



I Love Paris In My Kitchen
An ode to the French bistro chair **D9**

OFF DUTY

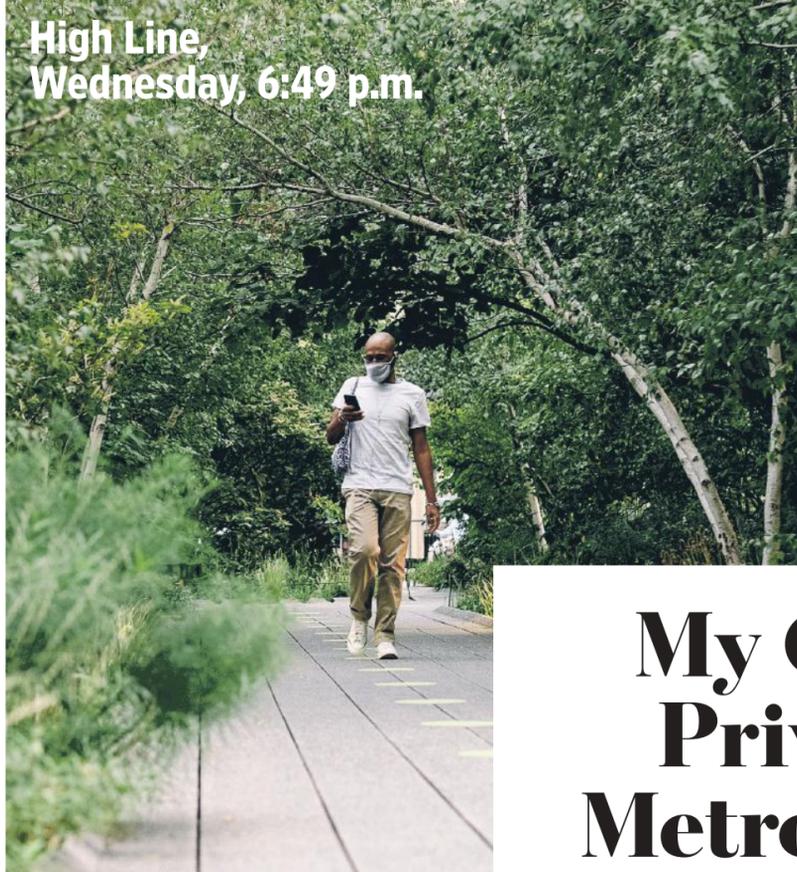
Plié or Nay?
Ballet flats are the controversial new trend in men's shoes **D2**



