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ГОЛЯ ВРЕДИТ ВАШЕМУ ЗДОРОВЬЮ
BOUNDLESS
010  EVENT The 15th Anniversary of Armenia’s Independence
012  OUR FOLK The Treasure Guardian
    Father Harutyun Pstikyan, a celebrated painter who was once a protégé of Picasso, is now Guardian of the Mkhitaryan Order’s priceless treasures.
014  GEO Tranquilo y Manana
    The rhythm of life in Buenos Aires is measured — except that, is for the local Armenian community.
026  AGENDA Armine Mon Amie
028  UPFRONT Life After Tennis
    Far from resting on his laurels, Andre Agassi is on the mark again — as an entrepreneur and a philanthropist.
030  VISIT Turning Point
    Charles Aznavour believes that Armenia has made great strides in its bid for Westernization.
034  MAILBOX Yerevan — With and Without Quotation Marks
    Readers share their opinions about a city more than 3,000 years old and a magazine that has already turned two.

BUSINESS
038  FASHION Zatik
    The words “Made in Armenia” on the garments of Zatik Company have drawn the attention of the biggest fashion house in Paris.
046  PERSONALITIES The Associative Pause
    Is Armenia a strong brand? Agnessa Hovhannisyan’s conversation with Vladimir Posner and Wally Ollince.
054  TECHNOLOGY The Thinking Rabbit
    A clever virtual pet with an Armenian name, “Nabatzag,” is conquering the planet.
056  HALLMARK Golden Surname
    Precision and creative excellence are the hallmarks of Boghossian Jewelry.
060  BRAND The Grand Scheme of Things
    Matching profits with far-reaching public service.
064  MADE IN ARMENIA The Modest Charm of Vahakni
    Come home to Armenia! More exactly, to Vahakni, the ultra-modern cottage community.
072  SUCCESS Scaled World: a Model View
    Richard Dikran Tenguerian has turned his passion for architectural modeling into a fascinating career.
076  TOP-LIST Red, Blue, Orange
    Notes on the Second Coming of the Armenian Tricolor.

ART
078  GALLERY The Apostle of the New
    The great Ervand Kochar was accused of “formalism,” “antisovietism,” and espionage for the French.
088  CULT OF PERSONALITY A Formula for Liberty
    Bej Zeitouniansian was neither a dissident nor considered himself a Soviet writer.
092  AUTOGRAPH Faces of My City
    You can’t help love Hrant Tokhatyan — even after he confesses to all of the deadly sins.
096  JOURNEYS Around Europe in 295 Days
    The Armenian sailing ship “Cilicia” has done just that.
098  PHOTO ART Literal Meaning
    An installation on the subject of the Armenian alphabet.

ARMENIA
106  ROUTE Through the Stoic City of Shushi
    Old cities are like deep wrinkles — to wipe them off the face of the earth is not all that easy.
114  MOOD Wine Couples
    A spirited guide to Armenian celebrity.
122  HYPOTHESIS AND DISCOVERY The Gold of the Basques
    A sensational theory of the ties between the Basques and Armenians.
128  HISTORY Levon, King of Madrid
    In 1383, Spain’s King Juan gifted the cities of Madrid, Villareal, and Andujar to King Levon V.

RETROSPECTIVE
134  The Knights of Cognac
    Academician Boris Piotrovski believes the history of Armenian cognac began not in 1887 but one and a half thousand years earlier.

ENCOUNTERS
144  ONCE IN ARMENIA The Return of the Spy
    A UN-conference attendee from Azerbaijan lands at Zvartnots Airport in broad daylight. So what’s wrong with this picture?
АРАРАТ
Встреча с легендой

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ЧРЕЗМЕРНОЕ УПОТРЕБЛЕНИЕ АЛКОГОЛЯ ВРЕДИТ ВАШЕМУ ЗДОРОВЬЮ
THE BEST ANSWER

Undoubtedly the main event of the year 2006 was for us the 15th Anniversary of Armenia’s Independence. For some reason I remembered the famous words of President Kennedy: “Ask not what your country can do for you — ask what you can do for your country.” To the Armenians’ credit it be it said, we, as a rule, irrespective of our citizenship, ask ourselves only the second part of that question. And the best answer is that, despite all the hardship of our path, we did celebrate the 15th jubilee of Independence.

editor-in-chief IDA MARTIROSYAN
Individuals must decide for themselves whether they have a fatherland in this world.
Father Harutyun Pstikyan

the treasure guardian

Based on a segment from Rafael Hovhannisyan's "Meronk" (Our Folk) TV Program
photo by Nazik Armenakian

I was born in Beirut, where our family settled after surviving the Armenian Genocide. At the age of 13 I entered the Mkhitarian Seminary at St. Lazarro Island, Venice, Italy. Upon graduation, I was admitted into the Mkhitarian Order and continued my education at the Theological College of Rome, where for the next seven years I studied philosophy and theology. I was ordained a priest at 25.

At that time, as my spiritual dedication went hand in hand with an abiding interest in painting, I began to attend the Venice Academy of Arts, where my teachers included distinguished Italian artists. It was an extraordinary experience, and one that helped enhance my subsequent service in various countries. First I was appointed Deputy Director of the Mkhitarian Seminary in Aleppo. Next I was given a post in Paris, where I taught at the local Mkhitarian Seminary. Today alumni of that school are among France's political elite. My stay in Paris was not long, but it was there that I began painting in earnest. Paris was also where I met and became friends with Picasso. He came to see my works, and immediately went on to organize an exhibition of them. Valerie Giscard d'Estaing, the future president of France, who served as Minister of Finance at that time, was among the many celebrities attending my show. I thought my paintings would fetch no more than $100 a piece. But people were paying up to $10,000 per painting. I was elated, because the income enabled me to repair our school. My friendship with Charles Aznavour, too, goes back to that period. One day he and his son, Patrick, came to visit me. Charles asked me to teach Patrick Armenian. The junior Aznavour immediately took to the subject, announcing that for the foreseeable future he would consider Father Harutyun his father.

Now I live in Venice and hold the position of Guardian of Cultural Values (which are considerable) at the Mkhitarian Order. Incidentally, some 150,000 tourists visit our island every year, and we try to generate among them an interest in Armenia — a country where they can see priceless treasures. Generally speaking, I live the life of an ordinary priest, and during the quiet Venice evenings I write books. Even the walls come to help me, as no doubt they have done for Hakob Meghapart, who printed the first Armenian book at St. Lazarro.
tranquilo y mañana

To many residents of Buenos Aires, Armenia is just history, apparent not in real time, but in a certain virtual space. This city has its own rhythm of life — tranquil and unhurried. But it’s different for the Armenians of Buenos Aires: they live in accordance with a special “Armenian time.”

*text by Marie Grigoryan*

*photo by Carolina Aldao*
Diagonale Norte — the Central Buenos Aires street leading to May Square
We are on the evening flight back to Buenos Aires, en route from the Missiones Jungles — one of the most picturesque provinces of Argentina. Looking through the bull’s eye at the swiftly approaching city below, I’m bewildered by the view: “This is so huge!” How was it possible to plan so precisely this massive settlement of more than twelve million inhabitants? The city’s gridlines remind me of a song: “The pavement is drawn in squares...” and I smile.

Men give women no peace by bombarding them with “piropo” (a special type of compliment) and laying handkerchiefs at their feet so that they won’t have to touch the ground.

I have noticed that when I am abroad, even the most unremarkable sight generates a chain of associations and comparisons. This begins right at the airport. Incidentally, an Armenian-Argentinean, Eduardo Ernekyan, who is a concessionaire at thirty-three airports in various countries around the world, including Yerevan’s Zvartnots International, is also established at Buenos Aires’ Jorge Newberry Airport, where we landed.

The first thing one needs to do here is get in line for a taxi. The long, straight queue seems to be a part of the city’s design. In general, the queue in Buenos Aires is something sacred. I can’t begin to understand how in a city where the very air is so full of emotions, where at every corner one can hear the tango or witness a loud family scene, where a match of beloved football teams can drive fans to destroy the stadium, where New Year’s Eve is followed by reports of hundreds of casualties due to illegal fireworks during the festivities, where men give women no peace by bombarding them with “piropo” (a special type of compliment) and laying handkerchiefs at their feet so that they won’t have to touch the ground, people are so passionate about the discipline of queuing. You see them patiently standing in line in front of the ticket counters of the bus stations, at the information office, and in front of a recently opened shop....
Caminito Street in Old La Boca, where the famous Argentine tango was born.
At any given event, Armenians are late to arrive, by at least 40 minutes — “Deh, Haykakan zhamanakov” (based on Armenian time). In fact, tardiness is a natural and accepted phenomenon in the Diaspora, to the point that you’d be raising eyebrows if you were so “impatient” as to arrive on time. On the other hand, a typical Argentinean doesn’t hurry anywhere either, true to the maxim “tranquilo y mañana” (as in, “tranquilo, mañana será otro día:” “take it easy, tomorrow is another day”).

The Friday Armenian dinners always draw large crowds, including non-Armenians, who come for the delicious foods. The club restaurant’s staff consists mainly of students from local Armenian schools (eight of them in Buenos Aires). The youths work for free, and at the end of the year they are rewarded with a group trip to Armenia, which they eagerly look forward to. Jacqueline, the niece of my friend, visited Armenia last summer. In response to my question about her impressions, she jumps up joyfully, gesticulating with admiration: “I love, I love Armenia!” I am laughing. She wants to say many more things, but her Armenian vocabulary is not sufficient to convey all the emotions. She’s wearing a hippie T-shirt. She’s got long, wavy hair and Armenian eyes. Jackie is a rock fan. Every Saturday she performs with her band at “Woodstock” — a rock gathering of Armenian-Argentinean youths.

In Argentina, Armenians excel at practically every profession. There are so many famous Armenian surnames here that when you tell someone you are Armenian, you will at once gain their respect. The Kalpakyan family sells
Buenos Aires is often called the Paris of South America. But this city does not need such comparisons. It holds its own, and it is open and kind—blooming even in winter.
the best carpets in the country; Yagmur, the popular youth-fashion chain, belongs to Turkey-native Yagmuryan, now an Argentine citizen; Argentina’s Minister of Security is an Armenian: Arslanyan; so is tennis star Nalbandyan, an icon with Argentinean girls; and on Libertad Street, home to a plethora of jewelers, you feel like you’re in Yerevan. It seems everyone around you is Armenian. Most of the merchants have immigrated to Argentina in the past 15 years. And, incidentally, most of them have not had formal training in the art of jewelry.

There are plenty of Armenian restaurants. The entertainment they offer includes belly dancers (a must) and coffee-cup reading. Any Argentinean talking to an Armenian will make mention of the food: “What a cuisine you have!” It must be said, however, that the fare in these restaurants is not Armenian per se, but rather Turkish-Arabic or a mélange of Eastern. This is quite understandable, as most of the local Armenians are from Turkey, from which they’ve brought their recipes.

The Argentineans have an original view of Armenia’s geography. For example, Sergio, the owner of the Wilton Hotel on Kajao, one of the main avenues of Buenos Aires, tells us about his recent trip: “In Armenia we first visited Adana and Urfa...” (territories of modern Turkey). To the Argentineans, Armenia is “everything behind the mountain,” as Armenians used to live there and admittedly still do, in a virtual sense. I love Sergio. Just about every Armenian visiting Buenos Aires stays at his hotel. Many of them are not even charged for their rooms, and Sergio seems genuinely happy to be of service.
СОБЛЮДАЯ МНОГОВЕКОВОЙ ОПЫТ И ТРАДИЦИИ АРМЯНСКОЙ КУХНИ С ИЗЯЩЕСТВОМ СОВРЕМЕННОСТИ, НЕДАВНЯЯ ИСТОРИЯ КАФЕ «АРАРАТ» ОБРЕТАЕТ НОВЫЙ ОБЛИК. НАШ ШЕФ-ПОВАР В СОВЕРШЕНСТВЕ ВЛАДЕЕТ ПОДАИННЫМИ РЕЦЕПТАМИ СТАРИННЫХ НАЦИОНАЛЬНЫХ БЛЮД И СОБЛЮДАЕТ ТРАДИЦИОННОСТЬ ИХ ПРИГОТОВЛЕНИЯ.

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УЛ. НЕГЛИННАЯ, Д.4
I am sitting around a table with an Argentine woman, at the birthday party of an Armenian-Argentinean friend. I scoop some hummus, the traditional “Armenian” dip, with a piece of lavash, before answering the question: “How is the situation in Armenia?” “You know,” I say, “the country is developing. There is big progress in the economy.” She interrupts me: “Yes, yes, Armenia suffered so much from that massacre...I know.” The Armenian woman on my other side, who has recently come back from a trip to Yerevan, is clueless. She asks me excitedly, “What happened in Armenia?” It is pointless to explain that the Genocide happened in the beginning of the last century in Turkey. In Buenos Aires they have their own calendar and their own Armenia.

After midnight, as the party breaks up, I come out on the street. It’s a warm, humid October night that feels like late spring. The seasons are reversed here. I take a taxi home. Behind the window the city makes noise — a city that never falls asleep. On October 1 even the museums are open till 3 AM. This is a special day, when beginning at 7 PM people line up in a queue to catch a free bus ride and enjoy a museum tour.

The lights are always on in Buenos Aires. Couples are always kissing at the traffic lights and dancing tango on the streets. Here the European architecture is brought to life on an American scale and infused with a Latin sensibility. This is a city of bygone luxury. They call it the Paris of South America, although I think it does not need such a comparison. This city holds its own. It does not compete with anyone. It is open and kind. This is a city that blooms even in winter. And in spring it gives way to the blooming of the luxurious magnolias.

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**reference**

**MAN LEADS, WOMAN Follows**

Tango originated at the end of the 19th century in the poor immigrant neighborhoods of Buenos Aires. The African rhythms of tanganao, Argentinean milonga, Habana jambanera, Spanish flamenco, ritual Indians dances, Polish mazurka, and German waltz came to meet here.

At first tango was considered a male dance, a duel for winning a woman. Then prostitutes got into the act — a fact that explains why in classic Argentinean tango the costume of the woman maintained some details specific to the representatives of this profession — narrow dress with a prodigious slit, fishnet stockings, provocative décolleté blouse, and high heels.

Indeed, tango’s proliferation is in part due to the numerous brothels of the workers’ districts, where by the end of the 19th century portenos (as the residents of the port area call themselves) came to have a drink, socialize, and listen to live music.
French President Jacques Chirac and his wife, Bernadette, paid visit to Armenia from September 29 through October 1, at the invitation of Robert Kocharyan, President of the Republic of Armenia.

The French delegation accompanying President Chirac included Philippe Douste-Blazy, Minister of Foreign Affairs; Dominique Perben, Minister of Transportation, Public Works, Tourism, and the Sea; Christian Jacob, Minister of Civil Service; Renaud Donnedieu de Vabres, Minister of Culture and Communications; as well as a group of entrepreneurs, artists, and journalists.

President Chirac stated that for the past 10 years France has espoused the quest for a peaceful settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. “I believe in the ability of the Armenian people to fight for peace,” he said. “This is a challenge that Armenia can and must meet.”

During his visit to the Tsitsernakaberd Memorial, Chirac placed a wreath next to the Eternal Fire in memory of the 1915 Genocide victims and planted a silver fir in the alley of the complex. He also wrote down a single word in the memorial book: “Remember!”

“I would like to remind you again,” President Shirak said, “that France, as a country of laws in which racial intolerance is treated as a serious crime, has outlawed any denial of the Genocide of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire.”

President Kocharyan announced that French investment in Armenia has resulted in more than 100 new businesses and that French companies are also active in the development of the republic’s infrastructure. President Chirac added, “French investors trust Armenia.”

“I am getting to know the Armenian land with deep excitement,” Shirak said in his speech at the inauguration of the French Square in Yerevan. “This is the first time that a French head of state pays a visit to this land. A land where Noah found shelter at the summit of Mount Ararat. We are touched to the bottom of our hearts by the fact that a public square of Yerevan will henceforth be named after France.”
LIFE AFTER TENNIS

There were prodigious victories, as well as incredible slumps in the life of Andre Agassi. It took him only a year to drop down to 141st position from the top in the ATP rating. But Andre managed to pull the strings to get back the title of the World No 1. It is not by chance that in Greek his name means “courageous”.

text by Gork Gulryan

Big tennis became “small” for the Armenians—as our legendary compatriot Andre Agassi left it. Although he did not win the last tournament in his career—US Open (where he was the winner in 1994 and 1999), the spectators of Flushing Meadows saw him off as the king. Agassi played 1244 matches and won 870 of them. He is the only athlete in the history of tennis, who won the most prestigious competitions, including the Olympics and Davis Cup—the 37 years old athlete won 60 tournaments and earned 31 million dollars. Let formally Agassi did not leave as a winner, but his words to the spectators after his last match were the words of a genuine tennis king: “The score-board shows that today I lost. But it does not show what I gained. During 21 years of career I gained confidence. You’ve supported me on the court, as well as in my life. I gained inspiration. You wished me success, even when I had difficult times and I gained generosity. You lent your shoulders for me to get my dream, a dream that I would never achieve without you. And finally I got you and will always remember you”. Twenty three thousand spectators of Arthur Ashley stadium saw him off with applause.

Andre’s career was determined before he was born. He was “conceived” as a tennis-player and indeed a great one—just like the ambitions of his father Emanuel (Mike) Agassi. An Armenian, son of a carpet trader from Tehran, boxer, who took part in two Olympic games in Iran’s team, he dreamed that his son would be a famous tennis player. Mike did everything for it—if to become a “professional” they take the racket aged four, then Andre started literally from diapers. Even the room of the newly-born was decorated as a bedroom of tennis fan. Aged three the kid would hit the ball 800 times during everyday trainings and in a couple of years already 4000 times. Naturally Andre “effortlessly” coped with all of his rivals at his first tournament—Las Vegas championship of children. By the way it was in the gambling capital of US that the future tennis star was born on April 29, 1970.

For the first time Agassi Jr. got to the professional court in California in Palm-Spring. It was in the final right here that there began the main tennis confrontation of the last decade of the last century: Andre Agassi—Pete Sampras. The defeat of son made Mike think about a good coach and Andre found himself in the most pretentious tennis institution of the world—Nick Bolletieri’s academy in Florida. The name of scandalous tennis-player, flashing in receptions with his earring, began to appear in the sports news, as well as in the cover pages of tabloids. Many times Andre shocked the society with his passionate romances. The tennis-player had his rating—romance with Barbara Streisand, marriage with Brook Shields...Andre’s union with “the last virgin of Hollywood”—Brook Shields, lasted for less than two years. It cost too expensive for the tennis-player—apart from paying 70 thousand dollars for each day of joint life, in one year spent as “honeymoon” Agassi found himself on 141 position of ATP rating.

