

LIFE IN ARMENIA

FOR DIGITAL NOMAD FAMILIES



AUG, 28TH 2026 | NO. 39 | LIFE IN ARMENIA

WE ARE OUR MOUNTAINS

AN AUSTRALIAN WOMAN DISCOVERS THE SOUL OF ARMENIA

THE CAIRO-YEREVAN LINE

WHY AN EGYPTIAN NOMAD FEELS AT HOME IN ARMENIA

MAYRI, THE CEDAR, THE MOTHER

THE IDEA BEHIND DILIJAN'S NEW COMPLEX

YEREVAN, AN OPEN GALLERY

ONE ITALIAN EXPAT'S PLAN TO GIVE THE CITY A BIENNALE

OUT OF THE ROCK

HOW "MHER JUNIOR" CARRIED AN ANCIENT EPIC INTO THE AI AGE

A HIGH YEAR INDEED

ARMENIA, WINE, AND THE VIEW FROM ABOVE

I NEVER RAN THE NUMBERS

LIFE IN ARMENIA IS THE RETURN ON INVESTMENT

HOW TO LIVE LONGER IN YEREVAN - PART 2

PROVEN STRATEGIES FOR A LONGER, HEALTHIER LIFE IN THE ARMENIAN CAPITAL



MATHEW ZEIN

EDITOR'S LETTER

Life in Armenia magazine just won the EU Travel Award as the Best Remote Work Travel Guide in Europe 2026.

Earlier this year, we were nominated by EU Business News, based in the UK, and had to complete a thorough 3-month evaluation process before receiving the big news earlier this month.

In 2025, we won the Travel and Tourism Award as the Best Digital Nomad Guide of the Year. This makes Life in Armenia a two-times award-winning magazine. Can you believe it? A magazine dedicated to remote work and digital nomadism, based in a small country that wasn't even a recognized nomad destination until recently, is now winning global awards.

The 2026 award will soon arrive from the UK to where it belongs in Yerevan, Armenia.
It's coming home.

Mathew Zein



CONTENTS

AUG, 28TH 2026 | NO. 39 | LIFE IN ARMENIA

WE ARE OUR MOUNTAINS AN AUSTRALIAN WOMAN DISCOVERS THE SOUL OF ARMENIA

When Australian traveller Irene Adventurette stepped onto the Transcaucasian Trail, she discovered that beyond the rugged terrain, the true heart of Armenia revealed itself through its people. From sharing coffee inside a shepherd's home to earning the trust of Gampr guardian dogs, Irene's journey reveals how a trip across Armenia reshapes how you see the world.

P 9



THE CAIRO-YEREVAN LINE WHY AN EGYPTIAN NOMAD FEELS AT HOME IN ARMENIA

Inspired by ancient epic folklore and a shared cultural bond, Egyptian tech founder Rashad relocated his AI venture studio to Yerevan instead of global hubs like Dubai or Stuttgart. Discover how historical ties between Egypt and Armenia laid the foundation for an outsider to integrate and bet big on the local tech ecosystem.

P 30



MAYRI, THE CEDAR, THE MOTHER THE IDEA BEHIND DILIJAN'S NEW QUARTER

Many global mountain towns risk turning into off-season ghost towns dominated by empty holiday homes. By anchoring the project with a 128-room Mövenpick hotel, open-air thermal baths, and long-term residences, Mayri's leadership plans to create year-round employment, raise regional service standards, and keep the lights on through January.

P 38

HOW TO LIVE LONGER IN YEREVAN - PART 2 PROVEN STRATEGIES FOR A LONGER, HEALTHIER LIFE IN THE ARMENIAN CAPITAL

Read the 2nd article of Wolf Alexanyan's series about longevity in Yerevan and discover four actionable meal strategies, including changing food sequence and leveraging affordable Armenian staples like matsun and greens, to protect your brain, lower chronic inflammation, and boost daily productivity.

P 48



CONTENTS

AUG, 28TH 2026 | NO. 39 | LIFE IN ARMENIA

YEREVAN, AN OPEN GALLERY ONE ITALIAN EXPAT'S PLAN TO GIVE THE CITY A BIENNALE

Italian expat Fabio Lenzi is working to give Yerevan its own international biennale, aiming to transform the city's avenues, courtyards, and industrial spaces into a public gallery. Discover how his foundation overcame early setbacks to lay the groundwork for a major edition targeted for 2028.

P 55



OUT OF THE ROCK HOW "MHER JUNIOR" CARRIED AN ANCIENT EPIC INTO THE AI AGE

Step behind the scenes to see how a team of traditional cinematographers, ethnographers, and designers tamed wild AI models to bring a national legend into modern cinemas. Read this piece about one of the world's first AI-generated animated feature films based on the epic hero "Pokr Mher".

P 62



I NEVER RAN THE NUMBERS LIFE IN ARMENIA IS THE RETURN ON INVESTMENT

Discover the story behind an AI-driven business platform built by three Armenian high school friends that scaled to top US Google rankings with zero ad spend. Learn how a team operating out of Armenia turned financial frameworks into a tool empowering entrepreneurs in 178 countries.

P 73

A HIGH YEAR INDEED ARMENIA, WINE, AND THE VIEW FROM ABOVE

Understanding altitude comes down to what lands in your glass. By comparing benchmark Areni wines grown at 1,050 meters against those cultivated at 1,600 meters, learn how elevation alters the structure, aromatics, and profile of Armenia's premier indigenous grape.

P 80





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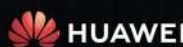
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WE ARE OUR MOUNTAINS

AN AUSTRALIAN WOMAN DISCOVERS THE SOUL OF ARMENIA



**ANNA
MAMMINGA**

Mary Kay Inc.



**IRENE
ADVENTURETTE**

Outdoor Photographer, Solo Hiker,
and Travel Storyteller

INTERVIEWING



WE ARE OUR MOUNTAINS

AN AUSTRALIAN WOMAN DISCOVERS THE SOUL OF ARMENIA

There are journeys we take to get somewhere, and then there are journeys that quietly change who we are. For [Irene Adventurette](#), walking more than 950 kilometers across Armenia along the still-developing [Transcaucasian Trail](#) was never simply about reaching the next mountain, crossing the next valley, or proving that she could endure another difficult day. It was about stepping into the unknown with an open mind and discovering what might be waiting there.

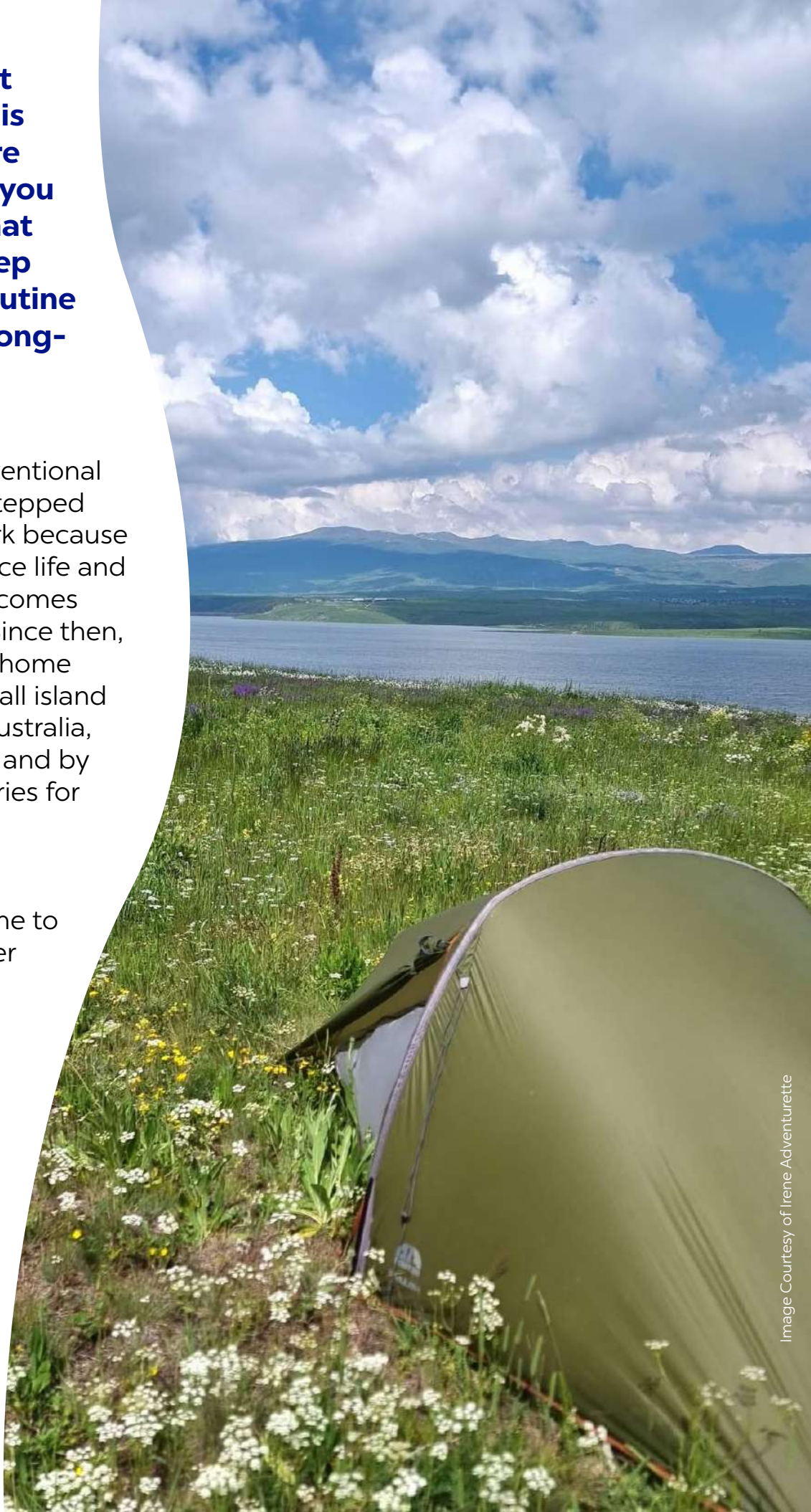
In Irene's telling, Armenia is not frozen in its history, nor defined by the hardships it has endured. It is resilient. It is generous. It is wild. It is ancient and alive. It is a place where a stranger can walk into a village and leave carrying something far more valuable than anything that can fit inside a backpack.



Irene, tell us about your life before this journey. What were you doing, where you call home, and what inspired you to step away from that routine and commit to a long-distance trek?

Irene: I don't live a conventional life. A few years ago, I stepped away from full time work because I wanted to fully embrace life and have the freedom that comes with owning my time. Since then, I've been exploring my home state of Tasmania, a small island at the southern tip of Australia, by motorcycle, on foot, and by kayak. And other countries for months at a time.

So, I didn't really leave behind a routine to come to Armenia because I never had one. If anything, the Transcaucasian Trail has given me more of a routine than I've had in years. Wake up, pack my tent, walk all day, find somewhere to camp, and do it all again. There's something surprisingly freeing about that simplicity.



Of all the hiking trails in the world, why did the Transcaucasian Trail in Armenia call to you? Was there a specific moment when you knew this was the journey you needed to take?

Irene: I don't tend to plan my adventures years in advance. In fact, the Transcaucasian Trail wasn't even on my radar. My original motorcycle trip fell through, so I started looking at other ways to explore a part of the world I knew very little about.

I'd done a lot of hiking back home in Australia over the previous year and thought maybe it was time to tackle a true long-distance trek. I also prefer remote places over busy, tourist filled trails. When I searched for remote thru hikes, the Transcaucasian Trail appeared. The more I read, the more it sounded like exactly the kind of adventure I was looking for. Wild, challenging, unpredictable, and largely unknown. There wasn't one defining moment where I knew I had to do it. It was more a feeling that this trail ticked every box, and once I found it, I couldn't stop thinking about it.



Image Courtesy of Irene Adventurette

Was this journey more about exploration, adventure, self-discovery, or something else entirely?

Irene: This journey was, above all else, about adventure. That's what drew me here. But real adventure naturally brings exploration, whether it's discovering a new country, learning about its history, experiencing a different culture, or meeting people whose lives are completely different from your own.

It was also a test. I'd never attempted a long-distance hike before, so I wanted to find out what I was truly capable of. I wanted to test my physical strength, my stamina, my determination, and my resilience. I wanted to see what I was made of and whether I could actually finish something of this scale.

What has been the most physically demanding day so far, and what got you through it?

Irene: The most physically demanding day was actually Day One. I started in Meghri (Syunik Province in southernmost part of Armenia on the border with Iran) with over 2,000m of elevation gain. It was brutally steep, and the temperature reached 37°C. As I climbed higher, the trees became sparse, leaving me fully exposed to the relentless sun. It drained every bit of energy I had.

I also had to carry enough water for the entire day because the next reliable water source was more than a kilometer off the trail near my first campsite. It was absolutely grueling. The heat was relentless, and I knew I had to reach that water. In those conditions, it wasn't just about comfort, it was essential. At no point did I think about giving up. There wasn't really a choice. You simply put one foot in front of the other and keep moving. That's how I've always approached challenges. Quitting has never really been part of who I am.



Has there been a moment on the trail when you stopped and thought, “This alone made the entire journey worthwhile”?

Irene: There hasn't been one single moment that made hiking over 950km of the Transcaucasian Trail worthwhile. It was the entire journey. This isn't an easy trail. There are long sections with no track at all, bush bashing through stinging nettles and thorny wild roses, rough 4WD tracks that are difficult to navigate, relentless steep climbs, and day after day of physical and mental effort. The reward isn't one viewpoint or one special moment. It's everything combined. Every challenge overcome, every village visited, every conversation, every mountain crossed, and every kilometer earned. Looking back, it's the whole experience that made it worthwhile, not any single moment.



