

LIFE IN ARMENIA

FOR DIGITAL NOMAD FAMILIES



SEPT, 30TH 2026 | NO. 40 | LIFE IN ARMENIA

COP 17 ARMENIA

THE BUTTERFLY EFFECT

BIODIVERSITY AS MUNICIPAL SPECIFICATION

DILIJAN AS A ROLE MODEL
IN URBAN DESIGN FRAMEWORK

AN ENTIRE WORLD IN A WINE BOTTLE

PRESERVING ARMENIAN RICH BIODIVERSITY
AND LIVING VINEYARDS

HOW I LEARNED ABOUT BIODIVERSITY

THE LARGEST CONSTRUCTION SITE
IN ARMENIA WITH NO CIGARETTE BUTTS

A LOVE OF DOMAINS - PART 1

BECAME A LOVE FOR ARMENIA

FLORA AND FAUNA IN LORI

WHY NORTHERN ARMENIA HOLDS
THE KEY TO BIODIVERSITY

CYPRUS IN WINTER

HOW TO DESIGN A YEAR BETWEEN YEREVAN
AND LIMASSOL

FIFTY YEARS TO FIND HOME - PART 1

HALFWAY AROUND THE WORLD
TO FIND FAMILY IN ARMENIA



MATHEW ZEIN

EDITOR'S LETTER

Thanks to this magazine and the incredible journey we've taken together over the past four years, I am honored to share a special milestone: next month, I will be officially hosting the daily off-campus morning briefs for international journalists covering COP17.

Having listened to hundreds, if not thousands, of stories about Armenia, I've learned how to find the precise angle that makes this country resonate with audiences anywhere in the world. For two full weeks, I'll be sharing these stories directly with the global press, and on weekends, if I'm lucky enough, taking them into the regions to experience Armenia firsthand.

I was originally scheduled to be in Canada in October to present Armenia to the diaspora through the Engage Armenia program, despite the fact that I'm not an Armenian nor a diasporan. However, when the opportunity to work directly with the international press at COP17 arose, I chose to remain in Yerevan. Guiding the journalists who will carry Armenia's story to the rest of the world offers a unique chance for global impact.

Thank you for being part of this journey with me, and as always, for reading.

Mathew Zein



CONTENTS

SEPT, 30TH 2026 | NO. 40 | LIFE IN ARMENIA

COP 17 ARMENIA THE BUTTERFLY EFFECT

Inspired by a fragile butterfly native to Yerevan, COP 17 gathers world leaders to tackle humanity's global biodiversity crisis. From ancient wild wheat strains to AI-driven genomic benefit sharing, explore how Armenia's biological wealth and diplomatic stage are uniting science, finance, and diplomacy to shape the future of nature.

P 10

BIODIVERSITY AS MUNICIPAL SPECIFICATION DILIJAN AS A ROLE MODEL IN URBAN DESIGN FRAMEWORK

Two years ahead of hosting COP17 in Armenia, Dilijan is revolutionizing urban planning by embedding biodiversity directly into its municipal building codes. Discover how technical specifications, rather than short-term grants, are turning wildlife conservation into a default.

P 24

AN ENTIRE WORLD IN A WINE BOTTLE PRESERVING ARMENIAN RICH BIODIVERSITY AND LIVING VINEYARDS

Inside every wine bottle lies a hidden ecosystem, from ladybirds eating aphids to ancient roots drinking deep from living soil. Discover how Saromm Grounds is reviving centuries-old, organic Armenian vineyards, sacrificing high yields to prove that nature itself is the best ingredient in exceptional winemaking.

P 33

HOW I LEARNED ABOUT BIODIVERSITY THE LARGEST CONSTRUCTION SITE IN ARMENIA WITH NO CIGARETTE BUTTS

As Armenia prepares for UN COP17, discover how Yerevan's first LEED Gold certified tech park had to pioneer eco-friendly building standards from scratch, proving that real environmental impact begins before the first foundation is even poured.

P 41

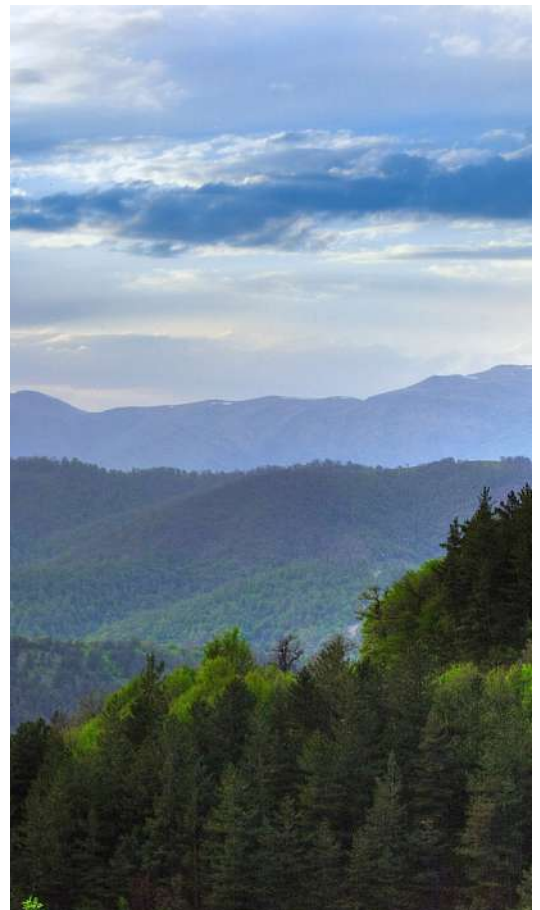
CYPRUS IN WINTER HOW TO DESIGN A YEAR BETWEEN YEREVAN AND LIMASSOL

Trade crowded conference halls for golden forests and coastal warmth. This practical seasonal guide bridges the gap between Armenia's vibrant autumn landscapes in Tavush and a restful week at Limassol's thalassotherapy coastline.

P 46



COP17
YEREVAN ARMENIA



CONTENTS

SEPT, 30TH 2026 | NO. 40 | LIFE IN ARMENIA

FLORA AND FAUNA IN LORI WHY NORTHERN ARMENIA HOLDS THE KEY TO BIODIVERSITY

Lori is Armenia's vibrant biodiversity hub. From 177 bird species soaring over the Dsegh gorge to hidden sanctuaries protecting brown bears and rare rhododendrons, discover why this northern wilderness holds the key to the region's rich ecological future.

P 51

EVERYTHING CHANGED WHEN WE GOOGLED 'PLOGGING' HOW A MORNING RUN TURNED INTO A LOCAL ECO-MOVEMENT

When a local youth suggested "plogging", combining jogging with picking up litter, during a project in Gyumri, organizers were doubtful. But a small \$100 budget and a Facebook event quickly mobilized 500 people, sparking a vibrant nationwide eco-movement.

P 58

A LOVE OF DOMAINS - PART 1 BECAME A LOVE FOR ARMENIA

After retiring from twenty years in the US Marine Corps, one veteran stumbled into the domain name industry, and discovered a tiny country he had never seen on a map. What began as a simple query about the .am extension quickly transformed into a lifelong journey in Armenia.

P 64

FIFTY YEARS TO FIND HOME - PART 1 HALFWAY AROUND THE WORLD TO FIND FAMILY IN ARMENIA

After decades of silence, a dusty batch of old family letters sparked an unexpected search halfway across the world. Guided by a local tour guide in Gyumri, one Armenian-American traveler uncovered a long-lost 97-year-old aunt and an emotional homecoming fifty years in the making.

P 74



CONTENTS

SEPT, 30TH 2026 | NO. 40 | LIFE IN ARMENIA

TO BE NATURE, NOT JUST WITH IT THE DESERT, THE BODY AND THE SEARCH FOR VOICE IN ARMENIA

From the California desert to the borders of Armenia, artist Nelly Achkhen Sarkissian uses performance art and female collective action to navigate memory and identity. Discover how she moved beyond traditional media to embrace co-healing, nature as sanctuary, and the raw power of authentic voice.

P 81

LIVE, WORK, AND BELONG 11+1 BY TUMO IN DILIJAN

Dilijan has plenty of guesthouses, but 11+1 by TUMO offers a space to sleep, work, and build a community under one roof. Discover an inspiring mountain co-living hub where modern workspaces, rich Armenian heritage, and social impact meet in the heart of nature.

P 88

HANDEL, QUINCY, AND THE DUDUK A GRAMMY-WINNING ALBUM FINDS ITS STAGE IN YEREVAN

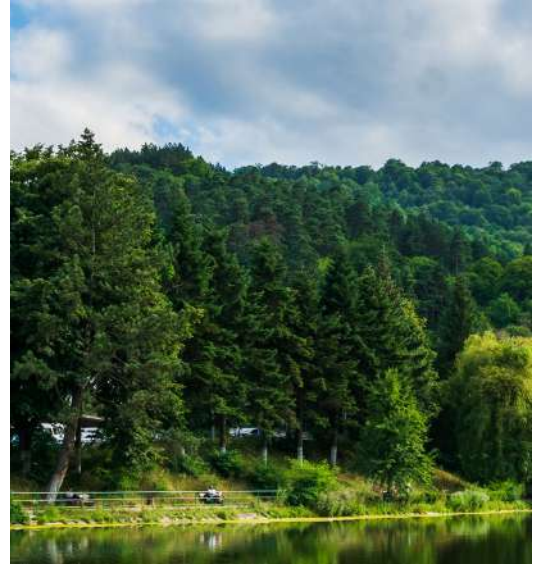
What happens when you combine Handel's Messiah, Quincy Jones's iconic soul-gospel arrangements, and traditional Armenian instruments? Discover how Handel Reimagined: An Armenian Soul is bringing a legendary, rarely staged 1992 recording to life in Yerevan.

P 94

LIFE FOR ARMENIA THE BOOK I DIDN'T KNOW I WAS WRITING

After earning degrees in journalism and political science and working internationally, returning to her hometown to sell tomatoes seemed like a massive step backward. But standing behind her parents' shop counter in Noyemberyan ignited something unexpected: a viral Facebook diary, a unique local dialect book, and a journey back home.

P 98





PARKLANE
RESORT & SPA
LIMASSOL

YOUR DREAM MEDITERRANEAN HOLIDAY

Parklane, a Luxury Collection Resort & Spa, welcomes you to vibrant Limassol and the island life of sunny Cyprus. Wake to panoramic sea views and a Blue Flag beach framed by palms. Enjoy the privacy of your room or Park Villa with a private pool, while little ones enjoy the Explorers Kids Club and adults recharge at Kalloni Spa or browse the luxury boutiques of the Retail Village. As the sun sets, discover the iconic flavours of La Petite Maison and Nammós Limassol.

PLEASE CALL +357 25 862 410 OR VISIT PARKLANECYPRUS.COM

THE
LUXURY
COLLECTION®





VALLEX GARDEN HOTEL
ALAVERDI

COMFORT IN LORI. CULTURE ALL AROUND.



Akhtala
Monastery



Aramyants
Castle



Haghpat
Monastery



Sanahin
Monastery



Mikoyan brothers
Museum

Life in Armenia Partner 2026

📍 Lori, Alaverdi, Spandaryan 2

🌐 www.vallexgarden.am

☎ +374 55 272800

📘 Vallex Garden Hotel Alaverdi

📱 @vallex.garden.hotel



mayri.life

All roads
lead to Dilijan



mental
health
awareness
initiative



sponsored by

YEREVAN
M U N I C I P A L I T Y

0800 00 900

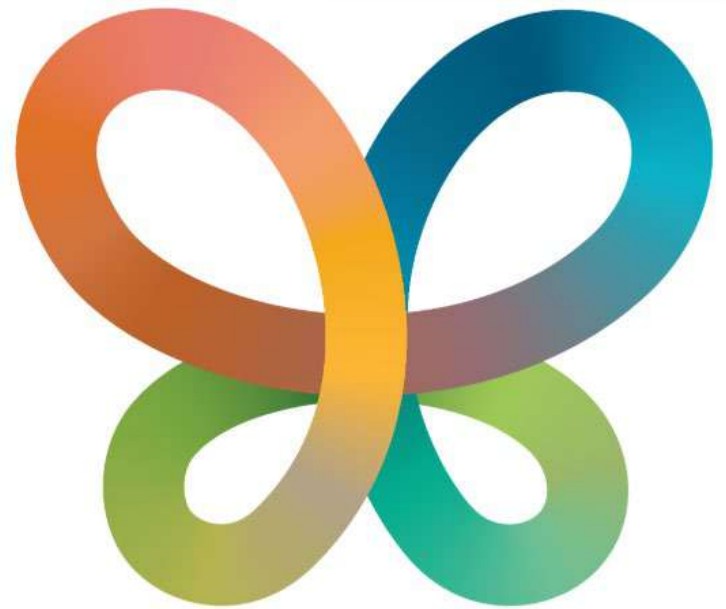
New **toll-free** number for confidential
emotional support

Help us do more ♡



COP 17 ARMENIA

THE BUTTERFLY EFFECT



COP17

YEREVAN ARMENIA



**ARMEN
ABELYAN**

CLIMATE AND BIODIVERSITY POLICY EXPERT
MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT
REPUBLIC OF ARMENIA

COP 17 ARMENIA THE BUTTERFLY EFFECT

When the world gathers in Yerevan to take stock of its efforts to save nature, the argument will be about much more than butterflies. In October, a small blue butterfly will acquire an unusually large diplomatic burden. *Polyommatus eriwanensis*, a butterfly native to Yerevan, inspired the official emblem of COP 17, the United Nations biodiversity conference that Armenia will host from October 19th to 30th. The choice is fitting; a fragile insect with enormous potential. Biodiversity is, above all, a story about connections: between an insect and a flower, a forest and a river, a seed and a harvest, and increasingly between a strand of DNA in one country and an AI powered laboratory in another.

Armenia, the Noah's Arc of Biodiversity

Life on Earth is not evenly distributed. Conservation scientists identify 36 biodiversity hotspots; regions both exceptionally rich in unique species and exceptionally threatened. The 36 hotspots combined cover only about 2.5% of the planet's land surface yet contain more than half of the world's plant species and nearly 43% of its birds, mammals, reptiles and amphibians as species found nowhere else. Armenia lies within two of these biological treasure-houses, the Caucasus hotspot and Irano-Anatolian hotspot. If biodiversity was oil, Armenia would certainly be in the OPEC, raking in unfathomable profits.

Much of Armenia's biological richness is written into its topography. Though small in area, the country rises from semi-desert valleys at roughly 400 meters above sea level to alpine landscapes above 4,000 meters, compressing a remarkable variety of habitats into short distances. Changes in altitude, slope, rainfall and temperature create a mosaic of microclimates; semi-deserts, steppes, forests, mountain meadows, wetlands and alpine ecosystems, each supporting different communities of plants and animals. Armenia's mountains are therefore not merely scenery: their sharply varied terrain is one of the principal reasons so much biological diversity can exist within such a compact country.





For Armenians, some of this biodiversity is familiar enough to appear ordinary. Lake Sevan has its Ishkhan, the Sevan trout (*Salmo ischchan*), a critically endangered fish endemic to the lake. Armenia also has highly range-restricted mammals such as the Armenian birch mouse (*Sicista armenica*), and plants such as the Armenian rowan (*Sorbus hajastana*) and Aragats buttercup (*Ranunculus aragazii*) are counted among the country's endemic flora. Other emblematic species, such as the Armenian steppe viper and Darevsky's viper, belong to the wider Armenian Highlands or have small ranges crossing modern borders, a useful reminder that evolution pays little attention to customs posts.

For centuries, [Armenian biodiversity quite literally colored Armenian culture](#). Vordan Karmir, the Armenian cochineal (*Porphyrophora hamelii*), is a rare scale insect native to the Ararat plain from which Armenians produced a celebrated crimson dye used in textiles and the illumination of priceless medieval manuscripts, the source of some of the brilliant reds that survive on their pages centuries later. Remarkably, the insect spends most of its life underground, feeding on the roots of salt-tolerant plants, emerging above ground only briefly, usually in September, to reproduce.

Preserving Vordan karmir therefore means preserving much more than one unusual insect: it requires protecting the specialized plants, saline soils and fragile Ararat-plain ecosystem on which its life cycle depends. It is biodiversity in miniature; a reminder that when one link in nature's chain disappears, we may lose not only a species, but the ecological relationships, knowledge and cultural heritage attached to it.

More dramatic examples inhabit Armenia's mountains. The bezoar goat (*Capra aegagrus aegagrus*), with its enormous backward-

curving horns and remarkable ability to conquer near-vertical cliffs, survives in rocky landscapes from Khosrov Forest to Vayots Dzor and the Zangezur range. It is also an important prey species for one of the Caucasus's rarest predators, the Caucasian, or Persian, leopard (*Panthera pardus*). Once widespread across the region, the leopard was pushed close to disappearance by hunting, habitat loss and the depletion of its prey; today perhaps 10-12 are estimated to occur in Armenia, with recent

evidence suggesting a small but encouraging recovery. The relationship between the two illustrates biodiversity better than a species list can: protecting a leopard means protecting the bezoar goats and other animals on which it feeds, the mountain habitats that sustain them, and the ecological corridors that allow populations to move across borders. A leopard, in other words, cannot be conserved alone.

Yet the species most consequential to humanity may not be the most photogenic. **Armenia is an ancient center of agricultural diversity** and still harbors wild relatives of wheat, rye, barley, grapes and other crops. Three of the world's four recognized wild *Triticum* (wheat) species occur here. These wild plants have been subjected to nature's breeding program for millennia, accumulating genetic characteristics that can help them tolerate drought, cold and disease. Such traits represent a reservoir from which plant breeders

can draw as commercial agriculture confronts a warmer and less predictable climate. One Armenian wild wheat, *Triticum Urartu*, is particularly noteworthy: it is closely related to the source of the A genome found in modern durum and bread wheats in Europe. A scruffy grass growing beside an Armenian field may make the extended genetic family of wheat more resilient. The bread in Parisian boulangeries may depend on *Triticum Urartu*.

The story becomes more appetizing with grapes. Researchers studying wild Armenian grapevines found considerable genetic diversity and, among 107 vines examined for a particular resistance locus, many carrying alleles associated with resistance to powdery mildew, a persistent disease of viticulture. Wild populations from several parts of Armenia, including Lori, were studied. The researchers concluded that the Armenian wild-grape gene pool represents an underexplored reservoir with considerable breeding potential. This does not mean that a vine from Lori can be posted to Burgundy and rescue the next

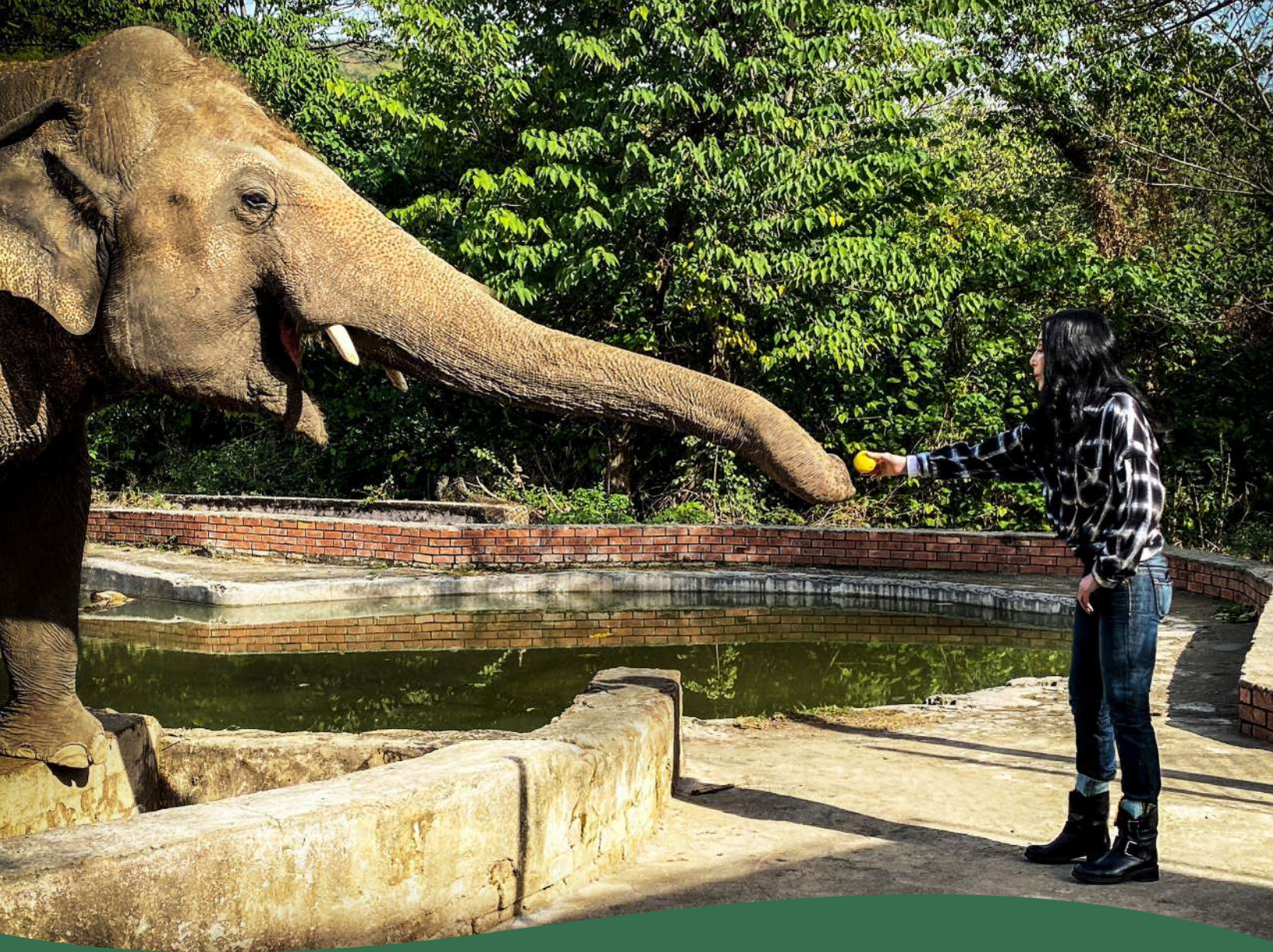
vintage. Genetics is more complicated than that. But it does mean that conserving wild populations preserves options that future breeders may need.

