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LISA FRIEDMAN BLOCH



JOHN BENDHEIM

Imagine a day without kindness. No one holds the door. A neighbor walks past without a greeting. Even the UPS truck, loaded with holiday gifts, rolls right by your house. Nothing dramatic has gone wrong, and yet the day feels cold and disconnected.

That's the quiet truth about kindness: It lifts us up and holds our days together like a warm embrace. It's why we chose it as the theme of this 2026 holiday issue of BEVERLY HILLS STYLE® magazine.

No one embodies that idea better than Francois Reihani, the imaginative founder and CEO of La La Land Café. Just seven years ago, he built his entire business plan around kindness and the power of caring connections. In our cover story, discover his extraordinary journey from a "lost" teenager at Beverly Hills High School to creator of an innovative café brand that has exploded onto the national scene.

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Kindness can also shine through in the little things we do for others and for ourselves during this festive season. "The Sweets of South Beverly" rounds up the latest and greatest pastry shops and the decadent holiday creations perfect for anyone on your list. Share some treats with loved ones during a special movie night this season. Our annual Holiday Film Guide provides plenty of crowd-pleasing suggestions.

The holidays are also the time of year when we thank you for your own kindness, shown by your support of our weekly newspaper, our magazine publications and our online engagement. To our subscribers, our cherished global, national, and local advertisers, and our loyal readers: We could not do this without you.

From John and me, and from all of us in the Courier family, we wish you a wonderful season of good health and happy blessings, and a new year filled with kindness. Hold the door, say hello, smile to a stranger and pass it on.



LISA FRIEDMAN BLOCH, PUBLISHER AND WRITER

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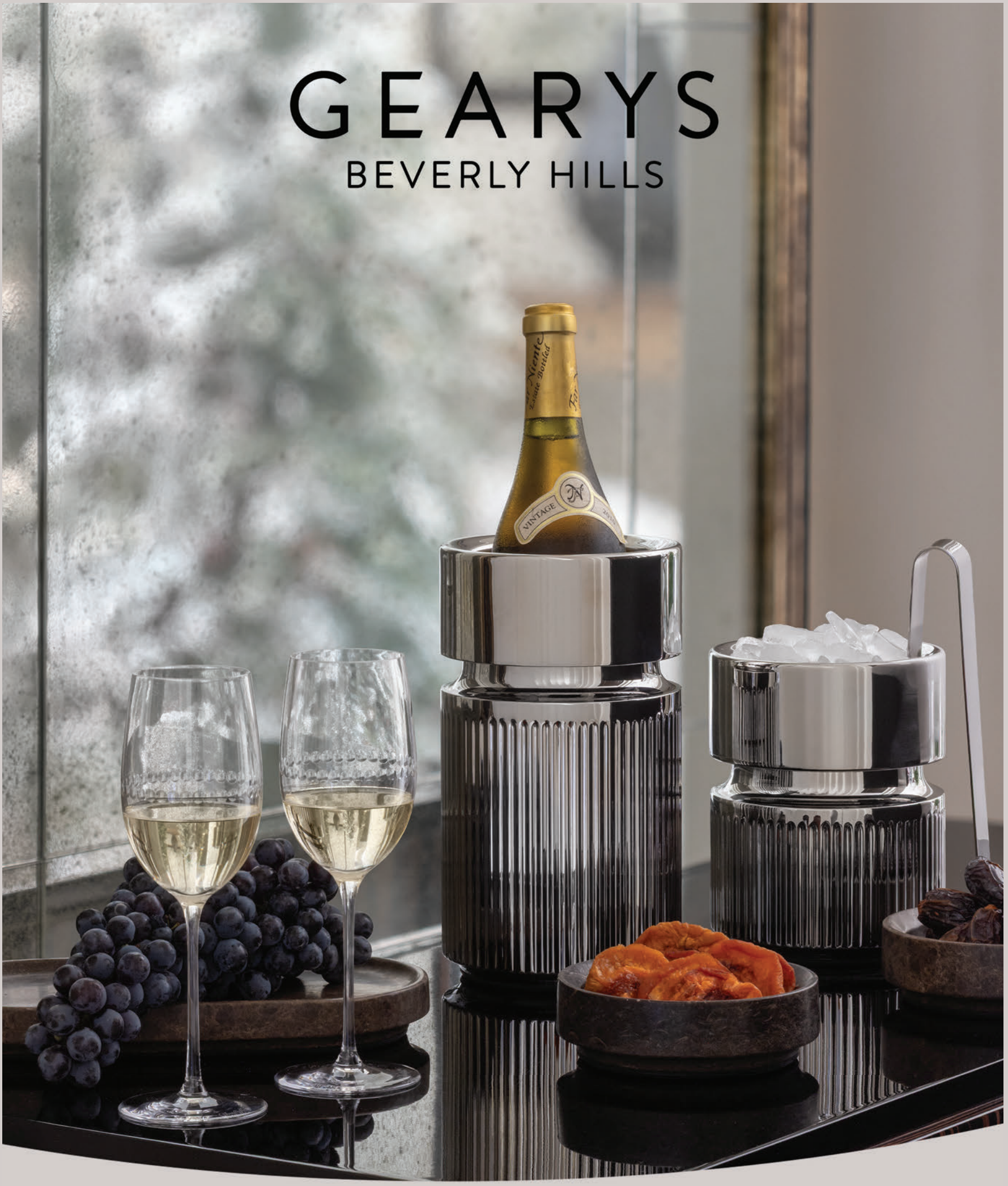

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What's New on Rodeo Drive ... and What's Coming Soon

BY CAROLE DIXON



TOP: VIEW OF RODEO DRIVE
PHOTO BY BRICA WILCOX, COURTESY OF RODEO DRIVE COMMITTEE
BOTTOM: RODEO DRIVE HISTORICAL IMAGE
PHOTO COURTESY BEVERLY HILLS PRESERVATION SOCIETY

World-renowned developers and celebrated retail brands are banking on a return to shopping IRL (in real life) and Rodeo Drive is a prime example. Over-the-top designs, art, hidden rooftop terraces and one-of-a-kind experiences and product launches are commonplace.

A stroll down Rodeo Drive now involves more than new Balenciaga boots or Fendi Baguette bag. The actual store design and amenities are creating a new forum for comprehensive luxury.

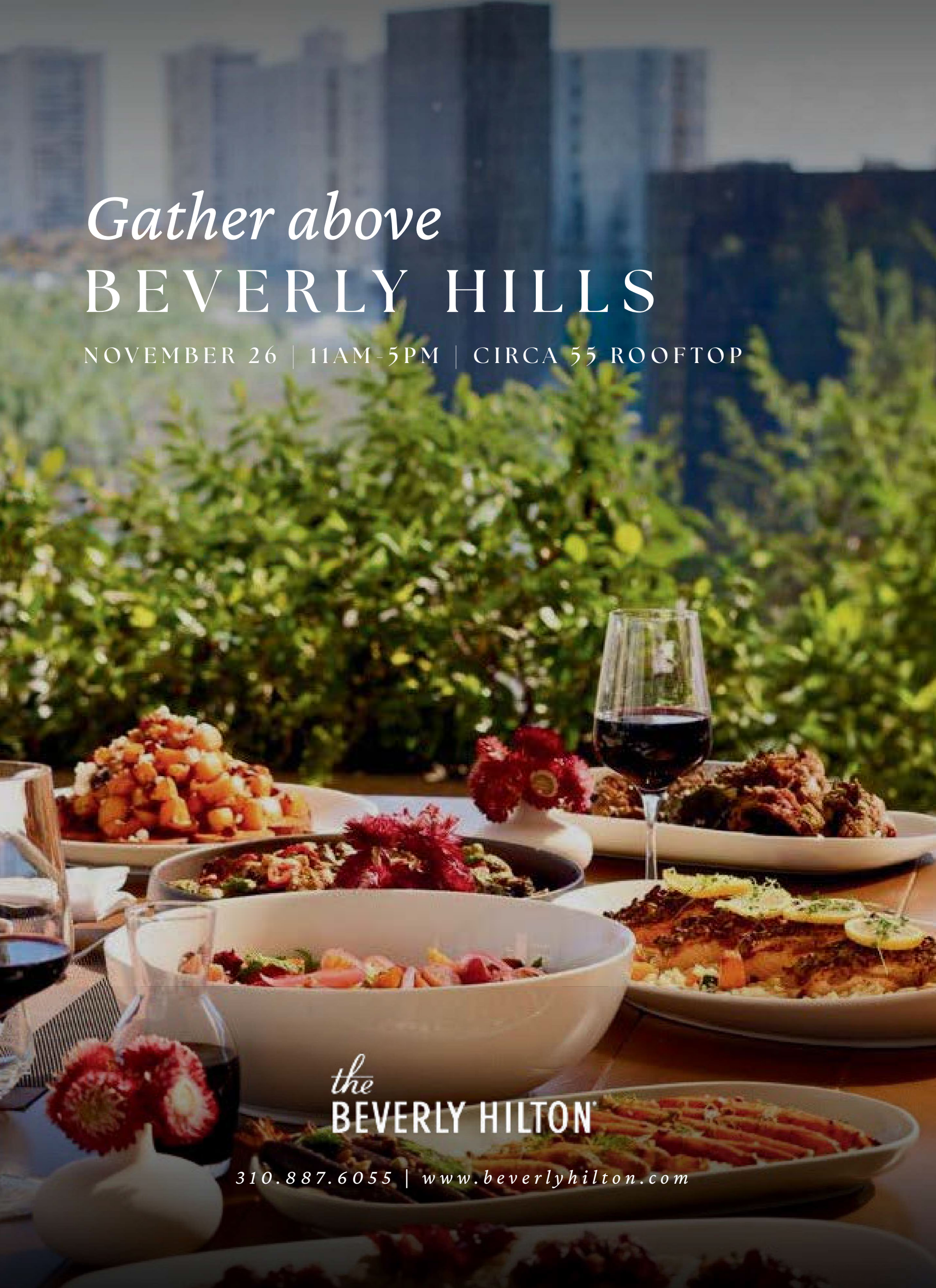
This year marks the 50th anniversary of the Rodeo Drive Committee established by Fred Hayman, who was a pioneer with his retail emporium that housed a bar with Champagne flowing for shoppers, and elevated experiences for guests. We have come full circle with stores like KITH offering gourmet ice cream collaborations for shoppers, as well as a tasting menu with a three-Michelin-starred female chef at Monsieur Dior by Dominique Crenn.

While the urban lifestyle setting of these stores is certainly attracting new clientele to Rodeo Drive, the idea actually originated in 1949, a block over at Saks Fifth Avenue on Wilshire Boulevard, when a young Black architect Paul R. Williams, who later designed The Beverly Hills Hotel, created a groundbreaking new store where shoppers could lounge and relax. The hotel can arrange "Building Dreams" architectural tours of Beverly Hills that include Rodeo Drive architectural highlights such as



the Prada store by Rem Koolhaas and the groundbreaking Givenchy store in a Frank Lloyd Wright-designed building.

Architectural historian, professor of Architecture at Woodbury University and founder of research studio Radical Craft, Joshua G. Stein, told the Courier, "The relationship between luxury fashion and star architecture has been going strong for decades, but I suspect the sudden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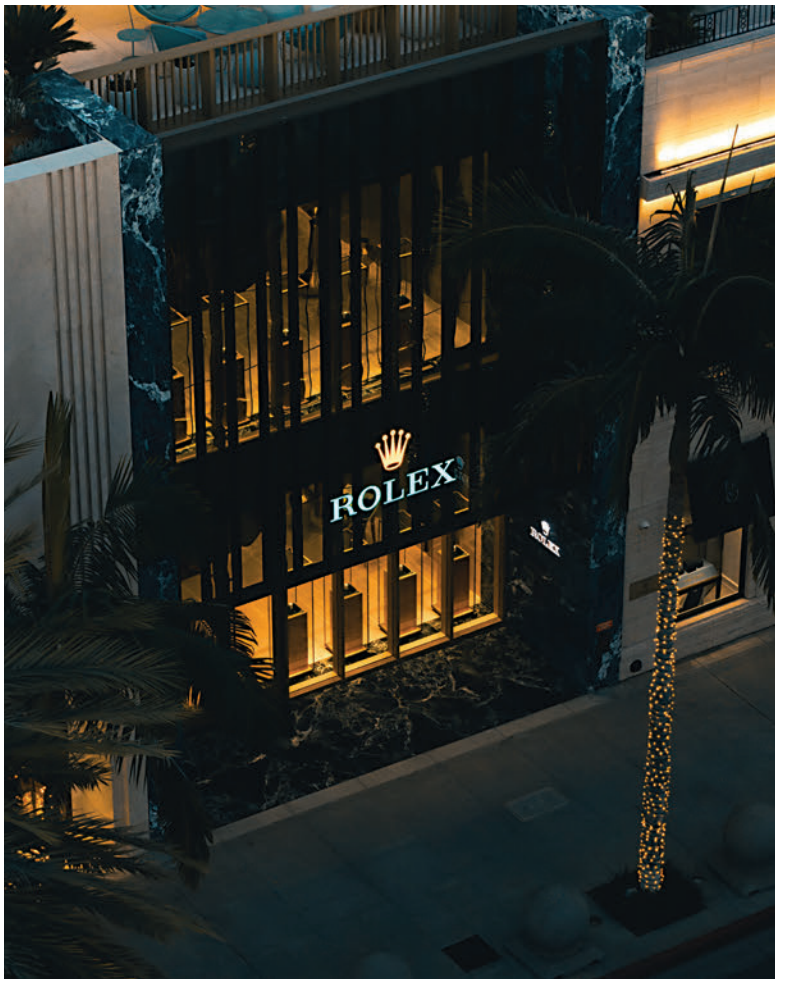

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PHOTO BY LUIS PEREZ BARRIO, COURTESY RODEO DRIVE COMMITTEE

influx [on Rodeo] is more about real estate than retail."

