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The gay hockey rom-com we need right now P. 20

MURDER

The stranger-than-fiction story of the Stoney Creek killing P. 56

MEMOIR

My six-year battle to stay in Canada P. 90

Toronto Life

No.

1

Mark Carney

Canada's elbows-up defender-in-chief

Most Influential 2025

THE INTERVIEW



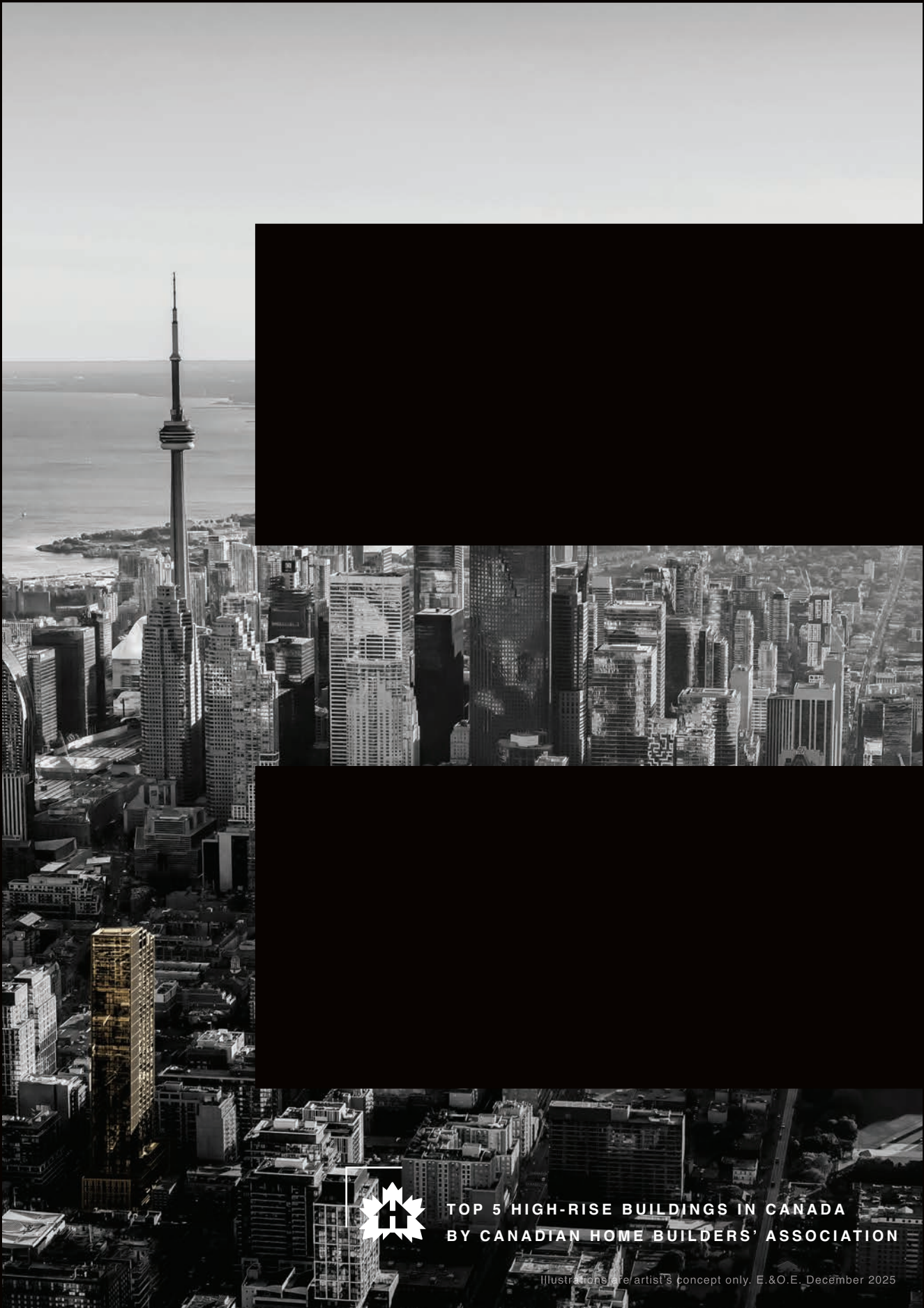
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Photograph by Markian Lozowchuk; styling by Jodi Ulrick, Plutino

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A few of 2025's movers and shakers (clockwise from top left): Eva Chin, Mae Martin, Vladdy Guerrero Jr., Doug Ford, Carley Fortune and Mike Myers. To see where they ranked, turn to P. 29



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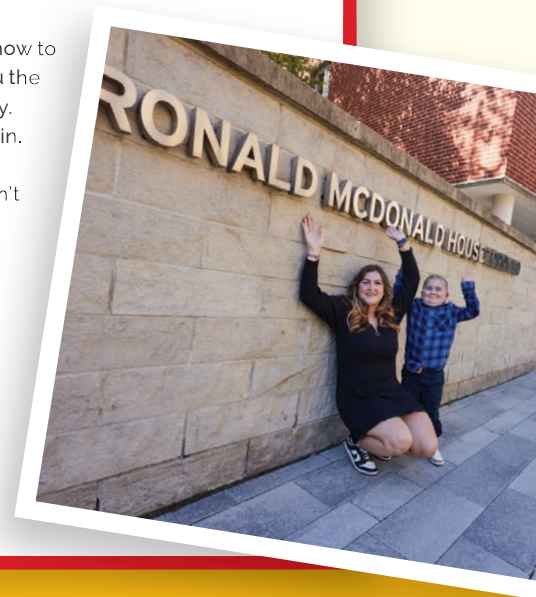
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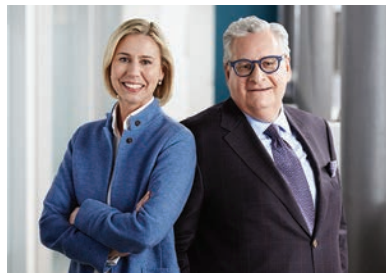
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Power of Attorney

Courtney Shea’s investigative feature on Singa Bui—the lawyer accused of embezzling millions of dollars from her clients to sustain her family’s extravagant lifestyle—got readers in a lather about legal ethics and a perceived lack of oversight.

“Time to start holding them accountable: an unethical lawyer stealing people’s hard-earned money from legal trust accounts to fund her luxury lifestyle.”

—@StrategicMove1, X

“These d-bags belong in prison. But what I find most interesting is that the title and face of this negative *Toronto Life* spotlight is the wife. You have to read the story to know that her husband is complicit in this. Typical *Toronto Life*.”

—PsychologicalHall820, Reddit

“The wife was charged with 42 counts of fraud, 17 instances of criminal breach of trust and one count of possession of the proceeds of crime over \$5,000. The husband got one count of fraud over \$5,000.”

“Bui is the real estate lawyer who’s accused of stealing her clients’ money from the trust account. The husband almost definitely knew, but he isn’t directly implicated in the crime.”

—Superior-Flannel, Reddit

“This was an insane deep dive. I’ve been following this story for a while now, and there were details that I was completely in the dark about, including how deeply the husband was involved from the moment he quit Sutts, Strosberg. He was the one deflecting and delaying while Bui had her hand in the funds. Cartel is basically relying on plausible deniability, but when you’re wearing \$5,000 suits and shopping for \$100,000 pieces of art with \$5 million in mortgage debt, you kind of have to know where your money is coming from.

“The \$7-million question, however, is still unanswered: Where has all the money gone? The article mentions Cartel looking to set up a base in Turks and Caicos (a well-known tax haven) and Bui wanting to leave Canada (for the UK) and taking multiple trips to Europe (including Switzerland) around the time investigations officially began. That leads me to believe they either have significant savings overseas or they’re trying to set up a similar shop abroad where they are not yet infamous.”

—HotBeefSundae, Reddit

“As someone who works in the legal space, I have to say this story is so incredibly well investigated. Love *Toronto Life* articles, man.”

—TheRahulParmar, Reddit

“My mother was a real estate lawyer for 40 years. The sacredness of the trust fund was something I grew up knowing about. You don’t touch that money, ever. But we heard stories about the ones who did. What happens to more lawyers than people want to admit is that the end of the month comes, too many bills need to be paid, and it’s either (illegally) borrow from that fund or shut down the business. Maybe, for some of them, it does work out. They say ‘never again’ and go to their deathbeds with that secret. (My mother swears she never touched her trust fund, and she’s bad at lying, so I believe her.) If the Law Society didn’t catch Singa Bui, imagine how many lesser amounts are getting embezzled under their radar.”

—Crazy_Package_8580, Reddit

“I feel for the family that lost \$2 million. They’ll never get it back. The sad part is that the lawyers’ kids still go to private school, and they still live lavish lives. Clearly, they’ve moved the money to Europe. No wonder there are copycat crimes. There are no real consequences.”

—90s_vibe, Reddit

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Who's Number One?

At *Toronto Life*, around the time the colours turn, the big themes of the year tend to crystallize. In the past, that's meant the rise of women's pro sports, the AI revolution, the heroism of the front-line worker, the Raptors' winning ways and the advent of medical marijuana. This year's theme was patriotism, and it emanated not from within but from beyond, provoked by a venal, volatile, expansionist-minded American president.

Make all the tired jokes you like about oxymorons, but Canadian pride coloured virtually every storyline this year. Premier Doug Ford, for instance, was a strong candidate for the top spot in our ranking of the city's most influential people. He styled himself as Captain Canada, donning a "Canada Is Not For Sale" hat and appearing on any network that would have him, pushing his tough-guy act and standing toe-to-toe with Howard Lutnick. Ford yanked American hooch off the shelves; threatened the power supply to Michiganders, Minnesotans and New Yorkers; and aired an anti-tariff ad so effective that Trump threw a hissy fit.

With each pinch-hit grand slam, knee-buckling curveball and sprawling catch, the Blue Jays made a convincing case for number one as well. They strung together a breathtaking postseason and got heartbreakingly close to becoming MLB champions again. The Rogers Centre, still sparkling from its upgrade, couldn't contain the pipe-burst of civic enthusiasm. Vintage bomber jackets and other glory-days merch not seen since the '90s flooded the streets. The Jays' exhilarating run was about more than sports: it became a national rallying cry, an opportunity to beat Americans at their own game, in prime time.

This year, the eternally influential Margaret Atwood pressured the Edmonton Public School Board into reversing its absurd book-banning policy. Her dystopian masterwork *The Handmaid's Tale* continued to prove itself prescient, and its sequel, *The Testaments*, is in TV

development. She wrote a knockout memoir called *Book of Lives* and in May was named the recipient of the British Book Award for Freedom to Publish.

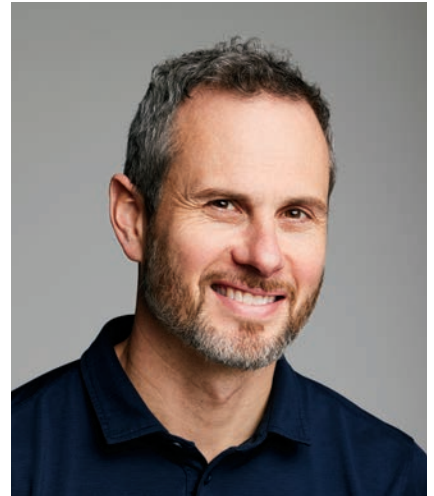
We could also have made a case for Maggie Kang, creator of the global smash hit *KPop Demon Hunters*, or for Mae Martin, the creative multi-hyphenate knocking down barriers and making audiences laugh, cry and sing along the way.

None of those candidates, however, matched the impact of Mark Carney. Canada's prime minister is *Toronto Life's* most influential person of the year not for his place of residence (though he did live here for a solid stretch) but because of the power of his actions.

Canada rests on the bedrock ideals of democracy, rule of law, academic freedom and an independent fourth estate. They allow for the liberty to publish without fear of political persecution; to trust in the courts; to dress how you like and to watch what you want, be it a queer icon's stand-up set or your favourite baseball team.

In October, I sat down with the prime minister for an in-depth interview (page 29), and we discussed those ideals, Canada's vexing domestic and international challenges, and how he sees the path forward. No politician is without flaws, and Carney's political story has yet to be written. But, for his commitment to defending Canada's economic, democratic and sovereign future, our choice was crystal clear.

—Malcolm Johnston
editor@torontolife.com



COMING UP

365 unforgettable dishes to try in 2026; the secrets of the booming business of fertility; inside the battle for the heart, soul and future of the Bay; and the explosion of new gyms for the decidedly un-faint of heart.

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THIS CITY

“We deserve to have a gay show that is sexy and horny and fun”

—JACOB TIERNEY, P. 20



THE BIG PICTURE

Project Runway

In the decades-old fight for the soul of the islands, mark one down for team airport

BILLY BISHOP'S EXISTENCE has always been contentious, with advocates touting the economic benefits and critics condemning the environmental harms. But, last year, the municipal and federal governments sided with the former camp when they agreed to extend the airport's lease until 2045. Now, another coup for the aerodrome. In October, Air Canada announced that it would be dramatically expanding its service on the Toronto Islands beginning next spring. That means new routes to New York, Chicago, Boston and Washington and increased flights to Ottawa and Montreal. It also means long-term financial security for Billy Bishop. It's good news for time-strapped Torontonians and tourists but bad news for islanders and condo dwellers suffering from turbine-generated noise—to the tune of 600 flights a day.

TIERNEY BY ISIAH TRICKEY/FILMAGIC/GETTY IMAGES, AIRPORT COURTESY OF PORTS TORONTO

Q&A

Hopeless Romantic

After co-creating *Letterkenny* and *Shoresy*, Jacob Tierney became Canada's go-to director of bro comedies. Now he's releasing *Heated Rivalry*, an erotic gay hockey love story. Life's funny that way

BY COURTNEY SHEA

As the brain behind shows about dudes drinking beer and telling fart jokes, you're associated with frat-boy humour. A gay hockey romance feels like a departure, no? Yes. I stepped back from the *Letterkenny* universe to do something different. I loved working on those shows, but I feel like I've put in my dude time. I told my agents, "If you send me any work related to sports, I'm going to kill you!" Then I presented them with Rachel Reid's gay hockey series, *Game Changers*. A sincere gay romance is very different from bro comedy.

You don't strike me as the typical romance reader.

I discovered Rachel's books during the pandemic. A friend suggested that I get into smutty gay romances. When I found *Game Changers*, I was hooked right away. And not ironically; it wasn't a guilty pleasure. I appreciated the storytelling: extremely sexy, funny and sweet.

And you thought, *This is my next project*? Not immediately. I didn't yet understand the breadth of the appeal. Then I came across an article on how romance is a billion-dollar industry that doesn't get any respect. It also explained that hockey romance, in particular, had

"This is a gay love story set in the world of hockey, so its very existence is an act of rebellion"



exploded in America even though hockey is considered a second-tier sport there. *Heated Rivalry*, the second book in Rachel's series, was mentioned. Suddenly, I thought, *If someone else options this book, I'll be devastated*. I followed Rachel on Instagram, and it turned out that she was a *Letterkenny* fan. We talked about my vision for the show.

Which was what? Something extremely joyful. This is a gay love story set in the world of hockey, so its very existence is an act of rebellion. But the show itself is happily ever after. I didn't want to subvert too many romance tropes—I love these stories. This show is queer joy for adults. None of the characters go back to a miserable wife. No one self-harms. There's a tendency in queer art to focus on real tragedies. Sometimes, it feels like we're still telling stories about the McCarthy era or the HIV/AIDS epidemic. We deserve to have a gay show that is sexy and horny and fun.

Was there any concern that this might be a tough sell to the suits? Oh, definitely.

There are many studios where a pitch like this would be DOA. It's about finding an executive who understands, and Rachel Goldstein-Couto, head of development at Crave, was that person. She's a romance fan, she knows this world and she wanted this show. But, right up to the end, I was still waiting for someone at Bell to step in and say, "Okay, now it's time to cut out all that sex."

I've seen the trailer. I guess that moment never came.

Someone on the corporate team even thought one of the sex scenes was too quick. I was like, "It's six and a half minutes long, you thirsty, thirsty people!" It's not just

queer stories that lack consensual, pleasurable sex; so many stories involving sex end up with an assault plot line or something else that's dark and punitive.

You mentioned that the romance genre, despite delivering at the box office, isn't respected. Why? It's pure misogyny. Romance is something that mainly women consume, so it's not given the same level of discourse. But it's been amazing to see audiences come together around these books. Rachel's works are queer, I'm queer, the show is queer. But one of the things that made it viable in terms of viewership was the baked-in female audience.

Can a gay hockey romance influence the NHL's culture of homophobia? That's not my agenda, but it's something we address in the show. I love Rachel's books because they exist in a world with homophobia. There are queer romance fantasies where a hockey team will have many openly gay players. *Heated Rivalry* is set in the real world—and a pro athlete being out is very rare because the risks are very real. That adds tension and dynamism.

The show is set in Montreal but filmed in Toronto. Was that a sore point for you? I love Toronto. I lived in Little Italy for several years in my 20s and shot my first movie, *Twist*, in Parkdale. Filming in Montreal wasn't financially feasible, so now we're like the Americans, shooting in Toronto and pretending that it's someplace else.

The series streams November 28. Do you hope to direct a second season? It's my show! I'll never abandon it.

This interview has been edited for length and clarity.

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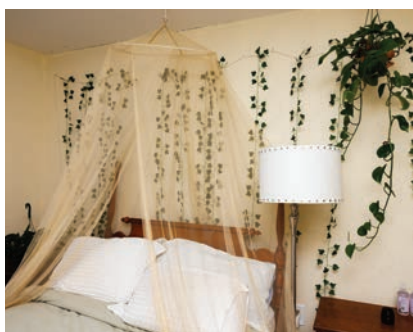
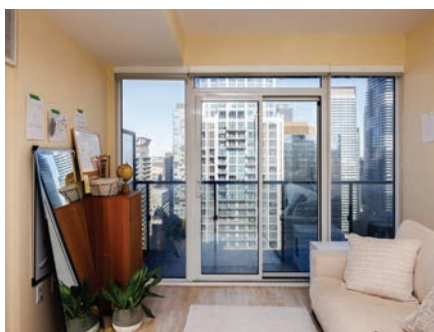
How this entrepreneur got back on track after a health scare

BY TEAGAN SLIZ

Keleigh McCall is a 30-year-old entrepreneur living in a one-bedroom apartment near Yonge and Bay. In the spring of 2023, she suffered a mental health crisis, which forced her to pause her career and blow through her savings. After two hospitalizations at CAMH, Keleigh got her entrepreneurial mojo back by creating the Life-Maxing App—a self-improvement gaming platform that recently landed her a spot at TMU’s start-up incubator. Now she’s hard at work building up the business while sharing daily “life-maxing” advice and activities with her 40,000 TikTok followers. She’s on track to make **\$23,000** this year. Here’s how she spends her money.



“It was hard to accept financial aid from my parents, but it actually brought us closer together”

**REGULAR EXPENSES**

Rent: \$2,000 a month.

“I couldn’t have afforded it without my parents’ help, which was hard to accept at first. I’m a very proud person. But it actually brought us closer together. I’m grateful.”

Utilities: \$125 a month.

Phone: \$65 a month with Rogers.

Groceries: \$350 a month.

“I mostly shop at T&T.”

Transit: \$80 a month. “I walk almost everywhere, but when I don’t, I take the TTC.”

Dining out: \$50 a month.

“I love sushi. So, maybe once every two weeks, I’ll get takeout from a spot that’s right below me.”

Clothing: \$250 a month.

“During my mental health crisis, I threw out everything I owned. It was devastating. I’m gradually building a new wardrobe.”

Skin care: \$50 a month.

“I get a lot of free products through work. Otherwise I’ll buy Korean skin care on Amazon. I love doing face masks.”

Business subscriptions:

\$300 a month. “Notion, Typeform, ChatGPT Premium and Framer are my go-tos.”

Gadgets: \$30 a month.

“Playing with new things is a hobby of mine. I’m constantly fiddling with a new tripod, a light for my phone or a magnetic case.”

RECENT SPLURGES

Ankle weights: \$30. “I used to be a personal trainer, and I’m still keen on fitness. These weights are for home Pilates.”

Snacks: \$150. “I hosted an event in my apartment building to promote my app. Ten people attended.”



The goal isn't just to protect value; it's to preserve meaning. This is where RBC Wealth Management brings both practical experience and cultural sensitivity. The firm's advisors understand that no two collections—or families—are alike. "The confluence of legal, financial and often sentimental considerations necessitates that we take a different approach when planning with our clients," says Robyn Solnik, vice-president of high net worth planning services at RBC Wealth Management. "In addition to legal and tax planning, we engage with our client's qualified tax and legal advisors, working together to ensure our client has a well-thought-out plan to pre-empt misunderstandings and disputes."

RBC advisors recognize that stewardship isn't only about preserving monetary value, but about continuity. That same philosophy informs RBC's own art collection, one of the largest in Canada, encompassing more than 6,000 works of Canadian artists and installed in offices globally. RBC also actively sponsors events like Art Toronto and institutions such as the National Gallery of Canada and the AGO. Over the past 20 years, RBC and the RBC Foundation have invested more than \$130 million to arts organizations around the world, reflecting their deep appreciation for the role of art in connecting our communities. It's the same principle their advisors bring to client relationships—care, expertise and respect for legacy.

Good planning, after all, isn't just about preventing disputes. It's about ensuring the next generation understands not only what they've inherited, but why. The most effective estate plans balance fairness with sentiment—they reflect both the emotional and financial dimensions of ownership.

When viewed this way, wealth management becomes a kind of storytelling: a way to decide how your values will live on, long after you do. Whether that means keeping an heirloom in the family, cataloguing the objects that define your home or even donating a collection to a gallery, the first step is starting the conversation.

"After considering their aspirations for their artwork, our clients might consider engaging in conversations with museums and galleries," says Heather Powers, director of RBC's Charitable Gift Program. "But there are many other financial considerations that our advisors can help them understand, including whether their works can be certified as a Canadian Cultural Property in collaboration with the museums, tax implications for the client or if they need other charitable contributions to reach their philanthropic objectives."

Discussing the meaning behind a family's cherished pieces can bring generations closer, turning potential conflict into connection. These conversations reveal what families value most—not just what they own, but what they stand for.

Contact an RBC Wealth Management advisor today to discuss your collection's legacy and ensure its worth is valued for generations to come.



Tailored planning for your art collections

From appraisals to inheritances, thoughtful wealth planning keeps your art and heirlooms protected for generations

CREATED FOR 

A porcelain tea set. A signed landscape painting. A gold bracelet worn by a grandparent on their wedding day. These aren't just objects—they're fragments of a family's story. And when that story changes hands—through inheritance, gifting or estate planning—what once bound generations together can quickly become a source of stress or disagreement.

It's a scenario that plays out more often than you'd think. Families meticulously plan for financial assets but forget that sentimental ones carry their own kind of value. A painting or vintage watch might not appear on a balance sheet, but its emotional weight can be immeasurable. And if expectations around those pieces aren't discussed early, they can create uncertainty later.

Part of the challenge is psychological. Money invites structure—forms, balances, statements. But when something holds sentimental value, people often hesitate to assign it a number. That reluctance can create emotional turbulence. Addressing those emotions early helps ensure the items that mean the most don't become the ones that divide.

