November/December, 2012 issue (22)

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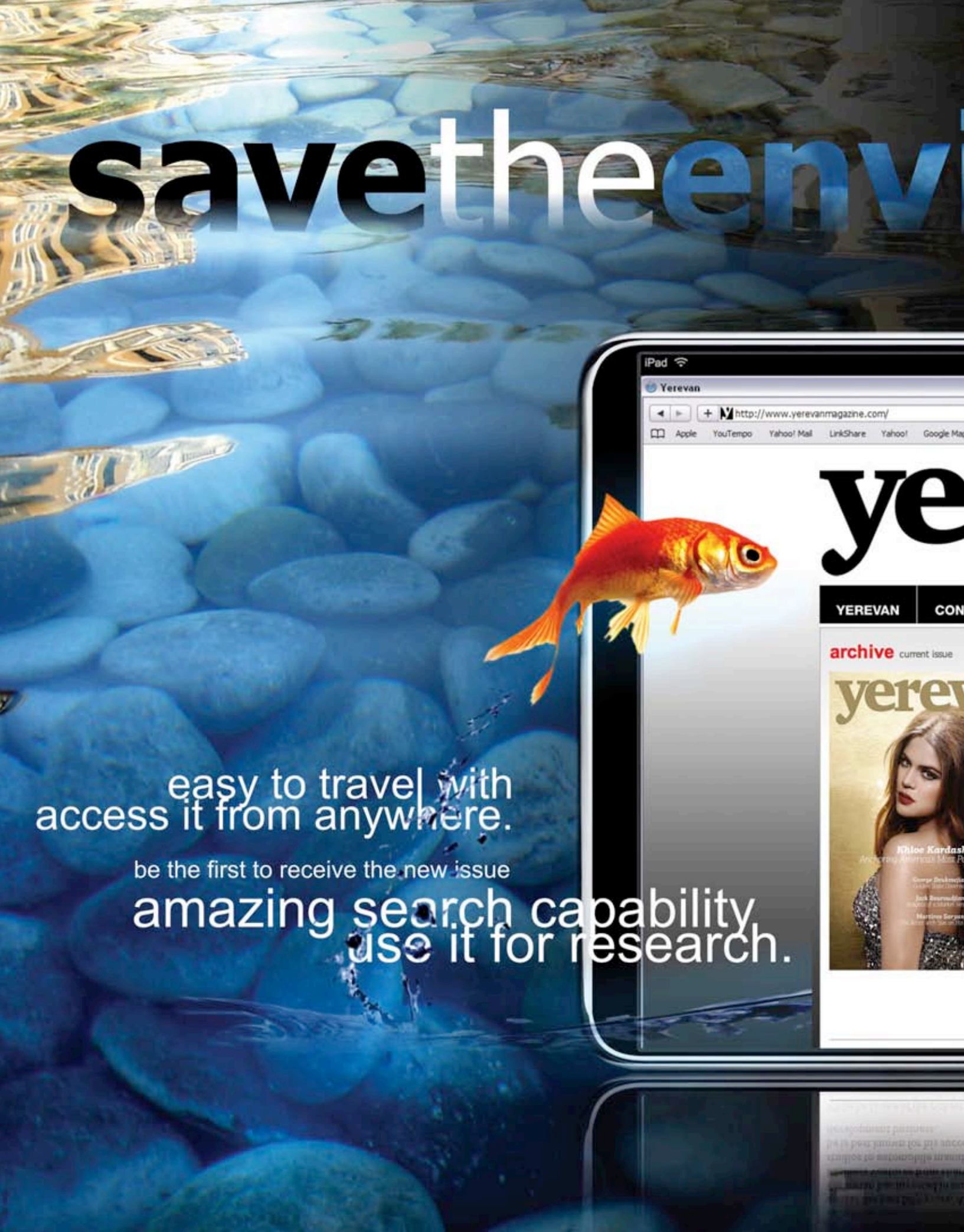
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The authors wanted to find out more about possible Scottish roots of the prominent Armenian miniaturist, Toros Roslin, but in Edinburgh they discovered an Armenian restaurant called... Aghtamar Lake Van Monastery in Exile.

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Food Network's newly crowned Iron Chef and luminary restaurateur Geoffrey Zakarian explains his longstanding stronghold in the industry.

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Map of Edible Opulence

A delicacy for some could be disgusting for others. Our list of delicacies around the world is a sound example of that.

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Dances with Lavash

The eye of the photographer sees art in every-day life. Even the act of lavash-making can become a dynamic ballet with a subtle plot.

Culinary Journey

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...And Oxtail Soup

Secrets of regional winter recipes are passed through generations.

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Love at First Bite

Celebrity chef George Duran's circuitous journey through life has always had one constant: a passion for cooking.

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Tasty Contemplations

Andrea Fehring, Gevork Kazanchyan, and Lenore Tolegian Hughes met at the kitchen table to discuss how food defines us.

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No Small Risk

Food safety expert Armen Abajian discloses the particularities of the new federal Food Safety Act.



Reportage



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An Afternoon in Towne

Our reporter spend the day in Towne Food & Drink. It is American, timeless, and...inspired by an Armenian.

Event

page 84

Yerevan discovered first-hand that the Taste of Armenia is more than a church picnic. Every year over 3,000 people visit the festival in Chicago.





The stars were out in full force for the world premier of the film *My Uncle Rafael*. The event was hosted by *Yerevan Magazine* at the famous Chinese 6 Theaters in Hollywood, California.

Cinema

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Michael A. Goorjian began his career on the stage and on television, and soon expanded into film when he directed Hollywood legend, Kirk Douglas, in his last feature film.

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Not Your Mother's Jewelry

Whether on a red carpet or in an episode of *American Idol*, you have most likely seen Jacqueline Nerguizian's exquisite jewelry pieces.



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Romeo Lives

The power of dance can transcend a true love story from stage to life, as demonstrated by Davit Karapetyan, principal dancer of San Francisco Ballet.

Art Heritage

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Tangible Light

Enjoy the beauty of the Hovsep Pushman's canvas, surrounded in his signature quality of light.

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The Coach That Blew Out of the Water

Former UCLA water polo standout player Adam Krikorian led the United States Women's Water Polo National Team to a gold medal at the 2012 London games.

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Rapping it Up

A skilled MC, R-Mean tells stories to a beat straight from his heart.



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Information about the "great and impregnable" Van is preserved in the writings of many distinguished scholars.

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In Search of a Legend

Gregory Deyermenjian is the explorer who dedicated his entire career to finding the legendary site in Peru known as Paititi.

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Passing the Torch

Learn about Armenians in Romania, their history, past and present days.

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Tsakhkadzor Tap Dance

The Valley of Flowers is heaven for outdoor enthusiasts.



Legacy

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Playing God

Screenwriter Mardik Martin is the creator of the Hollywood classic *Raging Bull*.



A child of Jewish immigrants is asked to play Jesus in her school's Christmas pageant ... don't miss this hilarious and poignant story for the whole family from Pulitzer Prize winner Donald Margulies.

