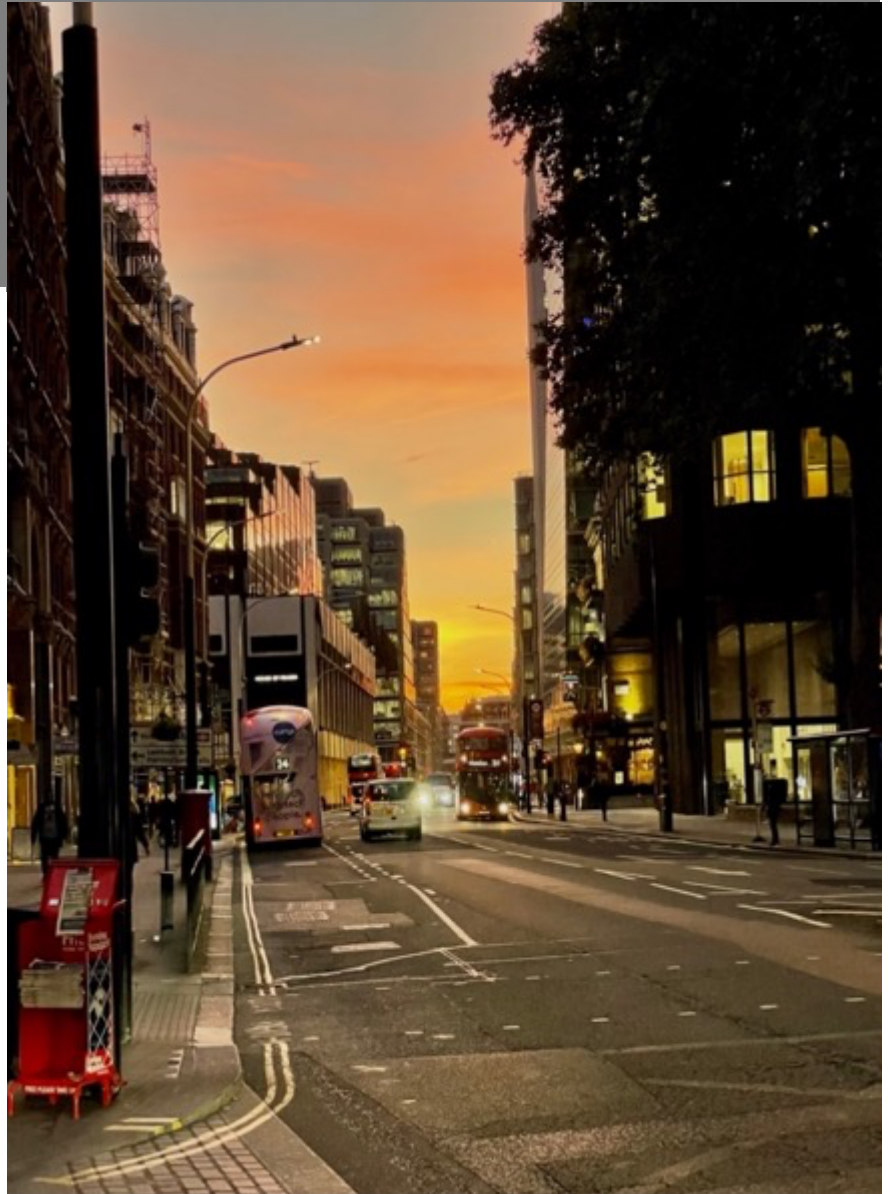
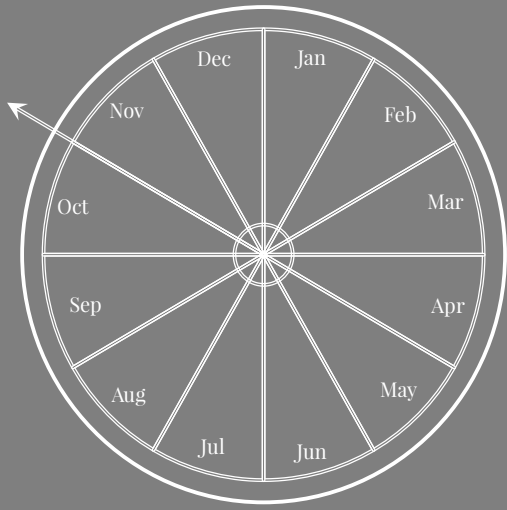


# B



## Volume 26: October 2021



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# October 2021

“London is back” declared a well-known journalist on Twitter, a remark on the now-heaving English capital’s arteries and establishments. In many ways, the city is as it was before – replete with tourists, workers, businessmen and society figures. This takes a little getting used to but after a few weeks, one grows numb to it.