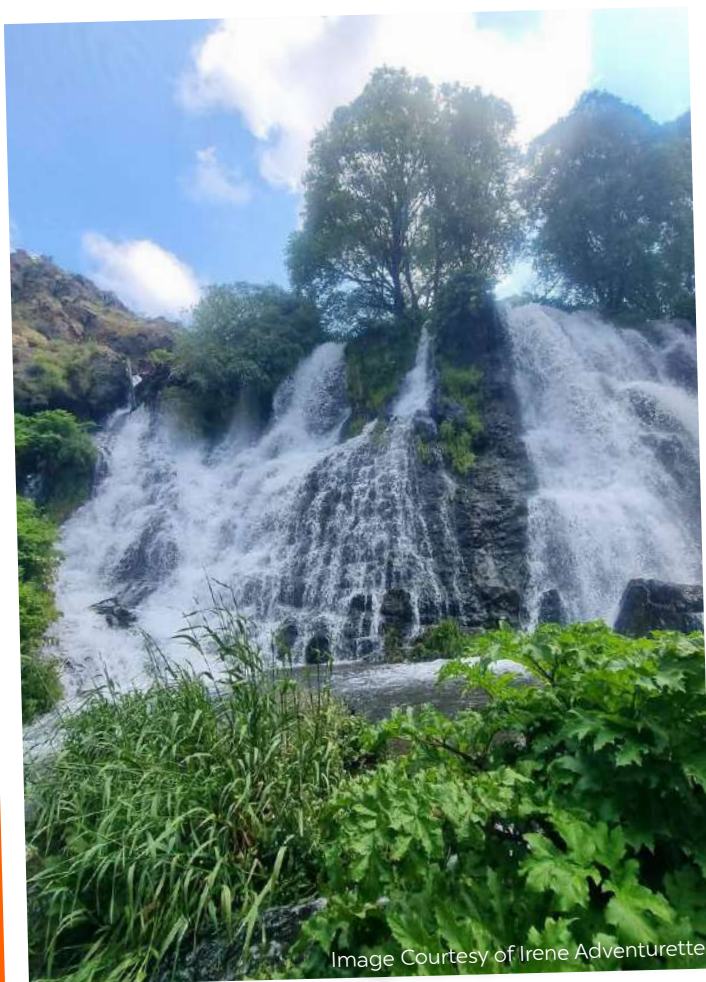


Image Courtesy of Irene Adventurette

What's something about hiking through Armenia that no guidebook could have prepared you for?

Irene: There isn't really a guidebook for the Transcaucasian Trail yet, and that's one of the reasons it caught my attention. It's a relatively new trail that's still being developed, so you can't rely on a book to tell you exactly what to expect each day. You have to be adaptable. Every day brings something different, whether it's route finding, overgrown trails, unexpected obstacles, weather, or changes on the ground. You can't control any of it, so you learn to go with the flow, solve problems as they come, and simply embrace whatever the trail throws at you. For me, that's what makes it a true adventure.

Your photographs are stunning. What story are you trying to tell through your blog that goes beyond beautiful scenery?

Irene: The story I'm trying to tell goes far beyond beautiful landscapes. I want people to realize that life is meant to be lived. Open your eyes to the beauty that's all around us. Escape the mundane. Step outside society's expectations and create a life that excites you, one filled with curiosity, adventure, and that childlike sense of wonder.

We only get one life. As a former nurse, I cared for many people at the end of theirs, and one of the most common regrets wasn't that they hadn't worked harder. It was that they hadn't truly lived. They hadn't chased the dreams that mattered to them or lived life on their own terms. If my words and photographs inspire even one person to take that first step towards the life they've always wanted, then sharing this journey has been worth it.

Image Courtesy of Irene Adventurette



What have you learned about Armenia through conversations in villages that you could never learn by reading history books?

Irene: One of the biggest things I've learned is just how proud Armenians are of their country. They genuinely love hearing visitors speak positively about their landscapes, mountains, villages, and history. You can see the pride they have in sharing their homeland. Considering everything Armenia has endured throughout its

long and often difficult history, I expected to find a people weighed down by that past. Instead, I found honesty, kindness, generosity, and incredible hospitality. There isn't bitterness. There's resilience, warmth, and a genuine willingness to welcome strangers. That's something I'll always remember.

Can you share a story about a village visit or a location on one of your stops that completely changed your expectations?

Irene: I came to Armenia with very few expectations. I'm quite spontaneous and haven't done a great deal of research. One experience that completely changed me was being invited into a shepherd's home. A little girl ran down from what I thought was a ruined house, gesturing for me to follow her. Her parents smiled and welcomed me inside. Their home

was a single room where a family of five lived. They heated coffee, cooked me a meal, and despite having so little, they insisted on sharing everything they had. We couldn't speak the same language, so we communicated with hand gestures, broken Russian, photos on our phones, and plenty of laughter.

When it was time to leave, they refused to accept any money. I walked away in tears. Here was a family with very little, yet they welcomed a complete stranger with such generosity and warmth. That day completely changed my perspective on what we really need in life and the kind of person I want to be. I still think about that family, and it still brings tears to my eyes.

How do local communities view hikers passing through, and what have those interactions taught you about the country and its people?

Irene: One thing that surprised me was that many of the communities the Transcaucasian Trail passes through don't even know the trail exists, or that it crosses their village or land. It's still a relatively new trail, so awareness is only just beginning to spread. Whether people knew about the trail or not didn't matter. Everywhere I went, I was met with warmth and kindness. A simple "Barev" (hello), a smile, an offer for coffee, someone stopping to offer me a lift as I walked near roads and villages and food just given freely. Those small acts of generosity taught me that Armenians are genuinely welcoming people. Their kindness isn't for tourists, it's simply part of who they are.



Have you discovered a favorite Armenian dish that you'll continue craving long after the trek ends?

Irene: One dish that really stood out was Kchuch, a rich, slow-baked meat and vegetable stew cooked in an individual clay pot and sealed with bread dough. After spending all day hiking through the mountains, sitting down to a hearty meal like that was incredibly satisfying. It's comforting, full of flavor, and definitely a dish I'll be craving long after I leave Armenia.



Was there a meal or food tradition that introduced you to a side of Armenian culture you hadn't expected?

Irene: I wouldn't say there was one particular meal or food tradition that changed my view of Armenian culture. What stood out more was how food is used to bring people together. Time and time again, I was invited to sit down, share a meal or a coffee, and made to feel welcome, even by people who had very little. It wasn't so much what was on the table that left an impression, but the generosity of the people around it.

Image Courtesy of Irene Adventurette



You've been carefully documenting the animals you encounter. Which wildlife sighting has been the most exciting or meaningful?

Irene: I thought my most memorable wildlife encounter would be the mother bear and her cub climbing into the Geghama Mountains. That was certainly unforgettable. But the animal that really stole my heart was a European badger. I'd just crossed a river hiking out of Jermuk hot springs and was sitting in long grass putting my boots back on when I heard something happily bounding towards me.



Image Courtesy of Irene Adventurette

The grass was so tall I couldn't see what it was, and I honestly expected a small dog. Then, suddenly, a badger appeared only a few meters away. We both froze in surprise. We simply stared at each other for a few seconds before it calmly scurried off along its path. It wasn't just seeing a badger in the wild for the first time that made it special. It was the complete surprise and how incredibly close we were to each other. It's a moment I'll never forget.



Image Courtesy of Irene Adventurette

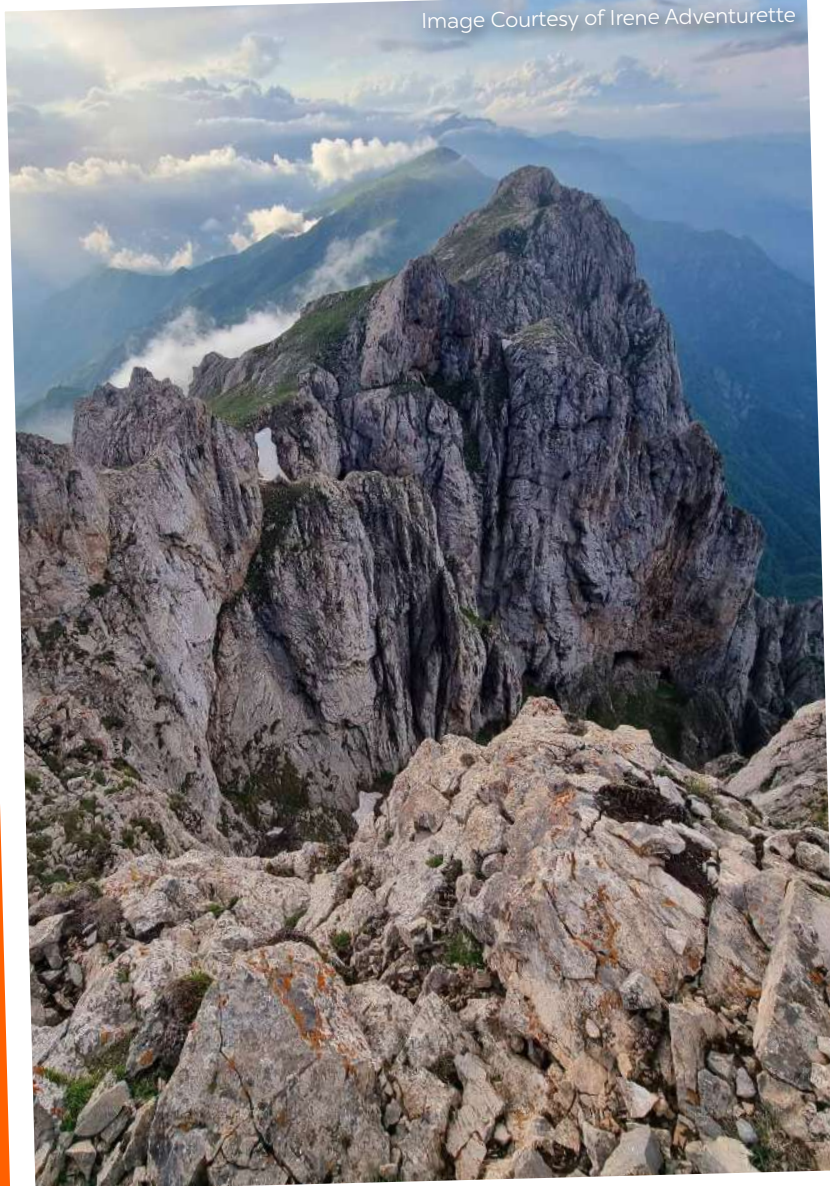


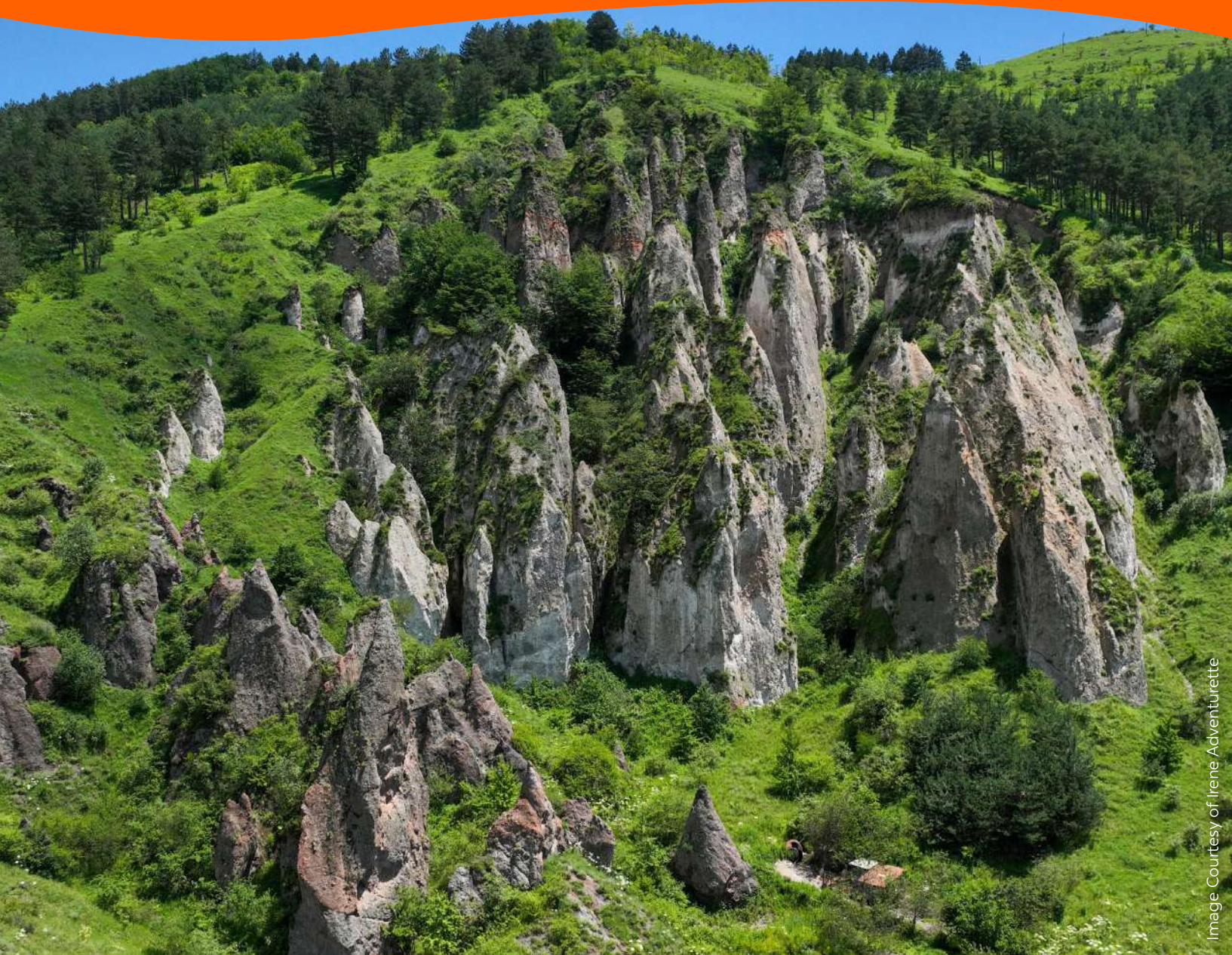
Image Courtesy of Irene Adventurette

Have there been any moments when nature reminded you how small and vulnerable we really are?

Irene: Nature has always made me feel incredibly small, but not vulnerable. Standing in the middle of vast open plateaus with nothing but horizon in every direction, looking over immense canyons, walking ridgelines surrounded by endless layers of mountains, or standing on the highest point of the entire Transcaucasian Trail atop a volcano, you realize just how tiny you are in comparison. But I don't see that as vulnerability. For me, those moments bring a deep sense of freedom and strength. They remind me that the world is far bigger than our everyday worries, and that feeling small in a place that magnificent is actually incredibly empowering.

What's one natural phenomenon or landscape you've encountered that simply doesn't translate well into photographs?

Irene: The sheer scale of Armenia is something no photograph can truly capture. Photos flatten everything. They can't show the depth of the canyons, the endless layers of mountain ranges fading into the distance, or the feeling of standing completely alone on a ridgeline with 360-degree views. You have to stand there yourself to appreciate just how vast and wild it really is. That's something a camera will never fully convey.