TALK BACK TUESDAYS
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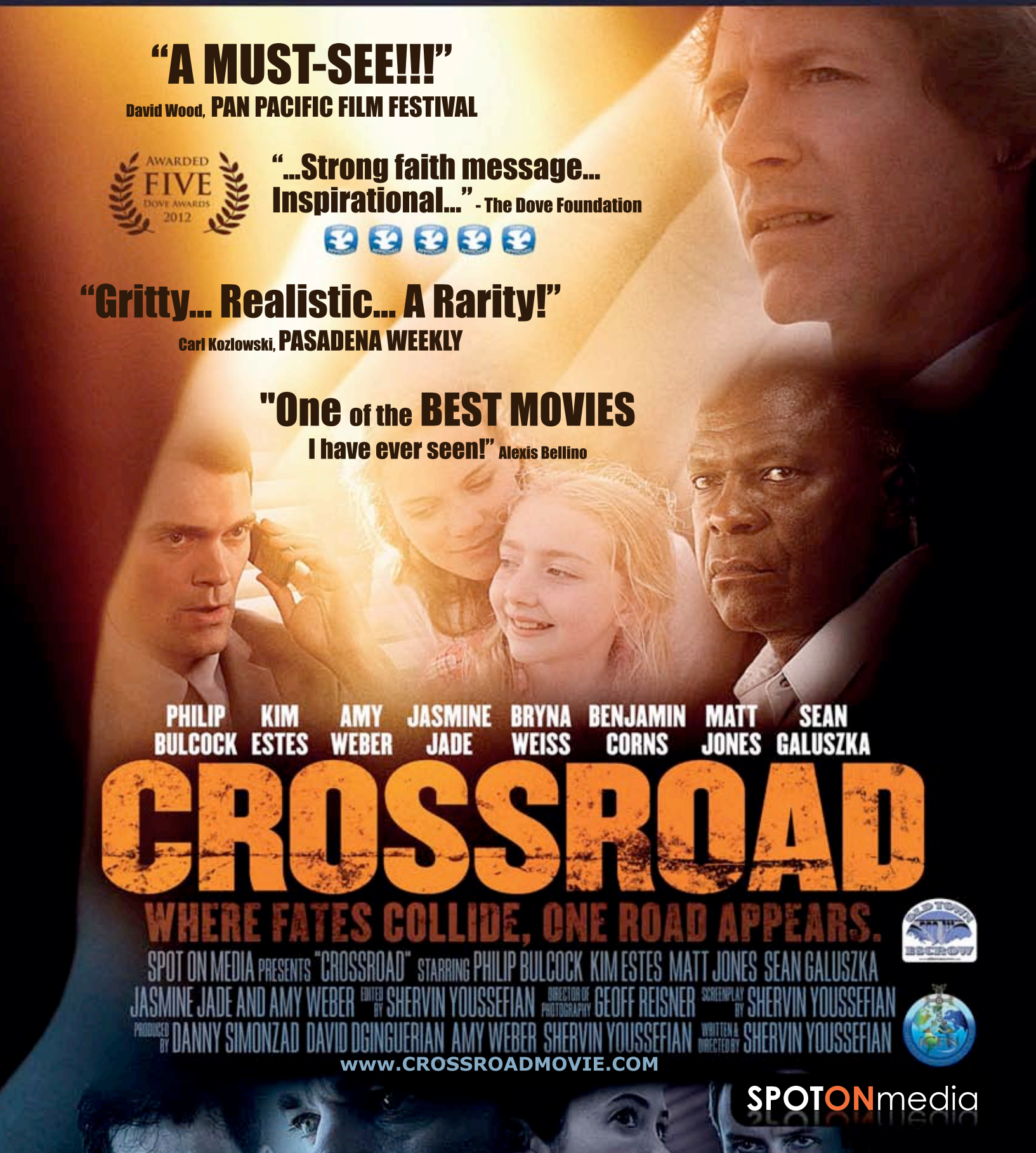


Many Tastes of Happiness

When our team was planning the culinary issue, we decided to stray from the traditional approach and look at food from a different, unexpected angle. We hoped to find risk-takers, new-era strategists, and missionaries of Armenian cuisine in places where locals had never heard the word Armenia. The task seemed challenging, but to our delight, we found and met our modern-day heroes of culinary art.

Today, food is present in our lives in so many ways that extend beyond our kitchen tables. Celebrity chefs, cooking shows, food critics, nutritionists, and scientists have become familiar household names.

In our quest, we immersed ourselves in the din of urban cafes, the warmth of cozy kitchens in remote village homes, and the crisp precision of upscale and boutique restaurants. We sampled unbelievable culinary creations and captured the eyes and hands that created those meals. We got to know some very special people whose mission is delivering one of highest pleasures in life – good food.

Times have changed. Globalization has opened us all to new culinary experiences. The symbolic "melting pot" transformed the cityscapes into sizzling, boiling, roasting and frying scenery with hundreds of scents and aromas gathered from all over the world. Our native cuisine stopped being exclusive to our own ethnic community. People visit cultural festivals to experience music, artistry and also authentic ethnic cuisine. Food brings us, literally, together.

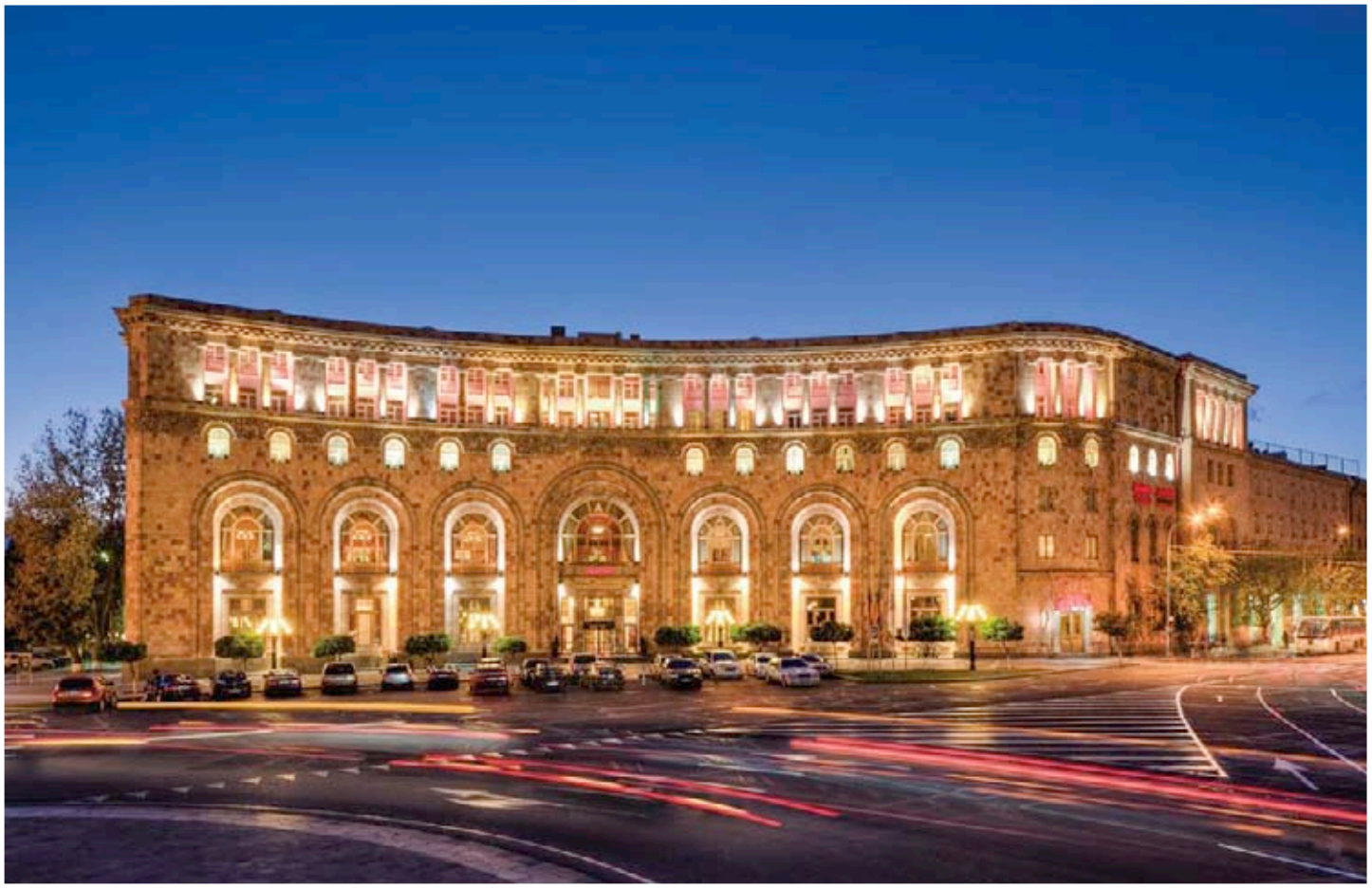
Without doubt, the notion of good cuisine transcends its ingredients; it is the entire atmosphere of the meal that matters, the company, and the mind-set of those around the table that makes the important difference. The humanity of the dining experience is what makes meals memorable for years to come.

Although modern households increasingly rely on pre-packaged products, the importance of gatherings around the table always represents a symbol of happiness and harmony. So, this holiday season Yerevan wishes you, dear readers, to be healthy, happy and surrounded with family and friends.

Cheers and Happy Holidays!