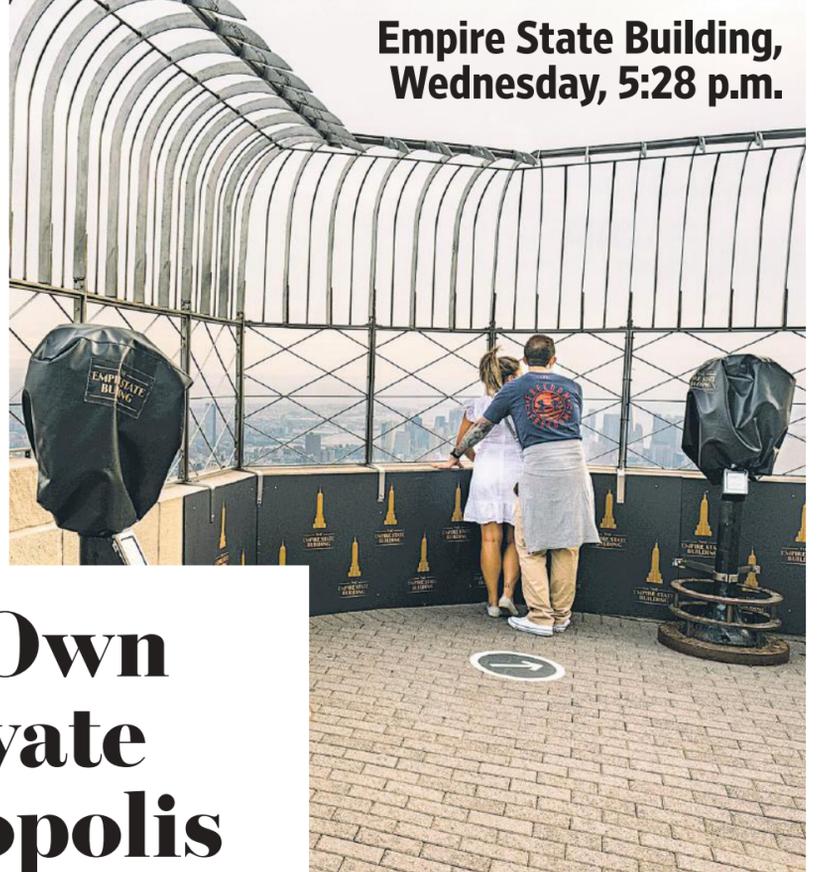
FASHION | FOOD | DESIGN | TRAVEL | GEAR

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

Saturday/Sunday, September 19 - 20, 2020 | **D1**



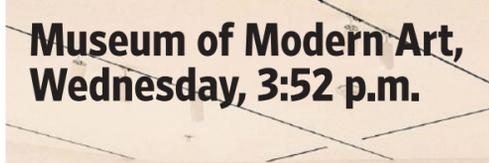
High Line, Wednesday, 6:49 p.m.



Empire State Building, Wednesday, 5:28 p.m.

My Own Private Metropolis

As New York City cautiously reopens its most beloved attractions at 25% capacity, one longtime local weighs the euphoria of being alone with Monet's 'Water Lilies' against the eeriness of the 'new normal'



Museum of Modern Art, Wednesday, 3:52 p.m.



Metropolitan Museum of Art, Friday, 5:19 p.m.



CLOCKWORK APPLE Clockwise from top left: The High Line pathway, now more wild than wildly popular, reopened with timed-entry reservations in July; the Empire State Building's 86th floor observation deck, which now welcomes less than a quarter of the oglers it once did; the Metropolitan Museum of Art's roof garden; Monet's 'Water Lilies' at the Museum of Modern Art.

By **TONY PERROTTET**

WELCOME TO PARADISE," said the beaming security guard as the elevator doors opened on the Empire State Building's newly renovated 102nd floor. At least I thought she was beaming. I tried to guess from her eyes, visible between her surgical mask and black doorman's cap that read "Observatory," whether the remark was serious or laced with irony. After all, the word "paradise" has rarely been paired with New York since Henry Hudson dropped anchor off Manhattan in 1609, and certainly not since the global pandemic brought my beloved metropolis to a grinding halt six months ago. But no, the guard was genuinely delighted to share my giddy excitement as I stepped onto the platform at dusk.

I had invited along the most hardened New Yorker I know—my 15-year-old kid, Sam, a lifelong East Villager who rarely leaves downtown. Sam was impressed despite himself, as the million golden lights of New York began glittering below, the view extending 80 miles. "Even New Jersey looks beautiful," he marveled dryly. But we both agreed that, while the new floor-to-ceiling glass walls of the 102nd floor were thrilling, the real star

is the original 86th floor observation deck, which we visited next. Its stone perimeter is open to the fresh air and the vertiginous 1,050-foot drop.

What most astonished me about the 86th floor—the thing that really made me pause and pinch myself—was how few people were up there with us. A space that in pre-Covid times was famously elbow-to-elbow with frenetic tourists was virtually empty. I could actually enjoy it.

We're all searching for silver linings in 2020, and in my battered home city of New York, not long ago the world epicenter for the pandemic, the transition into Phase 4 now offers some unexpected pleasures. The reopening of its most renowned attractions, using timed entries to limit occupancy to 25%, has had an unexpected side benefit for residents and intrepid travelers alike: Once-overcrowded sites can now seem civilized even at peak times. For art-lovers, the reopening of the museums fulfills a fantasy; social distancing rules guarantee unheard-of breathing room.