One name that seems to be dominating the current development buzz is New York-based designer Peter Marino. His projects range from the revamp of the Chanel boutique in 2023, and the Dior multilevel masterpiece which opened in 2025, to the new Louis Vuitton roughly 105,000-square-foot complex coming to the corner of Rodeo and Santa Monica Blvd. in 2029. The late architect Frank Gehry designed the building, which is currently under construction in the former Cheval Blanc hotel project space. What we know so far, Marino's contemporary interiors for 468 Rodeo Drive will house men's and women's collections, along with fine jewelry, and accessories, an exhibition space, rooftop deck, and multiple food venues. LVMH seems to have the market cornered on Rodeo Drive real estate, which should exceed 200,000 square feet by the time this flagship and its other developments open.

Until then, the existing Louis Vuitton Rodeo Drive store, recently launched a dedicated space for its beauty line, La Beauté Louis Vuitton, and its limited-edition Monogram Rouge holiday collection, as well as a line of small leather goods and accessories.

Meanwhile, Tiffany & Co. (part of LVMH since 2021), is constructing its new 30,468-square-foot flagship on the site of the former Luxe Rodeo Drive Hotel. Once completed in 2028, this will be the brand's second-largest store behind its landmark Fifth Avenue location in New York.

The Beverly Hills Planning Commission approved the project in 2025, which started construction earlier in 2026, to build a 60-foot-tall, three-story commercial building that will house two levels of retail, a VIP rooftop terrace, and a third-floor restaurant. With Daniel Boulud recently opening his Blue Box Café from the New York City location at the Tiffany & Co. at South Coast Plaza, there is speculation he may be at the helm of this new dining development as well.

Chris Rivielle, president and CEO of Plant Construction, the general contractor for the Tiffany project (who is also behind the Beverly Hilton revamp), tells the Courier that some believe the upcoming Olympics spurred

RODEO DRIVE CONTINUES ON PAGE 36

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Movies, Movies, Movies— Happy Holidays to Us All

BY NEELY SWANSON



ANDREW SCOTT AND OLIVIA COLMAN IN "ELSINORE"
PHOTO COURTESY OF FOCUS FEATURES

We're approaching the end-of-the-year movie crunch when studios release their best films for Oscar-qualifying season. Apple and Netflix both have prestigious theatrical releases with Oscar sugar plums dancing in their heads. They will all stream shortly after their theater runs begin. Apple's entry, "Being Heumann," is already streaming. Amazon opens "The Man with the Bag" starring Arnold Schwarzenegger, on Dec. 2. But the less said about that, the better. So, without further ado, it's time to buckle up and head on out to the cineplex. How about a double feature and dinner at one of the dine-in theaters?

Here's what's coming your way starting on:

Nov. 20

"Elsinore" fully illustrates a Richard Burton quote that "Hamlet" is a play about being alive and becoming dead. This is the very dilemma faced by actor Ian Charleson, most famous for his role in "Chariots of Fire." Finally given the golden opportunity to show his acting mettle at London's National Theatre in this most storied of plays, it comes at the end of his life as he was secretly dying of AIDS. Starring Andrew Scott as Charleson and Olivia Colman as his doctor, this is one of the absolute must-sees of the year. It will open wide on Dec. 11.

"Minotaur" is a Russian-language political thriller based on the French New Wave classic "The Unfaithful Wife" by Claude Chabrol. Under pressure from all sides, Gleb sees his world collapsing around him. Local authorities demand that he release some of his workers for the draft while he must cope with laying off others because his business is cratering. Discovering the infidelity of his wife is icing on the cake, tilting him toward violence. Directed and written by Andrey Zvyagintsev, he won the Grand Prize at Cannes for directing.

"November 1963" and director Roland Joffé has another take on the assassination of JFK. Did the mob hire Lee Harvey Oswald to take out President Kennedy? Was it a plan gone rogue? They need to take out Oswald before their involvement is discovered. Told from the perspective of Chicago gangster Sam Giancana, who shared a mistress with Kennedy, the film looks to be fast-paced and chaotic. John Travolta is Johnny Roselli, famous for his CIA connections; Robert Carlyle as Jack Ruby and Jefferson White as Oswald.

"I Play Rocky" is the true and truly inspirational story of one man's unstoppable belief in himself when no one else did. Wanting to be an actor and laughed at by everyone for his diction, his looks and his lack of training, Sylvester Stallone wrote a film for himself that all the bigwigs wanted … but for someone else. You know how that ended but it's a great origin story starring Anthony Ippolito as Stallone.

"Paper Tiger," stars Adam Driver and Miles Teller as two brothers whose get-rich-quick scheme in waste management is, unbeknownst to them, backed by the Russian mafia, putting them and their families in grave danger. Scarlett Johansson plays the wife of one of the brothers to heart-breaking effect. This taut thriller is directed by James Gray.

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"The Hunger Games: Sunrise on the Reaping" and the stakes are high in this prequel set 24 years before the original film, bringing back Jennifer Lawrence as Katniss Everdeen. This is the 50th anniversary of the games and there will be twice the number of entrants and twice the number of games, culminating in a deathly finish broadcast universally on TV. With an even starrier cast, this time it's the diabolical Ralph Fiennes as President Snow with Jesse Plemons, Elle Fanning, Glenn Close, Kieran Culkin and many others in support.

Also opening on Nov. 20 are "Ash and Crayons," "The Host," "Josephine" and "Best Pancakes in the County." "Steps" streams on Netflix.

Nov. 25

"Bitter Christmas," Pedro Almodóvar's latest venture in the friends and family dysfunction arena, again mixes comedy, tragedy and reality with a dose of fantasy. With liars, cheaters, strippers and chaos, it's classic Almodóvar for his fans (of which I am not one).

"Focker-in-Law" brings Greg and Pam Focker back into the universe of Pam's supermacho father, Jack Byrnes. Greg and Pam's son has returned to the fold to introduce his fiancée Olivia, who, to Greg's dismay, is instantly welcomed by Jack. Greg will stop at nothing to prove the delightful Olivia is unworthy of his son Henry. Mayhem ensues in this new addition to the story of the Fockers. Starring all the regulars: Robert De Niro, Ben Stiller, Teri Polo and as Olivia, Ariana Grande. What's next? Baby Focker?

"Hexed" is Disney's Thanksgiving treat to fans of fantasy and animation. Billie Doe's life is anything but ordinary when she discovers that she is a witch with magic powers, something her mother had tried very hard to protect her from. Now they're both on the run from evil sources on a mission to capture them. The voice cast includes Hailee Steinfeld, Jodie Foster, Tracey Ullman and Stephen Fry.

"The Further Misadventures of Cliff Booth" is Quentin Tarantino's follow-up to "Once Upon a Time in Hollywood." Cliff Booth (Brad Pitt), no longer a stuntman, is now working for a shady studio fixer (Scott Caan). Expect murder, mayhem and sly dark humor, all the hallmarks of Tarantino's writing, this time around directed by David Fincher. After a two-week IMAX theatrical run, it will stream on Netflix beginning Dec. 23.

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4.



1. ELLE FANNING IN "THE HUNGER GAMES: SUNRISE ON THE REAPING"
PHOTO BY MURRAY CLOSE, COURTESY OF LIONSGATE
2. ROBERT DE NIRO AND ARIANA GRANDE IN "FOCKERS IN LAW"
PHOTO BY ATSUSHI NISHIJIMA, COURTESY OF UNIVERSAL STUDIOS AND PARAMOUNT PICTURES
3. "HEXED"
PHOTO COURTESY OF DISNEY
4. BRAD PITT IN "THE FURTHER MISADVENTURES OF CLIFF BOOTH"
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MOVIES CONTINUES ON PAGE 40

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The Sweets of South Beverly

BY ANA FIGUEROA

The holidays are for indulging in great food, in great friends and–without guilt–ourselves. For this issue, what better complement to a cover story about an exciting coffee phenomenon than a piece about sumptuous sweets?

Beverly Hills attracts the finest artisans in every endeavor, and that is certainly true when it comes to talented pastry chefs and bakers. The South Beverly Hills area, particularly South Beverly Drive and environs, is home to some of the city's most notable purveyors of pastries, cakes, tarts and mouthwatering cookies.

A notable handful are highlighted here. We've also included gift box suggestions for those on your list who would enjoy a sweet treat or simply to share with visiting family and friends.

Not that you need a crowd to indulge. When the hustle and bustle of the holiday season begins to overwhelm, an afternoon dash into a pastry shop can quickly lift the spirits.

After all, "stressed" spelled backward is "desserts."

Castanea Sicilian Café Beverly Hills

252 S. Beverly Drive
310-309-0537
Open Daily 7 a.m. - 6 p.m.
https://www.castaneacafe.com/

Step into Castanea, and you will believe you are back in Sicily. In fact, the feeling of a traditional Italian "bar" begins with the mini Vespa parked on the sidewalk outside.

The Beverly Drive business is owned by the husband-and-wife team of Nando and Rose Benincasa, whose Sicilian roots permeate the café. High school sweethearts who spent summers on Sicily, the couple decided to relocate to Southern California after visiting in 2017. They opened their first café in Venice in 2024, with Beverly Hills following in 2025.

Castanea has become a go-to destination for breakfast or a light lunch. But the stars here are the espressos (brewed with Morettino beans from Palermo) and classic Sicilian cannoli. The latter are made to order by filling crisp golden shells with either vanilla pastry cream or sweet ricotta and dusting with garnishes.

Staying close to their roots is one of the core principles of the business.

As Nando tells the Courier, "We founded this concept with the idea that we want to bring the 'dolce far niente,' or 'sweetness of doing nothing,' philosophy. That's the base of what we want to deliver outside of Italy."

It was also important to preserve and share their Italian heritage in the most authentic way possible.

"We import all our ingredients from Italy. Our cannoli shells, our pistachio crème, Crema di Bronte, is the best in Italy. We use it in our pistachio croissant and in our famous pistachio latte," he notes.

Other popular items at Castanea include the cornetto, an Italian version of the croissant that is slightly crispier on the outside. It is served the classic way, with a side of apricot jam. Bomboloni, the Italian version of doughnuts, stuffed with pastry cream or Nutella, are also top sellers.

The café serves artisanal focaccia sandwiches on bread imported from Florence, Roman-style pizza with dough imported from Rome and traditional Sicilian arancini (fried rice balls). A deli section is stocked with specialty imported items such as regional dry pastas.



CANNOLI FROM CASTANEA

"We are a very family-friendly café. We're behind the counter every day during the week. Our team members are like family, and we feel the same way about our customers," Nando adds.

Recommended Gift Boxes

Nothing says "holiday" in Italy more than a traditional gift of panettone, the dome-shaped Italian sweet bread. Castanea is stocked with imported classic panettone dusted with powdered sugar. It also carries special pistachio and candied fruit versions in tins decorated with Sicilian tile designs. For a sweet keepsake, the café is offering a gift panettone in a limited-edition Dolce & Gabbana tin.



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A neighborhood fixture for 30 years, La Provence is a familiar choice for those looking for traditional French pastries. Its heated outdoor patio is a favorite gathering spot for locals looking to catch up over a coffee and a selection of freshly baked delicacies.

Owner Farshid Hakim grew up in Monaco, where he honed his pastry-chef skills.

PASTRIES CONTINUES ON PAGE 52



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A Season for Giving

BY EVA RITVO, M.D.

As the holidays approach, our thoughts turn to giving. We buy or make gifts, plan holiday meals, hand out year-end bonuses, and send donations before December 31. "'Tis the season to be jolly," as the carol "Deck the Halls" reminds us. And generosity and happiness truly go together.