Amos Martirosyan



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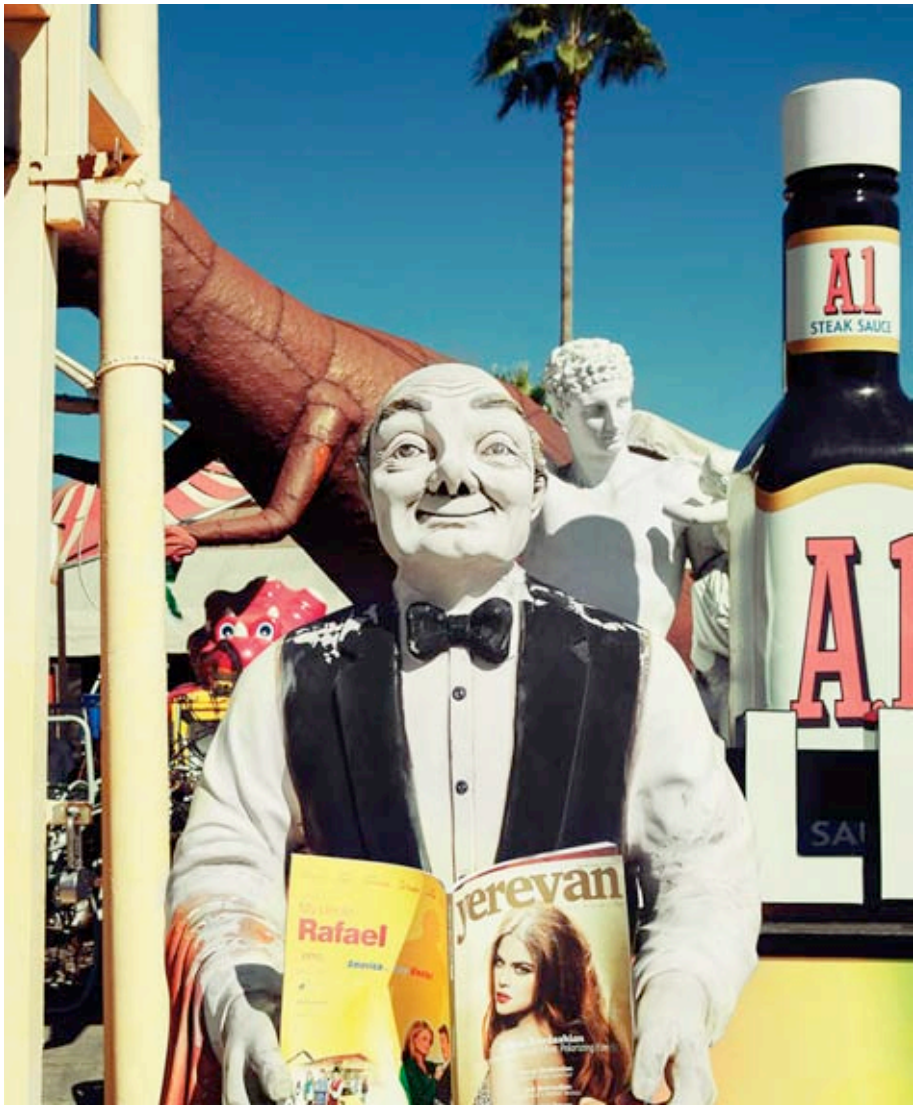
Dear Editor,
The September/October issue of Yerevan Magazine *is amazing. Khloe Kardashian is glowing (literally) on the cover. She usually isn't my favorite Kardashian but your feature story really changed my perspective on her. I will admit that I wasn't always a big fan of the Kardashians due to their constant media marketing and branding tactics. That all started to change after Kim tweeted to respect and acknowledge the Armenian Genocide. Soon after that, Khloe went on national TV and really gave a thorough explanation of what happened to the Armenians on an episode where Lamar was going to play for Turkey. Almost the entire episode was dedicated to the cause as mentioned in the cover article. As an American Armenian, whether it was for publicity or not, I respect her and thank her for supporting the cause. Her show is huge. Who knows how many viewers sat down to watch that night. I bet you more than half did not have a clue about the Genocide...and now they know. I look forward to her future efforts and how she'll shape people's views. Thank you* Yerevan Magazine *for always making the right choice with your articles. I support the Khloe issue amongst all the other issues.*

Cynthia Sarkissian,
Los Angeles, California

I have been waiting to read about Governor George Deukmejian for a really long time, Yerevan Magazine. *It was about time! But as always, you guys never let me down. I am originally from California and lived in Los Angeles during his time in office. He was a great provider for California and implemented really great changes in education. Retired now, I used to work in education and we really benefited from his efforts. He was well respected by all and carried himself as a real Governor should, unlike some of the ones the state has recently had. I do appreciate that your magazine tends to stay out of politics and really gives a personal and neutral view on touchy subjects. The Governor was involved in a lot of political drama but your point of view was very refreshing to read. I learned new things about his personal life that I did not know before. I am not very familiar with the cover girl but I will keep this issue on my coffee table for a very long time. .*

Michael Andonyan
Boston, Massachusetts



I found all of Jack Bouroudjian's advice to be very inspiring for young entrepreneurs and finance specialists. I started trading stocks when I was a young adult, learning the trades from my father. As a kid, he would explain to me how Wall Street works and what stocks are all about. All I saw was a bunch of numbers and food chains that I liked. As I got older, I started to grow into liking finance and majored in International Business. I have interned on Wall Street and currently work at a small investment company. You meet a lot of crazy people working in this field. It is one of the most overpaid professions for a reason. The work is stressful, the hours are long, and your sanity is constantly questioned. With that said, I wouldn't want to be doing anything else. I would like to see more articles like this in the future. Also being from the East Coast, it is nice to learn about Armenians on this side of the U.S.

Santo Topalyan,
Manhattan, New York

The Armenian story is tragic. Through sadness, comes beautiful art. As an art major in college, I have studied many Armenian artists. Martiros Saryan is one of the most influential artists for our people. Yerevan Magazine *is always my go-to magazine for great articles on artists and cultural art. Dmitri Shostakovich's quote about Saryan truly inspired me. His work really was influential and moving. "Love. Fairy Tales" is one of my favorites pieces of art. Also, great choice in showcasing Kaloust Guedel's art as well. He is so creative with his collages. The cover story was also enjoyable to read. I did not know much about Khloe Kardashian. I am an avid reader of your magazine and refer friends to subscribe all the time. Once I introduce others to* Yerevan Magazine, *they are hooked!*

Nazareth Bedrossian
Los Angeles, California



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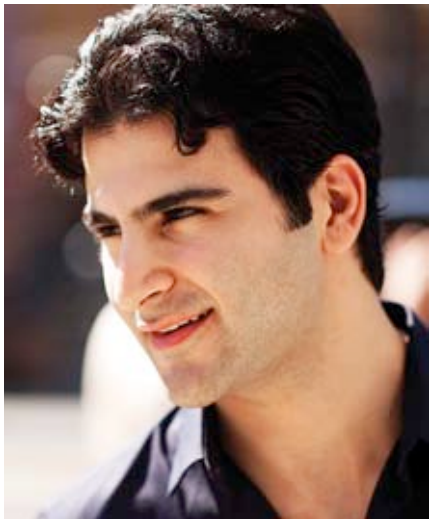
Suren Manvelyan
Contributing Photographer

Suren began taking pictures at 16 years of age and became a professional photographer in 2006. His photographic interests range from macro concepts to portraits, creative photo projects, landscapes and much more. His works have been published in numerous magazines and newspapers in Armenia and worldwide. His latest popular series of photos have had millions of viewers on the Web and were published by *Daily Mail*, *The Independent*, *Telegraph*, *La Republica*, *Liberation*, *Guardian*, *Wired*, *Wedemain*, *The Shortlist*, *DT Magazine*, and *MAXIM*. His photos were also used by BBC, WNYC, and Gizmondo among many other broadcast media outlets. For the past ten years, parallel to photography, Suren has also enjoyed teaching physics, mathematics and astronomy at the Yerevan Waldorf School. From 1997 to 2011, he was a staff researcher at the Institute for Physical Research of the National Academy of Sciences. In 2001, Suren received his Ph.D. in Theoretical Physics from the Yerevan State University where his research focused on Quantum Chaos. He received the President's Award of the RA the next year for his work in the field of quantum technologies. In his spare time, Suren plays five musical instruments – guitar, cello, piano, flute and lyre.



Gohar Barseghyan
Contributing Writer

Gohar is passionate about very few things; however when she is shooting photos, making an audio visual piece or writing on topics that deeply affect her, nothing else seems to matter as she enjoys every minute of it. Born and raised in Yerevan, Armenia, Gohar has been living in San Francisco with her husband and two daughters for over eight years. She enjoys the diversity of the city and its amazing cultural scene. She loves traveling, exploring and trying new things. Gohar Barseghyan has an M.A. in Comparative Literature from San Francisco State University and completed comprehensive courses on photography and film. When Gohar suggested that we feature Davit Karapetyan, we responded with a counter proposal – to write the material herself. The result – an exclusive interview, a romantic fairy tale with a happy ending.