The triumphant return of Agassi happened thanks to the second marriage. Was it possibly thanks to the correct choice of “sparring-partner”? Secretly Andre married Steffi Graff in October 2001 in Las Vegas. The star couple of the world managed to fool the paparazzi of the whole world—there was no journalist at the wedding ceremony. In the game of Agassi many specialists began to find the “handwriting” of Graff.

For many years “the body obeyed” Agassi and there came a time for tennis-player “to obey the body”. Over and over the pain of back was disturbing him. And he did it at New-York tournament. Is there life after tennis? Having left the professional court Agassi enjoys his family, wife Steffi and two kids—son Jeddan and daughter Jazz. By the way, the star couple does not want to stop on this achievement—Andre wants to at least five kids. The family was accompanying him in the past as well, but now nothing hampers his communication with family.

Andre is actively engaged in many projects. These are: resort zones in Idaho, Costa-Rica and Hawaii; a new furniture line that will be presented by the spouses in January. Many efforts are put into charity. The Andre Agassi Charitable Foundation collected more than 50 million dollars for vulnerable teenagers of Las Vegas. Andre has developed formula of life after tennis: “I believe in the future and growth of this game, and I want to figure out a way to help communicate how much this sport can add to somebody’s life”.

028 yerevan the best of 2006
Any visit by Charles Aznavour to Armenia is a great event. This time, however, Armenians awaited the arrival of their favorite singer with unusual excitement, as his visit was to be part of the much-anticipated “French Days” celebrations across Armenia. The famous singer sees the future of our country first and foremost connected with Europe.

*interview by Artak Herikyan*
Mr. Aznavour, did you find something different about Armenia this time? — It is difficult for me to judge Armenia. I have been only to Yerevan. The city is definitely changing for the better, but the people are facing more difficult circumstances. Armenia needs to become a strong country. People must have jobs and should be able to make a decent living.

What do you think was most noteworthy about President Jacques Chirac’s visit to Armenia? — The fact that he is very sympathetic toward Armenians and always speaks well of us.

The period from September 2006 to July 2007 has been declared “The year of Armenia in France.” What are your thoughts on this? — I have no doubt that there will be many different events I will also participate in some of them. I think it will be interesting and beautiful.

You once called yourself 100% French and 100% Armenian... — That’s right, as in France I am not accepted as an Armenian singer but a Frenchman of Armenian descent.

Which famous French and Armenian individuals do you admire? — There are many. But for me something else is important: thanks to the support of the Diaspora, many Armenians have had significant achievements in culture, sports, and business. You know, the fact that Armenians are famous and respected is definitely the result of the Diaspora’s huge efforts.

Can we say that the Diaspora has played an important role in helping preserve the very existence of the Armenian nation? — I think so.

You come from a refugee family. It must have had an impact on your life.

I wanted my life to be a model for young immigrants. I wanted to inspire them with confidence, make them realize that being an immigrant is not an obstacle to achieving success. You know, life in a foreign country requires a lot of effort to adjust. One should adapt to new circumstances and not live in a cocoon — in which immigrants sometimes even don’t learn the language of their host country. When coming to a new world, one needs to become a part of it and accept it, in order not to live as an outsider. This is the way the Armenians behaved in France — they became one of its organic parts. You know, not every one can do that. Some national Diasporas live in secluded enclaves and this causes problems. I am not saying that one needs to forget one’s roots. I certainly didn’t. It’s all about adaptation.

I assume parents play an important role in maintaining traditions — Indeed! My parents helped me and I helped my children. I am pleased that they do not deny their Armenian identity.

What are the moments you consider the most significant in your life? — My first visit to Armenia in 1960: I felt like a stranger here. Maybe it was the

Soviet regime, or else I was too young. Maybe now I have a more direct relationship with the people and I have a different perspective.

Yerevan: You usually steer clear of politics. But are you concerned about the problems that affect Armenia? — I would put it differently — the fate of Armenia is important to me. It has all the potential to become a strong country. When it comes to specific problems, such as the Karabakh issue, I think they can be settled only with the assistance of Europe.

What do you think of Turkey’s efforts to join the EU? — It’s at least in France: there are excellent relationships between our presidents, there are no problems between our countries, and this is great. It’s a different matter in the United States, because it’s an ally of Turkey.

What can be considered a turning point for Armenia? — The removal of the economic blockade. Despite being lacking in natural riches, Armenia is now the most Westernized former Soviet republic. As for the future, I think it largely depends on Armenia’s relationships with its neighbors and of course it is connected with Europe.
Everything about this magazine is to my liking. I treasure it, as I treasure its name. I like its relevance, its lightness, its gloss, its eclectic content, its seriousness as well as playful spirit. I like the chief editor’s style and great sense of irony in the editorial page, which gives the gist and meaning of each issue. The magazine is a celebration of Yerevan itself, which today marks its 278th birthday. I’m immensely proud that I was one of the contributors of the magazine’s first issue, which inaugurated the glorious biography of our difficult and almost heroic time — a time whose chronicler brims with talent.

ZORI BALAVAN
Writer/Publicist, Armenia

I miss Armenia. Haven’t been there for more than 20 years. The memories I have of it are a bit vague and impressionistic. Yerevan — pink, crammed with the spirit of antiquity, entering with its tastes of dolma and mutton, melting in one’s mouth and exciting with its scent of herbs. I used to take the most absolute reality of the unbelievable colors of Armenia as a mere product of Saryan’s imagination. The moon, as though from the pages of the “One Thousand and One Nights,” hovers splendidly in the high Armenian sky and is one more tale from my childhood which turned out to be true.

VLADIMIR POZNER
Journalist, Russia

“Thanks to my mother, I spent every summer in Yerevan since I was five years old. Unfortunately, due to some difficult circumstances, my recent visits were very short. But they also gave me an immense sense of space. This is excellent. It means that the city is open for contacts. The feeling of dynamic movement is everywhere. The residents of Yerevan make me happy. Isn’t it true that each city is the sum of the personalities of its inhabitants? But every era destroys something while creating something new. For example, old houses in Yerevan are being destroyed. The huge modern buildings are an eyesore for a melancholic person like myself. Now concerning “Yerevan” Magazine. We have a good deal of negative information in our press and it keeps me continually tense. So I’m thankful for the existence of “Yerevan” Magazine in this ocean of negativity. It gives me a chance to relax, to obtain interesting information, and enjoy the wonderful illustrations.

GAYANE KHACHATRYAN
Artist, Georgia

Although I live in Paris, the “center of the world,” for me Yerevan has been and is one of the most beautiful cities on the planet. I like Abovyan Street, where I grew up, the Swan Lake, the Opera House, and its square. I wish “Yerevan” long life and a large readership in Europe.

RUBEN ELBAKIAN
Singer, France

I love Yerevan, especially for that rare possibility it gives me to speak Armenian.

CHARLES AZNAVOUR
Singer, France

There are many good cities in the world, but Yerevan is my city. It is my favorite, and everything bad that happens to it troubles me a lot. Take the city’s frenzied construction boom: I like some of the new buildings, but I can do without the rest. The point is that I’m afraid the very “color” of the city will be spoiled. “Yerevan” Magazine is a top-notch publication of European standards. There is no other like it in Armenia. I especially appreciate the fact that not only is it beautiful on the outside, it is also rich in content. Among the huge variety of publications today, my choice is “Yerevan,” and I read it with pleasure from beginning to end.

BERJ ZEITOUNTSIAN, Writer, Armenia

I just love Yerevan. And I value “Yerevan” Magazine for its professionalism, though I have the feeling that the magazine is a demonstration of the success we can reach outside Armenia. But “Yerevan” strikes a great balance: while stories about owning a restaurant or tobacco shop abroad and being proud of it are fun to read, the magazine also offers probing articles, such as the one about the history of the Basques, which inspire a sense of national dignity and respect for our roots. We have to value what we have and what we used to have in the past. I wish that “Yerevan” Magazine plays an instrumental role in helping change Armenia to the better. A magazine can do that. This is why I hold it in my hands with great respect.

ROBERT SAHAKYANTS
Cartoonist, Armenia
FEEL THE SUN

COGNAC KAZUMIAN

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FEEL THE SUN
“Yerevan” is a magazine with a perfect name, rich in content and full of excellent illustrations. A successful mixture of traditional and modern, of charm and soul-stirring nostalgia. A very necessary magazine. It’s a pity that it’s published only in Russian—I always have to ask my friends to translate it for me...

JACK POGHOSYAN
Journalist, Argentina

I was born and raised in the US. But I’m Armenian and the feeling for the homeland, faraway as it may be, was always cultivated in my family. I very much love Yerevan—I try not to miss a chance to be there. Isn’t it natural?

In Massachusetts I came across a nice magazine with such a dear name, “Yerevan” (English version). I certainly wanted to read it. I came to know a lot and I decided to share it with all my friends. Our common verdict was, It’s a great magazine!

NAIRI BARDAKCHYAN
Student, USA

“Yerevan” Magazine is so good that many of us take copies of it 27,000 km way, to Argentina, as presents for friends, together with the “obligatory” assortment of souvenirs from Armenia.

LIKA
Internet café owner, Argentina

Yerevan is a brilliant city. Once, in my youth, my wife and I went out for a walk along its cozy streets. Suddenly a woman passing by turned to us, checked us out from head to toe, and exclaimed loudly, “Jan Yerevan!” “Jan Yerevan”—this is how the city is etched in my memory. I love this city very much. It gave me my education, family, children, and name. I’m fond of its enchanting gardens and unusual fountains. I like the fact that “Yerevan” Magazine, with its surprisingly smart, kind, and interesting articles, is published in the great city itself. By the way, would you tell me how I can subscribe to your magazine in America?

RAFAEL ATOYAN
Painter, USA

With all my heart I welcome the work of the magazine that is called to inform the reader about the culture and history of the Armenians, about ancient and modern Armenia. For a whole year “Yerevan,” which is geared toward the worldwide Diaspora as well as a great number of Russian-speaking and European readers, made us happy with its journalistic excellence. We can joyfully assert that the magazine has been a success. It’s pleasing that the material printed on its pages reflects centuries-old traditions of world culture, as well as the universal roots of spiritualism and ethics, morality and aesthetics, based on the common interests of all the peoples and states of the world.

With the staff of the magazine further success and its readers continued enjoyment of new and unforgettable impressions.

VLADIMIR SPIVAKOV
Conductor, Russia

I am overjoyed by the fact that there finally appeared an intellectual Russian-language magazine in Yerevan that no Armenian would be ashamed of. When it comes to “Yerevan” Magazine, I’m an extremist and I don’t try to find faults. While looking through the pages I’m glad to find familiar faces. I like the extraordinary way of presenting the intriguing material.

It is my firm belief that two crafty monsters, assimilation and the likelihood of being absorbed into the provincial marsh, continue to threaten Armenians—as they do any other small nation.

“Yerevan” is a wandering knight that dared to challenge them.

HENRY IGITYAN,
Art Critic, Armenia

The Yerevan of my childhood is our yard, Khanchyan Street, the river Getar...the friends with whom I snatched a cigarette and smoked when I was seven or eight years old. And played football endlessly. The old-timers in the yard waited with their knives, ready to prick the ball in case it landed on them. The Yerevan of my childhood is the outdoor café where we used to discuss Van Gogh and Picasso for hours...

And now, living in Paris, I most of all like the cafés that evoke the Yerevan of my youth.

VAKTAN PETROSYAN
Actor, France

I love Yerevan. It always gives me bright colors and meetings with extraordinary people. It’s pleasant to discover it anew for myself.

Every new journey to the city holds the possibility of warmth and smiles, fresh jokes, and the usual assortment of fond memories to take back to Moscow.

Each issue of “Yerevan” Magazine is an opportunity to learn many interesting things and to once again feel the Armenian coloring, which is so close to me.

Yerevan has celebrated its 2788th birthday, but it is so young! “Yerevan” Magazine is one year old, but it can be easily included in the list of media “leaders.” Well, I wish both Yerevens—the city and the magazine—prosperity and long life.

VLADIMIR PRESNYAKOV
Musician, Russia

One cannot but like Yerevan. Especially early in spring, when the trees are not yet heavy with leaves and the colors are bright. Or late in autumn, when the same trees, now shedding their leaves, get a bit of freedom—something they sorely lack in the city. A man will no doubt cut them and make them grow as he wishes. It has become extremely stuffy in my beloved Yerevan. One has to go to the countryside to get a breath of fresh air. “Yerevan” Magazine has become that breath of crystal-fresh air for me.

LUSIK AGULETSI
Artist, Armenia
Эксклюзивная линия сборных кованых дисков до 30"
Every woman is convinced that her lifeline runs through her waistline, and herein lies the special significance of the fashion industry. So it is all the more flattering that the words “Made in Armenia” attracted the attention of Paris’ largest prêt-a-porter salon. The director of the Zatik company, Nana Sahakyan, talks about the road to success.

interview by Anahit Hovhannisyan
from the photo archives of: Zatik Studio

Nana, your clothing designs have a style all their own. What is their main distinguishing element?
— It is hard to give an unambiguous answer. We play around with the clothes.

Is this an exciting game?
— Very much indeed! You should see what is happening here, when we are working on a new collection. The music is all around, screams, dances — it’s big fun!

How long have you been involved in this fun?
— Since 1997.

How did you get into the fashion industry?
— Well, basically I am an artist. My interest in fashion was an outgrowth of shopping for clothes for my son. That’s when I started to sew and knit. Soon the entire female segment of our family got involved in this business. Then… a company like Zatik is born, when you begin to make for others something that you need. Some interesting designers got together and we started to work. Our first product was a collection of funny and bright children’s clothes. Our focus now is on women’s clothes — this is more profitable, especially when the business is being established. However, we did not change our approach and style. In other words, if on an evening dress you see a small plane, that’s us.

Zatik is quite an operation. It seems there is no such other enterprise in Armenia, right?
— Absolutely correct. We had no experience. But we weren’t alone. Nobody in Armenia and in fact throughout the CIS had any experience. Well, in general, we were among the first not to print “Pierre Cardin” or “Nina Ricci” on our tags, as they often do here. We presented our own label, with “Made in Armenia” under it. This is not just a tag. We make Armenian clothes, we dye and decorate them with our colors and ornaments, and we even use our Armenian silk.

Is there such a thing as Armenian silk?
— If I am not mistaken, we are the only ones in the world to use filoselle. In general it is processed and becomes the famous silk muslin. However, the silk is very beautiful even without processing. We import it from Karabakh and it is of a specially high quality — as the Great
Silk Road passed through the region. An interesting detail: in the Karabakh dialect silkworm is known as “brakhma” and in Tibet silkworm is dedicated to Brahma, the God-creator.

Your line must have caught customers off guard — as they were not used to such designs?
— Only in the beginning. But when you make something consistently, confidently, and prudently, then they begin to trust you.

And then the designer takes a deep breath and leaves for Paris...
— Eighteen months ago we decided that the time had come for us to show off and organize a défilé in Paris. We rented an old, small, fashionable theater. We hired girls from Lido and Moulin Rouge. Dressed in our clothes, they danced to the tunes of Armenian music: Ruben Hakverdyan, Arto Tuncboyaciyan, Children of Picasso, System of a Down — these are our clothes in motion. Armenian. However, without the coat of arms on the forehead.

I am curious to know, what was the reaction of the dancers from Lido and Moulin Rouge to all this?
— After the show they were screaming and running around so much behind the curtains that the manager had a hard time getting them all into the dressing room. Our clothes are considered “haute couture” there and it was presented in hippie-rock-folk decoration. It was unusual even for Paris. We came back inspired by the success.

And recently — again France…
— Yes. Twice we have participated in the world’s largest expo-salon of prêt-a-porter, held in Paris. The last one took place in February 2006. From CIS there were only Russians and us. We went there convinced that statistics is a great science and the orders would come in only after the fourth or fifth time. We figured we’d spend a hell a lot of money and come back with nothing, but would make ourselves known. How could we not go the second time around when one of the four designs on the cover page of the salon’s invitation was from our own collection, presented at the first salon. We arrived. It was a real madhouse. For four days we did not have a spare

WE IMPORT THE ARMENIAN SILK FROM KARABKH, AND IT IS OF HIGH QUALITY — AS THE GREAT SILK ROAD PASSED THROUGH THE REGION.
ARMENIANS WORK FOR SEVERAL FAMOUS FRENCH FASHION HOUSES. HOWEVER, NOBODY BUT US PRESENTED ARMENIA HERE.

— Right. They say that newcomers are lucky. But we could not expect anything of that kind. From the designs presented by all the companies participating in the salon (there are 1,500 of them) they choose 80 complete collections, which are exhibited at the salon as samples that identify the fashion trends of the season. For our first salon appearance, they chose two of our designs, and this is normal — usually one or two designs are presented from each participating company. However, this last time they selected four of our works and we were on the podium, together with such high-profile companies!

As far as I know, your works were greatly appreciated by merchandisers and designers alike.

— Once we were so busy that we could not turn our attention to two women who were studying our designs. Finally I was free, and I approached them and offered my help. “No, no. Don’t bother yourself,” they said. “We are professors of fashion from the Paris Institute of Fine Arts and just want to say that what you make is just fabulous!” We also heard many encouraging words from an Armenian representative of Cop Copine and the manager of Pierre Cardin, who now helps us a lot...

There must be some funny stories as well, right?

— Indeed. Every day a Japanese woman would come to our stand, as though reporting to work. She was saying something in Japanese and bowing all the time. I understand that it is a tradition in their country, but not in ours. It was very uncomfortable! In desperation, she came to visit us with an interpreter, who spoke little English. It turned out that she wanted to buy a lot of things from us, or at least something, including the stills. We explained to her that the clothes she saw were just samples and we couldn’t sell them — what would we display then? But we told her that we could accept her orders and ship them to her in Tokyo. “Where are you from?” she asked. “Armenia.” “No, no. Sell them now. Afterwards I won’t be able to find you, as I don’t even know where that country is!” Well, we had to sell a sample to her. Then we had to sew one just like it for the exhibition, working from memory. Sometimes it was even absurd. Once I noticed two women next to our stand,
Armenian photo web page
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YEREVAN www.yerevan.ru/35mm
passionately discussing something among themselves. “It is not English,” I thought. “Not Italian, not French...” After ten minutes of plumbing the pool of the world’s languages, I figured it out: it was Russian! Look, Russian is just like my native language. They had an interesting reaction: “Are you Armenians? Then why on Earth are we giving our money to these Europeans? It is better to give to our Armenians.” That’s exactly what they did. They came back to Moscow and came to us to buy a lot of stuff.

