without prejudice

Lifestyle Feature
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Lifestyle choices are ones that we should make not just our wish to do the things we really want to, but also in order to try and find at least a semblance of balance in our lives. Perhaps that balance lies in taking up a new hobby and learning about a ‘different world’; it could be a sport that appeals or perhaps just a determination to escape by reading a book or listening to music.

A friend of mine who spent over ten years in South Africa says unless you have lived here, you cannot possibly understand the word ‘interesting’ as we use it. When we say it has been yet another ‘interesting year’ there are many layers of meaning attached to that, not least an underlying stress.

Writers for our lifestyle section have provided ideas for change of pace and place whether alone or with others, that make ’9 to 5’ only one aspect of our lives. Just by reading these articles I have travelled to places and flown like a bird that, as a non-adrenalin junkie I am most unlikely to do. I have added places, wines, whiskies and books to my list of ‘things for me and others’, imagined owning pieces of art that I covet and am listening to a little voice telling me to do those things I love but ‘am too busy to do’. I have no doubt you will all be equally inspired.

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The core of running –
taking a bite out of the Big Apple

Positively embracing the nation's Bigger and Better stereotype, New York City hosts the world's biggest marathon, 54 000 runners sprint, run, jog, and walk through the city's pulsating five boroughs, with over one million supporters lining the streets to egg on professional athletes and huffers-and-puffers alike. Whether you are Gerda Steyn, lining up for Olympic qualification, or Hannah Gavios (who was left paralysed after she fell 150m over a cliff trying to escape an attacker in Thailand, now willing herself forward on crutches), this race inspires every person who possesses the gene to swim upstream.

The logistics involved are akin to those inherent in invading another country, if you'll pardon the comparison. The Comrades Marathon is the world's largest ultra-marathon (a race longer than the standard marathon distance of 42.195km). In an average year, it attracts around 18 000 runners. The biggest Comrades field to date was at the turn of the millennium when 23 961 runners lined up for the 75th anniversary of this quintessentially South African form of torture. Any back-of-the-pack runner (ahem) will tell you that it can take up to six minutes to cross the start line after the gun sounds.

Now triple the average Comrades field and you'll get a sense of the mass of people moving forward when the actual cannon fires at the start of the NYC marathon. The organisers cleverly manage this by splitting the runners into four starting groups or waves, each with its own starting time and starting area. Participants from the blue, orange and green starting groups meet up for the first time at the eight-mile marker, allowing the field to spread out as faster runners sprint off and the rest of us question our life decisions.

I opted to take the Staten Island ferry to get to the start on Staten Island. Other options include buses from various pick-up areas, or combinations of buses and trains. Following sage advice dispensed on the internet — what can possibly go wrong — I left Manhattan at 06:00, giving us a beautiful view of the sunrise behind the island as the ferry made good speed across the Upper Bay. We smiled as starry-eyed tourists in vests and tights posed for photos on the deck in a chilling wind. Then we rushed out in our vests and tights and posed for photos on the deck in the chilling wind.

The runners’ gathering area on Staten Island was like a funfair in a cold storage unit. With the sun lazily spreading the odd ray through the trees and buildings, shivering athletes huddled together to escape the chilly morning wind. Dunkin’ Donuts instantly gained thousands of fans when they handed out free beans to the runners — yes, I will gladly wear a silly orange beanie with tassels, please hand it over! Free coffee, tea, energy drinks and bagels provided relief for the next two to three hours while we awaited the staggered start. Prior to the gun sounding for the starting groups of wheelchair and elite athletes, an announcer cautioned that the start of the race is signalled by a real cannon firing and that people should not be alarmed. I smiled as I contrasted this with the start of the Voortrekker Varsity race at the Voortrekker monument earlier this year, where the starting cannon scared the living daylights out of all of us when it fired without any warning. However, when you remember the horror of the Boston marathon bombing, you realise that we have been very fortunate to, thus far, largely have been spared the trauma of world terror in our country. For us, a cannon blasting out of the blue causes a fright and a giggle; in the Land of the Free, the sound of an explosion elicits all sorts of different emotion and reaction.

Our group was sent over the Verrazano-Narrows Bridge after an amazing rendition of America, the Beautiful by a female vocalist. The bridge that connects Staten Island with Brooklyn is a feat of engineering, with 13 lanes of traffic on two levels, spanning 4.2km. And if you ever thought
bridges were flat, this myth is dispelled as soon as you step onto a long one. The curvature of the bridge means your run is a long, slow pull until you reach the middle of the bridge, with some relief descending towards the shore. Whilst the VN Bridge is the longest, you know there are four further bridges to cross before reaching Central Park. There is a reason elite athletes don’t pick this race to run their personal best.

The run took us through the packed streets of Brooklyn where thousands of onlookers egged on runners with shouts of support and innovative banners. One delightful gem intended to encourage runners, not walking, read “No such thing as a Ty-Walked-OSaurus Rex!” It elicited smiles and cheers from passing runners and spectators alike. On the side of the road were numerous live bands and DJs booming music into the airwaves. Paying homage to a New Jersey neighbour, one band even did a perfectly passable rendition of Bruce Springsteen’s “Badlands.” Further up the same road Billy Joel’s “Uptown Girl” continued the theme of music from the area.

The race took us through Queens, Manhattan and the Bronx, before heading back into Manhattan to the end at Central Park. It is a remarkable sight, but you really appreciate the size of this 1895-designed green marvel when you have to run through it at the business end of a marathon. It is an astounding 4 km long and 0.8 km wide. It feels longer…

The crowds are beyond explanation, especially as you head into the final kilometre, running past the famous Plaza Hotel (after running past the equally famous Tavern on the Green as you snake through the park). As Eloise in the Plaza was our daughter’s favourite movie for a number of years, every landmark looked familiar and jogged nice memories, if you will excuse the expression. Another (brilliant rock) band played a fabulous cover of the old Whitmanake hit, Here I Go Again, as I approached the final stretch to the finish. Warm volunteers greeted you with a friendly smile, huge medal, space blanket to protect you against the wind, and a fleeced poncho to keep you warm.

Hearing the highway hit belt out in Central Park sealed the deal for me — this was the best big city marathon I had ever run. Our Comrades marathon is in another league for a number of reasons, including that it is the oldest and biggest Ultramarathon in the world, engenders unbelievable camaraderie during and after the race, is tougher than a canteen steak. However, the run through the Big Apple is special as a tourist experience: a comfortable – at times challenging – marathon, taking remarkable feats of organisation to corral 54 000 runners from various locations to the start, then shepherd them through a busy city and embracing them with amazing warmth and affection. As I walked back to the hotel after the race, limping and clearly identifiable as a NYC marathon runner with the...
Lifestyle running

Bright poncho, locals congratulated me for finishing the race, exchanged pleasantries and showed the best side of this amazing world city. Gerda Steyn ran an Olympic qualifying time and finished in 11th place in the women’s marathon. I came in 21 303 place out of 53 518 runners, almost two hours after my compatriot had finished her incredible run. If she enjoyed the run through the City that Never Sleeps half as much as I did, I am sure she will remember it when sitting on the steps in her rocking chair one day. I certainly will.

* Botes is a Partner with Baker McKenzie (South Africa).

Lifestyle music

Six of the Best

JOHN MCKNIGHT

If you feel that trying to find decent music in 2019 is the aural equivalent of paddling through some polluted back water of a harbour, we have the answer for you. Here are six of this year’s better album releases. Perfect stocking fillers for Christmas 2019.

Billie Eilish – When We All Fall Asleep, Where Do We Go?
You are very likely to hear this waiting out of your 16-year-old daughter’s room. But before you write it off as just another teenage flash in the pan, spare a moment to appreciate the lush production, self-deprecating, macabre and honest writing and fresh approach to record-making that so epitomises this release.

Billie Eilish (real name Pirate Baird O’Connell) was born on 18 December 2001 (I know, right?) and released her debut studio album, “When We All Fall Asleep, Where Do We Go?” on 28 March. The album debuted at No.1 on the Billboard 200 and also reached number one in the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia and multiple other countries. The album has been streamed well over two billion times. She is the first and (so far) only artist born in the 2000’s to record a #1 single in the United States.

Comparable to the works of female artists such as Lorde and Lana Del Rey, you do not have to be under 21, or even 81 to appreciate the inherent authenticity which courses through this meticulous, surprising and haunting album that has changed the way music will be made in future.

Top tracks: “Bad Guy” for a withering take on misandry and being an empowered young woman today. “Bury a Friend” for a hark back to Laurie Anderson’s “O Superman”, recorded some 20 years before Billie was born.

The Specials – Encore
Is it just me who so fondly remembers busting a move in the school disco to The Specials’ “Ghost Town” and “Message to you, Rudy”? Well, after a 21-year hiatus, The Specials are back with a stunning new album that reaches deep within and presents the best the band ever had to offer, sprung up and beautifully rendered for the 21st century.

Although critically acclaimed, the album did not fare particularly well internationally, only reaching No.1 in Scotland and the UK.
Lifestyle music

Nonetheless, if you remember the good old days before “Ghost Town” and you still enjoy socially charged reggae, this one is for you.

It was a messy split in 1981 when (lead singer) Terry Hall left the band to form Fun Boy Three, but things have definitely been patched up now as the album includes “The Lunatics”, a cover of FBT’s “The Lunatics (Have Taken Over The Asylum)” in a time when the song could not be more germane.