When we give, we often feel a warm glow ourselves, sometimes called the "helper's high" or "giver's gain." Giving activates the brain's reward system and releases chemicals such as dopamine and oxytocin. We feel good when we see someone's face light up when opening just the right gift. We leave a volunteer shift tired but feeling glad we went. We help a friend through a hard time and feel more grounded afterward.

In each of these moments, feelings pass from one person to another. We are wired for connection, and psychologists call this sharing of moods "emotional contagion." When we lift someone else's spirits, our own rise with them.

Yet for all its rewards, holiday giving can also bring stress. Whom should we give to, and how much? Like Goldilocks, we want to get it just right: not too little, not too much. Here are a few thoughts to guide you.

Give Money

Americans gave a record $617.2 billion to charity in 2025. Those dollars stock food bank shelves, fund scholarships and medical research, and help communities rebuild after disasters. Every gift, large or small, becomes part of something bigger. To make yours count:

• Choose a few causes you love, ones that will hold your interest long after the holiday appeals fade.

• Set a budget before the appeals arrive and talk it over with your partner or financial advisor so it works for the whole family. Generosity should feel joyful, not stressful.

• Do a little homework. Visit the charity's website or check an evaluator such as Charity Navigator.

• Consider a monthly gift. If it fits your budget, a recurring donation makes giving easy to keep up and helps a charity plan ahead.

• Feel free to decline. "I've made my charitable commitments for this year" is a kind and respectful answer.

Why Year's End?

To count on this year's taxes, gifts must be made by December 31. Many of us also have a clearer picture of our income by then, and a year-end bonus may leave a little extra room to be generous. The rules changed in 2026:

• If you don't itemize, you can now deduct up to $1,000 in cash gifts, or $2,000 for married couples filing jointly.

• If you itemize, only giving above 0.5 percent of your adjusted gross income is deductible.

• If you're 70½ or older, you can give up to $111,000 directly from your IRA without it counting as income.

Check with your accountant and remember that the tax break is a bonus. The cause is the reason.

Give While You're Living

In "Die with Zero," Bill Perkins argues that money is a tool for living fully, and that includes giving. He isn't arguing for reckless spending, just intentional living. He encourages us to give to family members, others we care about, and favorite causes while we're alive, rather than saving everything for later. A gift toward a first home or graduate school can matter more early in life than an inheritance in middle or older age. In 2026, you can give up to $19,000 per person annually without owing gift tax.

Give Time, Talent, and Attention

Some of the most meaningful gifts don't come with a price tag.

• Time. Volunteering turns concern into connection: we meet neighbors and become part of the work. Hospitals, libraries, and museums rely on volunteers. Start small: two reliable hours a month beat a big promise you can't keep.

• Expertise. Make a concrete offer, such as "I can help you prepare for your interview on Saturday." A clear offer is easy to accept.

• Attention. Put down the phone and really listen. Ask, "Would you like me to listen, or help you think it through?" I recently heard the phrase "giving advice is a vice," and it has stayed with me. Sometimes being heard is the gift.

• Appreciation. Thank the colleague who quietly prevents problems, or the friend who checks in without being asked. A handwritten note can be reread for years.

Give Small Gestures

Kindness doesn't have to be grand to matter. A smile, a door held open, or a sincere "How is your day going?" can brighten someone's day, and that person may pass the warmth along. Like the butterfly effect, a small kindness can ripple far beyond where it began. In a world of screens and remote work, these simple moments help us reconnect and remind us that we belong to a community.

Scaling Kindness: Kindness at Work

When kindness is built into an organization, it reaches many more people. Employers show it through recognition, flexibility, gift matching, and paid volunteer time. Workplaces built on kindness tend to be places where people feel valued and want to stay. Some organizations build it into their very structure:

• Nonprofits serve a mission rather than owners. Goodwill, for example, funds job training through donated goods.

• Benefit corporations are for-profit companies legally committed to social and environmental impact, such as Patagonia.

• Certified B Corps earn a certification from the nonprofit B Lab for meeting high standards in how they treat workers, communities, and the planet.

• Social enterprises build a mission into their business model, like Warby Parker's Buy a Pair, Give a Pair program.

Give Within Your Limits

The return on kindness is real, but only if our giving is sustainable. Choose what you can offer with a full heart, whether money, time, attention, or a kind word, and let that be enough. And remember that kindness begins at home: be as gentle with yourself as you are with others.

This season, may you find just the right gift, for someone else and for yourself. Kindness doesn't require a grand plan. A little intention, a warm heart, and an open hand can go a long way.

Wishing you a holiday season filled with kindness, connection, and the joy of giving. ●



Beverly Hills Courier columnist Dr. Eva Ritvo is a psychiatrist with more than 30 years' experience practicing in Miami Beach. She is the author of "Bekindr-The Transformative Power of Kindness" and the founder of the Bekindr Global Initiative, a movement to bring more kindness in the world. She is the co-author of "The Beauty Prescription" and "The Concise Guide to Marriage and Family Therapy." She is also the co-founder of the Bold Beauty Project, a nonprofit that pairs women with disabilities with award-winning photographers creating art exhibitions to raise awareness. Dr. Ritvo received her undergraduate and medical degrees from UCLA, and psychiatry residency training at Weill Cornell Medicine.

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Top Tech Gifts for the Holidays – Getting More From Less

BY JAMISON PROVINCE

In some ways, it's become a lot harder to gift technology to the savvy person in your life. Fewer devices do more than ever before. Anyone interested in tech is also bound to be well-informed. That's why we've put together a guide that takes a different approach to tech gifts, beginning with our phones.

These days, most of us feel dependent on our phones, but also a bit distracted by all of their attendant features. In the first part of this guide, we'll present standalone devices that can take on some of our phone's individual functions and do them better.

At the other end of the spectrum, many folks now aspire to some social media prominence or even influence. The right equipment can mean the difference between holding a potential follower's attention or seeing them scroll to greener pastures. Options also abound for those who prefer to remain behind the lens, regardless of skill level.

This fall was the hottest in recent memory in Southern California and may very well be a harbinger of what is to come. So, we've included some ideas for beating the heat here at home and while traveling in the new year. And no matter what climate you may be heading to, we have some travel-related items you'll want to take along.

Lastly, Beverly Hills has always been fitness-forward, and during the holidays we all tend to indulge a bit. We've included the latest to keep you connected to the future of fitness.

Disclaimer: Technology prices are fluctuating frequently due to the current state of the chip/storage market. Prices are accurate as of press time but may differ due to these conditions.



Exit the Matrix and Doomscroll Less

1. **XTEINK X4** – Setting aside seemingly obtuse model names, XTEINK e-readers are simple: they're pocketable, no-frills e-readers. These are small enough that their built-in magnets adhere them to the back of your phone like other accessories. In effect, they piggyback on the omnipresence of your phone to offer a diversion that's more enriching and rewarding. The X4 Pro offers a touch screen and adjustable temperature backlight. *$79 for the X4 Classic, $69 for the X3 (slightly smaller) and $100 for the X4 Pro available on xteink.com (deals to be had on AliExpress for the more patient and savvy), Photo by Jamison Province*

2. **Kobo Clara Colour** – Kindles are the most well-known e-readers, but as Amazon tightens its ecosystem, bringing genuine ownership and accessibility of "purchased" products (i.e. licensed, aka can be revoked at any time) into question, many have turned to alternatives like Kobo for a more open, unrestricted option. Use your own e-book files or purchase from Rakuten or any seller online. Recent models are waterproof for worry-free bath reading sessions and also have high-resolution, pixel-dense color e-ink displays, great for notation and comic books, if so inclined. *$180 from kobo.com directly or bestbuy.com, Photo courtesy of Rakuten Kobo*

3. **Anbernic RG Rotate** – Retro handhelds, relatively cheap portable gaming devices, have rapidly proliferated as secondary, less-existential-dread-imparting devices. This device does that, with a twist. The RG Rotate, when closed, looks like a square-shaped phone, with a clock face screensaver. However, once rotated 180 degrees up, old-school controls are revealed beneath. Its software is Android too, which means it can do more than just play games; it can run other apps to function as a music player, reading device and more. The metal version is a worthwhile upgrade that looks and feels more expensive than it is, but either model has the supremely satisfying metal hinge. *$80 for the black plastic model and $100 for the full silver aluminum model, available from anbernic.com directly or other online retailers (once again the experienced may find deals on AliExpress), Photos by Jamison Province*

4. **Brick** – We have all felt the pull of our phones, even when we want to try and disconnect. There are on-device software solutions, but the problem is that we always know how to unlock it. The solution? A physical device, when tapped with your phone, that blocks all but the essential, productive functions of your phone. You set what's accessible and what's not, and you must go back and tap the Brick with your phone again to unblock the unproductive apps. That deliberate action and physical barrier make all the difference for staying locked in. *$59 from getbrick.com, Photo courtesy of Brick*

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FRANCOIS REIHANI

How a Beverly Hills Dreamer Turned Kindness Into a Café Empire

BY LISA FRIEDMAN BLOCH

"He dropped by my classroom, unexpectedly, on his way to water polo practice," recalls former Beverly Hills High School English teacher Ms. Jamie Marrs. She could see something was different about 16-year-old Francois Reihani. His usual swagger seemed uncertain; his energy, contemplative.

Francois had just lost his beloved grandfather.

"It was kind of an awakening," shares Francois.

Entrepreneur magazine chose Francois, at age 25, for its cover and featured him in its "Young Millionaires" cover story. In it, Francois speaks about his high school days: "I had frankly become a d...ck. Like I wasn't being a good person."

"But that one day, I asked myself, 'What are you doing [with your life]?'"

"He definitely had grit," says Ms. Marrs, but she sensed there was far more beneath the surface. His rebellious streak, she came to understand, was how he was surviving.

That day's "awakening" transformed his life's trajectory. Ms. Marrs' counsel gave him the confidence to boldly move forward to La La Land.

Today, Francois Reihani is the 31-year-old founder and CEO of La La Land. A propulsive visionary, he has creatively and confidently reimagined the café experience. Ironically, he wasn't a coffee drinker to begin with. A believer in miracles, he's driven by passion and instinct, and a conviction that runs deeper than ambition: a certainty that human connection, built through kindness, is what ultimately matters.

Despite his successful first venture in hospitality at the age of 19, with a restaurant called Pok, Francois suffered from a surprisingly hollow and unsatisfied feeling. Searching for deeper meaning, his sister and friend led him to the Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) organization in Dallas. There he was exposed to the harsh realities foster youth face, especially once they "age out" of the system. Francois became obsessed with wanting to help.

Determined to provide foster youth a real path to self-sufficiency and independence, Francois rethought and rebuilt his business plan. Drawing on his "delusional positivity," he wanted to revolutionize the café experience. La La Land was born, a "mission-driven, consumer, hospitality brand" that supports turned out foster youth. Its beneficent mission was not an afterthought. It remains at La La Land's business model core, proving that a cup of coffee, with a tablespoon of kindness, and an entrepreneurial spirit can be a game changer.

Upon entering a La La Land, visitors are immediately welcomed in by the bright, uplifting, kind atmosphere. Vivid yellow serves as the brand's visual style. A barista's cheerful greeting sets the tone, complemented by the gleaming, professional-grade brewing equipment at the coffee bar. This dreamlike setting reflects the company's stated mission to bring "more yellow into the world ... more energy, optimism, and light to everyday life."

Francois' journey is as inspiring as it is unconventional. Armed with persistence and conviction, he first won over a local investor. Soon he was raising capital from sophisticated institutional partners. By the time he was 30, La La Land had reportedly raised more than $70 million since its start in 2019. Its advisory board includes three heavyweights of the restaurant and real estate worlds: Rick Caruso, founder and executive chairman of Caruso, the developer of many properties including The Grove and The Americana at Brand (four of which house La La Lands); Jonathan Neman, co-founder and CEO of Sweetgreen; and Brett Schulman, co-founder and CEO of CAVA.

"Magic happens when you do the right thing," Francois believes.

Many consider La La Land a bona fide breakthrough in the café space. Part of the credit goes to Francois' imaginative marketing instincts, and part may belong to his Zillennial sensibility: a millennial entrepreneurial path paired with a Gen Z playbook and a TikTok-driven brand. With more than 6 million followers across TikTok and other platforms, it's no wonder lines form outside La La Land locations. The company now has 38 cafés across six states, with seven more projected by year's end, and its first airport location just opened in Dallas Fort Worth International Airport.

Francois has built a roster of collaborations with some of the biggest names in fashion, entertainment, and beauty, including Disney's Mickey & Friends, Nike, Amiri, Lululemon, Fossil, and TOMS, along with celebrity-founded beauty brands Rare Beauty by Selena Gomez and JLo Beauty by Jennifer Lopez. He has his sights set on new markets, with an eventual goal of La La Lands in every state. Closer to home, the limited-edition matcha line created with The Beverly Hills Hotel, available at every La La Land location, was also featured at the hotel's legendary Polo Lounge.