This uncertainty is fundamental to the case for biodiversity. Scientists cannot know which obscure plant, fungus, tick or microorganism may one day contain a useful molecule, an adaptation to drought, resistance to a pathogen or a genetic sequence relevant to medicine, life-saving vaccines. **Armenia is an apt place to ponder the problem.**

According to Genesis, Noah's Ark came to rest upon the mountains of Ararat. The Ark is

perhaps civilization's oldest biodiversity conservation experiment: catastrophe approaches, so what should be saved? Viewed from the perspective of modern genetics, Noah faced a difficult selection problem. Why, for example, did he save the cockroach? Surely something more charming was waiting at the gangplank. Yet cockroaches have survived hundreds of millions of years of environmental upheaval. Popular culture maintains that after a nuclear apocalypse only cockroaches and Cher will survive. Science is less categorical about the cockroach, and Cher has proven she's got the resilience gene.





Cher's connection to biodiversity is not confined to jokes about surviving the apocalypse. In 2020 the singer helped secure the freedom of Kaavan, an Asian elephant dubbed the "world's loneliest elephant", who had spent decades in inadequate conditions at Islamabad Zoo and eight years without an elephant companion. Cher traveled to Pakistan, the only country in the world that refuses to acknowledge the

independence of Armenia as a state, and with her organization Free the Wild campaigned for his release. Finally, after a Pakistani court ordered the zoo's animals relocated, the animal-welfare group FOUR PAWS transported the elephant by air to a wildlife sanctuary in Cambodia. She then traveled to Cambodia to welcome the Kaavan at the other end.

The underlying point is serious. Humans are poor at predicting which forms of resilience will prove valuable in the future. The rescue required activists, veterinarians, courts and governments in several countries to cooperate, an unexpectedly apt miniature of what biodiversity conservation increasingly requires. Naturally, Cher and Pakistan have been officially invited to attend the CBD COP 17 in Yerevan. Cher has not yet confirmed.

The modern Ark is consequently larger and considerably colder. Seed banks preserve crop varieties and their wild relatives; gene banks store biological material; museums maintain specimens; laboratories freeze tissue; scientists sequence genomes. These collections are not merely archives of the past. They preserve possibilities for the future. A seed stored today

might carry the trait required to protect a crop in 2050. A genetic sequence that appears uninteresting now could acquire significance when a new disease emerges. Biodiversity is not merely a catalogue of species. It is an immense library of biological information, much of which humanity has only recently learned to read.

The World's First Biodiversity Report Card

That is the scientific backdrop to COP 17. The political backdrop began in Montreal in 2002, when the 196 Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity adopted the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KMGBF). It contains four long-term goals and 23 targets for 2030, including restoring degraded ecosystems, conserving at least 30% of land and sea, reducing pollution and invasive species, reforming incentives harmful to biodiversity and mobilizing far more money for nature. COP 17 will conduct the very first global review of collective progress in implementing that framework. Montreal produced the promise; Yerevan gets the report card.

That report will be unusually data heavy. By the deadline, 125 Parties had submitted their seventh national reports, representing nearly two-thirds of the CBD's membership and a large share of the planet's biodiversity. Those reports are the primary evidence for the global review. The seemingly tedious business of indicators, monitoring frameworks and national targets matters because biodiversity is difficult to measure. GDP can be reduced, however imperfectly, to a number. The health of a forest, wetland, coral reef or alpine meadow cannot. Yet without comparable evidence, a promise to "halt and reverse biodiversity loss" risks remaining an admirable aspiration rather than an accountable policy.



Then comes the money. The biodiversity framework calls for mobilizing at least \$200 billion a year from all sources by 2030; and for international biodiversity finance flowing from developed to developing countries to reach at least \$30 billion annually by then. It also calls for harmful incentives and subsidies to be reduced by at least \$500 billion a year. These numbers expose one of the persistent fault lines of biodiversity diplomacy.

Many developing countries, like Armenia, **contain an outsized share of the world's biological wealth**. They argue, with reason, that conserving forests, wetlands and genetic resources provides benefits to humanity while imposing real costs on countries that may have pressing development needs. Developed countries accept the need for finance but tend to put greater emphasis on mobilizing money from many sources, domestic budgets, development banks, private capital, philanthropy and subsidy reform as well as international public finance.

The divide is not simply about money. Developing countries also seek greater access to technology, scientific capacity and a fair share of economic benefits derived from their biological resources. Wealthier countries contain much of the capital, biotechnology infrastructure and intellectual property capable of turning biological discoveries into commercial products. The asymmetry is glaring. The contrast between financial resources concentrated in developed countries and biological resources concentrated in the developing world is difficult to manage. Modern genomics has made the question more complicated, not less so.



A biological specimen once had to cross a border to be studied abroad. Today its information can travel without it. Genetic material from a plant or microorganism can be sequenced and converted into what CBD negotiators call Digital Sequence Information, or DSI. Researchers anywhere can then use genetic databases in agriculture, pharmaceuticals, biotechnology and other fields. Imagine that an organism found in Armenia is sequenced; years later, scientists elsewhere use information derived from it to help develop a commercially valuable crop, enzyme or medicine. The organism never left Armenia. Its information did. Who should share the benefits, who owns DNA, the code of life?

COP 16, in Cali, Colombia, produced an important experiment in answering that question. The Cali Fund. Launched in 2025 after intense opposition from developed countries, the Fund is the financial arm of a multilateral mechanism for sharing benefits arising from commercial uses of DSI. Large companies in sectors that rely heavily on genetic material, including pharmaceuticals, cosmetics, plant and animal breeding, biotechnology and even scientific and technical services using artificial intelligence, are expected under the agreed framework to contribute, indicatively, 1% of profits or 0.1% of revenue. Half of the Fund's resources are to be allocated to the self-identified needs of Indigenous peoples and local communities, recognizing their role as custodians of biodiversity.

The Cali Fund points towards a larger question. Can the emerging bioeconomy create a feedback loop in which some of the wealth extracted from biological information returns to the people and places that preserve it? That question becomes more urgent as artificial intelligence enters biology. Modern genomics produces datasets too large for researchers to examine unaided. Machine-learning systems can compare sequences, predict molecular structures and identify patterns across vast quantities of biological information. AI does not create nature's genetic library; it makes the catalogue dramatically more searchable. This could increase the scientific and economic value of genetic diversity precisely as that diversity is being lost.

An obscure wild plant that appears economically irrelevant today may possess a gene useful against a disease that has not yet emerged. A microorganism may produce a molecule that an AI system recognizes as latent long before a human researcher would have done so. The logic extends to synthetic biology, another subject in the CBD's scientific work: sequencing allows humanity to read biological code; biotechnology increasingly allows it to modify it. Michael Crichton's Jurassic Park is unlikely to become a practical guide for delegates in Yerevan, but its more durable question remains pertinent: technical capacity tends to advance faster than certainty about consequences. *The butterfly effect takes on a precarious perspective.*

None of this means that COP 17 should be viewed chiefly as another warning of ecological catastrophe. The CBD's record is more substantial than the usual narrative of international environmental paralysis suggests. Since the Convention emerged from the Rio Earth Summit in 1992, it has achieved near-universal participation, with 196 Parties / countries. It produced the Cartagena Protocol to govern biosafety risks from modern biotechnology and the Nagoya Protocol to establish rules for fair and equitable benefit-sharing from genetic resources. It has pushed countries to create national biodiversity strategies, targets and reporting systems; elevated the knowledge and role of Indigenous peoples and local communities; produced a global monitoring framework; and in 2022 secured agreement on 23 measurable targets for 2030. More recently, governments have extended the principle of benefit-sharing into the digital era through the DSI mechanism and Cali Fund.

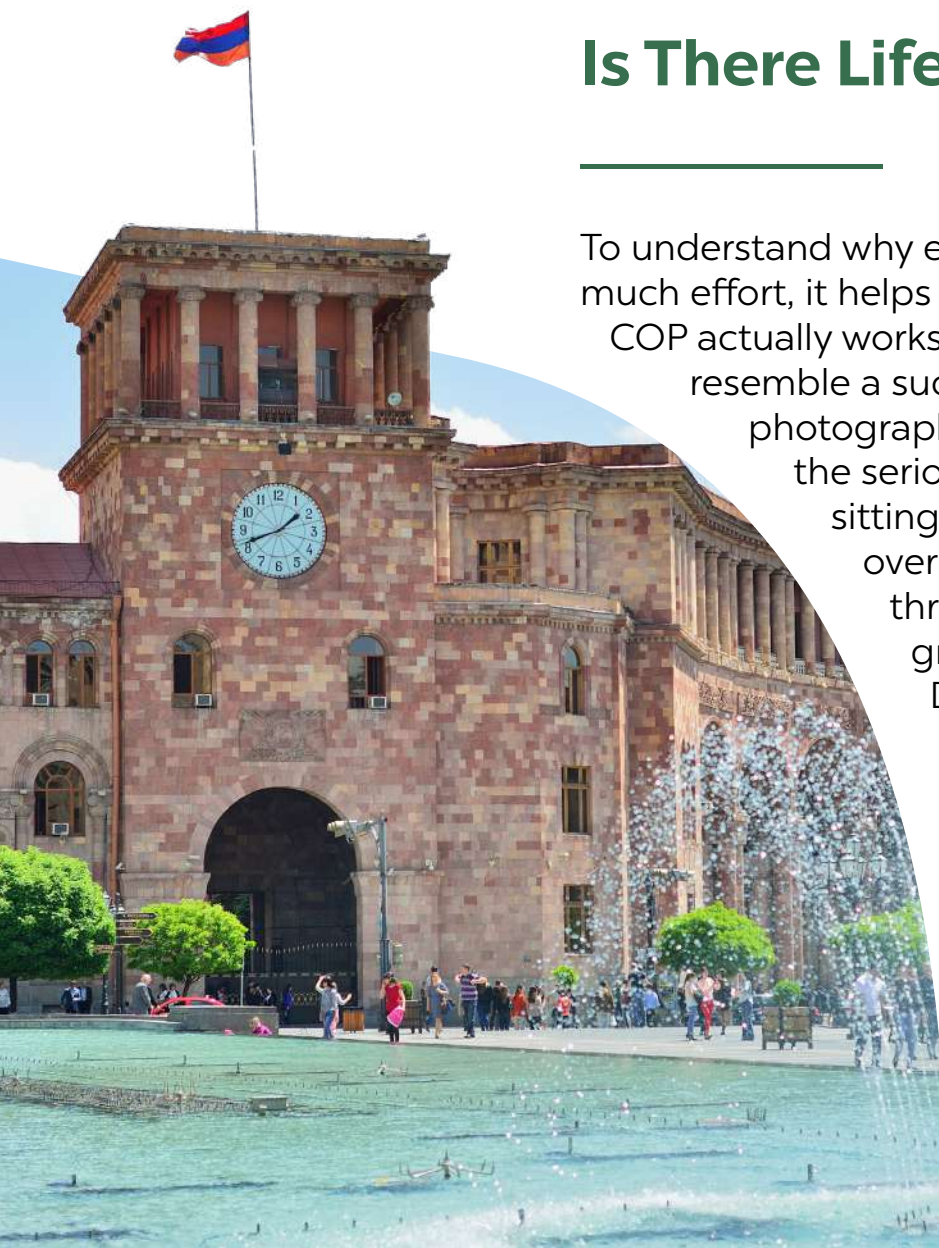


Progress also continues in the preparatory negotiations. At the CBD's implementation meeting in Rome in February, Parties reached broad agreement on several of the mechanisms needed to implement the global framework, with negotiators producing clean, bracket-free (finalized) text on a number of recommendations for Yerevan. Scientific and technical negotiations in Nairobi in August likewise found widespread consensus on several issues, including parameters for

protected nature areas, sustainable wildlife management, synthetic biology and marine biodiversity. International environmental diplomacy is notoriously slow when measured in hours spent in meeting rooms. Measured over three decades, the direction of travel is more impressive. The world has moved from debating whether biodiversity merits global governance to deciding how the digital code extracted from it should be governed in the age of artificial intelligence.

Is There Life After COP?

To understand why even modest advances require so much effort, it helps to understand how a biodiversity COP actually works. From outside, such conferences resemble a succession of speeches, flags and photographs of ministers. Inside, much of the serious business consists of people sitting under fluorescent lights arguing over text. Draft decisions pass through working groups, contact groups and informal consultations. Delegates negotiate paragraph by paragraph and sometimes phrase by phrase. Language on which agreement has not been reached appears in square brackets. One country proposes a word; another objects; a regional group requests an alternative; the conference chairs try again.



At COP 15, for example, negotiations over the global framework, finance and DSI ran through long consultations and culminated in a late-night plenary.

The reason is that CBD diplomacy operates through consensus-seeking among 196 Parties / countries whose economic circumstances, political systems and biological endowments differ enormously. A biodiversity-rich developing country, a small island state, the European Union, China and a landlocked state in the Caucasus may all read the same sentence differently and may want different outcomes based on their national circumstances and politics. Negotiators can spend hours removing brackets from a few lines because the objective is not to produce a text that 51% can impose on the other 49%, but one that all can accept, a consensus.

Reaching consensus can continue into the wee hours, sustained by coffee, fast food, bilateral consultations and the conviction that the 14th formulation of a paragraph may possess qualities that eluded the previous 13. The procedure is cumbersome. Its virtue is that when agreement does emerge, it carries unusual legitimacy.

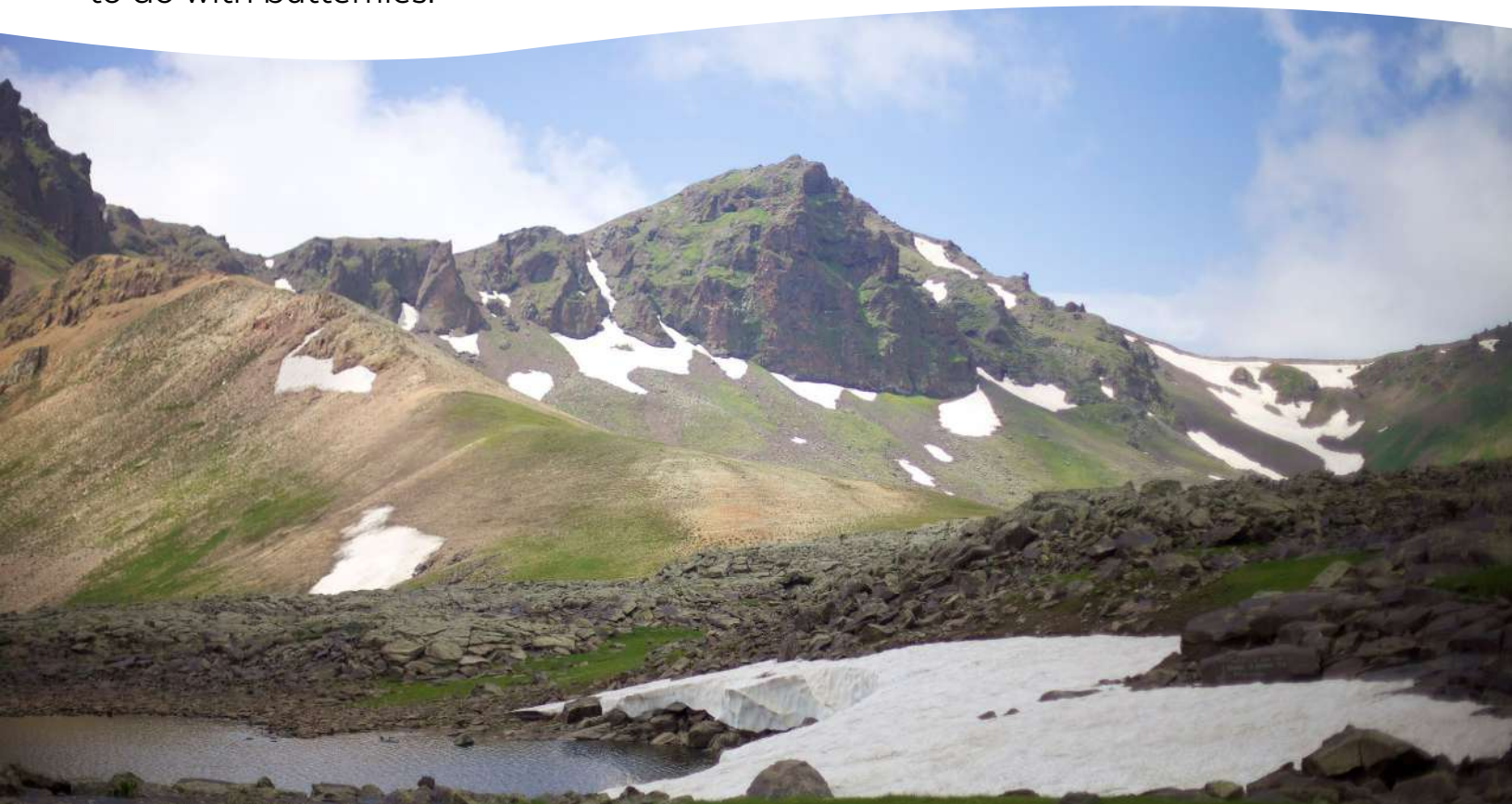
For Armenia, hosting that machinery has become an experiment in government as well as diplomacy. The Ministry of Environment sits at the center of preparations that reach far beyond environmental policy. Foreign affairs, infrastructure, transport, security, health services, Yerevan's municipal authorities and other state bodies must work alongside the CBD Secretariat, UN agencies, foreign governments, diplomatic missions and development institutions. Preparations cover everything from the Leaders' Summit and substantive negotiations to electricity, roads, medical stations, transport, security and the reception of thousands of delegates.

There is a case for regarding this process as one of COP 17's more valuable, if less visible, outcomes. Armenia has a relatively small public administration. Preparing to host and then preside over a negotiation involving virtually every government on Earth requires officials to work horizontally across institutions that normally operate vertically. Environmental specialists must learn diplomacy; diplomats must absorb biodiversity policy; logisticians must coordinate with scientists; ministries must consult international organizations, foreign partners and one another against deadlines that cannot easily be postponed.

The significance of that exercise may be greater than the successful staging of a two-week conference. Governments develop institutional memory by doing difficult things together. Officials acquire contacts, procedures and habits of cooperation. Ministries discover whom to telephone in another ministry. Civil servants gain experience negotiating with international institutions and nearly 200 foreign governments. If some of those relationships survive after the conference, COP 17 will have strengthened a form of administrative capacity that Armenia can use for problems having nothing to do with butterflies.

This prospect has produced a less formal question among some of the overworked, underpaid civil servants preparing the conference: "Is there life after COP?" It is asked as a joke, but it is also a useful measure of success. On October 30th the negotiations will end. Delegates will leave, temporary conference rooms will empty and the international press will move on. For the CBD, life after COP 17 will depend on whether the global review in Yerevan prompts governments to accelerate action during the remaining years before 2030.

For Armenia, other than helping the Presidency of the CBD for the next two years, it will depend partly on whether the skills, relationships and habits of inter-agency and international cooperation assembled for the conference remain after the badges and banners have been packed away. That brings the story back to the butterfly. The point of the butterfly effect is not that every small event causes a dramatic one. It is that complex systems are connected in ways whose consequences can be difficult to foresee.



Wild wheat preserved in Armenia may one day contribute a useful gene to a commercial crop elsewhere. A genetic sequence uploaded today may become valuable to an AI-assisted laboratory decades hence. A compromise over a few lines of text in Yerevan may influence how governments manage nature long after the negotiators who wrote it have moved on. And a conference organized by the Ministry of Environment in Armenia may leave behind a whole government slightly better at working across its own boundaries.

The “butterfly effect”, coined by meteorologist Edward Lorenz, captures how tiny changes can have enormous and unpredictable consequences in complex systems. His famous formulation asked whether the flap of a butterfly’s wings in Brazil could ultimately set off a tornado in Texas. In nature, as in climate, seemingly small disturbances can travel surprisingly far.

The butterfly on COP 17’s banners is small. The lasting effects for Armenia and the world are the parts worth watching.



BIODIVERSITY AS MUNICIPAL SPECIFICATION

DILIJAN AS A ROLE MODEL IN URBAN DESIGN FRAMEWORK



**MATHEW
ZEIN**

EDITOR IN CHIEF



INTERVIEWING

**EKATERINA
BREDIKHINA**

Head of the Green Rock
Foundation



BIODIVERSITY AS MUNICIPAL SPECIFICATION DILIJAN AS A ROLE MODEL IN URBAN DESIGN FRAMEWORK

Armenia holds only 6.7 percent of the Caucasus by area and roughly [60 percent of its biodiversity](#). From 19 to 30 October, Yerevan hosts COP17, the United Nations Biodiversity Conference. Delegates from around the world will spend two weeks discussing how to turn biodiversity promises into results. Probably, many of them will take a day off and drive north to Dilijan, because that is what visitors to Armenia do. Few will realise that [Dilijan has already taken steps to preserve biodiversity two years ahead of COP17](#).

Dilijan has incorporated wildlife into its local building codes, ensuring developers comply just as they would with any other regulation, without needing grants, special campaigns, or personal motivation. This initiative was led by the Green Rock Foundation in partnership with the Dilijan Municipality. Together, they [created the town's urban design framework](#), the core project governing physical development in Dilijan; most importantly, they made biodiversity a mandatory standard.





What's an Urban Design Framework?

Here it helps to know what kind of document we are talking about, because the term sounds more abstract than the thing itself. An urban design framework is [the document a town uses to decide what it should physically look like and how it should work](#): where buildings go and how tall they are, how streets and footpaths connect,

where the open space sits, how the built parts meet the natural ones.

The most prominent model for embedding biodiversity into urban planning comes from England. Since February 2024, Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) has been a [mandatory condition for most development approvals](#). Under these rules, any new project

must leave habitat better than it found it, by at least ten percent, calculated with a standard official metric and secured for at least thirty years. You measure the nature on a site before, you measure it after, and you must show a positive number. Dilijan's method is the opposite in character, and better suited to a small town. [It put biodiversity into its building standards instead.](#)

The Green Rock Foundation and Dilijan Municipality wrote a [set of design specifications directly into the town's urban framework](#). The document lays out clear technical parameters; for example, dry ledges along waterlines so animals can move freely past bridges and retaining walls, closed drainage channels designed for amphibian passage, and bird and bat roosts with unpainted, unplanned wood

and strict seasonal maintenance rules. It also specifies floating wetlands planted exclusively with native species to protect the adjacent national park from invasive flora.

