and a namesake label of beautiful prints inspired by nature, one of which closes this issue. I spoke to Robertson at his home in Los Feliz.

What brought on the move to LA?
I'd been in New York for about a decade; my wife had been there about 12 years. We were here every year for work. I was working in magazines, and I would come every year for the Oscars, and she would often come for celebrity interviews and things. She had a beat, so she was interviewing actors. She's a novelist, and her first book just came out. We'd come probably two or three times a year, and I loved it. It's just a beautiful, strange place.

What were you doing in New York?
When I moved to New York, I needed a job and there was a magazine. I chose this little magazine called *City*. They made an absolutely fantastic product that was one of those rare things where you can look back and say it was properly ahead of its time. It was principally a photography magazine, but we steered that toward art, design, fashion, and food. Kind of avant-garde photography. There was only something like *Purple* at the time that was dedicating pages to things that were a bit off-kilter.

I started off building the website—designing and coding the website. That turned into print production as well, and some of the design and layout for the magazine. I worked with Piera Gelardi, who became a founding member of *Refinery29*.

I ended up going the corporate route, ended up at Condé Nast working at *GQ* and then at *Vanity Fair*. That brought me back to LA a lot more, which was really nice. And something I really wanted to do was spend more time here as well.

And how did spending more time in LA turn into relocating?
My wife was getting a lot of work in Los Angeles, and we have a lot of friends here. We knew maybe 30 or 40 people who'd left New York for Los Angeles. So I talked to my bosses at *Vanity Fair*. It has an office here with a couple of people who I worked with regularly. And I said, "If you supported me if I went there, here's some stuff I could do," because I was the art director of the website at the time. I worked with them about another year after moving here. They were great. They were so supportive, and I transitioned into a role where I was producing and directing all their video content.

Do you ever regret leaving New York?
Not at all. We'd been there 10 years; we've done it. I think maybe it's different now that we have a child, as well.

When did you start your small businesses, Vacation Days and your namesake brand?
That first started about four months after I got here. Immediately upon moving here, I started making work again, which I really hadn't done for about eight years. In New York, I was working a full-time job and also had a lot of freelance work.

I'd done the Art Book Fair a few times in New York. It was always fun. And right after we moved here, they started doing the first LA Art Book Fair, and I had a table at the opening night. I went back after that preview night and said, "What else can I do? What else can I liven up my table with?" I had this series of work I'd been shooting, these photo collages. I was like, "I'll make some editions." So I did and took them in the next day and sold them all. All of a sudden, I had people wanting to carry the prints in their stores and talking to me about collaborations. Or about doing larger ones for the house they're designing. It was just all these opportunities. I loved making this work, and I didn't know what I was going to do with it. It was just a hobby in my spare time out here.

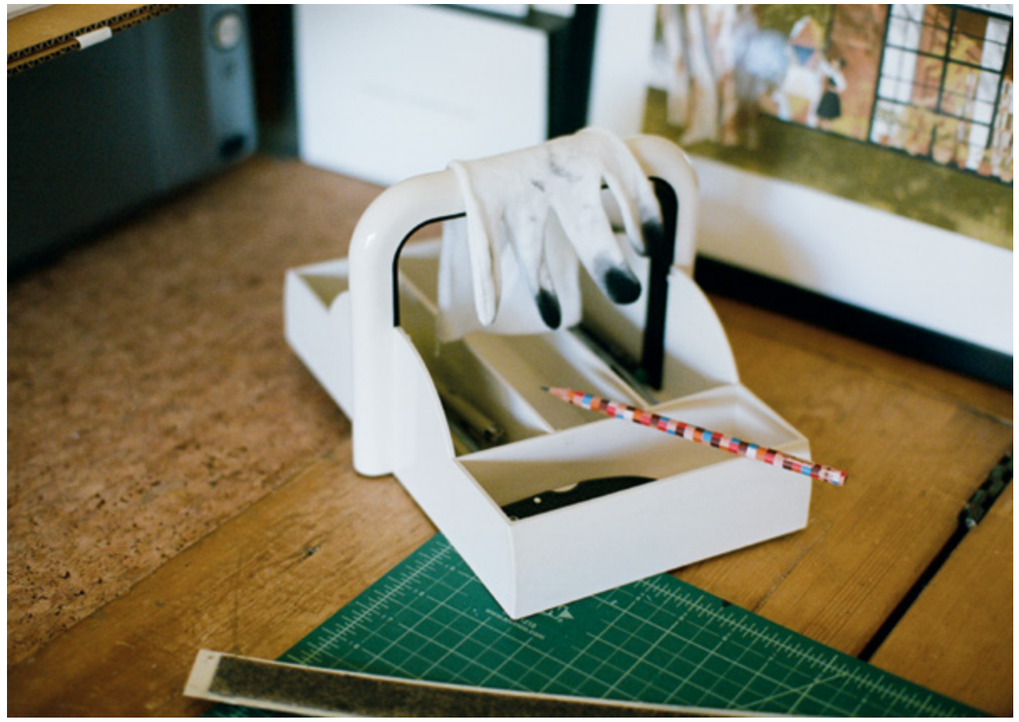
When an order comes in, you're fulfilling the order?
I do everything. I stick the sticker on the envelope. I love selling directly to people, and I like knowing the audience in that way.

Why did you start Vacation Days?
In all honesty, I think I wasn't confident about putting my name on something. I felt so detached from making work for myself under my own name for a long time. I liked the idea of having a brand. I was really inspired by a lot of these really fun Japanese brands. Vacation Days was actually going to be a store. I wanted to open a store. I wanted to start it online, so I was making some products for it: prints and accessories.

Prints and accessories—it was such a strange pairing. Sometimes people were confused by it, and they were like, "What are you doing? Which one is it?" And I agreed with them. By that point I was a lot more confident with the artwork I was making and thought I really needed to just put it under my own name. The artwork can be that thing and be in stores that it's sold in, and then Vacation Days will just be accessories. I'm going to work on a new collection, and I will probably change the name. I'm going to shelf that name, I think.

Talk to me about what you're focusing on right now.
I'm right in the middle of a project. I've been doing a series

Hamish Robertson, shot at his home in Los Feliz.



of artwork for Sony Music in the UK. I've been doing some record covers for them, which has been really fun. The first one just came out. It's for a guitar band called Sundara Karma. Hopefully I'm going to be doing another couple of singles and an album with them. That's definitely always been a dream for me, a real bucket list thing to one day hold a vinyl record that I designed the sleeve for.

I'm also trying to work on some new series for some new prints. I've been asked to do a gallery wall at a new store downtown called As Of Now.

What else am I doing? A lot of design work. I've just done a huge copy-editing project for a tech brand. All different sorts of clients, a lot of corporate clients. I don't put it on my résumé because it's all confidential, but it's interesting design work that I get to do.

You work from home.

Yeah. Moving here allowed us to both have studio spaces. Because it would have been the case of renting studio space somewhere for anywhere between $500 and $1,000 a month. I'd rather work from home so we can both be there and raise our child that way.

Do a lot of people in your circle work from home?

Yeah. I would say the people I know who work for themselves, more than half work from home. Some have studio spaces nearby, like a separate artist studio or design studio or photo studio. But a lot of the people we know are writers and designers, and definitely all work from home that way. But a lot of people also work full-time jobs, as well, and then come back and work in their home offices on their freelance work. People who've got an extra bedroom that they can have that space in.

What's the art and design community like in Los Angeles?

Welcoming. There's a lot of enthusiasm, a lot of positivity about it. Right when we were moving here was the whole, kind of like, pushing out of Jeffrey Deitch from MOCA, which seemed to have really divided public opinion. This sort of board of directors not wanting someone who has corporate ties and, you know, real experimental vision for what a gallery could present in the 21st century. It was pretty interesting to watch, but I think in the end there are a lot of independent spaces. It seems collaborative, it seems that it's positive and welcoming, which I don't think are words that are necessarily intrinsically linked to the art world.