That's why conversations about personal collections are increasingly finding their way into wealth management discussions. "Art collecting is a very personal endeavour," says Sara Johnson, vice-president of high net worth planning services at RBC Wealth Management. "We diligently guide collectors through a risk management exercise to ensure that the emotional and financial considerations of an art collection are properly addressed and documented."

The exercise starts not with paperwork but with stories: how an item was acquired, what it represents and who it was meant for. From there, advisors help families appraise and document these pieces to counsel them through the legal and tax considerations that can otherwise catch people off guard.

How to unlock rebates* to make your home more energy efficient†

Want to make your home cosier and more efficient? A rebate program in Ontario can help you do just that.

The Home Renovation Savings™ program from Enbridge Gas and Save on Energy offers rebates on upgrades like windows, doors, insulation, heat pump water heaters and air sealing. Whether you take on one improvement or bundle a few, the program is designed to put more comfort into your home in every season.

The program includes a home energy assessment that offers a deeper understanding of how your home uses, loses and saves energy.

Energy assessment reveals opportunities

Here's how it works. First, visit homerenovationsavings.ca/bundles and fill out a quick online form. You'll receive a list of approved service organizations in your area. Choose one and book an initial assessment with them directly.

A registered energy advisor will visit your home and check it out, from basement to attic, for drafts, insulation levels and other clues that determine your energy efficiency level.

Next, you'll get an EnerGuide rating for your home and a renovation upgrade report. You'll see exactly how your home could be improved, whether it's upgrading drafty windows, thin insulation or an inefficient water heater.

Homeowners will be able to apply for any upgrade that was part of the assessment. Completing at least two will qualify you for bundled rebates.

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Attic insulation	Up to \$1,500
Foundation insulation	Up to \$2,300
Exterior wall insulation	Up to \$3,600
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Windows and doors	\$100 per rough opening (three minimum)
Heat pump water heaters	\$500
Air sealing	Up to \$250

\$600 rebate after you've completed two or more upgrades.

Small investment of time with big returns

The initial energy assessment takes just two hours and could potentially lead to thousands of dollars in rebates.

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An energy assessment isn't just another item on your to-do list. It's the key to unlocking bigger savings on upgrades that will make your home more efficient and comfortable year round.



Start with a home energy assessment
homerenovationsavings.ca/bundles



* Terms and conditions apply. Visit homerenovationsavings.ca/terms-and-conditions for details.

† Any references to energy savings are based on the assumption that the participant is reducing their energy use through participation in the Home Renovation Savings program.

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CREATED FOR **maple**

Life doesn't stop in the city until you get sick

With Maple, you and your family can keep moving forward without missing a beat

Life in Toronto rarely slows down. Parents sign up for sleepless nights and the carousel of colds, flus and fevers. Many in what's known as the sandwich generation sign up for the double duty of raising children while caring for their aging parents. Others sign up for years of building their careers or keeping family traditions alive at home. Some sign up for the pace of city living, while others find balance on weekends away.

These are the chapters we choose: the goals, the responsibilities and the moments that define us. What no one chooses are the interruptions that illness brings—the stress, the waiting or the sudden halt to everything else. In Toronto, more than 510,000 residents are already without a family doctor, and that number could reach one million by 2026.

That's where Maple comes in. The virtual care membership connects people with Canadian-licensed doctors, nurse practitioners, specialists and mental health professionals 24 hours a day, seven days a week. It's healthcare that fits into real life, designed to keep people covered so they can stay focused on what matters most.



Trey Étseyatsé
@treyetseyatse

IN THE FAST LANE

For online strength and endurance creator Trey Étseyatsé, staying fit and running marathons have become as much about self-improvement as inspiring others to follow in his footsteps.

"My first run was a 5K, and it took me 40 minutes from start to finish," he says. "I was stopping every few hundred metres and felt like my heart was about to pump out of my chest. It completely humbled me. So I set a goal to run 10K, which I eventually did."

That perseverance paid off, leading to one marathon after another and a social following that looks to Étseyatsé for motivation. "It's become about pushing limits, inspiring others to move their bodies and showing that you can always reinvent yourself," he says. "I get messages all the time from people saying I motivated them to start running, buy their first pair of running shoes or make healthier choices."

When he moved from Ireland to Toronto six years ago, he struggled to find a family doctor. "Maple filled that role for me," he says. "If I ever fall sick or need a prescription, it's sent straight to my pharmacy or delivered to my door. I can connect with a doctor whenever I need, whether I'm at home, travelling or short on time. It saves me from waiting hours at a clinic."

For Étseyatsé, staying on top of his health is part of the same discipline that keeps him training. Virtual care gives him the speed and consistency to match his pace.



Matthew Ravenscroft
@thedirtyraven

A RECIPE FOR BALANCE

Matthew Ravenscroft, former culinary director at the Michelin-recognized Gia restaurant and currently business developer at New / School Foods, is known for his plant-forward cooking and enthusiasm for vegetables. “I genuinely just want people to see the potential in eating vegetables,” he says. “If people learn to enjoy cooking more vegetables, they’ll enjoy eating more vegetables.”

Between running a busy restaurant, travelling for culinary collaborations and raising two energetic kids, Ravenscroft’s schedule rarely leaves time for downtime. “One of my favourite things about this work is connecting with people,” he says. “In what world would I regularly talk with chefs I admire in the UK, Amsterdam or Australia and just chat about food? It’s amazing to share that passion.”

Since he can’t cook if he’s sick, staying healthy is non-negotiable. “Maple gives us an opportunity to be more preventive by having immediate access to assistance rather than guessing or waiting until it gets worse,” he says. “If I’m travelling, I can still connect with a doctor, get a prescription and keep things moving.”

For Ravenscroft, subscribing to the membership ensures he can take care of himself and his family without missing a beat. “It means we can live our lives, stay healthy and keep doing what we love,” he says.

KEEPING LIFE ON TRACK

From entrepreneurs and parents to caregivers and creators, everyone faces moments when life stops unexpectedly. Maple helps Canadians bridge those moments, offering care when and where it’s needed most. Although we all sign up for the things that give life meaning, we shouldn’t have to sign up for the wait.



Victoria Hui
@thelustlist

FINDING THE PERFECT FIT

When marketing strategist and digital creator Victoria Hui first launched the Lust Listt, she was 12 years old. “I needed a creative outlet outside of my academic studies and found blogging to be my little corner of sanctuary on the internet,” she says.

More than two decades later, the Lust Listt has evolved into a lifestyle platform that spans fashion, beauty, food, decor and travel. With robust followings on Instagram and YouTube, Hui’s work now reflects both creative independence and family life. “I love being able to be in control of my schedule, and to never know what each day will bring,” she says. “I also love the flexibility that it has provided my family. I get to spend so much more time with my husband, son and dog.”

That flexibility extends to how she manages her health. A world traveller with an unpredictable schedule, Hui can’t afford to be grounded by illness, at home or abroad. “It’s been a personal mission of mine to secure top-of-the-line access to healthcare for my entire family,” she says. “Maple is a phenomenal add-on to our existing family health team. It means we have coverage and access when typical clinics and offices aren’t open.”

Having specialists available on short notice is another reason Hui depends on Maple. “It can be hard to commit to specialist appointments when last-minute projects pop up,” she says. “I love knowing that I can get in contact with someone on my own schedule and have issues resolved quickly.”

Hui also uses Maple’s mental health services. Caregivers and parents report higher rates of anxiety and burnout across Canada, so she values knowing that support is there when she needs it. “It’s peace of mind, really,” she says. “It helps us keep our balance.”

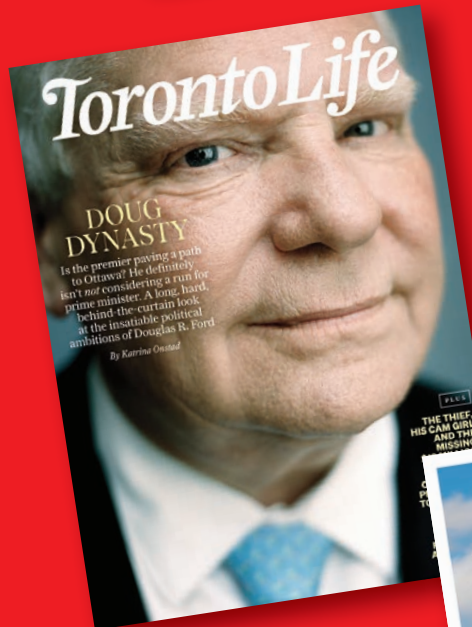


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Most Influential

2025

IT MAY HAVE taken Donald Trump's 51st-state rhetoric to stoke our national pride, but we kept the fire burning bright with subtle and not-so-subtle acts of patriotism all our own. In 2025, Mike Myers simultaneously trolled Americans and rallied Canadians on *SNL*; the heads of UHN and U of T welcomed world-class scientists and academics leaving the US; and Sheridan-trained animator Maggie Kang forced Netflix to revisit its entire business model with her unstoppable *KPop Demon Hunters*. The Jays united a city and a country eager for a resounding win against America's top team, and while they didn't end up with the trophy, they won the hearts of sports fans old and new. But 2025's true MVP? Prime Minister Mark Carney, who, along with fellow inductees Doug Ford and Anita Anand, among others, spent the year pushing back against authoritarianism across the border and around the world.



No.

1

Prime Minister Mark Carney

*FOR DEFENDING CANADA
IN A TIME OF CRISIS*

Portrait by **Markian Lozowchuk**



T

THE JOB OF PRIME MINISTER is hard, and it ought to be. But Mark Carney entered office in an unprecedentedly difficult time. Our decades-long partnership with the US has been unilaterally ruptured by a president who keeps treating our national sovereignty like a cat toy. Alberta is threatening to secede if they don't get what they want. Critical minerals, especially those in the Ring of Fire, position Canada to be a global leader, except Indigenous leaders are in no hurry to mine them, and for good reason. When it comes to AI, Canada must not be left behind—or so far out in front that we're vulnerable to its perils. And while Carney is popular, his party is decidedly not, and each jobs report, inflationary indicator and Trump mood swing threatens to undo everything. It's enough to make a guy run for the hills (or a yacht off San Diego). But Carney isn't running; he's down for the fight. Here, a conversation with the prime minister on domestic turmoil, the perils of AI and going toe-to-toe with Trump. *By Malcolm Johnston*

Mr. Prime Minister, as we look at the world today, much of what we have taken for granted for so long—democracy, rule of law, sovereignty, security—seems no longer reliable. In 2025, many influential Canadians have done many influential things in business, sports, culture, academia and beyond, but none of them can really function without those bedrock ideals. It's because of your commitment to defending Canadian ideals and institutions that *Toronto Life* chose you as the most influential person of 2025.

Well, thank you very much for the honour. It's important that we have those institutions, and I'm happy to play a role in preserving them. But it's interesting the way you frame it—what you're saying is that you're choosing Canada, because of what we represent as a country, what we believe in, what we're fighting for.

You are a creature of Canada, born in Fort Smith, raised in Edmonton, now living in Ottawa, but let's not skip over your time in Toronto. Back in the early 2000s, as you and your wife were starting a family, you lived in Forest Hill and worked on Bay Street. What do you recall most from those years?

It was an interesting time. We'd moved back from New York, and our eldest was six weeks old. So it was a time of meeting people in the neighbourhood and sampling what Toronto had to offer. The sheer variety of neighbourhoods is on a scale you don't experience in New York or London, both cities that I've spent some time in. So it was great to be back, a great time. I should have hung on to the house.

Did you not?

No. I mean, you only need one house.

On a related note: I understand you quickly grew tired of the materialism of Bay Street and, before long, leaped at the chance to enter the public service. It's reductive to trace your current job to having encountered too many flashy Bay Streeters with oversized Rolexes, but is there some degree of causation there?

How to put it? I always expected at some point to do some form of public service. That was bred in the bone from my family. My parents were teachers, and my father worked in public service in Alberta for a number of years. So this was not a diss of Bay Street; it was the call of public service.

Maybe we nudged you?

I learned a lot in my previous roles, includ-

ing on Bay Street, and I put that to use in the roles I've had since.

At the risk of alienating your friends and family in Alberta, can you tell us what place Toronto occupies in the national fabric?

I view this kind of thing as a win-win situation. Canada is more than the sum of its parts. Toronto makes the whole country better. It is in many respects the best of Canada, because it's all of Canada in one place. Toronto is a centre of finance, of culture, of business, of huge entrepreneurship. What makes Toronto unique is that it's the product of them all being together in one place. The genius of Toronto is the genius of Canada.

Toronto, for all its charms and excesses, faces major challenges. What is the most pressing one as we head into 2026?

Its capacity. The city is a victim of its success, of so many people wanting to live here. That puts tremendous strain on the system. Transit, safety—these pressures are huge. And we need to catch up to the scale of Toronto and the greatness of it.

You've announced plans to rapidly increase the pace of housing supply. From where I sit, however, the problem Toronto's housing sector faces is not a lack of supply so much as a supply of the wrong thing. Torontonians really crave two- and three-bedroom units.

How do you incentivize developers to build those when they're less profitable?

It's an astute observation. Sometimes people talk about the housing market as if it's one market, when in truth it's really segmented. There has been a huge

housing, cheaper for people to live in and more energy efficient. We recently announced our first project in Toronto, at Downsview, which will be a step toward almost 65,000 units built by Canadians, with Canadian technology, for Canadians,

“Trump texts with a lot of caps. And exclamation marks”

build-out of small condos that function as places for people to live but also as investment properties. And simultaneously there has been very little built in Toronto and across the country of affordable housing—that is, not the deeply affordable housing for the more vulnerable in society, but just basic affordable housing for the masses. The federal government is stepping up to build a new Canadian industry—cheaper, factory-built

and many of them skewed to affordability. So yes, the family that wants the two- or three-bedrooms will hopefully be able to access them.

That sounds great, but it leads to another problem. Doubling the pace of housing worsens our transportation woes by the same factor: more people getting stuck in gridlock and on the TTC. Shouldn't any federal investment in housing come with an accompanying federal investment in major transit projects?

We have multiple levels of government, and they need to make choices around what's important. But, yes, investment in transit in Toronto, all forms of transit, is important. The federal government is building out on lands that have that close proximity to transit, which is to residents' advantage.

Let's switch to US relations.

Oh, okay, so the light-hearted part of the discussion!

President Trump is the self-described master of the art of the deal. You, having spent decades in the private sector, are no stranger to the art yourself. Having been up close to Trump many times now, how would you characterize his negotiating skills?

He is a good negotiator. When you're president of the United States, you oversee the world's military hyper-power, the largest, most dynamic economy, and you



Office mates: Carney and Trump in their second White House meeting

PHOTOGRAPH BY SHAWN THEW/EPA/BLOOMBERG/GETTY IMAGES

inherit a series of very tight relationships with your major trading partners. So you're starting from a position of strength. Then you throw on top of that someone who has lots of negotiating experience, an ability to identify the points of maximum leverage and a willingness to exploit them.

From the Canadian perspective, it takes patience and an ability to open up different avenues of that negotiation. We're not going to sign a bad deal. We're not even going to sign a good deal. We're going to sign a great deal for Canada. Our relationship won't get back to what it was. We've learned a lesson as Canadians on the dangers of close integration. But our situation can be better than it is today, and that's what we're negotiating hard for.

Before Trump called off negotiations, you two had shifted your relationship to text. I'm wondering who took the bold step of asking for the other's number.

He offered me his number when we first met in the Oval Office.

How would you describe his texting manner? Is it as much all-caps as I'm picturing?

A lot of caps. And exclamation marks. And there is no time limit—there is a 24/7

nice with the big guy and let the negotiators do the rough-and-tumble approach?

I don't think there's an inconsistency. Canada and the United States had a long-standing relationship that the US decided unilaterally to change. It's had a real effect, which we see here in the GTA in the auto sector, as an example. The language on the campaign trail was more marked, maybe, but it was correct.

It's a delicate dance. On the one hand, you have to avoid offending Trump—we all saw what happened with President Zelenskyy in Washington in February. But Trump twists empirical data; he mocks our nation; and while he hates being called Donald, he repeatedly refers to you as Mark. How challenging is it for you to sit there and hold your tongue for the greater good?

A couple of things. One, I'm in his environment, the Oval Office, and he has literally 75 press people there, maybe 10 per cent of whom are from Canada, and he's speaking to them about US domestic issues that have nothing to do with Canada. So I'm not going to interfere. With respect to Canada, I think you do see in those settings a level of respect that we expect for Canada. We are not "the 51st state" there. He wishes that we would be part of the United States. In the Oval

engineering expertise and determination. We can also support the development of specific applications that can be enterprise-level AI. Cohere is an example, as are applications within Shopify, Creative Destruction Lab and the Vector Institute.

The other opportunity is the broad application of AI across the country. One of the things you'll see from the federal government over the course of the next year is developing the strategy of "AI for All." That means AI that works for you as opposed to you working for AI. How do we use it to make the job of, say, a nurse practitioner better? How do we get rid of some of the administrative work? How do we use it for education? Marketing?

AI is essentially in a global arms race, and we know from experience that arms races usually don't end well. So how do we embrace AI but also ensure that Canada isn't part of some sprint straight toward our collective demise?

That's very poetic.

Why thank you.

We need to be clear about what we value, and then use AI to help achieve what we value. Canada values equality and universal access to health care, to name two. How are we going to use AI so that our health care system is more effective and efficient? We all know it needs to substantially improve. Really, it's a question for everybody, all the readers of *Toronto Life* and their neighbours and others: What do you value? What do you want to solve for? And then you work back using AI as a tool that makes it much more likely you're going to be successful.

Misinformation, AI-generated deep fakes and the like are the scourge of our time. By way of example, an impersonation scam has been circulating in Saskatchewan claiming that you're endorsing two online investment platforms. My question is—

I do not have a side hustle as prime minister. I just want to make that clear.

Okay, my second question is whether there is any hope for truth when the big tech platforms seem to have given up on it.

Well, there's a responsibility that comes with being a platform. That's true for a publication like yours, as I'm sure you're acutely aware, but also for tech platforms. They try to pretend they're not publications, but they are in this respect. We can use AI to police AI, to track bots and block bots,

“Poilievre's hair is impeccable. And he loves his family”

element to it. In other words, it is not apparent how much the president of the United States sleeps.

Middle of the night?

Middle of the night, early in the morning.

Fresh off the campaign trail, you used charged language like "betrayal." In your October meeting, there was a spirit of defiance in the Oval Office. Is it fair to interpret an intentional shift there, a sort of Make

Office, when he said, "Never say never," I said, "Never, never, ever."

Let's talk AI. Growing Canada's leadership in artificial intelligence is one of your priorities. In what specific applications do you see Canada becoming a global leader?

AI can contribute to our economy in many ways. For example, when it comes to the infrastructure necessary to train models and build those models out—which we can do with Canada's cheap and clean power,



Let's lighten it up a little bit. When this issue hits newsstands, you'll have been prime minister for 250 days, roughly. What's the best perk of the job? And I won't accept "Meeting Canadians, coast to coast to coast." That's too easy.

That's exactly what came into my head! You're not going to allow me that, okay, but that *is* the best element of the job, without question. As a distant second, I would say—as a perk and a responsibility—having the resources of the country to make a sound decision. Consider your example of banning social media: I could form a table, I could talk to people, I could get others to study it. That is a real perk. There aren't many roles like that. Maybe you have that convening power in your role—

I do not.

—but there are not that many roles where that's truly the case.

What do you miss most from your pre-prime ministerial life?

It's not a regret, exactly, but in this job you're never alone. You have no privacy.

No offence to your team members in the room, of course.

No offence to present company. But there's always company.

The job of prime minister is naturally a pressure cooker, possibly more now than ever. Trump, tariffs, immigration, the economy, unemployment, Ukraine, AI, the Middle East, the auto sector, Alberta secession, approval ratings, re-election and whatever else lurks ahead. Is it possible to actually turn off?

No is the short answer. I mean, I went for a run this morning, so maybe for part of the run I wasn't thinking about policy issues. I was crossing the road, so I was—

Trying not to get hit by a car?

Yes. So it's pretty hard to turn off.

In your 2021 book, *Value(s)*, you talk about meditation. Is that still part of your routine?

I still do it, yes. And by definition, if you're doing it successfully, you've turned off, emptied things out, tuned your mind, which is very helpful.

And then Trump texts, right?

That's why you have to put your phone on silent mode.

This interview has been edited for length and clarity.

to identify deep fakes. And yes, we need to hold on to truth. We're putting a lot of resources, including 150 RCMP officers, onto exactly these types of issues, which is the rise of financial fraud.

We know that America is divided, perhaps beyond repair, but how deep do you think Canada's divisions are? And what responsibility do you think politicians bear for deepening them? It's no secret that the easiest way to whip one's base into a lather is to vilify the other.

Canadians, over the course of this year, including in Toronto, became more unified under the external threat of what was happening south of our border. We really looked into ourselves and saw what it means to be Canadian, what we want to preserve, what we want to build. It's my responsibility to bring Canadians together, to govern for all Canadians, not to look for wedge issues. I find that people prefer their politicians to be straight with them. They don't always agree with you, but at least they appreciate it if you're open and honest. And in that regard, we can swim against this tide of political division.

Can you compliment Pierre Poilievre?

I can, of course. What would you like me to compliment?

I don't know. Maybe name three things you admire about him.

His hair is impeccable. He's a hard worker. He loves his family.

Okay. Moving on: social media deepens this division we're talking about, disseminates misinformation and worsens the mental health crisis, particularly among young people. Do you see any merit to following Australia's upcoming banning of social media for kids under 16? Could that happen here?

I see the merit on both sides of the argument. How do you weigh being overly protective against the well-documented evidence of the causal link between exposure to social media and mental health challenges? We have an epidemic, not just in Canada but around the world, of mental health challenges in youth, and we need to take responsibility for that. So the question is, What's the route? It starts with the very basic banning of cellphones and access to social media in school, just literally giving children an opportunity to be present. Does it extend all the way to the Australian example? My view is not settled yet on that—I've been focused on other things. I know that most senior people in tech, certainly in Silicon Valley, do not let their children on social media. If they do, they very much limit their time.

That says something.

It says a lot. They're well-informed, and they care about their kids.

We've been getting heavy here.

It's been dark!



2

THE BLUE JAYS

WORLD SERIES RUNNERS-UP

For bringing an entire country together

WE WERE *this* close. For die-hard fans and bandwagoners alike, the game-seven loss that ended the Jays' best chance at the Commissioner's Trophy in 32 years was fastball-to-the-face devastating. But remembering how we got there brought up other big feelings too: schadenfreude (Vladdy's gleeful "Daaaaa Yankees lose!" shoutout after the ALDS win), admiration (when Mad Max Scherzer refused to leave the mound, then struck out Randy Arozarena to end the inning), elation (George Springer's three-run homer that secured the Jays' spot in the World Series), exhaustion (the morning after those 18 innings). And even now, beneath the sting of defeat, deep-seated gratitude. For four weeks this fall, the Jays gave Canadians the chance to cheer together and take a

THE SUPPORTING CAST

BECAUSE BASEBALL IS A TEAM SPORT



THE MANAGER

John Schneider

Having come up through the organization alongside Vladdy and Bo, he knows how his players tick. His "Start spreading the news, bitches!" ALDS victory howl should be a Canadian Heritage Minute.