The Cats and Dogs on the Street



I had the opportunity to read the part of the framework focused on biodiversity and what may surprise you most about it has nothing to do with rare species.

Two of its specifications are shelters for street cats and street dogs, described with the same rigour as everything else: entrances offset rather than centred, a canopy or short tunnel above them, straw bedding only, no toxic treatments or strongly scented paint, and a ventilated gap of at least seven centimetres beneath the floor.

The reasoning contradicts what most people assume. The document states that building shelters does not increase the number of animals on the street; that number is driven by irresponsible ownership and abandonment, not by whether a dog has somewhere dry to sleep. What shelters do provide is steady contact with the population, which is **the precondition for catch, sterilise, vaccinate and release programs** and for any routine veterinary control to function at all. Shelter locations must be agreed with residents, and the document calls for local initiative groups to keep them maintained.

“

Katia Bredikhina

Head of the Green Rock Foundation

People assume that if you build shelters for street animals, you will get more of them. You will not. The number of animals on the street is decided by how people treat their pets, not by whether those animals have somewhere dry to sleep. What shelters give you is contact with the population, and without contact you cannot vaccinate or sterilise anything.”

Here, I have to bring up one initiative by the Green Rock Foundation called DiliDogs, which focuses on stray dogs in the town; sterilisation and vaccination, veterinary care, and work with schools and community groups on responsible pet ownership. [DiliDogs teaches residents how to treat the dogs and where to feed them](#), so they don't gather in large numbers at tourist spots.



Why “Standard” is the Key Word

These are going to be the standard. A builder will soon have to follow them the way they follow any other rule, without a grant or a campaign. Environmental work usually runs on attention, and attention is the scarcest resource in any economy. Grants expire. Champions move jobs. Public enthusiasm follows the news cycle. *A specification sits in the permitting process and applies to everyone equally*, including the developer who has never thought about bats and never will. It converts a value into a default, and *defaults are what actually govern behaviour at scale*.

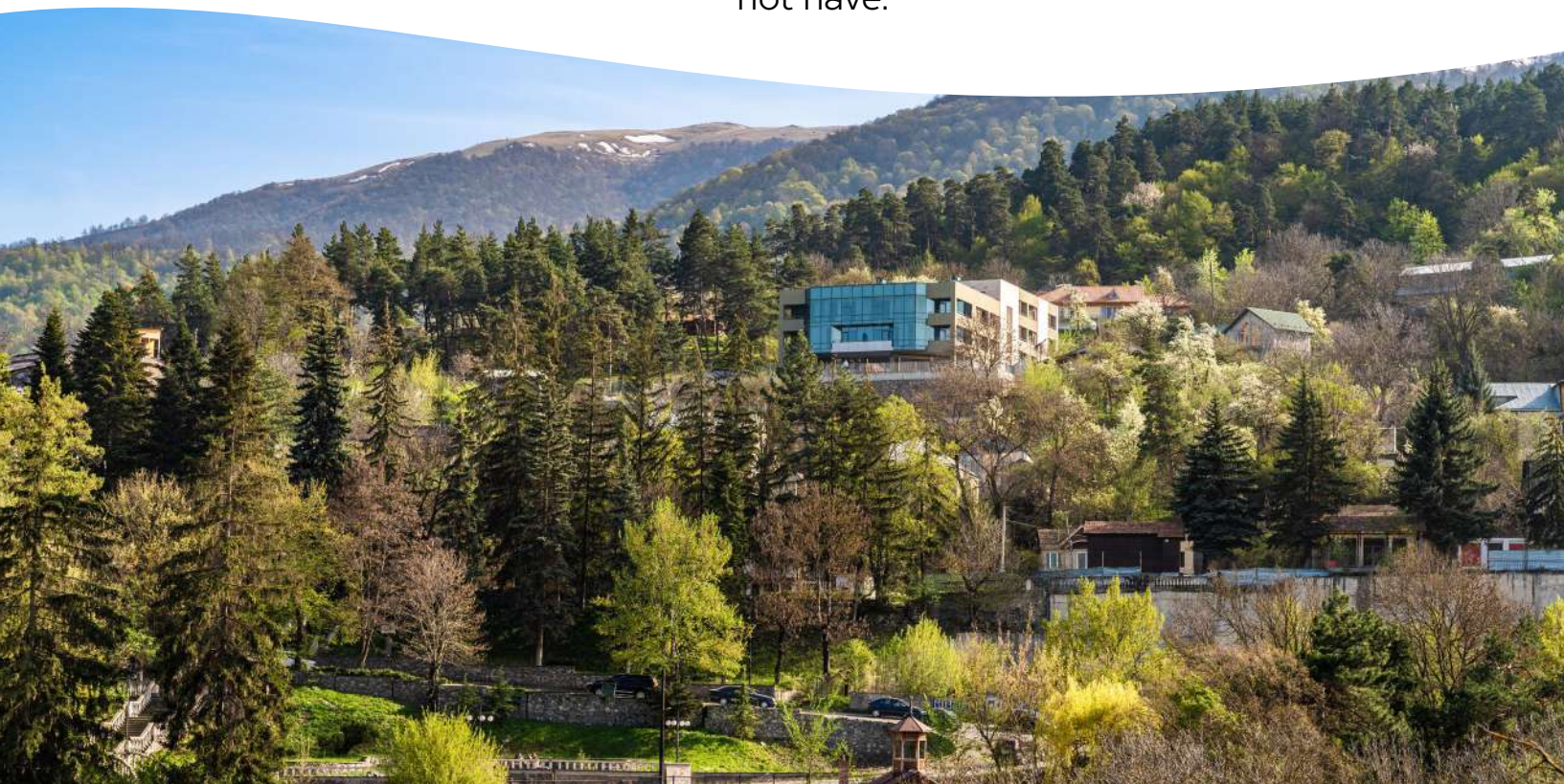


Katia Bredikhina

Head of the Green
Rock Foundation

A campaign protects animals for as long as someone is paying attention. A specification protects them on the days when nobody is. That is the only difference, and it is the whole difference.”

There’s a reason this happened here rather than in a larger city. In Dilijan, wildlife is on the other side of the wall, using the same water and crossing the same roads. Dilijan is also small enough that a municipality and a foundation can actually sit in one room and write a document together, which is an advantage that big cities do not have.





DALAN TECHNOPARK

WHERE POTENTIAL BECOMES PERFORMANCE



Life in Armenia Partner 2026



Dalan Technopark

www.dalantechnopark.com

zealousTM
Destination TMRW



we are zealousTM
transforming VISIONS into
REALITIES

12+

Years In The Business

300+

Highly Qualified Software
And Quality Engineers

50+

Countries Covered

1M+

Hours Of Software
Development

1M+

Hours Of QE And QA Done

200+

Test Device Farm

www.zealous.tech



GLOBAL CREATOR ECONOMY SUMMIT 2027

Create Influence. Build Community. Shape the Future.



GRAND HYATT
DUBAI
UNITED ARAB EMIRATES



JANUARY
18-20, 2027



APPLICATION DEADLINE
NOVEMBER 18, 2026



FULLY FUNDED

FLIGHTS • HOTELS • MEALS
ALL COVERED



APPLY NOW

www.globalsummitplatform.org



GLOBAL SUMMIT
COUNCIL
EMPOWER • CONNECT • IMPACT



UNITED
YOUTH ALLIANCE
EMPOWER • CONNECT • LEAD



GLOBAL
DEVELOPMENT
ASSEMBLY
UNITING LEADERS • DRIVING SOLUTIONS • TRANSFORMING FUTURES



UNITED
CIVIC COUNCIL
EMPOWER • CONNECT • IMPACT

AN ENTIRE WORLD IN A WINE BOTTLE

PRESERVING ARMENIAN RICH BIODIVERSITY AND LIVING VINEYARDS



**MATHEW
ZEIN**

EDITOR IN CHIEF



**ANOUSH
ISKANDARYAN**

Chief Executive Officer at Saromm
Grounds



**SOPHIE
CLAUSEL**

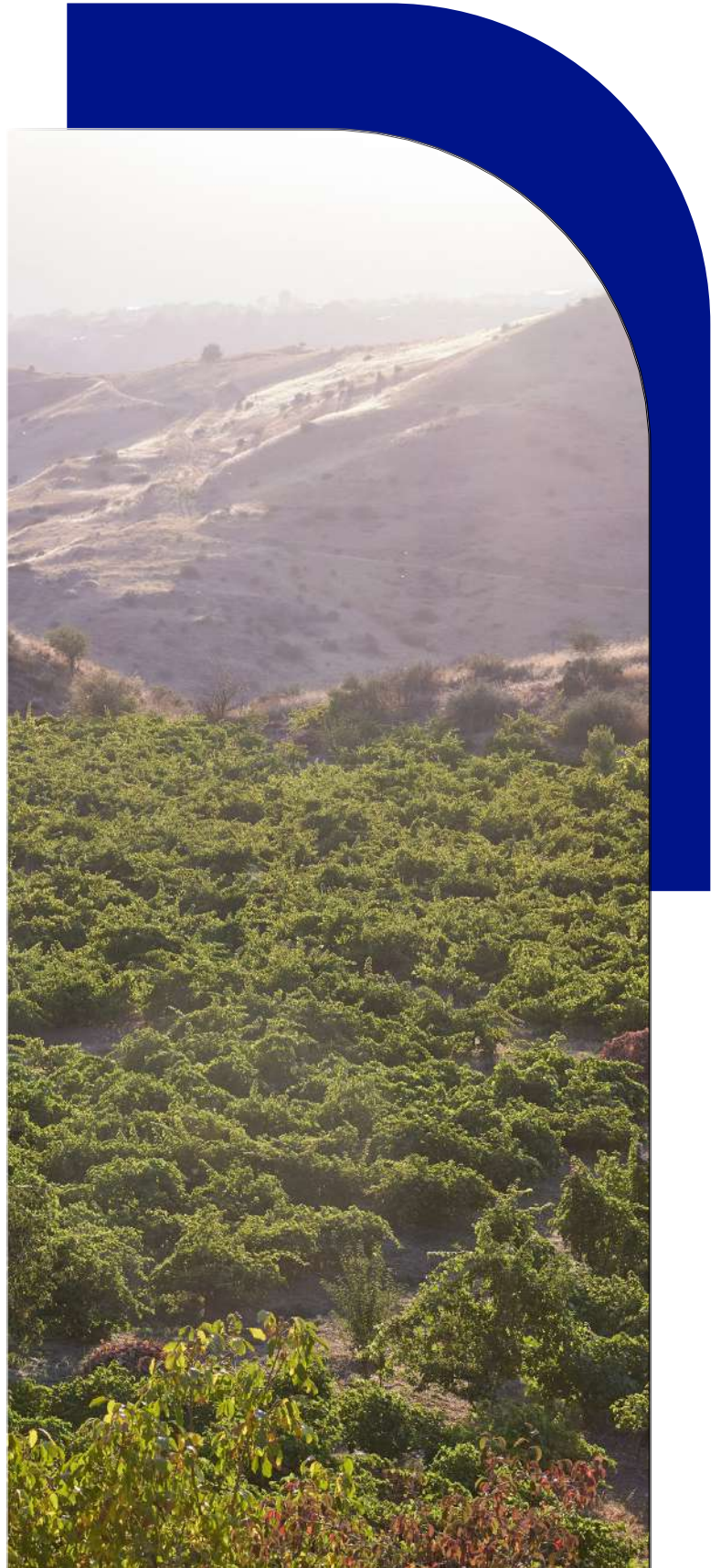
Winemaker and Vineyard
Manager at Saromm
Grounds



AN ENTIRE WORLD IN A WINE BOTTLE PRESERVING ARMENIAN RICH BIODIVERSITY AND LIVING VINEYARDS

A bee lifts out of the flowering weeds between two rows of vines and begins her shift; by evening she will have visited more blossoms than you could count in a week. A ladybird moves up a green shoot with unhurried purpose, eating the aphids that would otherwise eat the leaf. Underground, worms are turning last year's fallen matter into the soil the roots are drinking from, and a lizard has claimed the warm top of a dry stone wall, watching for anything small enough. At the treeline, a fox crosses with her cubs behind her. Nobody here is being protected. **Everybody here is working.**

Then comes September, and the work of a whole season is taken off the vines in a matter of days. The rows are stripped and go quiet. The bees move on, the leaves begin to turn, and the field that was busy all summer empties out. Everything those creatures built, the soil they made, the pests they ate, the water they helped the ground hold, is inside the fruit, and the fruit is on its way to the cellar. **Months later it is sealed into a wine bottle, and the entire summer is still in there, still lives in the bottle.**



What Armenia Is Sitting On

Armenia holds hundreds of indigenous grape varieties. It holds vines that sit on their own roots, the aphid that rewrote viticulture everywhere else. And it holds vineyards that have sat inside living natural ecosystems for hundreds of years, and **maybe for thousands of years**. Almost nowhere else on earth has all that at once.

This is exactly why Anoush Iskandaryan, CEO of Saromm Grounds, **decided to find out what lives on their vineyards and to keep it**.

She decided to turn the vineyards they recently acquired in Aghavnadzor into organic vineyards and preserve their biodiversity, **despite the costs that would impose**.

Their vineyard is centuries old. It sits in a fold of the mountain where humidity off the slopes gathers, a pocket chosen centuries ago because in a hard continental climate with no irrigation systems, people went looking for the one place damp enough for vines to survive unwatered. **This year it was irrigated**

once, by the aqueduct method used here since Urartian times. In two centuries it has passed through many hands; the villagers who held it most recently sprayed it with pesticides, and the transition back to organic began the day the company took it on. After so long the vines have gone feral, growing untrained in wild bushes rather than rows, and the company adapts to that personality rather than correcting it. **Across all their sites the focus stays on endemic varieties, above all Areni**.





The vineyard is wrapped in natural forest, and **the forest has been feeding it for centuries.** Fruit trees drop peaches, apples and plums that rot into the ground, wild plants flower and die back into humus, animals pass through and leave what animals leave, and insects hatch, live and decompose. Anoush describes it

as **a single complex system repeating itself season after season** for longer than anyone has recorded, which is why the soil here looks nothing like the soil a short distance away.

She is direct about what this costs, and the details are worth listing because they explain why so few producers do it. **Farming**

the vineyard organically is the most expensive decision the company has made. Preserving biodiversity is even more expensive. The treatments wash off in every rain and have to be reapplied. The vines are pruned to give less fruit, deliberately. The work runs through the night, because sulfur burns the plant in daytime heat.

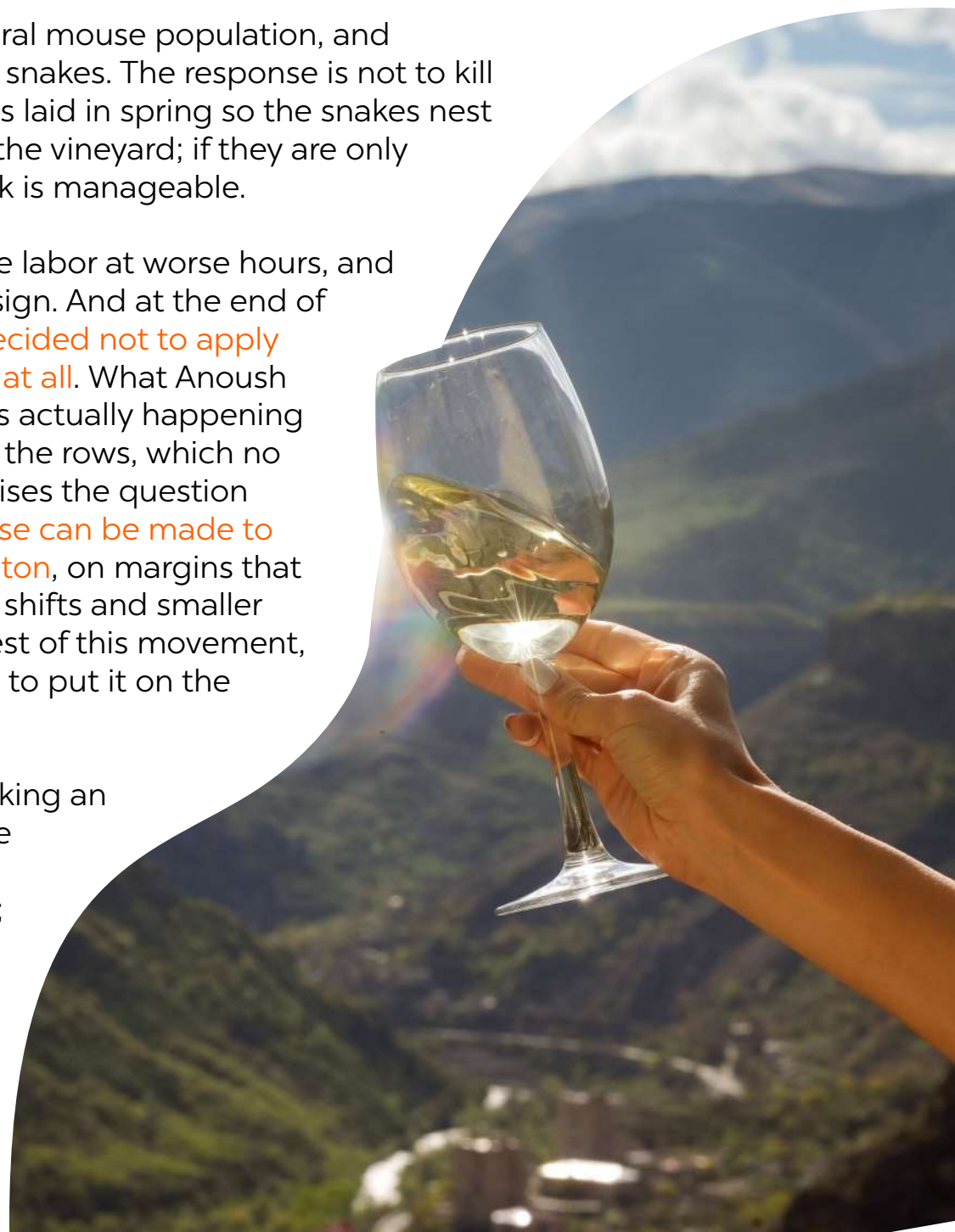
It is worth being precise, because **the word organic has been worn thin by marketing**. No chemicals or pesticides have been used since the first day; where treatment is unavoidable it is sulfur and copper, with manure and seaweed preparations to strengthen the vines' own immunity. Those products are mild and not persistent,

so after every heavy rain the vineyard is walked and treated again, cluster by cluster, and a disease that takes hold is close to impossible to stop. The night shifts because sulfur applied above 25 degrees burns the vine, and water given after dark reaches the roots instead of feeding weeds and evaporating.

The vineyard has a natural mouse population, and overpopulation attracts snakes. The response is not to kill them. Powdered sulfur is laid in spring so the snakes nest somewhere other than the vineyard; if they are only passing through, the risk is manageable.

Higher input costs, more labor at worse hours, and a smaller harvest by design. And at the end of all of it, **the company decided not to apply for organic certification at all**. What Anoush counts instead is what is actually happening in the soil and between the rows, which no label captures. It also raises the question of whether the same **case can be made to someone selling by the ton**, on margins that leave no room for night shifts and smaller yields. That is the real test of this movement, and it is honest of them to put it on the table themselves.

The company is not making an average wine, and in the premium segment you have to earn your place; the quality of a product is inseparable from how it was arrived at. Seen that way, **the expensive path is the cheaper one**.



Biodiversity as Infrastructure

Sophie Clausel, Vigneronne at Saromm Grounds, who makes the wine and runs the vineyard, treats biodiversity as a system the vineyard runs on, and once you hear it described that way it is hard to unhear. She puts it in one line: **she does not work on biodiversity, she works with it**. The aim is not to protect nature in a corner while farming the rest, but to have it become a functioning part of how the plots operate. Her other principle is that **wine is made in the vineyard**; by the time the grapes reach the cellar, the decision has already been taken.

The ladybirds and the bats are pest control; they work for free and they don't wash off in the rain. The cover crops and hedgerows are how the soil stays where it is and how rain gets into the ground instead of running off it. The life under a stone, the fungi, the invertebrates, the things nobody photographs, is what builds the structure the vine's roots grow through. In a conventional vineyard, each of these functions is replaced by a purchase: a spray, a fertilizer, an irrigation schedule. In a living one, **the functions are already present, and the job is to avoid breaking them**.

The method behind it is systematic. First an assessment: which habitats already exist, hedgerows, isolated trees, woodland, grass strips, ponds, dry-stone walls, which species live in them, and where the weak points are. **Sophie calls this finding out whose house you are in**. Then mostly restraint, leaving what exists alone and planning work so habitats are not destroyed in passing. **Only where biodiversity is poor does anything get built**: hedgerows of local species, flower strips, small ponds, stone piles, nesting boxes and bat roosts. One warning she repeats is that **natural does not mean harmless**; even an organic product can damage the organisms it was not aimed at.



The beneficiaries are specific: ladybirds, lacewings, hoverflies, spiders, insectivorous birds, raptors and bats, each given food, shelter and somewhere to breed so they stay. Anoush calls the ladybirds colleagues; their interests and hers are identical.

The payoff, in her account, shows up in the fruit and in the glass. A living vineyard survives a drought better than a clean one, because soil with structure and cover holds water that bare soil loses. Wine marketing usually sells scarcity, prestige, or place. Anoush wants to sell the relationship; these creatures are not decorating the wine, they are ingredients in it. The fox and the bear are as much a part of what you are drinking as the grape variety on the label.

For readers who follow this space, it's worth noting that this is not a local gesture floating free of any wider framework. The approach aligns with the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework agreed at COP15, and specifically with its targets on sustainable agriculture, on reducing the risk from pesticides, on the genetic diversity of cultivated species and their wild relatives, on private-sector disclosure and action, and on giving practitioners access to knowledge.