This unique historical moment inspired me to revisit the city's "greatest hits." Over several days, I booked tickets to the wildly popular High Line, the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Whitney Museum of American Art. I even pondered a trip to the Statue of Liberty. After living in various forms of lockdown, I hoped to see the classics with fresh

eyes.

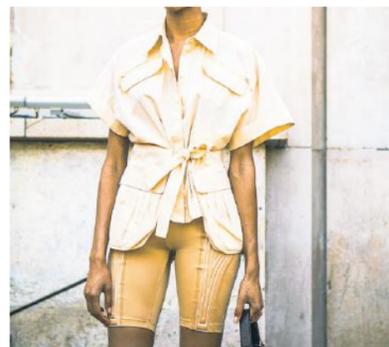
It turned out this "new normal" is rather bittersweet. Sightseeing now involves serious planning: You must choose specific time windows for all visits, registering in advance, which makes spontaneity a nostalgic memory and often creates anxiety in a city where one is perennially running late. Ubiquitous face masks add a note of dystopian anonymity. Though I found the guards unflinchingly polite and efficient, they treated me to high-tech temperature checks at every entrance.

Add to all this random technological glitches. With smartphones now a culture-warrior's essential tool, I needed a crash course in such basics as payment settings and how to quickly brighten the screen so bar codes can be read. (Leave home without a charger and the best-laid plans come crashing down.) But what is lost in spontaneity is gained in the euphoria that comes with the sheer sense of space.

There was a certain historic logic in choosing the Empire State Building as the first stop on my 2020 Grand Tour. When the world's highest skyscraper opened in 1931, in the depths of the Great Depression, wits dubbed it "the Empty State Building." The owners couldn't lease out office space. Today, for better or worse, the name is apt again.

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Are biker bottoms the chic answer to leggings fatigue or a fashion faux pas? **D3**



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ADVENTURE & TRAVEL

The City Stirs

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Sam and I simply swanned past the barriers set up to control crowds, through the new museum and into the elevator. We saw barely another soul.

I found solitude just as dreamlike on the High Line, the elevated former railroad track that, pre-pandemic, was typically as crowded as a Beijing train station due to its narrow design. Today, the route has reopened to limited visitors walking one way, from south to north. Even stranger, the foliage had grown wild and unwieldy, as if the High Line was returning to its pre-renovation state.

After entering from the Meatpacking District, I passed through an architectural artwork by Sam Falls—four ceramic archways fashioned out of old train track and embedded with plants gathered in the park—then descended into the Chelsea art district at 23rd St. Private galleries had opened in eccentric ways: In some cases, to be admitted you had to book a slot online, while others required phone reservations. A few galleries didn't seem to require advance notice as long as their spaces weren't crowded.

By now I was ready to tackle a proper art museum. The vast Metropolitan had naturally attracted some genuinely lengthy lines, although they moved quickly. I queued at the entrance, I queued at the pay-as-you-wish line for local residents, then I queued for the elevator to my favorite spot, the roof garden. It was worth the wait.

The Met usually attracts some 25,000 visitors on a busy September Sunday, said Ken Weine, chief communications officer, but now averages 5,500 in its 2-million-square-foot area. Getting to the roof took half an hour, but on the plus side, no forest of selfie sticks barred me from seeing Héctor Zamora's "Lattice Detour," a curving wall framed by the skyline and treetops of Central Park. The museum exuded an aura of Gilded Age gentility as I strolled the silent Greek galleries. There was a tangible exuberance in the air. "I have never in my professional life been a part of an experience that has involved such frank jubilation and joy," said Mr. Weine. "The spirit of the visitors has been tremendous."

Of course, some jarring moments brought me from the Gilded Age back to 2020. Hoping to take a break in the American Wing's charm-

I turned up alone at MoMA. The rare sense of privilege at being alone with masterpieces was sometimes tinged with a wistful melancholy.

ing cafe I discovered that the sun-filled sculpture court housed only a "Rehydration Station"—with bottled Dasani water selling for \$3.50 a pop. "What are we doing here, running the marathon?" I mused. (It will soon expand to a takeout snack service).