With the goal of La La Land becoming an iconic American company, he smiles, offering, "As I say all the time, there's Nike, Apple, La La Land."

It's one thing to be a dreamer; it's another to build a new cultural brand that's authentic and transformative. So how has this young man mastered this in seven years? Why did foster youth resonate deeply within him, and how effective are his programs? I sat down with our hometown boy in his Beverly Hills office, overlooking our beautiful city, to find out.



FRANCOIS REIHANI AT THE LA LA LAND RESERVE IN BEVERLY HILLS
PHOTO BY SARAH ORBANIC





LEFT: FRANCOIS AS A TODDLER WITH HIS FATHER, SHAWN, AND OLDER SISTER, CHLOE
RIGHT: FRANCOIS WITH HIS SISTERS, PARENTS AND NIECE
PHOTOS COURTESY OF FRANCOIS REIHANI

Once Upon a Latte

"La La Land's a great mix of my whole life growing up. I think both Mexico and Beverly Hills have shaped me in different ways," shares Francois.

He was born September 25, 1995, in Los Angeles to Shawn and Daniela Reihani of Iranian descent. Frequent travelers to Paris, Daniella fell in love with the name Francois. Months after his birth, Shawn suffered a heart attack which prompted the family to move to Rosarito, Mexico in pursuit of a better life. There, Francois embraced the warm, loving Mexican culture. Soon his little sister Francesca was born, sandwiching Francois between her and his older sister Chloe. Shawn ran a small clothing print shop. Financially, the family struggled, as did most in the community, yet Francois relished the kindness he felt all around him. The Reihanis' shared faith kept the family close.

Even as a boy, Francois showed signs of the entrepreneur he would become. Industrious and resourceful, he looked for ways to help the family. With a kind, friendly approach, he made people want to buy what he was selling. Traveling door to door with calendars and candy, he also hustled washing cars and mowing lawns.

Fearing for their safety as drug-war violence escalated, the Reihanis returned to Los Angeles when Francois turned 12, settling just east of Beverly Hills. But before long, it became evident Francesca's school was not a good fit for her. Daniela insisted they move to Beverly Hills, home to the best schools. The only place the family could afford was a small, one-bedroom apartment.

"It was a studio on the corner of Doheny and Olympic Blvd. It was five of us, and four dogs ... You can imagine, every couch is basically a bed and a bed is for three people."

For years the Reihanis lived crammed in this space.

"I remember being in that apartment. My mom had maybe given me a $5 bill and I felt horrible for taking it. That was literally the last dollar I ever took. I just figured out for myself how to make it on my own. I think about that apartment all the time. I love driving by. It is a huge motivator. Hopefully, one day I can buy that building just as a good memory."

Most of his classmates lived very different lives.

"I remember my first day starting at Hawthorne Middle School. I loved that place. It was a Friday. And a friend I made invited me to his house ... right above Sunset Boulevard on Mountain Drive."

Mountain Drive is one of Beverly Hills' most manicured streets. Lined with stately homes, it was worlds away from the life Francois knew.

"I remember the first glimpse I had. The gates opened and all the housekeepers came out. It was enlightening to me, to see something like that."

The contrast did not discourage him.

"I wasn't really looking around thinking, 'Why don't I have this?' I looked at it in a motivating way ... I wanted to find a way to build it for myself and my family."

But as an adolescent, it was hard for Francois to make an impact. The Reihanis' financial challenges grew. Francois and his sisters had to work while attending school, to help provide for their living expenses.

"That was such a tough period of time. We were constantly being forced to move ... to other apartments, always another one-bedroom. I didn't really care about anything. I didn't have any real regard for life."

His troublemaking behavior took hold, yet his disinterest in drugs remained. "That path was never an option," he shares. But playing on the Beverly Hills High's water polo team was.

"Water polo was a highlight of my life." Academically, he admits he was a "horrible" student.

"Probably 90% of the teachers thought I was just a bad kid, but when I applied myself, I could get 100% ... And so, in high school, even though most teachers were just fed up with me, I had one teacher; her name was Ms. Marrs, [who was not]."

Choosing to see her that day, Francois reflects, was one of his many miracles.

The Teacher Who Believed

Jamie Marrs taught Francois English during his sophomore year. At the time, she was unaware of his struggles at home. “He seemed to put out a persona that he didn’t care ... with an attitude like, ‘I’m above all this.’” She shares, “I used to tease him about the way he would respond in class.” She understood he was a student full of fire for whom the structure of school simply wasn’t working.

Francois’ older sister, Chloe, told him about the California High School Proficiency Exam. If he passed during his junior year, he could skip his senior year and start college a year early. It would also free him up to work full time and make more money for the family.

His guidance counselor and others discouraged the idea. His academic performance was poor. Would he have the stamina to study hard? They feared he might not pass. What could become of him? Unsure where to turn, Francois went to see Ms. Marrs the day after his grandfather passed away.

“’You can 100% do this. You’re going to do great things. Get it together, go study for it and get it done,’” Francois recounts Ms. Marrs’ words to him.

It was the kind, encouraging message he needed.

“Once I had set my mind to this, I didn’t care about anything but being great. It was straight A’s and only work. My friends did not see me for a long time.”

He passed the exam, entered Santa Monica College (SMC) and transferred to the University of Southern California (USC) while working full time selling cars at Volkswagen of Santa Monica.

When Ms. Marrs was informed of the importance of that one meeting with Francois, she chuckled, “Glad I had the right coffee that day.”

Francois kept up his responsibilities at home. After a full day of classes at USC, he would head to Brentwood and wait for Chloe, in their shared car, to finish work. Then she would drive him to his shift at Volkswagen.

“If anyone deserves 99% of the credit for anything I’ve done, it’s definitely my sister. She was helping take care of the family when she was 15, 16 years old. She never had a high school experience because she was working so much. By taking on all of the family responsibility and not leaving that on me, she allowed me to go and do what I had to do.”



FRANCOIS LOCKED IN FOR WATER POLO

A Dream Come True: La La Land Meets Mickey

During this period, Francois carved out a little time to coach basketball at Beverly Hills Basketball League (BHBL).

“I just love coaching sports. It’s competitive. What I do now is basically a more serious competitive version of me coaching.”

This particular year his team was good. They made it to the finals.

“We get there, and of course we’re playing Bob Iger, the CEO of The Walt Disney Company, and his son.”

Francois’ team lost, but years later, La La Land won. Bob Iger walked into La La Land in Santa Monica for a coffee. Coincidentally or serendipitously, Francois happened to be behind the coffee bar.

“We had four stores at that time. I went up to him, of course, and told him how much I respect what he’s done. I told him about us [coaching], and he remembered it. He was very complimentary of La La Land. I was so fired up afterwards.”

Four years and 20 more La La Lands later, Bob Iger’s marketing team at Disney reached out to Francois for a Disney-La La Land collaboration. In Francois’ mind, it was one of his many miracles. For a brand built on kindness, the partnership was a natural fit.

Francois answered the call with La La Land’s first-ever kids’ menu. Launched in August 2025 at all locations across four states, the four-week collaboration brought pint-sized lattes, Cocoa Cuddles, and Mini Eggy Avo Toast to the youngest guests, along with Mickey-themed sleeves, “Be Kind” tote bags, a collectible toy, and even a Pluto-inspired pup cup for four-legged customers. Baristas wore Mickey ears, and six cafés featured shoppable Disney displays. For Francois, it was a dream come true, and he reveled in the compliments of people comparing La La Land to the Disney experience.

Rejection Was Redirection

At USC, Francois was laser-focused. He read every business book he could find, sought out professors, and threw himself into every internship. His next miracle came in a surprising form.

“I went to every single Rick [Caruso] lecture, I took every class that one of his leaders was teaching, and I applied to every single internship possible at Caruso. I was dying to work there.”

Francois was never selected for the Caruso internship.

Restless and eager for momentum, Francois learned from a classmate at USC about Dallas, Texas, and its growing business environment. While bored in class one day, Francois booked two Spirit Airlines tickets for $80, one for himself and one for his father.

“When I got to Dallas for the first time, it felt like it was a land of opportunity ... like I was an NBA player playing middle school basketball ... It was just a bunch of great people in this amazing big city, but it was not competitive at all.”

Realizing that the price of a one-bedroom in Beverly Hills was equivalent to a big house in Plano, Texas, he wanted to move his entire family.

“It was a no-brainer. But my mother said, ‘I’m not going to go unless you come.’”

Francois weighed his options. Transferring as a senior at USC to become a sophomore at Southern Methodist University (SMU) was a crazy idea. But his gut instinct told him he would thrive at SMU. So, on a leap of faith, the family of five and their four dogs left Beverly Hills for Texas.

His buddy David from Hawthorne School came to visit and suggested a poké meal. Since L.A. was flooded with new poké restaurants, he assumed Dallas was as well. Francois searched Yelp. There was not a single poké restaurant in the state of Texas.

“That’s literally the day that I, delusionally, at 19 years old, never had worked in a restaurant, decided I’m going to open a poké restaurant ... with no money or experience. I sat there and really believed I could do it.”

A new friend at SMU mentioned that he had always wanted to start a restaurant. Armed with this information and the delusional overabundance of what a Gen Z would call "delusional positivity," Francois dove right in.

"I went home that day, started building this business plan, brand and menu. I pitched him and his parents to invest. I basically had them hooked three days after David left."

Delusional and Proud

"The whole journey began of finding the right real estate, which was a whole other miracle ... I knew that if I was going to do poké, I wanted it to be the best possible. At that time, the best sushi was Nobu. I walked into Nobu [in Dallas], poached one of the chefs, his name's Jimmy, and sold him on the dream. He was critical."

The business was a financial success, yet Francois was not satisfied.

"At the end of the day, you're serving people raw fish in a fast-casual environment. It's not like there's that much connection. I was doing it 16 hours a day. I wasn't sold on spending the next 80 years building this. I really started to look internally at what I wanted to do with my life."

Chloe, along with her friend Erin, suggested Francois explore the world of nonprofits. They took him to a CASA meeting in Dallas. There, he heard the tragic stories of many foster youths. This particular meeting focused on raising awareness of the heartbreaking path young people face when they "age out" of the system.

"I thought my life was pretty tough as a kid. Mine was patty cake compared to what Kelian [a foster child] had been through ... I wondered how in the world did this happen to even one kid in the United States. The next two girls, who told stories, were getting progressively worse ... funneling to prostitution ... drug dealing ... These kids never had done anything wrong to be in this position."

Francois identified with their struggles, yet he knew their pain went deeper than anything he had endured. They never had a loving family. Moved to act, he wanted to hire foster youth at the poké restaurant, but his financial partners weren't on the same page. So, Francois and his sister, Francesca, launched a nonprofit, only to discover that they couldn't effectively change the system on their own. Not long after, his partners in the poké business bought him out, leaving him to chart a new course.

"The beauty of hospitality is it's really the only place that strangers connect."

Using common-sense thinking, Francois knew coffee is a daily experience.

"It's this amazing, welcoming environment where people want to spend time. People want to go on their first date, or grab a coffee with their mom, or their friend, or come after their church or temple ... Human connection is almost at an all-time high compared to any other environment. That's really what opened my eyes."

Enjoying the process of branding and marketing, Francois felt he could build a café brand that could scale.

"I wanted it to truly mean something to humanity."

One of the key elements was recognizing the divisiveness that cellphones and technology have caused by keeping people insular and promoting opinions online. Francois knew an inviting, friendly, joyous environment would feel welcoming and fun. He decided to simplify the brand's social media campaigns by only spreading messages of kindness and connectivity. It immediately went viral.

"I wanted someone to walk in and feel like they walked into heaven, from the design, the products, the yellow pops, the human interactions ... to feel a sense of joy for life."

"The beauty of hospitality is it's really the only place that strangers connect."





TOP LEFT: FRANCOIS AT POK PRIOR TO OPENING
BOTTOM RIGHT: FRANCOIS PRESENTING THE NONPROFIT HE AND FRANCESCA STARTED DURING HIS SMU PROGRAM
PHOTOS COURTESY OF FRANCOIS REIHANI

Setting out to revolutionize the coffee industry with an experience filled with kindness, Francois points out that La La Land Cares programs, which help people in need in foster care or elsewhere, are never advertised.

"We did La La Land Cares because we thought it was the right thing to do, not for someone to come buy a cup of coffee. The brand on its own should be so great that someone would want to come buy the coffee on their own."

The company's mission is "more yellow" evoking warmth, kindness and joy. Francois' marketing masterstroke is the yellow coffee cup. It serves as a piece of portable branding. When someone leaves the café holding it, the message travels into the street, office, school, car, or social media post. It makes the company instantly recognizable, while also turning the drink into a visible reminder of the café's values. The cup often carries short uplifting phrases such as "Be Kind," "Normalize Kindness," or "Just Be Nice," so the object functions as both a beverage container and an advertisement for the brand's philosophy. The concept is authentic and transformative.