**Top tracks**: Characterised by mellowed out ska rhythms, The Specials have inherited the politics clearly in their sights and songs such as “Vote for Me” and “B.L.M.” (Black Lives Matter) skewer the UK’s Conservative Party with undimmed vigour (although you will be surprised just how universal the sentiments can be).

**Rammstein – Rammstein**

Like Depeche Mode and Wagner? Do you like your band to sound not unlike the Luftwaffe over Coventry? Rammstein is the band for you.

Blending Wagnerian loftiness, Depeche Mode-like melodies, Teutonic driving guitars, and growled baritone vocals, Rammstein has become a band bigger than all other German bands put together. Controversial, thought-provoking, and specialising in holding progressive views directly opposed the most common first impressions of the band, Rammstein has a surprisingly cerebral offering in this, their untitled seventh studio album, which was released in May and reached No. 1 in fourteen countries. In the first week alone it moved 260,000 album-equivalent units in Germany, making it the best-performing album in the first week from a band in the 21st century.

The single match on the cover is a sly reference to their well-known live pyrotechnics and the album as a whole is replete with references to the best parts of the past few decades since they first performed together in 1994 but with a few surprises.

**Top tracks**: Do not expect any English lyrics on this album but do expect a tribute to Kraftwerk (Germany’s second-biggest band!) in “Radio”, a thinly veiled criticism of their homeland in “Deutschland” and a 180-degree turn against what you might otherwise think on their third single entitled “Ausländer” (Foreigner).

**The Black Keys – Let’s Rock**

Hailing from Akron, Ohio (the same town as new wave band Devo), The Black Keys have achieved notable success with their raw blues rock sound. More refined than Jack White or The Raconteurs, the band recently moved to Nashville and its members are good friends with Jack White.

“Let’s Rock” is the band’s ninth studio album, building on a succession of even increasingly popular releases. Their 2013 album “El Camino” won a Grammy for Best Rock Album.

Described by drummer Patrick Carney as a homage to the electric guitar, the album has been praised as a well-crafted, albeit conventional record. Be that as it may, it is impossible to listen to this offering without the appearance of at least some air guitar.

If you are looking for an album to crank out in your car at top volume, then The Black Keys have two words for you, and a clue is in the title.

**Top tracks**: “Lo/Hi”, “Eagle Birds” and “Go” all deliver solid rock ‘n roll in a way that you cannot but help tap your foot to.

**Kaiser Chiefs – Duck**

Kaiser Chiefs is an English indie rock band from Leeds who formed in 2000 and named themselves after (South African) football club Kaiser Chiefs, the first club of ex-Leeds United captain Lucas Radebe, who is somewhat of a hero in Leeds having lifted Leeds out of obscurity during his tenure there from 1994 to 2005.

Best known for their smash hit “Ruby” way back in 2007, the band has consistently released great, foot tapping, vaudeville-like rock music since then, most of which has passed under the radar. But do yourself a favour, and grab this, their seventh studio album inspired by their frustration with the internet, about how it rules our lives and yet how we still just click “Accept”.

Pun-laden, quirky and yet deeply grounded, this album is a solid offering for the faithful.

**Top tracks**: “Record Collection” is not about a pile of vinyl but instead is a deceptive critique of your browsing history. “Don’t Just Stand There, Do Something” is a like having a drink with an old friend and remembering why you liked them so much in the first place.
Muse – *Simulation Theory*

Okay, so this was released in late November 2018 and falls just outside the timing applied, but it is far too good not to be considered as one of the better releases of the past twelve months (or so).

If the cover art is redolent of 1980s movie posters, it is because it is meant to be. The album is heavily influenced by 80s pop culture and those dodgy science fiction movies we so delighted in at the time. This, the band’s eighth studio album, is characterised by extensive use of synthesisers and less of their heavier sound, for which the band is so well known.

Cascading arpeggios, urgent power chords, creeping synth bass lines, soaring strings, this album has all that Muse fans have come to love.

Stadium rock at its finest, it is no surprise that the album supported the biggest tour of the European Summer, featuring interactive exhibits and a giant inflatable puppet skeleton, similar to ones seen in the music videos.

**Top tracks:** “Dark Side” a soaring ode to frustration and existentialism. “Dig Down” is an imploration not to accept an unsatisfactory status quo and instead look deep within. “The Void” is stripped down and spacey but provides an uplifting call to self-belief. Considering our present situation, a fine place to end:

> They’ll say, no one can see us
> That we’re estranged and all alone
> They believe nothing can reach us
> And pull us out of the boundless gloom.
> They’re wrong.

> They’re wrong. ♦

**McKnight is a Partner with Spoor & Fisher.**

...And Some of the Rest

**Dina Biagio**

In an attempt to ameliorate the obvious rock bias of John McKnight, we asked one of his better-adjusted partners to review their favourite albums from 2019. Dina Biagio shares her picks below.

**Norman [explicit] Rockwell – Lana Del Rey**

34-year-old Lana Del Rey burst onto the international music scene with “Summertime Madness” in 2012. Fast forward to 2017, when she released her fifth album, “Lust for Life”, promptly landing herself in a spot of hot water with British band Radiohead over the striking similarities between “Get Free”, a track off this album, and Radiohead’s legendary 1993 hit, “Creep”. With the copyright infringement issue settled, Del Rey went on to release this album in 2019 (almost), naming it after American author and artist Norman Perceval Rockwell, most famous for his cover illustrations for the Saturday Evening Post. Like the Rockwell illustrations, the songs on this album reflect American pop culture (they are tragically romantic and unashamedly melancholic) and suggest throwbacks to the 1950s – like the melody of Ella Fitzgerald’s iconic  “Summertime, and the living is easy...” overlaid on her “Doin’ Time” track. Despite the moody feel, the lyrics are sassy (“Your poetry’s bad and you blame the news”, “Why wait for the best when I can have you?”). Be warned though, as the title suggests (and with eight out of 14 tracks containing explicit language) this one is not for family listening.

**Origins - Imagine Dragons**

This Las Vegas band has released four albums since their 2012 debut Night Visions (the proud owner of “It’s Time”, “Radioactive” and “Demons”). Their latest album, released in November 2018, doesn’t disappoint. Their style is immediately recognisable despite the themes (love and relationships) being in contrast to what we’ve come to expect from Imagine Dragons.
Imagine Dragons — indie rock at its best. On the whole though, this album is more mature and polished than their earlier work, which is why I think it deserves an audience.

**Hollywood’s Bleeding – Post Malone**

You may know Post Malone for “Sunflower”, his collaboration with Swae Lee for the film Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse (“Then you’re left in the dust/Unless I stuck by ya/You’re a sunflower…”). This New Yorker is a real vocal talent and his album reflects the best of his ability to smear music genres. But the real genius that is Post Malone is the musical hook you’ll find in every song that will make you want to hit “repeat” over and over and over...

**Delta – Mumford & Sons**

Mumford has been described by some as the most unlikely success of the 21st century. Their fourth studio album combines folk song banjo-strumming with modern electronic sounds. The album has been criticised for being dark and “emo” — shaped by its devotion to the 4 D’s (death, divorce, drugs and depression). Several of the tracks feel hypnotic, with a galloping riff running into a crescendo and then starting over, so that by the time you make your way to the end, the cyclic atmosphere and dark themes may feel overwhelming and inescapable.

As with all music, your appreciation of this album will depend on your taste. Personally, I like its move away from the honky-tonk even if it is in the 4D direction.

For all the flak it has taken, the album contains some legendary poetry which may appeal to the romantic in you (“We’ll sit and talk the stars down from the sky/And I’ll not forget the chaos in your eyes”). Could you possibly describe the tranquility of being fully understood by someone better than “My mind finds peace in the shade of your attention”?

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**Lifestyle whiskey**

“Share and enjoy”

**Theo Buchler**

It’s trite that over 90% of all Scotch whisky sold is blended, mostly grain with varying degrees of malt added. The big names such as Johnnie Walker, Bell’s, J&B and Black and White, to name but a few, dominate the markets in most areas of the globe.

The interesting feature of the established whisky industry generally, up until recently, has been the adherence to consistent and recognisable brand identity and design of labels. Often these have their origins in a very distant past, the Striding Man of Johnnie Walker has been around in various forms for over one hundred years. A poster from 1910 represents him as a gentleman amongst the horses and hounds of the hunt. In the late ’90s, following the amalgamation of Grand Metropolitan Guinness and Distillers Company Limited (forming the global drinks company...
Lifestyle whiskey

Diageo, Johnnie Walker was “rebranded”. Sales of the Red, whilst still the best selling Scotch globally, were slipping. Although not too many consumers paid close attention, the Striding Man changed direction on the bottle (perceived to be heading into the past, he then smartly headed into the future) from walking left to then right. The extremely simple but effective “Keep Walking” slogan completed the gearing up of the Diageo marketing machine. As at end-2017, Johnnie Walker was the largest selling Scotch globally, moving 18.3 million 9 litre cases. By comparison, the next best-selling whiskey was Jack Daniel’s, shifting 12.9 million 9 litre cases. Both brands have been instantly recognizable by their labels for decades: although a bottle of Red from the 70’s looks somewhat old-fashioned now, the rebranding of Johnnie Walker 20 years ago, whilst significant did not amount to anything too drastic. However, none of these brands have been tardy in embracing new and eye-catching design, different releases of JW Blue in various global markets carry very distinctive labels.