The design community is very open, collaborative, and encouraging. There are great markets and fairs and shared spaces where people can have pop-ups and things. An understanding that a customer-facing opportunity for an artist is something that can be explored without you having to take a lease on a building. That's been great for me. It's been great to be able to present my work to the public and meet people through that and find opportunities through that.

What is it about Los Angeles that inspires artists and makers?

For me, that drive to make has always come from space. I think, for me and a lot of other people I've spoken to who are making things out here, that space is actually the city. Yeah, we moved into a place that had one extra bedroom than we had in New York, but it was going out and hiking, it was going out and driving into the desert, or just being in a place that isn't surrounded by claustrophobic buildings. I've definitely found that people here have been able to get space—be it a physical space, a place to work out in, a yard, whatever it is—just to say, "I've always wanted to try making a table."

And then these things kind of snowball. Like, our friend started an apron company here that's now seemingly in every restaurant in the city and on the cover of cookbooks. People are wearing them, and it's really exciting. They made one and manufactured it. Then people are like, "Can we get 40 of these by next week?" It's seemingly a city where you can say yes and then go, "Oh, shit. How do I make that?" And then you realize there's an entire neighborhood here of manufacturing.

Are businesses in LA supportive of local makers?

Yeah, often perhaps too much. I think there's definitely a lot of stores that are open that all have the same things.

I think when you visit a place, you want to see things that are of that place in some stores. I think Poketo does a really good job of it. They have a really good selection. You kind of want to receive everything they have in that store as a gift. Yeah, I mean just the wood they've used. Everything seems to be very much of LA, with the bright and airiness of it, the color, the fun they're having with it.

I think there's really cool mid-century strip malls up in Studio City and things that are sitting there empty. There is still a lot of opportunity here for interesting retail.

Nature is a big theme in your work. How does that tie into LA?

It's what I love about making work here. It seems that the city is kind of at odds with the nature around. It's like they weren't supposed to build a city here and nature is constantly destroying everything, whether it's earthquakes, or whether it's sidewalks that are all busted. Probably this is where the architecture started to bring the outdoors in, and that sort of thing. I find that really inspiring about being here.

It shows in your work and in your home.

Understand the nature around you and look at it in a different way. □

At Work with Nicole Rucker

Interview by **Melanie Keller**
Photography by **Elizabeth Weinberg**

The pastry chef discusses her role at Cofax, why she left Gjelina Take Away, and the food scene in Los Angeles.

Nicole Rucker's passion for food and community touch everything at Cofax, a café on Fairfax Avenue in Los Angeles. She's the winner of several high-profile pie contests, makes doughnuts that are as delicious as they are Instagram-worthy, and has locals stopping by just to say hi. Before joining Golden State Group (the backers of Cofax, Bludso's Bar & Que, Prime Pizza, and The Golden State), Rucker was the pastry chef at famed Venice eateries Gjelina Take Away and Gjusta. I spoke to the California native about her career arc and the food industry in LA.

Why did you move to LA?
It was impulse. I just moved here [from San Diego]. I didn't really have a reason. I had a friend who was moving here, and I moved in with her.

How did you get into baking in LA?
I was the receptionist in a graphic design office. It was one of those things where I was avoiding working in a kitchen because, starting out, you're only getting paid, like, $9 an hour. I'm not a server. I could never be a server in a restaurant, especially in Los Angeles. I don't have the DNA to make deals like that, to send a fucking headshot. So I took a job knowing I could get insurance and money, and it was very responsible.

Everyone in the office knew I was into food, so I would be in charge of creating the snacks for the whole office and making people's birthday cakes and things like that. That's where I met my husband, and he was very supportive. But the whole thing was leading up to me wanting to find a way to work in kitchens. It ended up that my husband, who was my boyfriend at the time, moved in with me and subsidized my career moves. From the get-go, he was really supportive and interested in helping me. He was like, "Yeah, I'll move in with you, and then you can pay less rent, and then you can go work in kitchens." He still is the biggest supportive career wrangler for me.

You said you went to art school in San Francisco for photography. Your desserts are always beautiful. Do you think about your food as art?
I think I see a connection in the process, but I don't see the food-as-art thing with the kind of stuff I do. But I will say that I gather a lot of visual ideas and cues—like that cat on the mural across the street from us right now. I'm really into looking at that. I took a photo of it. I put it on my wall at my house. I don't really know how that's going to translate, and maybe it'll make it into some food stuff. But it definitely gets me thinking about things.

Do you still use what you learned from school?
Yeah, I take photos every day. Recently, I got this small-format printer that only prints 4x6s. It's a Canon SELPHY printer. It's really cheap, but that's what's cool about it. It's kind of like a Polaroid camera, but it operates on WiFi from your iPhone. So now all the iPhone photos of plants or street stuff or food or whatever it is I can just print out. I put them on a wall at my house and look at them every day.

Is that part of your creative process?
Yeah. Because people take so many photos with their iPhones, and they keep them in their iPhone forever, and they never look at them again. It's been really fun working like that again.

What else is inspiring?
I really like sitting in traffic and thinking about stuff. It's like a traffic headspace. I actually find that to be a good inspirational time when I'm stuck.

What do you notice about the food culture in LA right now?
I think that anything's fair game here. There's not a lot of cultural boundaries. No one's really that concerned with authenticity. Obviously year round we have access to amazing produce and products that other people have to wait for. So I think in some ways it can make you a little bit jaded about Los Angeles until you leave and then come back, and then you realize it's really important because it keeps us constantly evolving.

How important is that year-round fresh produce?
I think it's put me on the map, so it's crucial. I don't know any other way. I grew up in San Diego and San Francisco, and in both of those places, it's still California. You still have the produce year round. In San Diego, especially, because it's even warmer there. I don't really know what that waiting is like. I never lived in any place other than California.

Maybe somebody reading this in New York City is like, "They have fresh peach pie in February?"
I mean, everyone who works in food in LA sends a photo of strawberries to someone in New York in the middle of February and early March. And it's a "fuck you" photo. It's like, "Sorry, girl. I'm just out here eating these strawberries." And every time they're like, "Why?" Yeah, I send that photo everywhere. Fuck you, New York. Just kidding.

What's the baking scene like in LA?
We're really in this bread thing right now. And that's cool. I think that's predominantly a masculine part of the baking scene right now. So I do think in Los Angeles, a lot of what's driving the scene and the press on all of our baking here is a lot of male-dominated bread-making stuff. I don't know why that is. I'm kind of wondering when that's going to change.

There are a lot of great places here. We have Huckleberry. We have Proof. It's a healthy scene, and everyone here is really into experimenting. Something I've noticed: I spent a week in New York a couple of years ago in January, and I talked to a couple of bakers. And we're using flours in different ways in Los Angeles that I don't think New York is that up on yet–like buckwheat and sorghum and things that in other places are getting more popular and more visibility.

Do you think that comes from accessibility, being an agricultural state?
Yeah, I also think it comes from it being a relatively young scene for baking, so it's definitely not beholden to, like I said before, any serious boundaries of authenticity about what should be. Here, it's just kind of a free-for-all, I think.

Why do you think doughnuts are so popular in LA? Because there's been a resurgence just the past few years.
I don't think that doughnuts were ever not popular in LA. LA has a lot of good doughnut shops.

Have you been to Randy's?
Yeah.

I haven't. Are they good?
You know, they're old-school doughnuts. I think they're good. But I can taste the era. Like, I can taste the palm oil or the shortening or whatever it is. You can taste things about doughnuts that are indicative of kind of more economical production. These [at Cofax] are expensive doughnuts to me. We don't make any money off of these doughnuts.

Really?
No way, man. But they make people happy. They bring people in the door.