Now down to business. Did you get many orders?
— Our clothes will be sold in 15 boutiques all over the world. In particular, in two boutiques in Paris and two in Moscow. In our book of orders there was no blank space left and all the participants — Armenians and non-Armenians — were looking for a second book to place orders from an unknown Armenian company.

And now — respite?
— Not at all. In the beginning of June we’ll do a large défilé in Moscow, marking the launch of our boutique in the trade house Triumphal. The music will be indeed Armenian and the choreographer will be the famous Egor Drujinin.

So, Armenian women seeking a European look would need to wear clothes made by Zatik?
— Why not? Our women have a huge desire to be feminine. Only an Armenian woman (also probably an Italian woman) waking up in the morning spends a long time to comb her hair, polish her nails, apply makeup, and put on high heels just to step out to buy some bread. She has the desire to be beautiful and there is a certain internal brightness to her. When it comes to dressing up, foreigners love the way Yerevan women are dressed — bright, juicy, and provocative. They are a striking contrast to the gray West. But when it comes to style and quality... it is not our business to talk; our job is to deliver.

Why did you decide to call your company Zatik (ladybird)?
— To me it now sounds the same as my own name. The bright colors of the ladybird — red and black. In addition, a big Armenian nose, which we drew ourselves. It is a nice animal.

Maybe you wanted to say “an insect”?
— Look at our logo. Is this an insect?
The CD is protected from falsification with the hologram

For the first time in Armenia

Quest for virtual adventures in the "Mer Bak" new computer game IN ARMENIAN

You may help HRANT to solve his personal problems, as well as the troubles of the popular yard and its dwellers by appearing in his role and overcoming interesting levels of the game.

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THE ASSOCIATIVE PAUSE

Terms like “Swiss bank,” “Italian design,” “English style” are actually advertisements for the countries in question. By virtue of their deeds and words, historic figures were also involved in the branding of their countries. How strong is the Armenian brand? What do foreigners associate it with?

Text by Agnessa Hovhannisyan
very time I meet someone abroad, I know beforehand what would happen in the next two minutes: “Where are you from?” they would ask. “I’m from Russia.” “But you don’t look Russian.” “I’m not Russian. I’m Armenian. I just live in Russia.”

At this point, in most cases, there is a short pause, during which the person smiles and waits for any “Armenian” association to pop up in his mind. In fact, this pause is a question: “How strong is the Armenian brand?”

**IMAGE**

Prior to my visit to Pozner, I did not know that a Saryan painting hung on the left side of his home’s guest room.

**Vladimir Vladimirovich, is there a certain symbol that you associate with Armenia?**

—I have been in Armenia many times, but very long ago. Probably what struck me the most was that the colors of Armenia mirrored those of Saryan’s landscapes. Up to that point, I thought that Saryan, being an impressionist, had given himself free rein to exaggerate. Well, it turned out no to be so. I was truly impressed. Moreover, the ancientness in the eyes of the people is felt more than anywhere else. You should add to this the sun-baked landscape, which can be yellow, brown, purple. And there you are with my image of Armenia. But I don’t know what kind of advertising slogan can be made of it.

**How old is your grandchild?**

—Eleven.

—I suspect that, living in Berlin, he does not know much about Armenia...

—No, unfortunately, I must admit that he knows absolutely nothing about Armenia.

**If you were to suggest to your grandchild to visit Armenia, how would you finish the phrase “Let’s go to Armenia, because...”?**

—It’s got to be Geghard. This is a church that was actually built underground to protect it from the Arab invasions. The top part of the complex is the oldest, as this is where the digging had begun; the bottom portion was built later. You know, I was singing there.

**Do you sing?**

—Well, I sang there. The priest received me in a circular room, then stepped aside, so I could not even see him. He began to whisper something. I heard the whisper amplify around the room. That’s when, all of a sudden, the priest told me, “Try to sing.” I am not a singer, but it was amazing how that sound intensified. It was an unbelievable experience! And the idea itself is so wise: to build churches in order to defend against enemies. In my opinion, this alone is sufficient to attract attention to the country.

**What would you answer, if your grandchild asks, “Grandfather, who is the most famous Armenian?” Who is the face of the brand?**

—Of course that would be Saryan. There are many wonderful Armenians — musicians, scientists, writers, sculptors. However, I love Saryan the most. Generally speaking, is the Armenian different from the Georgian or the Azerbaijani? Yes, he is different.

How is he different? Mostly the difference is the key in the branding of the country.

—How he is different from the Azerbaijani is easier to judge, as the culture is very different. The Azerbaijanis are a much less ancient nation. In addition, the Christian grounds are different from the Muslim ones. The main thing that makes the Armenians different from the Georgians is the diligence of the former — and maybe this is forced diligence, as the land of Armenia is not fertile: the stones are all around and one has to fight and work very hard. If in Georgia an orange tree will grow wherever you put a stick, as the saying goes, then in Armenia the situation is not quite like that. The Armenian nation is less striking than the Georgians — perhaps more self-restrained, and in general more sullen. However, there are many similarities as well, particularly in cuisine.

You have lived several years abroad. Have you perceived any differences between Soviet Armenians and those born in the West?

—I came to know many Armenians living in France and the US. Most of them are quite well-known, born to aristocratic families. These are friends of my parents. Our family had a very close friend, a certain Ghambarov — well-groomed, exquisite, fluent in several languages. He left for the West in 1923, at a very young age, upon the establishment of the Soviet regime. These are absolutely different people than the ones I met in Yerevan. Just like the Russians who left in the 1920s, they are very different from the ones that stayed behind.
ARMEonian paradox

It must be said that an inherent paradox is revealed when considering Armenians in a global context. Thus today, while at least three famous Armenians — Charles Aznavour, Cher, and Andre Agassi — have thousands of fans all over the world, to a foreigner none of them is a representative face of Armenia. Similarly, the shelves of Western supermarkets and boutiques today may carry a variety of goods produced in Armenia, yet, with some exceptions, their main competitive quality does not lie in the fact of their country of origin. Meanwhile the brand of the country, together with many other factors, is reflected in the ratings of the Geneva Global Competitiveness Report, in which those of 126 countries, including Armenia, are published. Countries create their own brands today and compete with each other just like the large corporations: they develop their logos, identify recognizable symbols, and invent slogans, compressing the entire information to a minimum for the sake of easy recognition. This is the rule of branding.

One must also take into account that today, in the age of globalization, individual countries, just like any advertiser, trust only professionals to handle their most valuable information. This is usual practice.
WALLY OLL INCE
There is a man in London who consults political parties, governments, and corporations. He developed the corporate images of giants (Orange and BT); banks (Direct First; Midland Bank) and charitable organizations. They say that he single-handedly created Tony Blair’s “Cool Britannia” and “New Labor.” Indeed, the most important brands that made Wally Ollince famous all over the world were the ones he created for the countries which turned to his services. The list comprises such countrees as Spain, Great Britain, Portugal, and Germany. Currently Wally Ollince is consulting Poland.

Could you tell, is there a clear image of Armenia in the mind of a European?
— In Russia, Turkey, and probably France, where the presence of Armenians is fairly obvious, people might have some notion of your country, but I would not start speaking about the Europeans as a whole.

Then what is the country that people might confuse Armenia with?
— Theoretically someone might confuse Armenia with Albania, as they sound similar. However, if we compare Armenians with another nation, then the Jews would come closest in terms of shared characteristics.

What do you think is the key distinctive feature of Armenia that can make it a known brand?
— The Armenians have an ancient and rich history; a unique church and a unique Diaspora all over the world. I also think that Armenians are quite strong in commerce.

In which case, would it be interesting for you to work with Armenia?
— If someone from the Armenian Government or other stakeholders turn to me with some terms of reference, then I see no reason not to work with them.

P.S. Of course that would be very nice for me, and maybe then the foreigner will know how to fill the pause in his mind after meeting an Armenian.

AGNESSA HOVHANNISYAN
The famous TV journalist Agnessa (Ana) Hovhannisyan is the producer, writer, and host of “Global Advertising” on the DVT-VIASAT channel. The program offers Russian audiences advertising the way it should be, that is to say, short artistic masterpieces, as opposed to the generic commercials we’re bombardeed with every day. As Hovhannisyan’s show has become a showcase for top-notch advertising talent, her popularity has grown exponentially. Steeped in music since childhood, Agnessa has performed as a soloist with symphonic orchestras in France, Greece, Italy, and Poland. In 1992-1993 she taught at Nco Chio, one of Greece’s most prestigious educational institutions. Agnessa’s television career began in 1993. For five years she worked for various RTR channel programs comprising “Pulse,” “VID,” “Telescope,” and “SSS.” Subsequently she worked for NTV, in the programs “Old TV set,” “SEGONJACHKO,” and “The Red Arrow.” On the TNT channel she was the author and host of the “Biie k tele” program. Agnessa Hovhannisyan is also the director of documentaries broadcast on RTTV.
ARMENIAN DUDUK from Djivan Gasparyan is an exclusive collection. The exclusiveness of this collection is in the duduk, which is made by well-known masters and tuned up by Maestro Djivan Gasparyan. This instrument made in 1000 examples. Each of them has gold signature of Maestro that is a quality confirmation for the latter. Besides the duduk, this collection includes one information booklet, one CD recorded of well-known contemporary duduk players, as well as original compositions executed by the famous jazz and ethno-folk musicians, one DVD of a film translated in 4 languages, where Maestro Djivan tells interesting stories about the national instrument. Besides this film, there is a music video of Djivan Gasparyan after the “Msho Gorani” music.

Thus, purchasing this collection you will inscribe your name in the history of duduk that the value, as the value of each masterpiece, increases in the time. In a certain sense, you will become a member of an aesthete club, including your name in addition to their creators.

ARMENIAN DUDUK from Djivan Gasparyan collection is made with love and respect to the ancient Armenian traditions, and you will be able to become a part of ancient and beautiful legend about duduk that is the music of our heart.

Part of the income received from the sale of the ARMENIAN DUDUK from Djivan Gasparyan collection, will be sent for the duduk school construction of Djivan Gasparyan. For information about the purchase of the ARMENIAN DUDUK from Djivan Gasparyan collection, call:

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The Thinking Rabbit

Attention! The rabbit now represents much more than valuable fur, the cowardly hero of fairy tales, or the logo of “Playboy.” It’s been a year since a clever little animal with an Armenian name, “Nabaztag,” conquered the world. The Japanese virtual pet Tamagochi or the robo pet AIBO can’t compete with it. This electronic cutie is a breakthrough in artificial intelligence.

Text by Artavazd Eghiazaryan

This is how Nabaztag describes itself on its official website (www.nabaztag.com): “I am a WiFi bunny capable of many things! I can give you the weather forecast, I can sing, change colors, wiggle my ears and tell you when you have new email... I will be your best friend!”

Nabaztag is made by the famous French company Violet, which made use of “emotional technologies” to develop the product. Established in 2002, the company successfully combines intriguing design and advanced technologies, taking into consideration the needs of technology-savvy consumers.

One of the founders of Violet is Rafi Haladjian, who also founded FranceNet, France’s very first ISP (which later became Fluxus), and Ozone, which is behind the project to deploy a WiFi network in France. It was Haladjian who came up with the name “Nabaztag.”

Born in 2005, this cute white bunny became a runaway hit in Europe and the US. Since then, Nabaztag has quickly evolved and offers additional services to its clients.

The WiFi-connected plastic rabbit has numerous talents: in addition to tasks like sending e-mail and reading weather forecasts, it can give stock reports, play a song in mp3 format, or just tell the time. Each Nabaztag is unique. Apart from playing music, speaking, whistling, and lighting up in different colors, a Nabaztag can sometimes share its “thoughts” with its owner. For instance, it can get moody if, say, its owner has received too few e-mail or SMS messages during the week. It is also able to communicate with other Nabaztags and even get married! After tying the knot, it can replicate the movements, sounds, and habits of its better half. Finally, users can load audio files on the Nabaztag site and share them with other users.

Fun and useful in equal measure, Nabaztag retails for the very reasonable price of around 115 euros.
Finally! The muzzle of the rabbit radiates pink light — my client has sent a letter for which I’ve been waiting for several hours. Hurry up, now I need to check my e-mail!

Suddenly my Nabaztag began to blink and sang: “I JUST CAAAALLED TO SAAY I LOOVE YOUUUU.” The singing message was sent to me by my boyfriend, Nick. I know he’s thinking about me!

I like how it moves its ears while sitting on the coffee table in the dining room. Nabaztag is my dog’s best friend. My dog plays with it for hours. I think I could even send a message to my dog through Nabaztag.

Now my Nabaztag wiggles its ears. Virginia just left for her office in New York. This is our secret code. When her Nabaztag wiggles its ears, mine does the same.

I sent a message to my husband, telling him not to forget to buy bread on his way home from work. His rabbit was sitting on the table and everyone heard the message. My husband was so ashamed that now he does not forget anything! Nabaztag is so CUTE!

RAFI HALADJIAN, CREATOR OF INTELLIGENT ENVIRONMENTS, IN HIS OWN WORDS

They often ask me, “Is Nabaztag a fruit of my fondness for literature, a purely scientific or commercial product, or something else?” Well, I’m not too fond of literature, and was not obsessed with the idea of creating a talking rabbit. Nabaztag is the result of the interconnection of a scientific process, a number of chance occurrences, and of course a purely commercial project. In this age of endless information streams, people have become more closed, stuck to a keyboard and a monitor. What they lack is live communication. A major objective of our company is to tear people off their computer monitors. In the past, I dedicated most of my career to the creation of a certain virtual space online. Now the idea is radically different: our goal is to give people both access to information and enjoyment of a physical environment. Nabaztag is the first object that helped us implement this. We want users to communicate, move, and play with the physical object, not just simply look at it as though staring at a computer screen. Some believe that Nabaztag is a step forward in making the cherished dream of artificial intelligence come true. I really think that Nabaztag will facilitate our relationship with technical objects, but this is not about robotics per se. Rather, our goal is the creation of an intelligent environment where all the objects will be interconnected, “intelligent,” flexible, and capable of reacting to the user’s mood. The “brain” of these objects will be located on the online server. There will be even more options if offline systems of artificial intelligence are used. As for the name of our creation, well, the whole world knows what Tamagochi is, though few people speak Japanese. With Nabaztag, my thinking was, “Why shouldn’t humanity learn at least one word in Armenian?”}

the best of 2008 yerevan
Golden Surname

Geneva, Mardin, Aleppo, Beirut, Brussels. The unique style of Boghossian Jewelry took shape in all of these cities. A genuine Armenian aspiration to make something radically new — without neglecting tradition — is the key distinguishing feature of this company. Its president, Albert Boghossian, talked about the history of the famous brand and the art of modern jewelry.

interview by Gregory Petrosyan
photo by Evgeny Zenchksov
Your business is family-owned... — I am a representative of the third generation of our family in this business. My great-grandfather started it in the Ottoman Empire, then my grandfather continued it in Syria and Lebanon. Around 30 years ago we moved to Belgium and Switzerland. When I say “we” I mean myself and my brother, who is in charge of our business in Brussels, whereas I work in Geneva.

What is the story of the Boghossian brand? How did your ancestor become a jeweler?
— My great-grandfather was a jeweler in a time when the profession did not exist in the form that we're familiar with today. In those years there were several silversmiths in the City of Mardin, Turkey, where my family lived. At 17 my grandfather was already a skilled jeweler. And when one of his brothers left for Egypt, they found a market for their products. After the Genocide my family lost its business but my grandfather managed to escape the massacres and move to Syria, Aleppo, where he had to work in a café to make ends meet. After a while he met a Frenchman who helped him sell some items. He was able to save some money, which allowed him to open his own business and go on to become the best jeweler in Aleppo. Later on the whole family moved to Lebanon because of Syria's unstable political situation.

Did you choose the jeweler’s profession because you wanted to continue the family business?
— From earliest childhood my brother and I used to go to my father’s shop to play and help him out. I have always dreamed of getting into the business, although I never thought we would be successful at it. The profession of jewelry is in my veins and I have always known that I will be involved in it.

What's your target clientele?
— Most of our jewelry is designed for women. But we also produce quite a range of accessories for men. In general, our aim is to be appreciated in the most discriminating of circles. Although our jewelry is meant for a broad range of buyers, our primary target clientele is of a certain income bracket. The uniqueness of our jewelry lies in our non-traditional approach to making them. This is expressed in proprietary techniques, great materials, and flawless workmanship. I think we’ve
created a new approach to making jewelry: we try to infuse life into these valuable products, some of which may take up to two years to make. It’s our scrupulous precision, ultimately, that makes our jewelry truly unique.

Are you going to stay an independent company or become a part of a larger corporation?
— We still have enough energy to make the business thrive and we’ll go on pursuing our own way. We have no intention of being “molded” into a larger company. We are proud of our history and name, and don’t want to lose them.

How would you describe the style of your jewelry?
— Although in our works one can see a strong influence of antique elements, the style is thoroughly modern, and one that has found resonance in many parts of the world. We are represented in several markets including the US, but we’ve been most successful in the Middle East and Asia — particularly Hong Kong, Singapore, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, and Indonesia. We also plan to get into the Chinese market, though this may take some time.

Why is there such high demand for Boghossian jewelry?
— Firstly, our prices are not astronomical; they’re simply consistent with the quality we offer. Secondly, creativity is key in our approach to making jewelry. Unlike most jewelry brands, we don’t make jewelry strictly in the classical or modern style. Rather, we combine the two. This is why our products stand out from the mainstream. I accept that someone might dislike them, but I think nobody can be indifferent to them.

What links do you have with your historic fatherland?
— In the aftermath of the Gyumri earthquake we founded a charitable organization in Armenia, which implements humanitarian, educational, and social programs. We help to build schools; rebuild infrastructure in earthquake-affected areas, and also give prizes to children excelling in the arts. Our latest project was the redevelopment of Pushkin Park. In the past it was a very beautiful garden and now we want to turn it into a Japanese garden with a Lebanese flare. It will be a public space for all sorts of performances, including summer music festivals. We plan to complete this project by next summer. ■
THE GRAND SCHEME OF THINGS

The “Grand Holding” group, one of Armenia’s top-five companies, matches profits with far-reaching public service.

Text by Anahit Hovhannisyan
From the photo archives of Grand Holding

The history of “Grand Holding” begins in 1997, with the launch of an Armenian-Canadian joint venture called “Grand Tobacco.” Tobacco cultivation in Armenia dates back to the 17th century, but mass production (up to 15,000 tons per year) started during the Soviet period. In the early 1990s, as the newly-independent Armenian republic’s transitional economy was in tatters, the local tobacco industry also took a sharp dive.