Disclosure needs numbers rather than intentions. **Sophie manages biodiversity against indicators that can be counted:** the share of the estate given to ecological infrastructure, the length of hedgerow preserved, the number of plant species recorded and nesting boxes installed, measured change in soil organic matter, reduction in pesticide use. Alongside it sits training, because none of this survives if the people doing the daily work do not understand why a strip of uncultivated land is being left alone.

The last of those may matter most here. **A single well-run vineyard changes very little;** a method that other growers can see, copy, and adapt changes an industry. Armenia's advantage is that **the country still has the genetics,** the ungrafted vines, and the intact surroundings that most wine regions spent the twentieth century losing. That advantage is not permanent, and it is not automatically protected. It exists for **exactly as long as the people who own the land decide it should.**

I asked Anoush why a company would take on this much expense for a result no certificate will

confirm. **She compared it to doing something good for your own child,** and the warm feeling that follows. The reason underneath everything else, she says, is that they love their land and their country.

So the invitation stands, and it is a simple one. Walk your rows. Find out what lives there, in the soil, under the stones, in the hedgerows, at the treeline. Then decide what you intend to keep. Because **an entire world really does end up in the bottle,** and the only question is how much of it survives the journey.



HOW I LEARNED ABOUT BIODIVERSITY

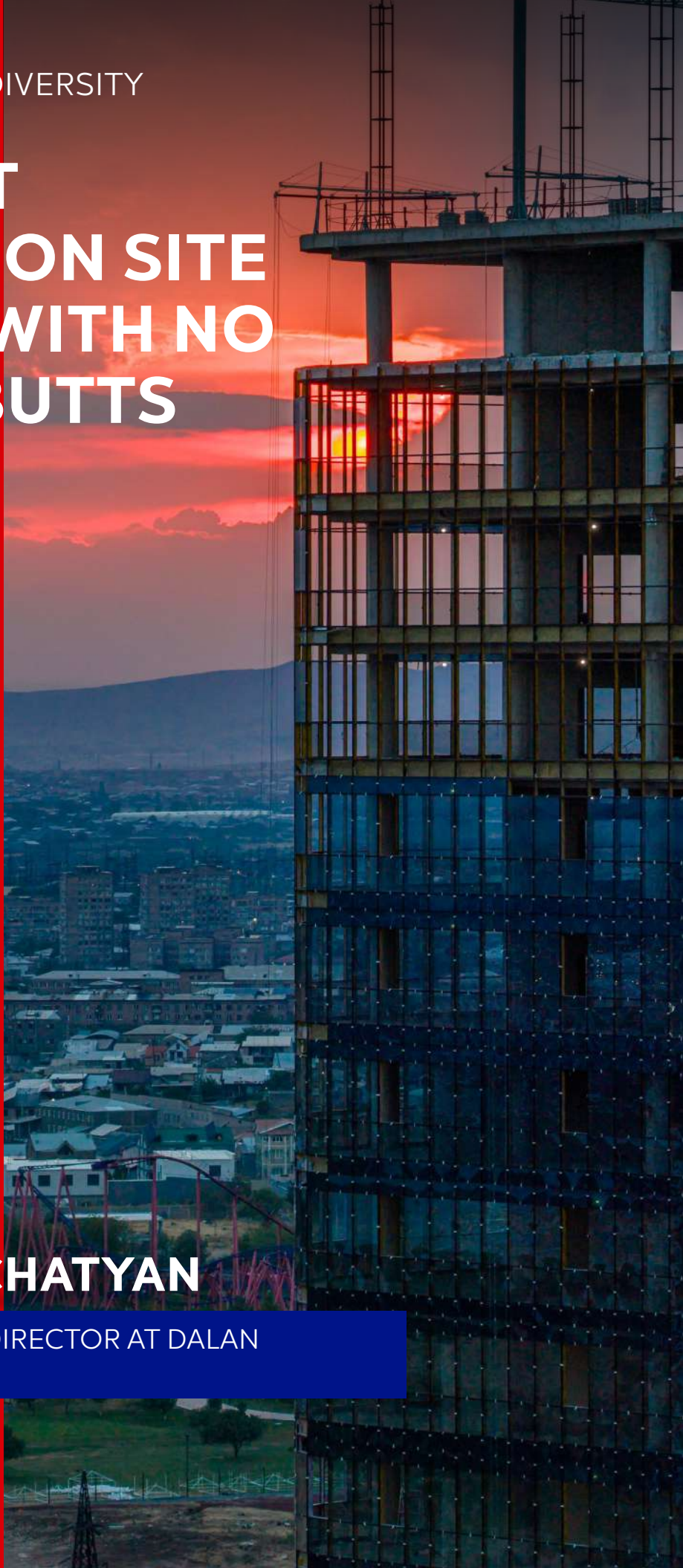
THE LARGEST CONSTRUCTION SITE IN ARMENIA WITH NO CIGARETTE BUTTS



in

**HAYK
TER-TACHATYAN**

OPERATIONS DIRECTOR AT DALAN
TECHNOPARK



HOW I LEARNED ABOUT BIODIVERSITY THE LARGEST CONSTRUCTION SITE IN ARMENIA WITH NO CIGARETTE BUTTS

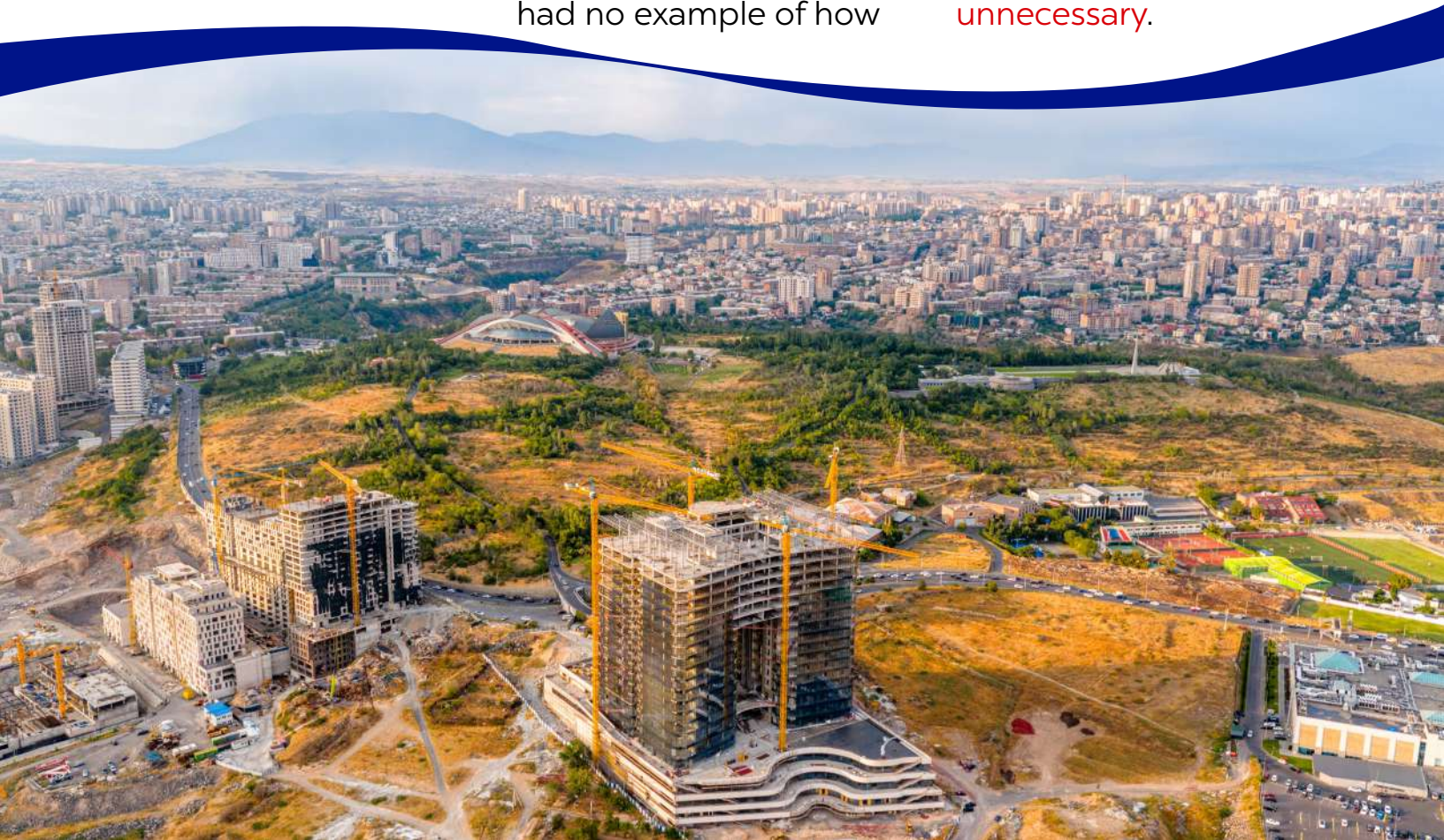
Yerevan is building more than at any point in its modern history, and that is, on balance, good news. It means investment, jobs and a city that is growing. But anyone who has walked through the centre on a dry afternoon knows the other half of that sentence, because you can see it in the air. Cities many times our size run far more construction than we do **without the haze that settles over Yerevan**, and the difference is not scale or effort. It is method.

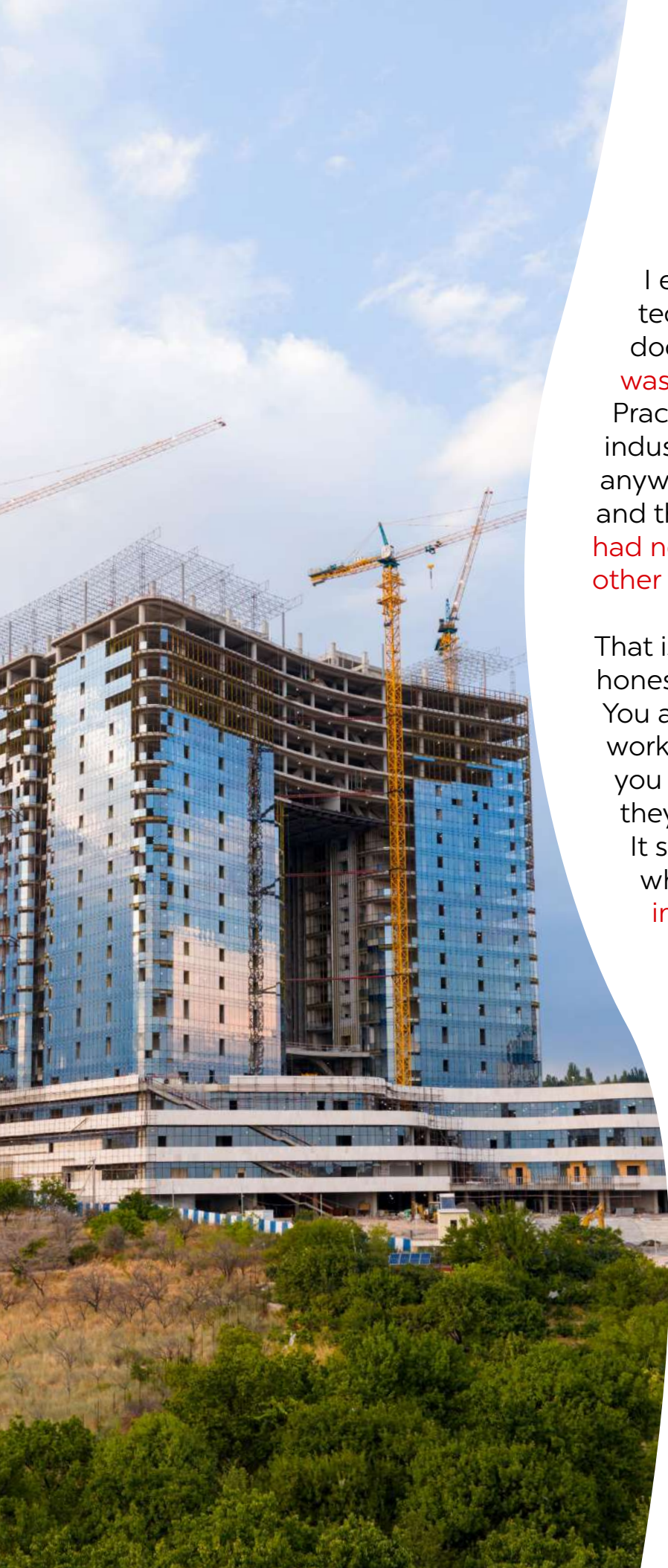
I want to be careful here, because it would be easy and wrong to blame the people doing the work. They are **following the practices they were trained** in, on projects priced and scheduled around those practices.

Dalan Technopark is the first commercial building in Armenia certified to USGBC LEED v4 Gold, and **we chose that standard on purpose**. The world's largest employers and impact makers now expect it, and Armenia had no example of how

to meet it. If we wanted the kind of tenants who ask these questions, **somebody had to go first and find out what going first involves**.

What that meant in practice was that we could not buy the answer. There was no precedent here, no experienced contractors, no supply chain, no one to ask. So we had to improvise, repeatedly, and often in public, in front of **people who had every reason to think the whole thing was unnecessary**.



A large building under construction, featuring blue glass panels and yellow cranes. The building is situated on a hillside with green trees in the foreground. The sky is blue with some clouds.

The Hardest Part was Not the Building

I expected the difficulty to be technical with systems, materials, and documentation. But **the hardest part was the site itself, and the people on it.** Practices that had been normal in this industry for decades, such as smoking anywhere on the ground, had to change, and they had to change with **people who had never once been asked to work any other way.**

That is not a small ask, and I want to be honest about how it felt from the inside. You are standing in front of experienced workers, men who have built more than you ever will, telling them that where they put a cigarette end matters. It sounds absurd until you explain why, and **even then it sounds like an imported rule.**

I assumed a green building standard was about the building. Most of what we dealt with was about the ground. Where soil is stockpiled, and whether it is covered. Where water leaves the site, and what it carries with it when it goes. What ends up in the soil and stays there, which is how I came to know more about cigarette filters than I ever wanted to; and just so you know, they are plastic, and they leach nicotine and heavy metals into the ground for years.

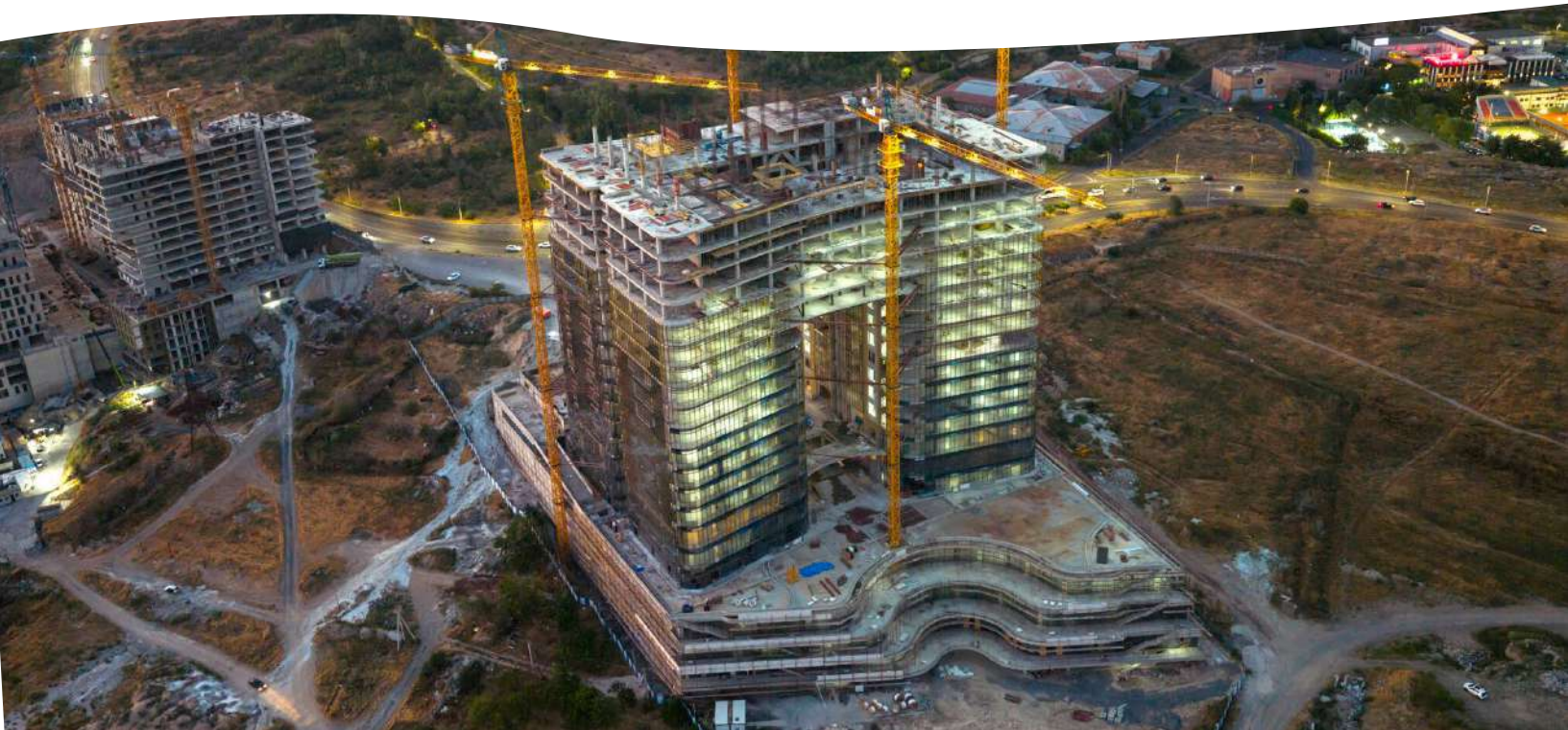
Where Biodiversity Hides in a Building Standard

This is the part I did not see coming, and it is why the word biodiversity ended up in the title of this article. I had filed that word under forests and endangered species, somewhere far from a construction site in a capital city..



Before you may earn a single point, **LEED requires a plan to stop construction pollution at source:** controlling soil erosion, keeping sediment out of waterways, and keeping dust out of the air. That is not a courtesy to the neighbours. Soil that leaves a site in a rainstorm does not disappear; it arrives somewhere, usually in a river, where it smothers the gravel beds that insects and fish depend on. Anyone who has watched the Hrazdan run brown after a storm has seen the transaction happening.

Then there is the ground itself. The standard asks you to **assess what is on your site before you touch it, its soil, water, plants and habitat**, and to protect or restore a meaningful share of it rather than paving it flat and decorating afterwards. It asks you to manage rainwater the way the land did before you arrived, letting it soak in rather than sending it into the drains at speed. And it asks you to point your lights downward and keep them off the sky, because artificial light at night disrupts the insects, birds and bats that navigate by darkness.



None of this requires anyone on site to love nature. It requires a covered soil stockpile, a silt barrier, a properly graded surface, and a shielded lamp. What it produces is a building that takes less from the living systems around it than the one next door. And it matters more here than in most places. A city block is not a national park, but Yerevan sits in a country that holds roughly 60 percent of the Caucasus region's biodiversity on 6.7 percent of its land, with **rivers that run from the city straight into farmland and gorges.** What leaves a construction site in Yerevan does not stay in Yerevan.

And here is the detail I would most like other developers to take from this. Almost **all of it has to be settled before the first foundation is poured.** You cannot retrofit where the runoff went during excavation. You cannot uncontaminate the strip of ground your crew used as an ashtray for eighteen months. A building's effect on soil, water and air is largely determined in a narrow window at the start, and that window is open only once. It cost more, and it cost time, and I am not going to pretend otherwise; certifying to a standard nobody in the country had met means **paying for the learning curve as well as the work.**

A Conversation Arriving in Yerevan

There is a reason to be writing this now rather than a year ago. From 19 to 30 October, Yerevan hosts COP17, the United Nations Biodiversity Conference, and the task in front of those delegates is no longer to agree on targets. The targets were agreed in 2022. This is the first global stocktake of what has actually been delivered since, which is a much harder conversation.

Two of those global targets speak directly to a construction site. One asks the private sector to assess and disclose its impact on nature rather than leaving it to governments. The other asks cities to increase the quality and connectivity of their green and blue spaces.

I am not going to claim that one technopark in Yerevan answers either of those. It does not. But it does demonstrate something that delegates will spend two weeks discussing in the abstract, which is that the gap between a commitment and a result is usually filled by unglamorous, specific, checkable requirements that somebody has to follow on an ordinary Tuesday. We found that out the slow way, without a precedent to copy. **The next developer will not have that excuse, and that is the entire point of going first.**

CYPRUS IN WINTER

HOW TO DESIGN A YEAR BETWEEN YEREVAN AND LIMASSOL



**MATHEW
ZEIN**

EDITOR IN CHIEF



CYPRUS IN WINTER HOW TO DESIGN A YEAR BETWEEN YEREVAN AND LIMASSOL

COP17 closes in Yerevan on the 30th of October. For the delegates, the researchers, the NGO people and the journalists who will spend two weeks in this city attending the conference, that Friday is usually the end of the story; however. It does not have to be. So here is a piece of advice from someone who's spent almost a decade in this country. Give October and half of November to Armenia.

Late autumn here is not the off-season, it is the pretty end of the good season; the forests in Tavush and Lori will be as colorful as Armenian carpets, and the country goes back to being itself. So, if you have just spent a fortnight in conference rooms in Yerevan talking about landscapes, give yourself two weeks of standing in them.



The Calendar in Cyprus

We have been taught to think of islands as swimming pools, open in summer and closed the rest of the year. It is a terrible assumption because it hides the most valuable months. Cyprus in January is around seventeen degrees on the coast, with roughly six hours of bright sunshine a day, a sea that sits in the high teens, and streets full of people going about their normal lives.

So here is the second half of the advice. When the Armenian mountains have given you what they have to give, fly south for a week. It is a short flight, and the island is closer than most people realise. **Warmth, water, and a week in which nothing at all requires a decision from you.**

Parklane Resort & Spa

Parklane sits on twelve hectares of Limassol coastline with a three-hundred-metre Blue Flag beach, and it is our partner for this piece. What makes it the right recommendation for this particular moment in a year is not the beach, which in November is a pleasure but not the point. It is the fact that everything there is somebody else's job.