As an aside, four brands of Indian whisky are the top selling whiskies in the world: Officers Choice (32 million, 9 litre cases), McDowell’s No.1 (23.7 million, 9 litre cases), Imperial Blue (19 million 9 litre cases) and Royal Stag (18.7 million 9 litre cases).

The numbers for blended whisky are staggering, but where does the curious novice or even connoisseur go for a little something different once the mainstream blends are not enough to satisfy curiosity? Many blends are of good quality but the very essence of the blend is consistency, batch after batch, year after year. Most curious whisky lovers will end up looking into single malt. Once again, a significant number of single malt distilleries are very label and consistency driven. For many malts, brand identity on (and even the shape of) the bottle has largely remained unchanged in any significant way for decades.

Subtle and not so subtle changes do occur over time; a noteworthy example of significant design change being Ardbeg after being acquired by Glenmorangie PLC in 1997. When the distillery (barely operational for a decade in the ’80s and ’90s) was reactivated in 1997 (a new visitor centre opened in 1998) the impetus for more imaginative labels was born. While drawing on clearly identified design elements, Ardbeg has largely rejuvenated its brand with numerous quirky elements thrown in on different editions. From obscure small distillery to cult status took less than a decade: a “committee”, which has now grown to tens of thousands of Ardbeg-lovers, was formed in 2000 which unashamedly and joyously keeps the distillery in the public eye.

Another detour through more interesting whiskies is to explore the world of the independent bottlers; often single cask single malt appears under the name of companies such as Cadenheads, Scotch Malt Whisky Society and others. Cadenheads and Scotch Malt Whisky Society tend to be very uniform with labels, the contents of the bottles themselves are generally of good quality, and whilst the releases are prolific, the number of bottles are generally limited to a few hundred. Another group falling into the category of independent bottlers are restaurants and liquor wholesalers or retailers that buy a cask or two from a distillery and bottle it under their own name. In South Africa, Whisky Brother has released a string of very successful and excellent quality single cask whiskies, and Checkers have similarly stepped in to meet the need of many curious drinkers for that little something unusual with their own Private Barrel Company brand.

As is evident, the whisky world now has an almost staggering choice for everyone from the curious novice to the bored connoisseur. Where just 15 years ago the choice of both content and label tended to be quite limited, today the industry is drenched in variety and innovative design, particularly in the independent field, and smaller mainstream malts and blends.

It also seems a truism, especially in the mainstream whisky world, that a good and consistent brand should not lose its identity and market share with changing labelling or contents too much. However, of late there are
Iconic brands which have built themselves on the very cornerstones of consistent quality but not consistency of releases, consistently good but not consistent design. One such maverick is Compass Box Whisky, brainchild of John Glaser. An independent bottler focusing generally on small batches (with a core range which is always available but ever dynamic), the company has followed a model which record companies in the ’80s and onwards embraced: content and cover should speak of consistent quality, however diverse the cover and content may be. Two UK record companies spring to mind, Factory and 4AD, the latter renowned in the early ’80s for a particularly ethereal sound propelled by the gorgeous cover designs by, among other artists, Vaughan Oliver, world-renowned graphic designer. While famous artists on the label such as Cocteau Twins and Pixies in no way sounded like each other, the interpretations of art on the cover certainly mirrored the quality of music.

Compass Box have taken this concept to new levels in the whisky world, partnering with design house Stranger and Stranger, whose motto is “Don’t fit in, stand out”, and who are responsible for numerous eye-catching label designs in the wine and spirits world. Compass Box creates bespoke whiskies in a variety of contexts, often blends and blended malts for their own lines and also specially crafted whiskies for clients such as Delilah’s punk bar in Chicago and the Brewdog chain in Britain. Eye-catching design by Stranger and Stranger and contents crafted by Compass Box for the two establishments patrons’ flavour profiles; the two are utterly consistently inconsistent, revelling in both quality of content and labelling. In September 2018 Compass Box released a limited edition of 802 bottles to commemorate 10 years of collaboration with Stranger and Stranger. Global super brands are not oblivious to good design; in 2012 Jack Daniel’s released a special edition for the 120th anniversary of White Rabbit Saloon. Design? None other than Stranger and Stranger.

Another independent that has adopted quirky labels is That Boutique Whisky Company, which this year released the first independent bottle from our own James Sedgwick Whisky Distillery. Specific hand-drawn art, consistently featuring bottling, the label on the six-year-old Three Ships features Andy Watts, master distiller, wielding a cricket bat with Table Mountain in the background and rows and rows of casks. Highly personalised, a great whisky and definitely one for the fans.

Lastly and very interestingly, is the phenomenon where the fans bottle and label for themselves, usually their favourite distillery, sometimes direct from the distillery or from another independent company holding casks. The idea of a group of friends or associates buying a cask and bottling it is as old as privately owned casks have been around; the origins of the Scotch Malt Whisky Society lie in this concept. The past couple of years have seen the ultimate independent bottlers emerge: social media groups buying casks, bottling and labelling them under the groups’ names, not for profit but to have something utterly personal: a bespoke bottle from the distillery for that social media group.

Sometimes the label may be created by the distillery, other times it’s an enthusiastic amateur, but the contents and label speak to the everyday fans who often passionately chat to each other daily across the globe, strangers united by a common love for a particular distillery. Facebook pages such as Friends of Bruichladdich and Its All About Springbank have bottled and labelled their own spirit from that distillery – sometimes proudly proclaiming the contents, sometimes the distillery insists on anonymity. Needless to say there are also less public, highly secretive groups such as the WFFA that not only bottle for themselves but have professional designs on the label which incorporate in-jokes and more serious aspects such as commemorating the passing of a family member. Groups such as WFFA bottle whatever takes their fancy, sometimes an entire cask, occasionally an incredibly rare blend, always with the sense of belonging to a very exclusive and close global family. In the words of John Glaser, “Share and enjoy!”

Buchler is a Director of ENSAfrica.
The farm’s flagship white, Tokara Director’s Reserve White 2017, has been hailed as one of Tim Atkin’s wines of the year and scored a whopping 95 points out of 100. It was one of just five wines to make the cut as a wine-of-the-year in its category, and rated as one of the best white blends in the Cape by Atkin. This blend of 69% Sauvignon Blanc and 31% Semillon is made from grapes grown on the highest slopes of Tokara’s Stellenbosch property.

The freshness from the Sauvignon Blanc is complimented with a hint of passion fruit and lemon, intertwined with a herbal, salty mineral-like character. The wine has a full palate and a remarkable complexity. It drinks well but will improve even more after a few years in the bottle.

The farm’s flagship red, the Tokara Director’s Reserve Red 2016, is a classic blend of Cabernet Sauvignon (78%); Merlot (11%); Petit Verdot (7%) and Cabernet Franc (4%) is made from only the best blocks of grapes from the farm’s premium vineyards on the slopes of Simonsberg Mountain and scored a well-deserved 94 points in Atkin’s report.

The nose of this wine is intense, with notes of dark fruit and herbs and the palate is absolutely amazing – consisting of a complex flavour of black currant, blackberries and plum, with a hint of spice and well-integrated tannins. This is probably the best partner to the best steak in the country, it is an absolute blockbuster wine. The Director’s Reserve Red is super smooth and drinks well now but it will age well in the bottle for at least another five years.

The best of Tokara, and my absolute favourite, is the Tokara Director’s Reserve 10-year-old Potstall Brandy. The base wine of this
Brandy is made from Chenin Blanc from Stellenbosch vineyards and no sulphur or enzymes are used in the production of the base wine. Distillation is done in a copper pot still according to the traditional Cognac double distillation process where only the best fraction is used for maturation in French oak barrels.

It is hard to find words to describe the complexity and character of this pot still brandy that can compete with any super luxurious Cognac. Its aroma shows an abundance of vanilla, orange and a floral character and its palate consists of a mouthful of caramel, apricots and spice with a super long and ultra-delicious aftertaste. Take a bow!

For more information visit www.tokara.com.

Van Wyk is a Partner at Spoor & Fisher.

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A spectacle only seen once in a generation: The Fête des Vignerons!

JENNY STEINER

When we relocated back to Switzerland in January 2019, I never imagined that I would be so intrigued by the build-up and presentation of the most unique show and festival celebrating the world of wine-making in our town of Vevey, Switzerland. I have to admit that I had no idea what it was really about and didn’t quite understand why there was so much hype about it all....

Over the months leading up to it, I discovered the importance and meaning of this festival from the locals, who made it quite clear that this was not something to miss! We had a number of friends taking part, but it was definitely our neighbours sharing their experience with us that made the story of the “Journey of the Fête des Vignerons” come alive for us. The entire family participated; including the grandparents, the parents and all three children. This family wasn’t unique; many local families participated. On a personal level, this took an incredible amount of dedication and commitment and just listening to the logistics of co-ordinating practices and rehearsals while still continuing with normal daily life and school routines made me exhausted. But that was never the sentiment of the participants. There was a tangible feeling of honour, enthusiasm, joy and togetherness.

So, what really is the Fête des Vignerons? It is a winegrower’s festival that pays homage to viticulture traditions many centuries old. It is organised by the Confrérie des Vignerons – the Brotherhood of Winegrowers. This celebration takes place in Vevey, the town situated at the heart of the winegrowing region of Lavaux, in the Canton of Vaud, Switzerland. It is only held once in a generation (every 20-25 years). The last such celebration took place in 1999. The next is not to be expected until 2039 at the earliest. So, in fact, we were very lucky to witness this one!