The resurgence of tobacco production in Armenia is closely connected with Hrant Vardanyan, founder of “Grand Tobacco.” The company initiated an ambitious program whereby it invested in a number of independent farms throughout the top tobacco-growing regions of Armenia, providing its affiliates with working capital, equipment and materials including fuel, and technical assistance. Within a short period, “Grand Tobacco” introduced new brands of cigarettes that stood apart thanks to their high quality and slick packaging, gaining considerable market share against strong foreign competition. Local tobacco production received yet another boost in late 2000, when “Masis Tobacco M.V.,” an Armenian-Greek joint venture, opened a modern leaf tobacco processing factory in Masis. Soon annual tobacco production in Armenia reached several thousand tons, enabling exportation to Russia and other CIS countries. The company owed its meteoric rise to Mikael Vardanyan, the elder son of “Grand Holding” president Hrant Vardanyan. After finishing his studies abroad, Mikael returned to his homeland to have an instrumental role in the growth of the tobacco industry.

Following the model of global tobacco companies investing in other sectors, Hrant Vardanyan acquired the decrepit plant of the Yerevan Candy Factory, intent on reviving Armenia’s confectionery industry. Within just a few months, the factory was fully
reconstructed and became home to “Grand Candy,” a new company launched by his younger son, Karen Vardanyan. “Grand Candy” went on to become one of Armenia’s most profitable operations, offering a range of popular sweets and earning the coveted International Standard Certificate ISO 9001.

The power and influence of “Grand Holding” — the parent company of “Masis Tobacco M.V.” and “Grand Candy” — was in full evidence when it successively launched two television stations: “AR” and the country’s first-ever public-service channel for children, “Hayreniq TV.” Recently “Hayreniq TV,” which has won several international awards for its unique programs, moved to a new home — a building equipped with cutting-edge broadcasting technologies — where “AR” is also housed.

Other projects and companies in the “Grand Holding” portfolio have fast become Yerevan landmarks of great appeal and emotional resonance. Chief among these is the “Ponchikanots” chain of cafés, a favorite with students and artists, which “Grand Candy” restored. “Grand Holding” also delights thousands of visitors to the Yerevan Zoo with Grandik, a wonderful elephant which it acquired for the zoo and whose maintenance costs it covers. Grandik has earned its keep by having its image imprinted on “Grand Candy”’s logo.

Still, a passion for the aroma of tobacco remains at the heart of “Grand Holding.” In December 2006, the company opened “Smocking,” a tony tobacco emporium and lounge in the center of Yerevan. Here tobacco connoisseurs can find the largest selection of smoking products in Armenia — more than 200 cigar brands and a wide assortment of pipes, tobaccos, cigarettes, and accessories. It has a bar and a VIP lounge, filled with a wealth of literature on smoking. Since cigar-smoking can be a lifestyle onto its own, “Smocking” is planned to double as a full-fledged club for cigar and pipe aficionados. The project is of great interest to local smokers and tourists alike, especially on the strength of its great humidor room.

“Grand Holding”’s less glamorous yet as significant holdings include “Grand Sun,” formerly the industrial giant “Yerevan Electrical Bulb Factory,” and “Masis Gofrotara,” which produces carton boxes.

Beyond its spectacular business successes, “Grand Holding” perhaps shines most brightly in philanthropy, a sphere that touches the lives of so many Armenian citizens. The Vardanyan Family Philanthropic Foundation maintains a slew of charitable programs aiming to develop the country’s educational, scientific, and cultural institutions, and to foster the well-being of social and spiritual life. Among these are the construction of St. Thaddaeus Church in Masis, contributions to the Yerevan State Polytechnic Institute to assist an enormous number of students and lecturers, sponsorship of annual Labor Day (May 1st) celebrations, and provision of lifetime pensions to Heroes of Socialist Labor.
THE MODEST CHARM OF VAHAKNI

“Come home to Armenia,” urges Hovnanian International, luring diasporans to return to the fatherland or at least obtain a home there — not just any residence, of course, but a spot in Vahakni, an ultramodern residential community just outside Yerevan.

*text by Erna Kevazova*
Comfortable private residences sprouted out of a rock-strewn wasteland, with impeccable green lawns.
Modern Yerevan is a domination of the vertical. The glass and concrete masses of buildings stretched to the sky have transformed the tufted idyll of the capital, their height symbolizing the soar of human ambitions. But not everyone is impressed. Tired of the city’s breakneck pace, dusty streets, traffic noise, and overcrowded neighborhoods, many residents are increasingly seeking a measure of serenity—one which, however, does not exclude the comforts of city life. Just outside the capital, the “horizontal freedom” of the American architect Frank Lloyd Right provides a decisive antithesis to Yerevan’s vertical boom. After a mere 15-minute drive from Republic Square (the heart of the city), you are welcomed to the residential community of Vahakni, the first stop on the northbound Ashtarak Highway.

This suburban island of civilization is located on the southern slope of the Aragats plateau, offering a marvelous view of mounts Ararat and Aragats.

As you exit the noisy highway onto the quiet and perfectly smooth private road, you find yourself in an atmosphere of utter tranquility, thoroughly guarded by security service—the experienced professionals patrol the community 24 hours a day.

In 1998 Vahakn Hovnanian, owner and president of Hovnanian International, Ltd., a company that boasts more than 30 years of experience in construction, came up with
Golf is much more than a game. It is a culture unto its own and a way of life for entrepreneurs.
a new project for Armenia — the building of a residential community. The reason behind the idea was that in those years many Armenian-American entrepreneurs wished to establish businesses and spend time in the homeland, yet were concerned that they would have to make do without the comforts of the American lifestyle. Being an American himself, Hovnanian understood that problem and wanted to do something about it. His solution took the form of comfortable private residences (available for both purchase and lease) sprouting out of a rock-strewn wasteland, decked out with impeccable green lawns, clean playgrounds, and dedicated Internet connection.

Already 35 homes have been built in Vahakni. A major characteristic distinguishing them from their American prototypes, which are often vulnerable to natural disasters, is their solid concrete construction. Seventy more houses are currently “growing up” and will soon be ready for occupation. By the time the project is completed, the 160 hectares of the community will comprise more than 600 private residences and four-unit apartment complexes. Those who wish to buy a stylish American home in the ancient land of Armenia will get to choose from six different layouts. The residences, which are being built by the renowned Armenian-American builder Mark Grigoryan, are separated from one another not by high stone fences but neatly-trimmed hedges.

Home sizes start from 350-550 square meters (with a minimum lot size of 1,000 square meters) and purchase
prices start from 105 million drams (around US $245,000). Financing is available at a low 8% interest rate (in contrast to the usual 14%). Buyers also have the option of having their homes custom-designed.

Once a home is built, landscape architects will design its grounds according to the wishes of the owner. In addition to its hedges and picket fences, the community will soon be provided with reservoirs, ponds, and canals. Nature-hungry city dwellers will have an abundance of trees, bushes, and lawns to enjoy. The only exceptions to what can be planted in the community, as agreed by the residents, are silk and poplar trees, which “litter” sooner than late autumn.

Vahakni’s maximum level of comfort and service will include the convenience of an onsite shopping center. Will be you visiting your friends? Well, you’ll be able to buy a nice gift for them from Giorgio Armani, Gucci, or Ermenegildo Zegna without having to drive downtown. You will also have access to a bank, a fitness center, and a solarium. In addition, Vahakni will have a school for the children of community residents. The school will provide top-notch education, enabling graduates to attend some of the world’s most prestigious universities. Vahakni’s services even extend to transportation: for those rare residents who don’t own a vehicle, shuttle service will be provided for traveling to and from the center of Yerevan.

Vahakni’s social life, too, has a flavor all its own, thanks to the Ararat Valley Country Club and its wonderful golf course, the first in the South Caucasus. The length of the nine-hole course is 3,243 yards (2,965 meters). Irrespective of the course’s relatively short length, the game is not exactly easy here, as players need to have considerable skills for the precision golf strokes. Willy-nilly one is reminded of Sir Winston Churchill’s comment. “Golf is a game, the whole meaning of which is to get the small ball into even a smaller hole with the help of tools, which were deliberately invented in a way so they do not fit this purpose.” Be that as it may, golf is extremely popular among the residents and guests of Vahakni.

The quiet atmosphere of the club does more than inspire one to get into golf or enjoy the fresh air and the serenity; many successful entrepreneurs also use the club for business negotiations. The residents of Vahakni have the privilege of accessing the club. They consider golf as a pleasant pastime with friends and family, and appreciate the club for its great restaurant: its dishes are very popular, and many residents order them for home delivery.

While the adults play or chat over a glass of cognac in the club bar, children play outside and learn the nuts and bolts of the game on the mini golf course. Aficionados of more “active” relaxation will like the heated swimming pool as well as the football, basketball, and tennis courts. One can swim, play football, basketball, or tennis even at night, thanks to artificial illumination. All of which might be topped only by a wish to come back home: a comfortable town home overlooking Ararat.

At the Ararat Valley Country Club, one can swim all year round in a heating pool.
COMMUNITY FEATURES:
* Gated Community with 24/7 security
* Ararat Valley Country Club
* 9 hole golf course (Under Construction)
* Adults, children and infant swimming pools
* Miniature golf
* Tennis and basketball courts
* Mini- Soccer field
* Playground for children
* Attractive landscaping

HOME FEATURES:
* Concrete construction
* Tile roofing
* Insulated windows and exterior door
* Energy efficient gas heating and central air conditioning
* Luxury master bathroom
* Ceramic tile floors in kitchen, bathrooms, laundry room and entry
* Standard wood floors
* Built-in closets
* Furniture grade kitchen cabinets with all electrical appliances
* Over 1000 sq.m private land with each house
* All underground utilities included

www.vahakni.com

Armenia
Hovnanian International, Ltd.
50 Gevork Chaush
Yerevan, Armenia 375088
Tel: +374 10 39-01-02
Fax: +374 10 39-97-80
Email: sales@hovint.am
SCALED WORLD: A MODEL VIEW

“The way you recognize an artist by the stroke of his brush, you can recognize the model maker by his personal style, which is imprinted all over the model,” says Richard Dikran Tenguerian. Unlike Ibsen’s Master Builder, he is not consumed by a desire to succeed. He does what he does matter-of-factly, with utter professionalism and that is where he draws his satisfaction.

text by GILDA BUCHAKJIAN
from the photo archives of: RICHARD DIKRAN TENGUERIAN
Richard Dikran Tenguerian’s reputation has spanned the globe by virtue of his impeccable expertise, his vision, and acumen. “It is very reassuring to work with someone who can address the challenges of an unusual design and solve them with imagination and technique. I hope that the contractors who build this tower are as perceptive and capable as you have been with the miniature version”, said William Louie of the renowned architectural firm of Kohn Pedersen Fox to Tenguerian upon completion of the Taiwanese T’ai-chung Tower II model he built.

That is one of many glowing commentaries that resonate just as commendably with his prestigious clientele, luminaries like Aldo Rossi, Richard Meier and Partners, James Polshek and Partners, SOM, and the Grandfather of Architecture, the late Philip Johnson. Works of art in and of themselves, these models have been proudly exhibited by clients around the world and at Carnegie Hall, Federal Hall, and various museums in major US cities.

Building detailed miniatures of prospective high-profile projects, explains Tenguerian, has several purposes. Models create a visual three-dimensional rendition of what the architect has envisioned and help him to study and further improve the design. It alerts clients of potential discrepancies that may occur in two-dimensional drawings, thus averting costly mistakes in the actual construction. Models also help clients secure necessary building permits and are a crucial marketing tool.

Of Armenian descent, Mr. Tenguerian was born to a draftsman/artist father and a fashion-designer mother. Since childhood, he showed no interest in pursuing a professional career like law or medicine. One fateful summer, as a teenager, he went to Lebanon to work in the architecture firm of Hagop Atchian. Noticing his eagerness and aptitude to learn, Tenguerian was asked to put his creative juices to work. He built his first model. His talent was instantly discovered. The firm invited him back to work for the subsequent summers.

This was the turning point in his life. Tenguerian was overwhelmed to discover that his passion for building models could actually translate into an exciting vocation. After studying at the Architecture Institute in Armenia for a year and a half, he moved to the United States. He studied Architecture at the Pratt Institute in New York while continuing to build models, and in the process established connections with many of the world’s premier architectural firms. After graduation, he struggled, initially, but never wavered in his determination to authenticate his talent. His clients soon knew that he wasn’t merely a craftsman, “but someone who could actually understand architecture and turn their vision into reality.” Consequently, architects sought his services and in 1998 Tenguerian decided to start his own company.

One of his fortes is his ability to perceive each model as an original piece rather than an assemblage of familiar parts. He compares his job to that of a chef imaginatively combining ingredients to create a special dish or a tailor working with a fashion designer to make custom-made clothes for celebrities.
He says, “Just as an orchestra conductor translates the composer’s musical notes into a magnificent symphony, model making requires envisioning a project from two dimensional drawings and transforms it into three dimensional objects while keeping the architect’s dream alive is at the heart of the model-making profession.” Right after obtaining the preliminary drawings, Tenguerian's creativity is put to the test, from visualizing the anticipated outcome to assessing manpower deployment, materials needed, setting up the work phases to the actual building details. He allocates work among his staff according to their individual skills, from those who can interpret drawings best to those dexterous in the art of cutting Plexiglas with lasers, and to those who can assemble, paint, and achieve the finest finishing touches. Throughout the process, he is ever mindful of stringent deadlines, a consideration that demonstrates his work ethics and consolidates his constantly growing reputation by word of mouth.

Tenguerian is wary of the application of new technologies. People might think he’s old-fashioned, he says, but clients seek him out because he “knows the feel of what they want.” On several occasions, he has been instrumental in effectuating design changes himself. Hence his client’s trust in his ability to resolve complex problems.

The finished product is a masterpiece, complete with lighting, painting, landscaping, and final decorative detail. His work is described as “extremely detailed... work done with both craftsmanship and good humor — which are attributes rarely combined when on short deadlines!... product of the finest quality... richly detailed... fine accuracy ... beautifully crafted replica,” just to quote a few clients. Next to his works in progress, his spacious Manhattan studio houses replicas of Armenian churches.

“Reconstructing models of all Armenian churches, especially those under occupied territory, and assembling them under one roof, is a project that I’d like to realize,” says Tenguerian. He thinks he may have benefited from the gene pool of his ancestors many centuries ago when Armenian dignitaries offered models of churches as gifts to royalty. These representations are often seen carved on the walls of several historical Armenian churches.

One of Tenguerian’s major architectural accomplishments is the St. Gregory the Enlightener Armenian Church in White Plains, New York. He designed this magnificent complex with his partner architect Vatche Aslanian. The intricate rendition of interlocking arcades and the conical dome keep the traditional Armenian architectural style alive within a modern context.

Tenguerian’s brown eyes exude discernment and reassurance. He reflects before speaking. One can tell that his understated demeanor and quick laugh carry insight and experience that translate into the quality product he constructs. The fire that propels him is to be true to what the originator of the idea had in mind, as if it were his own. That is what his clients look for. And that is precisely what they always get.

“I am very lucky,” says Richard Dikran Tenguerian, “I am living my dream. Model making is not only my profession; it is my hobby as well. Doing what I have loved since childhood is my dream comes true. How many people can get to do that?”
RED, BLUE, ORANGE.

Which are the places the Armenian tricolor (“yeraguyn”) visited during the last 15 years? In whose honor was it raised and by whom? The chronicle of independent Armenia is also an account of the appearance of the Armenian flag in a leading role.

March 2, 1992, New York. Armenia became a member of the United Nations; the Armenian flag was raised in front of the UN Headquarters in New York.

May 28, 1992, Washington, DC. Armenia became a member of the International Monetary Fund; the Armenian flag was raised in the hall of the IMF.

June 7, 1993, Geneva. Armenia became a member of the International Committee of the Red Cross; the Armenian flag was raised in the hall of the ICRC.

February 5, 2003, Geneva. Armenia became a member of the World Trade Organization; the Armenian flag was hung in the hall of the WTO headquarters.

In 1994 the flag of Soviet Armenia was for the first time raised at the Armenian diplomatic mission in Moscow, where the first Armenian embassy was opened. Today there are Armenian embassies in 62 countries.

September 27, 1993, Vienna. Armenia became a member of the International Agency for Atomic Energy; the Armenian flag was raised in front of its building in Vienna.

May 29, 1997, Madrid. For the first time Armenia participated in NATO’s North Atlantic Council; the Armenian flag was among those of NATO members.

January 25, 2001, Strasbourg. Armenia became a member of the Council of Europe and its organizations; the Armenian flag was raised in front of the CE headquarters.

June 25, 1992, Istanbul. Armenia became a member of the Black Sea Economic Community; for the first time the Armenian flag was raised on Turkish soil.
In May 2005 violinist Sergey Khachatryan won the Grand-Prix at the International Music Competition in Brussels (Queen Elizabeth International Music Competition of Belgium).

The famous rock band System of a Down featured the Armenian flag throughout its videos and campaigns. The band organized a massive campaign in the US in support of international recognition of the Armenian Genocide of 1915.

In 2003 Elina Danielyan won the European chess championship.

In December 2005 chess player Levon Aronian won the FIDE world cup.

In June 2006, in Turin, the Armenian team won the championship of the 37th World Chess Olympiad.

May 20, 2006. Athens. At the “Eurovision” song competition, Armenian singer Andre won eighth place. Throughout the evening, the Armenian flag was featured on the e-voting site.

The sailing ship “Gliccia” — an exact replica of a medieval Armenian ship — began to circumnavigate Europe under the Armenian flag. During its 802-day sojourn (296 days of which on the sea), the ship crossed 22,000 nautical miles, and visited 26 countries and 84 ports.

On October 14, 1992 the Armenian flag was raised for the first time at international football matches, and the Armenian national team played its first match (against Moldova). It was a draw: 0:0.