In fact, the return of vehicle and human congestion in the city has had many longing for the artificial urban desert of lockdown, when entire boulevards had barely a soul on them, only supermarkets were open and the sound of vehicles was so faint and distant, you forgot they existed.

However, this fantasy is as unsustainable as social distancing. The fact all roads led to Rome was not an accident. Cities, so often considered to be at threat in a post-pandemic world, are inevitable. Human beings congregate and they yearn for choice and opportunity. But it’s also fair to argue that this ever increasing congregation is equally unsustainable, as many a dystopian futuristic thriller has tried to warn us. When overpopulated and congested, these stories tell us that cities lose their humanity and soul, becoming harsh and unwelcoming places with forbiddingly

tall, ugly structures and a zombified population who are silently tortured by increasing aberrancy of the experience. Some dramatic licence, certainly, but it is remarkable how quickly a place loses its lustre and, yes, even its luxury when it is weighed down with an ever enlarging mass of humanity. It was on this theme that recent discussions on store queues at luxury boutiques were centred.

The aim of these queues is clearly to bring attention to the store and the brand. Goyard started doing this years ago, claiming that their store on Mount Street was limited in size and couldn’t serve customers properly above a certain capacity. This is rather disingenuous as many who find themselves inside the store after a wait out in the London elements see that there is plenty of room and enough idle staff and conclude that the main impact of rationing access to the store is a visual pretension of the brand’s self-image.

However, as brands were warned many times, queuing only works if you’re one of the few doing it and it has the rather unsavoury effect of providing a transection of who your real clients are, and the sheer volume of them, which is a direct challenge to the make-believe of marketing and social media.



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# AGELESS

# LUXURY

*“The gods have been good to you. But what the gods give they quickly take away. You have only a few years in which to live really, perfectly, and fully. When your youth goes, your beauty will go with it, and then you will suddenly discover that there are no triumphs left for you...”*

These are the words from the remarkable mind of the youth-besotted Irish playwright and poet, Oscar Wilde. Wilde was an ageist. He didn't hate people because they were old but he only really liked people who were young. To his mind, the “only thing worth having” was youth, and to him poor young boys had riches that wealthy older men could only dream of.

Wilde's viewpoint may seem fanciful and strongly redolent of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century aesthetes' philosophies on beauty, art and youth – all of which met a harsh end in 1914 – but this is an evergreen issue which plagues our modern globalist society in the same way that it dogged that of 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe. The worship of youth and the hatred of age can be understood as a fear of death, a kind of gerontophobia; those that are nearest to the darkness tend to be the most eager to reach out for the light.

It can be argued that the philosophy of remaining relevant

is to remain young. This is certainly a position that many luxury brands choose to take, particularly those in fashion. The obvious example of this is the use of very young models in their late teens and early twenties – despite the fact that most of the clothing they wear in photoshoots and on the catwalks will be eyed up by women at least twice their age.

The major problem with this is that it necessarily ties value not to beauty but to age; real beauty is ageless. Youth is a type of beauty but it isn't the only type. The issue with focusing on youth isn't really just about the fact that your target audience is in an entirely different demographic, it's more about the fact that its broader message conveys that your beauty is redundant after a certain age.

This isn't all about being nice, it's about being commercially rational. We are all living longer, with continually improving healthcare, medicines and treatments for long term diseases. Wealthier luxury consumers are also far more likely to be health conscious than non-luxury consumers, with fitness regimes, careful diets and restrictions on harmful exposures. Not only are we existing for more years than ever before, some are looking better as they age than at almost any other time in history. This makes the focus on early adulthood even more puzzling, as it represents an ever

“...‘being old’ is no longer associated with Ancient Greek notions of wisdom or great social value. In modern culture, age is more associated with frailty, dependency & loss of vitality.”

diminishing phase of our lives. In short, we are elongating our middle-age and older-age, but the duration of the physical impact on our bodies of the loss of youth remains the same.