Why did you leave Gjelina for Cofax?
I actually think this is probably one of the most important life lessons for anyone who is creative: Knowing when to go and leave is really important. And I had been thinking about it for a while because I knew that to get to the next step of becoming who I wanted to in terms of being a leader and a businessperson–I knew that I couldn't do it there. It was percolating for a while, so I decided to leave. And it was really difficult. I mean, I went to a therapist for a year. To decide what was next and why I wanted to leave and what was going on. It's really hard to walk away from money and community and things like that. It's a big decision.

Do you feel like you have more creative freedom at Cofax with what you make?
Yeah, absolutely. More important than creative freedom is that I have life freedom.

> "I think in small business, that's a really overlooked aspect of operating a business–how long you are able to retain people and still make it profitable for you and them."

That always trumps.
I think at some point you realize what you really need is some space and some headspace. When I left Gjelina, for a while I wasn't really thinking creatively because I had a lot of space. I had to learn how to be in that space and not be stressed out all the time. Then I started to be able to have creative ideas, just once some time had passed.

What's the biggest accomplishment in your baking career so far?
My biggest accomplishment is my retention of employees.

That goes back to your desire to work on leadership.
I have four people that have been working with me for more than three years. I have one employee who started working for me when he was 17. He's 22 now. He started working for me the day after he graduated from high school. And he worked for me at Gjelina Take Away, and then when I left he followed me. I think some of it is getting used to how someone works, but also being able to take people with you, in terms of their career and helping them identify what about this industry they want to take part in and how they can make a living. All of those things.

That's a really big accomplishment because the food industry has a very high turnover rate. That for me, as it continues on, makes me the happiest. It makes my life a lot easier because everyone knows how we do things. But also it brings me so much joy to see this kid who started working with me when he was 17. And now he's running the morning shift by himself. He's proud of his work, and he makes everything wonderfully beautiful. He makes money. He contributes to his family. He's got a car.

That's inspiring.
Yeah. I didn't have that job when I was 17, so this is fucking awesome. He's already 20 steps ahead of me.

It's because you were a catalyst for it.
It just feels nice that we're able to nurture other people. I think in small business, that's a really overlooked aspect of operating a business–how long you are able to retain people and still make it profitable for you and them.

What you learn here, at Cofax, and what you see in this community, would you want to do it on your own eventually?
No, but yes. It's a lot easier to have a good partner to work with who knows what you want out of the situation. They can pick up the slack and you guys can trade off. I'm the creative part, and they're the money part. They're going to organize the things and make sure that I'm staying profitable and staying on point with my end of the bargain, just as I expect the same things from them. That's an ideal partnership.

What mark do you want to leave on LA?
I definitely still want to be in business in 50 years. It takes daily practice to stay in this frame of mind, but I think the best mark I could possibly want or strive to leave on Los Angeles is that anyone who works for me would be prepared to work for someone else at the highest level and kill it and make a living. I think mentorship of people in their careers is probably the longest-lasting thing that you can leave when you work in this industry. It's whether or not you worked it and you taught people a craft and you made sure that they knew how to handle any situation in their career.

Was that instilled on you by people you worked under?
Yeah, I worked for two people, Jason and Miho Travi, who are still close friends of mine. And I think that's Jason's way of working with people. He's proud when they go on and get a great job. It hurts when people leave, but he was like, "Yeah, you should." He loves when people take the next step. And I just think that's cool. Everyone has an aspiration for something that they want to do. And how long can I have you working for me happily and productively to get you to that end game? You can have a million Instagrams of your doughnut out in the ether. But I think that people are longer-lasting than that. □

An oral history of the iconic skateboarding brand and a case study in longevity.

VANS AT 50

Words by **Robert Brink**
Photography by **Ye Rin Mok**

To last 50 years and be more culturally relevant than ever is unheard of for a skateboarding brand. But such is the case with Vans, which celebrated its 50th anniversary earlier this year. Despite its humble beginnings as a made-to-order deck shoe created by Paul and Jim Van Doren in 1966, Vans is the skate world's longest-running brand and one of the few in American history to become a culture within itself. So how did the Van Doren Rubber Company go from selling a dozen pairs of shoes on March 16, 1966, in Anaheim, California, to surviving Chapter 11 bankruptcy, multiple acquisitions, going public, and five decades of trends? Some of the company's most crucial figures break down how it became the iconic $2.2 billion brand it is today.

Steve Van Doren, shot at Vans' head office in Cypress, California.

The Early Days

Steve Van Doren (VP of Events and Promotions and son of Vans founder Paul Van Doren): "We were just a tennis shoe company that my dad started in 1966. He knew he was going to have to do something special because he couldn't afford advertising. It wasn't my dad's niche; he was a manufacturer his whole life. So he made the sole twice as thick as anything else out there. He used pure crepe rubber with no fillers. He used No. 10 duck canvas and nylon thread so the shoes would last longer. He didn't know it was eventually going to be gripping a skateboard, but all those things, together with the construction, made for a better shoe. So if a mother came in and bought a pair for her kid and found out it lasted longer than other shoes, she's going to keep coming back for more."

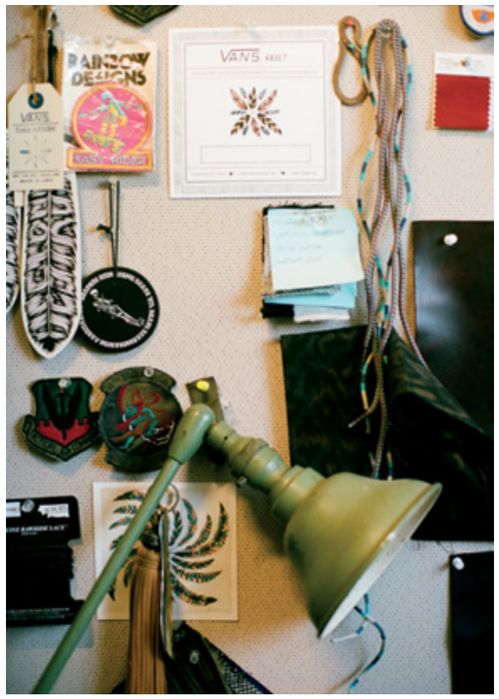
Tony Alva (professional skateboarder, Skateboarding Hall of Fame inductee, original member of the Zephyr team, Vans-endorsed athlete for 40 years): "We just knew that we needed deck shoes. Vans started, and there was a shop on the corner of 19th and Wilshire in Los Angeles, two blocks away from my junior high school. It wasn't intentional, but Vans were the best shoes for skateboarding. They were affordable and they lasted. And they would sell me one shoe at a time. If I wore out my right shoe from dragging my foot a lot, I would go over with a couple bucks and buy another shoe, which would keep me going for another week or two.

I was one of the guys that gave them input to start designing shoes for skateboarders, and they called it the Off The Wall series. We took the basic deck shoe but added a bit more padding and used two-tone colors because we were always wearing different colored shoes based on whatever we could get at the time. But what we were all about when it came to Vans was that gum rubber sole that grips a skateboard so good you don't want to reinvent it no matter what. The vulcanized rubber and either suede leather or canvas and that waffle sole—that's all we ever wanted.

Then they went to making hi-tops, which was a completely new level of functionality. That was the ultimate shoe for us because it had that gum rubber sole, but the suede and the canvas combined with the hi-top guarding the ankle bones. That's what we did—we gave Vans so much input that they started to evolve with skateboarding. It was one of the smartest things they could've ever done. And the reason they were able to do it is because Paul Van Doren and his sons were open to it. They were listening and they knew there was something about the skateboarding culture that was synonymous with Vans, and they rode it out. Here we are 50 years later and they're still riding that wave, which is amazing because what it's done for them is it's given them growth through an organic evolution that no other company in the skateboarding industry has or could ever have."