The Gampr is more than a dog in the Armenian Highlands; it is a guardian, fiercely intelligent, deeply loyal and instinctively protective of its flock. Along your journey, you encountered many of these magnificent and imposing animals, yet somehow seemed to earn their trust. What was your secret? Did you speak to them, sing to them, charm them, or simply understand when to approach and when to let them be? Tell us about your encounters with these remarkable guardians of the Armenian mountains, and what they taught you about trust, instinct and the unspoken language between humans and animals.



Image Courtesy of Irene Adventurette

Irene: I came across many of these incredible Armenian shepherd dogs throughout my hike. They have a serious job protecting the flocks and shepherd camps, so when a strange person approaches, particularly near the sheep, they are simply doing exactly what they are supposed to do. I've worked with dogs in the past and have owned many large breeds, so I'm comfortable reading their behavior. When they came charging towards me barking, I never ran or panicked. I stayed calm and confident, praised them for doing their job and let them know I wasn't a threat. I avoided walking directly towards the flock or staring them down, and simply kept moving.

Once I was clearly past the flock, they would usually lose interest and return to their work. I never felt threatened by them throughout Armenia. In fact, some became temporary hiking companions, following me for hours.

Once they realized I wasn't a threat, a few even allowed me to pat them and share my food. I don't think the Gamprs are dogs to be feared, but they absolutely deserve respect. They are powerful working animals protecting something important. Stay calm, understand why they are reacting, respect their space and let them do their job. I didn't tame them. We simply came to an understanding.



How has living day-to-day on the trail changed your definition of what's truly necessary in life?

Irene: As an adventurer for over a decade, I've already learned to live a minimalist lifestyle. I also live aboard my yacht in Australia, so I'm used to making the most of a small space and only keeping what I truly need. The Transcaucasian Trail simply reinforced that belief. Living out of a backpack for weeks on end makes you realize how little you actually need to be happy. Give me food, shelter, and the freedom to explore, and I'm content. I've found that living with less isn't a sacrifice. It's actually incredibly freeing. The fewer possessions you own, the more space you have to simply live.

What have solitude and long hours of walking taught you about yourself?

Irene: Solitude isn't something I discovered on this journey. It's one of the reasons I choose adventures like this. I've spent much of my life travelling and exploring alone, and I've come to value the peace that comes with it. When you're hiking all day, your mind starts out full of thoughts. Gradually, they disappear, and you become completely present, connected to your surroundings

and the moment you're in. That's something I cherish. More than anything, this trail confirmed that I'm not someone who shies away from discomfort. I thrive in it. I enjoy pushing my body and mind every single day because that's where growth happens. Solitude hasn't made me lonely. Solitude has made me stronger, more resilient, and more confident in who I am.

Has there been a difficult moment when you considered quitting or taking a different route? How did you push through?

Irene: My most difficult moment was without a doubt the final major electrical storm I faced on the Armenian section of the TCT. It is one of those moments that still sends a shiver through me when I think back on it. I was woken from sleep by the loudest crack of thunder I have ever experienced, followed immediately by lightning striking somewhere nearby. But surprisingly, it wasn't the thunder or the flashes of lightning that scared me the most. It was the smell.

The smell of electricity in the air is something I will never forget. Curled up on my sleeping mat, trying to make myself as small as possible, I could feel the atmosphere changing. The air became charged, my hair started standing on end with static, and every instinct in my body was screaming that this had moved beyond a normal storm. This was a dangerous situation, one where a lightning strike felt frighteningly possible. Yet instead of panic, my mind shifted into survival mode. The fear was there, but it became quiet. I started methodically working through what I needed to do, where I was, and how I could best protect myself. No hysteria, no rushing, just calm problem solving while waiting for the storm to pass.

When the storm finally moved away, the adrenaline and tension that had been holding me together released. That was when the tears came. Not from fear, but from the overwhelming relief of still being there, safe, after experiencing one of the most intense and humbling moments of my entire journey.



What habit, belief, or perspective do you think you'll bring home with you after this journey?

Irene: The biggest thing I will bring home is the ability to slow down and truly be present. Life moves so quickly when we are surrounded by distractions, expectations and constant noise, but the trail strips all of that away. For weeks, my world became incredibly simple. Wake up, pack my home on my back, walk, find water, cook, set up camp, and repeat. Yet within that simplicity I found something incredibly powerful. I noticed the small things again: the sound of birds in the morning, the changing light across the mountains, a conversation with a stranger, or simply sitting quietly watching the world around me.

I will also bring home a deeper trust in myself. The trail reminded me that discomfort is not something to avoid. Some of the most meaningful moments come when you step directly into the unknown and realize you are far more capable than you ever gave yourself credit for. I hope to keep carrying that mindset forward: needing less, appreciating more, and continuing to choose experiences over comfort.



What has the trail revealed about you that you didn't know before you started?

Irene: I think the trail revealed a level of calm and resilience in myself that I didn't fully realize was there. I already knew I enjoyed solitude and that I was comfortable being alone. I knew I could walk long distances, carry a heavy pack, and push myself physically. But the trail showed me how I respond when things become genuinely difficult or uncertain. There were moments of fear, exhaustion and discomfort, but instead of falling apart, I found myself becoming calmer. My mind would slow down, assess the situation, and focus on what needed to be done. Whether it was navigating through remote sections, dealing with extreme weather, or simply getting through the difficult days when my body and mind were tired, I learned that I trust myself more than I ever realized.

The trail also reminded me that I don't need everything to be easy or comfortable to enjoy an experience. In fact, some of the moments that tested me the most became the ones I remember most vividly. I started this journey knowing I loved adventure. I finished it understanding that adventure isn't just about the places you reach, but about discovering who you become along the way.

What do you wish more people understood about Armenia that they often overlook?

Irene: I wish more people understood that Armenia is so much more than its history and the challenges it has faced. Before coming here, many people's knowledge of Armenia is often limited to its past, its conflicts, or simply not knowing much about it at all. But what I discovered was a country full of incredible landscapes, deep culture, ancient history and, most importantly, incredibly warm and generous people.

Walking across Armenia allowed me to see a side of the country that many visitors may never experience. I walked through remote villages, slept beneath vast mountain skies, shared conversations with strangers, and witnessed a connection to the land that has existed for generations. Armenia is not just a place to visit for a few famous monasteries or viewpoints. It is a country to experience slowly. A place where the mountains tell stories, where hospitality is still deeply rooted, and where some of the most meaningful moments happen in the simplest interactions. I hope people see Armenia not just for what it has endured, but for what it is, resilient, beautiful, welcoming and very much alive.

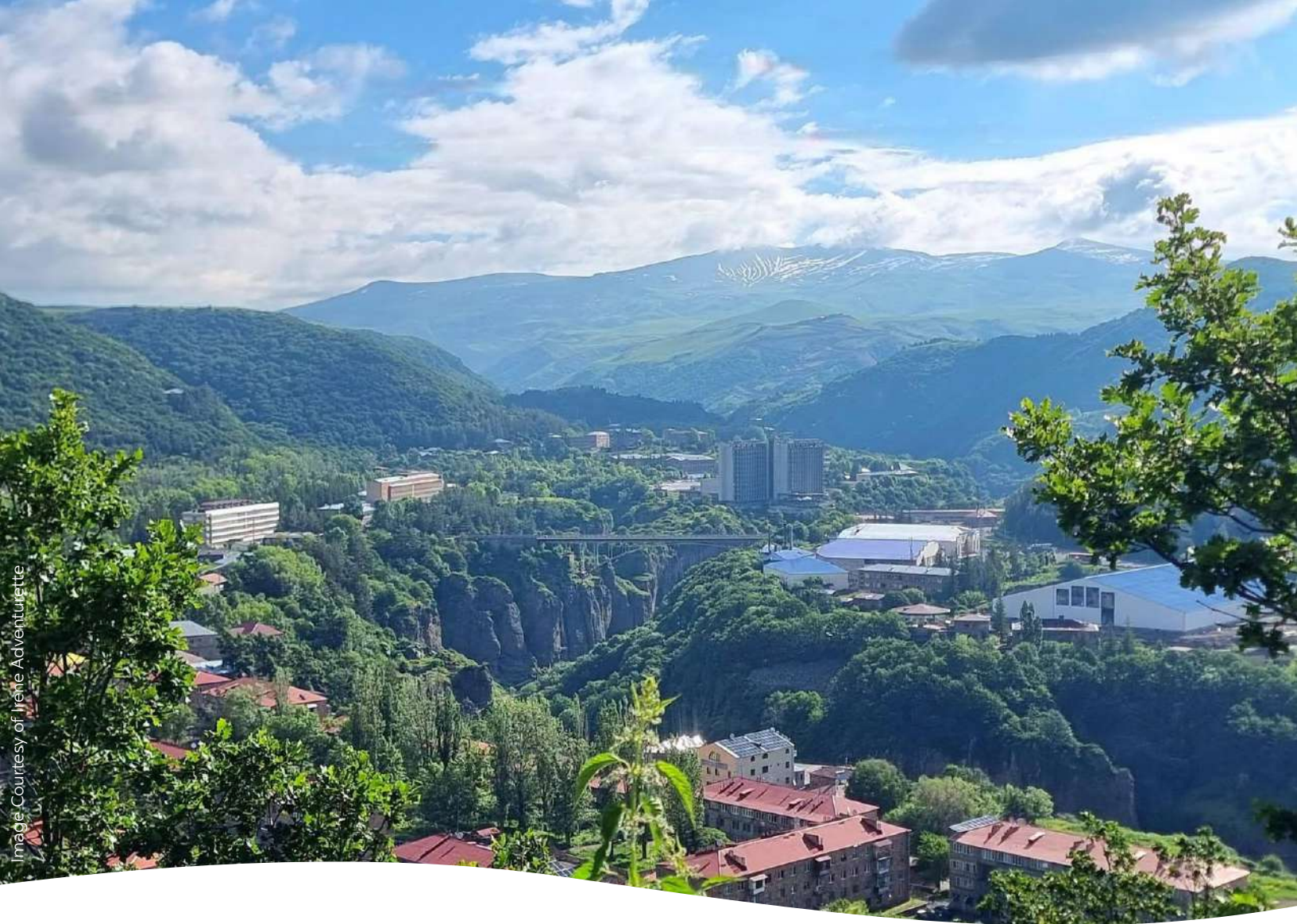


Image Courtesy of Irene Adventureette

If a reader finished your blog and booked a ticket to Armenia tomorrow, what experience would you most hope they seek out?

Irene: I would hope they seek out the people. Armenia is a country of incredible landscapes, ancient monasteries, rugged mountains and deep history, but what stayed with me the most were the people I met along the way. The kindness, generosity and curiosity of strangers often left a bigger impression than the places themselves. I hope people don't just come to Armenia to see the famous sights, take a photo and leave. I hope they slow down. Sit with locals, share a meal, accept the invitation for a coffee, learn a few words of Armenian, and allow themselves to experience the warmth of the culture.

Some of my favorite memories weren't standing on top of a mountain or looking at an ancient monastery. They were the simple moments, conversations with people I had just met, being welcomed into someone's home, or the unexpected kindness of someone who had no reason to help me but did anyway. The mountains may be what draws you to Armenia, but I believe the people are what stay with you.

**When this journey ends,
what do you think you'll
miss the most: the
mountains, the people,
the routine of the trail, or
something else?**

Irene: Without a doubt, I think I will miss the people the most. The mountains of Armenia are unforgettable. The landscapes, the silence, the feeling of standing somewhere ancient and wild will stay with me forever. But it was the people who brought the journey to life. I will miss the unexpected conversations, the kindness of strangers, the smiles, the shared food, and the moments where language barriers disappeared because human connection doesn't always need words. From farmers and villagers to people I met briefly along the way, so many opened their homes, shared their stories, or simply showed me kindness when they didn't have to.

The trail itself had a rhythm that I will miss too. Waking up with the sunrise, carrying everything I needed on my back, walking through landscapes that changed every day, and living simply with only the essentials. But it is the people I will think about most. The mountains gave me the adventure, but the people gave it a heartbeat.



Five years from now, what do you think this journey will mean to you?

Irene: I think five years from now, this journey will be a reminder of what is possible when you choose curiosity over comfort. The kilometers, the mountains, the difficult days and the moments of doubt will become part of the story, but I think what will stay with me most is the feeling of being completely present. Of stripping life back to the essentials and remembering that we don't need as much as we often think we do to feel fulfilled.

I hope I look back on this journey as the moment I proved to myself that there is still so much to explore, learn and experience, regardless of age or what society tells us we should be doing. The Transcaucasian Trail will not just be a line I walked across a map. It will be a reminder that life is meant to be lived with curiosity, courage and a willingness to step into the unknown.

If you could sit down with the version of yourself who stood at the trailhead on day one, knowing everything you've experienced since, what would you tell her?

Irene: Honestly, I don't think I would tell her anything. I wouldn't warn her about the difficult days, the storms, the exhaustion, or the moments where things felt uncertain, because every single one of those moments became part of the adventure. I wouldn't tell her what to expect, because so much of the magic came from not knowing.