Start with the water, because it is what your body is actually asking for. The Kalloni Spa runs to over three thousand square metres and holds the only thalassotherapy centre on the island: five seawater pools of varying salinity, including one that matches the Dead Sea. Anyone who has spent a fortnight on their feet at a conference will understand what seawater does to a body within about fifteen minutes.



There are fourteen treatment rooms, a hair salon, and suites with a Russian banya; the signature ritual is built around the island's own orchards, with lemon, grapefruit and orange oils, a jasmine and gardenia scrub and a yoghurt and honey wrap. The spa has partnered with Swissmed Health, a clinical longevity centre, which brings diagnostics, preventive care and proper medical supervision into a holiday.

ParkFit is a full health club with Technogym equipment, an indoor temperature-controlled pool for swimming lengths in November, sauna and steam rooms. Outside there are two clay tennis courts, a padel court enclosed in glass, and a mini football pitch. For those who want the sea in a more active form, there are kayaks and the rest of the watersports operation. And there are three outdoor pools, including an adults-only one and another filled with seawater.

If You are Travelling with Children

The Park Kidz covers roughly three thousand square metres, runs year-round with qualified multilingual staff, and is organised into separate worlds by age, from four-month-olds through to twelve-year-olds, with a castle and a pirate ship pool at the centre of it. It is among the largest kids' clubs in the Mediterranean.

Several consecutive hours in which your children are delighted and you are not required. If you have been travelling as a family, that is the single most valuable amenity on the property, and nothing else on the list comes close.





The Island Beyond the Gate

The resort's concierge team runs a set of experiences that take you off the property and into the island. One is Lefkara, the mountain village where lacemaking evolved in the sixteenth century, and where the story goes that Leonardo da Vinci bought a cloth that ended up in Milan's Duomo.

The other is a perfume workshop; the world's oldest known perfumery, over four thousand years old, was excavated in Pyrgos, the village next to the resort, and the amphora in the resort's own logo comes from it.

You make a scent with a master perfumer and take the island home in a bottle. For a group of people who have just spent two weeks at COP17 talking about what is worth preserving, it is a better souvenir than most.

The Invitation

This piece is supported by Parklane, a Luxury Collection Resort & Spa in Limassol, and you should know that before you weigh anything in it.

So, to the delegates and the visitors who will be in Yerevan at the end of October, **do not fly home on the thirty-first**. Two weeks in the conference hall. A few days in the mountains. Then a week somewhere warm where the only thing asked of you is which pool you would like to be in.

FLORA AND FAUNA IN LORI

WHY NORTHERN ARMENIA HOLDS THE KEY TO BIODIVERSITY



**MATHEW
ZEIN**

EDITOR IN CHIEF



FLORA AND FAUNA IN LORI

WHY NORTHERN ARMENIA HOLDS THE KEY TO BIODIVERSITY

Somewhere on the basalt cliffs above the Debed river, Egyptian vultures are raising chicks, and almost every visitor who drives through the canyon on the way to a monastery has no idea.

The species is globally endangered.

Let me start with why Lori is different, because everything else follows from it. The Debed river runs north out of Armenia into Georgia, cutting a rugged, forested valley framed by basalt cliffs and the Pambak range. The canyon's floor sits at Armenia's lowest elevation, and that low ground creates a microclimate milder than Yerevan's, with higher rainfall that keeps the valley green through the year.

That combination, low, wet, and warm produces a species mix you will not find on the Ararat plain; wild pears, barberries, linden, and meadows that fill with flowers in spring. The wider province adds the forests of Gugark and around Stepanavan, deep gorges, and the sort of orchard country where pomegranates, apricots, peaches, pears, apples, plums, persimmons and even kiwis grow. And because the elevation range across the province is enormous, from canyon floor to mountain forest to subalpine meadow, you get several habitat types stacked within a short drive of each other.

Habitat diversity in a compact area is precisely what biodiversity depends on.



What Actually Lives in Lori



The birds are the headline, and they are the reason ecologists pay attention to this province. The Debed canyon is habitat for golden eagles, griffon vultures, peregrine falcons, black storks, hoopoes and several owl species. The community of Dsegh, which most of our readers know as the birthplace of the poet Hovhannes Tumanyan, is recognised as one of **Armenia's Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas by BirdLife International**, meaning it hosts one or more globally threatened bird species. It is a rare thing for a village to be significant in both literature and ornithology, and very Armenian that we mostly celebrate the first.

A hundred and seventy-seven bird species have been recorded in the Dsegh area, and it is identified as important for the breeding populations of three in particular: the Egyptian vulture, which is globally endangered, the griffon vulture, and the peregrine falcon. Bearded vultures, booted eagles, long-legged buzzards and European honey buzzards use the same airspace. If you have never understood why people stand at the edge of a gorge holding binoculars for an hour, this is the place that explains it.

On the ground, the canyon supports jackals, foxes, hedgehogs, hares and turtles, alongside the smaller mammals and rodents that make up the base of the food chain. On a national level, **Armenia's forests cover around eleven percent of the country** and hold more than 3,500 plant species, over 300 bird species, and mammals including brown bear, lynx and Armenian mouflon. Lori's northern forests, together with the Dilijan and Ijevan woodlands, are among the key woodland refuges in that system. Lori is also, alongside Syunik, **one of the two provinces where Armenia's most contentious biodiversity pressures sit.**

Lori also holds several state sanctuaries that almost no visitor has heard of. Gyulagarak Sanctuary, near the village of the same name, was established in 1958 to protect the area's pine forests and covers roughly 2,576 hectares. Margahovit Sanctuary, set up in 1971 for the moisture-loving forests on the wetter northern slopes, covers around

3,368 hectares; its woods hold brown bear, wolf, wild boar, roe deer and lynx, its old hollow trees shelter bats, and its streams carry brown trout. And in a third pocket, protected since 1959, the object of conservation is the Caucasian rhododendron, an evergreen shrub barely twenty centimetres high, given a thousand hectares of its own.

What a Visitor Can Do



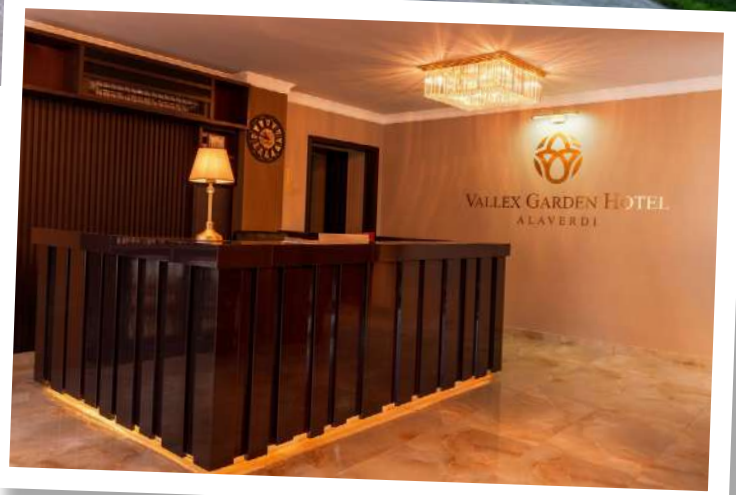
Go outside July and August, when the canyon is quieter and the birds are more visible; spring brings the wildflowers, poppies, tulips, irises, orchids, and the meadows at their best. Walk rather than drive where you can; the Dsegh trails and the canyon paths were made by locals long before they were made for hikers. Spend money in the villages rather than only at the monasteries, because a rural economy with alternatives is the most effective conservation instrument available and nobody needs a grant to run it.

From 19 to 30 October, several thousands delegates will be in Yerevan for COP17, and somewhere in those two weeks most of them will have a free day. The obvious suggestion is a wine region or the standard monastery circuit. The better one, for this crowd, is three hours north. **Lori in late October is at its autumn color**, the summer crowds are gone, and the gorge that the presentations describe as a habitat corridor is right there, holding vultures, doing its work, entirely indifferent to the conference. Anyone who has spent a fortnight discussing biodiverse ecosystems in a conference hall **should consider standing inside one for a day**. Bring binoculars to enjoy it.



Where to Base Yourself

This article was made possible by [Vallex Garden Hotel](#) in Alaverdi, and I want to be straightforward about both the support and the reason it makes sense. A story about protecting Lori that does not help anyone actually go to Lori is not much use to the province.



Wildlife keeps different hours than tourism. The birds are loudest and most visible in the first hours after sunrise, and the gorge changes character entirely in the last hour of light, when the cliffs hold the warmth and the sound drops away. Vultures ride the thermals once the air has moved, which is not something that can be scheduled around a bus timetable. None of this is available to anyone who arrives at eleven and leaves at four, which is why **an overnight stay in Lori is what you need to actually see the province.**

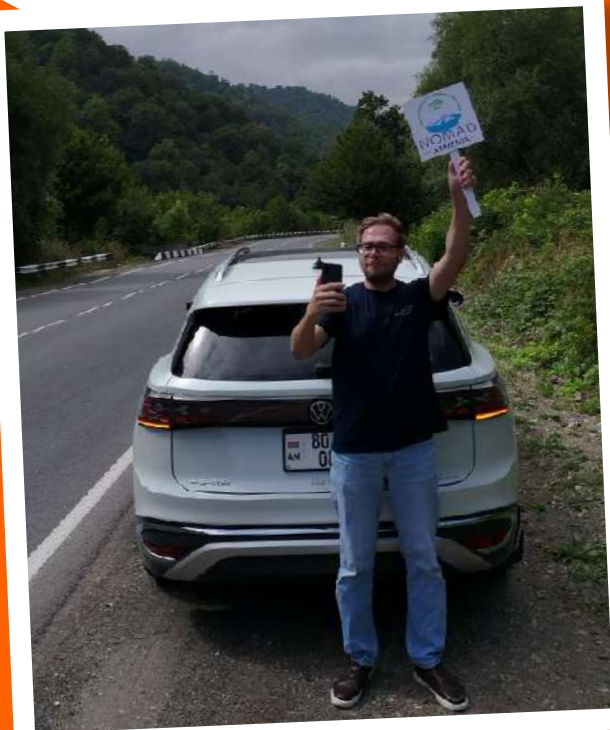
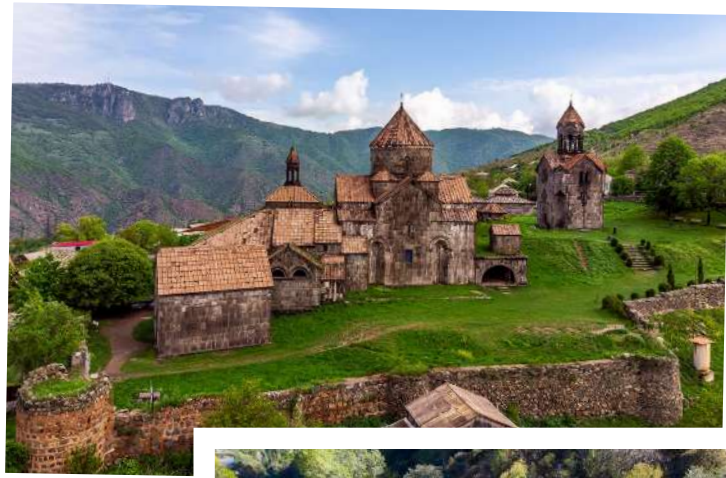




The hotel sits in Alaverdi, down in the canyon, and it works as a base for exactly the kind of trip this article describes. [Sanahin](#), [Haghpat](#), [Akhtala](#) and [Odzun](#) are all within [about twenty kilometres](#), which means the monasteries become mornings. It has 37 rooms across several categories, a restaurant serving Armenian and European food, a garden and terrace, and, in a detail that says something about where Armenian tourism is heading, a charging station for electric cars.



One morning for Sanahin and Haghpat, early, before anyone else is on the road. One for Dsegh and its trails, with the flora and fauna centre first so you know what you are looking at. One afternoon for Akhtala or Odzun, and one for simply walking a stretch of the canyon with no destination in mind. That is two or three nights rather than one, and two nights is the threshold to enjoy your time in the Lori region. What matters more for our purposes is the geography. Staying down in the canyon rather than passing through it is **the difference between seeing Lori and visiting it**. You get the early mornings, when the birds are up and the tour buses are not. You get the evenings, when the gorge goes quiet. Rooms and availability are at vallexgarden.am, and it is worth booking directly.



Lori is usually sold as scenery with monasteries in it, and it is superb at that job. But the more accurate description is that it is **the green hinge of a small country in one of the world's richest biological regions**, doing structural work for species that will never know Armenia has a border. That is a better reason to go north than any view, and the view is included anyway.

EVERYTHING CHANGED WHEN WE GOOGLED
'PLOGGING'

HOW A MORNING RUN TURNED INTO A LOCAL ECO-MOVEMENT



**DAVIT
MURADYAN**

FOUNDER OF PLOGGING ARMENIA



EVERYTHING CHANGED WHEN WE GOOGLED 'PLOGGING' HOW A MORNING RUN TURNED INTO A LOCAL ECO-MOVEMENT

“Plogging? Do you mean blogging? Or vlogging?” That was our reaction when a young participant suggested an activity during a community development project in Gyumri in 2021. We were discussing what the young people could organise for their community when this unfamiliar word came up. So we Googled it.

Plogging meant combining jogging with picking up litter along the way.

It sounded simple: go outside, move your body and collect the waste you find around you. What we couldn't predict was how people in Gyumri would respond. The young people had been allocated a budget of €100 for their initiative. I was doubtful. I thought about the mentality at the time and wondered: would people really come outside, run through the city and collect rubbish? Would they find it strange?

Together with the young participants, we decided to try anyway. We created a Facebook event called Plogging Gyumri. Then something happened that I really wasn't expecting. Within a few hours, I started receiving calls and messages. Businesses wanted to get involved. Local and international NGOs showed interest. Gyumri Municipality contacted us. Different people and organisations wanted to participate or support the initiative. On 22 May 2021, **what we had imagined as a small youth activity brought together around 500 people.**



I had been worried that nobody would join. Instead, the community gave me exactly the opposite answer. **Gyumri was also listed among the cities participating in Plogging World**, an international initiative associated with Green Heroes Austria. We had gone from Googling the meaning of the word to seeing Gyumri connected with people doing the same activity around the world. That was when I started thinking: if there is this much interest, why not continue?



Why not take this idea to Yerevan and other regions? Why not create something that could promote plogging as a culture across Armenia? **That experience eventually led me to establish Plogging Armenia in 2022.** For me, plogging has never been just another clean-up. Imagine seeing somebody running or walking through your neighbourhood and stopping to pick up rubbish next to your house, at the bus stop you use every morning or on the street you walk through every day.

Perhaps the next time you are about to throw something on the ground, you remember that somebody else had to stop and pick it up. I cannot say that one event will immediately change someone's behaviour. But **plogging makes environmental responsibility visible.** Instead of only telling people not to litter, we try to show another way through our own actions. And we try to make it enjoyable.



One of my favourite examples was Yellow Plogging, which we organised together with Teach For Armenia in Yerevan on 5 November 2022. The idea of yellow came from autumn. We gathered at Children's Park in the centre of Yerevan, and almost everyone was wearing yellow T-shirts or hoodies. Most of the participants were young people, and with the autumn colours around us, the whole group became part of that atmosphere.

We didn't just arrive, collect rubbish and leave. There was music. Before starting the plogging, we did a workout together. People were moving, talking and enjoying themselves before we even started collecting waste. That day captured something I wanted Plogging Armenia to become. **Environmental action doesn't always need to feel formal or heavy.** It can include sport, music, creativity and simply spending time with other people. You can enjoy a day with a group of young people while also doing something useful for your city.

Over the years, **we have continued taking this idea to different parts of Armenia.** One of the most meaningful recent moments for me happened on 12 August 2026, when our journey took us to Kapan in Syunik for International Youth Day. It was our first Plogging Armenia event in Syunik and our first collaboration with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA).



Together with UNFPA, The Body Shop Armenia and the youth council attached to the Kapan community head, we organised a plogging competition for young people in the city. Twenty-one young people participated in three teams and **together collected 57 kilograms of waste.** But for me, Kapan was about much more than the kilograms collected. When I created Plogging Armenia, **the idea was never to build something only for Yerevan.** Armenia is much bigger than its capital. Standing there in Kapan, seeing young people take part in an activity that had started years earlier with one young person's suggestion in Gyumri, made that journey feel real.

Today, we continue to organise free plogging events in different cities across Armenia, where anyone can register and join us. We announce upcoming activities through Plogging Armenia's Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn and Telegram pages.

The idea has also grown in another direction. We collaborate with businesses and organisations that want to organise plogging activities with their employees and communities, whether as part of team-building, CSR or environmental initiatives. Organisations interested in working with us can reach us through our social media pages or at ploggingarmenia@gmail.com.



When I look back now, I can trace the story through very different moments. A young person in Gyumri said a word none of us understood. **Us Googling “plogging.”** I thought nobody would participate. **Around 500 people proved me wrong.** A group of young people dressed in yellow, working out to music on an autumn day in Yerevan. And years later, three teams of young people plogging in Kapan. The lesson I keep coming back to is simple: sometimes we decide too quickly what people will or won't care about.

I did that in Gyumri. A young person suggested something unfamiliar. We gave the idea a chance, and the community showed us what was possible. But whenever I think about how it all started, I come back to that conversation in Gyumri. When we first searched Google for the meaning of “plogging,” I had no idea that years later I would be writing about it. It started with €100, one young person's idea and a word we didn't understand. **Sometimes that's enough to start something.**

A LOVE OF DOMAINS - PART 1

BECAME A LOVE FOR ARMENIA



**NICHOLAS
CERVANTES**

FOUNDER OF ARMENIADOMAINS.COM
AND .AM CCTLD ANALYST

A LOVE OF DOMAINS - PART 1 BECAME A LOVE FOR ARMENIA

In my last few months of military service in the United States Marine Corps at Camp Pendleton, California, I was trying to decide what to do after twenty years of service. I had plenty of job skills besides my primary career in telecommunications, but the more I went to career fairs the more I understood that it wasn't going to be that easy.

Many times, I would show my resume and would be told that I was over qualified or I would ask for a specific job such as safety inspector or manager since I had multiple Occupational Safety and Health Administration certifications. The recruiters at the career fairs would just respond as well with "we don't have that specific job, but we can give a different one and you can apply later".



For me being a prior Marine Corps Recruiter and seeing through all the BS, this was just total nonsense and that is when I decided that one of my interests for a while was domain names. One night, I asked some simple questions on Google and asked are domain names valuable and can you make a business out of it. During my research I ran across a video on YouTube called Domain Sherpa that was created by Michael Cyger. His videos showed a wide range of different parts of the international domain name industry such interviews with domain registrars, domain registries, domain brokers and aftermarket sales on domains that would reach into the millions of US dollars.

After watching his videos, almost non-stop, I felt this was it. This is something I want to do and be a part of this industry.

I absolutely knew that I could do it, but it was going to take a lot more than just walking into the industry and being a voice in the

community or someone that can serve some importance. Better yet making a profit from being a domain investor or a reseller.

A Name That Kept Appearing

So, in my last months besides the research on the domain industry, I was busy creating a website for blogging on the domain industry and working as a GoDaddy Pro Reseller. This made me go on LinkedIn and send requests to connect with other domainers, employees of domain registries and registrars. This was my start to entering the domain name industry.

After contacting so many people it became exhausting. That is when I came upon one woman named Katarina Gevorgyan who worked at GlobalR.com because she kept showing up in my feed no matter how many times I refreshed or came back for more connections. After seeing this, it seemed it was a sign. She seemed that she was very friendly and outgoing by the look of her profile picture. So, I sent her a connection request. Not too long after she sent a message saying that she was happy to connect with me and that she provided services for .am and .ge country code top-level domains (ccTLDs).



I was like ok, sounds great and I started to wonder what countries these two codes belonged to .ge for Germany or Georgia? But, the .am ccTLD I had to look and the only thing that popped in my head besides a country was AM radio. So, after doing a search on the internet, **the responses came up with Armenia. My thought was “Where the hell is Armenia”?** When I looked on Google Earth it seemed like I was going to go through the screen because it just felt like the zooming wasn't going to stop. Finally, the zooming stopped. I had to think what I was seeing.

It was a tiny country that I never even heard of or noticed on a map, especially during my twenty years in the military. I had to get back to Katarina and ask her what was going on with .am since .ge didn't seem very appealing to me as an investor. She became super excited to speak about it and also explained to me that she was from Yerevan, Armenia. After the brief conversation we never discussed the price and me being a newbie at domaining I bought two .am domains at GoDaddy for 89.99 each.

From Domains to Something Else

For a few months, I really wanted to talk to her again but I didn't want her to be weirded by trying to talk to her about more than domain names. I didn't want to just come and say “Hey what is your Facebook?”. I didn't feel at the time LinkedIn was the appropriate place for that. At around the same time I was thinking about this, I saw a message from her. I was surprised and excited. She contacted me about a startup she was helping campaign for called the Volterman Smart Wallet. It was a wallet that had many functions to include a camera, USB charging, Bluetooth and location tracking if you lost it. For me this was an easy way and I felt at the time, the only time to continue talking to her.

I bought a few wallets and things started going beyond normal work to her giving me her Facebook after I asked. After some great conversations with her on LinkedIn, we connected on Facebook. A few days later I told Katarina that I bought two .am domains for 89.99 each, thinking I was in the cool club for .am, but I was dead wrong. She informed me that I could have purchased them at around \$20.

Even though I wanted to bang my head into the wall after buying at that price, \$20 felt more appealing than before. She later discussed with me that there were some major aftermarket sales, [one being 9.am that sold for \\$169,000 in 2017](#). My imagination ran wild trying to comprehend buying a twenty-dollar

domain and flipping it to six figures. To me that was just wild. During many of these conversations of me investigating my new investment into .am, Katarina asked me if I would like to come to Armenia. I answered with a quick “yes” since I was already familiar with the pictures I saw of Yerevan, the landscape and culture.