In 2000-2006 mountain-climber Karo Hovasapyan erected the Armenian flag on the highest peaks of all six continents and in both the South and North Poles.
THE APOSTLE OF THE NEW

They accused him of “anti-Sovietism” and “formalism.” They called him a “Frenchman.” They arrested him after numerous accusations and countless denunciations. The great artist Ervand Kocharyan spent two years and two months in the torture chambers of the NKVD.

text by Harutjun Zulumyan
from the photo archives of Ervand Kocharyan
They would take him to the map: “Show us where Paris is. Where do you want to leave for?” Kochar would obediently comply and the strong punch of the jailer would throw him to the ground. Then they would shower him with cold water and take him to the map again: “Show us where Paris is...” For the rest of his life, the master suffered from bad hearing and often froze in his tracks, gazing at God knew what... Anastas Mikoyan and Karo Halabyan — friends with whom Kochar had studied at the Nersesyan Seminary in Tbilisi — helped release him from prison. Fortunately Kochar had stored his paintings, which were labeled “anti-Soviet,” at his sister Margarit’s home in Tbilisi. For a long time he felt alone and empty. They detested and envied him. They envied his talent, knowledge, and wit. It was not the kind of life he had expected to have in the USSR. Instead of help and support from the leadership of the Union of Artists, he found only hatred and hostility. The master was deeply disappointed. “What is this country about?” he would ask. “In Paris the workers live well, but they are unhappy. And in the USSR the workers live badly, but they are happy.” He was embarrassed. The country was really new and incomprehensible.

Ervand Kochar was born on June 15, 1899, to the family of wine trader Simon Kocharyan from Shushi. At
seven Ervand entered the Nersisyan Seminary, the most prestigious Armenian educational institution in Tbilisi. In 1918 Kochar and Karo Halabyan (who went on to become a renowned architect) left for Northern Caucasus. There they met the famous Armenian poet Vahan Teryan, who helped them travel to Moscow. Soon Kochar was admitted into the College of Painting, Sculpture and Architecture (which subsequently was renamed the High Arts-Technical Workshops — VKhUMETAS), from which he graduated after studying under Peter Konchalovski, one of the most outstanding artists of the influential group “Bubnovi Valet.” Within a year Kochar returned to Tbilisi, carrying with him Moscow’s avant-garde imprint.

“It is impossible to explain,” recalls artist Joseph Karalan, a friend of Kochar. “Kochar would walk wearing a hat and holding a cane, and would put on a pince-nez for good measure, though he could see perfectly well. He was unparalleled. He was always burning with something, always declaring something, speaking against the outdated artistic principles, and attracted the youngsters with the ideas of the new art. We were 18. Once Kochar came and said, ‘Get up, we are going to the Artistic Society.’ We had no tickets, but nothing could stop him once he was set on a purpose! At the Artistic Society Kochar offhandedly told the controller, ‘They wait for us.’ To which the perplexed controller replied, ‘Are you here to see Mantandiyan?’ ‘Not Mantandiyan, but Mister Mantandiyan,’ Kochar sternly corrected him with an arrogant look on his face. After apologies we were immediately let in. Yes, he was unparalleled.”

When he was 20, Kochar posted an announcement inviting anyone interested in art to join him for debates and discussions over the subject. A sign on the door of his Tbilisi apartment read, “The great artist Ervand Kochar lives here.” In 1919 Kochar created a furor with the first exhibition of his works. Referring to one of the featured paintings, “Portrait of a Boy,” a French critic wrote, “The author of this work has preceded the misérabilism of Alberto Giacometti, Francois Grabert, Kafka, and Sarat.”

In 1922, on the order of Georgian Education Commissar Anatole Lunacharski, Kochar was issued a certificate of professorship at the High Arts-Technical Workshops. That same year he managed to leave for Europe. It was a difficult journey. He passed through Turkey, then sailed to Venice aboard a big ship, with neither ticket nor money. He spent the entire journey on the deck, keeping to himself and making sketches. “Well, well, well, we have an artist here!” he heard someone exclaim. Kochar sadly nodded. “This is just great,” continued the voice. “Can you do me a favor?” Kochar raised his head. The captain of the ship was standing in front of him. “Your drawings are wonderful,” the captain went on. “Could you please draw the portrait of my daughter?” She died two months ago, but I have her photo.” Within two hours the portrait of the girl was ready and the artist was pleased to present it to the captain. Kochar spent the rest of the journey in a comfortable first-class cabin.

In Venice Ervand Kochar visited the Armenian Mkhitarian Congregation on the island of St. Lazaro, where he learned about ancient Armenian manuscripts. The last point of his odyssey was France.
Kochar arrived in Paris in the winter of 1923. Once his landlord, Monsieur Doree, saw his drawings and études, he literally forced the young artist to go to Montmartre, the heart of Paris Bohemia, where the same day tourists bought two of his works. “You are a very strange man, Monsieur Kochar,” Doree said one day. “You haven’t paid rent in months and that means you’re broke. Yet you sing all the time.” Kochar replied, “Yes, we Armenians are a strange nation. We love to sing when we are happy and when we are sad.”

Soon Kochar married an Armenian girl from Constantinople, Vardeni, whom he met through his friend Amlik — the son of the great Armenian poet Hovhannes Tumanyan. One day, while coming back home and thinking of Vardeni, Kochar was met by her as he approached their apartment. Vardeni ran to him. “I came and will not leave you,” she cried out as she embraced him. Vardeni was a romantic. She was also rather eccentric and reckless. She once broke her father’s safe, took all the money out, and left for Paris. Soon Kochar and Vardeni had a baby girl. However, by that time the delicate Vardeni was infected with tuberculosis. First the baby girl and then Vardeni died. Kochar was once again alone.

Kochar rented an abandoned space behind the Pantheon. He converted it into a studio, and built a second story as
“They had ten centuries at their disposal,” joked the master when he was asked to create a monument for the millenary of the epic poem “David of Sasun”, “but they commissioned me to design the monument a mere one and half months before the jubilee.”
Kochar was an inventor in the most unexpected areas. For example, he invented a special type of wax color; made a totally new type of modeling clay; and obtained a patent for his invention of a vehicle-ignition tool.
a dwelling. This was the period when he developed his “peinture dans l’espace” (painting in space) style, which soon brought him fame. The style is characterized by the way it arrives at the essence of an image through various aspects and perspectives. The complicated metal structures, with the freakish interweaving of surfaces covered with enamel paint, reflect the forms of specific objects. The sheets of metal, twisting around the axis, generate an impression of time and space in perspective.

In order to make a living, Kochar had to accept orders for drawing portraits and making statuettes. At that time he also invented an especially strong watercolor that could withstand rain and snow.

Kochar’s new landlord, Monsieur Dupont, saw a portrait of a young Armenian woman in the artist’s studio. He liked it so much that he offered Kochar to make a copy of the famous Rafael painting “Madonna with Baby” in return for no rent for the next several months. The work was so successful that the happy Monsieur Dupont promised Kochar to waive rent for a whole year. In less than a week a certain painting and antique trader, who had seen the copy made by Kochar and was astonished by his skills, offered him a deal: he would pay Kochar handsomely if he made copies of a series of famous paintings. The master got angry and sent away the unscrupulous customer. In Paris Picasso was a great fan of Kochar’s art. They say that when the historic international exhibition “Art Today” was being prepared, Picasso did not want to exhibit in the main hall, but preferred a small room. “Who would you like to see next to you”? asked the organizers of the exhibition. “Him, Kochar,” answered Picasso.

The celebrated Leonse Rosenberg, curator of the influential Effort Moderne Gallery in Paris, exhibited Kochar’s paintings. He trusted Kochar’s talent so much, he bought not only finished works, but also ones that existed only in the form of ideas. Kochar was one of the authors of the “Dimensionist Manifesto” (1936), which was signed by such prominent artists as Joan Miro, Robert and Sonia Dalaunay, Marcel Duchamp, Wassily Kandisky, and Francisco Picabia. The manifesto propagated novel ideas about space and time (particularly inspired by the theories of Einstein), as well as the latest achievements in technical applications.

Having attained recognition in France, Kochar returned to the fatherland. Perhaps the words of Charents played a decisive role: “You have to rise in Armenia, like the Eiffel Tower rises in Paris.” Kochar came to Yerevan in 1937, unaware that he would never see his second wife, Meline, again. The borders of the USSR were closed shut for both of them: Kochar was denied permission to return to Paris. Meline was denied entry to Armenia. For a while they maintained a secret correspondence, for which the artist was often called to the KGB.

All his life the master stated his abiding belief that if there is a great goal, then one needs to aspire for it, irrespective of everything, fight, and win. He was a winner everywhere: in Tbilisi, in Paris, and in Yerevan. A painter, sculptor, graphic artist, and caricaturist, Ervand Kochar lived to be 80. In the last years of his life he often jokingly asked how he would be portrayed in his obituary: great, prominent, famous, or just talented? 

ERVAND KOCHAR

Having lived in Paris for 13 years, Kochar participated in all the major exhibitions of the city, including those of the famous “Salon of Independents.” His works were exhibited next to those of Picasso, Miro, Leger, Ernst, Klee, Chagall, and Matisse. “The space painting of Kochar is a great achievement of modern art,” wrote French art critic Voldemar George. “Just like the clean forms of Brancusi; mineral forms of Arp; light constructions of Picasso and Braque; polychrome reliefs of Robert and Sonia Dalaunay; transparent black-lined papers of Lifshets; colored structures of Pevzner; and mobilies of Calder. This is an autonomous art that has its syntax and its dictionary. It opens new ways in front of artists and sculptors.” The famous French critic Raymond Celing wrote, “Modern painting is poetry in verse, whereas up till today it was only prose. Kochar is the herald of the new, having perceived his responsibility and chosen his formula, based on mature principles.” According to another art critic, Saint Elienne, “This wonderful artist has already gained a well-deserved popularity at an age when others are just beginning to paint.”
A Formula for Liberty

Variations in the Style of a Play

Berj Zeitountsian attributes his emergence as a professional writer to a crime called “repatriation.” “I would not have this big audience anywhere except Armenia and the USSR,” he says. “Well, nobody knows what would’ve become of me otherwise.”

Text by Anna Lorents
ART CULT OF PERSONALITY

ACT 1
Scene 1
I was 10 when I moved to Yerevan from Egypt, which was no paradise. But Soviet Armenia was hell itself. We, the repatriated, together with recent arrivals from Abaran and Martuni, lived on Twelfth Street. It seemed that the worlds collided here. An empty room of 18 square meters. We carried water from a long distance, after waiting for it in long lines. On the very first day at school, I got a bad mark in Armenian dictation. The teachers did not or would not take into account that Western Armenian was the only dialect I knew. I changed schools and never got bad marks again. My childhood was a difficult adaptation to alien conditions. I endured only thanks to the primitive rules of physiology. The adults, for whom these rules worked so smoothly, could not stand any of it. I had a much tougher time. I don’t like remembering my childhood.

Scene 2
Some repatriated Armenians were declared agents of imperialism and exiled. My uncle Karapet was one of them. He lived in the “Ziluchastka” district (an Armenian-infected distortion of the Russian “ziluchastok,” or residential area). In Egypt his apartment was on the fourth floor and he worked on the first floor—in a food store. The stairs between home and work were the route of his life. Most likely it was here that he was involved in politics. If it were so, then according to the logic of those times my father was supposed to be the first candidate for Siberia: a strong supporter of Soviet power and at the same time a member of the pro-Soviet Armenia “Ramkav-Azatakan” (Armenian Democratic Liberal) Party. In contrast, we used to pack cheese and several jars of eggplant caviar in our bags and waited. But nobody came after us. An illogical country!

ACT 2
Scene 1
At 12 I read the stories of Chekhov and was amazed. Only in later years did I reach the level of comprehending his plays, and to this day I consider him second only to Shakespeare. Chekhov and Maupassant remained with me forever.

Why did I start to write? Well, I don’t know. At age thirteen I published my first story, in the magazine “Pioneer.”

I was in 10th grade when my first book, “His First Friend,” was released. In commemoration of the 40th anniversary of Soviet power in Armenia, the first secretary of the republic, Suren Tovmassyan, wrote a book. A native of Egypt, he was repatriated in Armenia and moved up the ladder. In his book there was a paragraph about me. Armed with this tome, the legendary singers Tatévik Sazandaryan and Gohar Gasparyan went to him and managed to get an apartment for us. Several stories from my first and second (1955) books won a gold medal at the Youth Festival of Armenia and a USSR silver medal. But to me, as a 17-year-old boy, the most important reward was reading Maria Prilejæva’s “Open letter to Ber Zeitounians.” She wrote so many complimentary words about me!

Scene 2
I graduated from school with a gold medal and entered the two-year Advanced Screenplay Program in Moscow.

Here I saw the top 500 films of the world. I remember the day and hour when the bacilli of two diseases — “film” and “theater” — infected me. After watching the Italian film “Lost Dreams” (renamed “Give a Husband to Anna Giacao” in the Soviet Union), I lost my mind. Shock! Stupor! A bit later I saw “Three Sisters,” staged by Nemirovich-Nanchenko, in Moscow. When I came out of the theater following the performance, it was freezing cold. But I didn’t feel it.

Frunze Dovlatyan shot the film “Chronicle of Yerevan Days” based on my screenplay. We spent three years tinkering with the script before we got approval from Moscow. However, a film made with your screenplay is not your child, but the child of the director. It’s all different in theater. To date 12 of my plays have been staged.

ACT 3
Scene 1
I have arrived at a formula: “If one creates, then he’s free.” In any regime. I was not a dissident. I was not a Soviet writer either. To give you an example from the great ones, Parajanov did not create anything anti-Soviet. Simply, “The Color of the Pomegranate” is not a Soviet film and does not reflect a Soviet mentality. Even during the Khrushchev era the USSR was killing any expression of free thinking. But nobody can control inner freedom. There are writers who did not write even a line that one could feel ashamed of. When I was just a kid I learned some of the basic rules of the game — for instance, I wrote about happenings in this country but called it, let’s say, Egypt. This encapsulates my approach to fiction. Often the key would be expressed in the space between the words and lines. On the one hand, it’s absurd, but it’s also a blessing, because thanks to this we had to go into subtexts, which gave depth to the literature.
Still, censorship in Armenia was weaker than at the center. We thought we could cheat our censorship. I admit that it let us cheat it. In 1974 my anthem of freedom, “The Saddest Man,” was staged at the Dramatic Theater. A couple of days before the opening night, some eight strangers came into the hall. I asked Kaplanyan, the director: “Who are these people?” “From the KGB” was the reply. I froze. “Actions take place in the USA?” asked one of them. “Of course,” I said. The play went on. They did not understand anything. Were they stupid? I don’t think so.

Scene 2  
Recently Paolo Coelho came to Yerevan. Someone harmed by comparisons to Marquez! Marquez is great, I would say a writer of genius. And you read Coelho like drinking lemonade. It is very nice, but you don’t get drunk. I cannot understand this public excitement. I guess it’s a simple case of adulterating foreigners.

Inactivity?  
In 1990 my book “Verchin Arevalag” (“The Last Dawn”) was published, with 80,000 copies. My latest book was released a couple of months ago — 400 copies. But this is not about me. The situation is the same for everyone. I talked about it so much on television that my good friend Norair Adalyan told me, “Well, it is not appropriate. Don’t speak so much about small circulations.”

Literature is a form of dialogue. If the writer does not have an interlocutor, there is no literature. It’s been a year that I haven’t written anything. I take comfort in theater. In a full theatrical hall there are more spectators than readers of a single book. Although… our evolving life keeps offering new topics. Thus the telephone company Armentel helped inspire me with a plot for a new novel. You call home and a strange voice in the receiver says, “The number you have dialed does not exist.” This is not fiction. This is absurd.

file

BERJ ARMENAKI ZEITOUNTSIAN

He was born in 1938 in Alexandria, Egypt. In 1948, together with his parents, he emigrated to Soviet Armenia. He is a graduate of the Piatigorsk Pedagogical Institute and Advanced Screenplay Program in Moscow. Secretary of the Board of the Union of Writers of Armenia; member of the Screenplay-Editorial Board of CS Film Studios (formerly “Armenfilm”). He was the first Minister of Culture of independent Armenia; twice awarded the State Prize of Armenia; prolific arts figure; honorable citizen of Yerevan; winner of “Golden Pen” award of the Union of Journalists of the Republic of Armenia; honorable member of the Rome Academy of Arts and Public Sciences; decorated with the order of “Knight of Armenian Art.”

Works:
- “His First Friend,” “Voices of Our District,” “For Paris,” “Comedy Without Characters,”
- “The Saddest Man,” “Legend of the Destroyed City,” “Jesus of Nazareth and His Second Pupil,” “Stop, the Globe,” “Call of the Gods.”
Faces of My City

Even after repeated public confessions to all of the deadly sins, he is loved by everyone in Yerevan. Maybe it’s because he is a dweller of “Our Yard,” one of the creators of “Our Alphabet...” Well, because it is impossible not to love the actor Hrant Tokhatyan.

*interview by Anna Lorents*
*photo by Arnos Martirosyan*
Hrant, many of your works have been hugely successful. Among them are films like “Our Yard,” plays like “Khatabalada” and “Mea Culpa,” and the video series “Our Alphabet.” It seems that audiences are pleased with everything you do. But which of your roles do you consider the most important?
— The most important is the one that you work on: the one that will be played tomorrow. Right now it’s the one in two new plays with the tentative title “Buratino.” It promises to be very interesting.

“Mea Culpa” was your last theatrical work. Do you think we should even bother looking for those who are guilty?
— That’s the crux of the matter: we should be looking not for the guilty ones, but our share of guilt. The easiest thing is to complain: this one did not do something; that one made a mistake. However, by shifting the responsibility to someone else, we practically admit our own uselessness. In the play the question is posed differently: where was I? What did I do? Not the president, not the prime minister, but myself! Each one of us is part of a complicated mechanism and each has his own share of responsibility. When the prefect of the Kentron community showed me the spots where the now-vanished trash bins once stood, I felt ashamed, because this means that the citizen of Yerevan broke or stole them.

“Mea Culpa” is about life in Armenia. Yet you have successfully performed it on your tour overseas. Did audiences abroad react to it the same way as Yerevan residents?
— In Moscow or Los Angeles the reaction to this or that part of the play was different, and in Yerevan it was even more different. Of course the residents of Yerevan feel the painful points very acutely — outside Armenia sometimes those are not felt at all. However, some parts deemed “unimportant” in Yerevan were perceived and taken quite seriously elsewhere. There is also the language problem. For instance, it is no accident that we’ve toured not in Chicago but in Los Angeles, where there is a sizeable community of recent immigrants from Armenia.

One must not forget that the old Diaspora speaks its own Armenian and has difficulty understanding our language. When I’m abroad, I frequently hear the following request: “Could you please ask the anchors of ‘Haylur’ to speak a little bit slowly?” All the same, we have many things in common and the main theme of the play, which is “What will happen to us?” equally excites everyone here and overseas.

That is to say, what will happen to us in 2015, which is when the action of the play takes place.
— I am sure by that time something will change for the better and we will have something to celebrate on the streets, even if it’s late by a century.

The old Diaspora has difficulty understanding our language. When I’m abroad, I frequently hear the following request: “Could you please ask the anchors of ‘Haylur’ to speak a little bit slowly?”