The person who stood at the trailhead already had the mindset she needed. She trusted herself, embraced the unknown, and was willing to see where the trail led. That willingness to go with the flow, adapt and accept whatever came her way is what created some of the most incredible memories. If anything, I would simply remind her to enjoy every

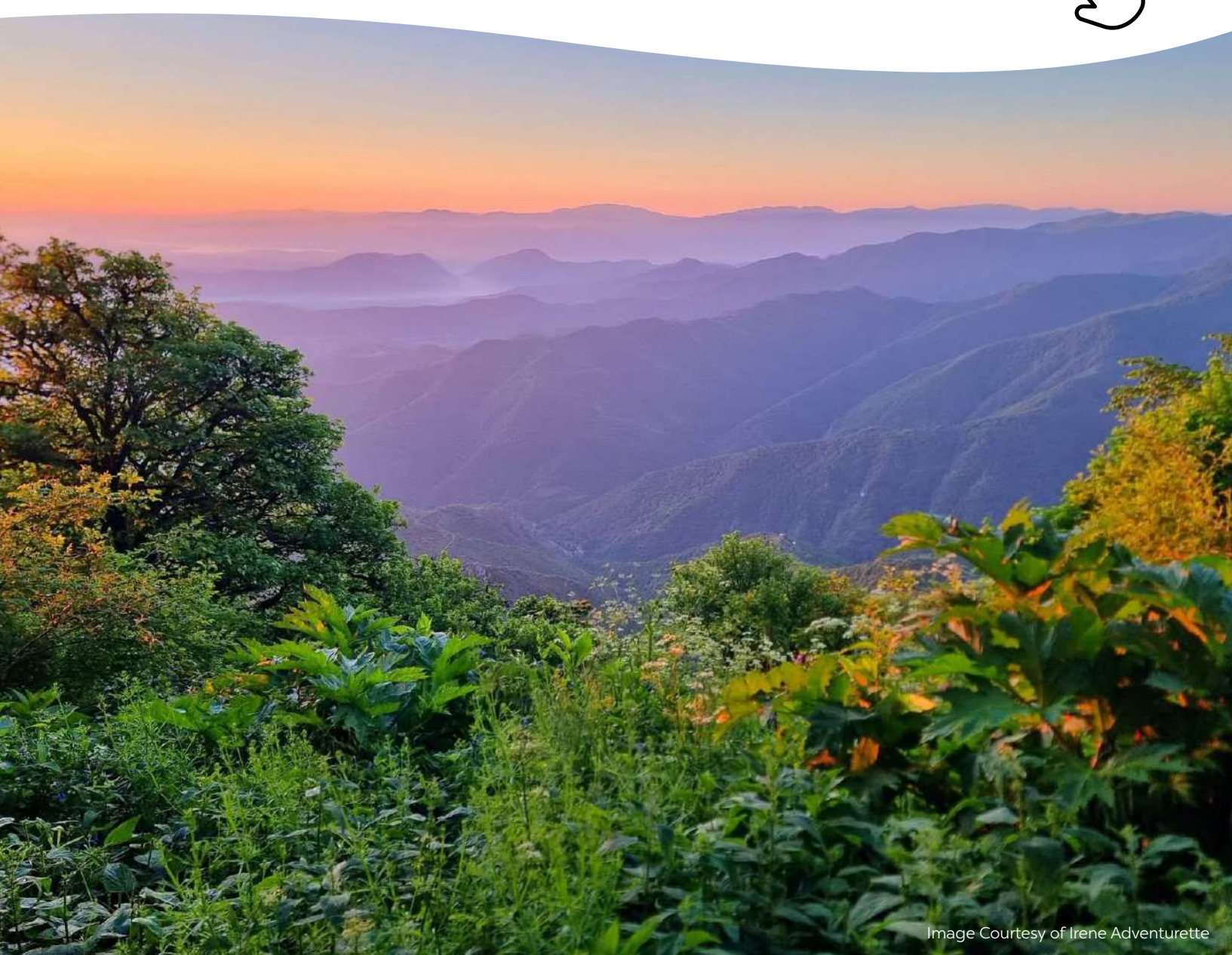
moment, because one day she will look back and realize that the unpredictable days, the unexpected encounters and the challenges were the very things that made this journey unforgettable. So, no advice. No changes. Just a quiet reminder: keep walking, keep exploring, and keep saying yes to the unknown.

By the time Irene reaches the end of the trail, the kilometers will eventually become numbers in a story. The mountains will become photographs. The storms will become memories. The aching muscles, uncertain paths and long days will soften with time.

But the people will remain. Somewhere between the Australian wilderness she calls home and the Armenian Highlands she came to explore, Irene crossed an invisible border – from traveler to storyteller, from observer to witness.

There are still roads ahead, mountains beyond the horizon, and stories waiting to be discovered. Because Irene's journey through the Armenian Highlands isn't quite finished – and neither is her story. And I suspect Armenia has not finished telling her its story.

Follow Irene Adventurette on Facebook on all her travels.



THE CAIRO-YEREVAN LINE

WHY AN EGYPTIAN NOMAD FEELS AT HOME IN ARMENIA



**MOHAMED
RASHAD**

FOUNDER OF MISR-HAYASTAN
PLATFORM



THE CAIRO-YEREVAN LINE

WHY AN EGYPTIAN NOMAD FEELS AT HOME IN ARMENIA

One day around 2017, I was exploring music on youtube, and I got a song, in Armenian, called “Sasna Tsrer”, I listened, I liked it and I started searching for the story about it, turns out it covers part of the most famous armenian epic “Daredevils of Sasun” and surprisingly when reading the text, I noticed the name “Misramelik” which means “The king of Egypt”, I started diving more, and this is how my story with Armenia started.

Not really, It started earlier, since as an Egyptian, we know probably a lot about Armenians, specifically Armenians in Egypt, our first prime minister, Nourbarian (Pasha) Nourbarian was Armenian, we have a ton of singers and actors like Anoshka, Lebleba, Fairuz and one of the most famous caricature artists in the middle east, Saroukhan,

are all armenians, we have armenian churches and schools (which I was always amazed by the alphabet on them) and many influential Armenian figures across history, including the man who rebuilt old cairo - Badruldeen Aljamaal, but “Sansa Tsrer” was the thing that attracted me to learn more.

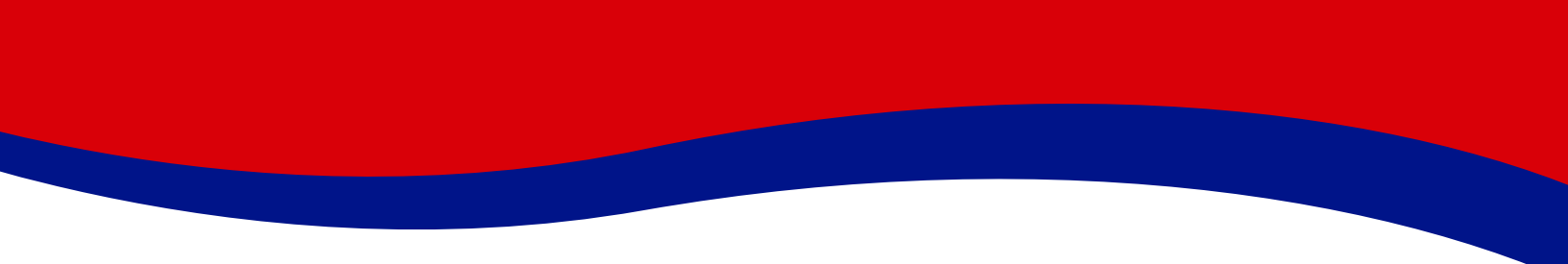


Fast forward to 2022, I was travelling, and I chose to come to Armenia for a week with a couple of friends, and at the same time I was looking for a country to locate and build my new company “[Hyperion AI](#)”, and I was automatically sold to move to Armenia, even if at the same time I was choosing between interesting locations, Including Stuttgart (Germany), Bali (Indonesia) and Dubai (UAE).



While all of them were cool for a couple of reasons, every place missed something, Bali is nice but remote, Dubai has a lot of financial opportunities but also it's too much hustle, Stuttgart is nice but too calm, I was looking for a home not only a place to work from, and after visiting all of them and staying adequate amounts, including a second visit to Armenia, I decided to bet on Armenia, and let me tell you, It was probably one of my best bets in the past few years, It gave me more than what I expected.

First of all, unlike nowadays in 2026, the Armenian tech ecosystem wasn't that visible on the international stage, I didn't expect it to be global, or very active, and I was extremely wrong, I just by pure luck arrived few minutes early to the party; because when I arrived, AI was still not a thing in Armenia much, most people were focusing on Web3 and similar stuff, yet in late 2023-early 2024 everything changed, very fast, beyond expectations!



When I first came, I got help from many nice people in the ecosystem, and I want to specifically mention and thank Hovhannes Kuloghlyan, a dear friend who I just cold-messaged on linkedin, and he gave me immense support by introducing the community to me through the Groktalks hosted in their company office, which lead to me starting to have connections and later clients from the Armenian ecosystem, and this was not the end of it.

Turns out, Armenia is a very high-trust, communal society, very similar to Egypt, everyone is competing yes, but in healthy way, everyone is trying to help everyone,

because the success is shared, and also the failures, and along the way I got help from many people to establish my presence in the ecosystem, and I always get a question : “You left Egypt and moved to Armenia, why Armenia? Why not other places?” and as much as I love answering this question, it makes people surprised, and my answer is simple : Armenia to me, has everything needed for success in the next few years, and is allowing me to contribute to this success.

Armenia is a small nation, located in a very interesting crossroad of continents, with a long history of engineering

and IT excellence, people are very friendly, helpful, they explicitly like us Egyptians, and we explicitly like them with a kind of national brotherhood that extended over literal millennia not years or centuries, the country is welcoming to businesses and talent, provides very good and fast conditions to running your business especially in IT, if we combined all of this with the idea that Armenians force you (in a very good way) to learn the language and be part of the culture, meaning you’ll never be excluded at any case, these conditions make it the perfect place to just focus on your business and enjoy your living.



And this brings me to the other part, Armenians somehow combine two contradicting aspects, everyone works hard, very hard, everyone I met has a something and few things on the side, or launching a venture, or trying something, basically everyone is busy, yet when it's time to rest or celebrate, you find yourself in the best parties ever, people forget about the pressure of work and enjoy, basically Armenians know how to live, not too consumed by work and forgetting to enjoy, and not indulging too much and forgetting to build.

All of this together made my decisions clear. I want to stay here, and not act as a foreigner, I have a moral obligation to give back to the community that gave me a lot, and also I have an opportunity to contribute to building something big, and it turns out by bet was on point!

Now as this is being written, the AI factory of Firebird just opened, more AI products and serious research is getting out from Armenia, and myself coming with a background of more than 10 years in AI, both working in big corporations and running my own venture, can and must contribute to this.



So, I did this, actively, over the past 3.5 years I contributed to more than 20 workshops and sessions to the tech community, while delivering corporate trainings to big names and SMEs all around Yerevan, my company, Hyperion is part of the UATE (Union of Advanced Technology Enterprises) and we're active in the community, participated in one delegation to Japan with them and multiple panel discussions with JICA in Yerevan to attract Armenian companies to work with Japanese

companies, and we're doing more now supporting and sponsoring more community events around, with the next big thing happening in September, the first Business hackathon in Dilijan for young adults, bringing more engagement with tech communities in the regions not only Yerevan.

On the other side, I found the opportunity to help Armenian companies get access to the middle east, through my network in Egypt, Dubai, Saudi Arabia and

more, and from this I led the first tech delegation from Egypt to Armenia in Digitec 2025, and planning to do the same for Digitec this year, and we're actively working with multiple companies in Yerevan to find and engage with clients and partners in MENA region, and finally we had an interesting pilot launching Armenian Code Academy Egypt Branch, with multiple courses and webinars delivered to the tech community in Egypt but with the standards of ACA.

On the cultural side, I'm deeply engaged with the Armenian heritage preservation, with a specific focus on Armenian-Egyptian cross-cultural interaction, and for this I launched misr-hayastan.com, the first and only wiki collecting possibly everything related to Armenians in Egypt, Egyptians in Armenia, spanning across 3400 years, since the first recorded interaction between the two nations, and I can claim safely that no one else is doing this.

With all of this, someone asks, actually I got asked a lot, "Why do you put a lot of effort in this, you're not Armenian, what is the benefit you're getting?"

Ok, valid question, and my answer is simple, you can't only take from the community, you need to give back, if you consider a place to be your home, you need to contribute to making home better, back in Egypt I was doing the same, volunteering, attending events, building, engaging with the community and now here in Yerevan I'm doing more because I have more experience and resources, and I see the potential that the Armenian ecosystem can reach, and I think it will be a pity to be in the right time and place to catch an opportunity to be part of something big and not contribute to it.



I believe the Armenian tech sector is on the right path to becoming a world-class tech hub, if not already, and we should contribute by attracting talent, connecting to more markets, and opening opportunities to one another. This way we all grow and we all win in the long run. Of course it's easier to just work pure business and not focus on the community at all, but this only gives you short-term gains. If our goal is to build a sustainable tech

scene, we should all be active with what we can offer to it, and it will pay back in tens of folds.

I'm Rashad, Originally from Alexandria, Egypt and I've been working in Software engineering and AI for the past 12 years, and currently running Hyperion AI, the first AI venture studio in Yerevan specializing in building and transforming companies to be AI native, we develop and fund bold ideas, and DevisionX, a company specializing

in industrial computer vision and agentic document intelligence for governments and highly-regulated sectors.

After reading all of this, I would like to take this opportunity to thank all the people who are supporting me during this endeavour, it will be too long to mention the names of everyone, but you know yourselves, and I would like to thank everyone in UATE for supporting my venture and making me be at home.



MAYRI, THE CEDAR, THE MOTHER

THE IDEA BEHIND DILIJAN'S NEW COMPLEX



**MATHEW
ZEIN**

EDITOR IN CHIEF



MAYRI, THE CEDAR, THE MOTHER THE IDEA BEHIND DILIJAN'S NEW COMPLEX

In Armenian, Mayri means cedar, the patient tree, the one that outlives the people who plant it and shelters the ones who come after. And hiding inside that word, one letter shorter, is mayr, which means mother. Whether the founders intended the double meaning or the language simply gave it to them, I can't think of a better name for what's being planned on a hillside in Dilijan right now.

This article is about a new complex in Dilijan, and that complex is called "Mayri" or as the people who work there call it in full, "Mayri Urban Resort."


MÖVENPICK
HOTELS & RESORTS



A Resort That Behaves Like a Town

Spending two hours at the project's headquarters in Yerevan and talking with several stakeholders gave me a clear view of how the core philosophy shaped the drawings. "Do you know our plots in Dilijan?" asked Devid Torosian, Mayri's Chief of Hospitality and Infrastructure. "I know every single spot in the city," I answered, and from that moment, we were off into a long conversation.

Set on a hillside along Shahumyan Street, the project sits less than ten minutes from central Dilijan, with the town and surrounding mountains unfolding below. Devid explained how Mayri was designed as an urban resort. The idea is to put the useful parts of a city inside a place that feels like a retreat. Nothing rises above the treeline. The buildings are low, a few floors at most, so that from the road below you see the mountain first and the roofs second. And they sit around a park instead of a parking lot, which sounds like a small detail until you realize it determines what you walk out of your front door into.



That last point turns out to be measurable. Buildings will cover less than thirty percent of the 3.3 hectares, which means more than two thirds of

Mayri is ground rather than construction: the park, the walkways, the trees, the space between things. In a country where the instinct is usually to

build to the edge of the plot, choosing to leave two thirds of a hillside as landscape is the signal of what kind of project this intends to be.

“

Hrant Sahakyan

Chief of Product and Marketing

Less than a third of the site is buildings. The rest is the reason people will come”

When I first heard the word ‘complex,’ my immediate thought was how a project of that scale might impact the surrounding forest. But Devid assured me that it’s being built on a neglected piece of the existing townscape, instead of untouched forest. In a small town like Dilijan that distinction matters.



“

Devid Torosian

Chief of Hospitality
and Infrastructure

We didn't want to put a resort next to Dilijan. We wanted to put one inside it, on a piece of the town that had been sitting unused for years.”