In truth, this worship of youth and its strange contrast with reality is more prevalent within womenswear. Theories on this center on fertility, explaining that the focus on being younger, or appearing younger, is tied up with biological conditions of the female body. Broader than this is the commonly cited, Wildean desire that everyone wants to be young again, so why would they wear a brand that is associated with being old?

For the trouble with “being old” is that it is no longer associated with Ancient Greek notions of wisdom or great social value. In modern culture, age is more associated with frailty, dependency & loss of vitality. Respect for age or for older people feels unpopular in this age, despite the fact that it happens to us all and that the older demographic is an increasingly larger cohort. And the older the oldest group gets, the less chance there is of the youngest identifying with them, or relating to them.

Focusing on youth is easy, and somewhat lazy. It means you don’t really have to think about value beyond age. With

older people, value is more diverse and thought provoking. We think about elegance, experience and resilience. The latest campaign from Raffles Hotels & Resorts, “#RafflesRoyalty” is an excellent example of this. Although the subject of aristocracy and royalty as inspirational figures may not be appealing to all, it cuts across generations. Whereas many other luxury brand campaigns are at pains to display their ideal target archetype as an attractive individual in their first flush of adulthood, Raffles mixes dowagers with debutantes which forces a focus away from the youth=beauty axis.

Another example is Patek Philippe, whose “You never actually own...” advertising campaign is one of the longest running and most successful, and which a few years ago pivoted to include three generations of family, not just two – proving that luxury is compatible with silver hair and crow’s feet.

The reason why these seem to work is that they don’t relegate age to a disability, and they don’t detach the old from the young as if they were two incompatible species. Instead, they show the process and results of a life well lived, a life that we all aspire to. For perpetually aspiring to something which we can never have returned to us is a dangerous daydream for our wellbeing.

# Sector updates



*Image: Rolls-Royce*

Luxury carmaker **Rolls-Royce** makes some of the biggest, heaviest and thirstiest cars on the road. They are synonymous with luxury, and many see them as the ultimate symbol of automotive indulgence. It therefore surprised many observers when, at the beginning of this month, they announced that by 2030, the entire Rolls-Royce range will be exclusively electric. Its first fully electric powered car, named 'Spectre', won't be on the market till 2023 but the CEO said that seven years later will see the end of the combustion engine for the marque. What is most interesting to Barton about this announcement is that parent company BMW has made no such commitment for itself, only promising that 50% of its vehicle production will be electric vehicles by 2030. Another sign that the demand from wealthier individuals for electric vehicles continues to outpace that of other road users.

**Range Rover**, the OG luxury SUV marque, announced its new 2022 full size vehicle this month, presenting a new design which, though a familiar shape, incorporates details that are quite different to previous incarnations. Simplicity has been embraced with this model, and this minimalist theme – which Barton can't help but associate with Tesla's alarmingly uncluttered aesthetic – has been presented alongside the brand's shift towards new drivetrains with mild-hybrid and plug-in hybrid options offered when launched in spring next year, with an all-electric version – arguably long overdue for the brand – arriving in 2024. Though Range Rovers have come to be associated with urban drivers who often ride alone, it is offering a seven-seat option (previously only available with the Land Rover Discovery) for those with larger broods.



*Image: Land Rover*



*Image: Belmond*

A few years ago, Barton recalls that **Belmond** produced a brand video called "Welcome to The Wonderful World of Belmond" that celebrated its heritage properties and journeys with a cinematic flair which was impossible not to associate with the irreverent style of film director Wes Anderson, with clear nods to the attractive eccentricity of a palace hotel seen in *The Grand Budapest Hotel*. Now, this homage has come full circle and it is the film director's turn to play at Belmond's game. Anderson was invited by Belmond to reimagine an entire train carriage 'Cygnus' which is part of the brand's British Pullman train. In addition to providing his unmistakable touch to the look and feel of the interior, incorporating swathes of art deco motifs (and a bright pink ceiling), he has also elevated the luxury of the experience by incorporating two private coupes, which seat up to four guests. Could this be the first of many fruitful collaborations between cinematic artists and the brand?