THE PLAY-BY-PLAY GUYS

Buck Martinez and Dan Shulman

The fan favourite and the best baritone in baseball, respectively, guided the Jays faithful through a wild season with characteristic smarts, professionalism and a flair for the dramatic.



THE ON-FIELD REPORTER

Hazel Mae

Mae has earned the players' trust over years spent around the team. Instead of prefab soundbites, they give her real talk, both in her interviews and during Gatorade-soaked post-game dispatches.



THE BENCH COACH

Don Mattingly

An iconic former player and MVP whose experience and wise counsel proved invaluable to Schneider on the bench. His gravitas and intimidating posture didn't hurt either.



THE PITCHING COACH

Pete Walker

The organization's biker-'stached secret weapon. Walker's ability to transform mediocre pitchers into all-stars has earned him a reputation around the league as a miracle worker.

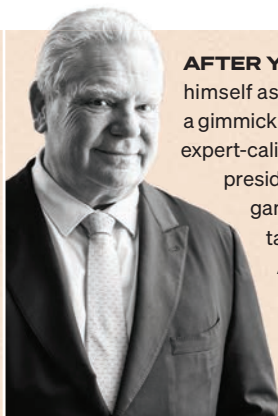
breather from the hostilities plaguing the world. **UP NEXT:** If the Jays want to go all the way next season, they have some moves to make—the contracts of key leaders (Schneider and Shapiro) and players (Scherzer, Bassitt and Bieber) are expiring.

3.

Doug Ford

PREMIER OF ONTARIO

For being the irritant Trump can't ignore



AFTER YEARS of cosplaying as Canada's answer to Trump, Ford repositioned himself as the guy most capable of pushing POTUS's buttons. What first felt like a gimmick (the baseball-hat slogans, the Fox News appearances) now lands like expert-calibre trolling. Ford's recent Reagan ad—archival footage of the Republican president railing against tariffs, which aired during the first two World Series games and got roughly 12 billion impressions—led Trump to suspend trade talks and slap an additional 10 per cent tariff on Canada. But it also has American voters contemplating the crushing economic impact of Trump's vendetta. Combined with Carney's genteel geopolitics, Ford's brand of brash may actually move the needle. **UP NEXT:** Having signed a road construction partnership with the Webequie First Nation, Ford plans to kick off the Ring of Fire mining project next spring.

BLUE JAYS BY THOMAS SKRLL/MLB PHOTOS/GETTY IMAGES, SCHNEIDER BY MATTHEW TSANG/CON SPORTSMWRZ/GETTY IMAGES, MARTINEZ BY COLTON HALL/MLB PHOTOS/GETTY IMAGES, SHULMAN BY STEVE RUSSELL/TORONTO STAR/GETTY IMAGES, MAE BY PEACE COLLECTIVE, MATTINGLY BY JIM MCISAAC/GETTY IMAGES, WALKER BY MIKE CARLSON/MLB PHOTOS/GETTY IMAGES, FORD BY CHRISTOPHER WAHL



4. Olivia Chow

MAYOR OF TORONTO

For being more focused on the work than on the optics

IF CRIME IS ALWAYS top of mind for voters going into an election year, Chow has nothing to worry about. The incumbent has a solid record to run on: 40 per cent year-over-year reductions in shootings and fire-arm discharges and a 51 per cent decrease in homicides. Police funding is up, 911 wait times are down and Chow is on to the next challenge. While she still loves to make a statement (who can forget her wrapped up in a yellow feather boa while calling out Home Depot for cutting its funding to Pride), she's being largely driven by party-agnostic pragmatism. To wit: Chow has secured housing funds from both the feds (\$2.55 billion) and the province (\$67.2 million), the latter as a reward for meeting new-build targets. **UP NEXT:** Chow is doubling down on her bid to support local businesses, building on the "Love Local" campaign launched last March with the new Red Tape Hotline for Toronto business owners. The city's economic development committee will meet early next year to discuss what makes starting and maintaining a small business so onerous and then tweak by-laws accordingly.

5. Edward Rogers and Tony Staffieri

EXECUTIVE CHAIRMAN, AND PRESIDENT AND CEO, OF ROGERS COMMUNICATIONS

Because they rule Toronto sports and telecoms

THE JAYS playoff run was a triple play for the company that owns not only the team but also the stadium and the broadcasting rights. Even before October, Rogers' newly acquired 75 per cent stake in MLSE prompted a \$5-billion third-quarter profit gain and installed Edward Rogers as the monarch of Canadian sportsdom. You can also thank the company for your *Real Housewives* binge (Rogers acquired Bravo, HGTV and Food Network), the emails you sent on your commute (Rogers expanded 5G service to TTC riders) and that time you spotted Dua Lipa at Julietta (Rogers is TIFF's lead sponsor for another three years). As CEO, Staffieri has kept shareholders happy with a 17 per cent overall spike. **UP NEXT:** Rogers will likely exercise its option to buy the remaining stock in MLSE from Larry Tanenbaum in July.



6 SHAI GILGEOUS-ALEXANDER

BASKETBALL PLAYER

For big wins on and off the court

»» IN JUNE, Gilgeous-Alexander joined a select club of greats—Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, Michael Jordan and Shaquille O'Neal—to have won MVP, the scoring title and an NBA championship all in the same season. Turning in one of the best performances in league history while leading the Oklahoma City Thunder to victory and

being hailed as the best player in the NBA would be impressive enough, but SGA is widely considered to be the league's most stylish player too, sporting tunnel 'fits that are met with the same breathless adulation as his jump shots. His recently dropped Shai 001 collection for Converse sold

out in 10 minutes. (His other apparel sponsors include Canada Goose and Skims.) **FRIENDS IN HIGH PLACES:** Drake recently inked over the LeBron James tattoo on his left arm with an image of SGA's Thunder jersey. "I understand why it might seem crazy," SGA said when asked about the tribute by *GQ*, "but to me, that's just the homie."



7. Keith Pelley

PRESIDENT AND CEO OF MAPLE LEAF SPORTS AND ENTERTAINMENT

Because he's transforming the city's sports landscape

IN MAY, Pelley ended the Leafs' so-called Shanaplan when he opted not to renew president Brendan Shanahan's contract or hire a replacement. A month later, he terminated Masai Ujiri's Raptors contract early. (It was status quo for football and soccer, but only because Pelley had already booted Bill Manning, former president of both the Argonauts and the Toronto FC, last July.) The moves seem to be less about money and more about running out of patience: Pelley has, in his own words, been tasked with "the relentless pursuit of championships." **UP NEXT:** Developing a partnership with the Buffalo Bills to grow Canada's football fan base.

8 J. MILES DALE AND GUILLERMO DEL TORO

PRODUCER AND DIRECTOR

For supercharging the city's film industry



» WHILE ACCEPTING the 2025 Ebert Director Award at the TIFF Tribute Awards, del Toro joked that it took a Mexican to remind Canadians of their country's status as a beacon of hope and artistic excellence: a charming if somewhat circular compliment given how much said Mexican has done to get us there. Since 1997, del Toro has built an impressive catalogue of Toronto-shot films—including *Crimson Peak*, *The Shape of Water* and *Nightmare Alley*—and a local cottage industry around them. But he didn't do it alone. Canadian producer J. Miles Dale joined forces with del Toro on 2013's *Pacific Rim* and never left his side. *Frankenstein* is their latest co-pro—shot on Cinespace Studios' rechristened "Guillermo del Toro Soundstages." **UP NEXT:** The pair is producing an adaptation of del Toro and Chuck Hogan's horror novella series, *The Boy in the Iron Box*, for Netflix.

9. Maggie Kang

ANIMATOR AND DIRECTOR

For creating an international frenzy with KPop Demon Hunters



SINCE BEING quietly released by Netflix in June, *KPop Demon Hunters* and its soundtrack have demolished expectations and records: 400 million views on streaming, more than \$18 million at the box office and multiple appearances at the top of the Billboard albums chart. The force behind it all is Kang, the movie's Sheridan College-trained creator and co-director.

Your movie was released in theatres after it was already streaming—something Netflix vowed never to do. How does it feel to upend a giant's business model? This film was unlike anything I'd ever worked on, so I'm not surprised that it's surprising us. It's teaching us that not every film can be marketed or promoted the same way. My co-director, Chris Appelhans, put it really well. He said this movie is like a baby that we birthed—you release it into the world, and at first you're like, "I hope you're okay! I hope you're making friends!" And now it's just doing its thing.

Your heroines—demon-hunting members of a K-pop girl band—defy stereotypes. They're unapologetically messy, they gobble ramen, they burp. Where did that come from? I made the movie for young Maggie but also for me now. I felt like I wasn't seeing the type of woman I wanted to see in film. Growing up in Toronto, I was a weird kid who did impersonations and made my sister film them. When I went into animation at Sheridan and became a story artist, I was surrounded by other hilarious weirdos. That's where I honed my love of comedy. I want to inspire young girls to like each other, to be funny and silly. There's massive power in that.

PELLEY BY CHRIS YOUNG/CANADIAN PRESS; DEL TORO BY MICHELLE MENGESU CHANG/TORONTO STAR/GETTY IMAGES; KANG BY CHUNG SUNG-JUN/GETTY IMAGES

10. Anita Anand

FEDERAL MINISTER OF
FOREIGN AFFAIRS

*Because she's repping Canada
on the international stage*



THE FOREIGN AFFAIRS portfolio has always been thorny, but in the current geopolitical crapstorm, it's more like a razor wire. In a speech to the United Nations in September, Anand criticized the erosion in global leadership and confirmed her country's commitment to filling the void. A month later, she was the first Canadian cabinet minister to visit India after two years of tense relations, and her groundwork scored Carney an invite to New Delhi for talks in the new year. Subsequent outreach in China had a similarly salutary effect, leading to a meeting between the PM and president at the APEC summit. **UP NEXT:** Anand will welcome foreign dignitaries on home turf for the FIFA World Cup in June.

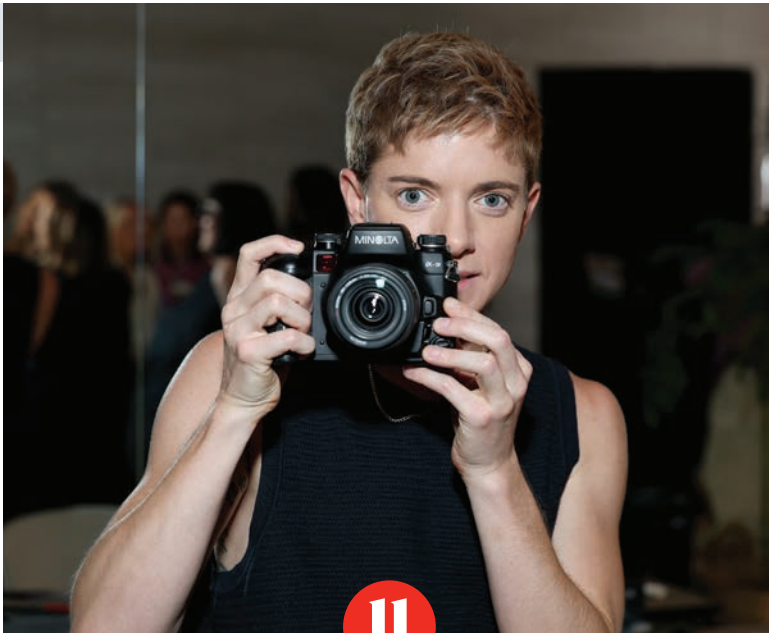
12. Cameron Bailey

CEO OF TIFF

For getting the film fest to 50



IN RECENT YEARS, Bailey's tenure as TIFF's top dog has resembled a classic disaster movie: a pandemic, a strike, a rolling funding crisis, this summer's uproar over Barry Avrich's film about the October 7 attack in Israel. Yet he always survives past the third act. The festival's 50th-anniversary edition was a fizzy showcase for Canadian film: an unfettered celebration of glitz, glamour and Ryan Reynolds, whose doc about John Candy was a perfectly nostalgic selection to toast TIFF's half-century. After securing a three-year sponsorship extension from Rogers, Bailey is looking ahead to the next 50. **UP NEXT:** Backed by \$23 million in federal funding, TIFF: the Market—a commerce and content hub created to boost the fest's economic health—launches next year.



11

MAE MARTIN

COMEDIAN, ACTOR, SHOWRUNNER, PODCASTER

Because they bring new meaning to "multi-hyphenate"

» **MARTIN HAS SPENT** the past few years building a following in comedy with stand-up specials, the TV series *Feel Good* and the queer podcast *Handsome*. But, as with all good mysteries, there was a twist ahead: the recently released series *Wayward*. In the thriller—which Martin wrote, directed and stars in—a cop moves to a small town and discovers something deeply weird at the local boarding school for troubled teens. The series is funny (assuming your sense of humour includes toad torture) and groundbreaking (in its understated trans representation). And it has more than paid off for Netflix Canada: the show debuted at number one here, then hit number one globally, with more than one billion minutes viewed by the end of its first week. **SIDE GIGS:** In addition to releasing an indie rock album in February, Martin sells hand-painted animal books, postcards and tote bags on Etsy, with proceeds going to Doctors Without Borders.

13. Margaret Atwood

WRITER

Because she controls the narrative



WHEN EDMONTON'S Public School Board announced that it was removing 200 books—including *The Handmaid's Tale*—from its libraries because of “explicit sexual content,” Atwood took to social media with a satirical story about a couple who “had five perfect children without ever having sex” that she promised Alberta’s government would deem suitable. A week after her widely publicized post, the school board revised its order, allowing the classics to remain on shelves. At age 85, she has just released her first memoir, *Book of Lives*, and is embarking on a North American and European tour.

UP NEXT: *The Testaments*, Hulu’s adaptation of the *Handmaid’s Tale* sequel, is expected to land next year, with Atwood as consulting producer.



14

CARLEY FORTUNE

ROMANCE WRITER

Because her steamy beach reads are unabashedly Canadian

now published in 30 languages.) Fortune’s most recent offering, *One Golden Summer*, gave millions of fans what they’d been clamouring for with a return to Barry’s Bay to revisit the charismatic troublemaking brother from her blockbuster first book, *Every Summer After*.

»» **FORGET QUEEN VICTORIA—** the month of May belongs to Fortune. Since 2022, the romance writer has released a new novel in the fifth month of every year, with each of them topping national and international bestseller lists. (Her work is

An Amazon Prime Video series, based on that debut and retitled *Every Year After*, wrapped filming in BC earlier this fall. **UP NEXT:** Fortune’s fifth book, the upcoming *Our Perfect Storm*, is a friends-to-lovers story set in the rainforests and beaches of Tofino.

15.

Mike Myers

ACTOR

For raising his elbows—and ours—skyward



THIS PAST MARCH, Myers returned to *SNL* for the first time in a decade to play a chainsaw-wielding Elon Musk in a gloriously unhinged performance that took aim at the Trump presidency. Then, during the show’s closing credits, he opened his vest to reveal a T-shirt emblazoned with “Canada Is Not For Sale,” mouthed the words “elbows up” and gave birth to a rallying cry. The phrase—inspired by hockey legend Gordie Howe—soon made its way onto protest signs, baseball caps and, by the end of that month, a campaign ad for Mark Carney. **UP NEXT:** *Shrek 5*, in which Myers will once again voice the iconic ogre (famous for facing down a different despot) and win over an entirely new generation.

ATWOOD BY MARIA MORATTI/GETTY IMAGES; FORTUNE BY JENNIFER ROBERTS; MYERS BY AMANDA EDWARDS/GETTY IMAGES

» **WHEN** Carney released the Liberals' platform a week out from election day, it called for the sweeping use of artificial intelligence to build the economy of the future and included a new cabinet position—the country's first ever minister of AI. Solomon, who has been an internet guy since his days editing *Shift* magazine, was working in the private sector in New York when Carney reached out. Now he's the MP for Toronto Centre and the person charged with pushing back against American digital dominance by getting Canadian industry and government to adopt AI. In September, Solomon announced a 26-person task force to execute an updated national AI strategy and deliver it two years ahead of schedule. **FRIENDS IN HIGH PLACES:** In 2022, his pal Gerald Butts hired him as publisher of GZero Media, a subsidiary of Eurasia Group, the political risk-analysis firm founded by Ian Bremmer (where Diana Fox Carney also works).

EVAN SOLOMON

FEDERAL MINISTER OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AND DIGITAL INNOVATION

Because he's charting Canada's AI path



17. Sean Cohan and Justin Stockman

PRESIDENT, AND VICE-PRESIDENT OF CONTENT DEVELOPMENT AND PROGRAMMING, AT BELL MEDIA

For giving couch potatoes more of the TV they want to see

ONCE A MINOR PLAYER, the Bell Media-backed streaming service Crave has spent the past year competing with US giants Netflix, Disney Plus and Prime Video, upping its subscriber base by 40 per cent to 4.3 million and expanding its offerings—10,000 more hours of content by the end of the year—to ensure even more eyeballs in the future.

MAFIA: MOST WANTED

True-crime fans devoured this three-part documentary series on the 'Ndrangheta—the notorious crime syndicate behind 70 per cent of the world's cocaine trafficking—and its GTA infiltration. After airing on Crave in March, the series was picked up by Netflix in the US and hit the top 10 there in its first week.



HEATED RIVALRY

Produced by Crave and set for release in late November, the streamer's foray into romance follows two pro hockey players who must choose between "the sport they live for and the love they can't ignore." Based on the hit romance by Nova Scotia author Rachel Reid, the series is sincere and steamy—and breathlessly awaited by fans of the book on both sides of the border.

SLO PITCH

The streamer kicked off 2025 by teaming up with PageBoy, Elliot Page's production company, for this comedy about a queer women's softball team (tag line: "Beer, lesbians and baseball"). Bell Media also has development deals with Tom Green and Seth Rogen.



SUPER TEAM CANADA

Crave's first cartoon for adults was perfectly timed to tap into Canada's new patriotism—with a theme song by none other than Bryan Adams. It premiered on the Friday of Victoria Day weekend, stars Canadian comedy all-stars Will Arnett and Cobie Smulders, and chronicles six D-list superheroes from the Great White North called in to fight the bad guys.



18

TOBIAS LÜTKE

CEO OF SHOPIFY

Because he heads up the country's most valuable company

➤ **THIS YEAR**, the e-commerce giant didn't just rule over Canada's tech and digital-retail scenes—it dominated the country's entire business sector. Shopify barely blinked at the ongoing trade and tariff troubles; if anything, its revenue growth sped up in North America, Europe and Asia. In August, Shopify edged out RBC as Canada's most valuable company by market cap, flying high on second-quarter revenue that had climbed year-over-year to \$3.7 billion. Making good on its strategy to land larger merchants, the company also snagged Starbucks and Canada Goose, partnerships that are predicted to drive growth for all parties. **UP NEXT:** Lütke recently announced a soon-to-launch partnership with OpenAI that will allow the company's merchants to sell directly in ChatGPT, so customers can buy skin care products, energy drinks, a winter coat or living room furniture without ever leaving the conversation.

19. Kristin Cochrane

CEO OF PENGUIN RANDOM HOUSE CANADA

For fostering national pride through the printed word

FEW HAVE championed Can-Lit as a beacon of shared values and a bulwark against authoritarianism as successfully as Cochrane. This year, PRHC launched the Indigenous children's imprint Swift Water Books as well as McClelland and Stewart's paperback series Kanata Classics; reissued Prime Minister Carney's 2021 tome, *Value(s)*, which became one of the year's bestsellers; and released *Book of Lives*, the long-awaited memoir by Margaret Atwood. Buoyed by a wave of patriotic zeal, the publisher also commissioned *Elbows Up!*, a collection of essays exploring Canada's relationship with the US that promptly landed on Canadian best-



seller lists. **CHARITY CIRCUIT:** Cochrane and her team donated more than 300,000 books to support literacy and provide readers across the country with access to diverse voices.



20. Nick Frosst, Aidan Gomez and Ivan Zhang

CO-FOUNDERS OF COHERE

Because their quest for market domination has hit hyperdrive

ENTERPRISE AI company Cohere has had a mind-boggling 12 months. So far in 2025, it opened new offices in Montreal and Paris (with one in the works in Seoul), closed a \$500-million funding round, then raked in another \$100 million, putting its valuation at \$7 billion. Its annualized revenue is also way up, nearly tripling from \$35 million in March of 2024 to more than \$100 million this past May. Cohere plans to use its cash bump to go head-to-head with American companies such as OpenAI and Anthropic—with an assist from the federal government, which tapped Cohere to figure out how AI can improve public services. Industry minister Mélanie Joly put the feds' stake in the company more bluntly at a tech conference in September: "We will build Cohere," she said, "and we will make it a Canadian champion."

UP NEXT: Though he hasn't announced an official date for an IPO, CEO Aidan Gomez recently said that the company could soon hit the public markets.

LÜTKE BY DUSTIN CHAMBERS/BLOOMBERG/GETTY IMAGES; COCHRANE BY FARAH NOSH; FROSST AND GOMEZ COURTESY OF COHERE; ZHANG VIA LINKEDIN

21. Mark Shapiro and Ross Atkins

BLUE JAYS PRESIDENT
AND GENERAL MANAGER

*For being the architects of
postseason magic*



EARLIER THIS YEAR, nobody had much good to say about the Jays bosses. Then came the postseason, and it got a lot harder to kvetch about Vladdy's half-billion-dollar contract extension (the largest in franchise history), the locking in of catcher Alejandro Kirk and the propelling of rookie pitcher Trey Yesavage through the minors. Atkins maintains that there was always a method to their madness and that this World Series run was inevitable. Well, no, but their vision made it a reality. **UP NEXT:** Negotiating with star shortstop Bo Bichette, who is now a free agent.

22. Ana Bailão

CEO OF BUILD CANADA HOMES

*Because she's Carney's new point
person on affordable housing*



IN SEPTEMBER, Toronto's former deputy mayor was hired to lead Build Canada Homes, a new federal agency designed to combat the affordability crisis and help the prime minister fulfill one of his major campaign promises. In her role, Bailão will oversee \$13 billion in funding earmarked for various projects, including the construction of 4,000 modular homes across the country to help reverse low new-build rates. Bailão, who did integral work on the city's housing files during her time on council and moved over to private sector housing in 2023, has the experience and the will to make it happen. **UP NEXT:** Pushing ahead on Arbo Downsview, 540 prefab, modular and mass timber homes—almost half of them affordable—at Keele and Sheppard.



23

SUMMER McINTOSH

SWIMMER

Because swagger looks good on her

>> ONE OF CANADA'S greatest living athletes showed up at this summer's World Aquatics Championships in Singapore wearing her ambition on her fingernails: five of them painted gold, in case anyone wasn't sure of her plans. The show of bravado—only Michael Phelps has won that many golds at a single Worlds—made it clear that she was coming for the queen, US champ Katie Ledecky. After snagging four golds,

McIntosh lamented her third-place finish in the 800 metres, telling assembled media that she hates to lose more than she likes to win. With the LA Olympics less than three years away and McIntosh not yet out of her teens, Ledecky should watch her back. McIntosh recently cut her long-time coach loose to start training under Bob Bowman—the man who got Phelps to 23 Olympic gold medals. **CHARITY CIRCUIT:** McIntosh, who was born at St. Joseph's Health Centre, is one of the public faces of the hospital's fundraising campaign to build a patient tower featuring expanded emergency care, a surgical centre, 340 beds in single-patient rooms and mental health facilities.