Steve Van Doren: "Tony worked with my dad and my uncle Jim. We realized that canvas was going to take a beating, so we started putting leather on the toe and the heel and added a padded collar so they had more support. From there, Tony would start suggesting, 'Hey, we're getting hit in the ankles

Tony Alva, shot at the Santa Monica Pier.



with our skateboards when we're in the pools.' So we came up with the second shoe, which was the mid-top Old Skool. Then my dad saw how hard they would pull their laces to tighten them up and break the eyelets. Normal people don't do that. So when we designed style No. 36, they left out the metal eyelets but put an extra layer of canvas so you didn't have a chance of pulling an eyelet out and ruining the whole shoe. Soon we made an even higher-top shoe, the Sk8-Hi. We always listened to what skaters or kids told us. When kids were drawing checkerboard patterns on their shoes, we just followed their lead. Same thing with skating. They'd ask us, 'Hey, can you do this? Can you do that?' And we would.

Later, in 1988, when we made the first shoe for Steve Caballero, he found out eight months later that kids were cutting the top down to make the shoe lower. He came to us and said, 'Hey, see how I duct taped these after I cut 'em? Maybe we can just make 'em a mid-top.' And that's how the Half Cab came about."

Steve Caballero (professional skateboarder, Skateboarding Hall of Fame inductee, Vans-endorsed athlete for 28 years, creator of the longest-running signature shoe of all time, the Half Cab): "I attribute the success of the Half Cab to a combination of things: timing, capturing a moment, and Vans listening to what the skaters and I wanted. Steve Van Doren is really good at listening and making sure skaters are well taken care of."

Stick to What You Know

Vans doesn't deny its mistakes, nor does it make excuses for its failures. The times it suffered were the times it tried to be something it wasn't. The company made breakdancing shoes in the '80s, for Christ's sake. But there has always been an accountability, a sincerity, and an authenticity to Vans that clearly illustrates why it's been here for half a century and is now more successful than ever. Not a lot of brands can say that. Nor can they say they swung back from the bottom all the way to the top, the way Vans has.

Steve Van Doren: "Vans was going great, the checkerboard shoe was flying, my uncle Jim was president, and he was doing a magnificent job, but he made the mistake of trying to be Nike. We had a running shoe. We had basketball, baseball, soccer, tennis, skydiving, and wrestling shoes. We even had breakdancing shoes. We were making really nice shoes, but my dad, who was a great manufacturer and businessperson, kept telling my uncle, 'Hey, they're costing us a fortune. We're losing our butts.' But my uncle wouldn't listen because he guided Vans through the checkerboard era, and we were the hottest thing going. All the money we were making on checkerboard shoes, we spent on lasts, dyes, and materials for making athletic shoes. And they weren't selling. People don't know Vans for that. You got powerhouses like adidas, Nike, and Puma, and we were getting our butts kicked on the athletic shoes.

Then, from about 1994 to 1999, they [McCown De Leeuw & Co., the private equity firm that bought Vans in 1988] were making all kinds of skateboarding shoes. They were excited about all these new things happening in skate footwear and they were trying to follow the other shoe companies instead of lead, but that wasn't us. They began manufacturing overseas for the first time and forgot all about vulcanized. They weren't using our traditional looks or side stripe on the shoes. There were a hundred skate shoes on the wall of shops, and you couldn't tell which ones were ours. I remember sitting in a meeting and telling everybody they were all full of shit. 'These aren't our shoes, guys! We used to make six million pairs of vulcanized shoes a year, and today we make less than a million!' That was when we signed Geoff Rowley to come on board the skate team and help us get back to basics. Unfortunately, a couple times during the history of the company, I've had to call everybody out and tell them they were wrong. Thankfully, they listened. We released Geoff Rowley's vulcanized shoe and started rebuilding Vans on classics and vulcanized, which is who we always were and what we always were."

"When kids were drawing checkerboard patterns on their shoes, we just followed their lead."

-Steve Van Doren

Geoff Rowley (professional skateboarder and Vans-endorsed athlete for 17 years): "I signed a contract with Vans and started to work with the design department on sketches for my first signature model. It was vulcanized, had the Vans side stripe and heel tab, had foxing stripe and the Vans original skateboard logo, and a primary color scheme. This was the opposite of everything Vans and the industry was pushing at the time, and it wasn't easy to convince upper man-

Taka Hayashi, shot at his desk.

agement that it was the right direction. This is when the fighting started, but the only person in the building that supported my design was Steve Van Doren. He believed in me, and I think he was quietly stoked that a skater had come in wanting to get back to his family's roots."

Creating a Culture

Vans has invested in the communities it believes in by creating countless contest series, building world-class skateboarding facilities, and sponsoring events, films, and more. Its continued support of what matters has paid off in that its customers, ambassadors, and fans return the favor with fierce loyalty.

It's what leads to things like Sean Penn hitting himself in the face with a Vans checkerboard sneaker in *Fast Times at Ridgemont High* or the longest-running concert series in America, the Vans Warped Tour, being recognized by the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame.

The viral explosion of "Damn Daniel" and his appearance on *The Ellen DeGeneres Show* may have been an amazing accident, but Daniel wearing his white Vans in the first place certainly wasn't. Neither was Kristen Stewart and her Vans footprints during the *Twilight* cast's Hollywood Walk of Fame ceremony. The company's placement and fandom is something you just can't buy.

Steve Van Doren: "If we want to stick around, we have to stick with our roots, which are skateboarding, snowboarding, surfing, and BMX. Fortunately, our parent company for the last 10 to 15 years, VF Corp., has been the bank. I don't have to worry about money like I did in the early days. They've given me the tools. Instead of having a van, I've got motorhomes. I'm from Boston, so when I see Converse, who is in Boston, stepping it up in the skate game, I tell VF I want to build a skatepark that'll be there for 20 years, because the kids there haven't had a skatepark for 13. We just spent $3 million and put a skatepark in Huntington Beach because they didn't have a skatepark either. Those are nice things that, thanks to our success, they've let us invest in. As well as continuing with the Vans Warped Tour, doing the Vans U.S. Open of Surfing, helping the Skateboarding Hall of Fame with their events, doing the Vans Pool Party for the last 11 years, and the new Vans Park Series, which is going to five countries and hopefully going to get park skating to the Olympics.

Five and a half years ago, we opened the House of Vans in New York [and opened another] three years ago in London. In those two venues, kids come and get a place to skate. House of Vans is also host to lots of great music and events. It's our clubhouse and we can do anything we want with it. All of the Vans events, except for the Vans Warped Tour, are free, and that's just our feather in our cap so people know that we give a shit.

A lot of our skateboarders play music, and music is important to us. So Kevin Lyman and myself got together, and we started the Vans Warped Tour 22 years ago. Art is another thing. When we have skateboarding contests, we always try to have an art show because a lot of the skaters will travel, they'll take some art with them, put it up, and sell it. They have a lot of different talents, and that's how trends start."

Taka Hayashi (artist and Vans Vault designer since 2004): "Vans is basic, clean, and timeless. Our classic models have simple paneling, which gives plenty of room to paint, draw, and tweak on a pattern. It's a perfect 3D canvas to create on. As a little kid back in the early '80s, it was a treat to go into a Vans store and go through stacks of fabric swatch books and customize your favorite shoe model. There were so many graphic prints, woven fabrics, suede, leather, and canvas to choose from. That was such an innovative concept at the time. I feel very honored to be a part of a brand that embraces art, music, fashion, and skateboarding. I really enjoy working with other artists and seeing what they come up with. They motivate me to keep pushing design and art to the next level. It's a never-ending cycle."

The Right Leader

When we talk about doing the right thing and ask how Vans has successfully cemented its place in our culture, all roads inevitably circle back to Steve Van Doren.

Geoff Rowley: "Steve has dedicated his life to Vans and goes above and beyond to support pro skaters and skateboarding hard goods brands worldwide. He is the single most important person in our whole industry, and we all owe a lot to him for his relentless support, hard work, and dedication to skateboarding.

Steve Caballero: "Steve's one of the main reasons I've stuck with Vans so long, because of who he is as a person and how caring and supportive he is of his riders."

Tony Alva: "He's the ambassador of fun. He's the guy who's got our backs. He's been the guy from day one. He enables us to make a living as professional skateboarders. Steve is like a big brother to all of us. He's taken the money that he's made and flexed it as a muscle for professional skateboarders. It's a really positive muscle, and we can do great things with it.