Arriving in Armenia

Once I retired in early September of 2018, I had a long three-day drive back home from Camp Pendleton, California to Dallas, Texas. When I arrived home, I was not only relaxing a bit and getting the feel of being back home with my family, I was also preparing to leave about two weeks later for a little over two weeks trip to Armenia to meet Katarina in late September of 2018. **Arriving at Zvartnots International Airport in Yerevan, I really didn't know what to expect.** My arrival was early in the morning between 03:00 and 04:00 AM. After exiting the plane, the area was pitch dark and I was unable to see much of what was outside of the airport from the air bridge to the terminal.

After clearing passport control and gathering my luggage I was determined to find Katarina. Once I exited the luggage area, I was getting surrounded by taxi drivers asking if I needed a ride into the city. I had to try and push my way through the chaos of the taxi drivers and those waiting for passengers arriving outside the terminal but also try to find Katarina. Just outside the wall of people we finally found and greeted each other. It was a relief and we started our journey in a taxi to our Air BNB apartment.



For my stay Katarina scheduled multiple tours around Armenia for us. My introduction and travels in Armenia were very exciting and every day was a new adventure. The feeling of being in Armenia felt like being in a movie and the atmosphere was very relaxed everywhere we traveled. **The citizens of Armenia were very outgoing and always excited about**

foreigners. Armenia's cultural food and wine were also an amazing part of my experience. The produce was surprising and very fresh. Each having real taste and not just a fruit that tasted like water. After having so much fun for my first trip, my time was coming to an end and it was almost time to head back to the United States.

The Wheels Start Turning

I reflected a lot on what I saw in the country and a lot of the issues that were going at the time with telecommunications, something that I was very familiar with from my previous career. My head was already spinning wheels on how I could fix issues and possibly start a business in Armenia

if I decided to live here. But with so much I still want to see with more tours, my genuine cause to help with Armenia's telecom sector, and the great memorable moments I had in Armenia, I decided to surprise Katarina to tell her I was coming back for New Year's and Christmas in Armenia for 2019.



In the winter of 2019, I arrived back in Armenia in the early morning hours, meeting Katarina as always and then taking our ride to our apartment rental. It was such a shock feeling the freezing cold of Armenia for the first time coming from Texas where it was still very warm, but I was very happy to be back.

Once I arrived it was a quick rest and later that night, we were already going out to meet her friends and celebrate with a lot of people in Armenia's tech startup ecosystem. This was my first time meeting a lot of popular and some of the most influential voices in Armenia's growing tech sector. The party and conversations about the explosive startup ecosystem and the idea of Armenia becoming a major tech hub was very impressive. Having these new connections and conversations sparked more interest for me about how I could do my part to support this cause with my experience.

For most of the time back, the wheels in my head were turning with ideas but the main issues were still at hand. How can you have a tech hub without modernizing it fast enough to catch up with other countries? Also, why was there not much adoption of the .AM ccTLD from international domain investors and registrars, and especially adoption among local businesses?



A Team, and a Plan

Not only were we now in a relationship, we were now working like a team, both passionate about domain names and why they are one of the most interesting and overlooked digital assets in the world. In the meantime, while I researched these issues each day I was in Armenia, Katarina surprised me one day with information that she was accepted for a fellowship with the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN) that would be held in Montreal, Canada in November.

Our plans were set on going to Canada followed by a trip to the United States to go to NamesCon 2020 in Austin, Texas. NamesCon is one of the largest domain conventions in the world and a place to meet the most successful domain brokers, domain industry experts and domainers of the world. For us this was the perfect time to meet Michael Cyger who I was a big fan of and was one of the first most influential domain experts for me to pursue my interest in the global domain industry.



Montreal: The First ICANN

November of 2019 finally came and I was able to meet up with Katarina at the Montreal Airport since we timed the flight arrivals close together while we were in Yerevan. This made

it easier for the both of us to travel safely to our destination. By being there at my first ever ICANN conference, I understood the importance of ICANN's mission, made a bunch

of new friends, and made contacts that would be very helpful in my new journey in domaining. It was an amazing time to be among around 2,500 people from over 130 countries.

Austin: Just for AM Radio

A fun start to 2020 had started in late January as Katarina flew in from Yerevan to my hometown of Dallas, Texas. After landing and going through customs at the Dallas-Fort Worth International Airport we met up in the terminal. Both of us were very excited and eager to begin our trip to Austin the next day.

After stopping at a few places on the way down we finally reached our destination at the hotel where the venue was being held. Lucky

for us we had rooms convenient to the event. The first day we went to the meetings which were very informative and provided a lot of valuable advice on domain trends, investing and brokering domain names. We also had a social after the daily meetings. Katarina knew some people and we conversated with a few but the majority that day were either tired, only spoke with other well-known domainers and for us we understood that we were new to NamesCon and it being our first one.

We didn't have much luck with conversation even when we tried talking with those in some of the small groups. But for the most part for the little conversation we did ask the question of what they thought about .am. **Many just responded that it was only a good domain extension for AM radio.** Not to say the event was bad, to me it was a good thing to finally understand. Armenia's domain name industry has a marketing problem. My thought was that there has to be more to .am than AM radio stations.



Meeting the Man Who Started It

On the final and fourth day NamesCon had a huge social event at Banger's Sausage House and Beer Garden and this was when I was able to meet Michael Cyger the host of Domain Sherpa on YouTube. For myself it was a great honor to meet him and I explained to him how much impact his videos had on my pursuit to create a career in the international domain industry.

He really enjoyed the talk with myself and Katarina and gave us a lot of information on how the industry is from his point of view, as well as how to be successful. For me this was mission complete and I was ready to head back to Dallas the next day.

And Then the World Stopped

After our overnight stay we headed back to Dallas for a few days and then saw Katarina off at the airport, wishing her a safe trip back to Armenia and to be ready to see each other in March for ICANN 67 in Cancun, Mexico.

Not long after Katarina left the COVID-19 pandemic struck, the world was in chaos and unfortunately, we never would meet in Cancun in March for ICANN 67. Months

after COVID-19 strikes, Armenia is caught up in the war for Artsakh in the start of September. I was deeply worried for Katarina and everyone there and still unable to fly there was even more upsetting because I was unable to make sure her and her family were safe. What started as a fun year became one of the darkest times for the World and an even darker one for Armenia.

In Part 2, I go back to an Armenia changed by war, and I finally get to work. There is a satellite, two international stages, an accent that surprised a room in Prague, and the night I stood in Dublin and watched my wife present .am to a packed hall. [The industry told me .am was only good for AM radio. Part 2 is what I did about it.](#)



FIFTY YEARS TO FIND HOME - PART 1

HALFWAY AROUND THE WORLD TO FIND FAMILY IN ARMENIA



**JOHN
KAY**

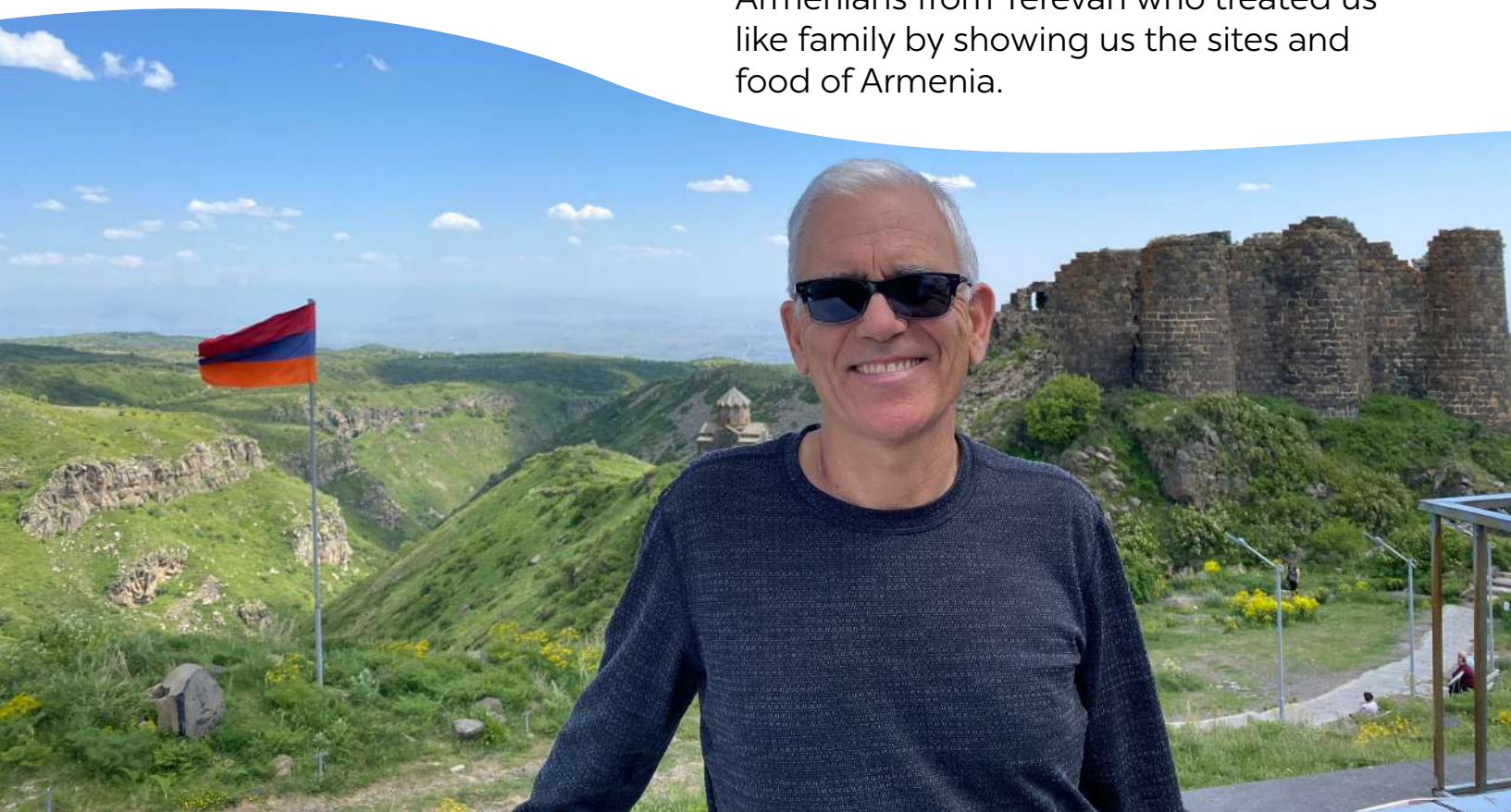
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

FIFTY YEARS TO FIND HOME - PART 1

HALFWAY AROUND THE WORLD TO FIND FAMILY IN ARMENIA

I traveled the world visiting countries in Asia, South America and North America so **why did it take so long to consider a trip to Armenia?** I had known Armenia as the birthplace of my grandparents, and I had known my family history migrating to the U.S., I hadn't seen an urgency to go to Armenia, but I had a deep, quiet desire to learn about my family history and my Armenia. I had not considered looking for my lost Aunt Seda in Armenia who I met in 1970. My father and mother made the trek to Armenia in the 1960's and my Aunt Seda made the trip to the U.S. in the 1970's. So why did I wait 50 years to visit my homeland and my family? I had to find out what I had been missing.

I wanted to go to Armenia with someone who knew the language, so I mentioned that to some Armenian friends over the past 5 years but I had not seen the urgency to make the sojourn. Divine intervention, good friends, the ability to travel, plus the opportunity to travel with a few U.S. Armenians to Armenia. I had discussed going with my Bangladeshi friend, Afzal, in Ocean Beach who **married an Armenian and who feels like he is Armenian**, along with a new Armenian friend, Ando. Ando lives in L.A., and he wanted to return to Yerevan and show Afzal the beauty of Armenia. Ando passionately loves his birthplace Armenia and loves the United States. Afzal suggested I join the small group of 1 Armenian, 1 Bangladeshi, 1 Ukrainian, and 1 American/Armenian (that is me) plus meeting up with well-connected Armenians from Yerevan who treated us like family by showing us the sites and food of Armenia.



Fifty Years of Silence

So much had gone by in the 50 years that I last saw my Aunt Seda. I had not reached out to connect because I did not think she was alive (she was the oldest of 5 children) or that I could trace her family. So, one night as I looked at family papers, **I discovered old letters from Seda to my parents.** I knew it would be difficult to find them, especially not speaking or reading Armenian let alone Russian. I Googled and found nothing using the address or name search. I had an idea, since I use tour guides when I travel, I searched for a tour guide in Gyumri, and I found one. So, I sent him an email and I got a message back from Armen Hovsepyan that said **he would help me find my relatives and he would give me a tour of Gyumri.**

I gave him the 50-year-old address (Street 49, House 57, Gyumri, Armenia) and he found that the street name no longer existed. Since he could not find the home, he went to the cemetery where **he found her gravestone with a birth date but no death date.** Good news. So, he went into the historic part of Gyumri, asked people if they knew of a 97-year-old lady with relatives in the U.S., and they pointed to Seda's home saying she has lived in that home her entire life. He found the home, knocked on the door and surprised Hyak, my cousin, saying that his U.S. cousin was looking for Seda's family. His thought was how could this happen after 50 years; a relative from America calling on us.

Our lives paralleled, me growing up in America and Hyak growing up in Armenia except that his mother, Seda, was left behind with her maternal grandparents when the Kaitangian family of 3 brothers and wives left for America in 1925 to meet up with the older brother who immigrated into the U.S. in 1922.



Unexpectedly, I discovered on my trip that Seda was told that her sister was Mary (Mary was only 14 when she had Seda). **Not until age 16 did Seda know the truth that she was Mary's daughter.**

I thought I was looking for my cousins when I directed my translator tour guide, Armen, to find my family. I received a picture of Armen from the Gyumri graveyard. The headstone showed that Seda's husband, Varazdat, had died and that Seda was alive, born in 1924 and living at age 97. Her three brothers including my father and one sister all passed away and she, the oldest, was still living. That was so unexpected and so fortunate to have made the discovery I had little time to spare.

A Voice on a Screen

Armen informed me that he set up a Skype video phone call the following week with Aunt Seda, Cousin Hayk, Lala (Hayk's wife), Michelle (my wife) and myself. Once again technology brought the world closer together, visually then physically. **To see them that day and visit them in two months was a family miracle.**

The visual call was eye-opening and quietly emotional by all; Hyak and his wife and Seda with lots of joy and happiness to connect. My Aunt Seda with her big glasses closely peered into the cell phone to see me and **she said in the only English words she knew, "I love you; I love you."** Remarkable women who can see, think, and talk in a small frail body, walking with a cane to greet me. She was happy to see me on the phone. Armen was able to translate the discussion. I told my family that I would drop out of the sky to visit them in May. I loved the mystery and the discovery of my family halfway around the world in a small country that survived at least 3,000 years of territorial change and domination by many empires.

I was going to Armenia, and I was going to prepare a notebook containing all my US and Armenian documents and photographs to share with Seda and my cousins. Also, I was going to share photos of my family in America. I was going on a **journey of discovery to find my Armenian roots and my relatives.**

Leaving

May 20 – Depart LAX 4:00 to Doha, Qatar, then to Yerevan, arriving at 12:15 A.M. + 2 Days.

Qatar Airlines arrived in Yerevan at 1:00 a.m. I had changed planes in Doha (very hot and humid) 16+3=19 hours. Yerevan is one of the oldest cities in the world, celebrating 2,800 years recently. Afzal, Ando and Elena picked me up at 1:30 a.m. in a small taxi. My 2 big suitcases and 2 carry-ons plus the 4 of us and the taxi driver fit in a Russian

compact car. It made me laugh and made me happy to arrive at my homeland. I arrived at the Marriott and fell asleep at 5:30 a.m. after drinking and talking at an outdoor restaurant with my night owl friends.

I woke up at 10:00 a.m., met the group at 11:00 a.m. for a ride to Lake Sevan, the largest lake in Armenia, which was about an hour away. It was a nice drive through Yerevan, then through the countryside.

The city looked like an old European city but much smaller with the central square lined with massive Russian-designed government buildings.

At Lake Sevan, we drove to a hotel on the lake with grassy areas, boat docks, a restaurant and sporting activities. We were treated with a full lunch of BBQ fish and sautéed fish in a wine sauce plus Armenian bread, lavash, parsley, onion, yogurt, tomatoes, cucumbers, potatoes, cheese, vodka, and brandy.



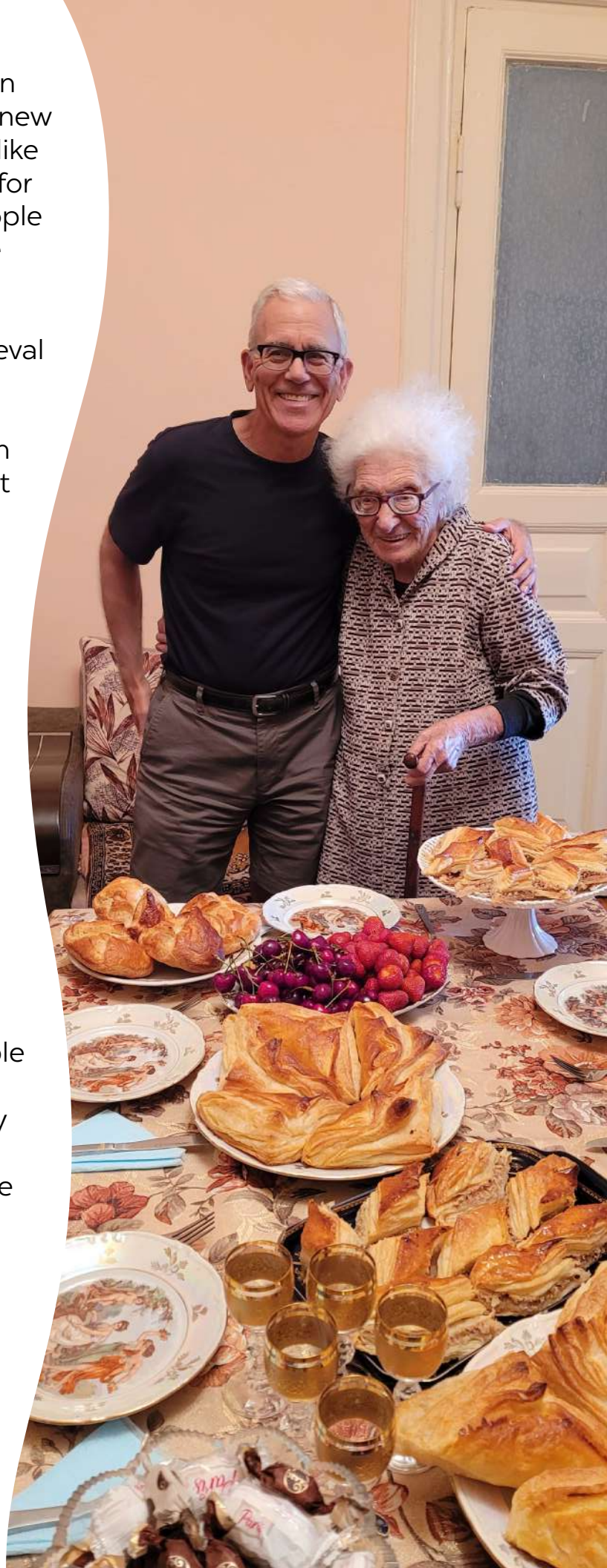
Yes, I drank and toasted many times but in smaller amounts, unlike my friends who knew how to drink. The brandy was very good, like fine wine. Lake Sevan is the water supply for Yerevan and for recreation. Not many people were there due to the cool weather at the higher elevation in May.

We drove to Geghard Monastery; a medieval building built into the rock and well preserved with a stream running through it. We drove to Garni, the site of the pagan temple built in the Greek Roman style first century before Christianity. It was built during the time of Rome's Pantheon.

Gyumri, and the Aunt Who Waited

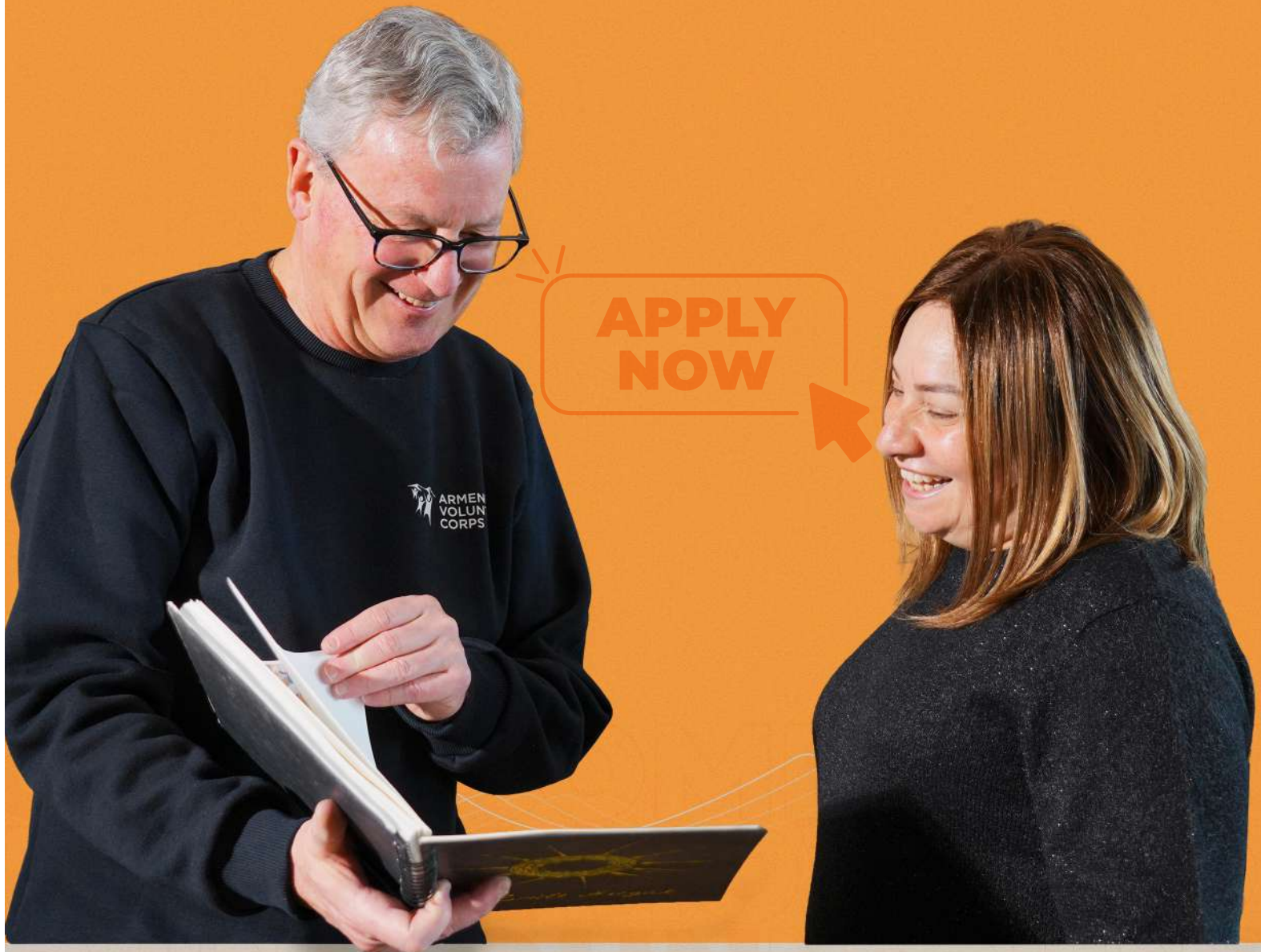
At 9:00 a.m., Armen, my tour guide and translator who arranged my visit with my father's family, picked me up for a 2-hour drive to Gyumri, also known as Alexandropol and Leninakan, named after consecutive rulers. The true name is Kumayri which was the name of the people 3,500 years ago. **Armen found a treasure for me**; my 96-year-old Aunt, who was my father's oldest sister, wanted to see me. My father visited her 50 years ago and she visited him 55 years ago.