24

CHRIS ABRAHAM AND MICHAEL HEALEY

» **TWO YEARS** ago, this Crow's Theatre duo proved that Torontonians will flock to local stories brought to life onstage. Under Abraham's guidance, Healey transformed a book about Google's Sidewalk Labs boondoggle into *The Master Plan*, a wry satire of corporate blunders, backroom dealings and false prophets. Implausibly, it became such a smash hit that the company remounted the show a year after its initial mega-extended run. The two are following that up with December's *Rogers v. Rogers*, a *Succession*-esque opus based on Canada's reigning telecom dynasty. The play's run was sold out, save one show, more than a month before opening night, so the unlucky will have to wait for a remount. **UP NEXT:** A three-year pilot partnership with Soulpepper and an expansion that will add more than 5,000 square feet to Crow's theatrical space.

ARTISTIC DIRECTOR AND PLAYWRIGHT
For championing Toronto's cultural sovereignty



25. Teresa Resch

PRESIDENT OF THE TORONTO TEMPO

For making the city even more basketball obsessed

RESCH HAS SPENT 2025 building her off-court roster for the Tempo, the WNBA's first franchise outside the US. Just who will represent Toronto in the paint remains to be seen—player selection is set to begin with an expansion draft over the winter, pending the league's new collective bargaining agreement. But one thing is certain: they'll have a bunch of MVPs backing them up.



GENERAL MANAGER
Monica Wright Rogers

In her playing days, Wright Rogers was a two-time WNBA champ with the Minnesota Lynx. More recently, she spent two years as the assistant coach of the Phoenix Mercury. The head of basketball operations has checked off a major box on her to-do list—finding a head coach—and will now turn to putting together a winning team from scratch.



HEAD COACH
Sandy Brondello

After spending four seasons with the New York Liberty—during which her team won the 2024 finals and she racked up the best win-loss ratio (107 to 53) in franchise history—Brondello was unceremoniously dumped in September. Their loss, Toronto's massive gain: Brondello is beloved by her players, and her hardware includes three Olympic medals for her native Australia and the WNBA's Coach of the Year award.



CO-OWNER
Serena Williams

"New court, new game," the tennis GOAT wrote in an Instagram post announcing her investment in the Tempo. Williams brings star power, swagger and unparalleled athletic acumen to an ownership group that includes Larry Tanenbaum—whose Kilmer Sports Ventures has a majority stake in the team—Montreal Canadiens execs Geoff Molson and France Margaret Bélanger, and tech entrepreneur Sukhinder Singh Cassidy.



HYPE WOMAN
Lilly Singh

The YouTube sensation has three big loves: basketball, Toronto and lifting up women—which means her new gig as the Tempo's chief hype officer is a slam dunk. Singh, who is also part of the ownership group, has been a diehard Raptors fan for years and plans to ratchet the enthusiasm for the women's game up to 11.

ABRAHAM: COURTESY OF THE SUBJECT; HEALEY BY J. GORDON; SHILLINGFORD PUBLISHING; RESCH BY NICK WONG; WRIGHT ROGERS BY R. J. JOHNSTON/TORONTO STAR/GETTY IMAGES; BRONDELLO BY ERICA DENHOFF/ICON SPORTSWIRE/GETTY IMAGES; WILLIAMS BY MEDIAPUNCH/BAUER-GRIFFIN/GETTY IMAGES; SINGH BY STEFANIE KEENAN/GETTY IMAGES

26. Danny Soberano and Charles Khabouth

RESTAURATEURS

Because their brand of hospitality never sleeps



SOBERANO and Khabouth, who joined forces to create Ink Entertainment in 1982 and now own more than 20 restaurants, bars and clubs across North America, show no signs of slowing down. In fact, they're in overdrive: building on the late-2024 launch of Animi—home of the \$1,000 surf-and-turf platter and \$7,000 cocktail—they unveiled Portland Square on King West in July, a four-level, multi-concept venue featuring old-school Italian, contemporary Chinese, private lounges and—of all things—a country music sports bar. And because even professional party planners need a reset, this fall was all about 30 Hazelton, their three-storey, 4,000-square-foot spa doling out lasers, injectables and IV drips. **UP NEXT:** A second country sports bar, this time in Niagara Falls (these boots are made for working), and further expansion into the US with new spots in Miami, Vegas and Boca Raton.

27. Erik Hoffman

PRESIDENT OF MUSIC AT LIVE NATION CANADA

For turning Toronto into Music City

IN EARLY 2024, the city's live music scene was at a crossroads: stadium-filling bands wanted to bring their shows to Toronto, but there was no venue large enough to accommodate them on their available dates. Hoffman was the guy who said, *If we build it, they will come*—and in less than a year and a half, the 50,000-capacity Rogers Stadium was in business. Live Nation Canada hosted a record 25 stadium shows in Toronto this past summer, more than triple the previous record—putting to rest the question of whether the city can sustain multiple large-scale venues. **UP NEXT:** Live Nation will transform Budweiser Stage (rechristened the RBC Amphitheatre) into a year-round space set to launch in 2030.



28

FOR HOLLYWOOD, the success of Johnson's 2023 hit *BlackBerry*, a surprisingly juicy drama about the eponymous tech company, indicated that attention must be paid to Toronto's filmmaking rebel. The offers came rolling in, including the opportunity to direct a live-action Hot Wheels movie, but instead Johnson opted to return to an old love. *Nirvana the Band the Show* started as a web series in 2007—the story of two lovable doofuses, Johnson and his creative partner Jay McCarrol—whose sole ambition is to play a show at the Rivoli. Its follow-up, *Nirvana the Band the Show the Movie*, has a bigger budget but the same inside jokes, awkward laughs, and stunts that skirt the edge of safety and good taste. (When a security guard was shot at Drake's Bridle Path mansion, Johnson and McCarrol rushed there to shoot scenes amid the crush of media.) After premiering first at SXSW and then at TIFF, the movie won back-to-back audience choice awards, proving that Johnson is still the one to beat with the Criterion crowd. **UP NEXT:** The release of *Tony*, the buzzy biopic about chef and fellow disruptor Anthony Bourdain, which Johnson shot in Cape Cod over the summer.

MATT JOHNSON

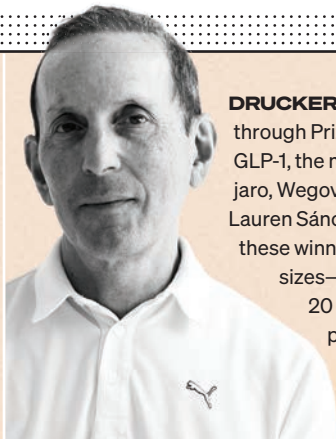
DIRECTOR

Because bigger budgets haven't dampened his weird genius

29. Daniel Drucker

GODFATHER OF OZEMPIC

For reminding the world that GLP-1 is about more than weight loss



DRUCKER WAS ONE of five scientists to accept the prestigious Breakthrough Prize in Life Sciences this past April for their roles in discovering GLP-1, the metabolic hormone that is the active ingredient in Ozempic, Mounjaro, Wegovy and others. Before awarding the \$3-million prize, presenter Lauren Sánchez Bezos joked that many of the famous people in the room owed these winners a big thank-you. But GLP-1 drugs aren't just reducing dress sizes—they're extending lifespans. A study about Wegovy showed a 20 per cent reduction in heart attacks, strokes and death among people with obesity and heart disease. **UP NEXT:** Drucker's lab at Mount Sinai will study the potential of GLP-1 to combat dementia, Alzheimer's disease and cancer.

THE BIG NEW GIGS

THIS YEAR'S NEWLY APPOINTED LEADERS



CHARLOTTE GEEVES

Executive director of the National Ballet of Canada

The National Ballet's artistic director, Hope Muir, has a new partner in Geeves, formerly of the Bristol Old Vic Theatre. Co-CEOs, the two will collaborate on operational, financial and artistic fronts.



TERESA M. CHAN

Founding dean of TMU's medical school

Chan heads up Ontario's newest training ground for future doctors, an ambitious undertaking meant to address the shortage of primary care physicians. The inaugural class of 176 students started school in September at TMU's Brampton campus.



PAOLO SANTALUCIA

Artistic director of Soulpepper Theatre

With Soulpepper's appointment of Santalucia as AD, the company is building on its legacy of fostering talent and promoting from within. Most recently an associate artistic director at Crow's Theatre, he came up through Soulpepper's 26-week academy.



JULIE ADAM

President and CEO of Universal Music Canada

After two years at UMC—Canada's largest record company—Adam was promoted to the top job and is currently the only female head of a major label in the country.



MANDEEP LALI

CEO of the Toronto Transit Commission

The former New York and London transit exec has pledged to rectify reduced ridership, a chronically tardy system (buses and streetcars were late nearly 40 per cent of the time in September) and a \$37-billion capital investment shortfall.

30. Melanie Woodin

PRESIDENT OF THE UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO

For recruiting top talent and taking big swings



AT HER INSTALLATION

address this fall, U of T's 17th president joked that she was the first to accept her post in pumps—an advantage, perhaps, given her promise to “rise to meet this moment.” Woodin, a neuroscientist and former dean of arts and science, recently approved a multimillion-dollar emergency fund so researchers affected by Trump's cuts in the US can continue their work. Other moves aimed at having a global impact include a partnership with tech firm Xanadu focused on quantum computing, the launch of the Lawson Climate Institute and work in AI at the Schwartz-Reisman Innovation Campus. **UP NEXT:** Cutting the university's greenhouse gas emissions by 2027 and becoming carbon positive by 2050.



31. Eva Chin

CHEF

Because her micro-restaurant is the hottest ticket in town

FOR THE PAST YEAR, Chin has been redefining Asian dining at her 26-seat hidden gem, Yan Dining Room, housed within Chinatown mainstay Hong Shing. Open three nights a week and accessed by pre-paid reservation, the neo-Chinese spot delivers a multi-course tasting menu that puts farm-to-table philosophy ahead of genre—and soul above all else.

THE DISHES

The menu, which changes monthly, is built around Chin's relationships with producers, whether that's West Coast fishmongers, a duck farmer in Elora or a Chinese family in Newmarket raising free-range chickens. There is one constant: every tasting begins with a serving of Chin's trademark seasonal broth.

THE GUEST LIST

Although Chin insists that Hong Shing was a popular late-night haunt for entertainers and NBA players even before she set up shop, her corner of the restaurant has brought in actor [Simu Liu](#) and a roster of top athletes (she's keeping their names as tucked away as her dining room) for private events.



THE COLLABS

Chin has teamed up with local chefs, including *MasterChef Canada* winner Christopher Siu of Daan Go, Thai queen [Nuit Regular](#), Instagram star Wallace Wong, the crew at Good Behaviour, and Nick Lin and Stephen Baidacoff of Burlington's buzzy No. 8 Restaurant.



THE NEXT STEP

Small is mighty—for the time being. Chin's long-term goal is to open a larger, stand-alone restaurant equipped for whole-animal butchery.

32

ANDREW BOOZARY

FOR YEARS, Boozary has been arguing that housing is health care: a win-win approach that combats homelessness and reduces ballooning costs caused by return visits to the city's emergency departments. Now, with the resounding success of Dunn House, a 51-unit modular apartment building in Parkdale that provides not just shelter but access to health care and other supports, the director of UHN's Gattuso Centre for Social Medicine has the numbers to prove it. A year into the initiative—the first of its kind in Canada—there has been a 52 per cent reduction in the residents' hospital stays and a 79 per cent drop in their length of stays. All told, local hospitals saved \$1.66 million—a powerful retort to the argument that we can't afford ambitious housing agendas. In fact, we can't afford not to have them. **UP NEXT:** A recent survey by public opinion research firm Relay Services found that Boozary would be the only candidate who could beat Doug Ford in an election, with Boozary earning 52 per cent of Ontarians' votes for Ford's 48 per cent. That election remains hypothetical—for now.

PHYSICIAN AND SOCIAL MEDICINE PIONEER

For proving that housing and health care are inextricably linked



33.

Moez Kassam

HEDGE FUND MANAGER AND PHILANTHROPIST

Because his giving takes many (many) forms



FORGET SPENDING money to make money—the Anson Funds co-founder makes money to give money. This year, the Moez and Marissa Kassam Equity Fund supported food programs through the Toronto Foundation for Student Success, established a follow-up clinic at SickKids powered by the couple’s recent \$15-million gift to the hospital and donated \$5 million to TMU’s new medical school. It is unsurprising, perhaps, that Kassam was recently named the 2025 Global Citizen Laureate by the United Nations Association in Canada. **UP NEXT:** Kassam is growing his Great to Gold program—which invests in underfunded athletes to get them on the Olympic podium—to include winter athletes.

34.

Timothy Snyder, Marci Shore and Jason Stanley

PROFESSORS AT THE MUNK SCHOOL

Because they’re fighting global fascism from Toronto



THERE IS ONE upside to Trump’s fanning of geopolitical tensions, disdain for civil discourse and attacks on higher education: they have led to some choice hires for U of T—including Snyder, Shore and Stanley, three former Yale colleagues and experts on fascism who joined the Munk School of Global Affairs and Public Policy earlier this year. **UP NEXT:** Snyder launches his first big course, “Hitler and Stalin Today,” in January; Shore is completing her Guggenheim Fellowship-funded book on truth and post-truth in Central Europe; and Stanley is setting up an institute at U of T devoted to the defence of democracy.



35

VERONIKA SLOWIKOWSKA

COMEDIAN AND ACTOR

Because she parlayed viral comedy sketches into a gig with SNL

» **IN MAY**, millions watched a TikTok video in which Slowikowska walked a mile in her roommate’s literal shoes to understand the plight of the white male. Four months later, millions more watched her inaugural appearance on OG comedy incubator *SNL*, where she is one of four new cast members and the lone Canadian. Her first-ever *SNL* sketch was a *Jeopardy!* riff—fitting,

perhaps, as many viewers over the age of 30 were asking themselves, *Who is Veronika Slowikowska?* Her style, which hinges on near-intolerable awkwardness, has earned her comparisons to all-time *SNL* great Kristen Wiig, but to the Gen Z viewers the show is thirsting after, Slowikowska is already an icon. **FRIENDS IN HIGH PLACES:** Justin Bieber and Jack Black are devoted fans of Slowikowska’s online offerings.

KASSAM COURTESY OF THE SUBJECT; SNYDER BY OLE BERG-RUSTEN/NTB/AFP/GETTY IMAGES; SHORE BY CHLOÉ ELLINGSON/GUARDIAN; STANLEY BY YURKO STEFANIAK/UKRAINER; SLOWIKOWSKA BY LONDON NORDEMAN/PEACOCK/GETTY IMAGES

MEDICAL MIRACLE WORKERS

THIS YEAR'S MOST INNOVATIVE DOCTORS



THE AFTER-DEATH EXPERT

Seyed Alireza Rabi

In September, Alireza Rabi—a surgeon at the Peter Munk Cardiac Centre—and his team completed Canada's first DCC (donation after circulatory death) heart transplant. The procedure has the potential to save many more lives: DCC is forecasted to expand the heart donor pool by 30 per cent.



THE BRAIN-COMPUTER EXPERT

Andres Lozano

This summer, at Toronto Western Hospital, Lozano led the country's first Neuralink implant surgeries. His team implanted Elon Musk's wireless brain-computer interface device in patients with cervical spinal cord injuries to allow them to control external devices using their thoughts.



THE ROBOTICS EXPERTS

Gianluigi Bisleri and Daniel Burns

Bisleri, Burns and their team of cardiac surgeons at St. Michael's Hospital performed Toronto's first successful robotic mitral valve repair in April. Compared with traditional open-heart surgery, the procedure results in smaller incisions, shorter hospital stays and faster healing.



THE BLOOD-BRAIN BARRIER EXPERT

Nir Lipsman

In a world first, Lipsman and his team in Sunnybrook's Hurvitz Brain Sciences Program non-invasively breached the blood-brain barrier using a focused ultrasound procedure guided by MRI. It allowed them to deliver a dose of immunotherapy directly to the brain of an ALS patient.



36.

Kevin Smith

PRESIDENT AND CEO OF UNIVERSITY HEALTH NETWORK

Because he's making sure the world's top scientists move here

THIS PAST APRIL, as scientists in the US were packing up their beakers, Smith launched the Canada Leads 100 Challenge to lure them north. The UHN head plans to recruit 100 of the best early-career health experts from around the globe and has secured roughly \$40 million in wooing funds. It's this type of thinking that has landed Toronto General Hospital in the number-three spot on *Newsweek's* list of the best publicly funded hospitals in the world for the second year running. (Smith got a solo nod as one of the world's top hospital CEOs.) It's also what led UHN to partner with CAMH on a joint physical-mental health initiative. **FRIENDS IN HIGH PLACES:** The late Pope Francis appointed Smith to the Order of St. Gregory the Great, one of the papal orders of knighthood, for his contributions to health care.

37

BOBBY WEBSTER

GENERAL MANAGER OF THE RAPTORS

For being a steadying force in a season of uncertainty

➔ **WEBSTER'S TITLE** hasn't changed, but his responsibilities have. The dramatic ousting of president Masai Ujiri in June sent the front office out in search of his replacement, but they soon circled back to Toronto—and Webster. After

eight years as the Raptors' second-in-command, the GM is now head of basketball operations and the one making the big calls when it comes to roster construction, team culture and overall strategy. **UP NEXT:** The current team is young but expensive—the Raptors are over the luxury-tax threshold—and has yet to prove itself worth the investment. No one is expecting a 2019-style championship run in 2026, but a spot in the playoffs would be nice.



38

DANIEL DEBOW

ENTREPRENEUR

Because he wants to make Canada the most prosperous country in the world

» **DEBOW**, a serial entrepreneur and an angel investor for WealtheSimple, Clio and SkipTheDishes, kicked off the year with a patriotic clarion call. After quitting his VP job at Shopify, he launched Build Canada, a policy platform for tech entrepreneurs who want to make Canada better. Led by Debow as board chair and CEO Lucy Hargreaves and supported by a who's who of Canadian tech (including Shopify's Tobias Lütke, WealtheSimple's Michael Katchen and Cohere's Ivan Zhang), the organization has published dozens of policy papers and created trackers for government spending, trade barriers and more. In September, Debow jumped at another opportunity to set the agenda when federal AI minister Evan Solomon named him to his 26-person task force. **FRIENDS IN HIGH PLACES:** Galen Weston Jr.—Debow sits on the board of Loblaw Companies—and Peter Thiel, who became an early investor in Debow's performance management platform, Rypple, after meeting him during a talk at Stanford.

39. Chandler Levack

FILMMAKER

For creating irresistible time capsules

LEVACK is a testament to the power of writing what you know. The Canadian Film Centre alumna's first feature, 2022's *I Like Movies*, was informed by her time spent behind the counter of a Burlington Blockbuster as a teen; after debuting at TIFF, it scored a raft of awards on the festival circuit. For this year's *Mile End Kicks*, Levack drew on her experiences as a plucky music critic navigating the boys' club of indie rock in the early 2010s. The charm of her films is twofold: Levack has a knack for hyper-specific details (the self-aggrandizing snobbery of video store clerks, a meticulously curated indie rock soundtrack), and she writes characters who are both funny weird and funny ha-ha, with neuroses and



questionable behaviour that feel both fresh and queasily familiar. **UP NEXT:** *Roommates*, a Levack-directed Netflix comedy produced by Adam Sandler and starring Natasha Lyonne, Nick Kroll, *SNL*'s Sarah Sherman and Sandler's daughter Sadie.



40. Andrew Joyner

MANAGING DIRECTOR OF TRICON RESIDENTIAL

For transforming the rental landscape

AS THE HEAD of Tricon Canada's multi-family rental business, Joyner is in charge of getting new purpose-built apartments made across the GTA. Since entering the rental field in 2016, Tricon is the busiest builder in its sector. The company has wrapped up five major projects, with another six under construction and three in pre-development—all of which prioritize convenient downtown locations and a commitment to a mix of market-rate and affordable options without sacrificing the fun stuff (on-site cafés, gyms, co-working spaces and more). One recent star property is Maple House at Canary Landing, three towers with 770 units that were developed as a private-public partnership with Dream, Kilmer Group and Infrastructure Ontario. In a city where renting for life is likely to become the norm, a bit of sophistication goes a long way. **UP NEXT:** Kicking off next year, the development of the former Coach Terminal site on Bay Street will feature 850 purpose-built rental units, with 30 per cent of them earmarked as affordable housing for hospital workers.

JASMEET RAINA

» **THE FIRST** season of Jasmeet Raina's semi-autobiographical dramedy *Late Bloomer* radically and hilariously altered audiences' ideas of whose stories belong on TV. The show became one of Crave's top 10 Canadian comedy series and earned Raina eight Canadian Screen Award nominations. Season two, which kicked off in April, counters stereotypical storylines with fresh and nuanced takes on identity, immigration and sex. To nail the realities facing international students—his character shares a basement apartment with a growing number of them—Raina spent time with students and temporary foreign workers. For an episode about anti-Sikh racism after 9/11, his directorial debut for the show, he drew on his own childhood experiences. **UP NEXT:** The third season of *Late Bloomer*, which has been renewed by Crave for the streamer's 2025/26 season.

ACTOR, SHOWRUNNER

Because he's redefining South Asian representation



42. Jennifer Bernard

PRESIDENT AND CEO OF SICKKIDS FOUNDATION

For giving the hospital its best fundraising year ever

IN 2025, a year in which charitable giving was down, the SickKids Foundation brought in \$208 million, the most in the organization's history. It will be counting on Bernard's powers of persuasion when it launches a massive campaign next fall to raise billions over multiple years. For Bernard, the mission is personal: 17 years ago, SickKids saved her son's life. "I wanted somebody to give me hope," she said at the hospital's 150th-anniversary celebration this past spring, "and they did." Now she's doing the same for others. **CHARITY CIRCUIT:** Bernard sits on the boards of the BlackNorth Initiative (which supports Black entrepreneurs) and the Telus Friendly Foundation (which empowers youth through technology) and is an advisory council member for Shift Canada (which fosters the next generation of entrepreneurs).

THE PHILANTHROPISTS

THIS YEAR'S MAJOR DONORS



THE LEGAL LEADER

Hal Jackman

With his \$80-million gift to U of T's faculty of law in September, Jackman brought his total to a cool \$100 million, much of which is dedicated to scholarships and student programming.



THE MED-STUDENT BENEFACTOR

Orlando Corporation

Carlo Fidani's family business extended its wide-ranging support of GTA health institutions with a \$25-million pledge to match community donations to TMU's new medical school in Brampton.



THE INDIGENOUS ALLY

Krawczyk Family Foundation

Alex Krawczyk donated \$11 million to St. Michael's Hospital and Providence Healthcare to improve the experiences of First Nations, Inuit and Métis patients within the health care system.



THE CLIMATE WARRIORS

Lawson Foundation

Brian and Joannah Lawson's \$60-million donation to U of T, announced on Earth Day, helped launch the university's new Lawson Climate Institute, a hub for climate change solutions.



THE HEALTH BUILDER

Peter Gilgan

The Mattamy CEO and his six siblings were born at St. Joseph's Health Centre, and his most recent investment of \$60 million will help build a new patient tower for future generations.