Ara Tahmassian
Contributing Writer

LL Cool J once looked him in the eye, and said "stay cool, my man." He was only 17, since then, the burden of maintaining a steady amount of coolness has weighed heavy on him. Ara managed to convince UCLA to give him a B.A. in English, and minor in Armenian Studies. His poem, "To The Artist and His Mother," was published in UCLA's *Westwind Literary Journal*. He hopes to release a collection of poetry sometime before the zombie apocalypse. Ara says, "Metaphors are a great place to hide, if you want to be seen," and insists anything good about him can be attributed to his mother, humor to his sister, spontaneity to his father, and any shortcomings, his own doing. As a kid, he was in an Armenian play about an absentminded boy who ends up on stage with his pants down. He still thinks of himself as that boy.



Ruzanna Tantushyan
Contributing Writer

Ruzanna earned her M.A. degree in Journalism from DePaul University and M.A. in Political Science and English from Yerevan State Linguistic University. She is fluent in Armenian, Russian and Spanish. Ruzanna started her career in journalism as an editorial assistant at *ArmeniaNow*. Later, as a freelance writer, she covered stories ranging from Israel's and India's anniversaries of independence and economic achievements to investment preferences of the Queen of Netherlands. Her joint project Silent Heroes brought her the United Nations X-Cultural Reporting Award. Having written for print and online publications, Ruzanna's portfolio includes photography production for International Chamber Artists and Tower Chorale, among many others. Ruzanna currently resides in Chicago.



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OMSF at the Space Shuttle Arrival Ceremony

The Open Music Society Foundation was part of the Space Shuttle Endeavour's arrival ceremony at Los Angeles International Airport. Selected by the California Science Center Foundation to present artistic performances, OMSF's involvement comprised the design and production of several specially-commissioned performances that were featured at various stages of the ceremony. "It was a globally significant celebration, marking the shuttle program's extraordinary achievements, which continue to benefit all of humanity. The OMSF team and I are very proud to be a part of Endeavour's historic arrival in Los Angeles through the language of music," said Aram Gharabekian, the OMSF's artistic director and conductor. The space shuttle Endeavour, perched atop NASA's 747 shuttle carrier aircraft, landed at LAX on September 20, ending a cross-country ferry mission and returning to its place of birth, California. Endeavour flew 25 times, traveling more than 122,000 miles and accumulating 299 days in space.



President of Southern Connecticut State University

Mary Papazian was inaugurated as Southern Connecticut State University's Eleventh President and has become the first woman of Armenian descent to serve as a college or university president in the United States. Education leaders, dignitaries and government officials from around the state and beyond joined Southern's faculty, staff and students to welcome Dr. Papazian into the university family. The university organized several events devoted to the new president, one of which was an exhibition that presented the works of 13 leading Armenian painters and sculptors in Armenia and the United States, including Arshile Gorky, Gayane Katchadourian, and others. Dr. Mary A. Papazian is a well-known educator, administrator and scholar in English literature. Mary Papazian and her husband, Dennis Papazian, are very involved in the Armenian community: as a couple they have done a great deal to raise awareness about Armenian heritage and culture, including the Armenian Genocide.

Chess Champions

The Armenian men's team won the World Chess Olympiad in Turkey for the third time in six years, confirming its internationally recognized status as a chess powerhouse. Armenia emerged victorious in 9 out of 11 matches. Sergei Movsesian secured the crucial victory against Hungary in the final round. This is the third Olympiad title in the history of independent Armenia. The first two were won at the tournaments in Turin and Dresden in 2006 and 2008, respectively. In 2011, Armenia also won the World Team Chess Championship. Upon arrival in Yerevan, the Armenian chess team – Levon Aronian, Sergei Movsesian, Vladimir Akopian, Gabriel Sargissian, Tigran Petrosian and their coach Arshak Petrosian were treated like national heroes by a cheering crowd and the president of Armenia.



ParArmenianPHOTO

World Cup Champion Armlifter

Emil Amirshatyan, who represented Armenia's team in the World Armlifting Cup in Yalta (Ukraine), won the title of world champion in the competition. A member of Armenia's Youth Armlifting Association, the sportsman brought Armenia its first-ever gold medal in this sport.



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Armenian Heritage Night

For the first time in the franchise's history, the Los Angeles Dodgers held Armenian Heritage Night while playing against the St. Louis Cardinals on Friday, September 14 in an 8-5 victory. The Dodgers are not the only Southern California sports franchise in recent years to honor the Armenian community in Los Angeles. Since 2009, the Los Angeles Kings have had Armenian Heritage Night for four consecutive years. The Los Angeles Galaxy and the NCAA Men's Pac-12 Basketball Tournament have held versions of the celebration as well.





Elevate 2012

The Homenetmen Glendale Ararat Chapter and the Woodbury University Center for Leadership in cooperation with the ANCA PN have joined forces to launch their inaugural Elevate 2012 Leadership Development Conference Seminar Series. This initiative is designed to identify, motivate and train future Armenian-American community leaders. The series organizers invited distinguished Armenian-Americans, who have achieved success in business, sports, political and social spheres, to share their experiences and the path they followed to success with the young people attending the event. Congressman Adam Schiff, President of Woodbury University, Glendale City Clerk, Managing Partner of Cordoba Corporation, CEO and Chairman of the Board of Home Organizers Inc. and other distinguished people were among the speakers and honorary guests. Over 200 young Armenian-Americans were present at the event.

Armenian-Korean Festival

With the smell of Armenian and Korean barbeque wafting through the air, spectators from both cultures were witness to a number of performances during the festival in Crescenta Valley Park. With taekwondo demonstrations, Armenian folk dancing, KPop, and a hilarious improvisation of Psy's Gangnam style, it suddenly became very clear why this event was taking place. The melting pot is intertwining more than ever before, and Armenian community representative Arick Gevorkian is more excited than ever. "Everybody was asking me, why Koreans and Armenians? And I was saying, why not? What makes us different? The inspiration was simple – we live in a community that has so much diversity. And to identify that diversity of different ethnicities is to honor their customs, honor their heritage, and to have tolerance for each other's behaviors. We have a lot in common that people don't see. We are much more similar than we are different. We hope to make this into simply a stepping stone and involve other cultures and ethnicities as well. We want to see leadership from everyone."

Repat Armenia

To promote and accelerate repatriation of skilled and dedicated professionals to Armenia, the Repat Armenia Foundation was launched in Yerevan. According to RAF's Executive Director Vardan Marashlyan, the Foundation will actively present and disseminate the idea of repatriation to the Diaspora and will support the integration of those in Armenian society who have decided to return to the homeland. Additionally, they will promote the formation of a state policy and social environment that will contribute to repatriation. With a full time, dedicated staff based in Yerevan and a network of supporters and representatives throughout the Armenian Diaspora, the Foundation's mission is to initiate and actively champion the return of professional individuals and families to Armenia.



AFFMA's Comedy Show

From analyzing the ever-so-literal Armenian vocabulary to not-so-conservative relationship advice (for Armenian standards), the Arpa Foundation for Film, Music and Art or AFFMA's Ballistic Comedy Show had everything to make the mostly Armenian crowd laugh out loud all night long at The Comedy Store. In its fifteenth year, AFFMA and the show's host, comedian Ara Basil, came together to form The Comics of Middle Eastern Descent program to benefit future projects of AFFMA, such as the ARPA International Film Festival this November. The five comedians performing were from different parts of the Middle East and used comedy as an outlet to show the similarities between the cultures despite political borders and language barriers. They brought their points across using hand gestures, accents and attitudes brought over from the old country in an expressive, and at times, raunchy fashion.

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The MFA Building Sold

The Armenian Ministry of Foreign Affairs will move to a new building. The current building was sold for $51,271,000 to Tango CJSC, which belongs to Argentinian-Armenian businessman Eduardo Eurnekian. The buyer is obliged to conduct the necessary improvements to transform the building into a five-star hotel while preserving its historical appearance.

Webpage for Armenian Artists

Deem Communications launched a booking Web page that allows Armenian artists in Armenia and throughout the Diaspora to have visibility in the global music world. The purpose of the Web page is to foster the entertainment and music industries and to open new markets for Armenian artists. The idea of starting a booking site is based on the need to find, connect and promote mutually beneficial projects globally. Since its inception in 2006, Deem Communications has presented international cutting-edge projects, world-famous artists and bands to the Armenian public. By working with Armenian artists over the years, Deem Communications has witnessed their talents and professionalism and recognized the need for them to be heard around the world. The booking site features artists' bios, main accomplishments, style and photos. The artists, bands and musicians featured on the Web page represent performers from a wide range of music genres – rock, jazz, blues, soul, R&B, folk, latino, country and many more. The current selection of artists is based on the criteria of musical quality and their ability to deliver a high-standard performance.