If we were to take Shakespeare’s famous “The world is a stage” idea, then, we can say that an actor changes from one stage to the other...
— I don’t know why people expect so much from actors. Recently I visited a doctor who explained to me the intricacies of one of his surgical procedures. You should have seen how well he was acting — just great!

But we are amateurs and you are professionals...
— Maybe that is why in real life we are less successful than you are. In a play, the actor is just a person who tries to speak to the spectator. And the stage is not necessary at all: one can act on the street, in the building lobby — it’s all the same. Practically speaking, the actors and the audience create the play together. We, as actors, take into account the possible reactions of the audience, and accordingly are prepared to react, to go with the flow. In fact, we have several options prepared for the denouement.
Do you have a daily routine?
— No. Moreover, I think a daily routine is a sign of something dangerous! Nothing should become ordinary — otherwise it blunts the senses. I don’t know what would become of me if I were to walk onto the stage as a matter of routine, without excitement. Every day I face a new audience and today’s audience cannot perceive what was perceived by yesterday’s audience. In our business yesterday’s work, even if it was brilliant, does not mean anything today.

Lately people increasingly consider you the face of Yerevan. What is that in your opinion?
— It is really flattering to hear it, but I myself cannot understand what that is. As a rule, while speaking about the faces of Yerevan, we name people who have passed away. Only the great ones. Let’s say, among the actors, Hrachya Nersisyan, Vahram Papazyan... This is nice. It’s like sitting in a very comfortable armchair. Imagine, we’re not saying that after house painter! For instance, when the designer and I told him which color to use to paint the room, he replied, “Hrant from ‘Our Yard’ cannot live in a room of that color!” “But I am not Hrant from ‘Our Yard!”’ I objected. “Who knows,” was his answer. And, interestingly enough, he was right. Why isn’t this a face of my city?

What do you like in Yerevan?
— In Yerevan I like Yerevan itself. It is different. There are many cities with better comforts, but they’re so alike that you can’t tell them apart. Yerevan has its color and its smell. My city is a vitally important part of my organism. To some, it was like an appendix that they easily cut off when they left. I admit that this kind of surgical intervention was necessary given their dire circumstances, and now they love the city from a distance. But for me it is my heart, lungs, liver: you cannot cut and throw it away. How much vodka was drunk for Yerevan? However, we don’t want to cross the

I told the house painter which color to use to paint the room, but he said, “Hrant from ‘Our Yard’ cannot live in a room of that color!” “But I am not Hrant from ‘Our Yard!”’ I objected. “Who knows,” was his answer.

Homer and Shakespeare humanity has not created anything noteworthy. We’re even lauding our contemporaries! (I feel uncomfortable naming names because I fear I would inadvertently miss someone worthy.) We Armenians have a terrible saying: “Die, then I will love you.” Maybe the time has come to love them when they are alive. Love not the geniuses, but the talented and good actors, sculptors, artists... And why only them? To this day, following each of my TV appearances, my Armenian teacher, Clara Kachikovna Margaryan, calls me and points out every single linguistic error I’ve made and tells me how I should correct them. “What will people say if my student speaks incorrectly,” she concludes. I’m 50 years old yet I blush like a first-year student. She is the face of Yerevan and there are many like her. Once a 19-year-old guy came to repair my home and presented himself as a house painter. Of course I did not trust him. However, the time came when he showed that he was not simply a house painter, but a beautiful street where it is appropriate and as usual we throw our cigarette butts on the sidewalk. I was so happy to learn that there are young people who once a week get together late in the evening at Republic Square and choose a street which they will go on to clean. Sometimes I go with them. Sometimes they are driven away and even beaten. But they’re stubborn and they’re set on doing their work. These are the people who love their city. There are many things in Yerevan that trouble me. But I think it has a future. As you may recall, once a telethon was organized to collect money for the reconstruction of the old stadium. At Republic Square, I saw with my own eyes an old homeless person approach the mayor and donate his last pennies for the good cause. Why? He will never have enough money even once to buy a ticket and go watch a football match, let alone a concert! Simply, he wanted to have something beautiful in the city. And as long as there are such people, everything will be fine.
Around Europe in 295 days

You cannot surprise anyone with a trip around the world. But what about the Old World? The Armenian sailing ship “Cilicia” did just that when it circumnavigated Europe — sailing through its oceans, seas, and rivers, and ending the voyage in Poti.

Stages of the Sojourn

2004

2005
Triest, Fano, Anakona, Brindisi, Syracusa, Valletta, Linares, Torre-del-Greco (Naples), Ostia (Rome), Portoferreaio: Livorno, Genoa, Nice, Marseille, Barcelona, Malaga, Gibraltar, Cadis, Sinesh, Lisbon, La Coruina, Breit, Portsmouth.

2006
Aybuben — this is what the Armenian alphabet is known as (named after the first letters “ayb” and “ben”). From the very beginning there were 36 letters in the Armenian alphabet (now 39 — as a result of adding the letter “o” in the middle of the 13th century and the letters “f” and “ev” in the 19th century). Where do they come from? Do they reflect the characters of the ancient language? Are they graphical symbols united by a mathematical system, still holding numerous undiscovered secrets? Maybe all of the above? Our alphabet is priceless knowledge given to us. Through the course of the centuries many words of the Armenian language have changed. We have changed too, and now only the letters gaze upon us in their original shape. The absolute does not need changes and additions; perfection does not need revisions. Our letters are perfect.

text by EDUARD AYANYAN

photo by DAVID AYVAZYAN AND NAZIK ARMENAKIAN

the project has been carried out jointly with the YEREVAN THEATER OF PANTOMIME.
UNDER THE LEADERSHIP OF JIRAIR DADASYAN
“hen”
Through the Stoic City of Shushi

Shushi is a strange Oriental ornament where gilded Persian thread is woven into an Armenian pattern. But the metaphor can be taken quite literally: carpets and laced curtains made by the city’s artisans decorated the palaces of not only Russia, but many European countries, including the French presidential residence at the Champs-Élysées.

Text by Anna Lorents
Photo by Hayk Melkonyan
Shushi. The ruins of the caravanserai of the Tarakhanyan brothers and the "Real" College of Higher Education.
It is no accident that the ancient parable about the king-artisan was born in Shushi — to marry the beautiful girl, the prince fulfilled her parents’ condition by learning the art of carpet weaving. Years later, when the prince became a king, he was captured on the battlefield and taken to a strange, faraway country. There he presented himself as a carpet-maker and began to weave marvelous carpets — incorporating in them ornaments that would be recognized only by him and his wife. Thus, when she saw one of the carpets woven by him, the queen understood where the king was and rescued him from captivity.

Yes, genuine artisans built this city. One can see it even today, in the fragments of buildings that bare witness to its former beauty — preserved even after the destructions of 1905, 1920, 1988, and finally 1992. Osip Mandelshtam saw the city after it was viciously looted and ruined, and viewed “the fears that were naturalized within the soul” as the stoic response of its residents. However, old cities are like deep wrinkles that one cannot just wipe off the face of the Earth — Shushi is a case in point.

The battered taxi — a ride in which could be deemed suicidal — arrived in front of the church. The driver, Maxim, who had introduced himself as a driver-tour guide (this convinced me to get into his car) declared: “Kazanchetsots!” and making himself comfortable on the seat... fell asleep. There was nothing left to do but dig deep into my memory. The construction of St. Amenaprkich Kazanchetsots, the second largest Armenian cathedral, began in 1868, “during the reign of the omnipotent Monarch and Emperor of All Russia, Alexander II, and Patriarch George IV.”

**Osip Mandelshtam saw the city after it was viciously looted and ruined, and viewed “the fears that were naturalized within the soul” as the stoic response of its residents.**

The cathedral was consecrated in 1888 — “at the time of the coronation of the son of His Majesty Blessed Emperor Alexander III and Catholicos Margar I.”

The woman from the nearby shop went to fetch the priest. In the meantime, as I looked around, I noticed on one of the walls of the cathedral a rare bas-relief with the image of the Lord and examined the four sculptures on the bell tower... Oh, I remembered. According to the inscriptions on the tower, its construction had started 10 years before the first stone of the church was laid. But first they built the church, then the vestibule, and only then the bell tower! In other words, the discrepancy in dates served as a reasonable excuse for historians to conclude that this was the site of a previous church, built probably in the 18th century — as corroborated in “Trip to Armenia,” a book by Mesrop Takhadyan, who visited Shushi in 1820. There is reason to believe that the previous church was rather unremarkable. But look at this one! If you could only see how luxurious the cattle shed was in the godless Soviet years!

The shop woman returned with Deacon Davit. He made himself comfortable on a church bench and began his detailed story:

“Our church was built of local white limestone. This stone is incredibly heavy and, as you can see, the building is high and has a dome. They built it as follows: they would set one or two layers and cover it with earth, then build another layer... In other words, when the cathedral was completed, it looked like a big hill. The entire project was in the head of the architect — Simon Ter-Hakobyan. Then they removed the soil and our white beauty emerged as if from underground and they called it Surb Amenaprkich Kazanchetsots. Do you know why? The church was built mainly with the resources of the residents of Kazancha — a famous village of artisans who made the best kazans [pans] in this area. Oh, these are not pans, but real masterpieces of art made of silver-plated brass and copper. We have one of those pans — a gift from a parishioner. We use it once a year, when we consecrate the water. Let’s go and I will show it to you.”

We went down to the basement of the church: long labyrinths of corridors and spaces of unknown designation. In one of the rooms there was the kazan made by the artisans of Kazancha — indeed a masterpiece.

On our way back, we entered a room that was a perfect semicircle.

“No other church in the world has a room like this,” the deacon told me. “Do you know what it is for?”

He asked me to step on the carpet laid in the center. Right over my head there was a square hole in the ceiling. 

The façade of a building destroyed by bombardment
The church was packed with “Grad” missiles up to the dome. Even if a single Armenian bomb hit Kazanchetsots, neither the cathedral nor the city would survive the blast.
In the 19th century, the wives of the officers of the local Russian military base asked to have access to a church for Russian-Orthodox rituals. Kanach became that very church.

“Say something…”
“Our Father…”
“You know what to say. The thing is that usually there are two priests in the church and one shall give the other’s absolution before certain rituals, so the other can serve with a clean soul. In Kazanchetsots there was only one priest. This room was built for him. When he stood in the middle and spoke, his voice echoed in different parts of the room, as though answering him. Thus he could give himself absolution.”

Again I stand in the middle of the room and begin praying: “Our Father…”
“This is only for clergymen,” smiled Deacon Davit. “Others cannot do it without a mediator.”

We went back outside.

“After the liberation of Shushi in 1992, we opened these doors and saw that the church was packed with ‘Grad’ missiles up to the dome,” the deacon said. “And even if a single Armenian bomb hit Kazanchetsots, neither the cathedral nor the city would survive the blast. However, the enemy knew that no Christian would ever aim at God’s temple.”

But that’s another story.
Now I’m back on the road, in the “tour guide”’s “car.”

People call the church of Surb Hovhannes Mkrtich by various names. And if the nickname “Kanach Zham” (green church) has a simple explanation (the church once had a green dome), “Kanants Zham” (church of wives) has several, including some extremely improbable stories. What’s certain, however, is that in the 19th century the wives of the officers of the local Russian military base asked to have access to a church for Russian-Orthodox rituals. Kanach became that very church. This is the reason the church was also nicknamed “Russian.”

There are churches that stand as pillars of Christianity, majestic, as if personifying the profound importance of one’s proper mission in this world. But there are also small ones, like Kanach, which were built to soothe restless souls.

We are sitting in the courtyard under a “bylina” tree as the local sexton, pouring spring water into the cut glass, leisurely tells us the intertwined story of his life and that of his native town:

“From time immemorial newspapers were printed and theaters thrived here. There was a “Real” College of Higher Education! In the evening beautifully dressed people rode in phaetons. It was a real city. Plenty of people would come here for their leisure and rest!”
Once construction was completed, the terrible Melik Shahnazar II killed the architect who built this passage, so nobody but him could know the secret of Shushi.

Shushi used to be a health resort. In Soviet times, Kazancha was converted into a mineral bathhouse. There was an iron container right on the altar. There were bathtubs in which holyday-makers lay for hours, nursing their calluses. It was only after the bathhouse was dismantled that the awful truth came out: there were no curative waters here. The stuff poured into the bathtubs was just regular water, heated in the basement of the church. I touched the heating equipment with my very hands. Godless atheists! Is it any wonder that only two of Shushi’s seven churches were preserved?

On our way to the famous Shushi Fortress, we passed by the twin-headed Persian mosque, built at the very end of the 19th century — a wonderfully exotic structure from which you could once see the sky through the wings of a cross. As we reached the caravanserai of the Tarakhanyan brothers, I asked Maxim to pull over. Here, in the courtyard, tired camels once stood while under the tracery arches merchants in white turbans practiced the ancient craft of advertising their wares. The Oriental bazaar both represents the human art of interaction and is an obvious sign of peace — rare for these areas. The marketplace is empty now, but it can still conjure the multilingual and peaceful negotiations of the traders.

We hit the road again. Maxim frowns at the white stain that’s the Shushi Prison and unexpectedly begins to speak: “The prison, damn it, was built at the time of Queen Elizabeth. Ever since then only two prisoners have managed to escape from it. This is a terrible place. I don’t know if it’s true or not, but my grandfather said that there was a missing room in this prison. According to the design, there were, for instance, 100 rooms. They built it just like that, in full compliance with the drawings — length, width, etc… but when they recounted the rooms there were only 99 of them. Everything was in order, but one room was missing. Devilry!”

Here is the famous Shushi Fortress, built in 1750-1752. Deacon Hakop Shushetsi described it in “The Histories of Artsakh.” 50 towers and walled fences 5,000 elbows long (2.5 kilometers) and 7-8 meters high. The fortress has a secret passage — the ladder next to the Yerevan Gates leads to the interlaced caves and up to the river Karintak. They say that once construction was completed, the terrible Melik Shahnazar II killed the architect who built this passage, so nobody but him could know the secret of Shushi.

Yes, “the wall of the city” looks quite impressive. I stand on top of it and try to imagine the brave man who would dare to lead the troops in an offensive, given that the other
The second half of the fortress “is reinforced by God himself” by an impassable gorge.
Wine Couples

Were you to observe people with a bit of creative license, you would find so many similarities between their personalities and those of various wines. And you would wonder: “Is wine the soul that fills the glasses of our bodies?” Here’s a delicious game of association that captures the essence of some Armenian actors and singers.

photo by ARNOS MARTIROSYAN
project realized in collaboration with THE CLUB
style by ARMINE TADEvosyan
makeup by MADLEN KHACHATRYAN
VLADIMIR MSRYAN
Actor, People’s Artist of Armenia, State Prize winner, decorated with the Order of St. Mesrop Mashtots

AREVSHAT, Malaga
Produced since 1907. One of the rarest and most famous Armenian wines. Gold-medal winner in a dozen international wine-tasting exhibitions. Arevshat is made from several grapes, including vaskehat, mshkhali, kakhet, and muskat white. It has exquisite caramel tones and a warm oak aroma.
NAZENI HOVHANNISYAN
Actress, TV host

IJEVAN, Dry White
This wine is made from calvary grapes, which are cultivated in the northeastern regions of Armenia. Ijevan is of light-straw color, fresh with a certain tartness and tender flower tones. The taste is balanced and light.
SHUSHAN PETROSYAN
Singer, Meritotous Actress of Armenia

GETASHEN, a Special Type of Kagar Wine
Getashen is made from kakhet grapes, which are grown on 50 hectares of land next to the ruins of Dvin, the ancient Armenian capital. The grapes are boiled without splitting the skins, the result of which is a rich, fruity tone. The wine’s brick color is obtained through long aging in oak barrels. Getashen becomes even more tender with further aging in the bottle.
ARAMO
Singer, winner of international contests in New York and Yurmala

VOSKEVAZ, White Vintage Wine
This wine is made from voskehat grapes, which have a 3,000-year-old history. VoskevaZ is of light-amber color, with a unique aroma of wildflowers and subtle notes of roasted nuts and oak.
THE GOLD OF THE BASQUES

The Basque Country is located around the western end of the Pyrenees in northern Spain and southern France. Up till recently the origins of the most ancient nation in Europe and its language were a riddle. However, recent research has resulted in a sensational find: Basques and Armenians are closely linked.

text by Vahan Sargsyan
By the end of the 19th century the English linguist Edward Spencer Dodgson (1857-1922) stumbled upon an intriguing discovery. A renowned scholar of Basque studies, Dodgson had begun learning the Armenian language to expand his linguistic horizon. The result was quite unexpected: after only two months, Dodgson noted that Armenian and Basque words are practically identical. Dodgson published his findings in 1884 in the magazine “Euskera” (the Basque language). There were more than 50 words included in Dodgson’s list of parallels. It was like a thunder in a clear sky, particularly for those scientists who had long maintained the hypothesis of the Georgian origins of Basque. This was a weighty matter related to an important vocabulary — traditionally considered the core of any language. The second important discovery regarding possible ethno-linguistic links between Basques and Armenians was made in the 1920s. A young Basque philologist, Bernardo Estornés Lasa, particularly linguistics, historiography, and mythology, has demonstrated otherwise. It turned out, for instance, that the name of the legendary Basque patriarch, Haitor, means “arrived from Hai” or “originated from Hai,” which correlates precisely with the Armenian “Hai tor” (Armenian grandchild). Similarly, the Basque term for thoroughbred, “haitoren seme,” literally means “son of Haitor.” This indicates that in the old days thoroughbreds were considered as such only if they were shown to be direct descendants of Haitor.

Further research led to additional discoveries, illustrating that the above facts and coincidences were only the tip of the iceberg when considering the Basques’ greatest secret. As it was made clear afterwards, the theory of the Armenian origins of the Basques has deep roots in the latter’s collective memory and is reflected in their written sources. As early as the 16th and 17th centuries, the founders of Basque historiography, Esteban de Garibai, Andres de Posa, and Balhaz de Echave considered Armenia the original homeland of the Basques and

Andres de Posa insists that the Basques are newcomers from Armenia. He even demonstrates that the Armenians founded the city of Tarragona, on the Spanish coast of the Mediterranean.

who later became a prominent scientist and academician, was collecting Basque folklore. In the Village of Isaba he wrote down a local legend which said that Isaba was founded by Armenians, who were the first inhabitants of Navarro and ancestors of the Basques. According to the legend, the leader of the Basque people was named Haitor. He came from Armenia with seven sons and in their honor he founded seven settlements in Navarro. It also said that the Basques’ Armenian ancestors knew the secret of metal processing. Later, an ancient chronicle found in the village archives proved the veracity of the oral legend. It is quite interesting that the word Isaba means “trace of ancestors” and, as incredible as it may seem, to this day there is a road in the village called Erminia.