Vans is the American dream story come true. It's crazy that a little mom and pop family business that manufactured rubber in Anaheim with a small corner store is now a multi-billion-dollar company that makes shoes strictly for skateboarders. But since skateboarders are such trendsetters—always setting the pace for fashion, art, music, and all the things that kids are crazy about—the kids who don't skate want to wear Vans, too. It's the same reason we wanted to wear them when we were kids. We wanted to wear them because the surfers wore them, and the surfers were the coolest guys in the neighborhood. They were the toughest, they got all the chicks, they were the hardest partiers, they were the dudes. Those were the guys we wanted to be like, and what did they wear? They wore Levi's flares and they wore Vans."

Steve Van Doren: "The skateboarders adopted us. I've been around the company since I was 10 years old—for 50 years. I'm very loyal to them because they gave us a reason to be, a reason besides just making sneakers." □

The electro-funk duo on their recent move to Los Angeles.

At Home with Chromeo

Interview by **Sachin Bhola**
Photography by **Derek Wood**

Secluded in the Hollywood Hills is Dave 1's chic 1954 home. P-Thugg, the other half of Chromeo, is in search of his own house, one from 1981, he says. Both are excited to be in Los Angeles to begin a new chapter that includes renting their own studio complex and, for the first time, recording an album entirely in LA.

Dave, you moved here about two weeks ago, and, P, you've had an apartment here for two years. Tell me about your moves to LA.
Patrick "P-Thugg" Gemayel (PG): I had been living in New York, but I had an apartment here to start getting a foot in the door and save on hotel rooms and have a bit of a home.

Was LA always in the game plan?
PG: Yeah. I mean, New York was getting harder and harder to cope with on a daily basis, especially coming back from a long tour. You're tired. You're jet-lagged. You want a place like this.

David "Dave 1" Macklovitch (DM): I'm the one who didn't want to come here. I've been in New York, like, 14 years.

What persuaded you?
DM: My brother [A-Trak] moved here a year and a half ago. When he moved, I was like, "OK, part of the family is here." Then we started doing a lot of studio sessions out here. In the last year, the flying back and forth was getting really exhausting and also cost prohibitive.

Now, the way we're working on music is way more collaborative than before. We're doing a lot of sessions with other writers and producers. For that, everyone's here. There's nobody in New York to work with. I saw this house randomly, and when I did, I fell in love with it. Then I was like, "Let's do this." I put in an offer. It jump-started everything.

Have you noticed a lot of people in your circles traveling to LA more, or even relocating?
DM: Yeah, everyone's relocating. It's crazy. Now it's like Brits have discovered LA. They're flocking here.

PG: New Yorkers and Brits. I've seen friends go every month, "Oh, yeah. LA, LA, LA."

It's one thing when the media talks about everyone moving to LA, but it's another when you see your friends doing it. Why do you think people are moving?
PG: New York is really saturated.

DM: But it's also dead for music. There's no vinyl in New York anymore. I still love it there. We'll always go back. It will always be home. For work and quality of life, it's better here. For us, we wanted to be around a community of musicians and actually make a community of musicians, because we always worked in isolation. The same way Kanye's created his processes—really collaborative and curated. We had a taste of that on the last album with people from out here. More so now, because we're basically doing sessions with new people every day. Out of those people, collaborators will emerge. They're all just here. There's no more studios in New York. There's a couple, but they're either really expensive or always booked.

The industry is not there.
DM: Yeah, it's not. And P and I are really into design, whether it's mid-century stuff or '70s stuff or even '80s stuff. LA is a total time warp. If you're into vintage, like P is, it's heaven.

PG: Yeah, this is the life.

DM: It's unreal if you're into vintage anything. This is the spot. I think what we could do is we'll make periodic trips to New York and get really stimulated and go see all the shows and touch base with all our friends. Obviously, Fool's Gold is still out there. I think this is a new place for us to set roots. We're like, "We've done two albums in New York, then an album in Paris. Let's try one here and see how it goes."

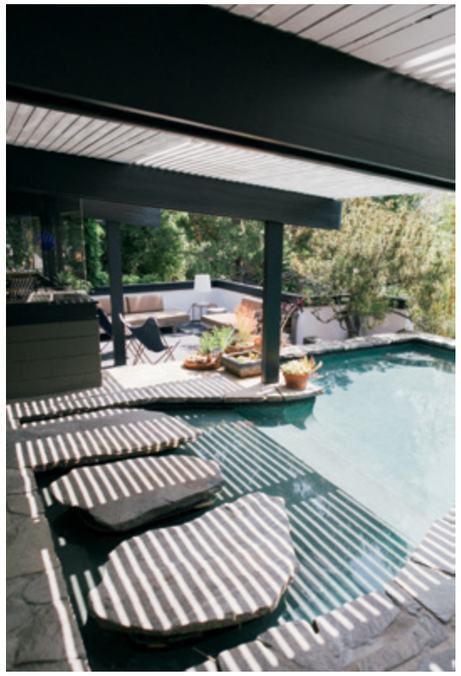
What do you guys find inspiring about Los Angeles?
PG: The weather, the cars, the houses like this.

DM: Design.

PG: It's strange, at first, to get used to the mentality, the "workout, great body" mentality of LA, the plastic surgery world. New York is completely the opposite, but you choose your circles. The Hollywoodness of LA was a bit strange from the beginning, even when we started coming here. I was like, "What is this?"

DM: When you start discovering Studio City, Burbank, Glendale, Eagle Rock—which is the new Silver Lake, the new Los Feliz. I feel gentrification isn't as rabid and rapid as in New York, where, literally, in one year, Williamsburg or Bushwick will morph completely.

PG: Expansion is possible [in LA]. In New York, there's only so much Brooklyn you can eat into. Williamsburg has become like Times Square. The rents are going up. It's all finance dudes. The further out you go, the more expensive it's getting now. LA's a slower rhythm. At first, that was kind of debilitating for me, the laid-back life. We're too much from the East Coast small, nervous cities where everything goes really fast. We're stressed all day. Coming here and people taking their time to bring you the vegan coffee or whatever, it's another thing.



David "Dave 1" Macklovitch

Patrick "P-Thugg" Gemayel

It's an environment that makes sense for you guys.
DM: Yeah. We can see the font on a doughnut shop and get an idea for a single cover. In New York, all the fonts are too good. Over here, it's still really authentic.

What are some of these gems that you discovered?
DM: Studio City's dope. P likes the Valley.

PG: I love the Valley. The Valley is good. Koreatown is fun.

DM: Oh, yeah. What's that place you took me to? Larchmont? That shit is fire.

PG: Yeah, Larchmont.

DM: Another thing we didn't talk about is the Broad Museum. That was a game changer for LA. It's sold out every day. It's free, so you reserve a ticket, but the admission is free. It's sold out online, but you can show up and they'll let you in.

It's basically this family. They were, like, the biggest art-collecting family in Los Angeles. They opened this massive museum for their private collection, and it's Downtown. The building is out of this world, super impressive. What's cool about it is it's a museum where everyone is under 30. It's all young, cool people.

What advice do you have for a musician who is in LA or is thinking about moving to LA?
DM: Plug into the infrastructure. If you're coming here alone, you could really freak out, I think.

PG: Yeah, get a house with two of your best friends. You'll have a lot of fun. The inspiring part of LA is just to get out there, the beautiful weather every day, and being able to afford rent for once.

DM: There's a million studios and producers and publishers and people to work with, but if you're by yourself, it's daunting. You got to really plug into the community and basically do sessions every day. Any given day, you can find somebody to go do a session with. That's what my brother was saying last year. He was like, "Dude, every day I wake up. I call five people. One of them's doing a session. I go do a session with them." We've been doing four sessions a week with someone different.

You guys have been working on new music. When's the next album coming out?
PG: Next year.