Historically, the festival has been an occasion to celebrate all the workers responsible for tending the vineyards.
The Fête des Vignerons has been recognised by UNESCO on its list of intangible cultural heritage.

The twelfth Fête des Vignerons took place this year from July 18 to August 11, 25 days in total.

The arena of the Fête des Vignerons took its pride of place on Vevey’s Place du Marché (market square). The huge open-air carpark was built on and constructed to create an impressive arena with a capacity for 20 000 seats.

With a surface area of 14 000 m² and a maximum height of 30 metres, the main stage was larger than an Olympic swimming pool and had four additional elevated stages. Not to be forgotten, the technical elements of loudspeakers, projectors, an 870 m³ LED floor, and four giant LED screens.

It took over six months of construction and ultimately just over two months to dismantle, to return the Place du Marché to the people of Vevey.

The show represented a year in the life of the vineyard, starting and finishing with the harvest. It combined the work of the vineyard, the seasons, the water, the sun, the moon and the stars; the link between man and nature highlighted, paying respect to the know-how of the winegrowers. At the heart of the show is the crowning of the winegrowers, rewarded for their excellence of work by the Confrérie des Vignerons.

The story was told through a moving dialogue between a little girl Julie and her grandfather, who enables her to discover the traditions and work of winegrowers.

The music was exceptional. The choir consisted of 500 choristers, 300 chorus-percussionists and 150 children’s voices. 120 brass band musicians, 16 jazz musicians, 40 percussionists, 36 Alphorn members, the small ensemble of 20 musicians and 36 Basel musicians. The scenes were per-
formed by 5 500 actors and actresses, all locals. It was a magical, grand, dynamic and poetic performance. A mix of music, song, dance and movement, with images projected on giant screens and on the immense LED floor of the arena.

The costume designs were out of this world. By the sheer number of actors and actresses, the colours, designs, and the cleverness of the changing costumes was genius and breathtaking. An astonishing spectacle.

The official show in the main arena was just one aspect of the entire festival.

For the duration of the festival, the area around the arena, the old town of Vevey and the lake front were transformed into an open air musical and theatrical stage — from the morning until the night. Dozens of stage areas hosted concerts, performances and other activities including plenty of food and wine to entertain the crowds.

We ventured into town on a few occasions to soak up music, dance, colours, lively processions and the culture. Our palates were satisfied with a range of local specialities including the local Swiss wine.

I was amazed to see that most of the small shops in the old town converted themselves into bars or restaurants for the four weeks of the Fete des Vignerons, all participating in their own way to create the vibrant atmosphere.

When not performing, the actors and actresses enjoyed the festivities alongside the audiences with as much enthusiasm and vibrance as in the performance. The village was abuzz with energy.

One thing I hadn’t expected was to see and feel was the connection across the generations. The coming together of locals and foreigners collectively to participate in a unique show of cultural heritage.

For weeks after the show there was a wonderful buzz, with people sharing their experiences and joys from the shows. The memories and stories will be told for many years and shared with generations to come.

Even though the dust has settled, and the town of Vevey and everyone in it has returned to their usual business, there is a sense that things are not quite as they were. There are now deeper connections, stronger emotions, and engrained culture.

Steiner writes in her personal capacity.

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**Lifestyleart**

Starting an art collection

**ALEXIA WALKER**

The recent proliferation of local art fairs would indicate that art collecting is on the rise in South Africa. This year alone, four fairs were hosted in Johannesburg: the Turbine Art Fair in July, FNB Art Joburg and Latitudes in September, plus the inaugural fringe fair, Underline, that took place at the same time. In the Mother City, the Investec Cape Town Art Fair welcomed both local and international collectors in February.

Over the past decade, the South African art scene has grown exponentially. The larger galleries like Goodman and Stevenson have commercial spaces in both Johannesburg and Cape Town. First Thursday, when the galleries stay open at night to groom a younger generation of gallery-goers, has also spread to both cities.

Last September, following its success in Cape Town, Museum Night made its Johannesburg début. Six museums around the city stayed open late with free access to exhibitions, walkabouts, talks and performances.

Art enthusiasts have much to choose from. In fact, it can be quite overwhelming for the debutant collector who faces the question of how
to embark on the collecting journey. Let’s first make a distinction between buying art and collecting. Buying art is something casual whereby artworks are acquired randomly. Starting a collection entails a more thoughtful approach and is driven by intent.

Collecting art is about assembling pieces of ourselves. It comes down to telling the story of our time, our people and our values. The French cultural theorist Jean Baudrillard puts it bluntly, “for what you really collect is always yourself”. Personal taste is what distinguishes a truly unique collection from something that merely reflects the general consensus; personal interests give a collection its substance and specific relevance.

To get started, collectors should ask themselves two simple yet important questions: what am I interested in collecting and what is my budget? Answering this will help articulate a simple strategy. The collection focuses itself can relate to a particular medium such as photography, a region like South Africa or Africa, a period, a genre, or a combination of various parameters.

It doesn’t need to be restrictive and it can evolve over time. What it does essentially is focus the search for relevant works. There is so much
out there that clear parameters guide us. It can also make the hunt more
fun when we look at filling gaps in our collection.

Another benefit of focusing a collection is that it stands a better
chance of gaining value over time. What constitutes a great collection is
how well the various pieces relate to one another and how they combine
to tell a meaningful story. Simply put, the whole becomes greater than
the sum of the parts. There are artworks that may not be very valuable
taken individually, but as a whole they form something important, per-
haps historically or culturally.

When it comes to budget, there is a persisting belief that one needs to
be wealthy to collect art. This is simply not true. There are plenty of tal-
ented young artists whose works can be bought at a very reasonable price.
The challenge, however, is that it takes a trained eye to spot talent early.
It is far easier to select artists who have already been vetted by others.

There are a few tips for collecting on a budget. Some mediums are
more expensive than others, and so are unique works compared with edi-
tions. For instance, works on paper are generally more affordable than
paintings. Small scale works are a good option too.

There is the legendary exam-
ple of the American collector
couple Herb and Dorothy Vogel
who put together a major col-
lection of minimalist and con-
ceptual art in the ‘50s and ‘60s.
Dorothy was a librarian and
Herb a postal clerk. To suit their
modest means, they chose to
collect only works on paper
which had to be small enough
to fit in the taxi back home.
They later donated what had
become a significant collection
to the National Gallery of Art
in Washington.

There are many good ways to find affordable art. Visit the open days at
a place like August House, a building in downtown Johannesburg that
houses artist studios. Follow them on Instagram to keep updated. There
are galleries focusing on emerging artists such as Kalashnikov in
Johannesburg, limited edition publishers like Bad Paper in Cape Town,
and art school graduate shows at Wits or Michaelis.

The Turbine Art Fair focuses on accessible art and the new Latitudes
Art Fair and Underline offer a good range of inexpensive works too. Art
auction houses are also a good place to shop. Major auctioneers, Aspire
and Strauss & Co, put together smaller sales that are usually accessible
online. Get onto their mailing lists to keep updated.

When budgeting for art, we must always keep in mind possible ancil-
nary expenses such as framing, installation, conservation, shipping and
insurance. The Sotheby’s Institute for Art estimates that these costs can
easily come up to 25% of what we have paid for a specific work.

Collection care is important and should not be neglected. Artworks
are physical objects that require special conditions and prevention is
always better than cure. It is advisable to get professional advice. For
instance, works on paper and photography are fragile and
should not be exposed to much
light. Humidity is generally detri-
mental to art and those who live
on the coast should take special
precaution.

When buying right, meaning
getting the right artwork at the
right price, there is a good
chance that we can see our art
appreciate in value over time.
History shows that, globally, the
long term appreciation of art is
between 6% and 12%, without
taking inflation into account.

According to the South
African Wealth report published by AfrAsia
Bank in 2018, in South Africa the appreciation
of art values over the past 10 years was 28%.
This reflects a correction in a generally under-
valued art market. It is certainly nothing to be
scorned at.

The art market can be intimidating and diffi-
cult to navigate. Because of the volume out
there, it has become a full time job to stay on
top. This is why more and more collectors,
whether they are debuting or confirmed, work
with advisers who can do much of the ground
work for a reasonable fee, make the collecting
journey more meaningful and fun, and save
them from potentially costly mistakes.

Walker is an independent Art Adviser.
alexia@walkerart.co.za
All it takes is the right partner
The Boot

THEO BUCHLER

My ever-patient editor (patient, that is, with my dreadful adherence to deadlines) and I were chatting about things to write about, over dinner with others. I mentioned a recent trip to Brighton to see the pebble beaches, something that I’ve wanted to do for decades. Brighton and the disaffected, rebellious Mod sub-culture of the ’60s and ’70s feature heavily in the 1979 cult film *Quadrophenia*, which formed a staple of my viewing youth. Brighton always seemed grimly exotic in the film.

The idea struck me recently that 40 years ago alternative subcultures were a lot more clearly defined. By interesting coincidence, I came across an old copy of Time Magazine, dated 24 October 1983. Published in a very bleak economic period of British economic history, it focused extensively on what it called “The Tribes of Britain”: Punks, Mods, Teddy Boys, Sloane Rangers, football hooligans and a host of others. Key elements in defining most of these tribes was (and still is, to a lesser extent) dress style and music, particularly footwear. The article was focused on the extreme political, social and economic discord of Britain in the ’80s, but it illustrated something that remains relevant even today: the expression of non-conformity.