43. Joanna Griffiths

FOUNDER AND PRESIDENT OF KNIX
Because busting taboos is good business

ALREADY THE GLOBAL leader in her industry, Griffiths isn't content to sit idly by. Expansion projects for Knix have taken the period underwear company into bras, activewear, swimwear and, this past summer, Lower Manhattan. Griffiths, who sold her majority share for \$320 million in 2022, continues to oversee operations and is leading her empire into its biggest year yet.

THE AMERICAN OUTPOST

Knix kicked off its move into the US in August with a brick-and-mortar store in SoHo. The shop, complete with a bra bar, is the first of three planned locations in the Big Apple before the company expands into other American cities.



THE CELEBRITY SPOKESWOMEN

Actor Kristen Bell, a long-time Knix customer, starred in the company's new "You're Good" campaign; Broadway star Nicole Scherzinger vamped in period-proof leggings to promote the brand's activewear; and Canadian Olympian Penny Oleksiak appeared in swimwear ads geared toward young girls to bust period stigma.

THE RETAIL TAKEOVER

While the company's roots are in the direct-to-consumer category, recent retail partnerships signal plans to meet Canadian customers where they're at—whether they're Costco devotees (Knix has been available there since 2024) or Holt Renfrew faithful (a recent partnership kicked off with a pop-up at the Bloor Street location).



THE CREATIVE FLEX

Griffiths served as executive producer on *The Pink Pill*, a new documentary about the fight to bring a female Viagra to market (it's the first offering from Knix's Docs for Change initiative). She also funds the TIFF Share Her Journey Groundbreaker Award, which she presented to Jodie Foster at this year's fest.

CARDINAL FRANCIS LEO

44

CARDINAL AND ARCHBISHOP OF TORONTO

Because he's the future of Catholicism in Canada—and the world



» **OVER TWO DAYS** in May, the world's more than one billion Catholics—plus fans of Ralph Fiennes's star turn in *Conclave*—were glued to a chimney in Rome, waiting for a telltale puff of white smoke. Among the 133 sequestered cardinal electors asked to choose a new leader following the death of Pope Francis was Leo, who had been in the job only six months. Elevated to the College of Cardinals by Francis last December, the head of the Archdiocese of Toronto has since been assigned to three departments within the Roman Curia—the dicasteries for legislative texts, inter-religious dialogue and clergy—in addition to his Canadian duties. And this is just the beginning: at 54 years old, Leo is

more than two decades younger than the average cardinal. **UP NEXT:** As part of his new mandates, Leo has been tasked with meeting representatives of other faiths to promote peace on a global scale (no problem).

GRIFFITHS BY ROBIN MARCHANT/WIREIMAGE; BELL BY TODD OWYOUNG/NBC/GETTY IMAGES; KNIX STORE VIA INSTAGRAM; FOSTER BY JEMAL COUNTESS/GETTY IMAGES; LEO BY DIMITAR DILKOFF/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

45. Perry Dellelce

LAWYER AND
PHILANTHROPIST

For repping athletes and
owners big and small



AS MANAGING partner of Wildeboer Dellelce, one of Canada's leading corporate finance law firms, Dellelce acted for MLSE in Rogers's \$4.7-billion acquisition of BCE's interest in the sports juggernaut. His altruistic athletic pursuits are impressive too. He's the chair of the Canadian Olympic Foundation, which announced its financial support of five Indigenous athletes and awarded the 50 Team Canada Olympic medallists from Paris a total of \$1.75 million. His firm also provides pro bono legal counsel to Canada Basketball and BIPOC-owned businesses within the basketball community. **FRIENDS IN HIGH PLACES:** The head of the Commonwealth. In June, Dellelce was awarded the King Charles III Coronation Medal for his philanthropic efforts.

46. Leora Shemesh

CRIMINAL LAWYER

Because she's racking up
court wins



IN SEPTEMBER, Shemesh secured a high-profile acquittal for city councillor Michael Thompson, who had been accused of sexually assaulting two women during a weekend in Muskoka. Now, having taken over from Brian Greenspan, she is representing Frank Stronach, the 93-year-old Magna billionaire who has pleaded not guilty to 18 counts of sexual assault. Shemesh has successfully lobbied the courts to bifurcate what started as a single trial into two proceedings, in Newmarket and Toronto, and Stronach will face his accusers in a judge-only courtroom starting in February. **FRIENDS IN HIGH PLACES:** She's besties with Emmanuelle Chriqui, the Montreal actor known for playing E's long-suffering girlfriend on *Entourage*.



47

SARAH POLLEY

DIRECTOR AND SCREENWRITER

For being in on the joke

THE ROLE that got Polley back in front of the camera for the first time in 17 years? Herself. Or, rather, a heightened, slapstick-y version of herself, one who clashes with Seth Rogen's buffoonish film studio head on his Emmy-sweeping satire, *The Studio*. The guest spot was a marked

departure from the more serious fare Polley is famous for and a reminder that she is actually very funny. But that's as Hollywood as Polley will get: in September, while accepting the key to Toronto for her artistic contributions, she waxed eloquent about the city that has shaped every

part of her life, one she never plans to leave. She even mooned over the gridlock, hailing it as a good opportunity to meditate. **UP NEXT:** Rogen convinced Polley—who directed him in her 2011 love letter to Toronto, *Take This Waltz*—to temporarily join the *Studio* writers' room for season two.



48

SURESH DOSS

FOOD WRITER AND TV HOST

For championing mom-and-pop kitchens across the country

➤ **BY THE TIME** he was in his teens, Tamil-born, Scarborough-bred Doss was busy exploring the GTA's vast and diverse food landscape, searching for hidden gems. For more than two decades now, he has shared his discoveries across television, radio, print and digital media. This fall, Doss brought his epic appetite to CBC Gem with *Locals Welcome*—a new series produced by members of Anthony Bourdain's former team—which moves beyond Toronto's borders to highlight the people and rich histories behind some of Canada's most interesting and unsung plates. **UP NEXT:** Doss is teaming up with the Waterfront BIA to launch a festival next spring showcasing GTA food culture.

49. Ali Badreddine, Iris Jazexhi and Kevin Jazexhi

RESTAURATEURS

For turning a waterfront warehouse into a sprawling over-the-top destination

THIS SUMMER, siblings Kevin and Iris Jazexhi and their friend Ali Badreddine accomplished what many have tried and failed to do: they built a restaurant that treats the waterfront as a dining destination, not just a backdrop. Queens Harbour is a 23,000-square-foot, 800-seat, split-level spot with an encyclopedic menu that includes Asian, French, Mediterranean and North American offerings. Featuring private rooms bearing their mothers' names (*aww*) and a retractable roof that rivals the Rogers Centre's, it transports diners to another dimension. **UP NEXT:** The trio is working on plans to expand the Queens concept internationally.



50. Michael Longfield

CYCLING ACTIVIST

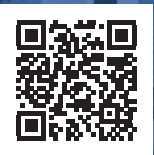
For being the David to Ford's Goliath



THE EXECUTIVE director of Cycle Toronto wasn't in court the day his organization launched a Charter challenge against Bill 212, legislation that empowered the province to rip up bike lanes along Bloor, University and Yonge. He was in hospital after getting doored in a painted bike lane—a real-life case study of the unprecedented legal argument that removing existing bike lanes violates cyclists' Charter-enshrined rights to life, liberty and security of the person. The premier did his best Big Bad Wolf impression, huffing and puffing about his plan to blow the bike lanes down, but the courts sided with the cyclists. "For anyone who rides a bike in the city, the victory is yours," Longfield said outside the courthouse following the big win. For the city's two-wheeling citizens, so often dismissed by Ford, the Constitution is a powerful ally to bring onsite. **UP NEXT:** The province is appealing the decision, so Longfield and Cycle Toronto's legal team will be back in court on January 28 to defend their victory.

A tower built for what's next.

With surgical demand rising, UHN is investing in innovation – not just for Toronto, but for all Canadians. Our new surgical tower will support advanced procedures with cutting-edge technology to reduce wait times and enhance outcomes, redefining what's possible for surgical care.

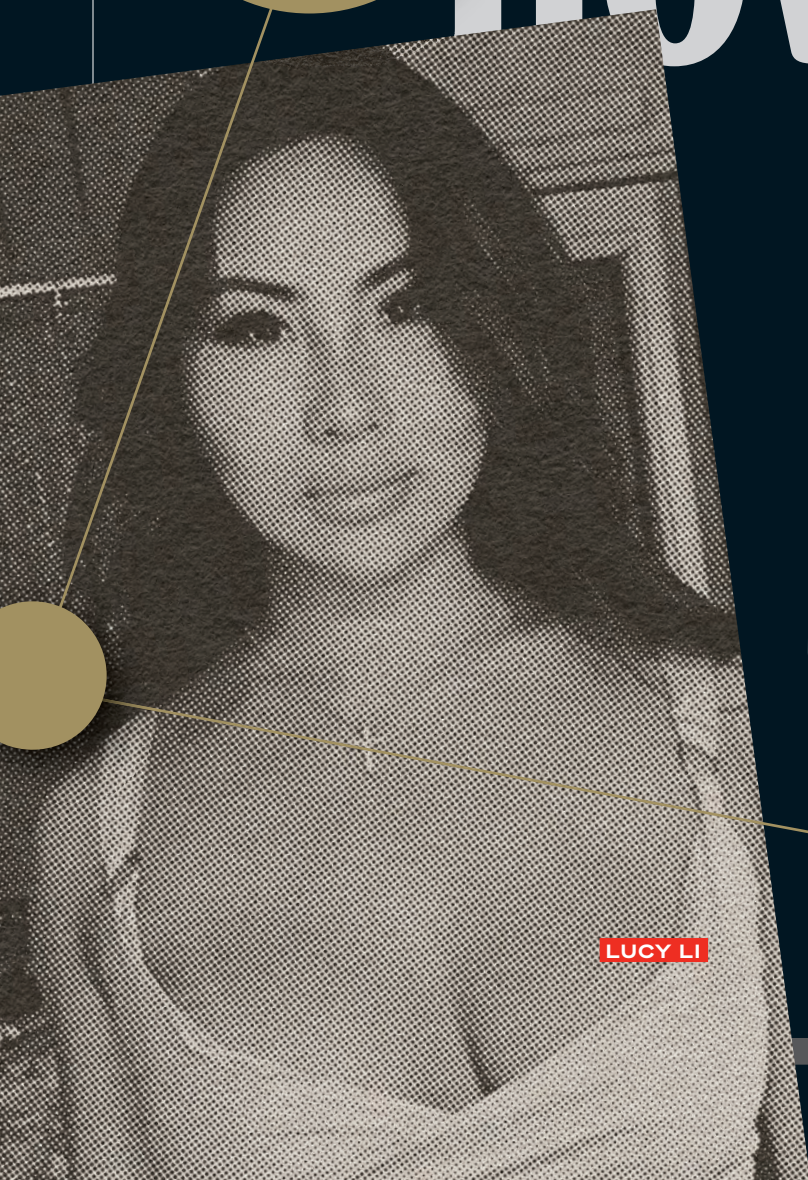


To learn more, scan QR code or visit
UHNfoundation.ca/talent

Lucy Li wanted to be a TikTok star. Oliver Karafa wanted to be rich. When a friend got in the way of their plans, they combined forces and pulled off a murder plot so preposterous that one of their lawyers used stupidity as a defence. The stranger-than-fiction story of the Stoney Creek killing

BY SARAH TRELEAVEN

HOW NOT WITH

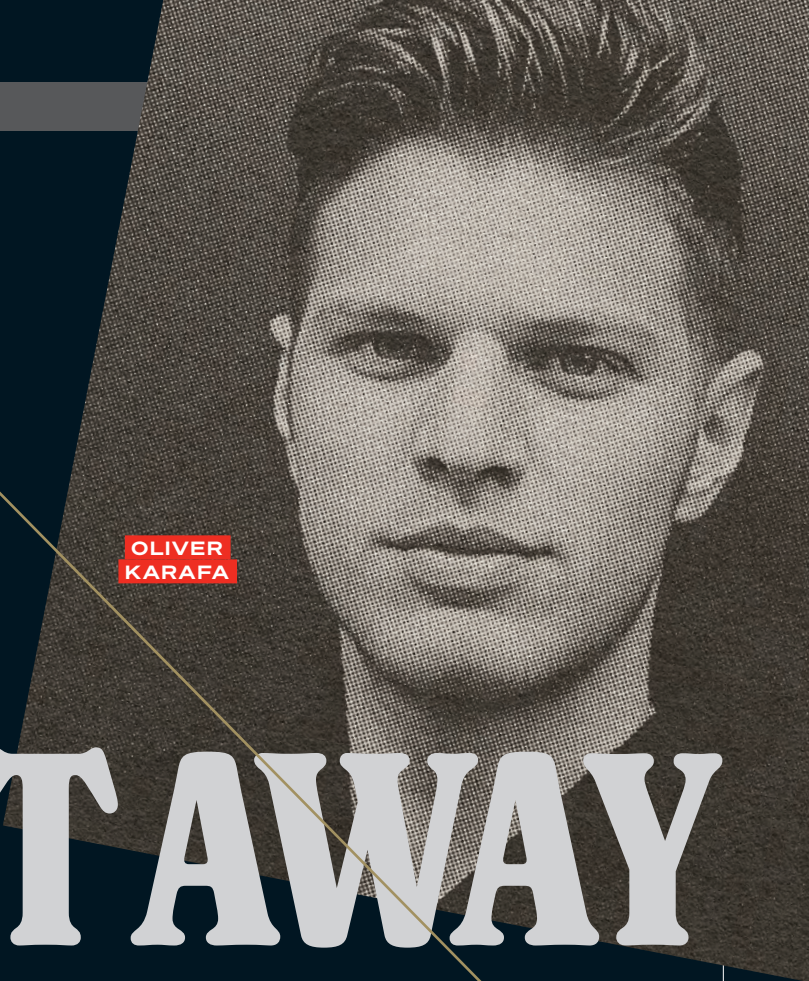


LUCY LI





OLIVER
KARAFKA



TO GET AWAY MURDER



FINANCIALLY, SPIRITUALLY AND OPTICALLY, Oliver Karafa and Yun Lu “Lucy” Li were a perfect match. Karafa was the consummate pretty boy: his brown hair always coiffed just so, his tennis shoes pristine. He was desperate to be seen as a successful and savvy entrepreneur, and what he lacked in skills or qualifications he made up for in bravado. With no post-secondary education and little job experience, he told whomever would listen that he was going to be a millionaire before he was 30. His wife, Li, had the looks and dimensions of a Kardashian: arched brows, high cheekbones, Barbie waistline. Her chosen path to fame and fortune was TikTok. She was part of a set of fraternal triplets who branded themselves as the Miaa Triplets on social media. They posed in lingerie and spoke little, evidently hoping that their looks alone would elevate them from wannabes to bona fide influencers.

Karafa and Li came from well-off families, and they wanted to expand on what their parents had achieved. Whereas that success had required sacrifice, however, Karafa and Li were looking for shortcuts. They leaned heavily on the idea that, if they looked the part, surely they would attract the right crowd and success would follow. If style over substance was their core compatibility, it would also be their undoing. When Karafa’s and Li’s ambitions were threatened, they were willing to go to horrific lengths to protect them.

THE WOULD-BE COUPLE FIRST MET in the late aughts, at Earl Haig Secondary School in North York. Back then, Li was a self-described nerd, shy and self-conscious about her braces. They dated briefly, but Li couldn't hold Karafa's attention. Karafa had recently moved from Slovakia, where his parents owned an industrial bakery. With their tailored wool blazers, silk scarves and expensive jewellery, the Karafa clan projected old-world money. When Karafa's parents decided to go back to Slovakia, Oliver, then 16, moved into a midtown apartment with his older sister. Their parents ensured that they wanted for nothing. "It was very much: you're on your own, but here's a credit card," says a former friend of Karafa's who agreed to speak to me on the condition of anonymity.

Karafa had an innate sense of hustle. After high school, he got a job working at a small French bistro and started talking about his intention to make it big, but Karafa's plans would have to wait. On April 2, 2012, he went bar-hopping. The final stop was the Bull and Firkin on Yonge, where, according to court documents, Karafa and two friends ordered four pitchers and two pints of beer, one black Russian, and four shots of Jack Daniel's. By 2 a.m., Karafa's blood alcohol was around three times the legal limit, yet he insisted that he was good to give his friend, David Chiang, a ride home. When he got into his Range Rover, he gunned it, reaching at least 100 kilometres an hour in a 50-kilometre zone. He lost control on Mount Pleasant north of Eglinton and drove into a pole, splitting the vehicle in two. The impact fractured Chiang's skull, and his brain was expelled out onto the pavement.

Karafa was miraculously unharmed, and though shaken by the accident, he seemed more concerned about going to jail than about Chiang's death. Karafa's friends joked that he would need to bulk up to defend himself. In 2014, he was found guilty on four charges, including dangerous driving causing death and criminal negligence causing death. Karafa had no prior record, so his sentence was relatively lenient: five years at Beaver Creek in Gravenhurst. In prison, Karafa struggled to follow the rules. He was caught engaging in prohibited three-way calls and suspected of making plans to smuggle drugs and tobacco into Beaver Creek. As a result, he was moved from minimum to medium security, and his first parole application was denied. The board wrote that his behaviour was "indicative of a young man with an abnormal sense of entitlement"—someone who believed he was above the law. He wasn't granted full parole until 2017.

When he got out, Karafa was 24 and eager to make up for lost time. He retrained his sights on becoming rich, though he was foggy on the means. He started going by the name Oliver Knox, presumably to hide his past from potential investors, and mixed with like-minded 20-somethings who also harboured outsized ambitions. Then he launched the first of several ventures: a restaurant called Food Society, on the main floor of the now-defunct Be SixFifty Hotel near Bay and Dundas. The place had an antique espresso machine and served brunch and acai bowls, but it quickly went bust. Luckily, Karafa wasn't attached to restaurants—he was simply looking for a means to an end. So he pivoted, starting a drop-shipping business that he claimed made \$1,000 a day and getting a gig as a sales

representative for a luxe travel agency. He also launched Insulact, a company that supposedly sold subscription insulin to Americans, and obtained a licence to grow medical marijuana in a warehouse near Yonge and Steeles. It's unclear whether any of these ventures were successful, but Karafa acted like they were—he ate at trendy restaurants, always showing up well dressed and immaculately groomed.

In 2018, he reconnected with Li, who had shed her braces and now struck him as girlfriend material. Li's parents, both financial advisers, lived in a McMansion in North York with a stone façade. They'd bought it for \$1.85 million in 2011 and filled it with Chinese calligraphy and ornate furniture. Her mother, Hong Wei "Winnie" Liao, was the president of Respon, a wealth management company, and the chairman of Botrich, a professional networking service with offices in Vancouver, Toronto and Saskatoon. Liao was also a donor to the federal Liberal party, hosting fundraisers for then-prime minister Justin Trudeau. On the mantle of the family's living room fireplace, Liao proudly displayed a photo of Trudeau beaming beside her five children, including the triplets: Li and her sisters, Kaitlyn and Jane.

As a teen, Li had been keen to emulate her mother. Liao offered a car as a prize for the first triplet to get accredited to sell insurance, and Li won it. She started working as a financial adviser in her mother's business at just 17, then continued working in insurance while she studied business at Western University and then Toronto Metropolitan University. But, after graduation, she stalled. Li asked to take a year or two away from the family business, and her mother agreed to give her a monthly allowance of \$5,000. She used it to finance beach vacations and cosmetic procedures, then she and her sisters started posting as the Miaa Triplets. They stood around in lingerie and fielded inane questions from randy scrollers (*Are you really sisters? Can you twerk?*). It didn't generate much in the way of revenue, but Li saw potential. While her sisters pursued other gigs, she made Tik Tok her main preoccupation.

“Li loved that Karafa was a bad boy, and he loved that she loved him being a bad boy”

Li and Karafa moved in together after just two dates. “She loved that he was a bad boy, and he loved that she loved him being a bad boy,” recalls Karafa's friend. Because of his impaired driving conviction, Karafa had no licence; Li drove him everywhere in her Mercedes. He clearly called the shots in the relationship. Once, when Li was planning to go to Miami with her sisters, Karafa objected. If she partied without him, it would make him look bad in front of his friends, and appearances were everything. Still, Li seemed content with the dynamic. The couple soon settled into a two-storey condo near Yonge and Eglinton.

In May of 2020, Karafa and Li planned a vacation to Europe. When they reached the airport to board their flight to Zurich,

the attendees stopped them. Due to pandemic restrictions on cross-border travel, only EU citizens were allowed onboard. Since Karafa was a Slovakian citizen, he was fine, but Li wasn't. They quickly scrambled for a workaround. They managed to find a Zoom officiant who was available immediately and were wed on a video call from the airport. Afterward, they spent months hanging out in Europe while the world was in lockdown.

IN THEIR GOALS, if not their methods of achieving them, Karafa and Li were a product of their generation. Gen Z is increasingly rejecting the conventional nine-to-five as both unappealing and unattainable, and they have a point. AI and a shrinking economy have made full-time jobs hard to come by. In July, Statistics Canada found that only 54 per cent of Canadians between 15 and 24 were employed, the lowest rate since 1998. Even when there's a job on offer, many salaries barely cover the cost of living. As a result, more and more 20-somethings are pursuing entrepreneurship. A TD survey found that 73 per cent of Gen Z Canadians want to start their own business, and a third of Gen Zers and millennials aspire to be their own boss. One survey found that 57 per cent of Gen Zers want to become influencers, a form of self-employment that promises seductive perks: free meals, beauty products, vacations and the clout that comes with showing off your success online.

On the surface, starting a business or becoming a TikTok star can look like the ultimate life hack—a way to skip the grind and work from a beach chair in Mykonos or an artisanal taco joint in Tulum. And while there's no shortage of TikTok videos and Substack gurus willing to sell the idea that it can be done in 10 easy steps, the fact is that starting a successful business is hard. About one in five fail in the first year; half fail within five years. The vast majority of influencers don't make enough money on TikTok to sustain themselves. For those willing to do the leg-work, going it alone can be a viable, rewarding path. But, for anyone hoping they can find this generation's version of a get-rich-quick scheme, the odds of success are long.

In the spring of 2020, after years of failed attempts, Karafa finally hit on a promising idea. With the world in the throes of the early pandemic, everyone was scrambling to find personal protective equipment, particularly in Europe, where supplies were critically scarce. Karafa saw the desperate need for masks and gloves as a chance to make a profit. He recruited a friend as his partner, enlisted his father's help and secured an investor. Then he started buying PPE in bulk and shipping it to Europe, to sell at a markup.

The potential for profit was real, but they needed a steady stream of cash to purchase supplies. A single investor wasn't going to cut it. So in the summer of 2020, an associate introduced Karafa to someone he thought could inject some capital: Tyler Pratt. Six feet tall, 222 pounds and covered in tattoos, he cut a formidable figure. He was a high-level cocaine dealer, and business was booming—he once pulled in \$1 million in a single day. But he also had a young son and daughter in Vancouver and a partner, a former erotic dancer named Jordyn Romano, with whom he'd just relocated to Toronto. He was looking to get out of the drug game. He'd already started a few legitimate side hustles: a diamond company and a weight loss supplement company. Still, Pratt and Romano's apartment was littered with evidence of his criminal undertakings: steroids, brass knuckles and a taser, plus expensive trappings



LUCY AND HER SISTERS, KAITLYN AND JANE, POSTED ON TIKTOK AS THE MIAA TRIPLETS

like Balenciaga clothing, Louis Vuitton shoes and an Audemars Piguet watch.