What can we expect?
DM: It's all collaborations. It's crazy. We got a song with MNEK, Miguel. We got stuff with Jack Antonoff. And that's not counting the producers and writers that we've been working with. It's going to be a ton of collaborations.

How would you compare it to *White Women*?
DM: It's too early to tell. Right now, we're just amassing songs. From the songs we amass, hopefully in the next few months, a single or two will emerge. We're excited about this new studio complex that we're renting. We're going to record there.

So the album will be recorded entirely in LA?
DM: I think so, yeah. The studio we're going to rent is, like, a whole complex. There's a room, and we're going to write our music and produce it. There's also a recording and tracking room. They're all ours. There's even a garage for P's cars and shit.

PG: All of this for the price of one small studio in the city, half of one.

What excites you in music today?
DM: We have one foot in electronic music and one foot in, like, old-funk and '70s and analog and whatever, and maybe a third foot in pop music. We've always had deep roots in electronic music. I guess it's nice to see that the very, very commercial EDM thing is finally morphing into something more musical and melodic. I think everybody could see that bubble bursting.

I think it's doing so with really fun results. A lot of people might imagine that we would be sour because so much stuff on the radio has the same '80s references that we've been using for years. On the contrary, we love it because it's so inspiring to us because now we're no longer oddballs trying to fight for this sound and make this sound acceptable. The sound is now acceptable. The music we make fits into an aesthetic that people are more accustomed to. It's less of a tough sell for us. That's cool.

PG: It shows that our initial intention wasn't to be these smartasses.

DM: Yeah. That's so true. We thought that was going to be the best pop, most fun music to dance to and to get dressed to and all that. It validates what we're doing. Also, I think a lot of pop albums are amazing. All the stuff that, obviously, the Weeknd did with Max Martin is really inspiring. We're listening to, like, The 1975, which is, like, a boy band, pop, British thing. Their new record is really interesting, production-wise, and has amazing songs and sounds and references. Then, I think rap is at one of the most interesting points with people like Young Thug who are not only pushing boundaries of what rapping versus singing sounds like, but also masculinity and blurring gender boundaries. Dude walks around with nail polish and a skirt and singing absurd stuff that I think is amazing.

PG: Even within the rap community, which we come from, there's an internal change.

DM: You've got Run The Jewels, who made political rap cool again, and Kendrick. In general, pop music is really, really well done and well-crafted and competitive. It's no longer a dirty word.

PG: It gets back to real artistry.

What else is going on this year?
DM: Our manager told us, "You guys got to keep your head down." We're not even going to go to Coachella and hang out. We're just at the studio.

PG: All these moves, succeeding is going to be a thing. He just moved. We're moving the studio. I'm going to have to move. We're writing songs. We're just focused.

You're finding your groove.
DM: It's like a new tunnel that we're starting. When we saw this new studio we're going to move into—we wouldn't be able to have a space like that anywhere else. To us, it's like we're almost paying tribute. We're getting this authentic '70s, '80s LA studio gem. I live in an authentic house from 1954 that hasn't really changed much. We're really paying homage to the LA culture. ◻

DR. WOO

Get acquainted with Los Angeles' premier tattoo artist.

Interview by **Sachin Bhola**
Photography by **Peter Bohler**

He's inked rappers, actors, and models, and if you want an appointment, you'll have to wait a few months before taking a seat in his chair at the Shamrock Social Club in West Hollywood. Here, Brian Woo (aka Dr. Woo) discusses his beginnings and the tattoo scene in Los Angeles.

How did you get started as a tattoo artist?
I got my start as a tattoo artist by becoming a client first. I've been getting tattooed since I was 16. As I got older, I started becoming a collector of more well-known artists—most of them, obviously, are from my mentor, Mark Mahoney. I started getting tattooed by Mark religiously over the years and hung out at his shop, Shamrock Social Club, all of the time. Eventually, after a spot for his last apprentice became available, he asked me to apprentice for him, and that's where my journey began. It was such a huge honor. I never thought that being a tattoo artist was a part of my future, as it was very intimidating. But, when Mark asks you something like that, you can't resist.

What were some of the career milestones that led to your popularity today?
From the beginning, I just started with my head down, doing walk-in tattoos every day and trying to get better and better with each one. It wasn't really an overnight difference; just slowly, I began to notice that my appointments were becoming less and less available. More people were asking for me, and more images were being passed around and viewed. I guess that was a milestone for me. But I guess, firstly, transitioning into an official artist at the shop after serving my apprenticeship—that was huge for me as well. The next milestone would be being approached and participating in some pretty interesting collaborations that have afforded me the opportunity to travel the world.

What was the tattoo industry like in LA when you first started in 2008? How does it compare to today?
It was a bit grimier, in a good way. The tattoo community was a bit tighter and smaller. There wasn't a huge presence in social media as there is today, so more artists were renowned by word of mouth and referral. There were no overnight tattoo artists as there are today, and only a handful of well-respected shops ran each city in the tattoo world.

What's the tattoo community like in LA?
The tattoo community out here is great. There are so many diverse styles and shops. We were so huge and influential in the fine-line black and gray style here, so to see that progress, and the amazing tattoos being put out here, is awesome. The boundaries are being pushed daily by these LA artists. Not to say they aren't all over the world, but I still consider LA to be the fine-line capital when it comes to tattooing.

Speaking of which, describe your signature style.
I guess the easiest way to answer that is to say that my tattoos don't really look like the typical "tattoo" tattoo. The lines are finer and the detail is magnified.

What tattoo design are you most often asked for?
Nowadays, I can definitely say small, detailed animals or scenery scapes. Also, the circle and line formations.

Does LA have a particular style of tattooing?
I wouldn't say LA has a distinctive style aside from the black and gray fine line. There are so many artists out here that do every tattoo style amazingly, and all bases are pretty much covered out here.

Do different cities have different tattoo styles? How does that work?
Different cities definitely do different things. Some tattoo bold traditional style. In Japan, the tebori bodysuit traditional Japanese style of tattooing is very popular, but I would say in every city now, artists have covered every aspect and style of tattooing. It's only in some cities that certain styles are easier or harder to find.

What's the most memorable tattoo you've done?
The most memorable tattoo I've ever done would definitely have to be my first tattoo. After three years of apprenticing hard, doing all the grunt labor, I remember it was Saint Patrick's Day, and I had some friends at the shop. Everyone was doing shamrock tattoos, and Mark said I could do a couple on my friends if I felt ready. It was nerve-racking and the best feeling all in one. Mark looked over my shoulder the whole time and helped me through it, and the tattoo didn't come out half bad either.

On the subject of firsts, what was the first tattoo you had done on yourself? And what's your most memorable tattoo?
I hand-poked a happy face on my thigh in seventh grade. And my most memorable tattoo is definitely the portrait of my grandfather that Mark did on me. It still looks so good after all these years.

Have you ever refused to tattoo someone?
Only if their tattoo is something that isn't suited for them in a negative way. Sometimes you have to be responsible for your client even if they aren't looking out for themselves.

What advice do you have for aspiring tattoo artists?
Learn from someone great. Put in the time, put in the work, listen to everything—no shortcuts. Anyone can call themselves a "tattoo artist," but very few nowadays really are.

What has this profession taught you about life?
The most important lesson is to enjoy the off time. That's what all the hard work is for: your family and your future. Put in the effort to succeed on both ends of the spectrum.

What's something people don't know about you?
Anything that people don't already know about me is probably that way for a reason. I played classical violin till I was 13, though.

And what would you be doing if you weren't doing this?
Honestly, a chef or a rapper probably. □


GRACIE
JIU-JITSU
Hennessy
WOO-HOO!!!

Matt Paweski

Interview by
Sachin Bhola

Photography by
Peter Bohler

In 2007, Matt Paweski moved from Phoenix to Los Angeles for a graduate program at the ArtCenter College of Design. After one day of meetings, he switched his course of study from painting to sculpture. He's since developed a style of his own that has captured the attention of art galleries stateside and internationally. Here, he discusses his work and his experience in LA.