There can be no doubt that one of the most iconic symbols of rebellion is the ubiquitous Dr Martens 1460 8-eyelet boot. So where does one start on my lifelong obsession with the best footwear ever created? The boot of the counter culture is now mainstream fashion but retains great credibility; it’s the brainchild of an injured doctor creating shoes that would help remedy a broken foot from a bad skiing accident. Now it’s about to celebrate its 60th anniversary.

The 1460 takes its catalogue number from the date on which the first pair rolled off the factory floor at Cobb’s Lane, Wollaston, Northamptonshire: 1 April 1960 (1/4/60). Initially designed by Dr Klaus Martens in Germany in the 1950s, the idea and licence was picked up by Bill Griggs of the Griggs Company in England to make functional, working men’s boots (yes, working men’s boots!). In this simple concept lies probably the greatest reason Dr Martens have endured in popularity: extremely comfortable once worn in and highly durable. The soles are soft honeycomb that bounce, styled “Air-Wair”: virtually all derivatives use this general concept as the sole.

The first years of the ’60s saw the original black (there was a time when you could only have black, oxblood or cherry red eight hole Dr Marten’s boots, and later shoes) being exclusively worn by working class men: among others police, factory and blue collar workers. By the ’70s, they were fairly standard attire for the police, but at this point the sturdy comfortable air-cushioned
sole boots and shoes (a 3-eyelet plain Derby shoe was introduced in the early ’60s) had become increasingly popular: the style was about to be adopted by almost all of the late 70’s subcultures in what was the start of a cultural footwear phenomenon that continues to this day.

The ’80s saw not only punks and other subcultures but also politicised activists, feminists and a wide range of women adopting numerous styles of Dr Martens, floral designs and tartan boots dispelling the notion for once and for all that the Boot is the preserve of men. A plethora of less masculine styles have been consistently available for decades.

Women who push the boundaries often have the common thread of embracing the Air-Wair sole: Siouxsie Sioux’s extravagant 20-eyelet boots, autographed in the ’90s, are housed in the Dr Martens mini-museum in Camden, London. No stranger to confrontation or nudity, her exploits have been echoed by none other than Miley Cyrus, sporting a pair of 10-eyelet classic Cherry Reds in the Wrecking Ball video, and occasionally not much else. With roughly a billion views, there can be no doubt the video is a modern music classic.

Literally thousands of variations of Dr Martens exist both in terms of official releases and home-made modifications, usually painted or adding studs or ornaments, together with a plethora of obvious and not so obvious imitations.

Modern day collaborations have taken the Boot to cultural heights that are simply staggering. The iconic post-punk album, Unknown Pleasures (Joy Division 1979), recently received its own 1460 black boot: embossed leather with Peter Saville’s instantly recognisable design. The image of the Boot in its various incarnations and slung names persists: on 6 October, The Times UK carried an article, “Fashion learns to revel in a spot of bover with return of skinhead boot”. Some fashionable manufacturers are charging up to £1,000 for what is suspiciously very Dr Marten-inspired gear...

But we still go back to the question of how people across different cultures and countries express their non-conformity today? The world is increasingly fragmented and conformist at the same time, the static of designer labels, global cool TV shows with vacuous content... the young and not so young non-conformists are still here. While this is something beyond the scope of this article, the one answer I can give on this topic, as uninformed as my lapsed sociologist brain is, is the continuing combination of innovative music and the 1460 and its myriad descendents. The new 1460s I wore on Brighton beach while the stoner dug into my soft lawyer rear are the same unchanged basic model that the counterculture and the mainstream have embraced for 60 years. The young daughters of my partner shouting, “Mom, can I wear your Docs?” speaks to a pair of black (1984 vintage) 1460s that have travelled 35 years, thousands of steps and now span two generations...

In putting this together, I have relied for history on various sources, but specifically mention Martin Roach’s work, “Doctor Martens: A History of Rebellious Self-Expression”.

Buchler is a Director of ENSafrika.
Balancing life as a full-time lawyer and professional dancer

URAYSHA RAMRACHEYA

I've never seen myself as a perfect fit within the legal fraternity. I grew up in a household of legal minds, but my interest at a young age lay a distance away from that.

I began studying dance at the age of four and worked my way up the ranks to be an accomplished choreographer and performer in the South African entertainment industry. I am proficient in the Indian classical dance form known as Kathak, as well as styles such as Indian Folk Dance, Bollywood and Indo-Jazz. Dance has taken me to stages all over the world (including India, Mauritius and South America). Amongst other dignitaries, I have performed for the late Nelson Mandela, former President Thabo Mbeki and the former Indian Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh. I have both starred in and managed acclaimed stage shows and when it all comes to a close, I come home to the space that inspires me to do more - my desk.

When people think about lawyers and what they do, they probably envision someone who is stern, left-brained and tightly suited up. I am not those three things. However, times are changing and the attitude that people have towards lawyers and how they should look is diversifying as fast as our technology is.

I have been fortunate to have worked within two large organisations (one a global law firm, and the other a corporate bank). They are unrelenting in their need for the highest possible quality of work. At the law firm, I was pushed to spend the maximum amount of billable hours on our high profile clients and, even though the hours in corporate aren't as recordable, the pressures working at the bank are no less. In spite of the work ethic, both employers have allowed me to pursue my second love - dance.

That being said, the road to this dual life is not easy. There are colleagues who look down on you for having this colourful creative side; perhaps some individuals higher up who believe that anything non-law related is simply a distraction. This is the mindset that our community needs to start changing. The belief that lawyers can only be cut from the same boring, navy blue cloth is one which could, one day, make our profession redundant and irrelevant. We should instead be looking at ways to grow our creative minds and come up with new and ingenious ways to tackle our work – and what better way to grow your mind than to dance?

The benefits of dance are varied and far-reaching:

- On its most basic level, dance is a fun way to keep fit! As lawyers (who are in a profession that requires them to sit at a desk for pro-

- Dance is a recognised way to manage stress. It is a joyous distraction which elevates your endorphins and has the ability to soothe and to calm anxiety. In a profession where the majority of our colleagues suffer from burnout, occupational stress and depression, the value of joy is immeasurable.
Lifestyle dance

- The neuroscientific benefits of dance are invaluable. Dance and music activates the deeper brain areas (which are primarily responsible for emotions, memory and social interaction) in a unique way, and strengthens interpersonal interaction and self-understanding.

- Dancing introduces the body to the “flow” phenomenon – where a person becomes fully immersed in an activity. Flow experiences, such as this, increase the productivity of an individual as well as the quality of their actions.

I could go on and on about the benefits of moving your body but I believe my point has been well made. Now the challenge is how to allow ourselves the luxury of dance within our high-powered careers.

Thankfully, as I have experienced in my career, there are an increasing number of amazing leaders within the legal community who understand the benefits of a happy employee. They understand that people need freedom and flexibility to survive and they allow their employees to live their lives to the fullest. Of course, this is to be juggled with the responsibility of managing your workload efficiently. Even today, I commit fully to my legal work while balancing a life of dance and performance. How, you ask? Work smart, not hard! Move away from selling every hour of your life, to making every hour count in the greater scheme of things. Take a long hard look at the way you run your career and your mindset and I promise you it will not be hard to find that one extra hour in the week to shake it up at a Zumba class, a Bollywood bhangra or a hip hop workshop. Build your mind, your body and your talents all at once – and watch as the skills you learn in the oddest of dance studios help your legal career flourish.

Ramracheya is Senior Legal Counsel at Absa.

Lifestyle swimming

Swimming

JESSICA OSMOND

Coming from a life filled with swimming caps, constantly wet hair and the smell of chlorine emanating from my skin on a daily basis, to a life behind a desk, to and from court and the countless emails ending in the words “for your urgent attention”, it’s hard to imagine there are similarities to be drawn between life as a lawyer and that of a South African National swimmer. But upon consideration I have found the two aren’t so different after all.

A keen swimmer for most of my life, I started my competitive training when I was 10 years old. The early mornings for me were the greatest adjustment and having to be in the water at 6am was something I never got used to – even after a 12-year swimming career. Many years of training and many sacrifices along the way made for a challenging yet rewarding career in sport; I achieved most of the goals I had set for myself. The same dedication is needed for someone pursuing a career in the “notorious” legal profession.
My ultimate goal was always to compete for South Africa at the Olympic Games but in order to achieve that goal I had to first set my sights on competing for South Africa at some international meets.

Many years of training and many threats of throwing in the towel (pun intended) later, I finally made my first SA team in matrix. I was selected to compete in the 5km open water swim at the Senior African Champs in Morocco. Having achieved gold at these championships, I knew that this was a step in the right direction to achieve my life-long goal of competing at the Olympic Games.

In order to pursue my swimming career full time, I moved to Durban to train under the guidance of National Head Coach, Graham Hill. I trained alongside many other swimmers who had represented South Africa internationally and at the Olympics – this made for an immensely competitive and challenging training environment which was invaluable.

Whilst living in Durban, I was fortunate to compete in many International meets, including the FINA World Championships in Shanghai where I competed in the 10km marathon swim. This was ahead of the 2012 London Olympics and acted as the first qualifying event for the Games.

Only 18 at the time, my sights were set on the 2016 Olympic Games and so I saw the International meets merely as an invaluable experience and opportunities to compete against the best in the world.