Such connections would well seem like some old Basque men’s fancy if it weren’t for the fact that science, tried to prove it on the basis of toponymic parallels between the Armenian and Basque languages. Moreover, de Posa insists that the Basques are newcomers from Armenia. He even demonstrates that the Armenians founded the city of Tarragona, on the Spanish coast of the Mediterranean. The word Tarragona is reminiscent of the Armenian region of Taron, the ancient form of which is Tarvana. The 17th-century Spanish historian Gaspar Escolano is another important source. In his study of the history of Valencia, published in 1610, he writes that following the Flood the patriarch Tubal and his people, who landed on the eastern coast of Spain, spoke Armenian. Furthermore, Escolano describes the precise locations where legend says the first Armenian inhabitants of Spain were buried. Today those locations, mainly in Catalonia, comprise a string of churches, indicating that these places have been deemed sacred since ancient times.

Unfortunately, all this information was neglected for a long time. In addition, when in 1928 German linguist Joseph Karst published the results of his extensive research, presenting more than 300 Basque-Armenian linguistic conformities and numerous similarities in phonetics and grammar, including a shared system of conjugation, he was fiercely rebuffed by mainstream linguists. Their concern was quite clear: Karst dared to revise the linguistic map of Europe, casting doubt on traditional certainties. The Armenian language was considered Indo-European whereas Basque was not, thus hundreds of coincidences, folk legends, and historical data were rendered meaningless.

Be that as it may, the vast body of parallels between the Armenian and Basque languages required rigorous
**The scientists have developed the most complete list to date of Basque-Armenian linguistic parallels, including close to 1,000 shared words and grammatic elements.**

Analysis and interpretation. Contemporary research needed a follow-up. With this in mind, in 1993 the Armenology Chair of the Yerevan State University launched “Arax,” an Armenian-Basque scientific magazine, the editorial board of which included many famous Armenologists and Basque experts from various countries. “Arax” has published some 30 scientific articles on issues ranging from linguistic materials, mythology, ethnography, and history. The Yerevan State University’s Armenian-Basque programs are implemented in close cooperation with relevant organizations in the Basque Country and France (Gascony). Their research has resulted in the following:

1. The scientists have developed the most complete list to date of Basque-Armenian linguistic parallels, including close to 1,000 shared words and grammatic elements. Indeed, research has demonstrated that one can form a great number of sentences in either Armenian or Basque that would be mostly understood by speakers of either language. Such strong parallels cannot be dismissed as mere accidents. Furthermore, the possibility of loan words is excluded due to the long distance dividing the two nations.

2. The Armenian and Basque-Country highlands share several toponymic words. In the past, such parallels were not thought to hold any scientific interest, based on the fact that other groups of regions shared words that sounded the same but had different meanings. However, the Armenian-Basque toponymic parallels have an important peculiarity: in most cases they mean the same thing. Examples are “aran” (valley in both Armenian and Basque), “karbi” (under the stone in Armenian) — “karbe” (under the stone in Basque); “tsaval” (expans in Armenian) — “sabal” (width in Basque), etc.

**Dictionary**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>In Basque</th>
<th>In Armenian</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>char (bad, evil)</td>
<td>char (bad, evil)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>anti (from there)</td>
<td>anti (from there)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>zati (separate)</td>
<td>zat (separate)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tegi (place)</td>
<td>tegi (place)</td>
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<tr>
<td>jelki (exit)</td>
<td>jelk (exit)</td>
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<tr>
<td>ete (if)</td>
<td>ete (if)</td>
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<tr>
<td>jaraunci (inherit)</td>
<td>jarangel (inherit)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>muruncha (growl)</td>
<td>merenchoch (growl)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mutrci (fist)</td>
<td>muts (fist)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>orma (wall)</td>
<td>orm (wall)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tuil (weak)</td>
<td>tuil (weak)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lajno (size, width)</td>
<td>lajn (wide)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>irurden (third)</td>
<td>erorden (third)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hastadun (weighty)</td>
<td>hastatun (firm)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>urti (water-bearing)</td>
<td>urti (water-bearing)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hastatu (to prove)</td>
<td>hastatel (to prove)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gari (millet)</td>
<td>gari (barley)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>harich (oak)</td>
<td>harich (oak)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hasi (to grow)</td>
<td>hasnel (to grow)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>enchauz (nut)</td>
<td>enkoiz (nut)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>herqa (furrow)</td>
<td>hergel (to furrow)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>orots (calf)</td>
<td>oroch (lamb)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ardi (sheep)</td>
<td>ardi (sheep)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ajnts (goat)</td>
<td>ajts (goat)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hato (herd, flock)</td>
<td>hot (herd, flock)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>matoin (sour milk)</td>
<td>matsun (sour milk)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Some of the Armenian words above are no longer in use today.

**Toponymic Similarities**

- Ashtarak (town in Armenia) — Astarakan (settled in the south of France); Goris (town in Armenia) — Goris (settlement in Gascony); Deba (river in the north of Armenia) — Deba (village in Gascony); Shuberta (ancient name of the Sasun Province) — Shuhera (Basque province in France); Arax (river in the South Caucasus) — Arakses (river in Gascony); Aran (location in Armenia) — Aran (valley in the Gacon-speaking part of Catalonia); Karkar (area in Western Armenia) — Karkan (well-known toponym in Gascony); Karbi (village in Armenia) — Karbi (toponymy in Gascony); Tsaval (settlement in Syunik) — Batalka (location in Gascony), etc.
National festival in Bayona (France). On the kerchief: Pays Basque (Basque Country) and lauburu (Basque swastika).
3. In light of Basque folk traditions pointing to Armenia as original homeland and making mention of Armenian forefathers who knew the secret of metal processing, researchers revealed further etymological parallels. Thus the word “Euskaldunak,” which is what the Basques call themselves, comes from the root word “eusk” (“usk,” “esk,” “ask” in various dialects). This root is etymologically linked with the Armenian word “voski” (gold) and its variations “iski,” “veske,” “aski,” etc. “Voski” is also the root of the proper name Voskan, which means “one who owns gold” and is reminiscent of the Basque “Baskon” (“Vaskon” in Latin sources). It is worth noting that during the era of the Urartu Kingdom, the southeastern coast of Lake Van, i.e., the cradle of the Armenian nation, was called Khubushkia, which literally means “valley of usks,” or “golden valley.” In early medieval Armenian sources, the region was no longer called Khubushkia. The new name was Hayots Dzor, which means “Valley of Armenians” or “Armenian Valley.”

On the other hand, Urartu inscriptions mention the mountains of Ushkiani on the northeastern coast of Lake Urmia. In the time of the Greek geographer Strabo, the mountains of Ushkiani were called “Armenian Mountains” and in subsequent Armenian sources they are known as Voskian (golden). All these facts make us conclude that for our ancestors the notions “gold miner” and “Armenian” were synonymous, which is confirmed by the Basque legends.

Of course one cannot state that all the issues relating to the theory of Armenian-Basque kinship have been settled definitively, but the main point is beyond doubt: that the Basque civilization contains a deep Armenian layer due to migration processes in prehistoric times. It is widely recognized that the Basques are the oldest nation of Western Europe. They appeared long before the arrival of the Indo-Europeans, following initial invasions dating back to 1000 BC. Hence by that time the Armenian element already existed in Western Europe and subsequently had a significant influence on the development of European civilization.

Basque folk legends talk of the basauns, unusual mythological figures who were the lords of the forests and lived by themselves, far from the ordinary people. Analogical characters exist in the mythologies of various nations, but the Basque basauns stand out with a unique characteristic: they knew the secret of metal processing and wheat cultivation. Most likely, at a certain point, mythology mirrored historical events. The image of simple-minded forest giants could have existed in the local mythology before the arrival of the Armenians. In later times, however, the Armenian settlers, who knew the secrets of metal processing and wheat cultivation, were equated with the basauns, as people able to process metal and cultivate wheat could well be considered supernatural creatures. Thus, in addition to language, the Armenians also seem to have brought to Europe crucial industrial achievements. This is why it’s no accident that the Armenian and Basque languages have a number of almost identical words relating to agriculture. As the archeological evidence points to the appearance of the Armenoids on the Pyrenean Peninsula in the middle of the third millennium BC, it would be only logical to assume that the Basques are Armenoid in origin. The hypothesis is further bolstered by recent genetic research, which brings to this story an interesting and unexpected twist. It is a known fact that the Armenians have a marrow-donor problem. In other words, only an Armenian marrow can be transplanted into an Armenian person. That is why scientists have been busy searching for a donor tissue compatible with Armenians. What they have discovered is that Basque marrow-tissue composition is the closest to the Armenian one. As the Basque proverb goes, “Self-knowledge is the real science.”
Levon, King of Madrid

In October 1383 King Juan I of Castile shocked his nation when he gifted the cities of Madrid, Villareal, and Andujar to a certain Armenian monarch. In time, as Juan witnessed the outrage of Madrid’s citizens at his excessive generosity, he swore that the gifted cities would revert to the Castilian crown after the Armenian king’s death.

text by Erna Revazova
illustration by Arthur Hakobyan
The phantom of the eternally young queen Melusine of French legend hovered above the besieged city of Sis—the capital of the Armenian Kingdom of Cilicia. Once upon a time the knight Raymondin de Forez, he of the iron hand and brave heart, saw Melusine in the moonlight at the Fountain of the Fairies—a spring at the foot of a towering rock—and proposed to marry her. According to the old French legend, the dynasty of the Lusignans was founded. Levon V, the last King of Armenian Cilicia, was a descendant of that dynasty. According to the same legend, Melusine visits the castles of the members of her clan “every time something tragic happens to them.”

Cilicia’s days were numbered. “...During September 1374—April 1375, the enemy besieged Sis, which surrendered only when starvation set in, on a Friday,” as a contemporary Armenian chronicler wrote about those sad events. Levon Lusignan could not save the capital of Cilicia. Even before their fatal siege of Sis, the invading Mamluks had penetrated the city. Sis was doomed when the Mamluks managed to take the citadel. King Levon, who was wounded in battle, stayed in his castle, perched on a 300-meter precipice, behind strong walls and towers. According to the French monk-chronicler Jean Dardel, there was treachery by mercenaries from Cyprus, who were bribed by the enemy. And although Armenian soldiers continued to put up a fierce fight, the Catholicoi and noblemen decided to surrender the castle to the Mamluks. The pro-French policies of the king were not popular with Cilicia’s body politic. During his seven months on the throne, Levon, who was born in Cilicia, could not secure the confidence of the population.

Levon was only two years old when his father, Jivan Lusignan, “a good and patient” man, died suddenly. He was succeeded on the throne by his brother, Gvidon. Within two years, however, the Catholic Gvidon was murdered by rebellious Armenian princes. The subsequent election of the Armenian prince Konstantin as king marked the eclipsing of Lusignan power in Cilicia for the next 30 years. Once on the throne, Konstantin imprisoned Jivan’s widow, the Georgian princess Soldana, and her sons, Boemund and Levon, in the fortress of Korikos. Nine months later, Soldana heard a rumor that the cruel king intended to poison her sons, the rightful successors to the throne. The prisoners managed to escape. An old boatman took them to Cyprus, whose king, Pierre I, was a relative of the Lusignans—the Cilician orphans were his grand nephews.

In the middle of the 14th century, when the Cypriot kingdom was at its zenith, King Pierre I Lusignan sought to launch a Crusade against the Sultanate of Egypt with a powerful fleet and a strong army. King Pierre considered Cilica to be a convenient beachhead for his military campaigns. He traveled to Europe to secure the support of Pope Urban V for his goal, and "to ask him to crown to the kingdom [of Cilicia] the elder son of Madame Soldana, Boemund. [The king] took [Boemund] along, but the latter died on the way to Rome in Venice in 1363."
Levon V Lusignan was crowned “with the crown of the Armenian Kings,” first by the Archbishop Ebron in a Catholic ceremony, then by Catholicos Poghos I in an Armenian-Church ceremony.

as chronicled by Jean Dardel. Pierre subsequently gained the Cilician crown for Levon Lusignan, but concealed the Pope’s written consent. There was a period when Pierre even fancied himself “the king of all Armenians”—there is information regarding a silver coin with an inscription stating his “Armenian” title. Such a coin, however, could well have been the work of a counterfeiter.

Back in Cilicia, when Konstantin V was murdered by Armenian princes for wishing to establish peace with Egypt, the country’s nobility suddenly remembered the existence of Jivan’s younger son. Thus Levon Lusignan accepted their plea “to come, accept the heritage.” But coming back to Cilicia was easier said than done. The future Armenian king was captured when Genoa seized Cyprus in 1373. He had to pay 9,000 ducats for his freedom. In order to come up with the ransom, he had to sell his valuables, down to his silver plates and dishes, and give up the estate of his wife, Marguerite de Soisson. But that wasn’t all. Levon was accused of participating in the conspiracy to murder Pierre I. He was able to prove his innocence and, with the permission of Queen Eleonora of Aragon, Pierre’s widow, he landed on the Cilician shore. He made it to Sis in the company of a brigade of mercenaries, after crossing secret mountains paths. In summer 1374 Levon V Lusignan was crowned “with the crown of the Armenian Kings,” first by the Archbishop Ebron in a Catholic ceremony, then by Catholicos Poghos I in an Armenian-Church ceremony.

Following the fall of Sis, the Armenian King, his family, Catholicos Poghos, and 20 Armenian counts were captured and taken to Cairo. Though remaining in captivity, Levon was allowed freedom of movement and a daily allowance of 60 silver dirhams, after the request of some Armenian notables. The Catholicos and the counts were allowed to return home. In his bid for freedom, Levon sent numerous pleas to the Pope, the emperor of Byzantium,
and several European kings. Many, including Queen Joanna II of Naples and Emperor John V of Byzantium, wanted to help, but were unsuccessful. According to Dardel, King Pedro IV of Aragon “for a long time made empty promises and only after eight months turned to the bishops of his kingdom to allocate a portion of church revenues for the ransom to free the Armenian King from imprisonment, but the bishops refused him.”

In summer 1382 Levon’s envoys — his counselor and chaplain Jean Dardel and Sohler Ducarte — arrived in Castile. Juan I, “hidalgo of hidalgos, knight of knights, brave warrior, humble and genuine Christian, Majestic Monarch and proud Castilian,” deigned to listen to them. With burning eyes, Dardel informed the king of the circumstances that made the Armenian kingdom disappear from the shores of the Mediterranean; the sufferings in captivity of the proud Catholic monarch “for the sake of the faithful Christian church,” and his futile pleas to the Christian rulers and his last hope: the noble and powerful Castilian King. King Juan — a zealous defender of the catholic faith — perceived the foreigners’ plea to save “the Christian honor” as one more ordeal sent by God. He had just lost his wife, Queen Leonora, who had died after bleeding terribly during labor. And now he was being visited by these envoys from the East, who turned up on the very day of the queen’s funeral. Wasn’t this a sign from above? Apparently, the Almighty demanded his involvement.

Soon afterwards, a delegation from King Juan arrived in Egypt, bearing rich gifts — in addition to a large amount of money, a gilded silver vessel, a gold cup with a lid, precious wares, steel weapons, 3,000 beaver furs, white marten fur, and four falcons. In December of the same year Levon V was set free. His release was bitter-sweet, as his wife and twin daughters had died in captivity.

Before meeting with his liberator, Levon tried to receive the support of Pope Clement VII of Avignon to reclaim his land for the sake of the Holy Trinity. Levon was received solemnly by the Pope, but his request went nowhere. But Clement VII awarded the Armenian king with a “Golden Rose,” an event that has been recorded in the registry of the Vatican, as follows: “Today, on February 28, we have transferred to the commissioned the jeweler Giovanni Bartoli… to make a Golden Rose.” On the following Sunday, “… the Rose was presented to the Armenian King.”

The gifts that Levon later received from the king of Castile were far more valuable. Juan not only promised to help Levon reclaim his kingdom by giving him six galleys and six ships equipped with all that was necessary, but in October 1383 transferred to Levon ownership of the cities of Madrid, Villareal, and Andujar, during a ceremony in Segovia — the capital of Castile — attended by a large number of Spanish nobles. As the three cities brought the Spanish treasury yearly revenues of some 150,000 dirhams, the Castilian noblemen were absolutely outraged by Juan’s decree. Furthermore, the proud noblemen
To the surprise of the French, “King Charles VI, accompanied by princes, dukes, counts, barons, knights, cardinals, archbishops...” went to meet the Armenian king (chronicle of Saint-Denis, 489).

found it uncociousable to submit to an unknown monarch from the East. Be that as it may, the residents of Madrid accepted Juan’s decision and recognized the Armenian king as their rey. However, they dared to express their discontent to Juan. In the nooks of the city a deaf murmur was growing. The king’s reply to the angry citizens of Madrid has been preserved: “The delegates of the city informed us that the transfer of the city to the Armenian king is harmful for the city and contradicts the privileges conferred on him by my ancestors and me, as the aforementioned city belonged to the Royal Throne and they asked that Madrid shall remain with the Throne like in the past. We encourage this request and mention that this city was offered to the Armenian king as he lost his kingdom while defending the Holy Catholic faith, and we gave to him the city of Madrid with its revenues, taxes, and rights to support him until the end of his days. Our decision is that the right of Levon to the city of Madrid shall be terminated upon his death. We swear that never in the aftermath this city will be passed to another man of our country or a foreigner.”

Faced with local resentment and hostility, Levon ended up leaving Castile. In summer 1384 he arrived in Paris. To the surprise of the French, “King Charles VI, accompanied by princes, dukes, counts, barons, knights, cardinals, archbishops...” went to meet the Armenian king (chronicle of Saint-Denis, 489).

Levon was subsequently installed at the royal palace of Saint-Owen in Paris, where he gradually reconciled himself to the loss of his fatherland. He lived large in Paris — wealth, lavish honors, and adoring French women. Levon’s will listed, apart from 12 Paris churches and hospitals, a number of illegitimate children. One wonders how the Catholic king hoped to bypass purgatory. Could the 2,000 francs he donated to the Celestine Church, a sum that earned 200 gold coins annually and employed two priests, ensure forgiveness for Levon’s sins through the priests’ constant prayers? Incidentally, the very fact of Levon’s will, which was signed in the presence of two notaries, marks the adoption of yet another European innovation by the Armenian monarchy. Up to that date, the last will and testament of Armenian rulers would be carved on the walls of temples.