Describe what you do.
I've developed a vocabulary of sculpture that lives within a narrow space between known forms: sculpture, furniture, painting, and design. The work has varied in scale and presentation. I am drawn to furniture and design for the rules of function, their rigid geometric structures, and minute details. I find the most freedom working within the restrictions of these categories and use them to set up different forms of sculpture.

I've never really been interested in making something that works—my focus is on the details that add up to function, though we never really get there in favor of flourish and idiosyncrasy. It's like setting out to build a table but only ever working on the small curved nub at the bottom of the leg and then moving on.

How did you get into sculpting?
I was born in Detroit but moved to Phoenix when I was quite young. My parents had enough of the freezing winters and moved west like so many for the quality of life and a fresh start. I've drawn most my life but didn't know anything about art until I attended Arizona State University for my undergrad. I studied printmaking there, though I was a "serious" painter, slopping and slashing my way through art history.

I'd spend all my free time digging through the library stacks, working through other paintings, becoming obsessed with Klimt and Schiele and COBRA and Franz Kline. I rented an industrial space near the school so I could make bigger works and have exhibitions. It was in this industrial park where I met the designer/fabricator Bill Prokes, who taught me all I know about making things, materials, and problem-solving your way through objects. I worked for him all through undergrad getting a parallel education in fabrication and design.

Describe your creative process and your work environment.
I currently have a shop/studio in Azusa, a sleepy, industrial city east of LA. It's half equipment—saws, welder, tools, a large work table for drawing and fabrication, and a semi-clean open space for moving around and viewing the work.

The sculptures all begin with drawing: organic forms contained within a geometric frame. To-scale drawings are made, which I then transfer directly onto cardboard and cut out to visualize the size and forms of the work; this allows for quick tests and experimentation. Once things are finalized I start cutting down materials for the finished panels (European beech hardwood, birch plywood, aluminum) and transfer the original drawings onto them to get cut. I run the studio and make the works much like a furniture shop, both in the production process and in the materials and techniques.

There is a lot of preplanning, funky math, and experimentation before anything actually gets made—that's where most of the time is spent. Once everything is cut, fit, and finished, the parts get painted with enamel or hand painted with acrylic, and are riveted together. The color and paint handling work to reinforce the cut contours and volumes that are depicted. The "logic" of the sculptures inspire the color and its application.

Where can people purchase your work?
I'm represented by Herald St, a gallery in London, and have my first solo exhibit at Ratio 3 gallery in San Francisco starting in May and ending in July.

Talk to me about Studio Spruzzi. What is it, exactly? How did it start?
The filmmaker Gillian Garcia and I started Spruzzi in 2013. It's essentially a conceptual platform cloaked in a lamp company that we use to make collaborative works together. It currently consists of film and photo elements that fuel a sculptural light or vice versa. Up until now, the projects have lived and been exhibited at South Willard, a shop here in LA, and scarcely online, though we'll be presenting a couple new projects elsewhere this summer that we're excited about.

And what advice do you have for artists thinking about living and/or exhibiting in LA?
LA's been good to me. I'm fortunate to have a strong group of friends and colleagues who have supported and mentored my work throughout my time here. I've only ever worked out west, so it's hard to draw distinctions, but the environment certainly has had an effect on the work I make, from scale and materials to color and technique.

I think anyone who's been here for more than a few years can really feel the current intensity focused on LA. It's historically been a home to so many amazing artists because of its space, nature, and the ability to get by a bit easier. This has allowed for all types of experimentation. I think the current eye on LA can't help but be good for many of the talented artists who haven't gotten all the recognition they deserve. There are also so many new galleries and independent exhibition spaces and studio compounds—there is a much wider audience to engage with. Though the city's definitely not operating at the same mellow pace I once felt. I'm not sure where this current boom will leave the town. It works both ways. □

Inside the sculptor's studio.

Photo courtesy of Ratio 3.

Mirrored Table (Shadow), 2016
Birch plywood, euro-beech hardwood, aluminum, aluminum rivets, acrylic

Photo courtesy of Ratio 3.

Handles, 2016
Euro-beech hardwood, aluminum, aluminum rivets, acrylic

The Great Escape

Photography by James Andrew Rosen

Two hours east of Los Angeles is the peculiar Pioneertown. A relic of a bygone era, the former set for 1940s Old West movies includes an abandoned bowling alley, vacant trailers, and disused film props. It's at once strange yet serene, and therein lies its unique beauty. Located in the town of Yucca Valley, a desert oasis bordered by Joshua Tree National Park and the San Bernardino Mountains, Pioneertown, and its surrounding landscape, is the perfect bohemian getaway from LA.


Mojave Sands
MOTEL
VACANCY


PAPPY & HARRIET'S
PIONEERTOWN
PALACE

Headed to Los Angeles? While you're there, stop by Blind Barber in Culver City for a haircut, a bite, or to hang out with its spirited team, whose style epitomizes LA's dress code.

BARBER

Photography by **Elizabeth Weinberg**
Styling by **Marc Anthony George**
Makeup by **Diane Dusting**

Jamal Damon, Shop Manager
Hoodie, 69
Shirt, Frank + Oak
Sunglasses, RETROSUPERFUTURE

Gabrielle Richmond Laub, Event Producer (cover page)
Blouse, Theory
Dress, rag & bone/JEAN
Scarf, Saint Laurent Paris

Jeff Laub, Co-Founder (opposite page)
Shirt, Junya Watanabe
Sunglasses, RETROSUPERFUTURE

Gabrielle Richmond Laub, Event Producer
Vest, Vintage Havana
Dress, Simon Miller
Boots, Chiara Ferragni

Jeff Laub, Co-Founder
Jacket, McQ by Alexander McQueen
Shirt, Frank + Oak
Jeans, Levi's

Leah Shields, Barber
Tee, Junk Food
Jumpsuit, 69
Shoes, adidas
Sunglasses, RETROSUPERFUTURE

Eric Holmes, Barber
Shirt, Alexander Wang
Pants, 69
Socks, FALKE
Shoes, Vans

Eric Holmes, Barber (opposite page)
All, Eric's own

Richelle Justine, Barber
Vintage tee, Kelly Cole
Shorts, Levi's
Shoes, Vans
Sunglasses, RETROSUPERFUTURE
Watch, bracelet, and necklace, Richelle's own

Josh Boyd, Co-Founder
Jacket, John Varvatos
Jacket (inner layer), Burberry Brit
Tee, The Kooples