The next international meet in 2012 was part of the World Series Circuit in Portugal, the same year as the London Olympic Games. Portugal acted as the second and last chance to qualify for the Games. Once again, I had little faith on qualifying but saw this as another opportunity to learn, experience and grow as a swimmer on an international scale. However, much to my surprise, I had the race of my life, and ended up qualifying for the Olympics as Africa’s Continental qualifier, which secured me a spot in the London Olympic Games later that year.

I could not believe that my life-long dream had come to fruition and that I was heading to London to represent South Africa at the London Olympic Games at just 19-years-old. I felt that all those years of sacrifice and hard work had paid off and I was elated.

Come the Games, I felt stronger and fitter than ever in my life. I trained up to 20kms a day in 18-degree water to prepare for the conditions we would face in London; I felt ready to take on the challenge. However, on the day of my race, things did not work out as we had envisioned. I woke up on the day feeling ill and sick to my stomach – no amount of prior training or preparation could take away that feeling. Needless to say, the race did not go according to plan at all and I left the games disillusioned, disappointed and heartbroken.

All those years of sacrifice and having made it to the Olympic Games – my pinnacle – only to have it amount to, what I felt at the time, a disappointment. After the Games, I decided to take my life in a different direction and move back to Port Elizabeth to pursue my studies full time and challenge myself in a different area of life, as my love for the sport was strained.

Over time, however, I learnt to see the good that came out of this incredible experience and was grateful for the amazing opportunity to
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achieve my goal – even though things didn’t go quite as planned.

I learnt that experiences like this one shape us and allow us to learn lessons which we are then able to apply to other chapters in our lives. Being able to reflect on life and my swimming career from a different perspective has, I feel, prepared me for a career in law. I’ve come to realise that the challenges, commitment and disappointments faced in both areas aren’t so different at their core.

How often do we see our fellow colleagues making huge sacrifices over the years, whether it be time with their families or friends, or personal sacrifices of time and denying oneself, to serve a purpose or goal that they believe is going to be fulfilling in the end, but ultimately doesn’t ever fill that gap?

Not to say that making sacrifices and setting out to achieve certain goals is not something to aspire to. However, I have learnt that it is important to ensure that you do not define yourself and your existence by something that could be taken away in a second. This, I have come to learn, can be avoided by ensuring balance in life.

I believe that it is always important to evaluate your life as a whole; understand the things you have set out to achieve and endeavour to find a healthy balance between that which you want to achieve and that which you deem to be important in your life.

As we all know, a career in law can often become somewhat of a rat race, and many of us tend to get sucked into a lifestyle which isn’t, in fact, really a lifestyle at all. And that’s because we often forget the value of balance.

There were many sacrifices to make during my swimming career. I do believe though that sometimes the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow may not be as glamorous or fulfilling as one had previously envisioned (exhibit ‘A’ above). This can leave one feeling disillusioned about the choices made over the years and the things sacrificed in order to achieve that goal.

From what I have learnt, I believe that in our day-to-day lives we should always bear in mind the importance, when things get busy and the hours are long, of achieving balance in life. You are then able to make the necessary considered sacrifices with the surety of knowing that when/if your efforts seem to have been fruitless or did not quite live up to what you had envisioned, you will not be left feeling disillusioned about who you are as a person and what you gave up; you will remain dynamic and multifaceted, and have more to offer than your primary set of expertise.

Osmond is a Candidate Attorney with Cliffe Dekker Hofmeyr.

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Lifestylebooks

A Year of Books

It feels like just yesterday that I sat down to write my annual book column for without prejudice, and here we are again. A little bit older, a little bit wiser, and hopefully a little bit better read.

The way that I compile these lists for you is that I go back over my Facebook reviews for the year from the online book clubs that I belong to. If you are a reader, this is a great source of reading ideas – and, for me, it acts as a reminder of what I have enjoyed most in the year.

The Big Reads

Let’s start with two books that everyone was talking about, that I thoroughly enjoyed.

The first was *An American Marriage* by Tayari Jones, the winner of the 2019 Women’s Prize for Fiction. I am not, generally, a fan of prize-winning books – I find the Booker winners united by a thread of incoherence – but the Women’s Prize tends to be an exception, and this book is wonderful. As implicated, it is a book about marriage; a happy marriage torn apart when Roy, the husband, is wrongfully accused and found guilty of rape.

Elizabeth Gilbert’s *City of Girls* was one of the big releases of the year. Small town girl Vivian arrives in 1940s New York, and gets caught up in her Aunt’s theatre – befriending showgirls and learning about sex. As a writer, what I loved about this was that she wrote it when she was mourning the death of her wife, and she told herself that she could have fun with it; use the fun as therapy. And as a reader, I could feel her having fun. It is a romp. And I really liked that.

If you have read her previous work, it is definitely more like *Signature of All Things* (which I loved) than *Eat, Pray, Love* (which I loathed).

The SA Stars

You will seldom meet a South African writer who is not also a South African reader – and it is always exciting to see how many books there are by SA writers that have an international feel. I’ve been writing a thriller this year, so both locally and internationally. My focus has been on thrillers or gripped. These SA writers’ books kept me hooked; although some are not published primarily in SA, they are all home-grown talent:
Lifestyle books

- Amy Heyadenych’s The Pact – A prank played on a work nemesis goes terribly wrong in this book which is fast-paced, clever, touching on so many important social issues, especially those that affect women in the workplace.

- Green Valley, by Louis Greenberg – This book was absolutely gripping. A community has rejected the big brother world of technology and reverted to a screen-free world. And next door, in a giant building almost sealed from the world, live a community who only live in virtual reality, completely wired in to society. And then dead children start to appear. Stayed with me for ages.

- A Walk at Midnight – Alex van Tonder. Just as Jane is about to release her debut novel, her husband Colin is found dead, in circumstances eerily mirroring her book. Absolutely gripping – despite me knowing “The Thing” quite early (Thrillers always have a thing at their centre, I think). Always a sign of a good thriller – when you know, but also you don’t know for sure.

- Jo MacGregor’s The First Time I Fell – In this second book in what will hopefully be a long series, Garnet is barely coming to terms with her new psychic powers when she stumbles across a dead body. It looks like suicide… but Garnet knows better.

The beach reads

As I said, I’ve been reading a lot of thrillers and thriller-like books this year, and what better genre for the beach or long haul flight than these.

Here are my picks:

- The Girl at the Window by Rowan Coleman. This book by a favourite author lived up to expectations despite the title making me expect a rote thriller. It is not that at all. A bit family drama, a bit historical (I generally have a low tolerance for historical but this was fine) and fairly spooky with actual spooks. Think of Du Maurier meets Hannah Kent. Also, Bronte fans will be very charmed by it as it has a whole Bronte related story (although this is not a prerequisite for enjoyment).

- A Nearly Normal Family by MT Edvardsson. Can a book set in Sweden ever really go wrong? 18 year old Stella is arrested for murder. We hear from her father’s point of view, then hers and then her mother’s. Together, a complicated story emerges, keeping the reader guessing to the end.

- My Lovely Wife by Samantha Downing. Looking for an easy-reading gripping thriller that will keep you captive? A fan of the TV show Dexter? This novel about a couple with a dark secret is the one for you.

Still on the beach – but a bit less scared

These choices are still easy reading – but you’ll be able to breathe easy while you read them:

- Killing It by Asia Mackay (and the sequel, The Nursery). Lex has to go back to work after having a baby. A normal book about the challenges of new motherhood and proving you still have what it takes at work… except Lex is an assassin in a secret branch of government. James Bond meets Yummy Mummies… and absolute fun!

- This Child of Ours by Sadie Pearse. Inhaled this book. Easy to read on an important subject that makes a parent think hard about how they would cope with the challenge of a child with gender identity issues. It is not lyrical writing. It has no startling plot twists. Some of you are going to say “manipulative” and “formulaic”. But I finished it in a day.

- The Truths and Triumphs of Grace Atherton by Anstey Harris. Grace is a violin maker, and happily in love. Then a chance incident forces her lover to show his true colours, and Grace is left broken. This is real up-lit, and life affirming and joyous. An aside… if like me you are not musical, don’t let the instruments and music put you off. The passion for a job one loves is a universally relatable theme.

Schimmel is CEO of the ARB.

Schimmel’s fifth novel, Two Months, will be released by Pan MacMillan in April 2020.
The backpacker’s guide to the galaxy

JASON FLEISCHER

I love one thing in life above all else: backpacking. I relish nothing more than packing my beloved backpack and getting on a plane to a fascinating and faraway place. Over the past few years my backpack and I have visited 14 different cities, in places as diverse as Brazil and Russia. Among my many adventures, I have journeyed from St Petersburg to Moscow on the Red Arrow, the former official train of the Communist Party of the USSR; cycled through Amsterdam’s 17th century canal belt; and watched Lionel Messi and his FC Barcelona teammates beat their city rivals Espanyol in front of a crowd of over 90 000 at the Camp Nou. I have done all this and a lot more whilst travelling on my own (or “solo travelling”, as we enthusiasts call it).

Whenever I tell anyone about my solo adventures, I always seem to get a version of the same four questions:

“Isn’t travelling alone scary?”