Anyway, a philosophy still needs a bill of materials, so here is what will stand on those 3.3 hectares. Around 150 compact, efficiently planned apartments in a smart-format residential building. 24 urban villas forming the transition between the public and private sides of the complex. A club house of 39 boutique residences for buyers who want fewer neighbors. An apart-hotel of 77 units. A wellness complex with open-air thermal baths. Around a thousand square meters of shops and services. And a 128-room hotel to be operated under the Mövenpick flag.

The whole complex sits an hour and a half from Yerevan and two hours from the international airport.



Building Lightly on a Mountain



If you are going to put several hundred people on a forested hillside, the first question that comes to mind is what that costs the hillside. It came up in Yerevan with Hrant Sahakyan, Mayri's Chief of Product and Marketing. Water is to be recycled on site rather than consumed and discharged. Solar energy is part of the initial plan. And the team intends to pursue international green building certification, LEED or BREEAM, through one of EBRD's programs in Armenia.

When it comes to environmental promises in large scale projects, certification makes all the difference. It converts intentions into a document somebody else has to sign, a 3rd-party that's responsible for auditing and making sure everything goes by the book, and that's exactly what I like about it.

The Shape of Dilijan's Year

If you've been to Dilijan before, you can immediately tell this is capacity, and capacity is what Dilijan has been short of. Dilijan's problem has never been appeal; anyone who has driven up through the forest understands the appeal within ten minutes. Its problem has been the shape of its year and the size of its ceiling. Visitors arrive in summer, fill what accommodation exists, and leave by November.



For this reason, the open-air thermal baths were among the few things that caught my attention; these are at their best when the air is cold and the steam rises, which makes them a January reason to drive up rather than a July one. And the integration of Mövenpick means it would market itself year-round by default, because that is how such hotels survive.

That is the first domino, and the ones behind it are what make this project worth this magazine's attention.

A Career Ladder Within Driving Distance

A 128-room hotel, an apart-hotel, a wellness complex, and a strip of shops require, collectively, a large permanent staff including chefs, front-office teams, spa therapists, maintenance engineers, managers. For a young person from Dilijan or the surrounding villages, that is a career ladder within driving distance of home.

An international operator raises the stakes further, because a brand of that kind brings its own training systems and service standards. Those standards do not stay inside one building. They leak into every café, guesthouse and restaurant that later hires the people who learned them, which is how a single hotel can raise the floor for an entire town.





The Missing Middle

A town cannot grow on guesthouses. For a remote worker who wants three months rather than three days, or a family considering a move out of the capital, or a returning professional weighing a life here, the absence of decent long-term housing is a hard stop.



Several hundred well-designed homes and apart-hotel units change that answer from no to maybe, and 'maybe' is where towns begin.

Having studied the development of many resort towns around the world, the concept of 'ghost towns' is the worst that could happen to a small city in Armenia.



The Mistake the Alps Made

Housing is also where Europe's mountain towns made their most expensive mistake, and it is worth naming precisely, because Dilijan is standing at exactly the fork where it was made. Across the Alps, second homes multiplied until they accounted for more than a quarter of the entire housing stock, outnumbering by far the beds in traditional hotels. The result was called cold beds. Apartments occupied two or three weeks a year, dark for the other forty-nine; shops that closed because there was nobody to sell to in the off-season; villages that had, in the words of the campaign that eventually followed, become ghost towns with beautiful facades. Locals in some resorts could no longer find anywhere to live in their own town.

In March 2012, Swiss voters passed a national referendum, capping second homes at twenty percent of housing in any municipality, and the law has been in force since 2016. Resorts already above the line simply stopped building. One of the most property-friendly countries on earth chose to freeze construction in its most valuable locations because the alternative, hollow towns, was judged worse.

The distinction that decides which side of this line a project lands on is about who occupies the buildings, and how often. That's why when Devid said, "We're building a complex in Dilijan," I couldn't help but raise an eyebrow; though as he explained the various components, I lowered it. A complex sold as holiday

assets produces cold beds. One built around a functioning hotel, an apart-hotel with a rental operation, permanent staff, and homes designed for people who live somewhere rather than visit it, produces warm ones.

On paper, Mayri's composition, about 150 apartments and a hotel-

and-apart-hotel core rather than a field of villas, sits on the right side of that distinction. Oleg Shevchenko, the Project's Director, is the person who will have to hold that balance through construction, and it is the number I would watch as this project moves forward, more than any facade or finish.

“

Oleg Shevchenko

Project Director

A project like this isn't judged on opening day. It's judged in the third winter, when you see how many windows have lights on in January."

What I Will Be Watching

A complex of this size will change Dilijan, and change is exactly what many people love Dilijan for lacking. I'm not talking hypothetically here; mountain towns across Europe have been loved into blandness, their character traded for occupancy rates until the thing that drew everyone is a memory being sold in a gift shop. The plan's instincts, low buildings, under a third of the site built on, a park at the center, reviving a disused piece of town rather than clearing a new one, suggest people who understand that risk.

The name, in the end, carries the brief better than any brochure line could. Build like the cedar: slowly, at human scale, for a generation that hasn't arrived yet. Shelter like the mother. If Mayri lives up to its own name, Dilijan will have proof that a small mountain town can grow without turning into somewhere else, and that proof is worth more to this country than any single building on any single hillside.

HOW TO LIVE LONGER IN YEREVAN - PART 2

PROVEN STRATEGIES FOR A LONGER, HEALTHIER LIFE IN THE ARMENIAN CAPITAL

in



**WOLF
ALEXANYAN**

Chief Operations Officer and Chief
Product Officer at Hexens



HOW TO LIVE LONGER IN YEREVAN - PART 2

PROVEN STRATEGIES FOR A LONGER, HEALTHIER LIFE IN THE ARMENIAN CAPITAL

Last issue I introduced Wolf Alexanyan and his Longevity Protocol for Non-Billionaires, and I promised that Part 2 would stop philosophizing and start introducing practical steps.

As a quick reminder, Wolf is a tech executive based in Armenia who spent a decade tracking, testing, and adjusting his own habits before publishing his routine at keepsimple.io. Following his longevity protocol in Yerevan costs an extra \$3,000 per year on average beyond regular living expenses. Two rules he insisted on before agreeing to publish this column in the magazine.

1- First, this is not medical advice, and nothing here replaces a doctor who knows your history.

2- Second, he doesn't want you to copy him; the only thing he endorses is mindfulness, honest attention to what your habits are doing to you.

So read the following as one man's practice, tested on himself, and take what fits your life.



Use Your Brain

Something I really like about Wolf's longevity protocol is the way he describes it as the UX of your day-to-day life. In terms of product design, your body is the product and the day is the interface.

His protocol lists six core habit areas, lifestyle, study, diet, workout, sleep, and supplements, and of those, study is the most important to him. Everyone accepts that muscles weaken without training. Almost nobody applies the same expectation to the mind. What separates people who stay sharp at sixty from those who don't has nothing to do with genetics; it's whether they kept training the organ.

Study has a twin, and it's subtraction. There's no point pouring good information into a mind that's being flooded with noise, which is why the protocol pairs learning with strict filters: no Instagram or YouTube during the work block, non-work chats muted for its entire duration, no social media scrolling, no political or ideological debates, and no attention given to topics outside his work and core interests. He also offloads every task he's carrying, into reminders, pinned messages, and a long-term board he's kept running since 2014, on the principle that a mind holding no clutter executes better.



Not The Diet Talk You're Thinking About

Now let's touch on diet. I know it's probably the last thing you want to read about in this magazine, but if you've trusted me over the course of 40 issues, I ask for your trust just one more time and take a look at this [webpage](#) Wolf created. It changed our lives at home, and I would love for it to do the same for yours.

The most interesting thing you'll see is the scoring system he created. Rather than dividing food into good and bad, he ranks it on a damage index from one to ten, which lets you see exactly what you are trading when you make a choice. Based on this index, the site calculates the estimated days of brain life lost with each meal.

Notice what the index does psychologically. It removes the moral language from eating. You are not being good or bad; you are choosing a number, and you can see the cost. For readers who have never managed to stick to a diet, this framing alone may be the most useful thing in the article.



Briefly speaking, when it comes to diet, Wolf recommends four simple steps, in order:

- 1 Learn a bit of food science
- 2 Stop eating certain bad things
- 3 Start eating certain good things
- 4 Finally, learn the right sequence of eating

His own transition took months at the first step and a couple of months each at the next two; the last one became a habit in a few weeks.

The Facts That Change Behaviour

Step one is knowledge, and Wolf lists the food-science facts that most influenced his own choices. A few of them reorganize how you look at a plate. Around 75% of chronic diseases come down to diet. Three out of four chronic conditions, in other words, are not bad luck; they are the accumulated result of what someone ate every day for years.

Sugar does not just change how you look; it breaks your brain. High sugar and insulin resistance starve brain cells, inflame them, and damage the connections between them. Ignore it in your thirties, he warns, and the damage builds fast through your forties and fifties. What starts as brain fog can end in dementia.



About 90% of serotonin is produced in your gut, which means mood, sleep, and motivation all depend on gut health, and ultra-processed food slowly dismantles that system. Most people are inflamed. Up to 60 to 70% of adults in industrialized countries show signs of chronic low-grade

inflammation, largely from refined carbs, seed oils, and ultra-processed food.

And the fact I have not been able to forget since I read it: one junk meal can cause four to six hours of damage. A single fast-food meal spikes inflammation, raises oxidative stress,

and reduces blood vessel function, even when you feel completely fine afterwards. If you eat twice a day, that is two decisions daily, each one either keeping you sharp and stable or costing you the next four to six hours of clear thinking. Every meal shapes how you think, feel, and act in the hours that follow.

What This Looks Like in Yerevan

And here is the essence of the column; what this looks like on the ground in Yerevan. Wolf's protocol contains a section specifically for people living in Armenia, including a public [list of non-obvious healthy products](#) that can actually be found in Armenian markets. If you take one action after reading this, open that list before your next shop.

Our produce markets are, in damage-index terms, mostly a two or a three,

and seasonal, and cheap; greens by the bunch, tomatoes that actually rot, walnuts, dried fruit without additives, matsun, village cheese, eggs, fish from Sevan.

The expensive foods are the ones that hurt you; the cheap ones are the ones that repair you, which is an inversion of how longevity is usually sold. Meanwhile the traps are equally local and equally obvious

once you name them: bread with everything, sweets with every coffee, and the list goes long.

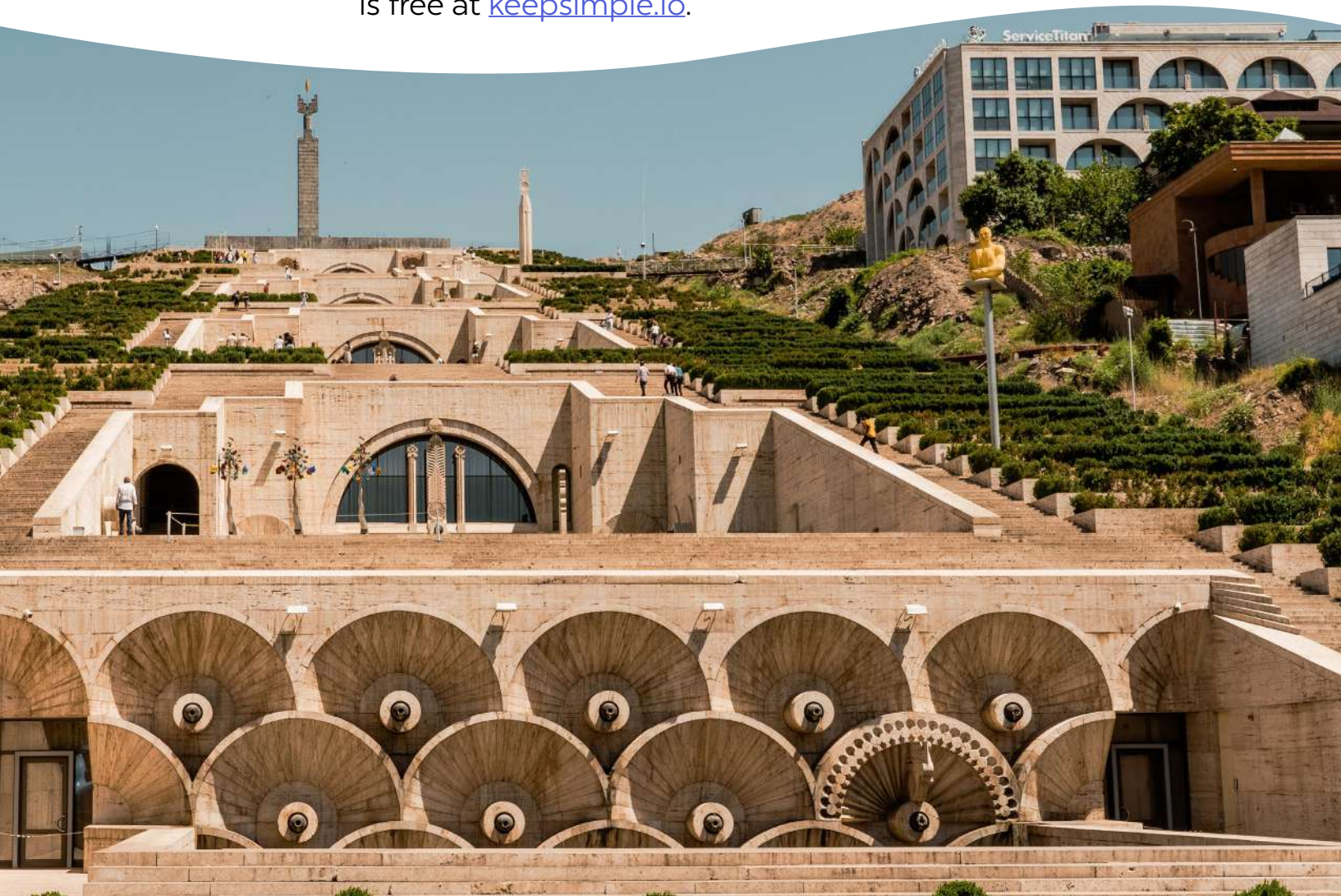
None of this requires you to become the person who refuses gata at a family table. It requires you to know the price of the trade and to choose it deliberately, which is the entire philosophy of this protocol in one sentence. Wolf is not against pleasure; he has spent years researching sweeteners and cheat hacks so he could keep some of it. He is against paying a price you never agreed to.

Your Homework Until Part 3

Four things, none of which cost money.