Karafa, ever confident, wasn't fazed by Pratt's reputation. After meeting with Pratt and Romano, Karafa sent Li a text message: "I hope these retards have money." As it turned out, they did. Pratt and Romano sized up Karafa and decided he seemed legit. Just days after they first met, Pratt forked over \$170,000 for the PPE start-up, then followed up with other payments that added up to an additional \$300,000. Pratt gave Karafa a burner phone, telling him to use it to keep in touch.

Their relationship began as a professional one, but a working friendship developed. Karafa gave Pratt a \$350 bottle of Johnnie Walker Blue and suggested that the four of them go on a vacation to the Amalfi Coast. Pratt bought Karafa a necklace for his birthday, one he hoped would match a bracelet Karafa often wore. On a birthday card, he wrote, "Oliver, happy birthday!! All the best in 2021! Love Tyler and Jordyn." Pratt and Karafa even spoke about a new joint venture: an island property in the Bahamas where they could open a club with lots of beautiful women, whom Li would be in charge of sourcing.

There was just one problem: Karafa's businesses were crumbling. Even for experienced entrepreneurs, turning an idea into a lucrative enterprise is a challenge. Karafa was making rookie mistakes. His PPE supply had stalled, and his other ventures weren't doing well enough to cover his losses. The grow-op, which he had filled with plants, had gone bust. A year and a half in, the entire crop went mouldy. It was a ruinous blow. Karafa, determined, got over a hundred more plants—but it was unclear if or when the business would turn a profit. Instead of coming clean to Pratt, Karafa doubled down. He showed Pratt forged financial documents claiming that European companies were paying big bucks for their PPE and boasted that they were each making \$69,000 in profit on every shipment.

But Pratt grew impatient. By January of 2021, he started leaning on Karafa: he wanted his initial investment back, plus some interest. Karafa, cornered, promised to have \$500,000 ready by March 1, 2021. With a deadline locked in, he started to panic. Pratt wasn't the kind of spurned business partner who would take him to court. Karafa knew about a former

associate of Pratt's who had recently been gunned down in a Vancouver parking lot. Once, according to Li, Karafa came home from a heated business meeting and claimed Pratt had punched him in the face.

He needed a stall tactic, and Li had one at the ready. She offered to set up Pratt and Romano, who was newly pregnant, with a life insurance policy worth \$1.5 million through her mother's company. The details she drummed up were deeply suspect. She told Pratt and Romano that, if they paid the first premium in cash, Karafa could direct their profits from Europe to cover all further premiums. In doing so, they would effectively bring their profits into Canada without paying taxes. She also led them to believe that they could borrow against the policy, getting money they could use in Canada. Li falsified documents itemizing Pratt and Romano's assets to convince them things were underway, but she was just buying time.

As the days ticked down, Karafa faced the prospect of admitting that he was overextended and, worse, a fraud. Then he had an idea. What if there were a simple solution, a way of dealing with his problem that would allow him to keep his money and his reputation? And Pratt and Romano, well, they would just disappear. He would need Li's help, but surely between the two of them, they could pull it off. So, just weeks before the day he was supposed to pay Pratt back, Karafa hurriedly put together a hare-brained murder scheme.

THE FIRST STEP was to find a secluded spot and come up with a plausible reason to lure Pratt and Romano there. Using Google Maps, Karafa found a warehouse in an industrial part of Stoney Creek, on the outskirts of Hamilton. He went to scope out the property in person and found that it was sufficiently private, then asked Pratt if they could meet there on Sunday, February 28, the day before Karafa had agreed to give Pratt his money. Karafa lied, saying that the warehouse was owned by Li's mother and that he'd arranged a meeting with their realtor to talk about turning it into another grow-op. Pratt agreed, and the four friends made plans to go for dinner afterward at Sotto Sotto in Oakville, the sister restaurant to the Avenue Road celebrity hangout.

Next up: covering their tracks. Karafa and Li needed to keep their phones at home on the day of the meet so it would look like they had never left their condo. Karafa asked a friend named Phi Chinh, whom he'd met working in a restaurant almost a decade earlier, if he could borrow the SIM card in his cellphone on February 28. Karafa's story was that he had an important meeting with some Chinese investors, acquaintances of Li's family whom he was hoping might inject \$1 million into his PPE business. He didn't want Li's family—or anyone else—to know that the deal was going down. Chinh didn't fully understand, but he agreed. Step three: the getaway car. Karafa bought a white Audi Q5 for \$18,000 and made plans with a contact to dispose of both the Audi and Pratt's Range Rover by shipping them to Europe, where they would be broken down and sold for parts.

On the day of the meeting, Chinh arrived at Li and Karafa's condo just after 3 p.m. to deliver his SIM card. Li seemed nervous as they put his card in her phone. Karafa then snuck out of their apartment using the stairs, which didn't have security cameras. Li, however, insisted on taking the elevator even though it had cameras that could jeopardize their alibi. In a

half-baked attempt to minimize the risk, Karafa dug out a blond wig that Li had used for a social media post. She sometimes wore it during sex, but this time, Karafa told her to put it on for her elevator ride. She also pulled on a tuque with a Mercedes logo, a hoodie and, for good measure, a PPE mask. By this point, they were running late, so they texted Pratt and Romano and asked to push the meeting back by 45 minutes. When Karafa and Li finally arrived at the warehouse, they cut the chain on the gate and headed around to the back of the lot.

Ten minutes later, Pratt and Romano pulled up in Romano's Range Rover. Pratt had a bag full of cash and a pizza; Romano, now 13 weeks pregnant, was hungry and had insisted that they stop. Karafa and Li led their guests to the door but quickly realized they hadn't thought much further: it was locked. Li, improvising, pretended to look for a lockbox, suggesting that the realtor must have left a key somewhere. Romano got into her car and turned on the seat warmer. Pratt, sensing that something was off, demanded to know where the realtor was. While Karafa did what he could to pacify him, Li got inside the Range Rover and made small talk with Romano, but the conversation was tense and awkward, so Li got out and stood in front of the car.

As Pratt got angrier, Karafa ran out of tactics. He pulled out a 9 mm handgun—but he didn't point it at Pratt. He wheeled around and aimed the barrel at Romano, who was still in the passenger seat. "Get out of here, Jo," he said, his voice and hand both shaking. But he didn't wait long enough for Romano to react. He just started shooting. Two bullets got buried in the seat of the car, but the third hit Romano squarely in the chest. Pratt had only enough time to scream, "What the fuck, bro?" before Karafa turned the gun on him. Karafa shot Pratt five or six times in the head and chest before he collapsed onto the pavement. One of the bullets tore through his lungs, which began to fill with blood; he would be dead within the hour.

KARAF AND LI took Pratt and Romano's cellphones, which they knew contained texts that linked them all to the meeting, and the \$20,000 in cash Pratt had on him. Then they pulled Romano out of the car, so forcefully that one of her thigh-high Louboutin boots came off, and dumped her on the ground. They left her there while they drove both cars off the property, ditching the Audi nearby and returning in the Range Rover. It was only at this point that Li noticed her grey sweatpants were covered in Pratt's blood. But they had a bigger problem: scanning the parking lot, they realized that Romano was gone.

They frantically looked for her, driving around for an hour, desperate to find her body, before getting nervous about lingering at the crime scene. *Surely she couldn't have survived*, they thought, and they decided to leave, Karafa driving while holding the car door, which had been damaged from the gunshots and wouldn't stay shut. He messaged his contact who was buying the cars: "Both cars are fucked you have to tow both." Ever the dealmaker, he said he was willing to accept just \$2,000 for both cars if they were picked up the next day. Li and Karafa drove to Etobicoke, where Karafa threw his gun away, then abandoned the Range Rover on Audley Street.

They flagged a cab and rode, still covered in blood, back to their condo, where they stripped and put their clothes in a plastic bag. Li was scrolling on her phone when she came across

a news item, a worst-case scenario they had not anticipated: Romano had been found—alive. The bullet had pierced her heart, and though she was bleeding profusely, she had regained consciousness. Afraid for her life and the life of her baby, she managed to crawl down to the curb. A few minutes later, a Good Samaritan spotted her on the road. By the time the paramedics and police arrived, Romano was barely breathing. The police, casing the scene, quickly found Pratt's body along with a keychain bearing a picture of his young son smiling in a hockey uniform.

Karafa and Li's weeks of planning had been undone in a couple of hours. Still, they weren't prepared to give up. They cobbled together a new plan. First, Karafa called Chinh, who was at a party, and told him they would drop off his SIM card. Chinh was drunk and didn't register that anything was wrong. Karafa and Li arrived not long after midnight, seemingly calm and in good spirits. Karafa flashed a smile before telling Chinh that his big business meeting had been a success.

After that, Karafa and Li returned to their condo to pack a small Louis Vuitton backpack and throw Li's wig, some bullets and the clothes they had been wearing at the time of the murder in a garbage bag. At 2:49 a.m., they rode down in their elevator for the last time. Li held a UPS package and Karafa carried the bag of evidence. Then they got into Li's Mercedes and started driving north. They ran out of gas near a general store in Muskoka and decided to ditch the car. They also threw the bag of evidence, which included a lottery ticket with Pratt's signature on it, into a nearby trash can. Then they called a taxi and asked the driver to take them to Montreal. It was too far, the driver told them, so they settled for Sheppard-Yonge station. From there, Li and Karafa took the subway to Union, caught a train to Montreal and flew to the Czech Republic.

DESPITE SERIOUS INJURIES to her heart, liver and diaphragm, Romano survived—though her pregnancy did not. After three days in a coma, she awoke and identified Karafa and Li as the shooters. Police, initially unable to find their suspects, triangulated signals from nearby cell towers. This led them to Chinh, who appeared to have been at the scene of the crime—but he immediately volunteered the SIM card story. On March 4, the Hamilton police issued warrants and a public bulletin seeking the arrest of Karafa and Li.

After landing in Prague, the fugitives spent some time in Slovakia, where Karafa's parents live, then settled in rural Hungary. Fearing capture, they obtained fake Slovakian passports, Karafa's under the name Jakub Nichta, Li's under Ying Feng Nichta. But, in the end, their forgery didn't save them. In mid-June, the Hamilton police, working alongside the Hungarian Fugitive Active Search Team, tracked them down in Budapest, where they were hanging out in an area known for its nightclubs, and took them into custody.

After they were apprehended, their strategies diverged. Li agreed to return to Canada voluntarily on July 12, 2021. Her mother offered to spring for a private plane for the police officers who were sent to retrieve her; they declined. When Li arrived in Hamilton, she was interrogated by Detective Troy Ashbaugh. Li, who was wearing jeans, a T-shirt and a blanket draped over her shoulders, seemed tired. When Ashbaugh asked about her flight, she commented on how tight the leg room had been. She wasn't used to flying economy, she said.

Over four hours, Li insisted that she would need to speak to her lawyer before answering questions yet simultaneously divulged details about the crime. She was eager to clear the air, she said. She told Ashbaugh that she'd had no idea Karafa was planning to kill anyone and insisted that she was "like maybe a half a football field away when it happened." She was emphatic that Karafa would return and explain everything. Pratt's death couldn't have been planned, she insisted, because if Karafa had known it was going to happen, he would never have brought her along. "I'm not a very strong person," Li told Ashbaugh. "I'm very squeamish of blood. It was all very overwhelming."

But, as time passed, Li started to turn on her husband. "I think I didn't know much about him at all," she said. "I'm just a little bit scared, because I don't want to get in trouble for something that I didn't do." When Ashbaugh revealed that Romano had confirmed Li's presence during the shooting, Li clammed up. "I think I'm gonna wait for my lawyers for this



WHEN PRATT AND ROMANO MET KARAFKA AND LI, PRATT WAS TRYING TO RETIRE FROM HIS CAREER AS A COCAINE DEALER

part," she said. "She's not, like, entirely wrong, but she's just missing a lot of information. I think after I give you the full story, though, it will make a lot more sense for everyone. It's just so piece-y right now."

For police, it was less piece-y. Despite their scattershot efforts, Karafa and Li had left behind voluminous evidence—less breadcrumbs than whole loaves. Surveillance cameras had caught them at just about every stage of the crime: in the condo elevator, at the shooting location, dumping the Range Rover and en route to their various pit stops. The police didn't need Pratt's and Romano's phones to access messages about the meetup; they were able to subpoena texts that outlined the entire plan. They'd found Li's abandoned Mercedes and the nearby garbage can where she'd left her wig and bloodied sweatpants. Even as Li and Karafa had made their escape, security cameras caught them at Union Station, waiting for a shuttle bus in Montreal and again at the Montreal airport.

IN DECEMBER OF 2021, Li had a three-day bail hearing during which her lawyer argued for her to be put on house arrest pending trial. Her mother told the judge that she would “chain lock” her daughter’s door, install iron bars on the windows, and take away Li’s credit cards and car keys. She was, she insisted, willing to pay whatever it cost. Li’s bail was set at \$3 million, and her mother and a few family friends agreed to act as her sureties. With Liao on the hook for \$2 million and the friends putting up the rest, Li was sent home with an ankle monitor.

The arrangement worked, for a while. But, when Liao went out of town in May of 2023, she appointed one of Li’s other sureties to keep an eye on her. Li told this friend that she was allowed to leave the house because she was meeting with a paralegal to discuss a potential lawsuit. Instead, she went for lunch with her sisters at Dragon Legend, a Chinese buffet in Markham. The next day, she said she had another meeting, this time downtown at her sister’s luxury condo in the Four Seasons hotel—but, when she arrived, Li just used the gym and scrolled on her phone. All these trips were in explicit violation of the terms of her bail and jeopardized the money her mother and friends had proffered. The Hamilton police, who were monitoring Li’s movements using the GPS on her ankle monitor, arrested her on May 29 and charged her with four counts of breaching bail conditions. She was sent back to jail to await trial.

Meanwhile, Karafa was in Budapest, fighting extradition. He argued that his life would be at risk in Canada, and he hired a private investigator to try to prove that Pratt had a network of criminal connections who might avenge his death. Karafa

also accused the Hamilton police of corruption, though he neglected to elaborate. In March of 2022, a Budapest court ruled against him. If Pratt really had such far-reaching connections, a judge noted, they could get at Karafa anywhere in the world. He was put on a plane to Canada to face murder charges, then confined in the Hamilton-Wentworth Detention Centre.

The trial began on April 10, 2024. Li and Karafa were tried together but with different lawyers and diverging narratives. The legal strategy Li’s team deployed wasn’t flattering: they argued that she was essentially too dumb to be part of any criminal conspiracy. Despite the fact that Karafa had been controlling, manipulative and a chronic cheater, they said, Li had failed to recognize any red flags in their relationship. On the day of the crime, she had been planning to have dinner with her mother and sisters, and at the last minute, Karafa had asked for a ride to meet with Pratt and Romano. Li was annoyed, but then she found her stringy blond wig in Karafa’s bag. She thought it meant that he was planning to cheat on her and worried that Romano was bringing one of her stripper friends to meet him. In order to keep an eye on Karafa, she agreed to drive to Hamilton.

She told the court that she had been on the far side of the building when the shooting took place. When she returned, it was too chaotic to figure out what was going on, so she just hopped into the car when Karafa told her to. She said she had seen Pratt on the ground but initially thought that Romano had run over him. Later, when she’d asked Karafa what had happened, he wouldn’t really tell her, she said. He just warned her that Pratt’s associates would kill them; they had no choice but



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to flee and live under new identities. “Lucy Li is a distinctly flawed, naïve, superficial, entitled, sometimes vacuous, irresponsible and quite juvenile human being,” the judge told the jury in his instructions. “She has many moral failings and conducted herself poorly and immorally with respect to the fake insurance application and the accompanying lies, but that does not make her a murderer.” For maximum clarity, he added: “Ms. Li concedes she may be the stupidest person in the room.”

Karafa admitted to pulling the trigger, killing Pratt and seriously wounding Romano, but his lawyer argued that it wasn't something he'd planned out—it was purely self-defence. Karafa wanted to terminate his business relationship with Pratt but was afraid of the fallout. The lawyer emphasized Pratt's drug-dealing, his allegedly violent nature and his sheer stature. Karafa's fear and panic, he argued, were justified. He'd come up with the Stoney Creek plan as just another stall tactic, and it was Pratt who had escalated the situation by getting angry.

When Romano took the stand, a different portrait of Pratt emerged. Romano told the court that they had been trying to start over, to chart a new course that was safer and more respectable. When they met Karafa, they thought the charismatic salesman could help them—and it was a wonderful perk that he also wanted to be their friend. They had never imagined that Karafa and Li were capable of double-crossing them. Romano described Pratt as a devoted father. On the day he was murdered, he had just flown back from BC, where he had celebrated his daughter's birthday.

On May 24, 2024, the jury rendered a verdict. They didn't buy Li's attempts to play dumb or Karafa's claims of self-defence.

The evidence of premeditation—the arrangement to dispose of the cars, the SIM card loan, the story about the Stoney Creek building, the extensive security footage—was overwhelming. Karafa and Li were both found guilty of first-degree murder in the killing of Pratt and the attempted murder of Romano. The convictions triggered a mandatory life sentence with no possibility of parole for at least 25 years. Romano, who now has an angry pink scar on her chest, has since filed a \$3-million civil suit against Li, Karafa and the mutual friend who connected them all, describing the physical trauma, depression and anxiety she's suffered in the aftermath of the shooting.

This May, a Hamilton court deliberated on whether Li's sureties would have to pay up for her breaching of the bail conditions. Liao's lawyer argued that his client “never imagined for a moment that her daughter would ever do something as thoughtless, selfish, irresponsible.” Li looked on silently from the prisoner's box, wearing a prison-issued grey sweatsuit; her lawyer conveyed her regret to the court for “blowing it.” In the end, the court ruled that Liao would have to pay \$1 million; her friend who had been chaperoning was on the hook for \$50,000.

Li and Karafa, who remain married, both declined my requests for interviews. After her bail hearing, Li returned to the Grand Valley Institution for Women, near Kitchener. Karafa is at a penitentiary on the East Coast. Despite their convictions, they still seem to believe in the existence of a get-out-of-jail-free card. Karafa recently filed an appeal, and Li is shopping around for a new lawyer. 71



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Scott's transformation from in the hospital post-transplant to at home, six weeks apart

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CREATED BY  **UHN** Canada's #1 Hospital

When James “Scott” Wilson was rushed to the hospital in 2023 with end-stage liver failure, he knew his time was running out. As Scott’s condition worsened, the hardest part was imagining his children growing up without him.

For patients living with end-stage organ failure, time is often measured in days or weeks. Scott’s only hope was a transplant, yet the demand for donor organs far exceeds the supply. Across Canada, for every patient who receives a life-saving transplant, many more remain on the waiting list. For those who do receive a donor organ, it represents the possibility of a future once thought out of reach.

At University Health Network (UHN), the goal is to close this gap so that more patients can receive a second chance at life.

KEEPING HOPE THROUGH MOMENTS OF DARKNESS

When Scott was diagnosed with compensated liver cirrhosis in 2022, he was determined to stay strong for his children. Together, they had already faced heartbreak after the sudden loss of his husband several years earlier. But by 2023, the disease had progressed to decompensated liver cirrhosis stage 4—end stage liver disease—leaving him critically ill. Receiving a liver transplant was his last chance.

“I couldn’t bear the thought of my children losing another parent,” says Scott.

In an urgent attempt to find a living donor, Scott launched a social media campaign that also caught the attention of national television. His sister volunteered, but she was not a match. As his condition worsened, he feared he would have to prepare his children for a future without him.

Transplant eligibility depends on being sick enough to qualify but healthy enough to survive surgery. The unfortunate reality is that many patients deteriorate while waiting and may be too ill when a donor organ becomes available.

Just when it seemed that hope was gone, Scott got the call: a deceased donor liver had become available. Within 24 hours, he was in surgery at Toronto General Hospital. Scott’s life was saved by the generosity of an organ donor and the expert care of the transplant team at UHN’s Ajmera Transplant Centre.

“The moment I got that call, it meant life,” he recalls. “It meant my children would still have me.”

TRANSFORMING LIVES THROUGH SURGERY AND SUPPORT

Thanks to the expertise of his surgeon, Dr. Blayne Sayed, and the dedicated transplant team at UHN, Scott came through the operation successfully. Today, he is back home, grateful for every day he gets to spend with his children.

UHN's Ajmera Transplant Centre is home to one of the biggest liver transplant programs in North America, performing 209 transplants in 2024. The program's success is rooted in its highly skilled surgical team and the strong support network that surrounds each patient, including nurses, coordinators and specialists who guide them through every step of the journey. Scott experienced this first-hand during his recovery and often speaks about the compassion and professionalism that helped him heal.

Every donor surgery at the Centre is treated with the utmost care and respect, reflecting the extraordinary nature of the gift. The Ajmera Transplant Centre's commitment to safety ensures that each procedure meets the highest standards of care, just as Scott experienced during his life-saving transplant.

"Transplantation is the pinnacle of what we can do as clinicians, taking some of the sickest patients and transforming their health and their lives," says Sayed. "None of it is possible without generosity, whether it's an organ donor who gives the gift of life or a financial donor who fuels the innovation and care that make transplantation possible. Both forms of giving inspire me every day, and both give families more time together."

EXPANDING ACCESS TO LIFE-SAVING TRANSPLANTS

Living donor liver transplants are the preferred treatment for liver failure, offering earlier intervention and better long-term outcomes. UHN's Ajmera Transplant Centre is a global leader in living donor liver transplants. Since 2000, its living donor liver transplant program has given more than 1,000 adults and 300 children a second chance at life—the highest numbers of any program in North America.

To further expand access, UHN established the Centre for Living Organ Donation in 2018. The only program of its kind in Canada, it is dedicated to improving access to life-saving kidney and liver transplants, supporting donors and ensuring more patients can receive the care they need.

However, most liver donations in Canada come from deceased donors, and the need for viable organs always exceeds the number available for transplant. In 2023, 15 per cent of Canadians waiting for a liver transplant died before receiving one—a higher mortality rate than any other transplanted organ.

"Getting a transplant is like having a chance to start life over. That's why we're pushing to increase the number of livers available for transplants, because wait list mortality is still far too high," says Dr. Deepali Kumar, director of UHN's Ajmera Transplant Centre.

To achieve this goal, UHN is shaping the future of transplant medicine by implementing innovative techniques such as ex vivo organ perfusion. This groundbreaking technology keeps organs alive outside the body and allows surgeons to assess, repair and transplant organs that would previously have been discarded. The lung transplant program at UHN pioneered the development and use of ex vivo lung perfusion, and the liver and kidney transplant teams, under the direction of Dr. Markus Selzner, have been early adopters of the technology. Research is also underway to bring ex vivo heart technology to clinical use at UHN.