Armenian Film for the Academy Awards

Natalya Belyauskene's *If Only Everyone* is Armenia's candidate for the 2013 Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film. The plot of the film takes place 20 years after Armenia's independence and centers on a young Russian woman's efforts to plant a tree on her father's grave only to discover the burial site lies on the other side of the border in Armenia. Russian-Armenian filmmaker Karen Shakhnazarov's *White Tiger*, which is Russia's official submission, also entered the long list of films submitted to the Academy for Best Foreign Film. The submission list represents 71 countries and will be narrowed into a shortlist of nine finalists. The final five nominees will be announced on January 10, 2013.

Contemporary Art Festival

The idea to make Shushi a center of modern art became a reality. From October 1st to 14th, the streets of Shushi were transformed into a huge canvas on which 20 artists created unique pieces of art, often in collaboration with local residents. The Shushi art project brought together Armenian artists from the US, Europe and Armenia for the unprecedented event called 'The Land & Technology' Festival. "The concept of land has a very important ideological meaning in this project. It symbolizes the land of Shushi, the land of Armenia, and technology is today's reality. Whatever we do, there is somehow technology involved," executive director Hary Vorperian said about the concept of the festival. The program included many genres of contemporary art such as open-air performances, installations, photography, video and land art. The goal of the festival was to help people meet and establish contacts for future cooperation. The artworks remained in the city to become permanent parts of its landscape.



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Astronauts in Artsakh

Renowned astronauts from the U.S. and Europe were among participants at an international conference in the capital of the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic, which was dedicated to the late astronaut Neil Armstrong. Among the attendees to the conference, called Man and Space, were professor of the Institute of Astrophysics of Canary Islands and European Northern Observatory Gagik Israelyan and noted astronauts Charles Duke of the U.S. and Claude Nicollier of Switzerland. They expressed contentment with the fact that the first conference held in memory of the world-famous astronaut was being held in Artsakh. Israelyan, Duke and Nicollier met with President Bako Sahakian to discuss issues related to the development of sciences and organizing different international scientific events in Artsakh. As a lunar module pilot for Apollo 16 in 1972, Charles Duke became the tenth and youngest of the 12 people who have walked on the Moon. Claude Nicollier has flown on four space shuttle missions.



Photolure

Stepanakert Airport

A new airport servicing Stepanakert, the capital of the Nagorno Karabakh Republic, officially received a certificate and is now in operation. The airport meets international standards, including security regulations, and is authorized to service flights. The airport is situated about 10 kilometers from the NKR capital of Stepanakert. In 2008, architect Tigran Barseghyan and his team started designing the main building in the shape of an eagle with open wings. The new building, which occupies a total area of 1,200 square meters, will be able to accept 100 passengers per hour. The Yerevan-Stepanakert flight lasts 35 minutes. Flights are expected to start soon.

Yes Hay Em, Yes I Am

The "Yes Hay em, Yes I Am" Festival in Antwerp, Belgium, organized by ARDIA NGO and the RA Embassy in Belgium, was attended by not only Armenians in Belgium, but Armenians from Germany, as well as Netherlands. The first part of the event was a scientific conference devoted to the current attributes and issues of Armenians. The conference was followed by a cultural festival with performances of choirs, dance groups and individual Armenian artists. Among speakers at the festival were the RA Ambassador to Belgium, the Pontiff of the Armenian Apostolic Church in the Kingdom of Belgium and others. The speakers discussed preservation of the Armenian identity, Homeland-Diaspora relations, as well as other issues concerning the Armenian Diaspora.



Ellis Island Medal Recipients

Three Armenian-American women – Nancy Arabian, Alice Petrossian and Joyce Philibosian-Stein – are among the proud recipients of the nation's highly prestigious Ellis Island Medal of Honor 2012. The medals were created to pay homage to the immigrant experience and to the contribution made to America by immigrants who "preserve and celebrate the history, traditions and values of their ancestry group while proving themselves valuable citizens of the United States and live a life dedicated to helping others, whether at a community or national level." The Armenian International Women's Association paid tribute to the winners, who are also long-time and valued members of AIWA.



New Statues in Yerevan

Monuments to Armenian writer Yeghishe Charents and actor Mher Mkrtchyan have been installed on benches in Yerevan's Charles Aznavour Square. Moreover, monuments to Minas Avetisyan, Hrachya Nersisyan and others will soon appear in different parts of the city within the framework of the project "Our Geniuses Beside Us" in Yerevan. Meanwhile, Colombian painter and sculptor Fernando Botero's bronze sculpture, Smoking Woman was installed near the Cafesjian Center for the Arts in Yerevan and two series of statues, Cat and Roman Soldier, were placed in the Cafesjian Sculpture Garden.



ALEXANDRE BAJBEUK-MELIKIAN

"Juggling Woman"

1965, oil on linen, 44 x 37 cm

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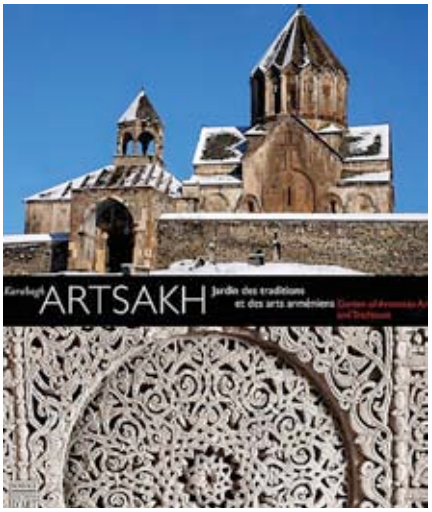
Antonia Arslan

The Book of Mush

Skira, 2012

The winner of over twenty literary awards, including the Passate Edizioni Premio (PEN) award, the Premio Manzoni, and the Premio Stresa di Narrativa, essayist and writer Antonia Arslan for many years taught modern and contemporary Italian literature at the University of Padua. She has discovered her Armenian roots through translating the poetry of Daniel Varujan (*The Song of Bread*) in 1992. Her bestselling novel *The Lark Farm* was published in 2004, translated into many languages all around the world and adapted to the screen by the Taviani brothers in 2007. Her next novels followed in *The Road of Smyrna, Ishtar 2: Chronicles of My Awakening* and *The Courtyard of Talking Sunflowers*. Her newest book is *The Book of Mush*.
On a warm night in late June 1915, five fugitives run away from the ruins of their town in the valley of Mush, after the Turks of the Third Army destroyed its inhabitants. A small group, three women, a child and a man met by chance in the ruins of the monastery and are fleeing to the mountains. They had lost everything, home and family, but fortunately they recovered a treasure of inestimable value and are determined to bring it to safety at any cost. This treasure is the last story of the ancient *Book of Mush*. Superstitiously convinced that the book is a talisman for all of them and that they must stay together, they believe that a reason that it fell in their hands is that the angels who watched upon them decided to deliver it through those who touched it "with pure hands." And so they take an oath that they will defend with their lives the sacred book from every insult and outrage on their path and take turns carrying it.

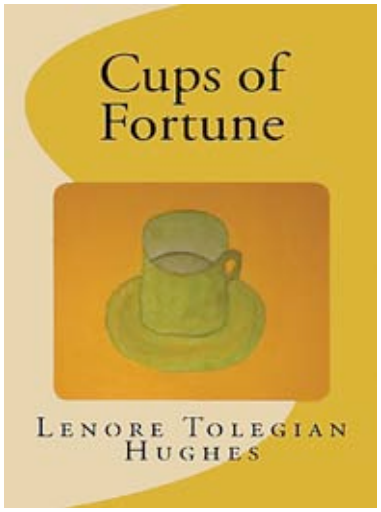


Dickran Kouymjian, Claude Mutafian

Artsakh: Garden of Armenian Arts and Traditions

Somogy Art Publishers, 2012

A historic book written in English and French, Dickran Kouymjian and Claude Mutafian explore the fascinating, mountainous province of Artsakh. The region adopted Christianity early on, marking its destiny and shaping the main features of its heritage in the architecture of cross-stone carving, the art of illumination, and the craft of carpet-making. Presenting an intriguing synthesis of this region's complex past, this narrative also captures the collapse of Tsarist Russia, the Soviet 1921 allocation of Karabakh to the shores of the Caspian Sea, and the Armenian people's eventual proclamation of independence in 1991.