LEFT: FRANCOIS WITH HIS NOW ICONIC MERCHANDISE
RIGHT: FRANCOIS WITH TEAMS FROM TWO OF HIS CAFÉ LOCATIONS

Caring in La La Land

In 2019, Francois found a 100-year-old house on Bell Avenue in Dallas' Lower Greenville neighborhood and converted it into the original La La Land. Dario Ferdows, Francois' first investor, stood by him through COVID-19 as Francois signed leases and built out new stores. From the start, the plan included a foster youth employment program. Ten were hired to staff the first café.

"It was a disaster. I didn't realize how hard it was going to be."

Stretched to the limit building his first business, Francois was also driving them to and from work, and helping manage their daily lives. He hadn't anticipated how complex their needs would be.

"I'm delusional in moving fast, but this was the one thing I learned that being delusional is not good for you or for the youth. It was the first time I learned real patience … You really need to put them in an environment that is going to help them move forward."

Over the next six years, the nonprofit program was reworked nearly 14 times. With each revision, the criticisms seemed to outweigh the praise. Francois responded with tough, decisive changes.

"I'm going to dispose of the nonprofit and we're going to do it without any tax credit."

La La Land Cares is all self-funded. There's no tax credit enabling Francois and his company to do what they care about without restraints. It has a summer internship program for foster youth as well as individuals with special needs at The Americana at Brand, a Caruso shopping mall. Francois also has plans to start a program in Mexico in support of homeless kids, a program to help support struggling families of La La Land employees, and a pet adoption program.

Back in Dallas in 2022 with four cafés, Francois led the core team of three tired, overworked employees. The glue and motivator pushing them forward was Francois and his "delusional positivity."

"We literally were doing everything from hiring to training to stocking a store, to being at a store for three months and operating that store," shares Francois. "We were dying up until that point. But it was a huge step into actually building an infrastructure and being able to hire a team to scale."

John Phelan, former co-founder and chairman emeritus of MSD Capital, L.P., and founder of Rugger Management LLC, and Andy Teller, a private investor, heard about Francois and his hospitality concept. They recognized his talents as well as the brand's potential and decided to invest $20 million in 2023.



Mentor Moment

"In my head I was 100%, absolutely, we're going to be the next and better Starbucks! When you look back at that time period, it was crazy. It was crazy! I give him [John] a lot of credit for being as delusional as I was in that moment."

Throughout the journey, Francois has been a quick study of success, particularly the career paths of his mentors, who today are members of his advisory board.

"When I started Pok, John [Neman] from Sweetgreen, coming out of Beverly Hills, was an amazing person to watch ... they were really scaling Sweetgreen to be something special. I was on the Sweetgreen website for hundreds of hours, and the first time I met John, I told him. He loved that one," Francois recalls, chuckling. He also shares that he hung out at The Grove during most of his formative years in Los Angeles.

"I'm an admirer of detail. I think detail is what creates something special. Detail is what's so hard to do ... Rick [Caruso] made The Grove an iconic place to be, which, at that time, it wasn't something special. Rick created his own environment. It's like a modern-day Disney ... a lot of elements of La La have been taken from that. There's almost no one better at detail than Rick."

Francois highlights the Caruso culture within his company as well. "It's amazing and it's very hard to do. I always had so much respect for him."

When asked about Francois, Rick replied, "I love Francois. He's a gentleman and a great businessman. His stores do exceptionally well."

Today, Rick is fond of sharing that one of his greatest mistakes was not accepting Francois for an internship. Francois wholeheartedly disagrees. If Rick had, Francois might not have had the entrepreneurial fire and hunger to create La La Land.

"I love Francois. He's a gentleman and a great businessman." – Rick Caruso



TOP LEFT: RICK CARUSO AND FRANCOIS, BOTTOM: FRANCOIS OPENING ANOTHER LA LA LAND LOCATION
PHOTOS COURTESY OF FRANCOIS REIHANI

"When you have a deep belief that something's there, and that something's watching over you, it kind of takes the weight off your own shoulders. You just work hard and do what you can do. If you have that deep belief, I think it brings a lot of great miracles."



LISA FRIEDMAN BLOCH AND FRANCOIS IN CONVERSATION
PHOTO COURTESY OF FRANCOIS REIHANI



FRANCOIS IN THE LA LA LAND RESERVE IN BEVERLY HILLS
PHOTO BY SARAH ORBANIC

Pressure is a Privilege

As La La Land has expanded into desirable neighborhoods across Texas, California, Arizona, Tennessee, North Carolina and Oklahoma, Francois says his biggest challenge has been learning to handle the pressure.

"You definitely can't let it out on your team or else they'll feel it. Early on, every small challenge is a big deal. I was always stressed and always felt the pressure. Now, seven years later, the actual pressure and the actual responsibility is 100 times higher, but mentally it's not."

When the Beverly Hills store opened in December of 2025, it was La La Land's first "Reserve" location. The neutral, cozy, calming, well-appointed interior is a variation from the bright yellow branded cafés. On the wall above the "pool table" sits a large piece of artwork that reads, "In God We Trust."

"Spirituality is huge ... I don't push my beliefs on anyone. Having a serious belief and a higher power is a very big deal for me ... When you have a deep belief that something's there, and that something's watching over you, it kind of takes the weight off your own shoulders. You just work hard and do what you can do. If you have that deep belief, I think it brings a lot of great miracles."

In the fall of 2025, it was announced that Stripes Group, a New York-based growth equity firm behind brands such as Erewhon, Popup Bagels, KHAITE luxury womenswear, Vuori performance activewear, and A24, the film and TV studio, made a large investment in Francois' La La Land, aimed at growing the brand nationwide.

"The Stripes deal, as big as it was, was a step forward. But I'm not sitting here pretending I won the championship."

Feeling the humility from this superstar Zillennial, I asked, "What is the championship for you?"

He paused. "Defining a new culture where the brand is really a part of how the country breathes, how it affects the next generation of entrepreneurs and how they build companies. When La La becomes a great American company, I think that's probably the championship. And there's a lot of work to go until we get there." ●

RODEO DRIVE CONTINUED FROM PAGE 16



FUTURE SITE OF TIFFANY
PHOTOS BY CAROLE DIXON

the influx of development on Rodeo Drive over the past few years. He suspects it is simply a case of keeping up appearances. “It’s more about momentum and staying relevant,” said Rivielle. As for the Tiffany building, he notes, “It’s going to be their flagship for the U.S. and maybe even the world, and it’s going to be spectacular.”

This past summer, Celine unveiled a new two-story flagship at 309 Rodeo Drive behind a palm-tree-reflective glass façade. Spanning 5,500 square feet, the interior residential feel includes area rugs, vintage furniture seating configurations, and blue-chip art such as Andy Warhol. The mezzanine level has an apartment feel with private salons and wooden chevron flooring. Under the new artistic director, Michael Rider, this destination for women’s and men’s ready-to-wear, will also offer exclusive Nino, Luggage and Frame bag variations in exquisite silks and leathers.

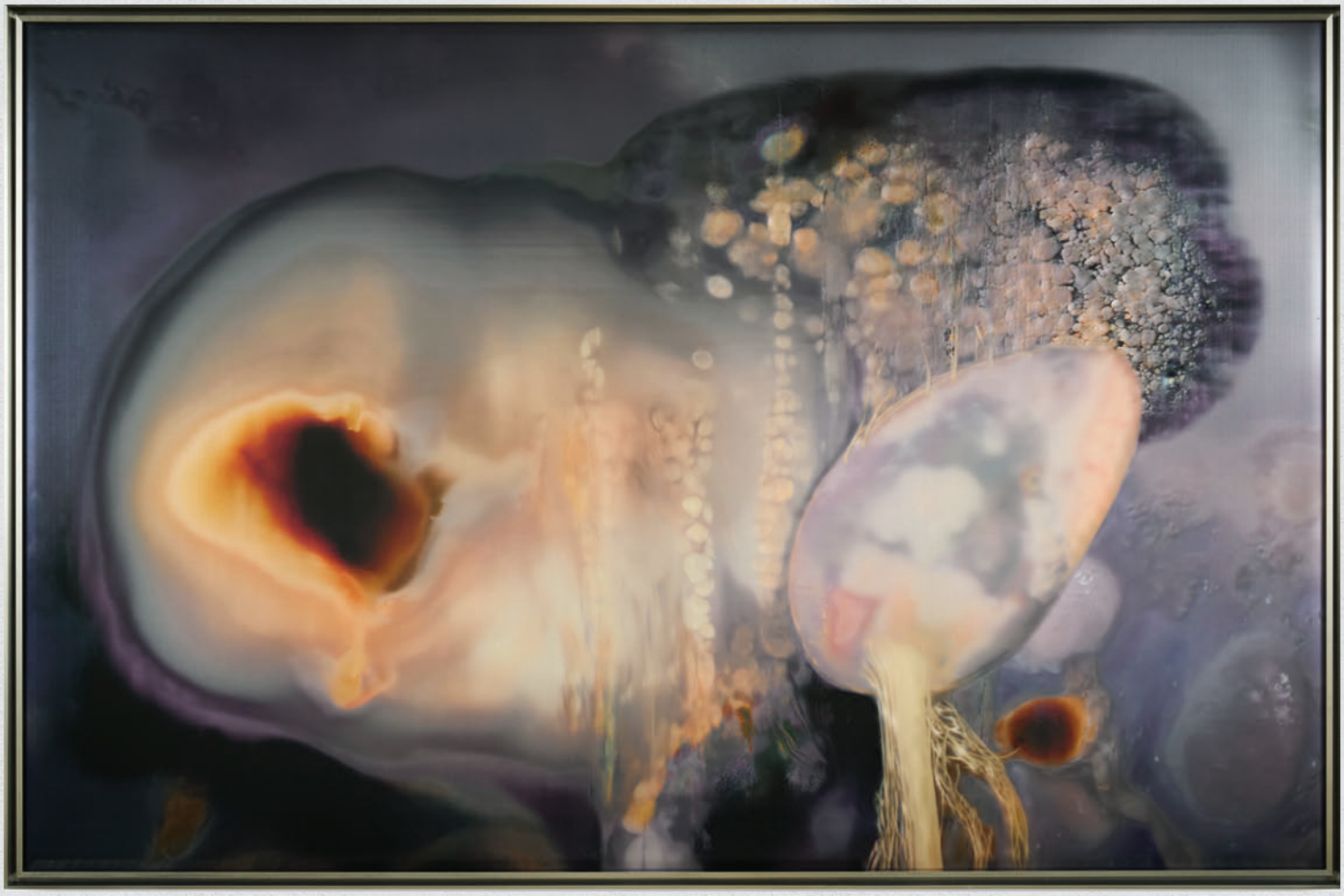
Nearby, fine Italian craftsmanship is alive and well at Ferragamo, which recently unveiled its new retail destination that reflects a focus on architecture by Belgian designer Vincent Van Duysen at 357 N. Rodeo Drive, along with Chairman Leonardo Ferragamo during “The Joy of Loving” holiday campaign.

“Beverly Hills holds a deeply special meaning for us,” said Ferragamo. “It was here, exactly 100 years ago, that my father made the life-changing decision to return to Italy, following the extraordinary success he had achieved in America while still only 29 years old. It was here in Beverly Hills that he opened his very first store and built a success that far exceeded even his most ambitious youthful dreams.”

Inspired by the hospitality of Salvatore Ferragamo’s original salons, the décor is constructed to resemble a contemporary Italian home, with natural stone, marble, glossy red lacquered metal counters, backlit panels, and bronze-framed mirrors. But the showstopping piece is a



CARTIER CONSTRUCTION SITE



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Anicka Yi
0þR†KLñ†0W£, 2026
UV-cured ink on acrylic topology, aluminum artist's frame
53 1/2 × 80 1/2 × 1 1/2 inches

Collection of East West Bank.
© Anicka Yi, 2026
Photo by Jonathan Nesteruk.