Each year, organs treated with ex vivo reach more patients, offering new hope and improved outcomes. At UHN, almost 90 livers once considered unusable or too high risk have been successfully transplanted into patients, saving the lives of Canadians in desperate need—including Scott Wilson. His



Scott Wilson and his children

donor liver was treated with ex vivo perfusion before transplantation, making his surgery possible. "Thanks to advanced technologies, we're now able to repair and transplant livers that wouldn't have been viable before, reducing the number of wait list deaths," says Kumar. "This is bringing us closer to a future where every patient has access to the transplant they need."

These transformative health care breakthroughs do not happen without donor support, which funds the research, technology and training needed to turn promising ideas into life-saving solutions. Donor-funded research made the development of ex vivo perfusion technology possible, provides long-term support for patients and families and helps train the next generation of transplant specialists and researchers. Donor support allows UHN to advance care globally while directly improving outcomes for patients like Scott and their loved ones.

LIVING WITH GRATITUDE

For Scott, life after transplant has been filled with family moments that he once feared missing. From the simple pleasures of gardening, family dinners and baseball games to the joy of watching his children grow, Scott is grateful for every day that his donor and transplant made possible.

"Every day is a gift," he says. "From celebrating holidays to simply getting out of bed, I know how lucky I am. Even the aches and pains of aging are just signs that I'm still alive."

Determined to give back, Scott now focuses on advocacy, education and raising awareness about the power of organ donation. He shares his story to honour his donor and inspire others to register and give the ultimate gift of life.

"The whole point is to keep giving back," Scott says. "I am so grateful to be running my daily marathon of life. As is. Better than ever."

Learn more about how we're transforming surgical care to help patients like Scott at [UHNfoundation.ca/talent](https://www.uhnfoundation.ca/talent).



Gift the
unexpected.

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A Kind ANNIVERSARY

.....

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oneofakindshow.com

ARTISANS: STUDIO 648 POTTERY, TWEAK, THE PARCHMENT LEATHER,
ADAM MACK WOOD ART, ALINE NASSEH ARTISAN CHOCOLATES

Navigator

“Perugia didn’t half-ass anything”

—NISHI BASSI, P. 86



miles the label

GIFT GUIDE 2025

In a year of elbows-up enthusiasm, we’ve curated the ultimate selection of (mostly) homegrown delights to give or get

BY CAITLIN WALSH MILLER

Seasonal Sweats
\$82 / Miles the Label’s sustainable Canadian-made kids’ sweatsuits, featuring groovy Santa giving the shaka, take holiday nostalgia on a tropical getaway. milestheLabel.com

\$50 & UNDER



Maple Leaf Sticker
\$4 / Toronto-centric brand Crywolf, founded by OCAD grads Rose Chang and Stephanie Drabik, has made a retro decal that's perfectly on-brand for Leafs loyalists who bleed blue and white.
crywolfclothing.com

Toronto FC Tee

\$29 / Bring Elmo, Bert and Ernie to BMO Field with Peace Collective's *Sesame Street* line. Pre-shrunk for pint-size future MVPs.
peace-collective.com



Cat Nap

\$36 / From Parisian label OMY, this inflatable tickled-pink kitty pillow is squishable, washable and paws-itively cherishable.
advicefromacaterpillar.ca

La Cucina di Terroni

\$50 / Take a man to Terroni, he eats lunch. Give him the gift of learning the Italian institution's classic recipes, and you've got a man who can cook you funghi assoluti for life.
labottegaditerroni.com



PACK OF PICKLES

Brining is back, baby. Grab a tub of house-made half-sour or mixed pickles from Toronto's lunch-counter darling, Linny's Luncheonette.

LINNYSLUNCHEONETTE.COM



String Theory

\$21 / Spin circles round the schoolyard with this old-school, pro-grade yo-yo designed by Canadian champion Wayne Ngan.
layerinfinity.com

Deck the Dolls

\$23 / It's queen against queen in this campy card game featuring drag superstars like Trixie Mattel and Coco Peru. Shuffle for life!
drakegeneralstore.ca



\$12



“I WILL DESTROY EVERYTHING YOU LOVE” KEYCHAIN

Stay Home Club, the preferred brand of misanthropes and nihilists everywhere, captures the chaos demon energy that every cat owner has come to embrace.

STAYHOMECLUB.COM



Supersized Scrunchie

FROM \$21 / Belleville-based brand XXL and Co. makes scrunchies as big as your face in a panoply of satiny, velvety colours and prints. They're also very much TikTok approved. xxlandco.com



Banorah

\$30 / Kikkerland goes bananas for Hanukkah with this whimsical fruit-shaped menorah. Candles included! bergodesigns.ca



Kanata Dry

\$4 / This cheeky Indigenous spin on the one-time Canadian classic is available at the Native Canadian Centre of Toronto gift shop and supports programming like language classes and Okichitaw martial arts. thecedarbasket.ca



Neighbourhood Cards

\$28 / Paperhood's greeting cards turn local streetscapes in Roncey, Cabbagetown, the Beaches and the Danforth into frame-worthy art. thepaperhood.com

Science Centre Print

\$32 / Hand-printed in the brand's Kensington Market studio, this print by Kid Icarus memorializes the Raymond Moriyama-designed architectural icon. kidicarus.ca



Coffee for a Cause

\$24 / Each bag of Street Brew's small-batch beans helps fund Toronto shelters—and they're a Jonas Brothers favourite. streetbrew.ca



Pet Bandana

\$27 / Empower your pup with a fashion statement that will help him channel Krypto—possibly the most divisive movie character of the year. shop.dc.com



Wall Hooks

FROM \$28 / These quirky handmade ceramic wall hooks are designed to hold your tote, jacket, hats or any other baggage that follows you home. junechildceramics.com

\$50
& UNDER
CONTINUED



\$44

DESK SIGN

Toronto product designer Duvan Gómez concocted this *Severance*-themed desk sign to signal when you're deep in the work, which is mysterious and important. Praise Kier!

WOODENSTIHL ON ETSY.COM

Body Butter

\$18 / Nutrius's fast-absorbing, non-greasy body cream is made in Toronto and smells like a coconut-and-berry-infused holiday. [amazon.ca](https://www.amazon.ca)



CanCon Candy Box

\$40 / It's a snack attack from north of the 49th, featuring Canadian munchie classics like ketchup chips, Smarties and Maynard's Wine Gums. etsy.com/shop/obcanadacandystore



Chappell Roan Candle

\$30 / Calm Down Caren's celebrity saint candle is H-O-T-T-O-G-O. Light one up for the Midwest princess. outerlayer.com



Saucy Apron

\$39 / If your recipient enjoys...entertaining, consider this saucy beaver-themed apron featuring multiple illustrations of the charming woodland creature that's absolutely not meant to be innuendo at all. kendallandco.ca

Lip Crayon

\$37 / The creamy comfort of a lipstick meets the precision of a lip liner. Ilia's new Lip Sketch crayons come in punchy soft-matte shades for a pop of colour that hydrates, plumps and smoothes. iliabeauty.com



Kooky Crochet

\$14 / Toronto artist Aynsley Grealis of Knotted Neon makes fungi balaclavas and pizza rat purses, and now you—yes, you!—can stitch your own whackadoodle masterpiece. knottedneon.com



Fidget Ring

\$5 / These dino-tastic spinner rings by Sarnia's Great Pretenders offer Jurassic stress relief at your kids' fingertips. treasureislandtoys.ca



Welcome to the Family

\$30 / Film critic Barry Hertz chronicles the *Fast & Furious* universe in this nitrous-fuelled epic, for readers who live their lives (vicariously) one quarter-mile at a time.
hachettebookgroup.com

The Cosmic Con

\$25 / Ron Kasman's award-winning graphic novel drops the reader into 1968 Toronto, complete with hippies, cults and Rochdale chaos. It's groovy, dark and rendered in lavish detail.
beguilingbooks.com



Statement Tote

\$30 / This is 2025's must-have merch for card-carrying bookworms. Plus, a portion of the proceeds helps support Toronto Public Library programs
spacingstore.ca



Customizable Sunnies

\$30 / Ontario sunglasses brand Señor Style lets you mix and match frames, lenses and arms to create shades as extra as you are. *señor.style*

EAST YORK PATCH

Rep the city's scrappiest 'hood with this retro crest patch from Old's Cool—perfect for denim, backpacks and showing off your east-end pride.

OLDSCHOOLGENERALSTORE.SQUARE.SITE

\$5



Sock It Forward

\$47 / For every pair of socks purchased—like this too-cute fruits-and-veggies set—Bombas donates a pair to someone experiencing homelessness.
bombas.com

CanCon Candles

\$24 / Ever wondered what Mr. Dressup would smell like as a candle? This collab between Newmarket's Market Candle and the CBC captures classic shows as flickering scents.
marketcandlecompany.com



Dubai Chocolate Bar

\$5 / This homegrown take on the viral pistachio-filled milk-chocolate marvel comes courtesy of Scarborough pastry shop Kunafa's. Snap, crackle, crunch. *kunafas.com*



Smooth Operator
\$138 / Local fragrance brand Sidia brings a sentimental touch to hand care with this ménage à trois of lightweight, fast-absorbing formulas with tops notes like bergamot, juniper and ginger root.
sidiathebrand.com



Portable Lamp
\$79 / These nature-inspired rechargeable, portable lamps are tailor-made for Scandi-inspired cottagecore. They're 3D-printed by Toronto-brand Humber.
shop-humber.com

\$51 TO
\$200

Game Changer
\$80 / 8BitDo's controller is as colourful as it is customizable, with swappable buttons, drift-resistant tech, throwback vibes and next-gen precision.
amazon.ca



Cheeky Sticks
\$72 / Toronto's 19/99 creamy blush and highlight duo is minimalist makeup at its most practical: blendable, versatile and easy on the pores and fine lines.
1999beauty.com



Jelly Doughnuts
\$55 / The Rolling Pin bakery goes all in on Hanukkah sufganiyot—stuffed, powdered and guaranteed to disappear before the menorah is lit.
therollingpin.ca

Very Merry Sweatshirt

\$132 / Deck the halls in oversized comfort with Province of Canada's locally made fleece featuring a super-soft chenille appliqué. Also available in kids' sizes.
provinceofcanada.com



\$200

LEGO WALL ART

Follow the yellow brick road for instructions to build an Emerald City mural that defies gravity—and bare walls—just in time for *Wicked: For Good*.

LEGO.COM

\$60



ANISHAA BASKETBALL

This sporty piece of indoor-outdoor art is called Bear Spirits in honour of Anishinaabe artist Brandon Jacko's clan.

PACHAARTS.COM



Matzah Ballin' Jersey

\$57 / Let the Hanukkah light in with this jersey, as sported by everyone's favourite six-foot-five prospective brother-in-law on *Nobody Wants This*. netflix.shop

Aiviq Sweatshirt

\$80 / Nunavut artist Nooks Lindell designed this chill walrus sweatshirt featuring a traditional motif on the tusk. Turns out the walrus wasn't Paul after all. hinaani.ca



Champagne Flutes

\$60 / If their cupboards are vertically challenged, gift them Corkcicle's double-walled glasses, which keep bubbly cold sans stems. thebeauandbauble.com



Digital Microscope

\$125 / STEM Adventures' kid-friendly portable scope zooms 1,000x with built-in LEDs. Bugs, plants and random rocks from the park had better get ready for their close-ups. ca.thelittlelearnerstoys.com

Ceramic Tableware

\$175 / Louf serves their sesame bread and fenugreek cake on this set from Jaffa-based Palestinian ceramist Nur Minawi—and now you can too. Available at Louf, 501 Davenport Rd.



Pamela Anderson Blanket

\$92 / BC's *Baywatch* queen has been immortalized in woven cotton. Finally, something for the notoriously hard-to-shop-for Liam Neeson. roseboundapparel.com

\$51

\$51 TO
\$200
CONTINUED



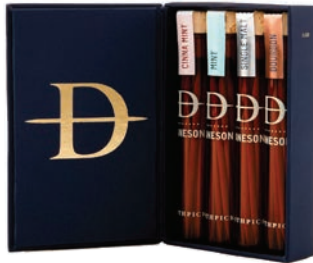
PLUSHIE WITH A PURPOSE

Cuddle and Kind has helped provide more than 36 million meals for kids in need through partnerships with organizations like Breakfast Club of Canada.

CA.CUDDLEANDKIND.COM

Fancy Toothpicks

\$63 / For every tree that's milled into Daneson's aromatic birch picks, the Toronto company plants 100 in its place.
daneson.com



Two-Tone Necklace

\$149 / Why choose between gold and silver when you can have both? Par Ici fuses the two in one swivelling piece for indecision chic.
paricijewellery.com



Wi-Fi Landline

\$99 / The '90s called—and they said, "Hey, that phone is super fly!" Tin Can's Wi-Fi-enabled landline connects kids only to approved contacts.
tincan.kids



Barbecue Bundle

\$177 / The Carbon Bar delivers ribs, brisket, beans and all their bestselling fixings—including chocolate chip cookie dough—with their introductory bundle.
shop.thecarbonbar.ca

Glass Eye Ornaments

\$70 / Turn your tree into a quirky creature with Alessi's handblown glass eye ornaments. Depending on where you place them, the gaze can go from friendly to surprised. Because you never know who's watching.
313designmarket.com



Hot Water Bottle

\$62 / Snuggle up like a Real Housewife of Etobicoke with this velvet-covered hot water bottle with a hand-embroidered leopard design.
theartofhome.ca



Bowl Goals

\$129 / Vancouver home decor brand Fable hand-finishes its zero-waste ceramic tableware in Portugal. They're like beautiful Russian nesting dolls you can sip borscht out of.
fable.com

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Seasonal ingredients, harvested at their peak.
Catering that delivers on every detail.



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\$201 TO
\$500



Medieval Sound Machine

\$420 / Get ready to whip up ye olde bangers with Teenage Engineering's beatmaker programmed with hundreds of medieval sounds. Hildegard of Bingen, who? *teenage.engineering*

Work Tote

\$398 / Founded by Toronto transplant Sasha Jardine, a self-described "winter-intolerant science nerd," SteMargScot offers wool accessories in the most SAD-defying colours. *stemargscot.com*



Pet Portrait

\$300 / Toronto illustrator Wendy Tancock doodles your favourite furry (or feathered or gilled or scaly) roommate in these pet portraits filled with quirky charm. *wendytancock.com*

Hot Sauce Set

\$250 / For heavyweight heat that packs a punch, look no further than this year's collaboration between MMA all-timer Georges St-Pierre and Lord's Hot Sauce, available in a limited-edition signed box. *lordshotsauce.co*



Heated Camping Chair

\$250 / Kuma's Canadian-designed Lazy Bear puts you in the hot seat—literally, thanks to Bluetooth-controlled seat warmers for all-weather lounging. *mec.ca*



Big Screen Energy

\$259 / Why doomscroll on your phone when you can beam it on the wall with this Kodak mini projector for the whole group to see? *amazon.ca*



SPOONER JERSEY

The Sceptres have her for at least two more years, so show your PWHL pride with a Natalie Spooner jersey—after all, she is the league MVP, a leading scorer and the International Ice Hockey Federation's 2024 top female player of the year.

CA.SHOP.THEPWHL.COM

Basket With a Twist

\$325 / Baba Tree's Ghanaian artisans weave strong, flexible elephant grass into a unique wave-like silhouette, creating a storage basket that doubles as functional art with serious shelf appeal. *goodeeworld.com*



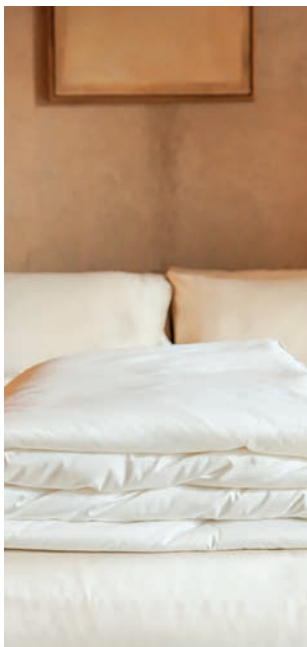


\$222

MOSS RUG KIT

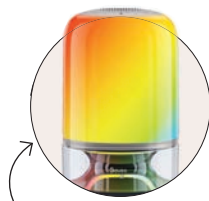
Craft Club's Forest Floor kit has 38 pieces of lush yarn and tools to tuft your own woodland-inspired rug.

CRAFTCLUBCO.COM



Silk-Filled Duvet

STARTING AT \$400 / Stuffed with double-cocoon mulberry silk—the highest grade you can get—this Aeptom duvet is cozy, cooling, cloud-grade Canadian luxury. Guaranteed to ruin you for basic bedding forever. aeptom.ca



Lava Lamp Speaker

\$250 / Govee's JBL-enhanced lamp pulses light to your playlist. It's groovy and actually sounds good—it's a lava lamp glow-up. ca.govee.com



It Bag

\$415 / Toronto brand Le Febour's buttery soft Everything Bag lives up to its name, with a triangular pouch that can fit a bottle of champagne or a tube of toothpaste, depending on the kind of evening you have planned. le-febour.com



Wild Style

\$348 / The watercolour deer-print crewneck from Wild Animals brings Bambi energy to streetwear. It also comes in a sweet-as-can-be bunny version. gaspardshop.com

Pretty Puffin

\$210 / Danish design master Kay Bojesen's iconic wooden puffin has migrated to Queen West, now nesting at the ever-playful Studio Brillantine. studiobrillantine.com



Yesavage Jersey

\$245 / Rookie ace Trey Yesavage went from Low-A to no-hitting the Yankees in a year. Rep Toronto's newest folk hero in Blue Jays blue. mlbshop.ca

Massey Hall Ring

\$499 / Local jeweller and wood carver Ring and Grove transforms Massey Hall's iconic maple floorboards into wearable souvenirs—Joni and Gord's stomping grounds, wrapped around your finger. madeyoulook.ca



E-reader for Kids

\$215 / Built for beach days, bedtime and everything in between, the newest Kindle Paperwhite Kids is waterproof and comes with six months of Amazon Kids Plus, unlocking thousands of titles for readers ages 3 to 12. amazon.ca

Luxe PJs

\$213 / Local brand Kip makes stretchy, soft, sag-free pyjamas—and they're monogrammable, so even your REM cycle can have a signature look. sleepkip.com



QUILTED JACKET

\$595

From her laneway studio, Rebecca Caulford—the artist behind Honeybea—reworks found fabrics and heirloom textiles into Vogue-approved wearables.

HONEYBEA.CA



OVER
\$500



Steeped in History

\$1,025 / Elevate teatime with this 22-karat-gold-trimmed Royal China set in a pattern once personally selected by Queen Elizabeth II and King George VI during a 1939 visit to the Fairmont Empress.

canada.fairmontstore.com

Ostrich Cabinet

\$46,743 / Ruffle feathers with the Lizzy cabinet, a hand-carved stunner from Italian furniture designer Piero Manara and a standout at this year's Milan Design Week.

artemest.com



Knitting Subscription

\$582 FOR 12 MONTHS / Toronto's Knit Me delivers Canadian-dyed yarn and patterns monthly. Perfect for a year-long project ending in snuggly results.

knitme.ca



Trunk Show

\$525 / Canadian suitcase company Monos is bringing back the travel trunk with a modern upgrade. It's also helping to restore the 2,000-hectare Old Bonjoge Forest near Kisumu City, Kenya, with some of the proceeds.

ca.monos.com



Old-School Camera Cool

\$2,699 / Nikon's Zf pairs vintage design with cutting-edge tech—think manual dials, full-frame power, and deep-learning-powered focus and tracking.

store.nikon.ca



AI Glasses

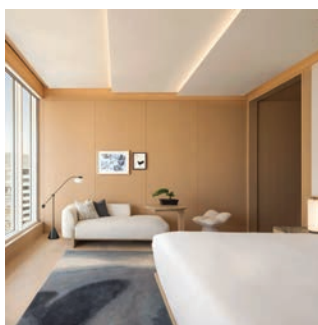
\$529 / Rokid's Kickstarter-smashing AI glasses pack a heads-up AR display, real-time translation and a 12-megapixel camera for first-person filming (if you're into that sort of thing).

global.rokid.com

Smart Garden

\$850 / Self-watering and app-tracked, Plantaform's "fogponic" garden grows 15 plants at once. It's basically FarmVille, but you can eat it.

plantaform.ca



Luxury Staycation

FROM \$529 / Nobu finally landed in Toronto this year, with its five-star rooms and celeb-approved sushi. Check in downstairs, then gorge on the black cod miso and crispy tuna rice like an A-lister.

nobuhotels.com

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Paper Tablet

FROM \$729 / ReMarkable's new pocket-sized tablet brings its signature paper feel to your commute for note-taking bliss on the go. remarkable.com



Double-Denim Diss?

\$1,100 / Was Kendrick's all-denim Grammys 'fit—featuring a Maison Margiela jacket—a homage to the Canadian tuxedo or a Drake dig? Could be both. simons.ca

OVER
\$500
CONTINUED



Bar Cart

\$790 / Sunday's solid teak cart rolls indoors or out, with a removable tray for cocktails wherever they're needed. sundays-company.ca

Exoskeleton Pants

\$7,016 / From the brain of an ex-Google X engineer—with an assist from outdoor giant Arc'teryx—these “movewear” pants fuse robotics and design to add a futuristic bounce to your step. skipwithjoy.com



Cooking Master Class

FROM \$600 / Choose from DaiLo, Bymark, La Palma or other notable venues, then join the chef in action for a three-hour, very hands-on experience. Possible add-ons include a chef's menu dining experience and wine pairing. Behind! intothekitchen.com



Coffee Table

\$865 / This 1969 piece from Italian furniture brand B-line morphs from coffee table to bookshelf to a set of side tables—a necessity when your living room is your bedroom. funsty.ca

Mini Sofa

\$1,088 / Australian brand King opened its first Eastern Canadian showroom in Toronto this fall, and its 1977 sofa—undulating, sculptural, modular—now comes in mini, for the kid with a budding mid-century modern aesthetic. kingliving.ca



AWARD-WORTHY GOWN

Get your *Hunting Wives* on in this pretty-in-black-and-pink gown from Toronto luxury label Greta Constantine, worn by long-time fan Malin Akerman to this year's Emmys.

GRETACONSTANTINE.COM



AKERMAN BY MICHAEL BUCKNER/VARIETY/GETTY IMAGES. COOK BY JENNA WAKANI

THE DIAPER BARRIER IS REAL.



1 in 5 Toronto families can't afford diapers.
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Help us remove the diaper barrier.



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Baby

INSIDER

TorontoLife **INSIDER**



What went down at the Tricon x Toronto Life 2025 Summer Garden Party

A vibrant midsummer celebration of food, music and community at Evergreen Brick Works

On August 13, more than 600 guests gathered at Evergreen Brick Works for the 2025 Summer Garden Party—presented by Tricon Residential and *Toronto Life*—which brought the city’s best food, music and cultural experiences to life under the stars.

Guests enjoyed an elevated selection of food and beverage offerings from across the city’s culinary scene, courtesy of Oliver and Bonacini Catering, Mamakas, Khazana, Good Behaviour Ice Cream, Pelee Island Winery, Steam Whistle, Beau’s, Strongbow, Saint Lucia Tourism Authority and Chatime.



The night’s soundtrack included elegant string covers by the Sonority Sisters, followed by a chill lounge DJ set from Jon Daniels and a powerhouse vocal set by headliner Andye, presented by Universal Music Canada.