- 1 Reverse the order of your next meal: protein and vegetables first, bread and rice last.
- 2 Cut one liquid sugar habit, because that category scores 8.5 and delivers nothing back.
- 3 Read the labels on two products you currently believe are healthy, and see if they belong in the 6.5 category.
- 4 And open Wolf's Armenian market list before your next trip to the shop.

In Part 3, we move to the pillar Wolf calls the most important of all, study, and to the workouts, sleep, and supplements that surround it. Until then, the full protocol is free at keepsimple.io.



YEREVAN, AN OPEN GALLERY

ONE ITALIAN EXPAT'S PLAN TO GIVE THE CITY A BIENNALE



**MATHEW
ZEIN**

EDITOR IN CHIEF

YEREVAN, AN OPEN GALLERY ONE ITALIAN EXPAT'S PLAN TO GIVE THE CITY A BIENNALE

Italy gave the world the biennale; Venice invented the very idea that a city could become an exhibition every two years. So there's a certain charm in the fact that the man working to give Yerevan its own is Italian.

Fabio Lenzi came to Armenia around the same time I did back in 2016. Within two years he had organized an international contemporary art exhibition in the city; within four he had co-founded a foundation and named it the Yerevan Biennial Art Foundation. I know what you're thinking right now, the name speaks volumes of the plans he has for this country.

The Corner Near France Square

There's a small corner near France Square that I send newcomers to when they want to see some art in Yerevan. It's an open-air stretch by Saryan's statue where painters hang their canvases on racks and fences every day.

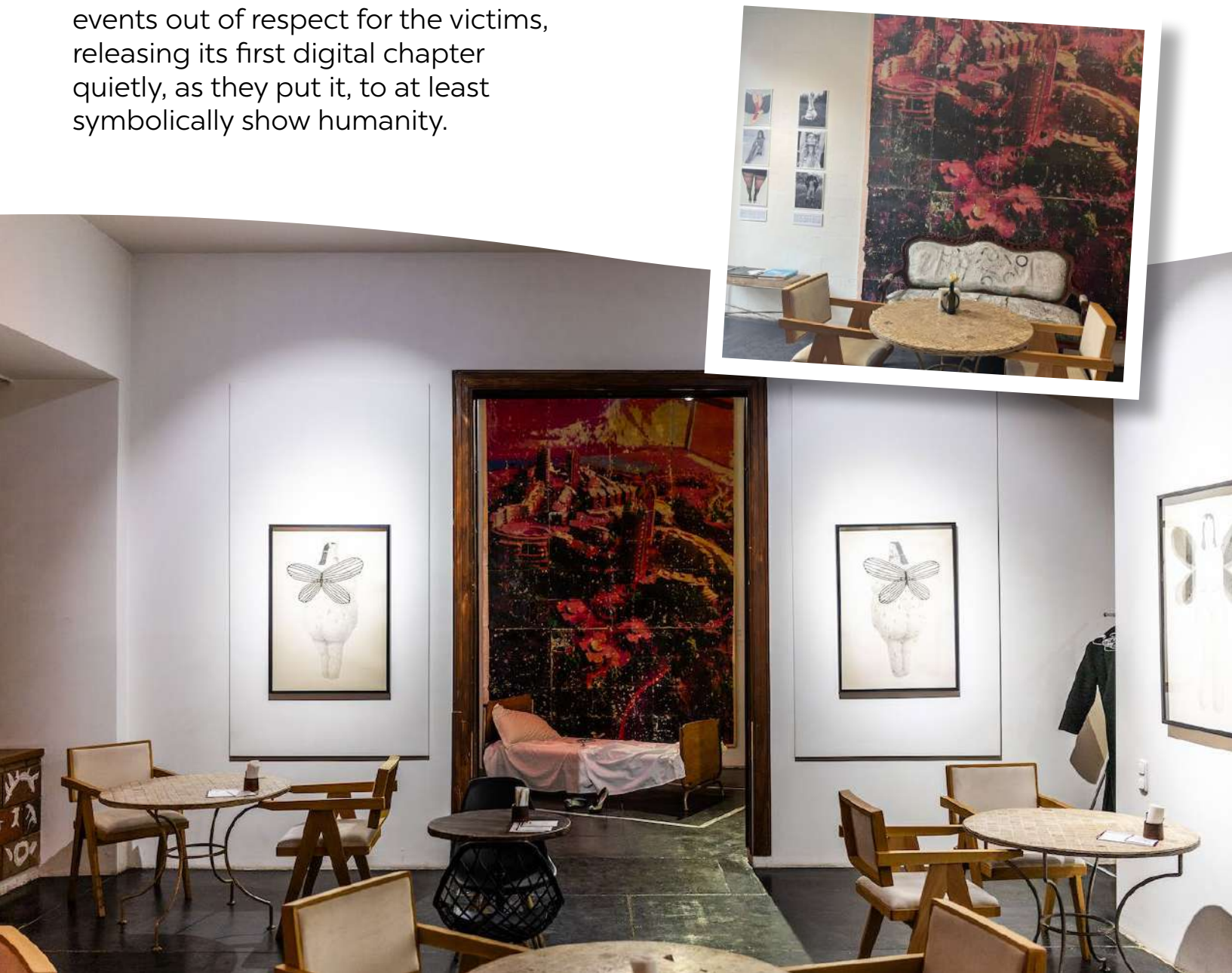
Now take that block and stretch it, in your imagination, across the entire city, down the avenues, into the courtyards, through the abandoned buildings. That's Fabio's plan for the Yerevan Biennial, and it has a date already.



Running Against All Odds

The Yerevan Biennial Art Foundation was established in December 2019. The inaugural biennial was scheduled for 2020; a pandemic pushed it digital. The foundation appointed a serious curator, Lorenzo Fusi, the man who had curated the Liverpool Biennial twice, and prepared 'The Time Complex' as its opening theme; then war came in September 2020, and the foundation canceled its launch events out of respect for the victims, releasing its first digital chapter quietly, as they put it, to at least symbolically show humanity.

Most cultural projects die from one such blow. Fabio's absorbed two and kept building. Today the foundation runs two permanent spaces in the city, A1 Art Space, a gallery-café-coworking hybrid in the center, and the Latitude Art Space at ArtFactory, a 500-square-meter industrial venue with artist studios for large-scale work. And now comes the third act: the first full-scale physical Yerevan Biennial, targeted for 2028.



What 2028 Would Bring

Artists from Armenia, the diaspora, and the world, working alongside academics and cultural thinkers, with residency exchanges and partnerships with the international biennial circuit in Yerevan. The foundation wants to establish Yerevan as a contemporary art hub, give Armenian artists international visibility, and leave a lasting mark on the city's cultural infrastructure and creative economy.

If this sounds like cultural romanticism, the ledger of other cities says otherwise. You just have

to do some reading and learn about it, and to be honest, I didn't know a thing about this until Fabio shared the details with me.

Venice turned a periodic art exhibition into the engine of its global identity; a century and a quarter on, nations compete for pavilions there the way they once competed for ports. Liverpool, a post-industrial city that needed a new story, built a biennial in 1998 and made contemporary art part of its regeneration; the connection to Yerevan is more than

theoretical, since the same curator who shaped two Liverpool editions was the Yerevan foundation's first artistic director.

And for the most instructive comparison, look at a city closer to our scale: Prizren, in Kosovo, whose Autostrada Biennale began in 2017 with private homes opening their rooms as temporary galleries; by 2023, FRIEZE magazine was ranking it among the ten best exhibitions in Europe, and the biennale had become a formal partner in revitalizing the city's cultural heritage.

What Yerevan Would Gain

Those are the numbers and the reputations. But the deepest effect of a biennial doesn't land on visitors at all. It lands on the people who live there, and it lands quietly.



Mathew Zein and Fabio Lenzi from the launch event of Forbes special feature titled Fashion Forward Armenia where the Yerevan Biennial was spotlighted

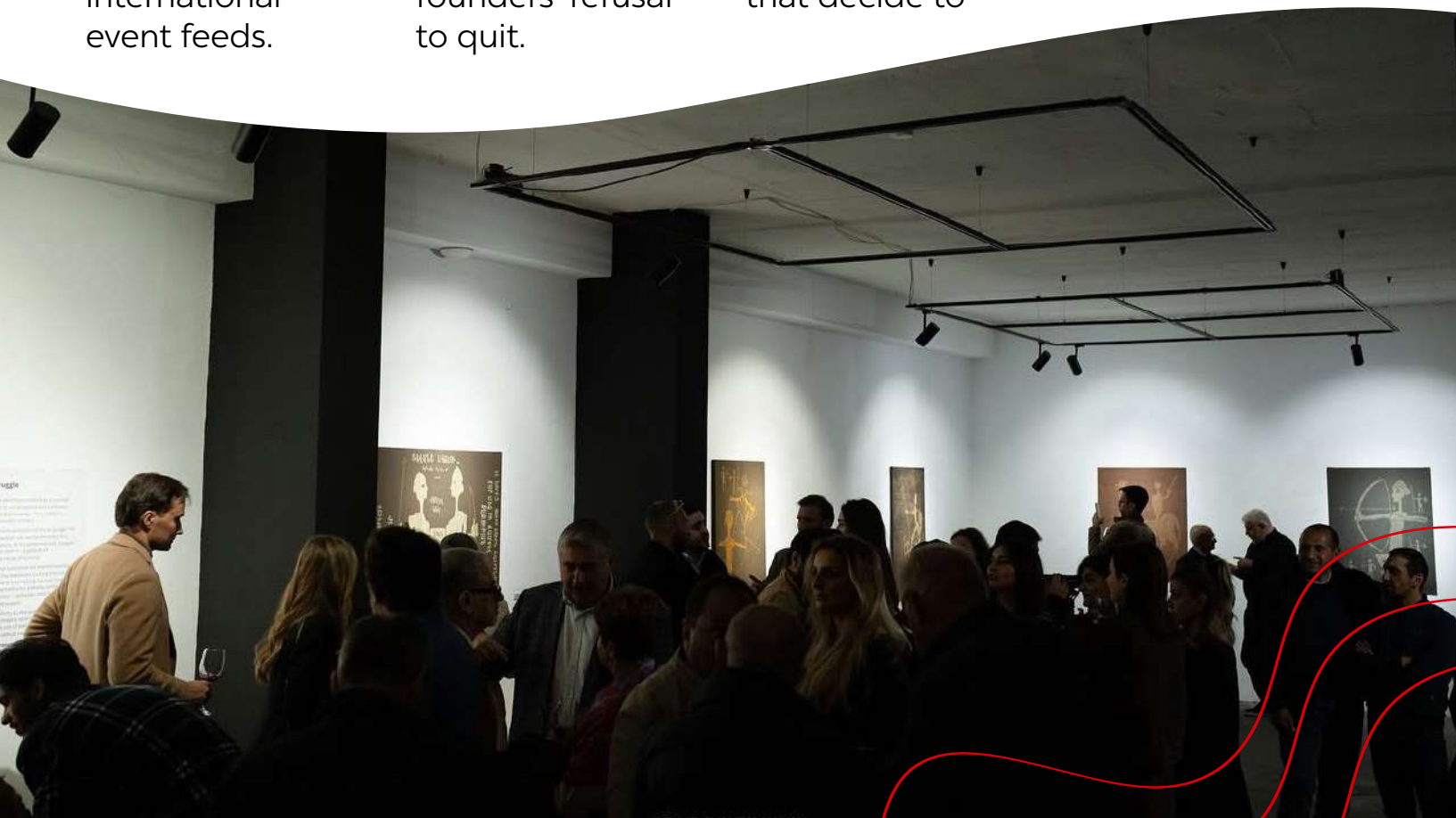
Every Yerevan kid who walks past a world-class installation on their way to school absorbs, without a single lecture, the idea that their city is a place where such things happen, and that they might make one. Multiply that by every street, every edition, every two years. Add the practical layer, the galleries, framers, fabricators, guides, cafés, and hotels that a two-month international event feeds.

A biennial of this scale is one of the hardest things a city can attempt: funding must survive electoral cycles and donor fatigue, city hall must say yes to artists occupying public space, and the first edition of anything is usually its roughest. This foundation's own history, postponed by pandemic, silenced by war, is proof of how much can go wrong between a plan and an opening night, even as it's also proof of the founders' refusal to quit.

2028 gives Yerevan two years to decide whether it wants this badly enough to help. My vote is on the record with this article. The painters near France Square have been holding one corner of the open gallery for years and I love it, and so does everyone I've sent there over the years. It's time the rest of the city reported for duty.

One last thing. A biennial is built by the institutions that decide to

show up. So if you work with an art foundation, a gallery, a museum, a cultural institute, or a private collection, whether here in Armenia, in the diaspora, or anywhere else, Reach out to Fabio. Partners, funders, curators, venues, and lenders are exactly what the next two years require. You can reach the Yerevan Biennial Art Foundation. Tell him where you read about it. That would make my entire year.



