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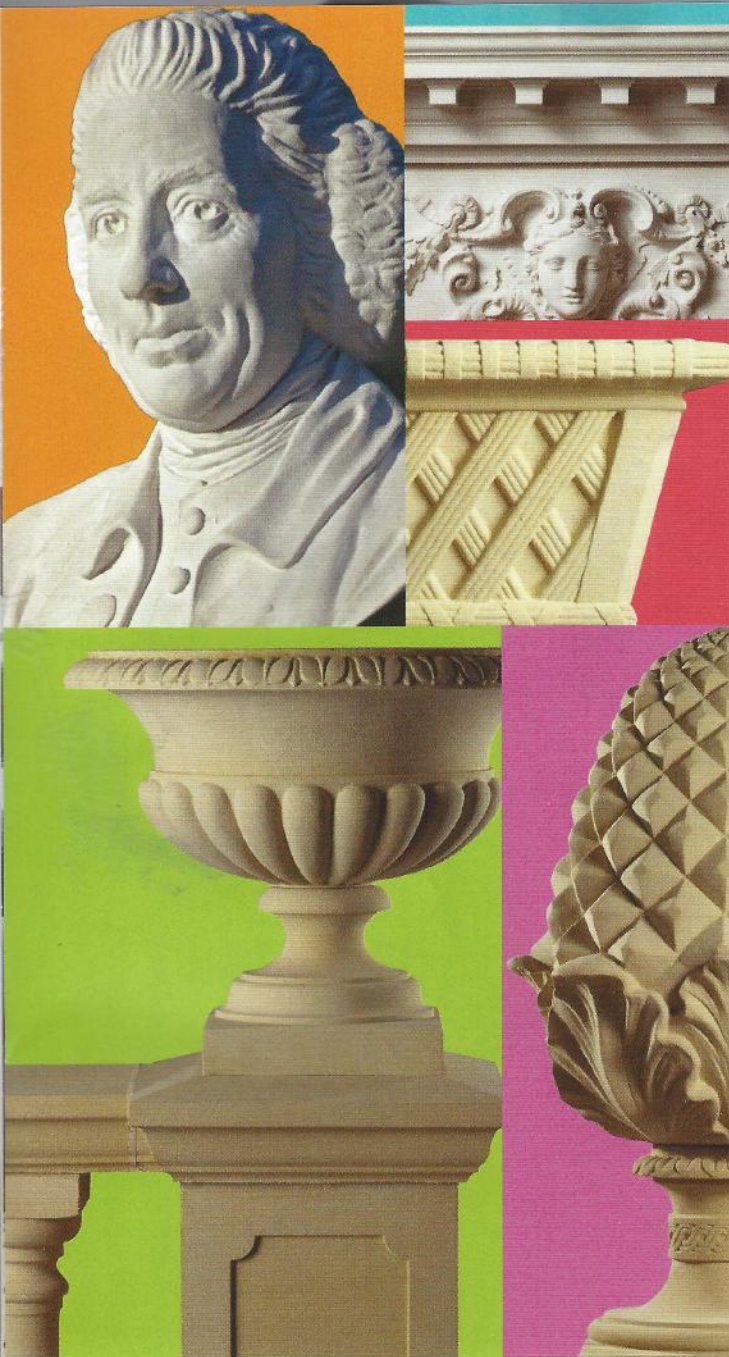


**THE TASTE
OF SUMMER**
SALLY CLARKE'S
SEASONAL RECIPES

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- HOW TO TAME ANIMAL-PRINT FABRICS

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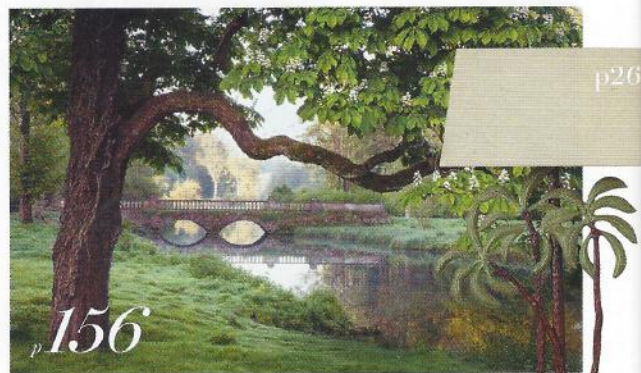