Yes! I’m often scared before I set off. Fears as diverse as not being able to find my way, losing something valuable and, of course, the fear of being lost in translation all enter my thoughts as I travel. Often these fears are founded in reality. For example, when I arrived in Moscow, it was minus 15 degrees and the directions my hostel had sent me to an unmarked dock in an alley behind a block of flats. I was extremely confused and, to be very honest, I was terrified. I was lost in a city that was so alien it felt like it could be on another planet. I was freezing cold. I was carrying a 20kg bag on my back and I could not find my bed for the night. However, I eventually managed to find the (quite frankly) impossibly discreet hostel (which turned out actually to be a converted flat – hence the location) and all was well again. So yes, in answer to that question, I do get scared and sometimes things are uncertain, but that’s all part of the adventure.

“Isn’t it lonely?”

When you travel solo you can be as much of a social butterfly as you want to be. Backpacking and, by extension, hostel culture is geared towards sharing. Backpackers share experiences, travel tips, and, of course, showers. The culture encourages open-mindedness. I am an introverted person but I never hesitate to jump into a plan if an interesting opportunity arises. That’s part of the fun and the freedom of solo travel: one is encouraged to say “yes”! One of my favourite stories happened in Rio de Janeiro. After hearing a familiar accent in a hostel, I struck up a conversation with a fellow South

African and wound up at a street party dancing the samba into the early hours of the morning. These experiences are common and, if you want to be around people, the opportunities to meet people are endless.

“How do you know where to go?”

You talk to people. Of course! Even in the world of TripAdvisor and Google searches, there is no better travel resource than the people around you: the staff at your hostel, fellow travellers, even taxi drivers. As I said, backpacking culture is about sharing. The best tips on things like hidden beaches, hole in the wall bars or even the best thermal baths in Budapest are often shared by people breaking the ice in hostel dorm rooms. One night, at a hostel bar in Rio, an Englishman told me about a small island off the coast of Rio de Janeiro state – “Ilha Grande”. He said the beaches were just beautiful. I had to go, he told me.
The next morning I booked a hostel on the island, packed a small overnight bag, locked the rest of my things in a locker in Rio and took a bus and a ferry to the island. This turned out to be the highlight of my trip. The island was not just beautiful, it was almost deserted. I spent two days hiking to secluded beaches and swimming in the calm warm water. It was magical and, although I had heard of it before that night, the decision to visit was based on the recommendation of a fellow traveler.

“How do you plan your trips?”

Research, research and more research! Over time, I have developed a bit of a process for planning trips. I start off by deciding whether I want to go somewhere hot or cold. This really sets the mood for the kind of trip I’m going to have. For example, this December I am going to India because I want to go somewhere warm. Next, I draw up my budget. This helps me to narrow down my choices as well as determine how long I can go for.

At this point I usually have a country or region in mind and start spending more time on details, like where, exactly, I will go, how long I’ll be in each place, where I am going to stay and what transport I’ll be using. This takes time. A good hostel, for example, can make all the difference, so putting in the research is worthwhile. Finally, I research a very loose itinerary for each stop. I always try to fill up about 25% of my schedule in each place before I get there. I do this so that I can make sure that I have flexibility while not being so rudderless that I waste all my time. I also try to cognisant of the fact that some attractions require prior bookings. Good planning is the basis of any successful trip.

So now that you’ve heard my piece, I hope I have inspired you to get out there and explore the world. Believe me, you won’t regret it!

Fleischer is a Candidate Attorney with Webber Wentzel.

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Lifestyle travel

Sandton corporate lawyer to carefree backpacker

Georga Ballard

A few things to know about me: I live my life by lists. I have always planned my life out with goals to be achieved by a particular stage. I am not a procrastinator and like to get things done. I had never stayed in a hostel before. I ordinarily travel with a massive wheely bag that contains at least three options for any potential occasion.

Do you have a picture of me in your head? Now try to imagine this person going on a solo backpacking trip through South and Central America for seven months, with only the first few nights of accommodation booked. May loco, no?

Travelling is a passion of mine. I've always thrived on the challenge of starting afresh in a new place, meeting people from all over, as I did in Edinburgh when I moved there for my Master's degree. South America had always been on my "must go there" list (again with the lists!). It is vast and varied beyond belief, so I'd never had enough time to do it justice.

I've already mentioned that I am goal-oriented. I've also always ensured that I meet the goals I set within the relevant timeframe: get an A aggregate for matric, be accepted into a good university, graduate with distinction, obtain a Master's degree from a foreign university, get articles in a good corporate law firm, pass my board exams and be retained in the department of my choice. I've had fun along the way, but I've never paused to take stock, or considered deviating from the path.

Experiencing a profound personal loss caused me to do exactly that. I wasn't enjoy-

ing anything in my life anymore. I didn't find any purpose or satisfaction in my work. I was severely stressed and on the verge of tears at any given moment. I was reaching breaking point and I knew that if I didn't do something to take back my life, irreparable damage would be done to my relationships, my mental wellbeing and my heart.

So, I knew that this was my time to explore a fascinating place with a rich history, so similar to Africa in so many ways, yet worlds apart.

When I boarded the plane from Johannesburg to Sao Paulo, Brazil, I felt equal measures of excitement and trepidation. Within a day of having arrived, the trepidation had flown out the window. I think the fact that I was in Rio for Carnaval might have had something to do with that. Carnaval is a time when Brazilians let loose after Lent. After three years of working in a high-pressure environment as a corporate lawyer, I had experienced a very long "Lent" and so it was high time for my personal Carnaval.

I have mapped out my trip in order of some of my favourite of the astounding experiences I had in each country: Connecting with my inner-self at Rosemary Dream, a yoga and mindfulness retreat in Florianópolis, Brazil;
Arriving at 4am at a hostel (that was closed at that time) on the beach in Punta del Diablo, Uruguay, watching the sunrise on a deckchair while waiting for the hostel to open;

Attending Spanish school for two weeks at Academia de Buenos Aires, Argentina, which built the foundation of my Spanish speaking and allowed me to engage with the local people for the rest of my trip;

Spending four days hiking through the breathtaking landscapes of El Chaltén, Argentina (and nearly getting blown over once reaching Laguna de los Tres);

Observing a colossal chunk of ice crack off Perito Moreno glacier and crash into the water below in El Calafate, Argentina;

Hiking 17km through sun and snow on my own to the Mirador las Torres at Torres del Paine National Park, Chile;

Working at a hostel overlooked by an active volcano in Pucón, Chile, and spending my days off visiting the Geometrica thermal baths and hiking through the peaceful Huerquehue National Park;

Exploring one of the wonders of the world, a majestic feat of construction – Machu Picchu, Peru;

Sandboarding down terrifyingly high sand dunes in the desert in Huacachina, Peru;

A boat trip on the Amazon river from Iquitos, Peru to Manaus, Brazil – our three days spent in the tri-border area were memorable for the wrong reasons – after finally buying tickets on a boat to Manaus (this being a fact in itself as there was absolutely no information available), we were nearly trapped in the Colombian tri-border town because the border was closed due to Colombian elections and after finally making it to the port, we were subjected to a drug search and intense questioning in Portuguese before being allowed to board the boat after sniffer dogs thought my friend’s Chilean tea was marijuana;

Marvelling at one of the largest pre-Columbian Mayan cities, in Chichén Itzá, Mexico;

Learning to surf in Playa El Zonte and travelling around by chicken bus (I actually saw a little boy with a chicken in a woven basket, so they are aptly named) with the locals along the coast of El Salvador;

Waking up in a teepee with a view of towering volcanoes in Lago Atitlán, Guatemala;

Witnessing hundreds of mother turtles coming ashore to lay their eggs during the arribada at Playa Ostional, Costa Rica;

Seeing an extremely rare Baird’s tapir, the largest mammal in Costa Rica, in Corcovado National Park, a place with over 50% of Costa Rica’s already astounding biodiversity;

Hang gliding off Pedro Bonita, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil;

Lazing days swimming and sun-tanning like a local with a Brazilian bikini, coconut water and acai on Ipanema beach, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil; and

Boating and snorkelling around the islands of Bocas del Toro, Panama.

I fell in love with my fair share of alpacas, rediscovered my childhood love of hiking, made friends with and photographed probably two thirds of the entire dog population of South America, and taught those I met about my country and its history and spread my love for it and its people.

Travelling on my own allowed for reflection, introspection and reading. But I never felt lonely; staying in hostels meant that I met some incredible, like-minded people, many of whom I’m sure will stay good friends for life.

I returned from my trip with a broken foot (I suffered a stress fracture from the 10kms a day I would often walk, sometimes in slip slops), but was tanned, relaxed and self-aware. My travels allowed me to reset my internal compass, to confirm that where I was heading was actually where I wanted to go.

It’s okay not to stick blindly to your “life plan” – while it’s a good idea to have goals and to work towards them, ripping up that plan and starting again, or taking a breather to re-evaluate, is perfectly alright. My trip (and the loss that precipitated it) provided me with invaluable perspective. I will never compromise on some of my key values (to work hard and always do my best), but I am now able to draw boundaries and to prioritise those things in life that are most important – friends, family and health (both physical and mental).

Sí, claro!

Ballard is an Associate with Norton Rose Fulbright (South Africa).
Uku hamba kubona

LUNTA QUNTANA

“Life is a book and those who do not travel read only one page” – St. Augustine

The life of a young lawyer is infamously a coffee-fuelled existence, chasing unending deadlines, with weekends reserved for much-deserved recuperative naps. The narrative probably rings true for many people and it may well be that this is the path to earn our stripes as we climb the proverbial ladder in this profession. Contemplating this reality while doing my articles, I remembered a proverb my grandmother once shared: “Uku hamba kubona” – Xhosa Proverb (To travel is to discover).