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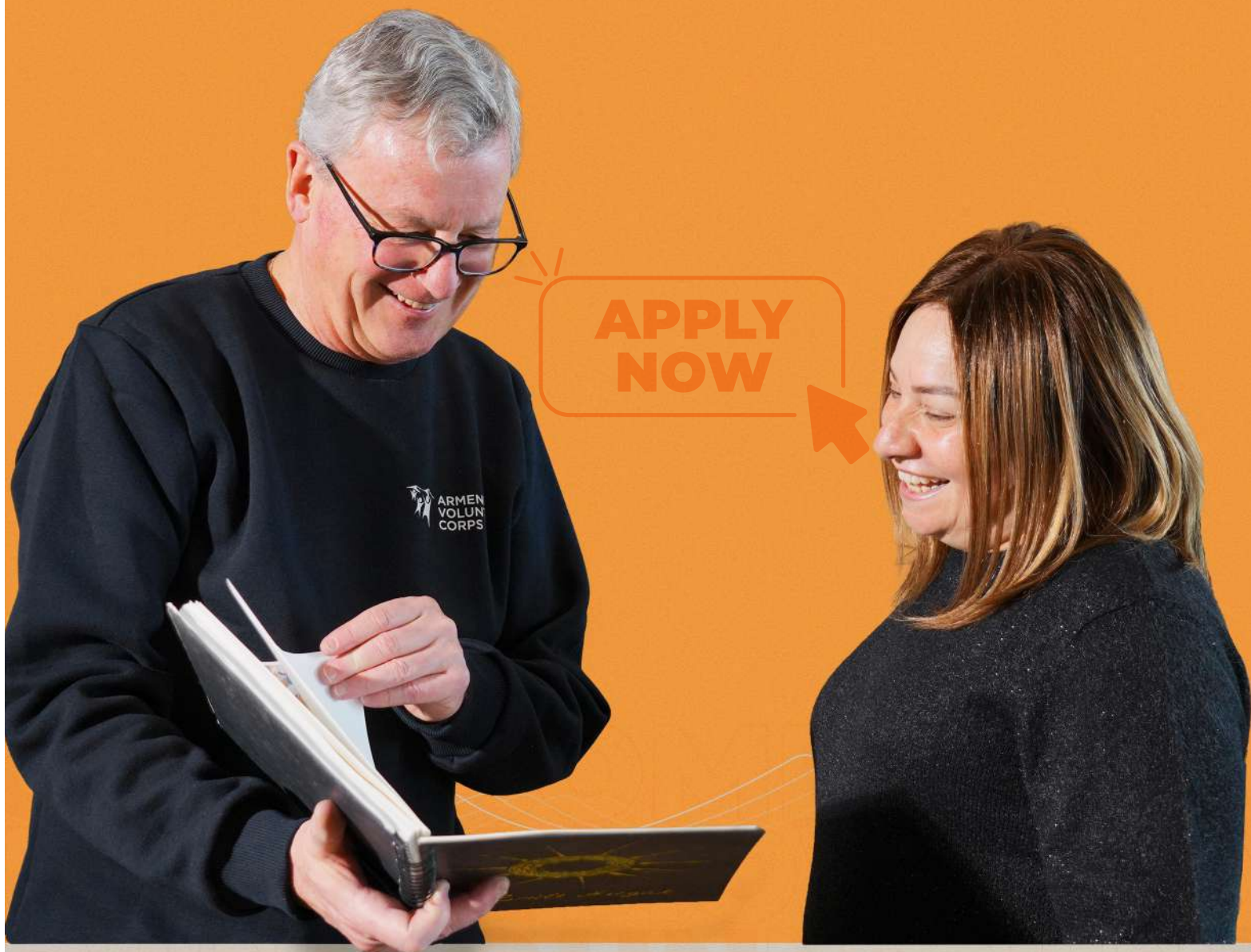
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OUT OF THE ROCK

HOW “MHER JUNIOR” CARRIED AN ANCIENT EPIC INTO THE AI AGE



**MARINA
ARZUMANOVA**

CONTRIBUTING WRITER
& ART MANAGER



OUT OF THE ROCK

HOW “MHER JUNIOR” CARRIED AN ANCIENT EPIC INTO THE AI AGE

Armenia's first feature animation made largely with AI put the last hero of Sassoun on the big screen. What looked like a machine's film turned out to be a human one.

In the epic of Sassoun, Mher the Younger is shut inside a rock. The world has grown too crooked to hold his weight, so he waits in Agravakar, the Raven's Rock, for a time when the ground can carry him again. This spring a version of him walked out. He walked into a cinema.

“Mher Junior” (Pokr Mher) opened in theatres across Armenia at the start of June, and it arrived wearing a label that made it either a curiosity or a provocation, depending on who you asked. It was one of the first feature animations anywhere to be generated largely with artificial intelligence and then given a wide cinema release. The story keeps its roots in Daredevils of Sassoun, the national epic, and follows its most mysterious figure, the last descendant of the Sassoun line, as he steps out of legend and into a present-day Armenian village he does not recognise. The film was built

for three audiences at once: children, teenagers and adults. Under the jokes and the chase scenes, there are quieter layers for anyone old enough to look for them.



People loved it. Some also called for a boycott. After we released the trailer, we faced real backlash from artists, and much of it came from people who felt AI was coming for their jobs. I understand where that fear lives. Having now worked on the project,

I think the picture is more complicated. Whether we had made this film or not, AI was already seeping into the industry, quietly, through software people already used every day.

How it Started

Every large story begins with something small. This one began with a promise. At another film's premiere, the director of "Mher Junior," Hovhannes Margaryan, promised his son that within a year they would walk the red carpet of their own film. A promise made is a debt owed, and paying it meant assembling, slowly, a team of professionals to attempt something no one around us had done before.

The studio that grew out of that promise is the 485 Generative Technologies Center, founded by Margaryan with the idea of putting Armenian identity and new technology in the same room and seeing what they make together. The first job was the script. The story of Mher was written and rewritten many times until it could hold two things at once: a plot that would grip a child today, and enough of the old epic to pull it back into the mainstream.



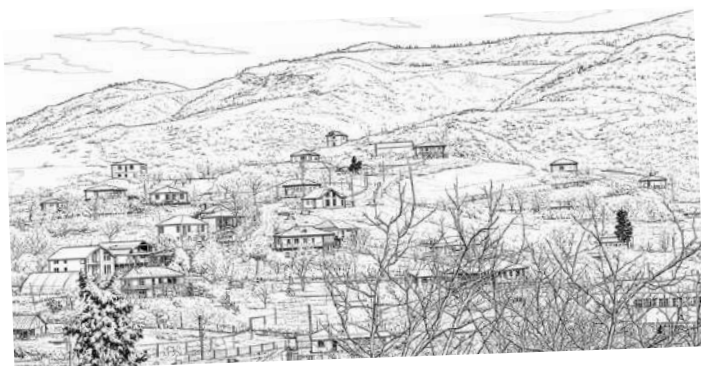
The People Behind the Machine

Here is the part audiences rarely see. Many of the AI artists on “Mher Junior” were 3D artists and designers before they were anything else. The technology does not run itself. Every frame has to be planned, analysed, and refined by a person before it is ever handed to a model. What AI needs, more than prompts, is a controlling hand, a stream of creative decisions, and a great deal of patience.

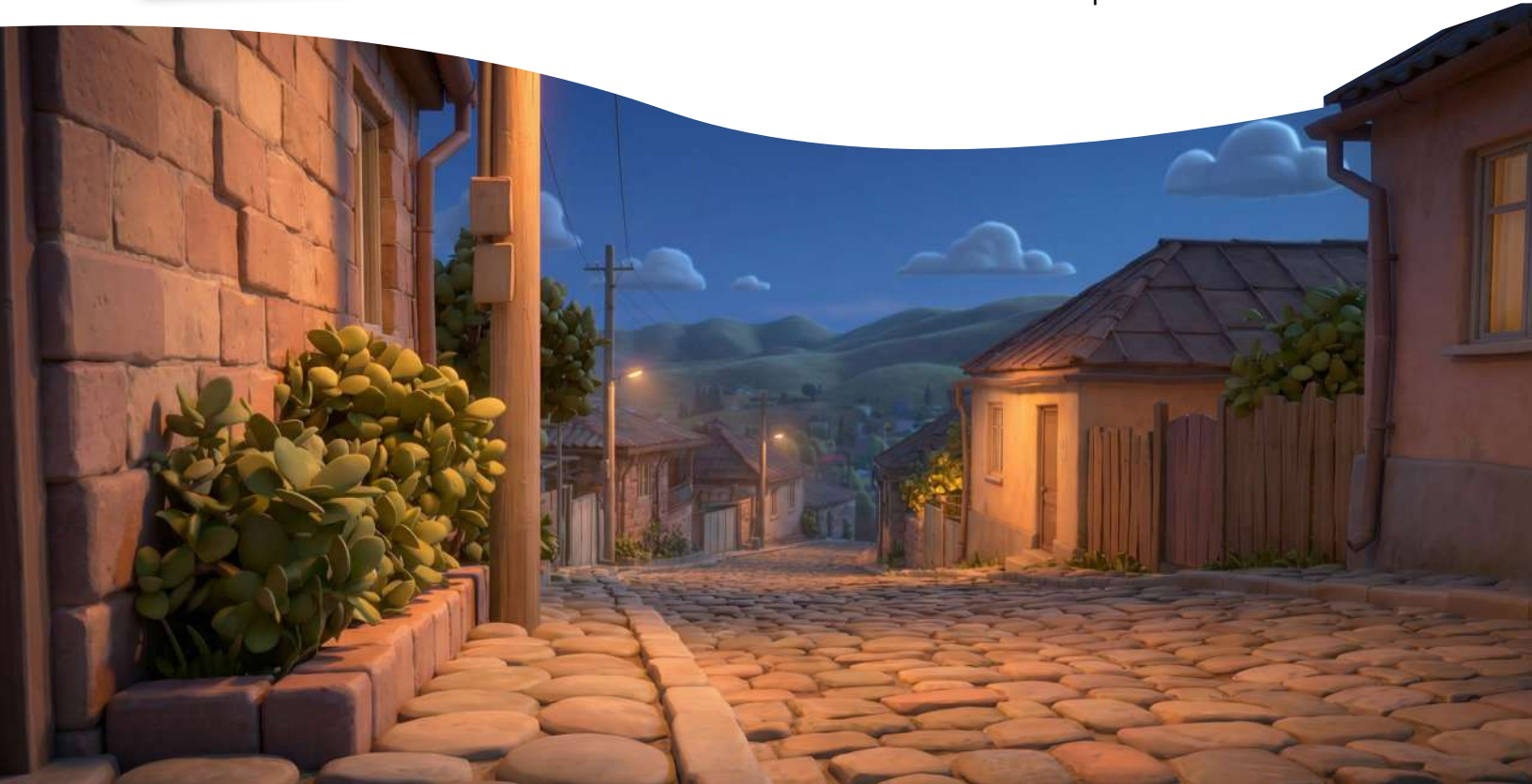


Mher’s look mattered most of all. We brought in an ethnographer and costume specialist, Vahe Kotanyan, to work alongside the designers. Hence, the hero stayed genuinely Armenian, from the cut of the cloak to the arm guards. The designers sketched first, then fed that knowledge to the model. Environments were the next hunt. Ask a model for “an Armenian village,” and you get either a pile of clichés or somewhere vaguely Mediterranean that no Armenian would recognise as home.

At first, the results looked more like those of Greece or Italy than Sassoun. So the team went out. They travelled to real villages, photographed courtyards and houses and old stone, sketched, gathered references, and only then fed that material back in. As Margaryan put it, the aim was for a viewer in Mexico to finish the film and want to visit Armenia, the way Coco sent people looking for Mexico.



Once the world existed, it had to be filmed. Vahagn Ter-Hakobyan, one of Armenia's leading cinematographers, sat down with the team and sketched the picture shot by shot, the angles, the light, the movement. It was here that the limits of the tools showed themselves most clearly. Shots were reimagined. The story bent to what was possible.



What the Machine Actually Did



At the beginning, we overestimated the technology, as almost everyone does. We expected it to be far more capable than it turned out to be, and when it refused to give us what we wanted, we adapted. We went back to the start again and again, changed the workflow, and solved the same problem five different ways. The tools we began with were half-obsolete by the end; better ones kept appearing while we worked.

One number tells the story better than any argument. Of everything the models generated, we used roughly ten percent. The rest was unusable or simply wrong. Sustaining a short clip is one thing; holding a character steady across eighty minutes is another entirely, and that consistency became our hardest fight. Faces drifted. Characters danced when we needed them still and sat when we needed them dancing.

Locations rearranged themselves between shots. Pictures on the walls started to move and talk on their own. In one scene, Mher was supposed to slip on a wet floor, and instead he kept breaking into dance. Even when the instructions were exact, the machine had its own reading of them.

Was it Actually Cheaper? There is a comfortable assumption that AI production is cheap. Having lived inside one, I am no longer sure. We did save something on this film, though it was time rather than money. Subscriptions alone took

real investment, and every round of experimentation meant buying more credits. For a small project, perhaps the sums work out lower. For something on this scale, the technology bought us speed and bought it at a price.

Why Can this Be Good for Armenia?

Armenia has a genuine opening to make technology one of its leading industries. The talent is here, and so is a habit of mind. One of the more useful things the Soviet period left behind was a culture of engineering and science, and the country has kept producing engineers and technical people ever since. On top of that sits a young and growing startup scene that permits people to try strange new things.

A film like this is a loud way of showing what that talent can do, especially once it travels beyond Armenia. Noise attracts investment, including investment in the creative economy, and because fully AI-made features are still rare, doing one well plants a flag. When someone abroad goes looking for a working example of how this is done, we would like the search to lead back here and to the collaborations that follow.



A Note from the Theatre

None of this is the first time a craft has felt threatened by a machine. When cinema arrived, the theatre looked down on it, and some of the era's celebrated stage figures kept their distance from the screen, which was treated as a low form of entertainment rather than an art. That held until film mastered its own tools and became a new art in its own right. I do not think AI animation is here to bury traditional animation, that slow and beautiful craft. I think it is something else standing next to it, still learning what it is.



A Personal Reflection

Before I joined, I believed opting out of AI was a real choice. Most of us picture ChatGPT or Claude when we hear the word, and forget that plenty of the “manual” software we already trust has these systems humming away underneath. I will still try not to lean on it too hard, because I know how fast I could get used to it, and how quickly my messages to friends might start reading like this:

“Hey! I hope this message finds you well. Based on our previous interactions, I believe there is a 97.4% chance you’re being weird right now.”

Whether I like it or not, AI will keep showing up in my life. And whether anyone likes it or not, a large team of professionals chose to build something new, and that choice will leave a mark.

This was not the easy way out. It was a decision to go and find out what a new tool could and could not do. Whether AI turns out to be a revolution or just another instrument in the kit, we will learn in time. What is already certain is that the conversation has started, and Armenia is standing inside it.

Mher waited in the rock until the world was ready for him. This time, he did not wait to be sure it was.



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I NEVER RAN THE NUMBERS LIFE IN ARMENIA IS THE RETURN ON INVESTMENT

By training, I price things. Companies, risks, decisions. Fifteen years in investment and corporate finance, the CFA and FRM charters, a career spent putting numbers on choices other people made with their gut. The strange truth is that the two biggest decisions of my life were never priced at all. In 2014 I left Armenia because I wanted adventure. In 2017 I came back because I wanted depth. Neither went through a spreadsheet. Both paid better than anything that did. This essay is about the second one, the unpriced bet on Armenia, and why it is open to the person reading this too.

Where the Numbers Started

I grew up in a neighborhood of small houses, gardens, and friends. Times were difficult, but my parents worked hard to make life feel like a butterfly for me: light, despite everything. My first brush with money came at sixteen, working at my father's company. The first salary felt really good. I spent all of it with my friends, which I maintain was the correct capital allocation.

Numbers were my way out before they were my way back. After a master's in finance at Hult International Business School, I went looking for adventure, and the road ran through Moscow to the United Arab Emirates, where I ran financial planning for a trading company. Life there was two things: working and studying for the CFA. Dubai was good to me. It was also never going to be the core of the story.



The Return

In 2017 I was deep in corporate finance and wanted capital markets. An opportunity came up in Armenia, so I came back. People ask whether I ran the numbers on that move. I didn't. I didn't care about the numbers. What I gave up mattered less than what I needed, and what I needed was experience. My family was happy. My friends were happy. I was back. The first month is easy to summarize: I was broke, but full of motivation.