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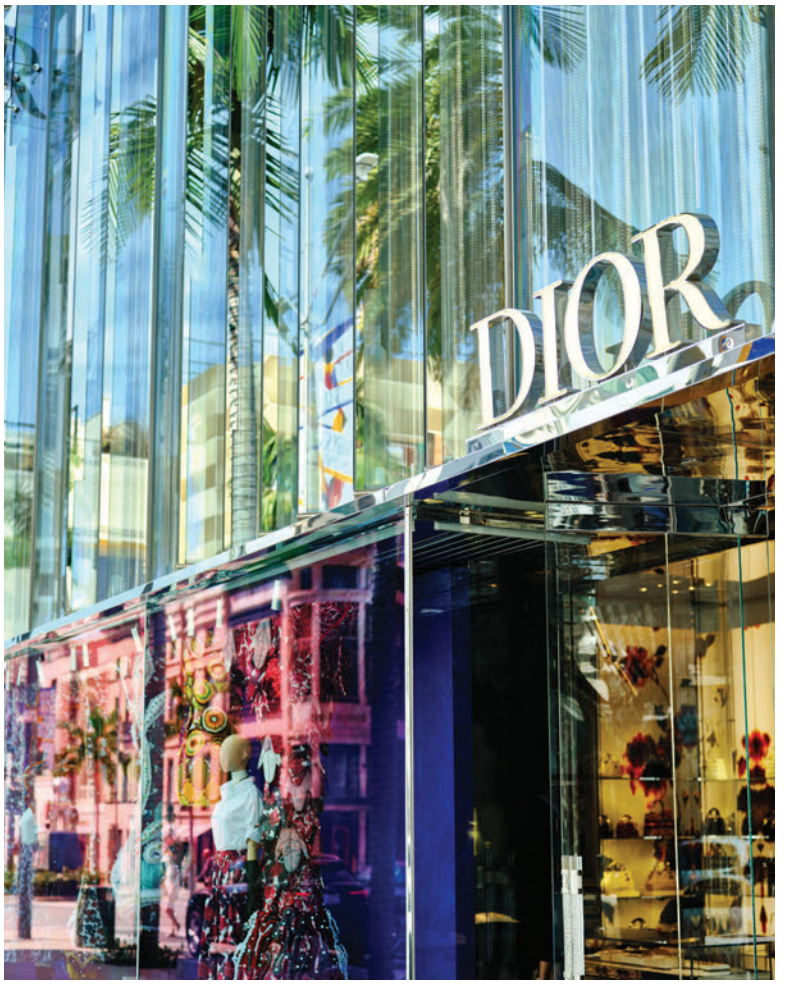

DIOR

PHOTOS BY BRICA WILCOX COURTESY OF RODEO DRIVE COMMITTEE

custom glass table by Milan-based designer Andrea Mancuso of Analogia Project, decorated with sea-blue ceramics from the Aquario collection.

Also recently opened in late October, David Yurman unveiled a newly reimagined showroom by Italian architect Andrea Tognon. It features a cast glass façade and warm limestone interior, with stone and onyx counters inspired by rich gemstones. Part of the expansion includes a private client salon behind an etched glass wall with the iconic cable motif.

While they might have just launched three new titanium watches, Bvlgari was also inspired by its Roman heritage for a complete revamp of the Rodeo jewelry and accessories store within the last year. Now, guests are greeted in the Maison by a focal staircase and its dangling curtain crafted by Venini's master artisans with 1,400 pieces of sparkling Murano glass in golden sunset hues, along with travertine columns, fluted walls, and Calcutta marble in a signature cabochon cut.

Bvlgari North America President Hervé Perrot commented on the Rodeo Drive enhancements, "Los Angeles has long been a source of inspiration for Bvlgari, a place where cinematic glamour meets bold creativity. We have been thrilled welcoming our clients to experience a renewed expression of our Roman heritage in this extraordinary city."

The Maison now spans a multilevel space with dedicated selling areas for its collections of fine jewelry, watches, perfume and handbags on the main floor, along with a salon for entertaining clients and a rooftop terrace, the brand's first in North America.

Celebrating 50 years on Rodeo Drive this fall, Bijan's boutique is now available by appointment only, so the entire 8,000-square-foot space is private during every guest's visit. To mark the occasion, the boutique didn't add a VIP terrace, but did create two new fragrances, Just Bijan for Men and Just Bijan for Women, carrying on the legacy of the original scent that put them on the map.

Tucked away on Two Rodeo, newer Italian lifestyle accessories store Abel Richard from Dubai and Miami, is using materials from Formula 1 cars to make one-of-a-kind handbags (priced at over $100,000) and James Bond-style brief cases that are both works of art.

In more expansion news, Hermès has acquired two adjoining Rodeo Drive properties for a reported $400 million, the largest retail real estate deal in the city's history, which will double the current footprint of its current store at 338 North Rodeo Drive.

More to look forward to: Cartier's future global flagship on the corner of Rodeo and Brighton Way, will reveal a 15,250-square-foot, three-level space designed by Foster + Partners, that will also hold a rooftop terrace.

The Courier also discovered that a development plan review is underway for Van Cleef & Arpels, which has filed a request to construct additions to its existing commercial building with a new rooftop use and terrace.

Once the Purple Line Metro Extension is complete on Canon Drive, and all of the flagship stores reopen, Rodeo Drive will be poised to become the prime spot for not just shopping, but year-round rooftop soirees with panoramic views of the city. ●









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MOVIES CONTINUED FROM PAGE 20

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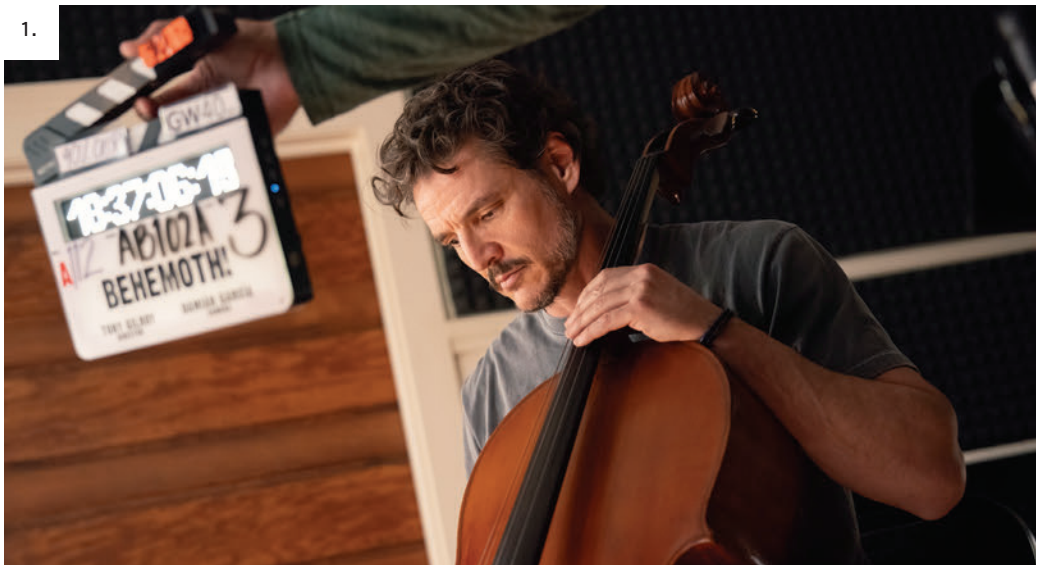

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1. PEDRO PASCAL IN “BEHEMOTH”
PHOTO COURTESY OF SEARCHLIGHT PICTURES

2. “RAY GUNN”
PHOTO COURTESY OF NETFLIX

3. DAVID HARBOUR IN “VIOLENT NIGHT 2”
PHOTO COURTESY OF UNIVERSAL STUDIOS

Dec. 4

“Behemoth,” from director and writer Tony Gilroy (“Michael Clayton”), tells the story of a gifted cellist (Pedro Pascal) who returns to Los Angeles after 20 years on the road, looking for a more stable life as a studio musician. But the movie scores he records bring back memories, both good and bad, of his past life. A rather obtuse theme, it will be filled with beautiful music.

“The Friend’s House Is Here” was a jury prize winner at Sundance. This film is about the underground art scene in Tehran, emphasizing the importance of art in all our lives, but especially in the lives of the oppressed. Joy can be found in defiance.

“Everybody Digs Bill Evans” is a deep dive into the personal turmoil of legendary jazz pianist Bill Evans whose life is upended at one of his career peaks when a close friend, Scott LaFaro, the bassist of his trio, is killed in a car accident. Evans, one of the greats of his era, hand-picked by Miles Davis to join his sextet, one that included John Coltrane and Cannonball Adderley, would go on to win Grammys with his own groups. The movie chronicles his low point after LaFaro’s death, when he stopped playing and moved back in with his parents, played by Bill Pullman and Laurie Metcalf.

“Ray Gunn” is an animated sci-fi hard-nosed detective noir combining a femme fatale (Scarlett Johansson) and a PI (Sam Rockwell) who are on a mission to save the world, or at least Hollywood, from monsters of both the human and one-eyed variety. From the versatile Brad Bird, the creative behind both “Ratatouille” and “Mission Impossible: Ghost Protocol.” Streaming on Netflix Dec. 18 after its theatrical opening.

“Tender Loving Care” may be the swan song of masterful director Mike Leigh. Thankfully veering away from the humorless narrative of his previous film, “Hard Truths,” this one promises to be a bit more upbeat, where friends support friends in sickness and in health. Starring Kate O’Flynn, a recent Emmy winner for “Widow’s Bay,” Leigh’s films are always thought-provoking.

“Violent Night 2” finds Santa on the naughty list. To redeem himself, he’s going to have to go up against a powerful gang, one that’s out to kill him. Can Christmas be saved? What do you think? Starring the very funny David Harbour as Santa and Kristen Bell as Mrs. Claus.

“De Gaulle: Liberté” is the second part of the De Gaulle epic, part I of which premiered in November. Continuing Charles de Gaulle’s arc from 1942 until the liberation of Paris and the end of the war in Europe, it boasts a top-notch cast and an interesting perspective on freeing the French Republic from the Nazis and the traitorous Vichy government.

“Flavia de Luce: Girl Detective” is a humorous story following the adventures of 11-year-old Flavia, something of a girl genius, who puts all her wiles to work to prove her father innocent of the murder he is accused of. Starring the charming Molly Belle Wright with more than able assistance from Martin Freeman as her father and Toby Jones as the somewhat inept police detective assigned to the case. Based on a popular series of books.

Also opening Dec. 4 are “The Gallerist,” “Game,” “Gods Don’t Give Gifts” and “Eternal Return.”

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4. GUY PEARCE AND JACK O'CONNELL IN "INK"
PHOTO COURTESY OF NETFLIX
5. PAUL GIAMATTI AND JULIANNE MOORE IN "THE DEBUT"
PHOTO BY MATT INFANTE, COURTESY OF A24
6. CHRIS EVANS AND CHRIS HEMSWORTH IN "AVENGERS: DOOMSDAY"
PHOTO COURTESY OF MARVEL
7. TIMOTHÉE CHALAMET AND ZENDAYA IN "DUNE: PART THREE"
PHOTO COURTESY OF WARNER BROS. PICTURES

Dec. 11

"Ink," the film adaptation of James Graham's hit play, chronicles Rupert Murdoch's transformation of "The Sun," a mediocre, failing British newspaper, into the massively popular scandal sheet it became. Modern journalism has never been the same. Starring Guy Pearce as Murdoch, the film will stream on Netflix beginning Jan. 8, 2027.

"The Debut," written and directed by Jesse Eisenberg, is about Mona (Julianne Moore), a New Jersey housewife in need of a revamp. She finds it when she auditions for a part in her local community theater in front of Jerry (Paul Giamatti), the biggest name in New Jersey community theater. Will he get a performance out of the basically talentless Mona? Will she find her missing self-esteem and will her family treat her the way she deserves? I don't know, but I'll definitely stay tuned for this one.

"Rose," a 17th-century period piece about a woman, disguised as a man, arriving in a village to claim an inheritance. Everything she does and says is based on a lie because she has taken on the identity of a dead soldier, the rightful heir. Starring Sandra Hüller, any film with Sandra Hüller (winner of the Silver Bear award at the Berlin Film Festival) is worth a try.

Also opening Dec. 11 are "Clarissa," "Zero A.D.: The Birth of Christ" and "George Michael: The Faith Tour."

Dec. 18

"La Gradiva" is a coming-of-age drama centered on a group of French high school students on the cusp of graduating who are on a trip to Pompeii with their Latin teacher. The focus is primarily on three students in the group. We have Toni, the class clown, lost in his battle for self-acceptance; James, sure of his future, self-centered and entitled by virtue of his social status; and Suzanne, odd-girl-out, who has yet to find her place. First-time director Marine Atlan tells this story sensitively against a backdrop of relatable ancient history.

"Dune: Part Three" finds Paul (Timothée Chalamet) as the emperor. He fears reprisals from old and new enemies. Still searching for his old love Chani (Zendaya), he must find redemption one way or another. Directed again by Denis Villeneuve from a story by Frank Herbert; if nothing else, the special effects will be Oscar-worthy.

"Avengers: Doomsday" has Dr. Doom (Robert Downey Jr. playing the villain this time around) wreaking havoc on the Avengers who must call on the Fantastic Four, the Wakandans, the New Avengers and the X-Men for help. If Dr. Doom prevails, the universe will collapse. Filled to the brim with stars from the Marvel Cinematic Universe hoping to save the Multiverse. No expense was spared. All your favorites will be there.