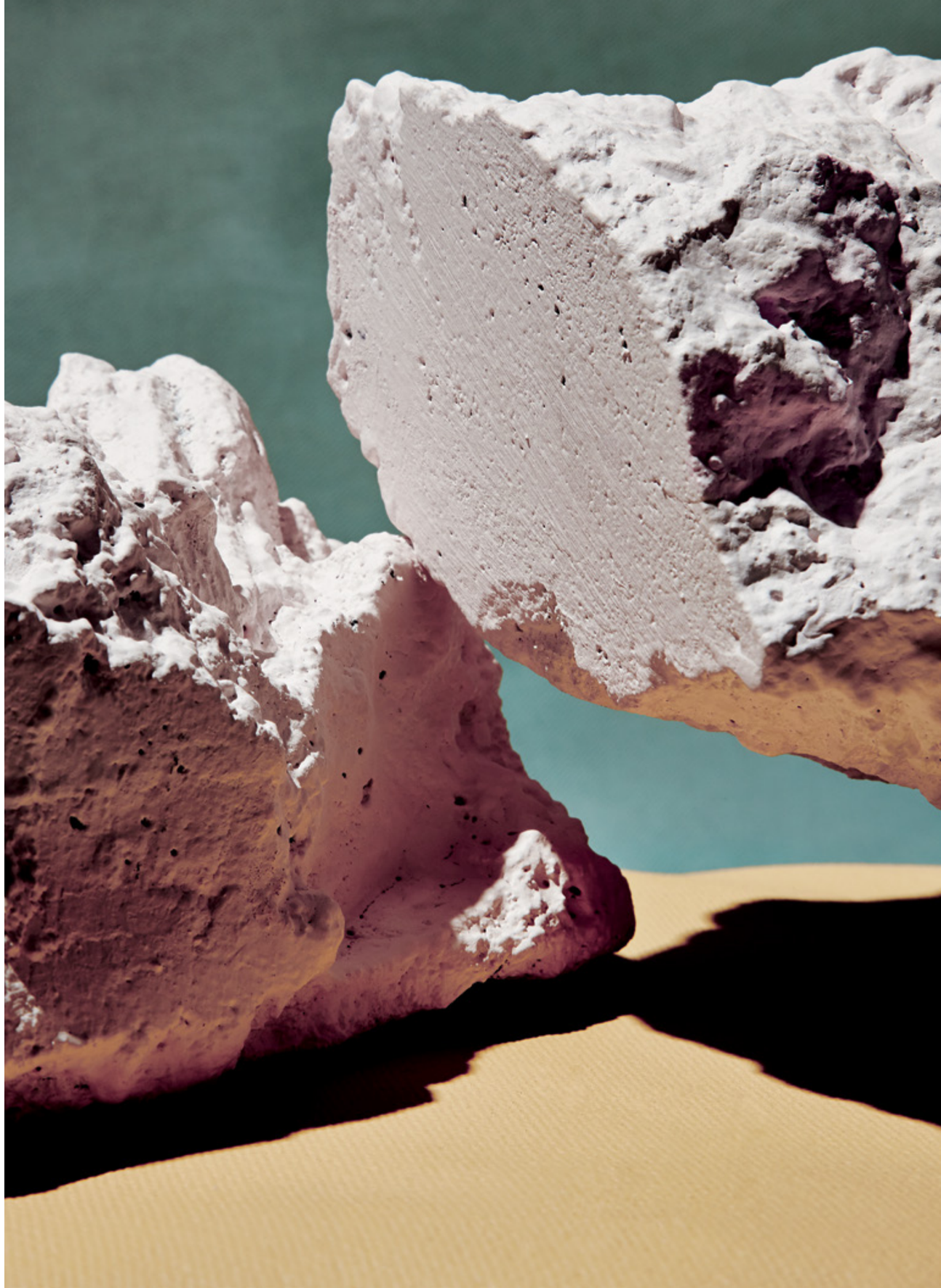
Gabrielle Richmond Laub, Event Producer
Blouse, Theory
Dress, rag & bone/JEAN
Boots, Jeffrey Campbell

Jonathan Poon, Apprentice
Jacket, stylist's own
Shirt, Paul Smith
Shorts, Levi's
Socks, FALKE
Shoes, Vans

SOME LIKE IT HOT

Styling by **Shauna Sen**
Photography by **Nik Mirus**

The one must-have accessory in Los Angeles? Sunglasses. Who better to trust than the brands headquartered in the city?



Wonderland (Barstow)

Oliver Peoples (Annetta)

Oliver Peoples (Vintage)

Garrett Leight (Hampton)

Diners

Wonderland (Stateline)

Photography by Celia Spenard-Ko

Diners do something to you the minute you walk in. They put you at ease, evoke nostalgia, and foster some of the most unpretentious social gatherings. More than just a hangover cure, they are a staple of American culture, and a handful of the country's best are in Los Angeles.

Bob’s Big Boy (1949)

Order: Original Big Boy combo and a milkshake

Corky’s (1958)

Order: California omelet

Rod’s Grill (1946)

Order: Parmesan onion rings

Astro Family Restaurant (1974)

Order: Three eggs, any style, with bacon (or sausage) and hash browns

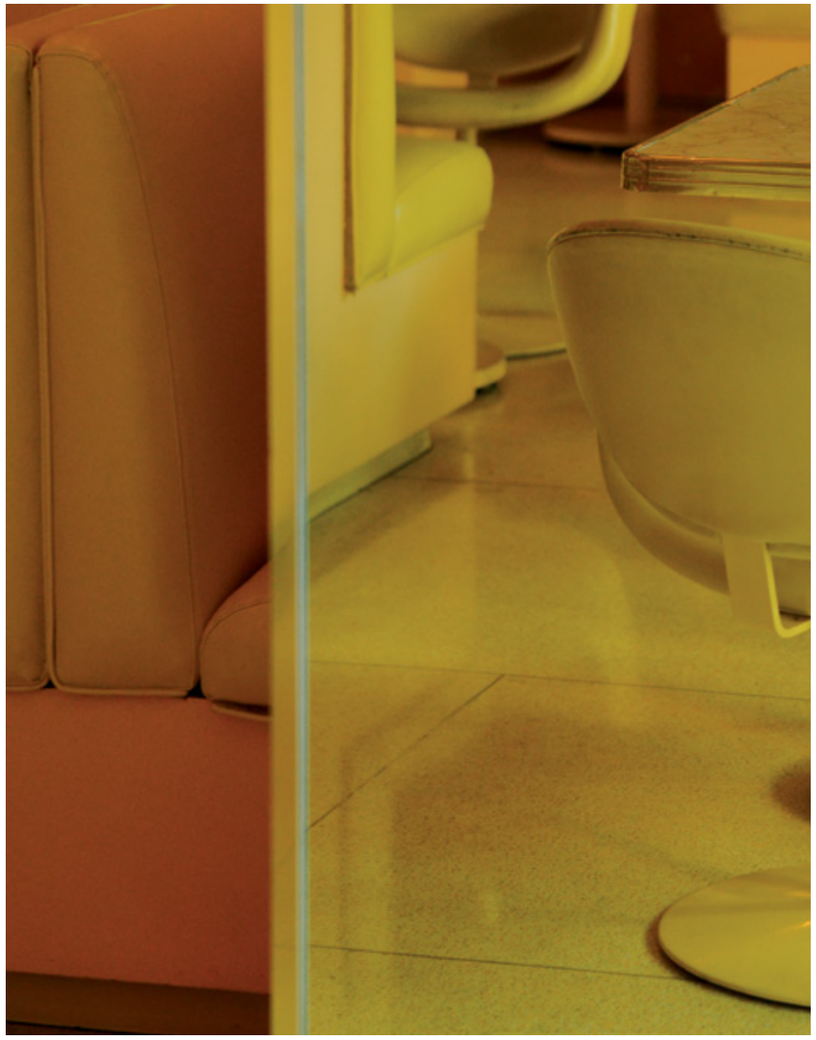
101 Coffee Shop (2001)

Order: Mushroom taquitos

Rae’s Restaurant (1958)

Order: Corned beef hash with biscuits and gravy

24/7 Restaurant at The Standard (2002)



Order: Wedge Salad

Fred 62 (1997)

Order: Avocado toast

Directory

69
sixty-nine.us

adidas
adidas.com

Alexander Wang
alexanderwang.com

Burberry Brit
burberry.com

Chiara Ferragni
chiaraferragnicollection.com

FALKE
falke.com

Frank + Oak
frankandoak.com

Garrett Leight
garrettleight.com

Jeffrey Campbell
jeffreycampbellshoes.com

John Varvatos
johnvarvatos.com

Junk Food
junkfoodclothing.com

Junya Watanabe
bloomingdales.com

Levi's
levi.com

McQ by Alexander McQueen
mcq.com

Oliver Peoples
oliverpeoples.com

Paul Smith
paulsmith.co.uk

rag & bone/JEAN
rag-bone.com

RETROSUPERFUTURE
retrosuperfuture.com

Saint Laurent Paris
ysl.com

Simon Miller
simonmillerusa.com

The Kooples
thekooples.com

Theory
theory.com

Vans
vans.com

Vintage Havana
vintagehavana.com

Wonderland
wonderlandsun.com


“Every new beginning comes from
some other beginning's end.”
—Seneca