I went where a finance person goes in Yerevan. Head of research at an investment company. A board seat at an asset manager. By 2018 I was running an investment firm. Those years were my map of the Armenian economy, drawn one company at a time. And they showed me the thing this story turns on: founders who could build anything except the financial case for building it.



A Firm as a Classroom

In 2019 we started Hundred MS. We were running a mutual fund for small investors and built an advisory firm alongside it. Our first advisory client was Noyan, the juice company. Then came the pivot that shaped everything since: we took the practice to the American market. Today Hundred MS consults mostly for companies in the United States, across consumer goods, health, tech and real estate, and the combined revenue of our clients has crossed a billion dollars. All of it served from Yerevan. Along the way we consulted dozens of startups, and the pattern never changed: intelligent people arriving late, after the lease was signed and the savings were spent, holding plans the numbers could not support.

People ask which client finally pushed us over the edge to build software. None did. It was a vision. We had deep experience in what we did,

and we could see the product. I know founding stories are supposed to have a lightning bolt. Ours was a forecast.

Three Friends and a Bet

My co-founders, Khachatur and David, are friends from high school and university. What made me trust them was our friendship, and our shared dreams. By 2023 one conviction had settled in from all those years of frameworks and models: AI works best inside a proven structure, and structure was what

we had spent our careers building. In October 2023 we started. The name is the mission: Prometheus brought fire to people, and we are doing the same for entrepreneurs, democratizing business planning. We bootstrapped it completely. No venture round, no grants. The income from Hundred

MS paid for [PrometAI](#)'s development, so every feature was funded by consulting hours we had already worked on. When the money is yours, you do not build things nobody wants. The first version had its flaws. The images in those early presentations still embarrass me.

The Stretch Nobody Photographs

The worst stretch was the first days. We had no users, everything felt stale, and we just kept pushing. One failure from that time stayed a failure: we did not get big as quickly as I had imagined. Things take time. The failure was the mindset, not the company.

Fifteen months after launch, more than 100,000 founders were using PrometAI, in 178 countries, and for the searches that matter in our category we sat at the top of Google in the United States, with almost no paid marketing. Founders found the tool and told other founders. People ask where I was when the counter crossed 100,000 and who I told first. Honestly, it is the wrong question. We do not celebrate that number. We just keep growing.

They also ask about the first stranger who used the product, and the answer is that I do not know. We do not look into user data to see what people are building. It is confidential, and it stays that way. The message I do remember came from a user who told us they did not want to tell

anyone about PrometAI. They wanted to keep it to themselves, as their competitive edge. The best review we ever received was a refusal to review us. The product outgrew its name along the way. Founders kept asking for the step before the plan and the step after it, so we built

the Entrepreneur Journey, a map of the whole path from idea to funding. And this year we started Between Campus and Code, a PrometAI research project on how AI is changing the economics of early careers. For the first interviews we sat down with people we used to only read,

including Olivier Sibony, the HEC Paris professor and former McKinsey senior partner who co-wrote Noise with Nobel laureate Daniel Kahneman. A bootstrapped team from Armenia, publishing that conversation. I still find that sentence strange to type.

What Armenia Actually Gave Us

Incredible talent. Our team is the most important asset this company has, and it is an Armenian team. Armenia also gave me a community I did not see coming: I studied at Oxford, and I would never have guessed back then that the alumni community waiting for me was in Yerevan. We have climbed Aragats together. I will not pretend it is frictionless: the exchange rate and the costs are real, and there is no workaround. You take the pain. We could hire in cheaper countries. We love Armenia, and we will always stay here.

Here is the asymmetry no spreadsheet showed me in 2017. The distance between Yerevan and any customer on Earth is now measured in milliseconds. Nobody gave us permission to take the top of the American search results, because nobody needed to.





Uphill, and Once Across a Lake

In 2022, I took up mountaineering. Aragats first, the southern summit. It changed me. Every founder essay has a mountain metaphor and I do not trust them, so I will give you facts instead. Kazbek, 5,054 meters. Ararat on the 22nd of August last year, standing on the summit with David, the co-founder from the same high school.



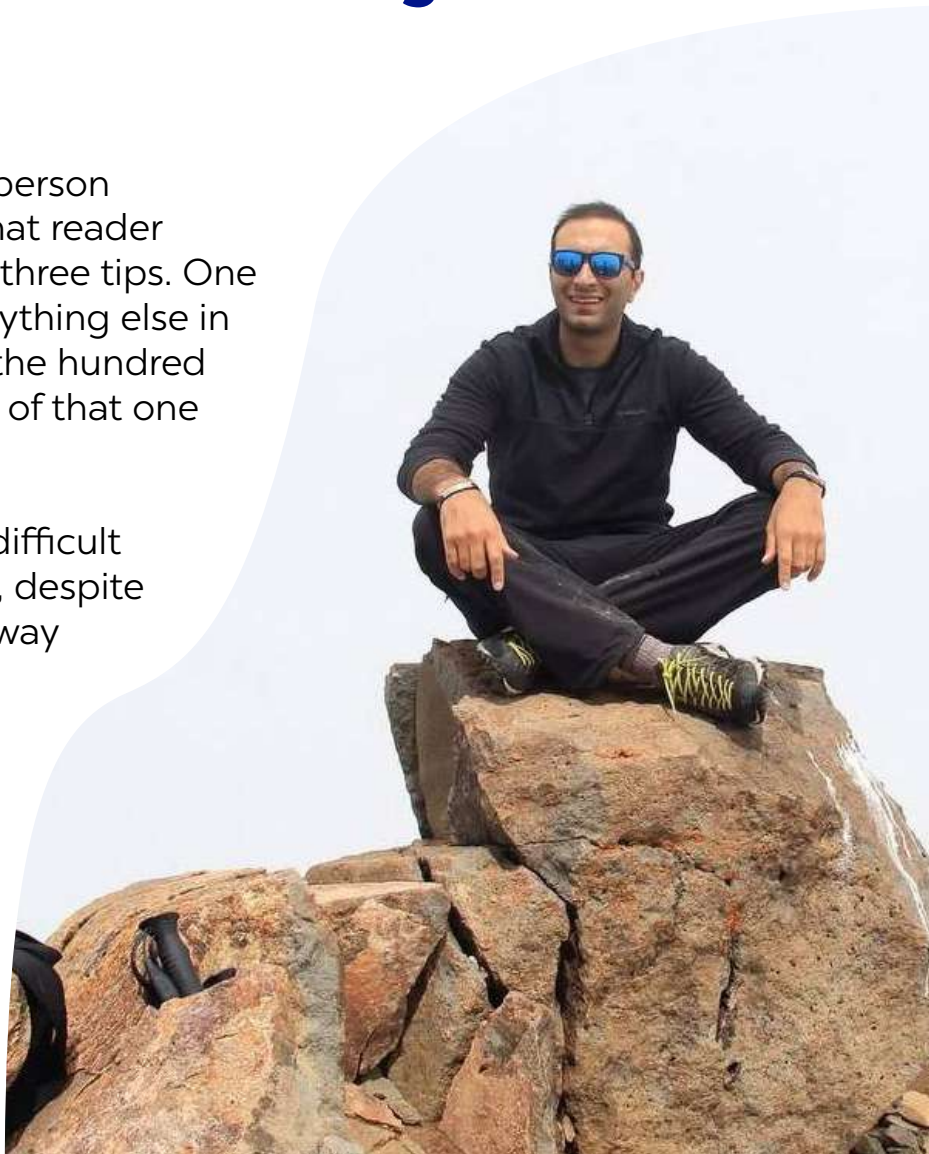


And one lake. Last July I swam across Sevan at its narrowest point, six kilometers. It was a childhood dream, planned since April. I am not even a good swimmer; the November before, I could barely manage fifty meters of freestyle. My mother dislikes Sevan. She says it is cold, that fresh water is dangerous, and when she heard I was at the lake she called and told me to come back before I caught a cold. She never guessed what I was planning. Forgive me, mama. I dedicated the swim to her afterward, so she would never again have to worry about me swimming in Sevan. I did not just dip into that lake. I crossed it.

If You are the Reader I was Writing this for

Mathew asked me to write for the person considering the move, and I owe that reader practical advice. Everyone expects three tips. One is enough: build a good team. Everything else in this story, the clients, the product, the hundred thousand founders, is downstream of that one decision.

My parents worked hard so that a difficult time felt light to a child. A butterfly, despite everything. Somewhere along the way that became the job description: we build so that the heaviest part of starting a company feels light to the person carrying it. That is the only valuation that has ever mattered to me, and you will not find it in any model. Including ours.



A HIGH YEAR INDEED

ARMENIA, WINE, AND THE VIEW FROM ABOVE



**DIANA
KHANDILYAN**

FOUNDER OF GLASS NOMAD



A HIGH YEAR INDEED ARMENIA, WINE, AND THE VIEW FROM ABOVE

Something shifted in Armenia's wine world this year, and I watched it happen. May brought the Concours Mondial de Bruxelles to Yerevan, and with it, over five hundred wine professionals from around the world. Judges, critics, importers, winemakers. People who shape how the global wine conversation moves. Many of them had never set foot in Armenia before. By the time they left, they had stood in our vineyards, met our winemakers, and tasted wines that needed no historical footnote to make their case.

That moment matters. But it is also, I think, just the beginning of a longer conversation. Because what Armenia offers the wine world goes deeper than a single competition, or even a single season. It goes all the way down to the ground, and upward from there, into the thin, clear air above our vineyards. This is the story of altitude.



Why Start with Altitude

When we talk about altitude in Armenian wine, precision matters. While many wine regions consider 500 to 800 meters (1,600 to 2,600 feet) to be high altitude, Armenian vineyards commonly sit between 1,200 and 1,650 meters (3,900 to 5,400 feet), with some sites approaching 2,000 meters (nearly 6,500 feet). These are among the highest commercial vineyards in the world.

But altitude is not new to Armenia. It is deeply embedded in how this land has always understood strength, resilience, and performance. In the first and second millennia BC, Armenia was renowned not only for its position at the crossroads of civilizations, but also for its horses. Armenian horses were among the most coveted in the region, known for endurance, fearlessness,

and the ability to outperform others in battle and long-distance travel.

The advantage came from altitude. Horses raised and trained at high elevation, where thinner air builds lung capacity and stamina, carried a physiological edge when brought down to lower ground. What looked like a constraint had become a source of strength. Armenian wine works the same way.

Altitude in a Changing Climate

Across the global wine world, altitude has shifted from curiosity to necessity. As temperatures rise, traditional vineyard sites are being pushed beyond their limits. Grapes ripen faster, acidity drops, alcohol rises, and established styles begin to drift. In response, winemakers are moving uphill where possible, rethinking grape varieties, and reassessing what balance looks like in a warming climate.

In many regions, this process is still unfolding. Altitude alone, however, does not guarantee quality. Vines must adapt to thinner air, stronger ultraviolet radiation, colder nights, and shorter growing seasons. That adaptation takes time. Armenia has had millennia.



Mastering Altitude, Not Chasing It

Armenia's vineyards did not move uphill in response to climate change. They were already there. More importantly, our indigenous grape varieties evolved under these conditions over thousands of years. Altitude, soil, and climate here act as a selective force. In nature, what cannot adapt

disappears. History often follows the same pattern.

Armenia sits at a geographic crossroads that has invited conquest for millennia. The Assyrian Empire, the Parthian Empire, the Median Empire, the Seleucid Empire, Hellenistic kingdoms, medieval

caliphates, among many others. They came to conquer, they enslaved, and then they languished into the archives of history, while Armenia remained.

Empires ruled these lands and faded. Armenia endured. Not unchanged, but continuous. And so did the Armenian grapes. Over more

than 6,000 years, grape varieties that could not adapt gradually disappeared. Those that remained learned to stay close to the ground, ripen slowly, preserve acidity, and build structure without excess sugar. These grapes were not retrained for altitude. They were shaped by it.

This is why altitude in Armenia functions as strength. Here vines ripen with patience, retain freshness, and develop balance

naturally. The wines that emerge feel composed and assured, reflecting long adaptation rather than correction.

A Simple Experiment in Altitude

One of the most compelling ways to understand altitude in Armenian wine is through comparison. Taste two Areni wines side by side: Van Ardi Areni Reserve and Oshin Areni by Zorah Wines. Both are benchmarks. Both are made from the same grape. Both reflect thoughtful winemaking. And yet, they are clearly different in the glass.

Winemaking choices matter but so does where the grapes were grown. Van Ardi's vineyards in Aragatsotn, near Sasunik, sit at about 1,050 meters (3,440 feet) above sea level. Zorah's vineyards in Vayots Dzor, near Rind and Yeghegnadzor, rise to approximately 1,400–1,600 meters (4,600–5,250 feet). The difference is significant, and it shows.

One wine may feel broader and more grounded, the other tighter and more vertical. Neither is better. Both are expressions of altitude, place, and terroir. Try to remember the taste, associate it with the place. That sensory memory is more useful than any tasting note. The next time you encounter a high-altitude wine, you will recognize it.



High Altitude Beyond Armenia

Armenia is not alone in turning to altitude, though few places have lived with it as long. In Salta, northern Argentina, some of the world's highest vineyards climb above 3,000 meters (nearly 10,000 feet). Here, Malbec and Torrontés ripen under intense sunlight and dramatic day-night temperature swings, producing wines that are both powerful and remarkably fresh. Altitude gives structure and aromatic clarity, even in an otherwise extreme environment.

Further north, in Tibet, vineyards sit on the edge of what many thought was possible for wine. At elevations above 3,500 meters (over 11,000 feet), vines face cold, wind, and intense UV exposure. Wines from this region are still rare, but they demonstrate how altitude can stretch the boundaries of viticulture itself.

Each of these regions approaches altitude differently. Some are experimenting. Some are redefining national styles. All are responding to the same reality: elevation changes how wine behaves, how it tastes, and how it lasts.



An Invitation to Taste Higher

The best way to understand altitude is to breathe it and drink it. Approach this year with curiosity. Go beyond labels and prices. Taste wines that speak clearly about where they come from. Compare Areni grown at different elevations. Explore Voskehat, Kangun, and other native varieties. Notice how freshness, structure, and aromatics shift with altitude.

You may prefer one style over another. That is beside the point. What matters is listening to what the wine has to say. Good wine always has something to tell us.

Share your wine stories and feel free to reach out via @glass_nomad or on LinkedIn. For now, I am raising a glass of Keush Rosé Extremis and inviting you to do the same. For over 6,000 years, wine has rewarded those willing to pay attention.





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