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SENDHIL RAMAMURTHY | MEERA SIMHAN

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Sandra Bernhard. Photo by Joshua Jordan.

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CONTRA-TIEMPO

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Dec. 23

"Angry Birds Movie 3" is more Angry Birds but now with better jobs. Red is a full-time dad but managing the kids and just keeping the baby alive may be the end of him. Laughs and sight gags are on order along with a great voice cast featuring Jason Sudeikis, Josh Gad and Rachel Bloom, all returning from the previous installments.

Dec. 24

"King" is from acclaimed Indian director and writer Siddharth Anand. An action thriller, it is based on Luc Besson's hit "Léon: The Professional," a '90s actioner that propelled Jean Reno into international stardom and launched Natalie Portman's career. Shah Rukh Khan stars as the hitman and his real-life daughter, Suhana Khan, plays his protégée. There will be blood.

Dec. 25

"Coward," ironically translated from its original French title "The Brave Ones," is a World War I drama of boys sent to war, untrained both in killing and loving. When Pierre meets Francis, gay to his very toes, they decide to mount a musical revue as an outlet to their grief, worries and the horrors of war. The film explores the thin line between bravery and cowardice, love and hate, straight and gay. "Coward" is Belgium's submission for the International Oscar. The two leads shared the Best Actor Award at the 2026 Cannes Film Festival.

"Werwulf," directed by Robert Eggers dipping back into the territory he covered in "Nosferatu," is a new, gory, grim present to unwrap. Willem Dafoe is a village elder in charge of hunting down the pack of otherworldly animals decimating the village. Expect darkness and horror. Give me back Lon Chaney as the Werewolf any day.

"Jumanji: Open World" is the fifth and final installment of this long-running series that started in 1995. Originally a board game, it is now one of the video variety. In beta mode (i.e., trying to get the bugs out), the characters have escaped the console into the land of humans, and a way must be found to return them, and the animals that escaped with them, back into their imaginary world. They find a way back into the console, but everything seems to be upside down and backward. The fun and action will be nonstop.

"Artificial" is Luca Guadagnino's sendup of the ups and downs and ups of Sam Altman who created OpenAI, which begat ChatGPT. Fired by his board of directors for not being forthcoming enough, he was rehired five days later after investors and employees rebelled. Starring Andrew Garfield as Sam Altman, it also features Ike Barinholtz as Elon Musk.

"Mr. Irrelevant" is the title given to the last man picked in the last round of the NFL draft. In 1983, that man was John Tuggle, chosen, if that's the right word, by the New York Giants. Determined to make the team, he shows the others what it takes to be a hero. Starring David Corenswet as Tuggle and Michael Shannon as Bill Parcells. His inspirational fight against the odds is this year's "Brian's Song."

There you have it. Make your list and check it twice. Pass the popcorn, the movie gods are coming your way.

Happy holidays and happy viewing. ●

1.



2.



3.



1. DAVID CORENSWET IN "MR. IRRELEVANT"
PHOTO COURTESY OF PARAMOUNT PICTURES
2. KEVIN HART, KAREN GILLAN, DWAYNE JOHNSON AND JACK BLACK IN "JUMANJI: OPEN WORLD"
PHOTO BY HIRAM GARCIA COURTESY OF SONY PICTURES ENTERTAINMENT
3. "ANGRY BIRDS MOVIE 3"
PHOTO COURTESY OF PARAMOUNT PICTURES



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TECH GIFTS CONTINUED FROM PAGE 26

The Influencer's Toolkit

1. **DJI Mic 3/Mini** – Audio may be the most influential factor in retaining viewers for online video, short-form or otherwise. To make sure your dulcet tones are captured in the highest quality, it's hard to beat the modern convenience of wireless mics from the folks at DJI. The Mic 3 offers top-of-its-class quality, coming with two transmitting mics, one receiver and a charging case for all three devices. Beyond typical influencer content, these could even be used for podcasting if a more mobile/flexible/lightweight setup is needed. If you're looking for a budget option, the Mic Mini offers an equivalent set for that price point. *$259 for the Mic 3 and $99 for the Mini, available on amazon.com, Photo courtesy of DJI*

2. **External SSD** – A simple but critical option, if you are recording high-resolution footage, you'll likely need more storage than what your phone alone can accommodate. There are many options online, but this is one product category where choosing a name brand option is important, as off-brand storage has issues with quality assurance and failure rates. Options like Samsung, Lexar, SanDisk, etc. are safe bets. MagSafe options that will stick to the back of your phone are extra convenient and will still function with any other device. For capacity, at least 1 TB is a good starting point. *$230 for 1 TB of Samsung storage from amazon.com (compare prices and models between retailers; price match when available), Photo by Jamison Province*

3. **DJI Osmo Pocket** – One of the most popular product categories for vloggers and influencers, a gimbal camera can free up your phone while producing similar if not higher-quality video, that's more stable in a wider range of situations. It's also compact and offers deeper video options for those inclined. The Pocket 3 is available from retailers domestically, but if you happen to travel abroad, you can grab the newer Pocket 4 and show up your peers. *$439 from DJI direct, or from your favorite online retailer like bestbuy.com or amazon.com, Photo courtesy of DJI*

4. **Sharge Discho 3-in-1 Power Bank 10000 mAh** – If you're recording and editing video on your phone, or even just excessively scrolling, you'll end up draining your battery – and it's a pain to be tethered to a wall to top up. Many good options like Anker are legion (once again, trusted brands only, many lie about capacity and batteries failing are actually dangerous), but few look as slick and unique as Sharge's "Discho" 3-in-1 power bank. It has a retro-futuristic look, evocative of turntables, plus a built-in retractable USB-C cable and a built-in AC plug to charge the power bank and your device directly at the wall simultaneously. It meets or nears the max charging speed of most phones at 30W and 10,000 mAh is a sweet spot for capacity to offer sufficient charging without becoming too bulky or heavy. *$50 on amazon.com, Photo by Jamison Province*

5. **iPhone Duo** – This largely speaks for itself – it's Apple's foray into foldable devices. The Duo, as a subject, is a fountain of potential content, but as a tool for creation, it may be even more prodigious. As app developers update their software to make use of the large and flexible inner screen, new workflows will emerge to take your content (creation or consumption) to new heights. The various folding positions of the Duo alone present opportunities to film and share in novel ways. Order soon if you want one, they're already backordered to next year. *$2,000 for the base model with 256 GB of storage at apple.com or your cell service provider, Photo courtesy of Apple*









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Beyond the Smartphone Camera

1. **Fujifilm Instax Pal 2** – Fujifilm has developed a keychain camera that's more than a novelty. The Instax Pal 2 is tiny but also produces photos using Fuji's iconic film simulations in aspect ratios to match real life Instax Film sizes. It has a viewfinder screen to frame and preview your shots and can connect via a built-in USB-C plug or wirelessly to your phone. It can even connect to an external Instax printer to immediately produce physical prints of your photos. And of course, it has a built-in flash to recreate the classic look of disposable camera photos in a smaller, less disposable body. *$170 from bestbuy.com, Photo courtesy of Fujifilm*

2. **Fujifilm X100VI** – For someone with experience in photography but also wants to streamline their relationship with the hobby, the Fujifilm X100VI is the platonic ideal. Put simply for non-photographers, it's a lovely union of top-quality hardware and software to produce beautiful images with a plethora of built-in and customizable film simulations. It also shoots extremely high-resolution video, also with film sims or flat color profiles for those who need it. Note: This camera's explosion on social media has made stock limited and scalping prevalent. The best bet is to be vigilant for restocks from retailers charging MSRP or find smaller mom-and-pop businesses that offer pre-orders for when stock is available, like below. *$1,900 from Samy's Camera (samys.com) if you get lucky or $1,800 as a pre-order, processed when stock arrives, from doddcamera.com, Photo courtesy of Fujifilm*

3. **Hasselblad X2D II 100C** – Few names in the camera world carry weight like Hasselblad. The X2D represents their step into the modern landscape of cameras, retaining their staple medium format in the form factor of modern mirrorless models. Image quality is what the price tag suggests; some of the best money can buy. *$12,400 for the X2D II 100C body and variable zoom lens and $7,800 for the body only, available direct from hasselblad.com, Photo courtesy of Hasselblad*

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Keeping Cool in the Heat, Holiday and Otherwise

4. **Ororo Zenflow Power Cooling Jacket** – An unorthodox alternative to separate, external cooling devices is to wear clothing with the cooling tech built in. Common in Japan, now, there's increasing availability over here in the States. Ororo offers its cooling jacket in two colors with variable-speed fans for circulation. It also features zip-off sleeves to turn the jacket into a short-sleeve vest. The included battery can deliver up to 9.5 hours of cooling on low and 5.5 hours on high. *$150 from ororowear.com or amazon.com, Photo courtesy of Ororo*

5. **Sony REON POCKET PRO Plus** – Sony's answer to the heat may look unconventional, but it's a cutting-edge personal temperature regulation device. The device sits on the back of your neck, so that the cooling (or warming!) plate is in contact with your skin. Then, via the device itself or app, you can adjust the settings to your comfort. It's quiet, and Sony quotes up to 15 hours of battery life, depending on settings. *$260, available exclusively from electronics.sony.com, Photo courtesy of Sony*

6. **Dyson Hushjet Mini Cool** – One of the first premium personal fans to hit the market, it banks on the design and engineering implicit in all Dyson products, rather than multifunctionality, to do its one job well. It's powerful, small, and light, and claims up to six hours of runtime. Available in three colors with matching included accessories to wear around your neck, stand on your desk, and travel in a pouch – perfect for daytime music festivals or long lines for a café or sample sale on Rodeo Drive. *$100, available directly from dyson.com, Photo courtesy of Dyson*

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On the Road and in the Air

1.



2.



3.



1. **Airfly Bluetooth Adapter** – Some airlines are beginning to introduce Bluetooth pairing to their in-flight entertainment systems, but until it's comprehensive, this is a great way to watch movies ergonomically in-flight. Plus, this can be used on any device with a 3.5 mm headphone jack, whether it be a classic stereo, a vehicle, gym equipment and many other devices. Three models are now on offer, with the premium options offering dual pairing for shared listening, audio receiving in addition to the standard transmission and more. *$70 for the Deluxe, $60 for the Pro, and $35 for the SE at twelvesouth.com, Photo courtesy of Twelvesouth*

2. **AirPods Pro 3** – AirPods Pro are possibly the best value in tech for how often they're used and how well they perform compared to the price. Noise cancellation is top tier, comparable to many over-ear headphones, and nothing beats transparency mode, which sounds natural and keeps you aware of your surroundings. Battery life is great, and they're incredibly compact (plus Find My support with a speaker in the case if you misplace them). If you or a loved one are due for an upgrade or somehow don't have a set, this is one of the easiest and safest recommendations on this list – even for those without an iPhone. *$250 at apple.com, Photo courtesy of Apple*

3. **Groov Custom Insoles** – There are endless recommendations online for the ideal "20,000 steps a day" footwear option for traveling. Here's the rub: everyone's foot is different. It seems intuitive, but for some reason, footwear manufacturers haven't seemed to catch on. Custom-fit insoles can bridge that gap. A scan with an iPhone (no app required) will collect 30,000 data points to create a personalized mold for an insole that fits in any shoe. Maybe you don't need a whole new pair of shoes. Maybe you just need the ones you have to fit right. *$150 on groov.me, Photo courtesy of Groov*



The Future of Fitness – Stealth to Audacious

4. **Google Fitbit Air** – Google has produced its competitor to Whoop and the like, a screenless wearable tracker in Fitbit Air. It's lighter and less obtrusive, with a longer battery life than a standard smartwatch (up to a week) while offering comprehensive fitness, sleep and overall health tracking. Users can also receive personalized training from Google's Gemini AI model, via a premium subscription (three-month trial included). *$100 from store.google.com or other tech retailers, Photo courtesy of Google*

4.



5. **Garmin Fēnix 9 Pro** – This is the polar opposite from the previous option. The Fēnix 9 Pro is a veritable Swiss Army knife of a smartwatch. It can function totally independently from your phone via cell service or satellite, has up to 31 days of battery life and even solar charging to supplement. Garmin offers multiple face sizes for the 9 Pro, and you can pick between an AMOLED or Solar display, as well as whether or not to include inReach satellite connectivity. The standard Fēnix 9 is also available for those who don't need the features mandated by extreme conditions. *$1,000 to start for the Fēnix 9, $1,100 to start for the Fēnix 9 Pro from garmin.com direct or other tech/outdoor retailers, Photo courtesy of Garmin*

5.