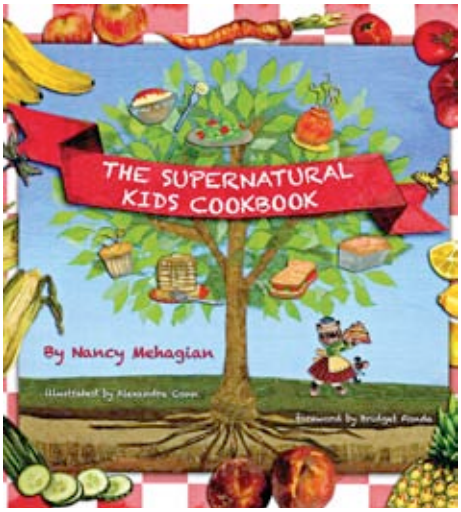


Lenore Tolegian Hughes

Cups of Fortune

Pomegranate Seed Press, 2012

Cups of Fortune captures the experience of the escapees from the Armenian Genocide who came to America to rebuild their lives and of their children growing up in 1950s Southern California. With a spirited and humorous voice Lenore Tolegian Hughes vividly evokes the physical, social, and psychological adventures of men and women driven by love of life to leave their homeland, and by their passionate natures to make something of themselves in the New World. The novel overflows with stories of three generations that are by turns horrific, hilarious, and heart-warming. At the same time *Cups of Fortune* is a powerful coming of age novel that recounts the early life of an Armenian American girl growing up in 1950s Los Angeles.



Nancy Mehagian

The Supernatural Kids Cookbook

Huqua Press, 2012

Nancy Mehagian's new book, *The Supernatural Kids Cookbook* is kid tested, and mother earth approved. The book is a collection of healthy, tasty and easy to prepare foods, that encourages mindful eating for junior chefs. "You can learn so much from cooking, like math, science, culture, and health," says Mehagian. With simple descriptions, and catchy recipe names like "Salsa Surprise," "Monkey Muffins," and "Zany Zucchini," Nancy tries to make cooking a family affair. While spending time with their parents, children are introduced to various preparation techniques, cooking styles, and healthy alternatives. Bridget Fonda, who wrote the forward to this book, says it helps guide children "toward a healthy path of confidence and self-sufficiency."

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September/October

ARPA International Film Festival

This year marks the 15th anniversary of the ARPA International Film Festival, which is the signature event of the ARPA Foundation for Film, Music and Art (AFFMA). The Festival will kick off November 29 at the historic Egyptian Theatre in Los Angeles, with the North American premiere of *Lost and Found in Armenia*. Closing night on Saturday, December 1 will feature the North American premiere of Natalya Belyauskene's *If Only Everyone*, starring actor and filmmaker, Michael Poghosian. This film is Armenia's official entry to the Academy Awards in the Best Foreign Language category. This year, the festival will present over 40 films. Feature narratives, short films, documentaries, music videos and animated films will be showcased from over 25 nations. "Arpa Film Fest is very much an audience-driven film event,'' says Festival Director, Alex Kalognomos. "Our patrons are dedicated to supporting the artists. In turn, we strive to create the most dynamic film festival experience for our audience. We are proud to be among one of Los Angeles' longest running film festivals and look forward to celebrating our momentous 15th year."



Niagara Falls Light Show

The Niagara Falls Winter Festival of Lights offers a special spectacle from the beginning of November. During the two month-long festival, a decorated six-kilometer route stretching from Dufferin Islands along the Niagara Parkway, an area known as the Niagara Parks, is illuminated by nearly three million lights and over a hundred lighting displays, including fireworks over the falls. A wintertime visit to Niagara Falls during this festival has become a tradition for over one million locals and visitors from around the world. The winter season in Niagara brings not just the Festival of Lights, but also a Niagara Falls event calendar full of everything from music to magic. Whether it's a family looking for fun or a couple on their honeymoon, they can experience Niagara from a new perspective. The Rink at the Brink, an open-air ice skating facilty is just steps away from one of the most famous natural attractions in the world.

World's Largest Disco

Be part of the biggest retro party in the world at the end of November on the largest dance floor in New York state with one million watts of sound and lights. The World's Largest Disco is an annual event held at the Buffalo Convention Center in Buffalo, N.Y. the Saturday after Thanksgiving with more than 7,000 people in attendance. Named the Greatest Event on Earth by the Wall Street Journal, this party is a tribute to the disco era and features live performances by 1970s-era musicians, along with dancers dressed in 1970s attire. It was declared the World's Largest Disco in the Guinness Book of World Records back in 1979, with 13,000 people in attendance. Past guest appearances have included Gloria Gaynor and the Tramps, Danny Bonaduce, Henry Winkler, Lou Ferrigno, Erik Estrada, Ted Lange and others. The World's Biggest Disco is more than just a good time for people nostalgic for the Bee Gees – it's also a fundraiser. One hundred percent of the proceeds benefit Camp Good Days and Special Times, a camp for children with cancer.



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ճ [cheh]

Text **Aram Khachatourian**

ճ (*cheh*) is the nineteenth letter of the Armenian alphabet. Its name is *cheh* (Eastern), or *dje* (Western Armenian). It has a numerical value of 100.



Suren Manvelian

The graphic representation of letter ճ in the manuscripts of various centuries



862 1170 1319



Ornamented Initials, Arahi Publishing House, 1992

The first word of the first sentence written in Armenian letters started with **ճ**. After the creation of the alphabet, Mesrop Mashtots and his disciples translated the Bible to Armenian. According to the testimonies of his biographer, historian and writer Koryun, "They started translating the Bible from King Solomon's Book of Wisdom, where he [Solomon] is telling people to acquire wisdom and teachings of the Lord as well as human knowledge." So the greater purpose of the creation of the alphabet, without which human knowledge could not be passed on, were the lessons transferred to future generations, as well as prophecies. So it happened that Mashtots' letters influenced an unprecedented advancement of the Armenian culture: a whole generation of writers, historians and philosophers emerged, and the 5th century went down in history as the golden age of Armenian literature.

The letter **ճ** designates a sound pronounced as a fused combination [t] and [sh], with none of the letters separately represented in the pronunciation. The origin of the graphic form is not definitely clear, but it likely goes back to the Coptic letter ϫ (janja), indicating the same [j] sound which represents the sound of **ճ** in Western Armenian. The first encounter of Armenians with Copts (Christian Arabs) may be dated back to the year 430. Indirectly this encounter could have happened even earlier: before the creation of the alphabet, Mashtots visited Edessa, a major cultural center at the time where a famous library was located. He could have seen the Coptic letters in manuscripts of Edessa and chosen one of the letters as its prototype.

The numerical equivalent of **ճ** is 100. It denotes the beginning of a new level of numerical place value – the 9 letters following **ճ** consistently increase their numerical value by 100.

The letter **ճ** found in medieval manuscripts was often depicted in the human form – as dancers, and actors. In his book *2000 Years in the Armenian Theater*, drama critic George Goyan describes the letter **ճ** found in the 1287 gospel which was created in the monastery Akner (Cilica) as follows: "In the hands of the dancers, there is the usual implement of gusans-mimoses [traveling actors], a long whip in the form of a dog-headed snake. The actors often wore skin-colored leotards and the traditional gusans' conical red caps." And in the 1323 Gospel from Gladzor in Syunik, the artist Toros Taronatsi portrayed **ճ** as a female dancer.

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At the Toros' in Roslin

Mountains, castles, stern men wearing "skirts" who for centuries fought bloody battles for their independence to the tune of music played on instruments made of calf skins with tubes sticking out. In short, if not for the kilts erroneously taken for skirts, everything is just as it was with Armenians, right? But, of course, we headed to Scotland not for discovering the above mentioned geography or historical events. We were curious to find out more about the hypothesis that one of the most prominent Armenian painters of all times, Toros Roslin, had Scottish roots.

Text **Artavazd Yeghiazaryan** | Photo **Arnos Martirosyan**

Angels and Communists

Edinburgh is one of those cities where a person would not be taken for a psycho no matter what crazy idea he or she comes up with. Then perhaps this is true of all modern cities. Warmly-dressed people were rushing around in the cool and cloudy weather, minding their daily business. And then we noticed a strange couple – a young guy and a girl – wrapped in some sort of bed sheets resembling Greek tunics with golden wings on their backs. It turned out they were impersonating cupids and posing for Valentine's Day photos. Soon the winged couple vanished, and our view was dominated by two red flags with a hammer and sickle. And not just anywhere, but right in front of the National Portrait Gallery in Old Town. The flags were next to a table with a display of books, newspapers and brochures, publicizing activities of the Communist Party of Scotland. We informed the man, who noticed our obvious astonishment, that we arrived from a country which for 70 years was steered by the Communists.

"We of course will take into consideration all the mistakes made in the USSR," said the fighter for the rights of the working class in sort of an apologetic way. "The ideas were wonderful. But we are too few in numbers to implement them..." The latter was said with such despair that we bought the local communist newspaper *Morning Star*, which we could have otherwise read for free on the Web, for a pound sterling.