In Part 2, I will tell you what happened when my aunt woke and walked into the room on her cane, to find an American relative and her whole family waiting for her; **it was simply the reason I crossed the world.**



VOLUNTEER IN ARMENIA

at any age, in any field, at any time with **AVC**



Join our Junior, Professional, or Senior Corps to gain hands-on experience, discover new passions, and experience the sight, sounds, and flavors of one of the oldest countries in the world. Choose among our 1,600 partner organizations that need your expertise.

TO BE NATURE, NOT JUST WITH IT

THE DESERT, THE BODY AND THE SEARCH FOR VOICE IN ARMENIA



**CHRISTINE
KHACHIKYAN**

CONTRIBUTING WRITER



INTERVIEWING

**NELLY ACHKHEN
SARKISSIAN**

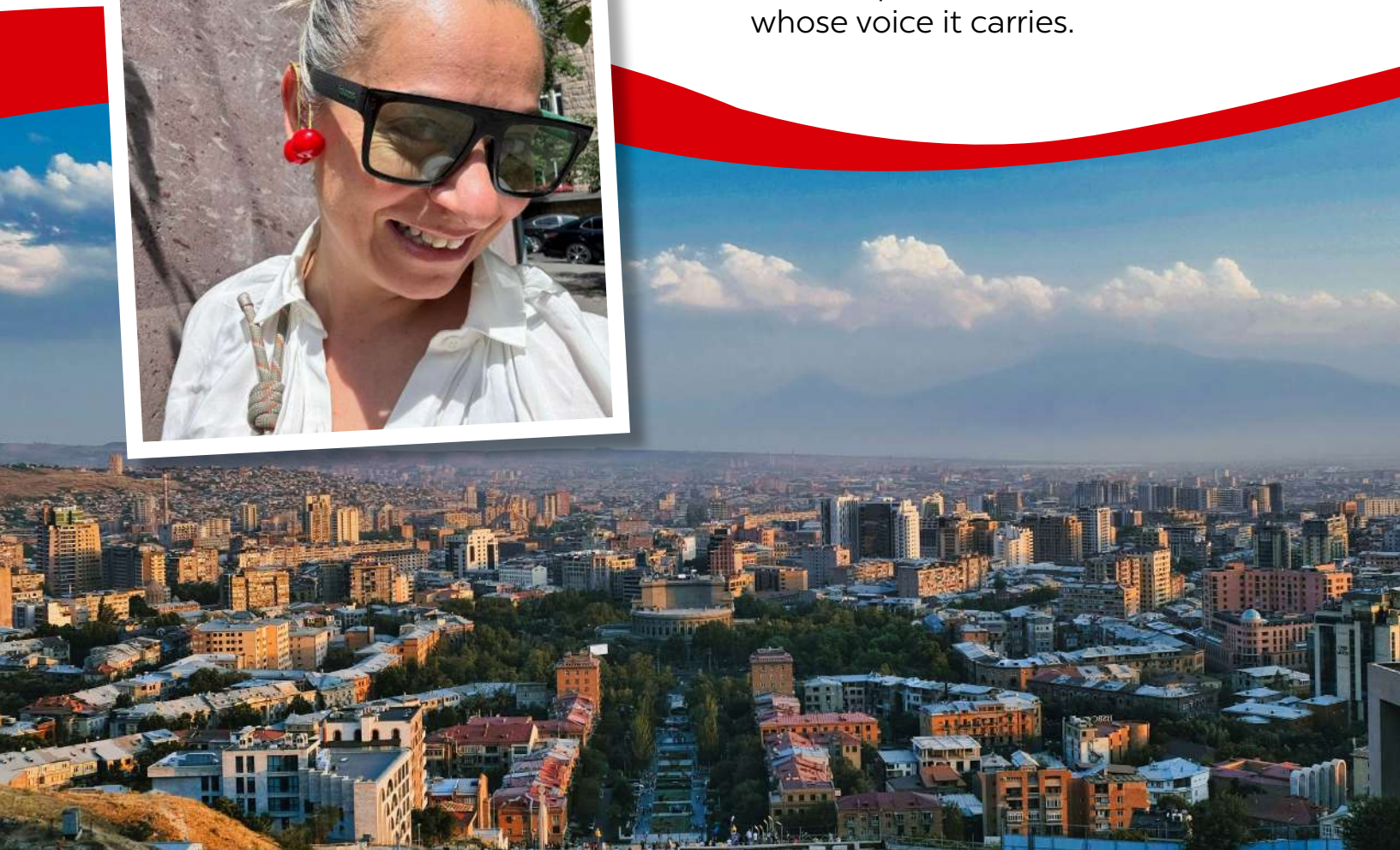
Emmy-Award Winning Art Director



TO BE NATURE, NOT JUST WITH IT THE DESERT, THE BODY AND THE SEARCH FOR VOICE IN ARMENIA

She appears on screen too close, just eyes, mostly, and we both laugh about it. She adjusts. Then she begins to talk and I stop noticing anything else. [Nelly Achkhen Sarkissian](#) is calling from Yerevan, where she is living for now, cautiously, with what she calls “high adaptability” and the honest admission that it is hard. Her life has moved through Beirut, Lebanon, Washington DC, Los Angeles and now tentatively back to Armenia, a geography that mirrors the emotional and creative terrain she works through.

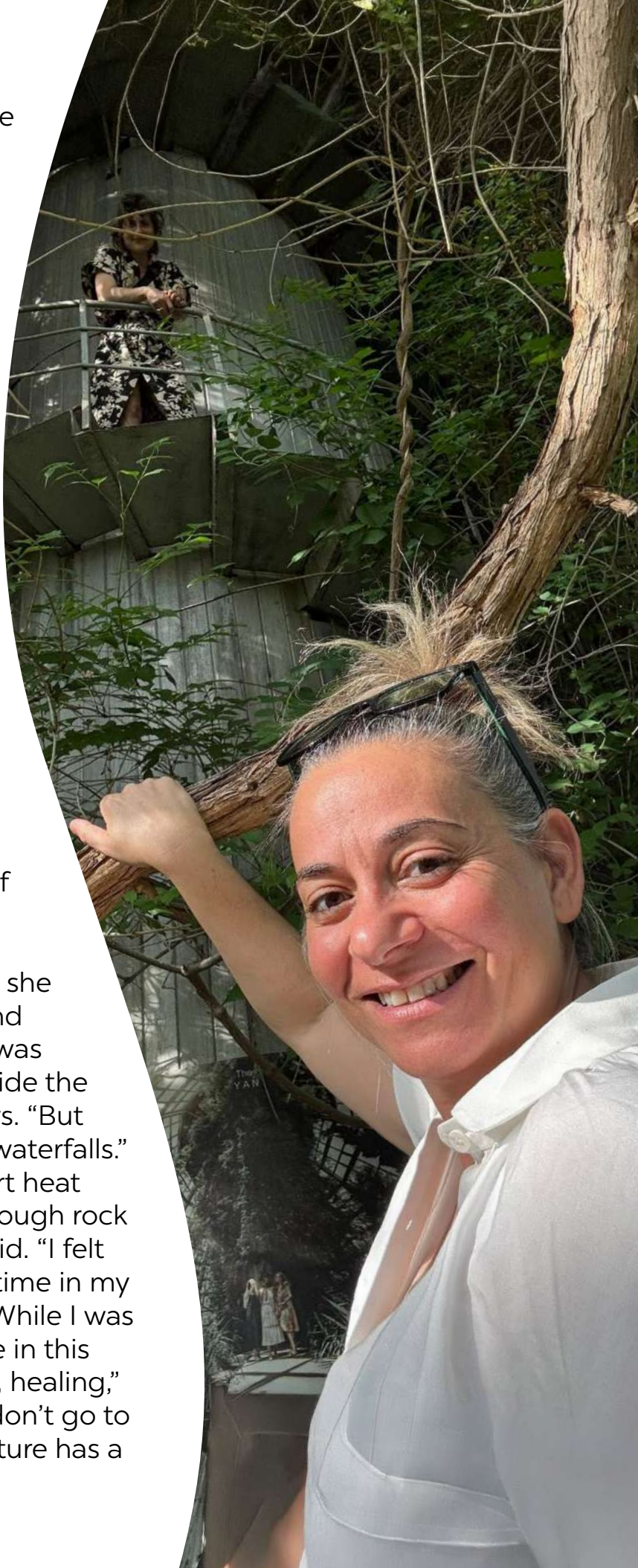
Born in Beirut and shaped by Lebanon, Los Angeles and now Yerevan, she has spent more than two decades in broadcast and digital design, received three Emmy Awards, co-founded a women’s art collective and developed a performance practice rooted in water, desert and the body’s need to return to something older than memory. These worlds, in her telling, are not separate. They are the same search conducted in different landscapes. What ties them together is not the medium or the geography but something she has learned through burnout, war and what she calls “waterfall moments”: that the platform matters less than whose voice it carries.



This is a profile of an artist who has learned through exhaustion and rupture that structure is only meaningful if it allows something human to speak through it. Her relationship with nature begins not in the desert but in a forest. She grew up in Beirut as a Girl Scout with trees behind her neighborhood. “Unlike kids these days,” she says, “we were the generation that had forests. Our childhood was surrounded by them.”

That closeness followed her through Virginia and into California, where the Grand Canyon became her first American revelation. “When you say America,” she says, “for me the Grand Canyon comes first.” But it was the desert that changed her. After 2020, as COVID, the war in Artsakh and the Beirut port explosion unfolded in succession, she was inside a large corporate news operation carrying grief that had no outlet.

“Three major events hit me really hard,” she says. “That’s why I was seeking more and more nature healing.” What she found was not what she expected. “From the outside the desert looks very much empty,” she says. “But the beauty of the desert is the hidden waterfalls.” She describes hiking an hour into desert heat and finding streams of water falling through rock and what happened to her when she did. “I felt like I’m meeting the divine for the first time in my life, as if teardrops were falling on me. While I was crying with joy, celebrating I’m still alive in this chaos, I’m also cleansing, transforming, healing,” she describes. She frames it plainly: “I don’t go to seek inspiration. I go to calm down. Nature has a reset button without you trying hard.”



But that realization came against the backdrop of exhaustion she could no longer ignore. Twenty years in mainstream news is an education in urgency. Breaking news as a format was aggressively introduced after 9/11 and the industry never slowed down. “The answer to ‘When do you need this?’ is always yesterday.”

She drove herself all the way to

empty. “I wish I knew better,” she says, “because I would have done much more trips to nature.” At some point, survival became about finding small exits inside the system. Her boss at the time was a devout Catholic. After the Beirut blast, she began asking for Fridays off, telling him the Lebanese community was holding vigils. “He always said yes. So every time I wanted to hike on a weekday, I went

to church.” The laughter settles into something more honest. “And in a way, that’s literally true. Nature became my church.”

That return to nature eventually deepened into something less symbolic and more physical in her artistic practice. Her “Back to Nature” work takes this further into the body itself. As an artist working on what she calls body politics, she describes feeling

compelled in certain natural spaces to remove her clothing and be physically present in water or earth. “I almost want to be in nature not as a human,” she says.

The impulse comes from having lived through too much human violence, wars in Lebanon, collective trauma and the weight of geopolitical grief that never fully lifts. “I’ve seen the horror. I almost want to be nature, not just with it.”

She references Ana Mendieta, the Cuban performance artist whose earth-body works explored disappearance and return. For Sarkissian, the practice is less about lineage than necessity. “What does it feel like to be part of nature again? We haven’t been part of it. We’ve been very far from it,” she says. The goal is not an image. It is a state. I tell her she speaks in a poetic way, that she describes things I have imagined through books but perhaps never allowed myself to fully feel. She does not deflect. She simply says next time you are in nature try to remember this conversation. See what happens.

‘She Loves Collective’ began, as many necessary things do, from a very simple frustration. It was around 2009 when Facebook was newly public and its algorithm was still intimate enough to surface genuine connections. Sarkissian had just completed her MFA at George Mason University and moved to Los Angeles, trying to recreate the density of the Armenian community she had known in Beirut. Through Facebook, through profile pictures, which she describes as carrying enormous social weight at the time, she found a woman named Adrineh. “We started communicating: Who are you, what do you do?”

What followed was a three-day exhibition at Ararat Glendale HMEM Boyscout Club, then more conversations, more women and a template borrowed from a D.C. collective called Floating Lab. Eventually, in February 2016, and in alignment with the political rupture of that American moment, came the first “She Loves Collective” art show: 45 international women artists in downtown Los Angeles over three days. “None of them knew they were artists,” she says. “They knew they had something. They had a voice. They wanted to voice something. ‘She Loves Collective’ became the platform. They were the artists, we were the platform.”



That logic continues today. “She Loves Collective” now has work at the Forest Lawn Museum in Los Angeles in an exhibition called Convergence, extending a lavash installation originally created for families and soldiers lost in the 2020 Artsakh war. It operates still on the same founding principle: the Armenian community runs on a patriarchal system even in Los Angeles, even on the West Coast.

“She Loves is for women to do something so they have a voice. We will shake how our community is organized,” she explains. This logic, that the platform exists only to carry voice, also runs through her broadcast career. When asked about her Emmy-winning work, she says: “I never worked toward an Emmy. I worked toward doing my best on a project and then something like that happens.”

That sentence, repeated twice in our conversation in different contexts, becomes the closest thing to a philosophy of practice she offers. She realizes aloud that it mirrors something she only recognized in hindsight: in her broadcast work, she was always allowing the protagonist to narrate their own story without imposing a shape on it.

Toward the end of our conversation she talks about time, how it is the one thing you cannot buy on the stock market and how we lose it every day without what she calls “lezu ktnei,” an Armenian phrase she uses for the work of genuine contact, of reaching across. The tongue is flexible, she says. That is literally what the word means.

You have to be like a tongue. She is not finished. She says this clearly: “I still have a lot of places to arrive.”

When I tell her how rare it is to have this kind of conversation in Los Angeles, one that does not stay on the surface, she listens without deflecting. She simply says L.A. is a particular kind of place. We both know what

she means. The camera had been too close at the start. By the end, it does not seem close enough. Before we say goodbye, I ask her what she hopes people take from her work, from the broadcast design, the collective and the performance practice. She does not hesitate.

“We are the platform. You do the voice. I do not alter it.”



LIVE, WORK, AND BELONG

11+1 BY TUMO IN DILIJAN

11+1
by TUMO

in



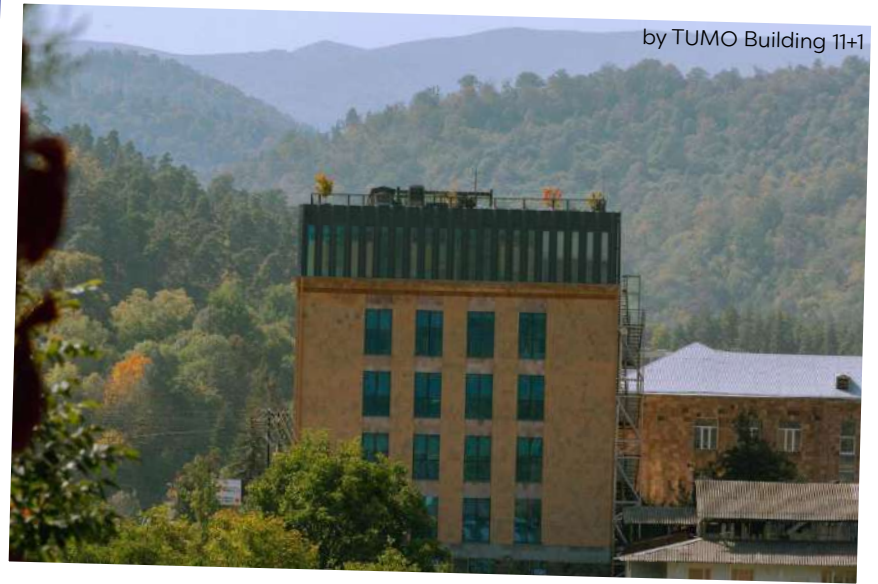
**MATHEW
ZEIN**

EDITOR IN CHIEF

LIVE, WORK, AND BELONG 1+1 BY TUMO IN DILIJAN

Working remotely from the mountains is a target for many digital nomads. Armenia has plenty of them, [more beautiful than anything you've seen elsewhere](#). The main problem is finding a community in some of the Armenian mountains, someone to talk to other than waiters in restaurants and cafés.

Dilijan found its way around this problem through TUMO, the free after-school program that teaches technology and design to teenagers, the concept that [changed what a generation of Armenian teens thought they were allowed to become](#). What almost nobody outside the town knows is that the Dilijan building also takes guests, and that you can book a bed in it. It's called 1+1 by TUMO.



The accommodation occupies the upper floors of the TUMO Dilijan building, the same building whose lower floors run TUMO education programs, and this is one of the reasons 1+1 by TUMO, on Myasnikyan Street in the middle of Dilijan, is a [more interesting building than regular co-livings](#).



Inside the Building

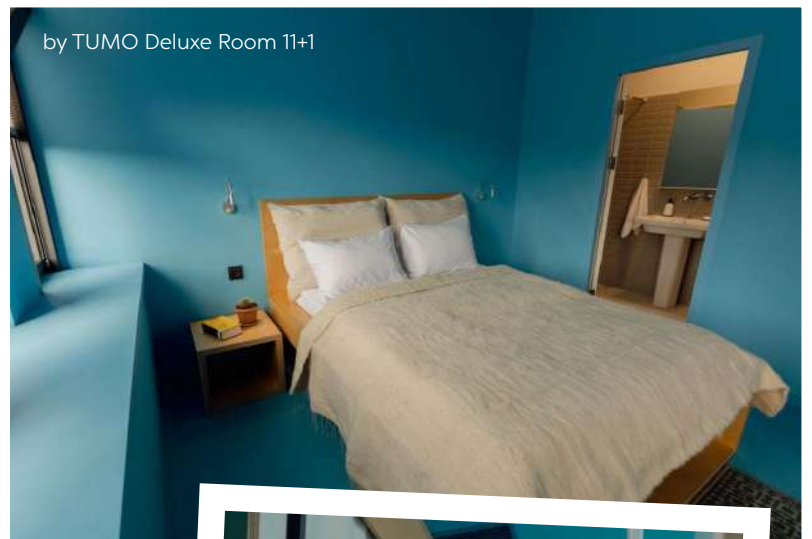
The rooms are what you would expect from TUMO, from an organisation that spends its working life designing spaces for teenagers to learn in. They are **modern, clean-lined, contemporary in their colours**, and built around how a person actually uses a small space.

There are co-living rooms, standard rooms, and deluxe rooms. You can see this one as a family room for nomads traveling with kids. In the co-living rooms where I stayed for a few nights, each bed has its own light, socket, shelf, storage beneath, a privacy curtain, a small foldable table fixed to the wall, and Wi-Fi. There is also a large shared kitchen that is fully equipped for the guests.

Then you walk into the coworking area and find **antique Armenian furniture sitting among them**, old tables and bedside cabinets that belong to another century entirely. I was told the mix comes from TUMO's CEO, who has a particular love for these pieces and wanted them in the building. The same instinct shows up in the family room, where I noticed a merino wool blanket, another traditional Armenian object dropped into a modern room.



by TUMO - coworking space 11+1



by TUMO Deluxe Room 11+1



by TUMO Co-Living 11+1

by TUMO - art work at the coworking space 11+1



by TUMO - antique furniture in the coworking space 11+1



Guests also get access to the library, study spaces and common areas downstairs. And there is the roof, which is the part everyone writes about, [a terrace with a view of Dilijan](#) that runs all the way around the town and up into the forest.

I spent a few days there last week, and the pattern of those days is the best description of the place I can give. I worked from the coworking space in the mornings, took the laptop to the rooftop when the light was good, and ended up in the kitchen most evenings with the other remote workers who were staying there, cooking, swapping plates and talking about where each of us had been. That is not something you can arrange in advance; [it either happens in a building or it doesn't](#). A mention is owed here to the building manager, who met me with a smile on the first day and made sure the entire stay was easy.

Reception runs from midday to nine in the evening, with security around the clock and key collection after hours. Check-in is from two, check-out at twelve. Breakfast is not included, which is what the kitchen is for. The bus station is within walking distance, the town centre is the street outside, and the national park starts where the streets end.