Guests were treated to various sponsor activations throughout the venue, including a photo booth and trip giveaway by Saint Lucia Tourism Authority, dried lavender bouquets by Amber Flowers and a cozy book lounge by Penguin Random House Canada’s Book Nook. Tricon also hosted an exclusive resident raffle, offering curated prizes and one month’s free rent.

The 2025 Summer Garden Party was a celebration of summer in Toronto and a showcase of what makes Tricon’s approach to rental living unique: signature events that build community between residents, local creators and the city itself.



THANK YOU TO OUR SPONSORS



The best things to see, do, read and hear this month in Toronto

BY ANTHONY MILTON



A hard-hitting investigation into toxic hockey bros

We Breed Lions

Out November 5

BOOKS On May 26, 2022, TSN reporter Rick Westhead broke the story that Hockey Canada had settled a \$3.55-million lawsuit with a woman known as E. M., who alleged that eight Canadian Hockey League players had sexually assaulted her. Westhead's report led to mass resignations at Hockey Canada and a national reckoning on the rape culture in Canada's favourite sport. In 2024, five of the eight men

were charged with sexual assault, but they were ultimately acquitted in a deeply controversial verdict. Drawing on his past three years covering the case, Westhead's new book, *We Breed Lions*, examines the toxic masculinity at the heart of hockey, asking where it comes from and what can be done to fix it for good.



the culture and the system around it, and I think, *Man, this needs to be better.*

Any surprising discoveries while researching the book? Academics have been grappling for decades with the question of how we got here and how to effect change in hockey culture. They've offered their data to the leagues, but invariably the leagues have refused to look—because if they did, the experts say, that would mean they could be held accountable.

Some of those researchers argued that intense team sports make men predisposed to sexual assault. Do you agree?

It's not my opinion, but I do cite that research. Studies from the US have shown that on university campuses, the most commonly reported sexual assaults are perpetrated by players of team sports.

In the book, you talk about how junior hockey is steeped in toxic masculinity. Is that the root of the problem?

As Canadians, we have this inherent love for hockey. It's been part of our social fabric for so long that to question whether parts of the game are broken is almost unpatriotic. It's like the movie *Spotlight*, when *Boston Globe* reporters uncovered how the Catholic church was covering up sexual abuse in its ranks. I think it's fair to compare the power of the church with the power the sport of hockey has over Canada.

Is it possible to foster healthy masculinity through sports?

I hope so. My younger son just went off to the University of Guelph. He's not a small kid—he's six foot two and goes to the gym a lot. I talked to him before he left, and I said, "Our expectation of you is that, if you're at a party and a girl looks uncomfortable, you do something." It's not good enough to just walk away. I would expect my sons to get involved and be protectors instead.

This interview has been edited for length and clarity.

What was the genesis of this book? In 2020, I wrote a book called *Finding Murph* about Joe Murphy, a one-time NHL star whose life had spiralled out of control. He made millions of dollars but wound up addicted to drugs and homeless. I used it as a way to dig into how the NHL handles player injuries and painkiller use. That book did well, but I didn't see another story I thought would work for a book until we broke the news about the settlement between E. M. and Hockey Canada in 2022.

Now that the Hockey Canada trial has wrapped, how do you feel about it? Was justice done? There were some interesting choices made. The judge questioned E. M.'s credibility because of inconsistencies in her testimony but didn't seem to mind some of the defendants failing to disclose information to the police. She

also excluded evidence from players who were at the same hotel that night but weren't accused of wrongdoing. Still, "not guilty" does not mean "innocent."

Hence the need for a book. What did your research look like? It was a real sprint.

I interviewed 58 current and former junior hockey players. I wasn't asking them about their best goal. It was more like, "Tell me how it feels to move away from home at 16 to a new community." Most of the players talked about how desperate they were to be accepted—and how they'd do anything to that end.

Are you a real hockey head? I play twice a week in Toronto. There's nothing better than ripping around on the ice, setting up a nice goal and hanging out with a bunch of great guys. There's so much about it that I love. But I look at



A dreamy netherworld production

Bad Hats' Narnia Soulepper, November 18 to December 28

THEATRE This holiday production invites guests to step into Narnia, both figuratively and literally: the doors to the Young Centre for the Performing Arts are being transformed into a wardrobe for the occasion. The show is a co-pro with Crow's Theatre and Bad Hats Theatre, a local company whose kid-friendly adaptations of *Peter Pan* and *Alice in Wonderland* have swept the Dora Awards in recent years. The similarly gilded cast includes award-winning Filipina Canadian actor and musician Belinda Corpuz as Lucy and Landon Doak, of *Shazam* and *Murdoch Mysteries* fame, as Edmund. In the lobby, animated decorations and a giant Christmas tree set the mood before one meets Tumnus.

BAD HATS TOP BY DAHLIA KATZ. BOTTOM BY LEIF NORMAN/MYP PRODUCTION. SWEATSHIRT BY MICHAEL BLACKSHIRE/LA TIMES/GETTY IMAGES

A FLASHY CELEB-APPROVED ART EXHIBITION

Ranbir Sidhu: No Limits

AGO, opens December 11

ART Scarborough-raised metalworker Ranbir Sidhu has been commissioned by some of the biggest names in hip hop: an OVO-branded table of his adorns Drake's home, and two of his futuristic paper airplane-shaped desks have found their way to the offices of Jay-Z's record label. Now, after 20 years of honing his craft, Sidhu is getting his first solo show at the AGO—and one put together by the museum's chief curator, no less. Made of reflective metal twisted into futuristic forms, this collection of sculptures incorporates Sikh history and iconography to reflect both Sidhu's heritage and his visions of the future.

A KUNG FU-INSPIRED DANCE PERFORMANCE

Wing Chun Dance Drama

Meridian Hall, December 16 to January 4

THEATRE Before there was Bruce Lee, there was Ip Man, the movie star's mentor and the person credited with bringing a contemporary version of kung fu to the wider world. That mission is dramatized in this high-octane mix of dance, acrobatics and martial arts, which traces Ip Man's story back to 1950s Hong Kong. Created in 2022 with the support of the city of Shenzhen, it broke box office records in China and received global praise for its smart staging, revolving sets and lighting tricks.

A CHEEKY RAP CONCERT

Earl Sweatshirt

History, December 8

MUSIC Ever since he graduated from Tyler, the Creator's rap group, Odd Future, in 2013, Earl Sweatshirt has been hailed as an oddball visionary of the craft. His latest album, August's *Live Laugh Love*, only boosted that reputation. Always a trickster, he skipped the album's launch party and sent an Asian American rapper named Gary Underpants to cover his songs. Sweatshirt is set to play History to promote the new record—and this time, the man on the stage should be him.





A HOLIDAY MUSICAL MEDLEY

'Twas on a Night Like This

Soulpepper, December 12 to 28

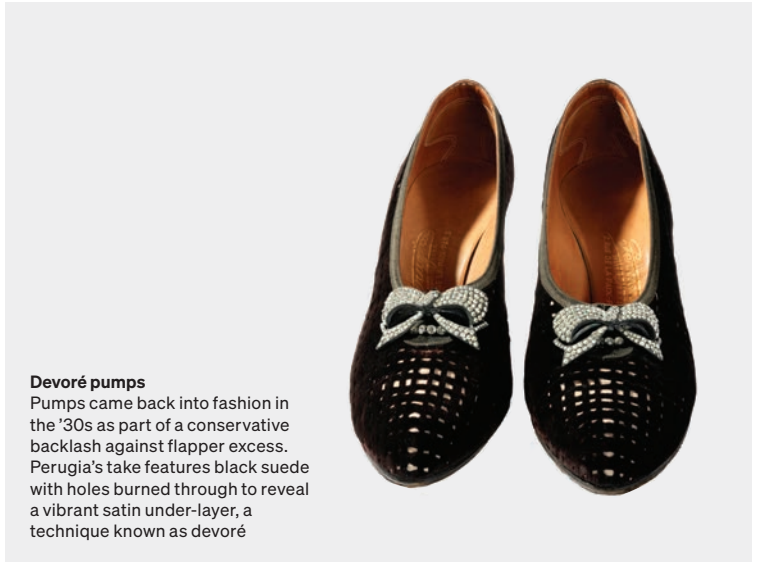
THEATRE Forget the dreams of sugar plums. Featuring actor, musician and music director Beau Dixon and his backing rock band, this cover show of all the biggest holiday hits promises a high-energy musical medley fit for all ages. Dixon is well-known in Toronto's theatre scene, having won Dora Awards for both his plays and his acting. Under his direction, the sleepy carols are out and the Joni Mitchell, Julie Andrews and Stevie Wonder bangers are in, making for a performance that will stir creatures all through the house.

A SLACKER-ROCK EXTRAVAGANZA

Mac DeMarco

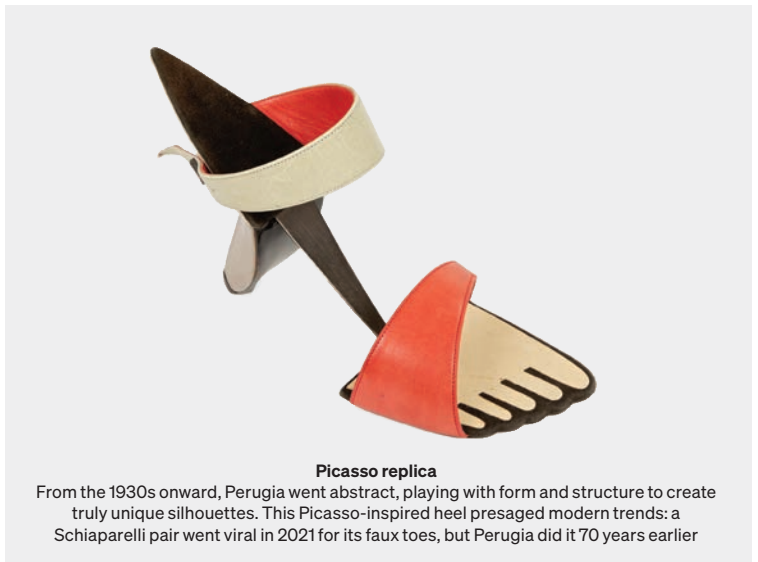
Massey Hall, December 8 and 9

MUSIC If Canadian indie-rock idol Mac DeMarco has seemed absent lately, it's because he's been holed up pruning olive trees on his remote seaside farm in BC. It's one of a few major lifestyle changes for the goofy rocker known for his fondness for cigarettes and alcohol—both of which he's given up. A similar transformation pervades his latest record, *Guitar*, which was released in August and features DeMarco playing every instrument, including guitar, keyboard and drums. Notably, most of the songs have lyrics, which differentiates this album from his last EP, 2023's *One Wayne G*, a nine-hour-long, 199-song, mostly instrumental tribute to Wayne Gretzky. DeMarco will be off the farm and touring the world until next June, and he's playing two nights in town on the way.



Devoré pumps

Pumps came back into fashion in the '30s as part of a conservative backlash against flapper excess. Perugia's take features black suede with holes burned through to reveal a vibrant satin under-layer, a technique known as devoré



Picasso replica

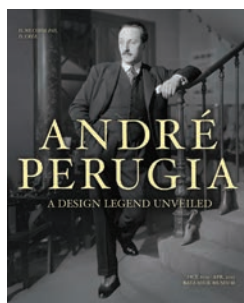
From the 1930s onward, Perugia went abstract, playing with form and structure to create truly unique silhouettes. This Picasso-inspired heel presaged modern trends: a Schiaparelli pair went viral in 2021 for its faux toes, but Perugia did it 70 years earlier

A vintage shoe lover's dream

André Perugia

Bata Shoe Museum, until April 2027

ART The folks at the Bata Shoe Museum like to call their work the wild west of fashion scholarship: footwear, as it turns out, is a notoriously under-researched topic. This retrospective on famed Italian shoe designer André Perugia is the first of its kind, featuring everything from turquoise fetish boots to Picasso-inspired sandals. Perugia was an eveningwear mastermind who pioneered the thin metal heels that led to the stiletto. He was so in demand that his customers had to order a minimum of six pairs, custom-made to their measurements. We caught up with curator Nishi Bassi for a sneak peek at four of Perugia's most daring designs.



'T'WAS BY DAHLIA KATZ; DEMARCO BY FRAZER HARRISON/COACHELLA/GETTY IMAGES; PICASSO BY THE BATA SHOE MUSEUM; DEVORÉ BY RACHEL REID



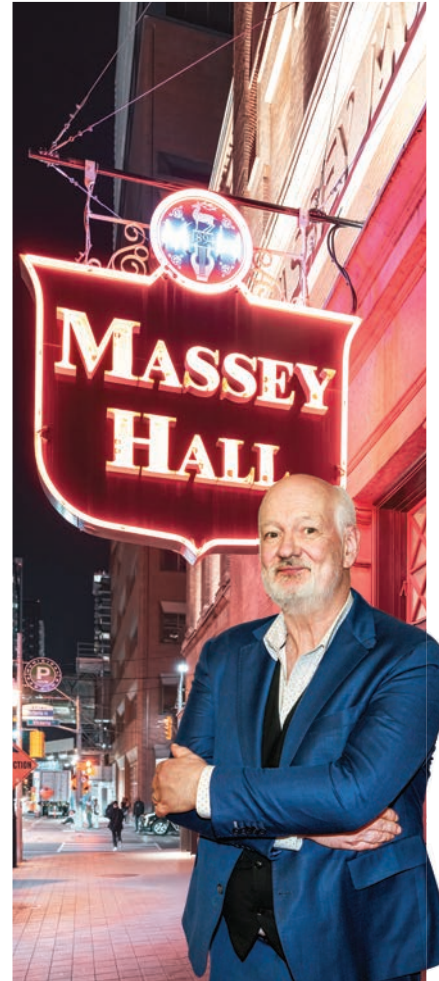
Gold leatherwork heels

While only the very well-heeled could afford an original pair of Perugias, fashionistas of lesser means in the '20s could buy knock-offs. These, however, are the real deal. "The leatherwork is so detailed," says Bassi. "Perugia did not half-ass anything"



Form-fitting boots

Perugia designed these leg-wrapping turquoise boots for French actor André Spinelly in the early 1920s. "The intricate lacing and tightly contoured ankles are a nod to 19th-century fetish wear," says Bassi



A year-end chuckle fest

New Year's Comedy Extravaganza
Massey Hall, December 31



COMEDY You're feeling awake, very awake: Colin Mochrie is taking a break from his improv-meets-hypnosis comedy tour to host a New Year's Eve bash at Massey Hall. Its headliner is Mike Rita, a Toronto comic who has

played Just for Laughs and was recently declared one of the most influential Portuguese Canadians of the past 70 years by that country's president. Yuk Yuk's founder Mark Breslin will curate the rest of the set list for this late-night laugh fest, which conveniently wraps before the stroke of midnight—allowing both revelers and sleepyheads to ring in the new year just as they please.

HEELS BY RACHAEL REID, BOOTS BY THE BATA SHOE MUSEUM, MASSEY BY STEVEN KRIEMADIS/GETTY IMAGES; MOCHRIE BY MATHEW TSANG/GETTY IMAGES

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A first look at the Playbook Commons, with championship tennis and a curated four-course menu

TL Insiders were treated to an exclusive first look at Toronto's newest dining destination, the Playbook Commons, which blends steakhouse classics with Italian American comfort food in a luxurious sports-inspired setting. Timed with the National Bank Open, the evening paired live tournament coverage with a curated four-course menu by chef Jia Zou, featuring dishes like truffle tagliatelle and swordfish meunière.




TL Insider neighbourhood tours, sponsored by Fitzrovia

Members headed to the lively King and Dufferin neighbourhood for a colourful evening at Paint Cabin, Toronto's original paint bar and DIY studio. With guidance from workshop leaders, guests designed custom canvas paintings or tote bags while enjoying Blondies pizza, drinks and a vibrant atmosphere. It was a night of creativity, connection and unforgettable neighbourhood vibes.



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The Runaround

I was on track for the Olympics. Then the government tried to deport my family

BY TAMARRI LINDO, AS TOLD TO KATHY CHOW



I GREW UP in Kingston, Jamaica, in a neighbourhood called the Spoilers—I guess what in Canada you would call a ghetto. My parents wouldn't let me walk to school by myself. The neighbourhood was dangerous, and it was made even more so by political division. My grandmother was a member of Parliament for the left-leaning People's National Party, and my dad organized for them as well. He often faced death threats and once an outright assassination attempt. During the 2012 election campaign, an assailant slashed his neck. My brother and I were in the crosshairs too. Once, we heard rumours that the opposing party was planning to shoot the car that took us to school, and we had to hide out at our grandmother's for a while. Everyone in my family was on high alert. A family friend who was a member of the police force became our unofficial bodyguard.

Despite the danger that surrounded us, I thrived at school. Track and field is the most popular sport in Jamaica, and I went to one of the best high schools in the country for it. I dreamed of going to the Olympics.

In early 2019, I was on a two-month visit to Toronto with my family when we got word that our friend on the police force had been assassinated back in Jamaica. We panicked. It became clear that, although most of our possessions were still in Kingston, it was too dangerous to go back.

We stayed with my cousins while we tried to figure out our options. The UN and the Canadian government define refugees as people who have “a well-founded fear of persecution” in their home country, and we thought that described our situation perfectly. The danger that we faced back in Jamaica was so blatantly obvious that we couldn't imagine anyone not believing us.

We didn't know we needed a lawyer. We did the research ourselves and, in May, submitted our refugee claim. In the meantime, my parents applied for work permits and found jobs. My dad operated a forklift for Walmart, and my mum was employed at both Walmart and Rogers. She had back-to-back shifts and barely slept. They worked hard and paid taxes. I enrolled in Grade 10 at Saint Mary's Catholic School and started doing track again. It felt like we were settling into our new country. Yet our lives were punctuated by meetings with immigration officers, to whom we had to tell and retell our story. Some officers were quite sympathetic, but it was an excruciatingly slow process made even slower by the pandemic. When they finally forwarded our case to someone higher up the chain, that person denied our claim, and we had to reapply. After the first rejection, we hired an immigration lawyer. We would end up spending most of our money—tens of thousands of dollars—on legal fees.

In 2023, I started training with Canada's national track-and-field team. I couldn't travel abroad with them to compete—I was too afraid of being refused entry back into Canada—but it was cool to know that I was running with some of the best athletes in the country.

Then, in June of 2024, the day before I was due to compete at the Olympic trials, an officer from the Canada Border Services Agency informed us that we would be deported in a week. I raced with a heavy heart and finished third in the 110-metre hurdles, which meant that I got to wave the Ontario flag on the podium but didn't qualify for the Olympics. I was disappointed, but there was no time to grieve—I had to figure out if there was any way we could defer our deportation.

My win at the trials drew some media attention, which helped our case, and our community rallied around us. People I knew from my track-and-field career and migrant rights groups organized petitions on our behalf. York University, where I'd enrolled after high school, wrote a letter of support. Before the week was up, the Canadian government granted us a temporary resident permit, giving us another year in the country. Right after that, at another competition, I happened to race the first- and second-place finishers who had qualified for the Olympics—and I beat them both.

Over the next year, I collected four gold medals and three silvers, including one of each from the Canada Games, but it was hard to celebrate wins when we kept getting calls from the CBSA about removal proceedings.

Finally, last September, we got an email. My mum read it first—and screamed. She made me and my dad read it too. We wanted to make sure we fully understood the words: “You have been granted permanent residence status.” An immigration officer called to congratulate us, and we just lost it. It was almost impossible to fathom that, after living in precarity for six years, I could finally start planning my future. I hope to become a citizen soon so I can represent Canada at the next Olympics. I want to win gold in the 110-metre hurdles—an event Canada hasn't won since 1992. Becoming a permanent resident means I can focus on my passions with the certainty that I can call this country home.

Email submissions to memoir@torontolife.com



If you smoked regularly before Nov. 20, 1998 and were diagnosed with a tobacco-related disease, you may qualify for \$14,400-\$100,000 from a landmark settlement.

As part of a landmark settlement with Canadian tobacco companies, the Ontario Superior Court of Justice (Commercial List) has approved two compensation plans to provide payments to eligible smokers and ex-smokers diagnosed with certain tobacco-related diseases:

- The Pan-Canadian Claimants' Compensation Plan (**PCC**); and
- The Quebec Class Action Administration Plan (**QCAP**)

For those who have died that qualify, payments may be available for their estates.

WHAT ARE THE ELIGIBLE DISEASES AND DOLLAR AMOUNTS?

This table shows the diseases covered by the plans and the maximum payment amounts:

Disease	You started smoking before January 1, 1976	You started smoking on or after January 1, 1976
Primary Lung Cancer or Primary Throat Cancer	\$60,000 PCC \$100,000 QCAP	\$48,000 PCC \$80,000 QCAP
Emphysema or COPD (GOLD Grade III or IV)	\$18,000 PCC \$30,000 QCAP	\$14,400 PCC \$24,000 QCAP

Important: Payments may be reduced depending on the number of eligible claims in each plan. A person will only be entitled to one payment, under one plan, and for one disease.

WHAT ARE THE CLAIM DEADLINES?

The Claims Submission Periods commenced on September 3, 2025 and the plans have different claim deadlines:

- PCC claim deadline is **September 3, 2027**
- QCAP claim deadline is **August 31, 2026**

Important: QCAP deadline is one year earlier than PCC deadline.

HOW MANY CIGARETTES AND WHICH BRANDS?

Both plans require the smoker or ex-smoker to have smoked at least 87,600 cigarettes (for example, 20 cigarettes a day for 12 years) between January 1, 1950 and November 20, 1998. The cigarettes must be from brands sold by the tobacco companies. The website has a list of the eligible brands, which include most legal cigarettes sold in Canada.

WHAT ARE OTHER PCC REQUIREMENTS?

In addition to the disease and smoking requirements, the smoker or ex-smoker under **PCC** must:

- reside in Canada (or if deceased, must have resided in Canada at the time of death);
- have been diagnosed **between March 8, 2015 and March 8, 2019**, inclusive of those dates;
- have resided in Canada at the time of diagnosis; and
- have been alive on March 8, 2019.

WHAT ARE OTHER QCAP REQUIREMENTS?

In addition to the disease and smoking requirements, the smoker or ex-smoker under **QCAP** must:

- reside in Quebec (or if deceased, must have resided in Quebec at the time of death);
- have been diagnosed **before March 12, 2012**;
- have resided in Quebec at the time of diagnosis; and
- have been alive on November 20, 1998.

HOW CAN I GET FREE HELP?

Agents are available **free of charge** to assist claimants under these plans. Agents will help you (a) complete your claim form; (b) commission your signature on the claim form; and (c) provide guidance on how to obtain the necessary information and documents for your claim.

PCC Agent is Epiq	1-888-482-5852 PCCAgent@TobaccoClaimsCanada.ca
QCAP Agent is Proactio	1-888-880-1844 tabac@proactio.ca

If you do not submit a claim by the applicable deadline, you cannot be eligible to get a payment.

If you are not sure whether you qualify, the website has a simple questionnaire to help you. The plans have been designed so that you **do not need a lawyer** to prepare and submit your claim. If you have already registered, you will be notified by an Agent about how to complete your claim.

Full information is available at the official website www.TobaccoClaimsCanada.ca and via the QR Code.

www.TobaccoClaimsCanada.ca



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