I have always been an obedient grandson, in that I have a healthy interest in “discovery”: I was born in East London, spent my high school years in Johannesburg, and am now working in Cape Town. The travel bug bit me at quite a young age and I have visited all nine provinces at least once.

Now here I was, an articled clerk given the speech about putting my head down and revisiting “life” after admission. My birthday was coming up and my best friend, Anathi Mnyakanyaka, suggested a road trip, reminding me of my goal to bungee jump at the highest bungee in Africa. I took up the challenge and we began plotting our adventures along the Garden Route.

The Garden Route – a 300-kilometre stretch of the south-eastern coast of South Africa – extends from Witsand in the Western Cape to the border of Tsitsikamma and the Storm River in the Eastern Cape. This stretch was conveniently along the route from our Cape Town home to our ultimate destination: Bloukrans Bridge Bungee Jump in the Tsitsikamma National Park. The adventures in-between were beyond our expectations; I recommend visiting at least one of these places along the Garden Route.

We began our expedition on a Friday, driving to Oudtshoorn (technically not on the Garden Route but easily accessible) as our first stop. Here we visited Highgate Ostrich Show Farm, where we learned about the art of feather weaving, the history of ostrich farming in South Africa and had the pleasure of watching an ostrich race. Oh, and did I mention riding an ostrich?

Our next stop was Mossel Bay, a small town with serene views and a tranquil presence. Here we took a two-hour class learning to surf at Surf’s Up Surf School – yes, we left Cape Town to learn how to surf in Mossel Bay – because of the warmer water! As neither Anathi nor I had ever surfed, it was the experience of a lifetime, learning by watching the others battle the waves and balance on their boards for the first time. I must admit, there were a few points I was nervous about. As they say: “Rome was not built in a day”. We are far from being pro-surfers but we can now balance on a board and handle a wave or two!

Surfing along, the next day was spent in a place called Wilderness. In my opinion, the most beautiful place in South Africa. The sea temperature is perfect, the people are lovely and the views are to die for! Anathi and I made a covenant to own beach houses in Wilderness when this
“billables-chasing” pays off one day. Here we took on another first: paragliding. I had gone into this trip thinking the bungee jump was the main event and here I was on top of a sand dune strapped to a parachute about to jump off, thinking to myself: “My parents have no idea I am doing this – what if I fall?” Another small voice said: “Dude, what if you fly?” Internal conflict or not, it was too late to back out. I flew!

The wind was beneath, above and around me, and the experience was priceless. Seeing the stunning architecture across the town, the endless sea, and breathing in the ocean air was magical. I remember asking my guide: “What is actually controlling this parachute?” and his response was: “The wind”. In mid-air, there was no time to reconsider terms and conditions, so I threw caution to that same wind and enjoyed the ride!

The thrill of riding the wind and the adrenaline boost after landing made us want to explore even more of the Garden Route’s hidden adventures. We moved along our route to Tsitsikamma and headed to Plettenberg Bay. We rented an Airbnb in Plett and found that the warmth of the sea matched the warmth of the hearts of people in the small towns along the Garden Route. We found the best service and discovered lovely local restaurants, with antiques such as a Welcome Dover coal stove! I had only ever heard of it in a song by famous playwright and musician Moonga Ngema. “Stove Samalale”. Anathi seemed to have seen it while growing up. The establishments had an authentically local-bred feel about them, which was welcome coming from a big city where everything is either an American franchise or an impression of it.

In Plett, we took to the dirt and kept our riding on more familiar territory: quad biking! The track at WildX Adventures was perfect for feeling like a little child, giving you the freedom to drive as fast as you want with no-one to tell you to slow down. This, of course, makes you vulnerable to tumbling and falling when taking a sharp turn on the track without breaking (which happened more times than I will admit!). The exhilaration of hearing the engine roar, the dust and pushing the bike to its limit made me feel like I was in a Dakar Rally race in a 4X4.

It was the last night before the big one. We had planned to jump in the morning and drive back the whole way to Cape Town the next day, so we had to make the most of it. We drove around Plett by night, hopped around the different beach spots and found a curry eatery before retiring for the night.

D-Day: the icing was now ready to be added to the cake that was my birthday weekend: Bloukrans Bridge is the tallest single-span bridge in the world and the fourth highest commercial bungee jumping facility, according to Guinness World Records – and I was about to jump. First bungee ever and I was doing it big. We drove that final stretch from Plett to Tsitsikamma and the nerves started kicking in. Collecting our harnesses and having the safety briefing brought it closer. The walk over the bridge, looking down through the meshed support structure below, was riveting. Finally, arms out and toes over the edge… Count down from three and lights out. It was an out-of-body experience: from being as close to death as I had ever been to being the most alive I had ever known. Once the rope straightened, lying suspended 216 meters from the ground, I let out a shout of relief, of victory.

I recommend this trip for anyone looking for an action-packed itinerary with limited time.

Ndikuni bafane ndi bafane! ✨

Quintana is a Candidate Attorney with Webber Wentzel.

DEALMAKERS

SA Exchange Listed M&A

AVI subsidiary I&J entered into an agreement with joint venture partner Simplot Australia to dispose of its 40% effective interest in Simplot Seafood Snacks and Meals for a cash consideration of A$62 million (R633 million). I&J will continue to service the Australian and New Zealand markets through an ongoing supply agreement with Simplot Australia.

Prosus subsidiary OLX invested $400 million into Berlin-based startup Frontier Car Group (FGG). The capital infusion will be used to accelerate the growth of FGG into the top five car marketplaces worldwide and make it number one in some African Markets. FGG has a presence in the Nigerian market operating through subsidiary Cars4s.

Senwes advised shareholders of the acquisition of Falcon Agricultural Equipment with effect from November 1, 2019. Falcon provides agricultural equipment to the agricultural sector, distributing products country-wide through authorized dealers and into twelve African countries. Financial details of the transaction were undisclosed.

Steinhoff International announced two disposals as it attempts to stave off closure and become a retail-focused investment holding firm. Allegro Funds acquired Greenfield Brands general merchandise division and Afterpay Investors, the specialist European retail sector investor, acquired Blue Group, the owner of Benson’s for Beds, Harvey’s Furniture and upholstery & bedding manufacturers Relion, Steinhoff UK Beds and Formation Furniture. Financial details were undisclosed.

General Corporate Finance

Dale Capital lists on the ZAR X

The company, a Mauritius-listed private equity investment holding firm, has taken an inward secondary listing on ZAR X with the aim of raising $2.2 million (approximately R30 million). The company listed 202,040,920 shares on the exchange at R0.80 per share. Dale Capital invests in food, beverage and food security sector in Mauritius.

RMB Holdings to restructure

The company’s board has decided to restructure its portfolio of assets and liabilities. The assets comprise a 34.15% shareholding in FirstRand valued at approximately R130 billion and a portfolio of property development assets valued at approximately R3.35 billion. In terms of the restructuring it is the intention of the board to distribute the FirstRand stake to RMB shareholders and to monetise the property assets over time. Remgro has also indicated that it intends to unwind its holding structure and distribute its 28.1% stake in RMB Holdings to shareholders. Further details will be made prior to the end of the first quarter of 2020.

Unlisted Deals

African Pioneer Group, a black-owned investment company, acquired HIK Alabone Farm from Agri-Ve Fond I, a private equity investment fund focused on food and agribusiness in sub-Saharan Africa managed by EXEIC Capital. The Fund was invested in HIK for eight years, investing a total sum of R41.5 million in two branches.

Nosa Group, a global occupational health a safety risk management solutions provider is to acquire the laboratory business of Diagnose Group. The business will be combined with the 2017 acquisition of the CSI’s Cape and Durban laboratories, positioning the group as SA’s largest food and agriculture laboratory testing business and occupational health-focused laboratories.

Thebe Investment Corporation, a black-owned investment firm, has taken up controlling stakes of 51% in Discover Digital South Africa and 50.12% in Discover Digital International. Discover Digital is an end-to-end digital media, content and fintech solutions provider.

And in the rest of Africa . . .

Egypt: Ekuty Holding, the investment arm of Kuwait Investment Authority in Egypt, acquired a 30% stake in the Nile Aluminum and Metals Company from the Erzilah Egypt Mid-Cap Fund. The rationale for the acquisition was the geographical reach of the company in addition to its growth and expansion prospects.

Nigeria: Visa announced it is to acquire a significant minority stake in Nigerian payments processor Interswitch, a technology-driven company focused on the digitisation of payments in Nigeria and other countries in Africa. Visa will join existing investors Helios Investment Partners, TA Associates and IFC as shareholders.

Nigeria: Interswitch, an Africa-focused integrated digital payments and commerce company, announced the acquisition of a 60% stake in eClat Healthcare. eClat is a Nigerian health technology company specialising in assisting healthcare service providers in planning, designing and operating unique practices through the deployment of its bespoke healthcare technology platform. The acquisition will enhance Interswitch’s product and service offering and expand its reach into new markets.

Togo: Avian Group, a leading Madagascarian telecoms group, and Africa-focused private equity firm Emerging Capital Partners formed a consortium to acquire a 51% stake in Togo’s state telecommunications company Togocom for an undisclosed sum. The deal marks the completion of a privatisation process announced in 2018 by the West African government.

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Delve Deeper

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