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FOOD & DRINK

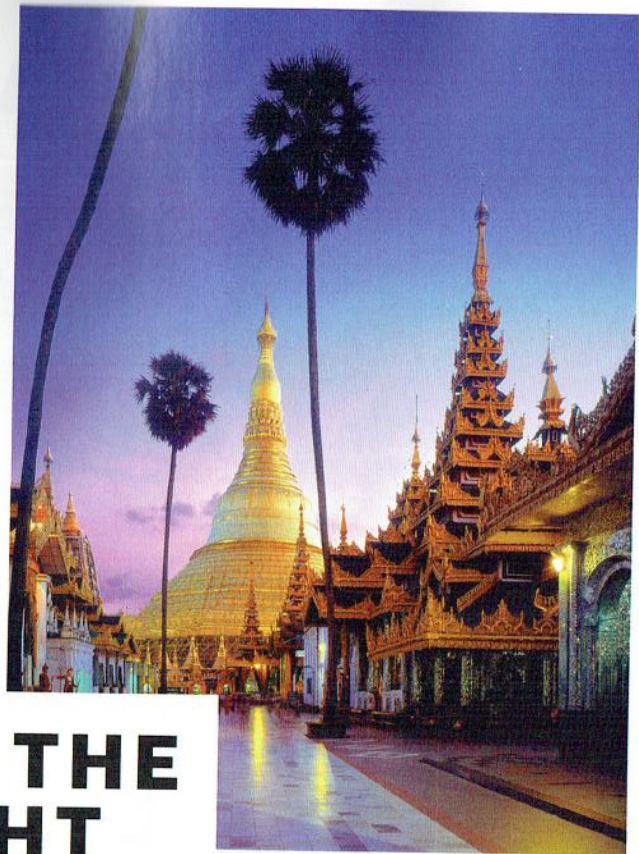
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