To test the timed-entry system, I turned up alone at the Museum of Modern Art without a reservation. MoMA had been booked up weeks in advance, but now, near the end of the day, I encountered no line—in fact, few other visitors at all. The attendant laughed indulgently at my excuse that I had "lost my ticket" and registered me on the spot. The experience proved haunting: In many galleries, I found myself alone apart from a guard. Sometimes it was just me, left to admire, say, van Gogh's "Starry Night." The rare sense of privilege at being alone with masterpieces was sometimes tinged with a wistful melancholy. When I visited the Whitney late the next day, it was also near-empty. I admired Edward Hopper paintings of lonely people in desolate urban spaces, then walked past the lonely closed museum cafe onto the desolate outdoor terrace.

Perhaps the last six months of living in New York had left me in a vulnerable state of mind, but even the most familiar artworks packed a more powerful punch than in years past, filling me with unexpected emotions. I felt as affected by a Picasso at MoMA as 1920s Parisians must have been on first seeing it. Was my wonder at an enormous Pollock canvas as fierce as that which it inspired when unveiled in the '50s? But perhaps the most moving work was an accidental discovery. At MoMA, a 1952 silent film shot in Spanish Harlem showed kids playing in the street, families sitting on stoops, friends hugging and gossiping—a reminder of pre-Covid days that stopped me in my tracks.

The following day, I headed back into the sunshine to tackle New York's most clichéd tourist site, the Statue of Liberty. This time, I got creative. Liberty Island offers little to do beyond strolling around the statue's base and enjoying the museum. I prefer to see the statue in the context of the city's storied harbor, once the world's busiest, so I took the \$3 timed ferry to Governors Island with a friend to find an immersive waterfront experience. With reduced crowds, it took only a few minutes to get a stool at the Island Oyster bar right by the lapping waves to watch the sun sparkle off the glass skyscrapers of the Financial District. Then, riding a Citi Bike along quiet bike lanes, we spotted a mysterious cluster of luxury canvas tents operated by a group called Collective Retreats. We found a sunny bar-restaurant housed in the largest tent and took a table with a view of Lady Liberty. From this unique vantage, the statue seemed as imposing as the Colossus of Rhodes. And admiring it with a glass of Sauvignon Blanc and lobster roll seemed the appropriate way to toast the city's revival. This accidental discovery felt a bit like old times.



LONG TIME NO SEE Clockwise from top: The newly roomy ferry to Governors Island; view from the Empire State Building's 80th floor; one of the European galleries at the Met, which re-opened Aug. 29; the Island Oyster bar on Governors Island.

THE GREATER OUTDOORS / MUSIC VENUES FROM CHICAGO TO MEMPHIS ARE OFFERING PERSUASIVE REASONS TO LEAVE THE HOUSE

OVER THE SUMMER of Covid-19, many American urbanites were gathering almost entirely on the sidewalks, streets, porches and parks, adjusting to the new reality. While this is hardly a stretch in Los Angeles or Miami, where outdoor life is common, more northern cities are seeing an explosion of outdoor restaurants, bars and cafes, and with them entertainment.

The most extreme change has been in **New York City**, where the side-

walks have traditionally been cramped and congested spaces. As summer drifts into fall, the streets now evoke pre-pandemic Paris, with tables and chairs spilling into once-sacrosanct parking lanes. The performing arts scene is coming up with creative ways to adapt. The NY Phil Bandwagon, where musicians from the city's prestigious orchestra and guests perform on the back of a pickup truck, is rolling through all five boroughs in the coming

weeks and even introducing world premieres composed just for the truck (nyphil.org/bandwagon). In an equally eccentric vein, the historic Greenwood cemetery in Brooklyn is hosting in-person, free and socially distanced concerts among the tombstones. The performances, a partnership with the organization Death of Classical, are suitably titled "A Lament for Troubled Times" and are scheduled for Sept. 19 and 26 (green-wood.com). And