Why the Mix Matters

Dilijan has never lacked places to sleep. Guesthouses are plentiful, and many are lovely. What the town has lacked is somewhere you can do all three of the things a remote worker actually needs to do in the same day: sleep properly, work properly, and be around other people while doing it. **11+1 by TUMO offers that.**

Coworking spaces are sold on desks, but **what people are**

really buying is the incidental company; someone at the next table, a conversation over the kettle, the low background hum that makes a working day enjoyable because you know you're not the only one still working after midnight.

It is worth asking why an education organisation is in the hospitality business at all. The answer is that it isn't, not really. **The co-living and the**

coworking exist to fund the school downstairs. Booking a bed contributes to tuition-free technology and design education for students aged twelve to eighteen from Dilijan and the surrounding communities.

Live, work, and belong is a lot to ask of one building. This one comes closer than anywhere else in Dilijan, and it pays for a school while it does it.





City of Smile Charitable Foundation



Helping Children and Young Adults on their Journey
of Conquering Cancer in Armenia

Barev it means hello!



LEARN MORE

● ● ●
www.cityofsmile.org

*you can
scan here!*



HANDEL, QUINCY, AND THE DUDUK

A GRAMMY-WINNING ALBUM FINDS ITS STAGE IN YEREVAN



**MATHEW
ZEIN**

EDITOR IN CHIEF



HANDEL, QUINCY, AND THE DUDUK A GRAMMY-WINNING ALBUM FINDS ITS STAGE IN YEREVAN

In 1992, some of the biggest names in American music walked into a studio in Los Angeles and did something that should not have worked. They took Handel's Messiah, the most performed choral work in the Western canon, and rebuilt it in the languages of Black American music: spirituals, blues, ragtime, big band, jazz, R&B and hip hop. The result, Handel's Messiah: A Soulful Celebration, won the Grammy for Best Contemporary Soul Gospel Album and a Dove Award, and in 1993 its artists were collectively nominated for an NAACP Image Award.

And then it mostly sat on shelves because of a practical problem that follows albums like this one. Assembling that many stars in one room was a miracle of studio scheduling; assembling them on a stage, in order, for one night, has proved close to impossible. Three decades on, a record that millions have heard has almost never been performed live as a complete work. That is the gap a group of Armenian musicians has decided to step into.

Handel Messiah



What Is Actually Happening

Handel Reimagined: An Armenian Soul is being produced by two cultural associations, Delta Culture Armenia and Sarer, in partnership with the Armenian National Music Academy Foundation. It is framed as a tribute to Quincy Jones, who executive produced the 1992 album and conducted its all-star Hallelujah chorus.



The line-up is Armenian and deliberately cross-genre. Gor Sujyan takes the lead vocal, joined by the cellist Artyom Manukyan, the keyboard player Khachik Sahakyan, the saxophonist David Melkonyan, and the Yerevan State Chamber Choir. The arrangements bring traditional Armenian wind and percussion instruments into the choral writing.

Why Armenia Is the Right Place for This

The 1992 album took a piece written by a German composer working in England, built from English-language scripture, and ran it through the entire musical history of a people who had been brought to America in chains. It was proof that a masterpiece belongs to whoever can make it live again.

Armenia is a country whose musical identity was assembled by a priest walking between villages writing down what farmers sang, and whose most recognisable instrument, the duduk, produces a sound that most listeners describe in emotional terms before they describe it in musical ones. Put a duduk inside the Hallelujah chorus and you are doing to Handel exactly what Los Angeles did in 1992, in a different language.



Irina Igitkhanyan

Founder and President at
Delta Culture Association

True to my love of bridges, I aspire to build one more bridge between centuries, different music cultures and genres, and between nations. On one hand, it's tempting and captivating to underline once again the universal, timeless and indiscriminate nature of the pieces created by the great masters. On the other hand, I am as always driven by the desire to show that Armenia, its people and culture were never detached from world civilization."

There is one instrument in that line-up worth thinking about in advance, because of where it could take the piece. The duduk is made of apricot wood and is usually played in pairs, one instrument carrying the melody while a second holds a single unbroken drone beneath it. That drone is the thing to watch.

Handel's world had its own version of it, a continuous bass line running under everything, so the two traditions already agree on something fundamental: that a melody needs ground to stand on. What differs is the colour. A duduk register is closer to a human voice at its lowest and most honest, which is why film composers reach for it whenever a scene needs expressing pain without words.

That suggests where it belongs in this work, and it is not the Hallelujah chorus. Messiah spends much of its second part in darkness, on the texts about sorrow and rejection, and those are the passages where an Armenian instrument could do something no arrangement has done before: sing the oldest music of suffering in the voice of a people who have their own long acquaintance with it. The 1992 album made that move once

already, filtering the same passages through the blues. A duduk would be the second time it has happened, in a different language, and I would go a long way to hear it.

There is also a straightforward pleasure in the collision. Handel wrote for a Dublin audience in 1742 and was, by the standards of his day, a commercial composer who knew how to fill a room. The 1992 version understood that. A Yerevan version with a chamber choir, a jazz cellist, a saxophone and a dhol has every chance of understanding it too.



The Thing Worth Turning Up For

Most concerts are a performance of something that has been performed before but this one is closer to an excavation. The music exists, the arrangements exist, and hundreds of thousands of people have listened to them through speakers; what almost nobody has done is hear them in a room, from people breathing in the same air.

A Soulful Celebration



When it works, Yerevan will have given a thirty-four-year-old recording its first proper life, and given Armenian musicians a place in a lineage that runs from Dublin in 1742 to Los Angeles in 1992. That is a strange and rather wonderful thing for a small country to add to its list.

If Quincy Jones's spirit were sitting in the hall the night of the performance, he'd see that his courage is contagious and inspirational. Just like he gathered exceptionally talented musicians of his era, Armenia has turned to the best in their field to bring this incredible cultural adventure to life.

LIFE FOR ARMENIA

THE BOOK I DIDN'T KNOW I WAS WRITING



**MARY
MAMYAN**

AUTHOR OF "A DIARY OF A SHOP ASSISTANT"



LIFE FOR ARMENIA THE BOOK I DIDN'T KNOW I WAS WRITING

The family was going back to Armenia in a fancy GAZ 3110 Volga¹. That is probably where this story really begins. I was 5 years old, and my parents had decided that, after a few years in Russia, it was time for us to grow up and go to school in Armenia. My two younger sisters were born there. I was born in Noyemberyan, in northeastern Armenia. So we came back.

My parents, as typical Armenians working abroad, managed to earn some money and wanted to invest it in something stable. The 1990s in Armenia were not exactly famous for stability, but my father had and still has his personal philosophy he calls միջինի լավը: roughly, “the good of the average.” Not the most ambitious option. Not the worst one. Something solid. Something that works long term. That “something” became a shop.



Our Shop

It stood at the Geghamej² (գեղամեջ) roundabout, on the road between Armenia and Georgia. At the time, it was the only stone-built shop in the area. My parents would run it for about twenty-five years.

I, meanwhile, went off to build a completely different life. Bachelor's degree in Journalism. Master's degree in Political Science. Work as a journalist. Poland. Project management. Non-formal education. Youth work. Chile. NGOs. International projects.

Then, years later, I came back to Noyemberyan. Not exactly the most predictable career move. I had a decent CV. I had job offers in Yerevan. But I reached a point where I felt I needed to stop. I kept thinking: if I take another job in Yerevan, what will actually change? But if I stay in a community like Noyemberyan and invest whatever I have, my time, knowledge, energy, maybe that can make some difference.

So I stayed. I registered an NGO. I started working with young people in the community. But what I also did is that I started going to my parents' shop to help them a bit. The shop was a completely different universe for me. And if you've ever worked in customer service, you know why. You never know who is going to walk through the door. You don't know what they're going to ask. You don't know what mood they're going to be in. And you definitely don't know the real aim of entering the shop. And somewhere between one customer and the next, I had a strange realization: I am from Noyemberyan, but I don't actually know Noyemberantsi (նոյեմբերյանցի)³ people that well.

I knew the town. I knew the dialect. I knew where people lived. But I didn't necessarily know the logic behind some of the things people said and did. I felt a little like a Peace Corps volunteer who had learned the local language but still hadn't quite figured out the locals. Then one day, something funny happened at the shop. I wrote about it on Facebook.

And because apparently I thought the situation was obviously ironic, I signed it: "From the diary of a shop assistant."



Տեղի Տանջան
հեղինակ և
գլխավոր հերոս



Սեֆ Դակոբյան
նկարապարզող

Who would call me a shop assistant, right? But I kept going back to the shop. And one story came after another. One post became two. Two became people asking when the next one was coming. And then people even started discussing them. They tried to figure out whether two customers in different stories knew each other. They recognized certain behaviors. They compared dialect words. They shared their own shop stories. The Facebook posts had somehow turned into a little meeting place. And surprisingly, most of the people waiting for the next story weren't even from Noyemberyan.

But was there a moment when you thought, okay, these are no longer just Facebook posts? Honestly? When people who had absolutely no connection to Noyemberyan started waiting for the next story. I remember thinking: Wow. This is becoming something bigger than I intended. And then another thought appeared. Honestly? I had always wanted to be a writer. For years I had imagined myself writing a novel. And suddenly I thought: Maybe this is THE BOOK that I was supposed to start with. With one sure nuance - I didn't want to change the dialect.

And if this was going to become a book, did you ever think about changing the language so more people could understand it? I didn't want to "translate" the stories, because I clearly know that the dialect isn't just a different vocabulary. It showcases the mindset, the rhythm, the culture and even a very specific kind of humor. Besides, the dialect gives it the charm, doesn't it?

On the other hand, I was realizing that presenting a book purely in a not-so-popular dialect isn't something very common or an easy thing to offer to the audience. But never mind. I never really worried that people outside Noyemberyan wouldn't understand it. Quite the opposite – they kept proving me wrong in the best possible way.

And then Seda entered the story. How did you imagine the illustrations at the beginning? I initially imagined the book with some beautiful illustrations alongside the stories. And Seda Hakobyan came into the project through friends when I was in search of an illustrator. She is Armenian, currently based in Spain for many years, has roots in Syunik, has never been to Noyemberyan and doesn't know the dialect.



I basically asked her - read the stories, if any image comes to your mind, draw it, if not, simply skip it. That was it. But what she created was outstanding. She didn't really illustrate some pages. She illustrated the story itself. She created the main character. She brought the customers to life. She turned conversations into comic scenes. And somewhere along the way, I became a character too. The first time I saw it, I remember thinking: Oh my Gosh. It's based on me.

I genuinely didn't see that coming. The character eventually became part of the identity of the entire project; the cover, the visual language, the brand. And in some stories, the illustrations became so complete that we actually removed parts of the text because the comic was already telling the story.

But why make it a physical book? Because I am a book lover. And I have my own criteria. I wanted a book that I would actually see in a bookstore and would get for me. And, honestly, I adore the smell of a real book.

We launched the digital version before the printed one, but the physical book was what I and many of the readers were truly waiting for. There is something magical and satisfying about holding in your hands a book that started with you standing behind your parents' counter. And what is also worth mentioning about the book publishing is that somehow we managed to publish a book from the northwest Noyemberyan in southwest Kapan. We had a long journey in search of a publishing house and here it's a, a unique and customer orientated, community based publishing house in the heart of Syunik called Metakse Hnchyun.

At some point, did you realize the readers were taking something different from the book than you had originally imagined? Then the readers started doing something I hadn't planned either. They started finding themselves in the book. Some had worked in shops and immediately recognized the feeling. Some told me: "You made me go back to my childhood."



Քերճ է՛մ, բայց կարճ չէ՛մ ճա՛մ: Զնդկասրան
էլ գնացի, ճնացի, շար լավն էր. ուղղակի
շար խիտ էր: Պրանից հեքո էլ գնացի
Ոստասրան, էն Տի՛նն էլ Ուկրաինա ա, բայց
դե՛ ի՛նչ անե՛մ, կարճ չէ՛մ ճա՛մ:
Բայց դե՛. ճենակությունն էլ ա գեշ...



Someone from Noyemberyan who now lives elsewhere told me that reading the book brought back the warmth of home – that it helped them կարոտս առնել⁴, that particular feeling of easing the longing for the place you've left. And suddenly, the book was no longer only about a shop. Or even about Noyemberyan.



It was about home. Not necessarily a place on a map. Home can be your grandmother's house. A smell. A song. Someone's voice. A particular word that nobody else uses quite the same way. Sometimes one sentence is enough to take you back. And still the book is so minimalistic. What I mean is that I actually left a lot out. No descriptions or explanations. That was intentional.

Noyemberyan is a small community. If I described every person, every detail and every situation, people would immediately know who I was talking about. I didn't want to expose people just to make the stories more enriched. And as a journalist, I had another instinct: record what happened but don't tell the reader what to think about it. So I kept the scenes as they happened. No unnecessary descriptions. No authorial opinion. Just the scene.

And then I left some space for readers. When I don't tell you everything, you start doing the work yourself. You imagine the shop. You imagine the people. You remember someone who talks exactly like that. You remember something your grandmother once said. You remember working in a shop yourself. You remember being a child. You remember home.

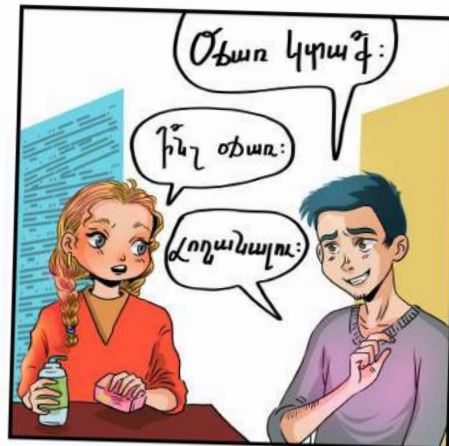


That is why I sometimes say that the stories in the book are only 10%. The other 90% belongs to the reader. The reader fills the gaps. The reader adds their memories. The reader creates the parts that I deliberately didn't write. So at some point, the reader becomes a co-author.

But what did other people think about you working at a shop back then? Well, not everyone understood it. I got criticized quite a lot. Sometimes by people who knew me, sometimes

simply by people who couldn't understand why, with my background and experience, I had come back to Noyemberyan to stand behind a shop counter.

You came back here to sell? To be a shop assistant? What's your plan? There was this idea that I had somehow gone backwards. I had studied, worked abroad, built a career, worked in international projects, and now I was selling tomatoes. I didn't really feel the need to explain myself. I knew why I was there. And honestly, that was enough. Somewhere inside, I knew I was supposed to stay. Not forever. Just for that particular period of my life.



And later, I had the same kind of feeling again: Okay, now it's time to move. And that was right too. Maybe that's the part we don't always understand when we look at

someone's life from the outside. Sometimes staying is the right decision. Sometimes leaving is. And from the outside, both can look completely irrational.

And who would have imagined that selling tomatoes for a while would eventually make me the author of a book? The thing some people saw as me taking a step backwards turned out to be one of the things that moved me forward. I still find that quite magical. And maybe that is why the book keeps travelling further than I expected.

From a small shop in Noyemberyan to readers who have never been there. From a local dialect to people living abroad. From my parents' customers to someone's childhood. From a Facebook joke to a physical book. I didn't start with a grand plan to preserve cultural heritage. I didn't sit down and decide to write a book about roots. I just went to my parents' shop and wrote down whatever caught my attention.

It brought together versions of me that had been living separately for years: the girl from Noyemberyan, the journalist, the traveller, the youth worker, the person who always wanted to write, and the woman who somehow ended up calling herself a shop assistant. So no, I don't think I "found my roots." I had never lost them. I simply came back and finally looked at them from a different distance. And in the end, this book became my own peace treaty; with my city, my roots, my past, and with the different parts of myself that had been shaped along the way.

¹ The GAZ-3110 Volga is a 4-door passenger sedan manufactured by the Russian Gorky Automobile Plant (GAZ) between 1996 and 2004.

² Գեղամեջ – a dialect word that means the center of a village. Though Noyemberyan is a town, locals still call the center Geghamej – village center.

³ Noyemberyantsi (նոյեմբերյանցի) – people from Noyemberyan.

⁴ Կարոտս առնել – it eased my longing for home.



TECH EVENTS



with

ARTAK N. G.



TECH BLOGGER

OCT 1

How AI changes legal work



OCT 1

Claude use cases (webinar, in Armenian)



OCT 1

Frontier Forum (in English)



OCT 1

AI broke production (webinar)



OCT 2

Media and AI Youth Hackathon (in Armenian)



OCT
2-5

Engineering week (in English)



OCT 2

Show me the money. Great product



OCT 3

Secrets of creating successful company in AI era



OCT
3-4

FPV 5 drone competition (in Armenian)



OCT
3-4

Green Tech academy hackathon



OCT 5

Armenia UK business forum (in English)

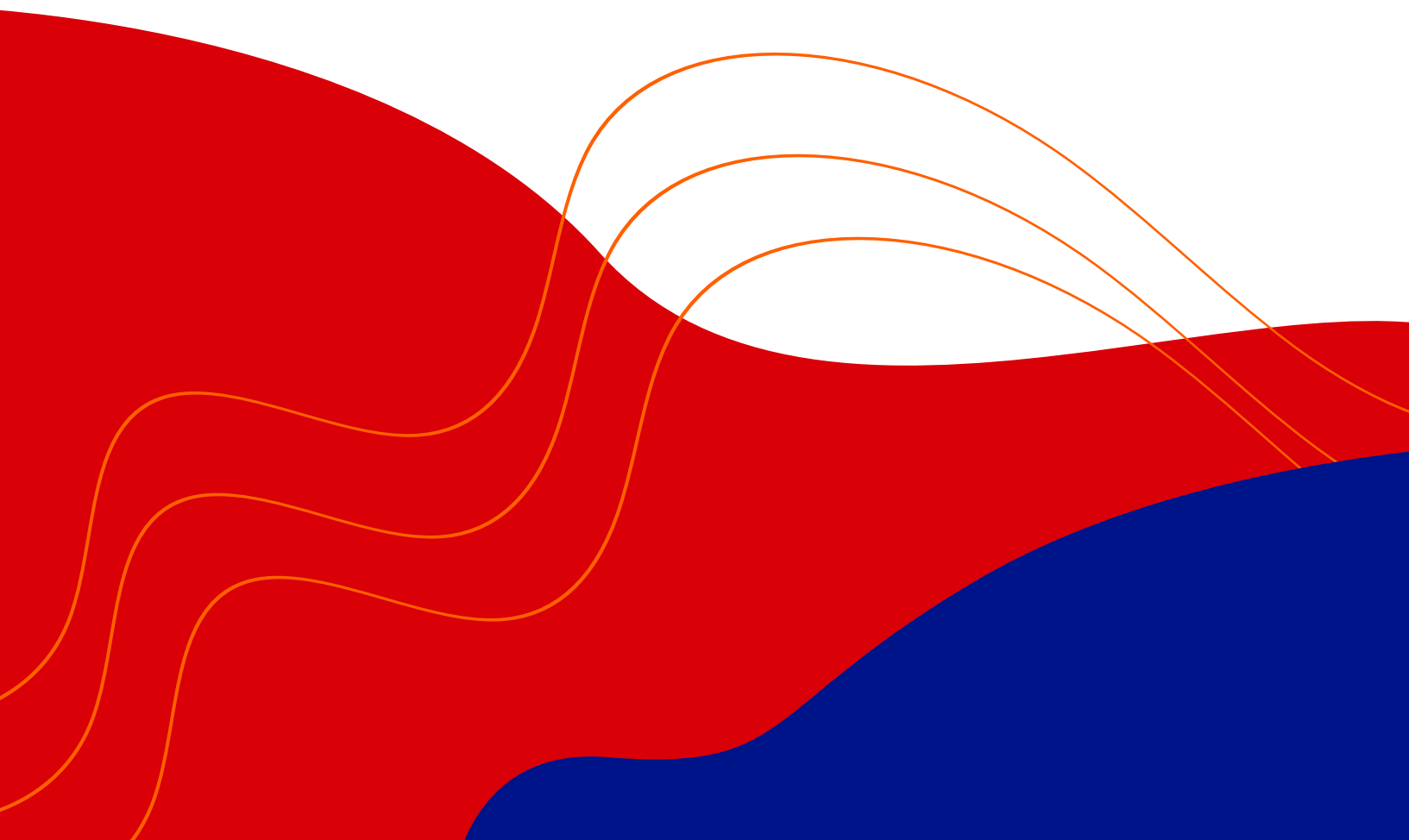


OCT 7

FinTeched meetup



OCT 7	AI tools for students	
OCT 8	Julia Yerevan October meetup	
OCT 10	Human x AI (in English)	
OCT 10	ML school meetup	
OCT 12	AI and future of the economy	
OCT 15-16	6: Game Dev Festival (in English)	



CREDITS AND SPECIAL THANKS



TOURISM COMMITTEE
MINISTRY OF ECONOMY OF
THE REPUBLIC OF ARMENIA

ArmENiA
The Hidden
Track



SPECIAL THANKS TO THE TOURISM
COMMITTEE AT THE MINISTRY OF
ECONOMY OF THE REPUBLIC OF ARMENIA
FOR BEING COLLABORATIVE AND
PROVIDING THE DIGITAL MEDIA (PHOTOS AND
VIDEOS) TO USE IN THE MAGAZINE

www.armenia.travel





ARMEN
ABELYAN



EKATERINA
BREDIKHINA



ANOUSH
ISKANDARYAN



SOPHIE
CLAUSEL



A HAYK
TER-TACHATYAN



DAVIT
MURADYAN



NICHOLAS
CERVANTES



JOHN
KAY



CHRISTINE
KHACHIKYAN



NELLY ACHKHEN
SARKISSIAN



MARY
MAMYAN



TVIN
ZEYTOUNIAN

CONTRIBUTORS

SEPTEMBER 2026



LIFE IN ARMENIA

FOR DIGITAL NOMAD FAMILIES

SEPT, 30TH 2026 | NO. 40 | LIFE IN ARMENIA

The information contained in this magazine is for general informational purposes only. Authors, contributors, and publishers make no representation or warranties of any kind, express or implied, about the completeness, accuracy, reliability, suitability, or availability concerning the magazine or the information, products, services, or related graphics contained in the magazine for any purpose. Any reliance you place on such information is strictly at your own risk. No part of this magazine may be commercially reproduced or used without the publisher's written consent.