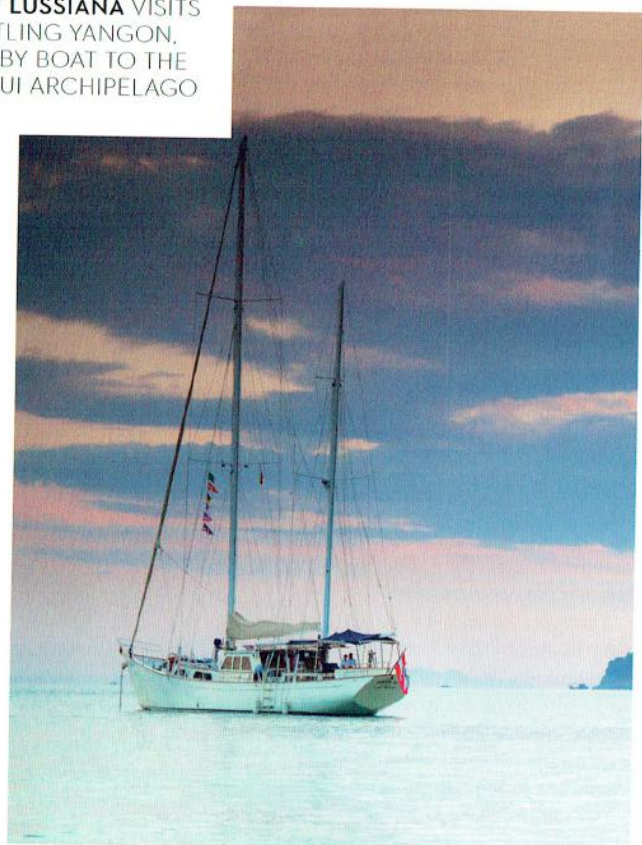
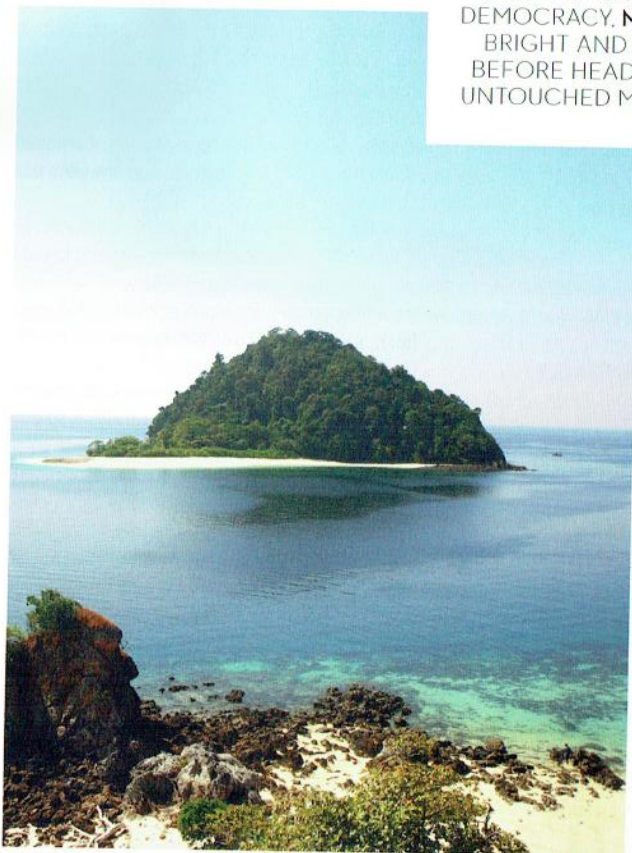
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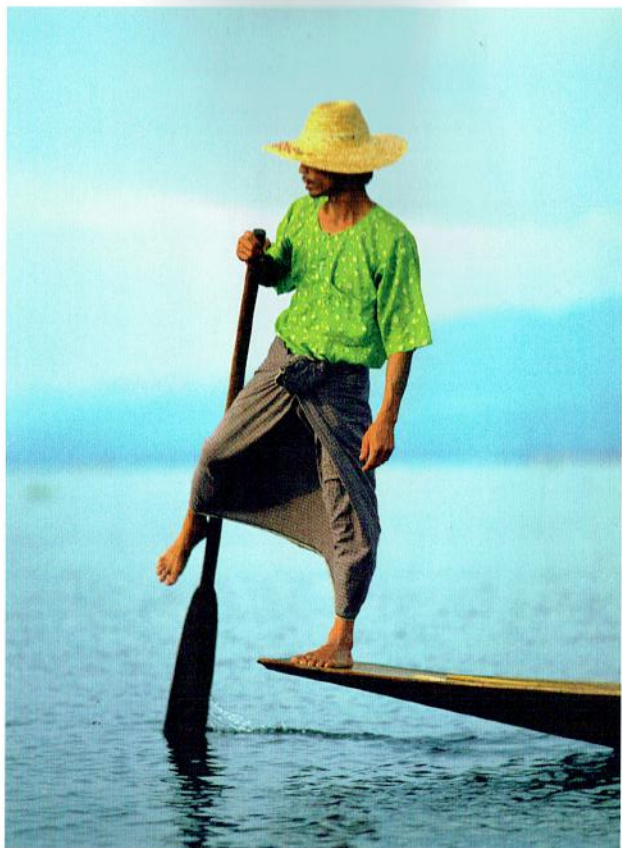