6. **Tennibot Partner V2** – Why bother coordinating your tennis schedule with a trainer or friend when you could get in productive practice time on your schedule? Tennibot Partner V2 is an AI-enhanced tennis training robot that can run drills, move around the court and learn from you based on your goals to better optimize training time. If you don't mind a stationary bot, the Partner Lite has the same intelligent features, just in a set position. There's even an additional ball-collecting robot, the Rover, that can make the process fully autonomous. *$2,275 for the Partner, $1,525 for the Partner Lite, $4,000 for the Rover from tennibot.com, Photo courtesy of Tennibot* ●

6.



LUXURY REAL ESTATE — SEATTLE, WA



SEATTLE, LAKE WASHINGTON WATERFRONT | $45,000,000



SEATTLE, LAKE WASHINGTON WATERFRONT | $15,950,000



SEATTLE, SKYLINE VIEWS | $3,590,000





SEATTLE, PIED A TERRE | $2,750,000



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PASTRIES CONTINUED FROM PAGE 22

He tells the Courier, "From the beginning, we've been known for French-style pastries and cakes with balanced sweetness that lets the flavors shine. In 1999, we introduced the French macaron to the Los Angeles market, and it has since become one of our signatures."

Macarons remain a specialty today, along with La Provence's bestselling Black & White Cake. It is a showstopper, with three layers of chocolate cake, chocolate mousse, fresh cream and strawberries, decorated with white and dark chocolate-dipped strawberries.

Additional offerings at La Provence include chocolate croissants, seasonal fruit tarts in varieties such as Apricot Frangipane and Lemon Meringue Brûlée, eclairs, cream puffs and crème brûlée. Also popular is the Lemon Caramel Meringue Cake, a lemon chiffon cake with fresh lemon curd mousse covered with toasted meringue, and the Hazelnut Mousse Cake, a yellow cake with hazelnut praline mousse and chocolate filigree.

Over the years, La Provence has expanded to offer breakfast, lunch and dinner. Hakim has also expanded the business to a total of three locations.

He adds a cautionary note about the Beverly Hills branch. "Today, our future at our Beverly Hills location is uncertain. Our shopping center has changed ownership several times, and we are now the only business open on the ground floor. After meeting with Mayor Craig Corman and his staff, however, I feel encouraged that, with their help, we can find a way to remain in Beverly Hills," he tells the Courier.

He continues, "Over these three decades, our customers have become friends and family. We're really a hub where people come to meet with friends and family. Sharing in their birthdays, holidays and milestones has been the most rewarding part of our story."



BLACK & WHITE CAKE FROM LA PROVENCE

Recommended Gift Boxes

"We do the Bûche de Noël (Christmas yule log), which is similar to the Black & White Cake," Hakim tells the Courier. "It is a decorated chocolate truffle rolled cake with chocolate mousse and fresh strawberries. We also do a Hanukkah Log version of chocolate or red velvet decorated in blue and white."

Sweet Lady Jane Beverly Hills

214 S. Beverly Drive
Mon. - Fri. 10 a.m. - 6 p.m.
Sat. - Sun. 9 a.m. - 5 p.m.
424-278-1868
www.sweetladyjane.com

Look up "traditional neighborhood cake shop" in the dictionary, and you are bound to see a photo of Sweet Lady Jane (SLJ). Cakes sell like, well, hotcakes at its popular Beverly Drive shop, as well as seven other Southern California locations. Owners Matt Clark and Julie Ngu reopened the business in early 2024 after its previous owner closed the stores a few months earlier.

"It has been a lot of work, but the Beverly Hills shop is in a neighborhood that we love. South Beverly is a block away from the tourist area, so we mostly have customers from the neighborhood who live or work there. They're our community and we do anything we can to cater to them," Clark tells the Courier.

The recipes and traditions that made Sweet Lady Jane a mainstay in Southern California since the 1980s continue to flourish today. Customers can choose from more than two dozen cake varieties, including the legendary Triple Berry Cake that is synonymous with the brand. The menu also includes cupcakes (red velvet is a bestseller), tarts, pies and customizable cookies.

Custom cakes are the brand's specialty, especially for weddings, where the demand for vintage décor is still going strong.

"We have people who have used our cakes for their weddings and come back for many years for all the milestones. We carry an important responsibility. It isn't just about making products and selling them. It's about bringing back those memories," Clark notes.

He and Ngu are also expanding the Sweet Lady Jane legacy, with plans to open five new stores next year. And they have launched a side business,



SWEET LADY JANE'S HOLIDAY COLLECTION

Sweet Occasions, which operates one-of-a-kind pink dessert vans that will bring sweet treats directly to any celebration.

Recommended Gift Boxes

The newly released Christmas Collection at SLJ includes festive takes on beloved classics and handcrafted holiday treats such as a new Gingerbread Bundt Cake, a Christmas Tree Cake and festive cookies and cupcakes. Holiday Gift Baskets can be customized with 14, 40 or 65 items. And, of course pies are front and center at Sweet Lady Jane this time of year. "For Thanksgiving season, we sell thousands of pies," said Clark. "We have an extraordinary recipe that we've used for many years, and offer apple, sour cherry, pecan, pumpkin and mixed berry."

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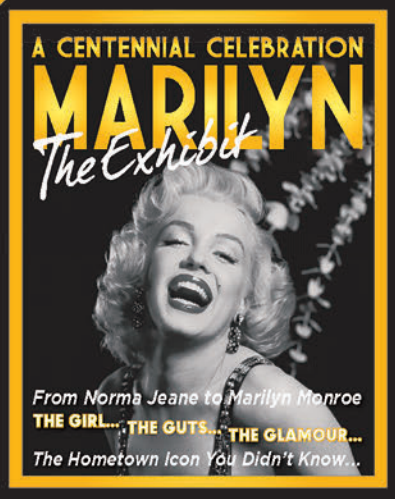
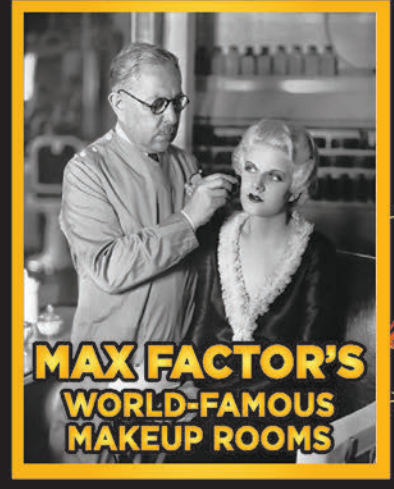
IN THE HISTORIC MAX FACTOR BUILDING



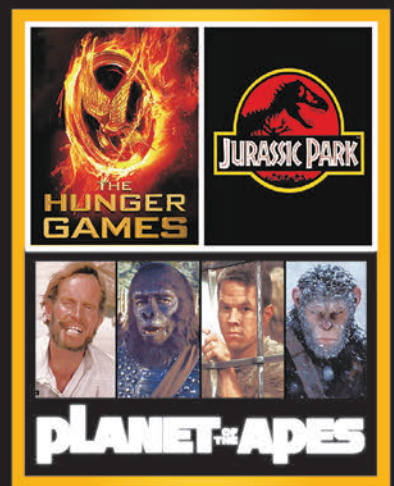


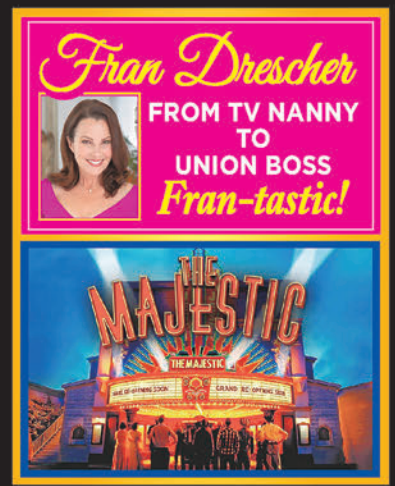








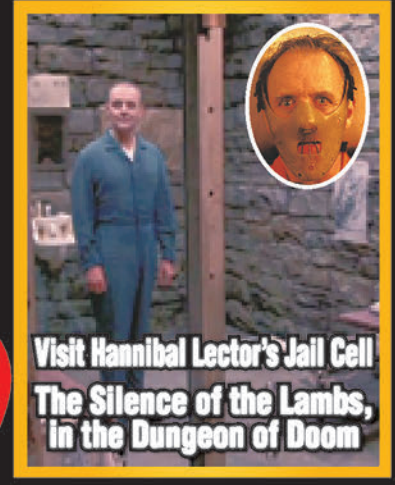












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424-245 4349
https://beverlyhillscookies.com

Barry Axelrod's entrepreneurial spirit has led him into several different business ventures over the years. Still, he keeps returning to the sweeter things in life, such as his Beverly Hills Cookies shop on Beverly Drive.

"I was in the business before, around the era of Mrs. Fields about 45 years ago," Axelrod tells the Courier. "I had another company called Swirls Cupcakes and did that for several years, as well."

He and his wife Wendy opened Beverly Hills Cookies three years ago. The shop has made a name for itself with popular cookie varieties such as chocolate chunk and Snickerdoodles.

"We developed our chocolate chunk cookie. My wife did a lot of different recipes. Neither of us were really chefs; we just liked food, and I love sweets," notes Axelrod.

In fact, the shop offers 25 different cookies at any one time, including bestsellers such as s'mores, sea salt chocolate smash and oatmeal crunch. They also offer brownies, muffin tops and cookie cakes. They serve gelato prepared from a recipe from Orvieto, Italy, and milkshakes crafted with all-organic vanilla bean ice cream. They can even create cookie milkshakes and offer specialty coffees and matchas, as well.

"If you look at the platforms that rate cookies, you'll see that we probably have the best vegan, gluten-free and keto cookies and sweets available," Axelrod adds.

Beverly Hills Cookies is a perfect spot for anyone craving a late-night sweet fix, as it is open until 11 p.m. each evening. The business is also very dog-friendly and sells its own dog treats named after the Axelrods' late dog, Mochi.

Ever the entrepreneur, Axelrod has his sights on opening a branch of Beverly Hills Cookies soon in the Sherman Oaks Galleria.

He has also branched into vending machines.

"We just put one in Century City and the Ovation Shopping Center in Hollywood, and we are installing more. People come here to the store because they've bought a cookie from one of the machines. So, we're doing great," said Axelrod.

Recommended Gift Boxes

Beverly Hills Cookies offers the Beverly Hills, Rodeo Drive or Baker's Choice Collections of its cookies, featuring six, nine or 12 bestsellers. "Of course, if the customer wants to change up the flavors, we will gladly do that," says Axelrod. "And since we're open so late, you can stop by at 10 or 11 at night and grab a gift box." They will also prepare "corporate-size" cookies, which are half the size, for events.

Levain Bakery

130 S. Beverly Drive
8:00 a.m. - 10 p.m.
424-699-1783
https://levainbakery.com

Ask any foodie to list the country's most distinguished cookie shops, and Levain Bakery will surely make the cut. The venerable business launched more than three decades ago in New York City. It now has outposts in four Southern California cities, including Beverly Hills, as well as Chicago, Boston and Washington, D.C.

Cookies are actually an offshoot product line. Levain's story began with friends Pam Weekes and Connie McDonald. Both were bakers who supplied bread to some of the top restaurants in New York City. In 1995, they decided to go into business together and opened a small shop on West 74th Street. They named the bakery Levain, after the French word for "leavened bread." They baked bread by hand every day. Cookies were, as they describe it, a happy accident. The women were both triathletes and baked huge chocolate chip walnut cookies to keep their energy levels high for training. After they took a sample batch to the bakery, customers clamored for more.

In the three decades that followed, their giant 6-ounce cookies have achieved cult status. Chocolate Chip Walnut is the best-known, but Dark Chocolate Chocolate Chip, Oatmeal Raisin, Dark Chocolate Peanut Butter Chip, Two Chip Chocolate Chip, Caramel Coconut Chocolate Chip and White Chocolate Macadamia have myriads of fans, as well. Levain also offers a vegan and gluten-free version of the Chocolate Chip Walnut.

Levain shops also offer a range of loaves, pastries and brioche, as well as breads that first made them famous. This fall, a spiced chocolate chunk cookie is hitting the shelves, as are two holiday offerings. A new Chocolate Cherry Almond Cookie combines red tart cherries with semisweet Valrhona chocolate and toasted almonds. Another holiday favorite, the Dark Chocolate Peppermint Cookie, is returning this season. It features a dark chocolate dough laden with soft red and white peppermint chips.



2026 HOLIDAY COOKIE TIN FROM LEVAIN
PHOTO BY KORT HAVENS



Recommended Gift Boxes

Cookies make a perfect gift for anyone with a sweet tooth, especially during the holidays. This year, Levain's newest collectible holiday tin features a deep forest green design and winter scene filled with skaters, snowy moments and Levain cookies. Available in 8- and 12-cookie sizes, the tin can be purchased on its own or as a complete cookie gift set. Levain has also partnered with Crate & Barrel to create a playful cookie jar that fits a dozen cookies and can serve as a permanent addition to any kitchen countertop.

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