Freedom and Brotherhood

The new town was built in the 18th century, when it became apparent that the old town, located on the hill surrounding Edinburgh Castle, ran out of space. Therefore, a small lake was drained and a park is in its place now. From there, a long cascade of steps leads straight to a building with a high steeple known as Victoria Hall, headquarters of the International Edinburgh festival. Every August since 1999, this world famous event transforms the town into a theatrical stage. A street on the right leads to the castle. The closer we came to it, the more tourists we saw. And where the tourists were, souvenir shops, bagpipe players and even Sir William Wallace himself followed. The man with half his face painted blue,



→
A memorial bench in Edinburgh



←
One of the many castles of Edinburgh, Scotland

↓
The school teacher Brian dressed as William Wallace



was wearing a traditional suit and held a sword taller than its bearer.
"Good day, gentlemen. Where are you from?"
"From Armenia."
"From Armenia?" the Braveheart was surprised – he had never met Armenians before. "Let's raise our swords to freedom."
The photo captured the moment: England should have trembled in fear.
"I am sure you also fought for freedom throughout your history," pondered the William Wallace stand-in, who in reality was a school teacher named Brian.
"Of course," I replied proudly. "But our issue is already resolved.

Every stone in the Old Town has literally its own history. For example, a lane is leading us to a former coach inn built in 1622, which now houses the Writers' Museum where personal belongings of Robert Burns, Robert Louis Stevenson and Sir Walter Scott are displayed.

By the way, Mel Gibson's film (*Braveheart*) is tremendously popular in Armenia; heroes like William Wallace are very close to us."
"Guys from Hollywood slightly embellished, of course, but at the end, they created a great universal symbol beyond national boundaries."
Every stone in Old Town literally has its own history. For example, a lane leading to a former coach inn built in 1622 now houses the Writers' Museum. The admission to the museum where one can see personal belongings of the three most famous Scottish authors, Robert Burns, Robert Louis Stevenson and Sir Walter Scott, was free. A block away was Deacon Brodie's Tavern, named after William Brodie who lived in the 18th century and was a law-abiding citizen by day and a leader of a gang of burglars at night. To support his nighttime activities, Brodie had the perfect day job, part of which involved making and repairing security locks and mechanisms. He was the prototype for the hero of the famous horror novel *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* by Stevenson. In fact, the 1931 screen adaptation of the book brought worldwide fame to its director, Rouben Mamulian.
After a long walk through the streets of the Old City, a rest is much welcome. You can drink Scotch ale in one of the many ancient and modern pubs, or just sit somewhere outdoors, particularly because there are plenty of comfortable wooden benches all around – on the squares, streets, courtyards, and even in the castle and around the trees. Each of them has an inscription in memory of someone's beloved wife, friend, father, or other relative. It's the local equivalent of Yerevan's drinking fountains, the majority of which are also installed in memory of departed friends and relatives. ▸



The three drummers and two pipers played so recklessly that it seemed that any moment now they would drop their instruments, grab swords and follow some new William Wallace to fight with the English invaders for the independence of their beloved Scotland.



→
The bathhouse of Queen Mary Stuart



←
An Old Town square

Bagpipes, Parkapzuk and Duduk

The bagpipe is another common point between Scotland and Armenia. We too have a national instrument, practically identical to this Scottish brand – the *parkapzuk*. But while in Armenia it gradually went out of fashion, replaced by other national musical instruments like the *duduk* and *zurna*, the Scots still actively blow into their bagpipes. You could hear their high-pitched sounds at every corner, especially in Old Town. The crowds gathered in the square, spellbound by the songs of Scotland performed by men in kilts with long red braids. The three drummers and two pipers played so recklessly that it seemed that any moment now they would drop their instruments, grab swords and follow the next William Wallace to fight the English invaders. But the times when people shed blood for freedom are long gone: in the 21st century, the Scots will solve the problem of their independence through a referendum. The musicians on the square were so friendly that we could not help but ask one of them if he knew anything about our Armenian instrument, the *duduk*.

"So you are from Armenia! Yes, I heard a duduk played a couple of years ago in a marvelous Armenian restaurant. You should visit it – it's a cool place. By the way, do you have a duduk, by any chance?" Unfortunately, we did not bring a duduk. But, of course, we decided to visit this Armenian restaurant in Edinburgh, where there has never been an Armenian community.



Parkapzuk

Similar bagpipes were used in Russia, Ireland, France, Italy, and also in Armenia at various times. The Armenian *parkapzuk* consisted of a leather bag and two or more handsets equipped with tongues. In the Yeghegnadzor region, a *parkapzuk* with nine tubes is depicted on a gravestone from the 13th century. An instrument with the same number of tubes is described by the medieval historian Arakel Syunetsi. In one of the manuscripts in Matenadaran there is even a miniature of women playing on *parkapzuk*.



↑
Traditional folk musicians on the streets of Edinburgh

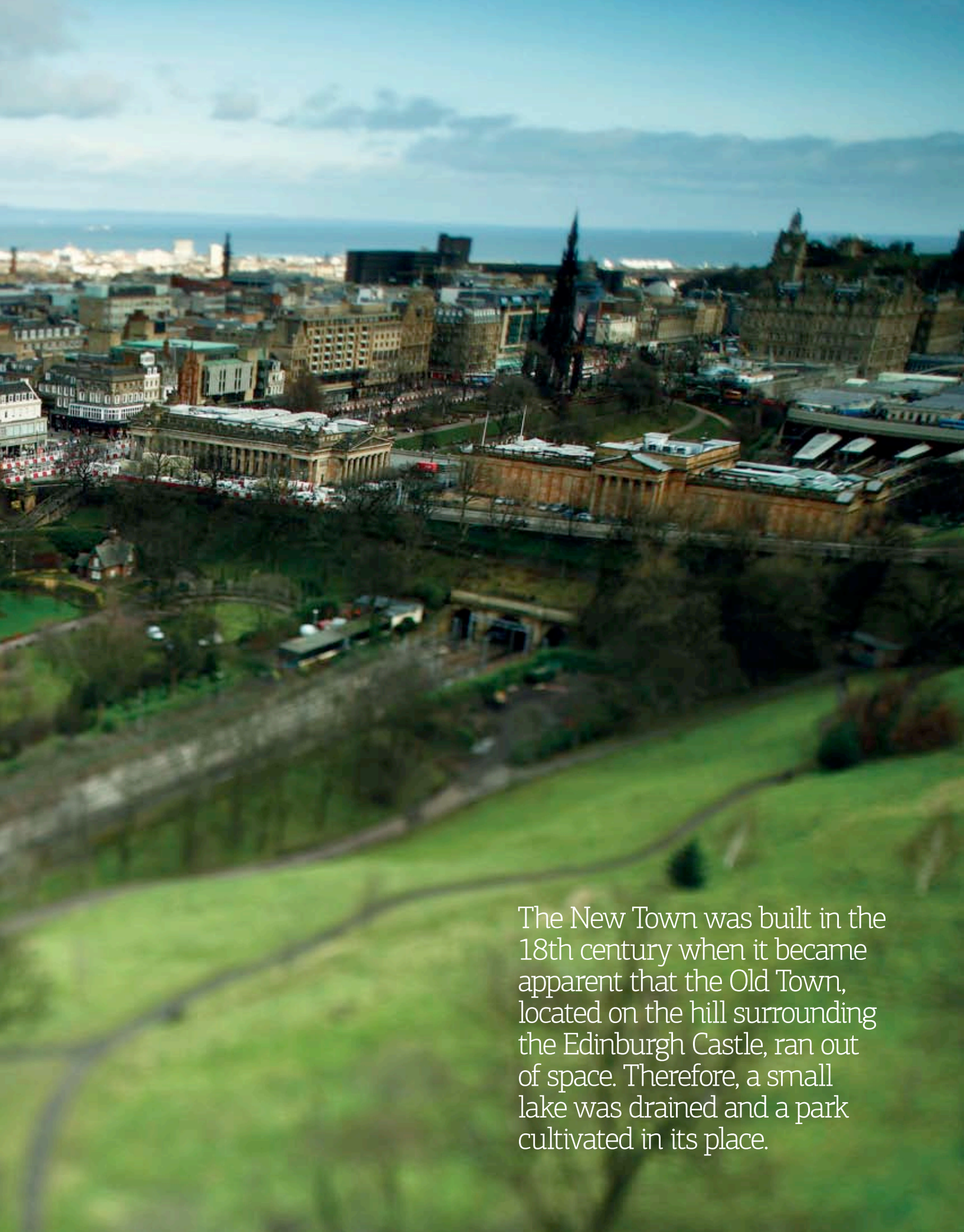


Aghtamar Lake Van Monastery in Exile

Following our map and the GPS, we came to the deserted Victorian-era railway station, a vividly-colored red building. The Armenian restaurant was supposed to be around the corner from the two-story brick house, which in the 16th century was Queen Mary Stuart's bathhouse. The huge wooden doors were locked and the windows were nailed shut. Nevertheless, we contacted the owner of the restaurant, Toros, who is one of the few Armenians in Edinburgh.