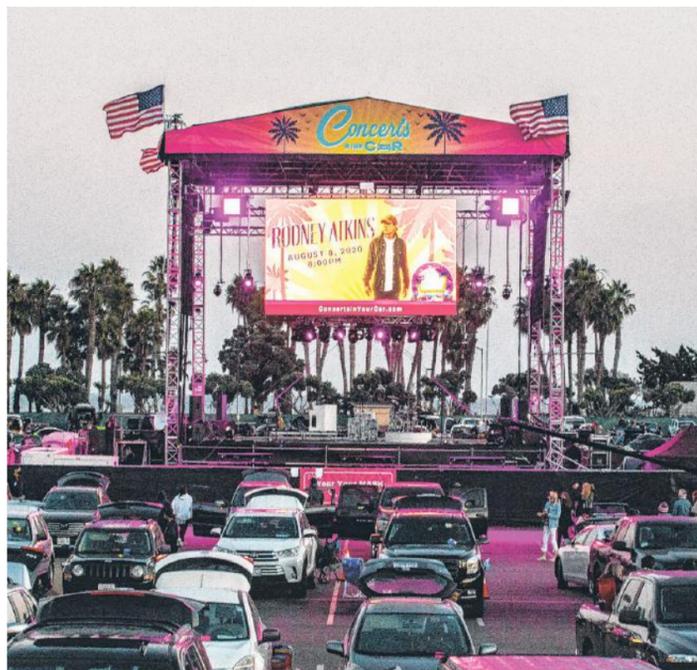
starting Sept. 30, the new musical show *Voyeur: the Windows of Toulouse-Lautrec* will use Greenwich Village as an impromptu stage (unmakinglautrec-play.com).

In **Los Angeles**, where Covid restrictions are at least as severe as in New York, the entertainment scene is just as adaptable. The historic club the Mint, which has been going strong since 1937, now hosts Sidewalk Sessions, with outdoor music most nights at 7:30 p.m. (themintla.com). As part of the new Concerts in Your Car series, hosted at the Ventura County Fairgrounds, live bands like Fishbone and Ozomatli play to up to 700 vehicles. Many fans honk their horns as a form of applause. Next up on Sept. 24 is Gordon Goodwin's Little Phat Band (concertsinyourcar.com).

Chicago's entertainment scene is slightly more structured now too. Comedy venues are cautiously reopening, along with the most beloved jazz and blues clubs, often with a mix of indoor and outdoor performances. Among the leaders: the city's oldest jazz club, the Jazz Showcase, a 1947 institution where Dizzy Gillespie spent his birthday for many years. Now the club has small indoor shows Thursday to Sunday ([\[case.com\]\(http://case.com\)\). The newer and more experimental Constellation in Roscoe Village live-streams its live shows for a maximum of 46 people, in a venue normally catering to 250 \(\[constellation-chicago.com\]\(http://constellation-chicago.com\)\). You can find more live shows in beer gardens and the temporary Lakeshore Drive-In, another drive-in concert venue in a parking lot just outside the Adler Planetarium \(\[lsdrivein.com\]\(http://lsdrivein.com\)\).](http://jazzshow-</p>
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In other great music cities such as **Memphis**, clubs like B.B. King's Blues Club on Beale Street have been playing to small crowds—roughly 50 people—since June, with regulars like Flic's Pic's Band and the King Beez now taking the stage once or twice a week. Patrons are tested for temperatures, and the staff are in masks and gloves (bbkings.com).

And even the long-suffering city of **Portland** is keeping the music playing with indie bands at offbeat outdoor venues. Despite serious hiccups of late due to air quality issues from the Oregon wildfires, most Friday nights local bands such as the Hot Minute and the Bad Table play for tips at the quirky mobile Alotta Wood Fired Pizza (alottawoodfired-pizza.com). You'll also find live music on many weekend nights on the leafy patio of McMenamins Kennedy School hotel (mcmenamins.com).



PRIME PARKING SPOT At California's Ventura County Fairgrounds, live bands play to up to 700 vehicles as part of the 'Concerts in Your Car' series.