INTO THE LIGHT

WITH THE DAWNING OF BURMESE DEMOCRACY, **MARY LUSSIANA** VISITS BRIGHT AND BUSTLING YANGON, BEFORE HEADING BY BOAT TO THE UNTOUCHED MERGUI ARCHIPELAGO



SHUTTERSTOCK; GIANNI IORIO/SIMEJACORNERS IMAGES; LOOK DIE BILDAGENTUR DER FOTOGRAFEN GMBH/HALANY



OPPOSITE CLOCKWISE
FROM TOP LEFT
A bustling street
in Yangon. The
Shwedagon Pagoda.
Burma Boating's *Meta
IV* flagship. The remote
Mergui Archipelago.
THIS PAGE A Moken
man rowing in a *kabang*

by lush gardens. The staff uniform incorporates the feather of a hornbill, worn at the back of a headband, and dragonflies dance over the beautiful fan-shape swimming pool.

Where next? There is a well-beaten path up the Irrawaddy River to templed Bagan and Mandalay, and then there is Inle Lake, which seemed to be a favourite with those I spoke to. To see a Myanmar that is as yet untouched, though, you need to venture further afield. The Mergui Archipelago of over 800 deserted islands in the azure Andaman Sea opened up

to limited tourism at the end of the Nineties. Ease of access across the Thai/Myanmar border came only in 2014. There are a restricted number of companies that have permission to cruise these waters; of these, Burma Boating is the most enticing, with a small fleet of yachts including its *Meta IV* flagship. A classic wooden two-master designed by the naval architect Thomas E Colvin, it was redesigned for cruising in 2012. With just four cabins in its teak-clad interiors, it makes a perfect vessel for groups of friends, or families with a thirst for the unknown and uncharted. From it, you can see not only an undisturbed wilderness of mangroves and monkeys, of long-spined black sea urchins, green cup coral and powder-blue surgeonfish, but also the fascinating culture of the Moken, for whom this has been home for some 4,000 years.

The Moken live on the seas in their *kabangs* – dugout canoes – for much of the year, seeking shelter during the monsoon in houses built on stilts along island shorelines. Once, they were the suppliers of the lustrous cowrie shells used worldwide as an ancient currency, harvested by free-diving deep below the surface. Then it was the sea cucumber valued by the Chinese: now it is fish and squid that they hunt. The authorities have, in the past, tried to assimilate the Moken by banning the felling of trees for boats and creating settlements for them alongside the Burmese. Their numbers are thought to have dwindled to around 2,000 because of this. But, for now, you can still wake in this empty archipelago and, as the day breaks, see a solitary Moken silhouetted against the sky, standing upright and rowing with crossed oars, silently intent on his catch of the day.

This is a world that cries out for you to catch the early mornings, with baby blues and shocking pinks stretched across the skies, kites and sea eagles overhead and hornbills calling from the dense rainforests. Slip into the clear, warm waters, where white damselfish and bluespine unicornfish flash by, and strike out for the nearest beach. Upon the white sand, hermit crabs scuttle between intricate shells and monkeys chatter from their forest lairs. And so the days pass, covering nautical miles, with a fishing boat to wave at every so often. The view changes at night, with the promise of a new world above and water below to explore the following morning. It is then that *Meta IV*'s Captain Chat, done for the day, takes out a flute, his music rising as the sun falls on what remains one of the world's most enduringly remote destinations □



As I write this feature, Myanmar, formerly Burma, is celebrating the landslide election victory of Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy party. The people who live in its largest city, Yangon, including, I am sure, my guide (who whispered to me just two weeks ago 'we don't dare to hope'), are flocking to the magnificent Shwedagon Pagoda to give thanks for answered prayers. Flowers are strewn and incense

burnt in the shadow of its golden spire. On the remote Mergui Archipelago in the far south, the Moken sea gypsies, whose language contains no words for 'want' or 'worry', will be content that, for now, they have no need for them.

What a perfect time to visit then, in this dawn of a new era. Fly to Yangon to see the Shwedagon Pagoda at sunset, if nothing else. As dusk falls, this ancient, sacred complex of stupas and shrines celebrating the eight days of the Burmese week (Wednesday is split in two) is illuminated in the darkness. But find time to walk around the city, too, past colonial architecture and faded palaces, shuttered façades in shades of pistachio green, and market women selling bundles of ginger, lemongrass and bags of dried shrimps, their faces streaked with a pale-yellow paste made from the bark of the thanaka tree to prevent sunburn. Stay at the Governor's Residence, a beautiful teak-framed mansion dating from the early twentieth century, which is surrounded



ways and means

Mary Lussiana travelled as a guest of Ampersand Travel (020-7819 9770; ampersandtravel.com), which offers a seven-night Myanmar itinerary from £3,005 per person, including five nights full-board sailing the Mergui Archipelago in *Meta IV*, two nights in Yangon at Belmond Governor's Residence, B&B, flights and private transfers.