Levon Lusignan was undoubtedly a gifted diplomat. Thus, for instance, we find him in London as the ambassador of France’s Charles VI, appearing at the court of Richard II. The Armenian king was there to reproach the English for waging a devastating war against the French (the Hundred Years War) instead of aiming their weapons against their common enemies in the East. Richard II was so impressed with Levon that he gave him a yearly allowance of 1,000 pounds, for so long as the Armenian king was in exile. With this, along with the 6,000 francs per year he received from the French crown and the revenues from his Spanish properties, Levon was indeed well-off.

The last Armenian king died on Sunday, November 29, 1393, in the Palace of Turnelle. The funeral of Levon V Lusignan, in full accordance with the funerary rituals of Armenian kings, came as yet another surprise to the residents of Paris. All the subjects of the Armenian crown, the young and old, were dressed in white. Twelve beggars carrying the coffin were also dressed in white — it was the will of the late king. Levon’s body itself was dressed in snow-white and on his head there was a gold crown.

However, the wanderer king didn’t find peace even after his death. During the French Revolution, in 1789, a mob ravaged his grave, along with those of others, at the Celestine Church. The French authorities restored the burial grounds and today the white marble tombstone of the Armenian king is at the abbey of Saint-Denis, in the burial vault of the French monarchs.

The ownership of Madrid reverted to the Castilian crown right after the death of Juan I (1390). And Levon’s dream of restoring Armenian statehood, entrusted to the rulers of Europe, remained an unrealized dream and an illusion.
THE KNIGHTS
OF COGNAC

The history of Armenian cognac began not in 1877, when Nerses Tairyants founded a distillery, but half a millennium earlier. So says historian Boris Piotrovski, who points out that in the mid-5th century Rome was supplied with barrels of distilled grape wine bearing the seal of Dvin, the ancient capital of the Armenian Kingdom.

text by David Grigoryan
The backyard of the Factory of Wine-making, Vodka and Russian Cognac
A TWIST OF FATE
The five percent of cognac that evaporates from barrels every year is “the angels’ share.”

FRENCH PROVERB

In the unwritten history of fortuities, the first chapter would most likely be devoted to alchemy, as in their quest for the philosopher’s stone alchemists would experience plenty of fortuitous discoveries — all of which have played a hugely important role in the development of chemistry. Although such discoveries may not have a direct bearing on the origins of cognac per se, the chemistry and technology behind this exquisite beverage are closely connected with fortuities.

It is thanks to a chance discovery that humanity owes the origin of cognac in the 15th-16th centuries. When Dutch merchants started to export white wine beyond Europe, it turned out that these beverages did not fare well under the temperature fluctuations of long-distance travel.

The solution was to utilize the well-known method of alcohol concentration in wine, i.e., distillation. Thus was born an alcoholic drink called “brandy” (a composite word from “burnt wine” (English), “branntwein” (German), and “branwin” (Dutch).

In the French city of Cognac, brandy intended for exportation sat in oak barrels for several years, due to the political “instability of the region.” When, after a while, the content of the barrels was tasted, it turned out that it was not “good old brandy” but something else altogether. The new beverage was called “cognac” and soon enjoyed great popularity.

But there’s another, similar, version of the history of cognac’s birth: in the 17th century, when there was a war being fought over the Spanish throne and the English had blockaded the French coast, French wine merchants were stuck with a fair amount of grape vodka in their barrels. After a while, when the merchants noted that the beverage tasted considerably better because of aging in oak barrels, they started using the method. Thus the small town of Cognac became the center of the beverage’s production.

As for fortuities associated with Armenian cognac, they go back to the 19th century. In pre-revolutionary Russia, the famous wine-maker Vasily Tayrov, who was the first in the country to establish an experimental grape-growing and wine-making plant, suggested to his cousin, the First Guild merchant Nerses Tairyants, to produce brandy in Yerevan. Who knows what the history of Armenian cognac would read like had Tairyants not taken Vasily’s advice. Fortunately he did, in 1877, with his entrepreneurial spirit resulting in the distilling of brandy at the winery he had founded 10 years earlier inside the Yerevan Fortress. The various products of the factory, which included wine, vodka, and dozbab (boiled wine juice), were highly sought-after in Armenia and abroad.

The first so-called classic Armenian cognac, made with the Charentais method (double distillation),

Who knows what the history of Armenian cognac would read like had Nerses Tairyants not taken his cousin Vasily’s advice.

emerged in 1887. Following an educational trip to France, Nerses Tairyants adopted the classic French technique of distillation: he installed two distillers of the Charentais type, traditionally used in the production of French cognac, and equipped a special room for aging. Thus cognac production in Armenia dates back to that year. By the end of the 19th century, the Yerevan Province, which was part of the Russian Empire, had more than seventy wine-vodka enterprises, including cognac factories. Soon other Armenians, including Afrikyan, Gezalov, and Sarayev, followed Tairyants’ lead to open factories, though Tairyants’ enterprise remained the biggest and most profitable. However, as he grew older and was less able to manage his business, Tairyants sold it to the Russian entrepreneur Nikolay Shustov in 1899. His company, Shustov & Sons, refurbished the factory with the latest technology of the time, and acquired additional facilities for distillation and aging. The Shustovs subsequently built a second factory, equipped with 12 Charentais distillers, and opened seven new facilities in various regions for grape-processing and storage.
1899 marks the second phase of the history of Armenian cognac. That’s when, following the death of Nikolay Leontievich Shustov, his sons Nikolay and Leonti took over the company. Nikolay Jr. was talented in managerial matters and Leonti excelled in the technical aspects of distillation. In a bid to modernize the factory and improve product quality, they upgraded their equipment and Leonti obtained a job in a cognac factory in Cognac, France, in order to learn new techniques. Was he engaged in industrial espionage? Or was he simply enhancing his skills? Either way, Leonti’s stint in France resulted in a much refined Armenian brandy, produced with the most advanced of technologies.

Contemporaries called the elder Shustov brother, Nikolay, “The king of Cognac.” He was really an extraordinary person. It is thanks to him that, contrary to all the rules, brandy produced in Armenia ended up being recognized as cognac. Legally speaking, only brandy produced in the Sharentes “department” in southwestern France had the right to be called “cognac.” Such strictness is attested to by the adage of wine-makers: “Every cognac is brandy, but not every brandy is cognac.” Shustov bent the rules through a clever ploy. At the 1900 International Exhibition in Paris, he presented samples of his brandy for a blind tasting. Following the degustation, and unaware of the samples’ origin, the jury awarded the prestigious Grand-Prix award to the Armenian product. One can only imagine the shock of the jury when it learned that the winner is not a French producer! But one must give credit to the French, who made an exception and allowed Shustov to label his product not “brandy,” but “cognac.”

One can also imagine the delight of Shustov, who today would be considered a PR genius. His advertising campaigns are worth inclusion in a manual. He distributed posters bearing his logo of a copper bell and the inscription “Shustov Cognac.” The posters decorated the sides of steamboats and dirigibles. He had verses, anecdotes, and puzzles with cognac themes printed in newspapers. He even made handsome payments to theater actors for incorporating the names of his products in the texts of their plays (what today would be called “product placement” or “strategic branding”). But these pale in comparison to his innovative campaign in Europe: Shustov would hire young, handsome men, dress them appropriately, and send them to the most famous restaurants in Europe. The young men would order Shustov Cognac and, upon learning that it was not on the menu, would make a loud scene and indignantly leave the place, slamming the door behind them. The campaign had stunning success — Shustov Cognac conquered Europe. The company was winning one award after the other — gold medals at competitions in Nizni Novgorod, Antwerp,

**BLENDING**

Cognac is obtained through blending — the mixing of cognac spirits of different ages. Color (“couleur” in French) is an important component during the process, as it gives the final product its sheen and hue, “reinforcing” the aroma and taste. The blend is poured into oak barrels, where the newly-born cognac will “rest.” The period of rest depends on the specific kind of cognac being distilled; whereas ordinary cognacs (three to five-year-old) require a resting period of three to six months, higher-valued cognacs are given a much longer period of rest. For example, 10-year-old cognacs must rest for a period of one to one and a half years, as determined by individual distillers.

Ordinary and vintage cognacs rest in different conditions as well. Vintage cognacs are put in barrels of 4 hundred liters while ordinary ones rest in special oak containers with a volume of up to 35 thousand liters or in enameled containers of the same size.
New Orleans, and Warsaw. England alone was buying 120,000 bottles of Shustov Cognac every year.

Armenian cognac reached a new plateau in 1912, when Shustov & Sons was appointed a supplier of the Court of His Imperial Majesty. To receive this honor, one had to participate in all provincial exhibitions through the course of several years and not get even a single negative comment with regard to product quality. At that time, only 30 local and foreign companies could boast such a privilege. There are several versions of the story of how Shustov achieved this great honor. According to one, he spent a huge amount of money to bribe his way to getting an invitation from the court. It was right before Easter and subjects came to congratulate the Monarch on this bright holiday. It is clear that all court events and time-honored rituals were strictly regulated. But Shustov, in violation of etiquette, offered the emperor a glass of cognac. This kind of insolence could have detrimental consequences, to put it mildly. There are different accounts of what happened next. Some say that Nikolay II found himself in a tricky situation: he had to drink the cup in front of the entire court and, most importantly, the French ambassador, without wincing. Anxious to show that he wasn't fond of strong drinks, the tsar asked for a slice of lemon. Others say that Shustov himself put the slice of lemon in the glass, so that in case the monarch did not like the cognac and winced, it would look like a reaction to the sour citrus.

After the official ceremony he ordered the destruction of all of his company's letterheads and business cards, and had all of his labels peeled off from their bottles, in Armenia and abroad.

Well, having drunk the cognac and slightly winced, the tsar smiled: “This is wonderful cognac, gentlemen, I recommend it for all!” Ever since that moment, Shustov Cognac became fashionable, and enjoying it with lemon was the way to go. That's also when cognac with lemon became known as “Nikolashka.”

Shustov had truly arrived. Right after the official ceremony during which he was given the title of Supplier to the Court of His Imperial Majesty, he ordered the destruction of all of his company’s letterheads and business cards, and had all of his labels peeled off from their bottles, in Armenia and abroad. His efficacy was mind-boggling. The very next morning, every single Shustov & Sons label and stationery carried the tag “Supplier of the Court of His Imperial Majesty.”

The company kept expanding. In 1913, of the 181,000 pails of cognac distilled in the Yerevan Province, 81,500 were produced by Shustov & Sons. The factory had its own power station, which greatly streamlined mass production. 

Cooperage shop for making barrels of 100-year-old oak

the best of 2008 yerevan 139
Practically from the very beginning of cognac production and for many years, Mkrich Musinyants was the manager of Shustov & Sons.
FIFTH ELEMENT

Never be late for dinner, smoke Havana cigars, and drink Armenian cognac.

SIR WINSTON CHURCHILL

One can hardly overestimate Shustov’s achievements in publicizing Armenian cognac. But his accomplishments would be inconceivable without the input of the people who actually created this legendary product. Take, for instance, the extraordinarily talented and highly educated Mkrtich Musinyants. Practically from the very beginning of cognac production and throughout many years, he was the manager of Shustov & Sons. Musinyants learned grape-growing and wine-making in Montpellier, France, and was perfectly versed in the techniques of these complicated processes. Evidently, his French education and techniques contributed to the exotic labeling of Armenian cognacs in those times: “Fine Champagne,” “Fine Champagne, Select,” “Fine Champagne, the Best,” “Extra,” etc. Musinyants personally selected various grapes for production, developed a unique formula, and in the dire 1920s rescued the valuable reserves of aged Shustov spirits. These are still used today by the Yerevan Cognac Factory to produce the best Armenian cognac. We owe Musinyants for the fame of the potable that entered history first as “Shustov” and then as “Armenian” cognac. The unique taste of this noble beverage is achieved thanks to the climate of Armenia (300 sunny days per year), its volcanic soil, which is rich with microelements, and spring water of unparalleled purity and taste. The excellence of Armenian cognac is also attributed to the Charentais vine, which Shustov imported to Armenia.

Like black caviar, Armenian cognac denoted sophistication and social and political influence. Indeed, the prestigious drink was served at the Kremlin.

In their infancy, Armenian cognacs had exotic names like “Fine Champagne, Select” and “Fine Champagne, the Best.”

The internationally renowned cognac “Ararat” is also indebted to Musinyants, who kept the secrets of its production under tight control. Musinyants went on to rescue the company’s precious products during the revolutionary upheavals of the 1920s, when all private enterprises, including wineries, were nationalized by the Soviet regime. In 1922 the “Ararat” wine and cognac trust was established, securing the resumption of the brand. In the Soviet Union, Armenian cognac was considered not just the best, but also the most noble. Like black caviar, Armenian cognac denoted sophistication and social and political influence. Indeed, the prestigious drink was served at the Kremlin, especially during visits by foreign dignitaries. It helped to solve so many problems and opened so many doors — all of them worth volumes.

Anastas Mikoyan ordered the strongest cognac in the world, the 57-proof “Yerevan,” especially for Soviet polar explorers. And although it was ready on the eve of World
In 1988 the Yerevan Cognac Factory was bought by the French company Pernod Ricard.
War II, it was not offered for sale as it was not intended for mass consumption.

Many people believe that a special 50-proof cognac was issued for the Conference of Tehran in 1943. It is said that British Prime Minister Sir Winston Churchill tasted Armenian cognac for the first time at the conference, which was held by the Allied Powers. An aficionado of noble drinks, Churchill immediately appreciated the taste of the cognac and asked Stalin to gift him a couple of bottles. They say that Stalin thought for a second, puffed away at his pipe, and said, “The Soviet Union is fully supplied with Armenian cognac and I think we can sell it.” Thereafter Churchill would receive his lot of cognac and it is rumored that he drank a bottle of “Dvin” every day. Legal limitations on the export of Armenian cognac to Britain were maintained up till the end of the Cold War. However, Churchill had his own means of obtaining the stuff. In addition to spreading the word about Armenian cognac, Churchill played a substantial role in the history of the drink. Hence another of those extraordinary turns of fate: at one point Churchill noticed that the quality of his Armenian cognac had declined significantly. When Stalin got wind of this, he immediately conducted an “internal investigation” and found out that the creator of “Dvin” and its chief distiller, Margar Sedrakyan, was exiled to Siberia. Sedrakyan was released with no further ado. He was given back his titles and positions, including membership in the Communist Party.

In the hall of fame of Armenian cognac, Margar Sedrakyan, the founder of new cognac-distillation technologies, occupies an eminence place next to Nerses Tairyants, Nikolay Shustov, and Mkrtich Musinyants. Beginning in 1927, Sedrakyan created a string of cognac brands that gained international fame and numerous gold medals in the Soviet Union and overseas. Among them were “Jubilee” (the first cognac of high quality in the USSR), “Dvin,” “Yerevan,” “Nairi,” “Festive,” “Akhtamar,” “Armenia,” “40 Years,” and “50 Years.” A recipient of the honorary title “Great master of cognac making.” Sedrakyan was decorated with many awards, including the exalted French title of “Knight of Tasting.” It is of no less significance that the wonderful cognac “Vaspurakan” is dedicated to the memory of the last Mohican, Margar Sedrakyan.

Armenian cognac entered the latest phase of its history in 1998, when the French company Pernod Ricard purchased the Yerevan Cognac Factory.

For many centuries, cognac, a fruit of “fortuitous birth,” has both witnessed and participated in momentous world events and the interweaving of human destinies. In the catalogue of many legends connected with cognac, there is one which pertains to a particular person but which applies to all the knights of this noble beverage. The story goes that having completed his military service, the Chevalier de la Croix-Marrone, of the city of Bordeaux, dedicated himself to alchemy, in particular to the quest for the “fifth element.” In the process, the Chevalier got into distilling wine and became addicted to low-strength alcohol. Once, in a delirium, he dreamed that the devil threw him into boiling water to take his soul away. Failing to do so, the devil threw the Chevalier into the water once again. When he awoke, the Chevalier did the same with his wine — thus obtaining cognac.

### THE RULE OF THE THREE “C’S”

Different countries have different ways of enjoying cognac. In Germany, for instance, they drink it undiluted before a meal, as well as after it. In Great Britain they often dilute it with soda. In the United States they drink cognac the traditional way, as well as diluted and in cocktails. In Hong Kong, Malaysia, Singapore, Taiwan, and Chinese communities throughout the world, cognac is enjoyed mostly as a table drink. In Armenia cognac is traditionally considered a dessert drink. They drink it with a cup of strong “Yerevan” coffee. Peach, apricot, and fig are best suited as accompaniments to cognac. The cognac glass shall be transparent, tulip-formed, and with a short leg. For a long time, the high style of consuming cognac required the observation of the Rule of the Four “C’s: Coffee, Cognac, Cigar, Chocolate. These days, however, it’s the Rule of the Three “C”s that has proven more manageable: Coffee to start with, then Cognac, and a Cigar for the finale.
the return of the spy

It's been a long time since they called me an Armenian spy in Azerbaijan. With time, my status was slightly upgraded to a kind of unofficial Armenian ambassador in Azerbaijan, though I had not visited Armenia until 2000. That year, when I was invited to participate in a UN conference in Yerevan, I thought, “Maybe I can take a look at the country I'm supposed to be spying for.” Well, my security issues were settled at the top level. All I had to do was to travel through Tbilisi on my way to the Armenian-Georgian border, where the Armenian special services would wait for me. “What if I travel on my own?” I thought and decided to take an adventurous step. Thus, without informing the organizers, I booked a flight that would take me from Baku to Moscow and then to Yerevan. Naturally, nobody was waiting for me at the Zvartnots Airport. I presented my passport and the face of the Armenian customs official changed: “Listen, are you from Azerbaijan?” “Yes,” I replied with pride. The official was baffled and asked a fatally charming question: “Listen, why did you come?” “I got contraband for Surik: two bottles of vodka,” was my reply. Now truly bewildered, he asked: “And who is Surik?” “Khachik’s neighbor,” I said. It was a marvelous picture: in broad daylight at the Yerevan airport, a certain Azerbaijani turned up with smuggled vodka for Surik, who is Khachik’s neighbor! But at this very moment representatives of the Armenian special services showed up. As I was informed afterwards, since they did not know my route, they put the entire border with Georgia, as well as the airport, under high alert. They politely asked me not to joke with them like that. From then on I was to travel in the city accompanied by four representatives of the special services. I was irritated with such guardianship and I decided to run away from them and also to put them to the test. I woke up at 4 AM and quietly walked down the hotel corridor. I descended from the third floor to the first one, but then I saw one of my bodyguards running after me and shouting, “Listen, be a good man, let us sleep!” I was in safe hands.
Presidential Collection.
6 Time Zone.