He told us the restaurant was closed for repairs, but he was currently working on the opening of the Armenian Cultural Center in that former train station building. Toros moved to Edinburgh 30 years ago. Back then, in 1982, he opened a restaurant, giving it a somewhat strange name for such a venue: Aghtamar Lake Van Monastery in Exile, which should have been named Akhtamar Monastery from Lake Van in Exile. "I have roots in Van, and I wanted it to be recognized," explained the 60-year-old Toros, who does not advertise his establishment, and who doesn't even have a sign on the building. ▸





The New Town was built in the 18th century when it became apparent that the Old Town, located on the hill surrounding the Edinburgh Castle, ran out of space. Therefore, a small lake was drained and a park cultivated in its place.

"What's the point? Who knows who might come? For me it's almost a family home, and I have no intention to allow just anyone into my house." Actually, he is famous for his strict rules: he won't let in those whom he just doesn't like, and he might kick out a hapless visitor who dares to ask for a "Turkish" coffee, which he is sure is really Armenian.

"It's a miracle!" – A woman who lived near the restaurant told us. "I've never heard such music as at the Toros'!" And the funny thing is that it was recorded on a compact disc cassette, which Toros' patrons have listened to for the past thirty years. The owner admitted that he couldn't do without Armenian music.

"When everything goes right – well, as it is at family get-togethers – then I raise all customers to their feet to dance with the music. After my food and wine that's the right thing to do."

And the portraits of the Armenian liberty fighters look down at the dancing Edinburgh residents from the walls. They look and don't mind.

With the help the GPS we came to a vividly colored brick building of the deserted Victorian-era railway station. The Armenian restaurant had to be here, around the corner from the two-story stone house, which was a 16th century bathhouse in which the Queen Mary Stuart once bathed.





↑ St. Giles Cathedral in Old Town

← The former train station where the Armenian restaurant is located





←
The house in the Rosslyn Castle territory

↓
The entrance to the Rosslyn chapel, built in the Victorian era





←
The view of the new town from the Edinburgh Castle

The Templar's Sanctuary

In just a half an hour, a quaint-looking bus took us from Edinburgh to the quiet, cozy countryside, which quite possibly is directly related to Toros Roslin, the Armenian painter who painted his masterpieces in the mid-18th century in the Cilician city of Romkla. Ironically, virtually nothing is known about one of the greatest masters of miniatures. For a long time, experts could not identify the origin of his name Roslin – there were never any similar names or place names either in Armenia or in Cilicia. But there is a place called Rosslyn 30 kilometers from Edinburgh. It has become world famous thanks to Dan Brown's bestselling book and Ron Howard's film *The Da Vinci Code.* These lands, along with the family chapel and Middle Age castle belonged to the famous noble clan St. Clair, or Sinclair as it was changed to by the end of the 16th century. The castle was built in the 11th century, and the main local attraction, the Chapel, came four centuries later. One might wonder what is the connection between the Scottish clan and a Cilician artist? The fact is that at the end of the 11th century, the Baron of Rosslyn, Henry St. Clair, took part in the First Crusade, and Cilicia was on the path of the Crusaders to the Holy Land. Wasn't it possible that the Scottish baron settled in the last Armenian Kingdom and married an Armenian woman?
But these are just speculations; let us now get back to the facts. The first stone in the base of the chapel was laid in 1446 by a descendant of Sir Henry – William Sinclair, but as was often the case in the Middle Ages, the author of the idea did not live long enough to see its realization. Moreover, after his death, the chapel that was built was not quite the same as was originally planned – it was almost half the size. By the end of the 20th century, the chapel which was in rather poor condition, in part because of two unsuccessful restorations, was attended by 30,000 visitors a year. ▸

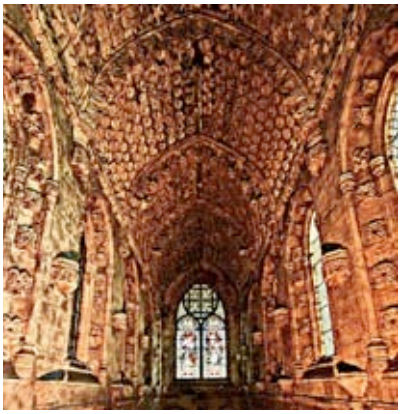
The mountain scenery seems taken from the Saryan's paintings. One look and it becomes clear why the verse of Scotland's greatest poet Robert Burns, "My Heart's in the Highlands," is so popular in Armenia, and why the hero of Saroyan's play was Scottish.







Property of the St. Clair clan in Rosslyn – the famous chapel and a crumbling castle



The Legend of the Rosslyn Chapel

The main attraction of the chapel is the Apprentice Pillar. According to legend, the builder of the temple was a master mason who did not believe that the apprentice could perform the complicated task of carving the column without seeing the original that formed the inspiration for the design. The master mason traveled to see the original himself, but upon his return was enraged to find that the upstart apprentice had completed the column anyway. In a fit of jealous anger the mason took up his mallet and struck the apprentice on the head, killing him. The legend concludes that as punishment for his crime, the master mason's face was carved into the opposite corner to forever gaze upon his apprentice's pillar. One of the legends says that the Holy Grail is still hidden inside the column. Another legend states that the Sinclair burial crypt is connected by secret passages with a hidden place where, according to various versions, the Holy Grail, Scotland's crown and the Templar's treasures are buried. There is a belief that if we decipher the symbols on the ceiling (roses, lilies, five-pointed stars, etc.), we can make a map and find the place where the treasures of the Templar were hidden to avoid falling into the hands of King Philip IV of France.

But after the release of the 2006 book and subsequent film *The Da Vinci Code*, the final scene of which was shot in the temple sanctuary, more than 160,000 tourists came here in just one year. Most are convinced that the Templar treasure is really buried under the chapel, and one woman seriously hoped that in addition to the Holy Grail, one could also find Elvis here, the local guide Anna told us. When the fascinating lecture ended and tourists scattered to admire hundreds of figures and patterns carved on the walls, we got a chance to talk to Anna. At first, she was surprised to learn that we were from Armenia, but when we mentioned the name of the Armenian miniaturist, she was genuinely interested. "Is there anything specific about his relationship with the St. Clairs? I have never heard about him. In any case, you have to meet Helen Sinclair. First of all, she is an art historian, and secondly, perhaps your artist is her distant cousin."

We decided to visit the family castle and meet Ms. Sinclair. If Toros of Romkla was really related to the St. Clair family, this castle might have been his family home. The path on the right of the chapel led to the gorge, which was incredibly similar to Armenian gorges until it reached the huge stone bridge. The medieval builders really knew their trade very well, and even now the bridge is very safe. However, almost nothing is left from the castle itself – only the ruins of the walls where it once stood. It was almost completely destroyed in the 16th century by frequent attacks from the British. Its outline reminded us of the Armenian fortress Amberd. True, while the few relatively preserved Armenian fortresses are now tourist sites, people still reside in the Rosslyn Castle. Their last name is, naturally, Sinclair. The two-story house which is surrounded by fortress walls is used by Peter Sinclair mostly as a vacation house. It must be so cool to have such a stunning view and be surrounded by these rocks which are reminders of the history of the country. In general, the local mountain scenery appeared to be taken from Saryan's paintings, only instead of monasteries there were fortresses here. One look and it became clear why the verse of Scotland's greatest poet Robert Burns, "My Heart's in the Highlands" translated by Vahagn Davtyan, is so popular in Armenia. And it was not a coincidence that the hero of William Saroyan's famous play with the same title was from Scotland. Unfortunately, Ms. Sinclair was away, and we did not have a chance to meet her. When we returned to the bus stop, I thought that it would be awesome if Toros, the owner of the restaurant named Aghtamar Lake Van Monastery in Exile, opened another restaurant here in Rosslyn, and named it, At the Toros' in Rosslyn. I think, the great artist would appreciate the wordplay, even if he did not have any family relationship with the local nobility. ■



→
The bridge leading to the Rosslyn Castle



Sweet Memories



Vahram Muradyan

They say we are what we eat. That got us thinking. Armenians have *shish kebabs* and *khorovats* (barbeque). Japanese are known for sushi. When speaking of vodka and pickled vegetables, the Russians come to mind. Nothing says Americana like a multi-layered burger. You get the point. Food also evokes emotion and flashbacks. Nothing can beat delicious childhood memories of home-cooked indulgence, when we were pure and clean, before civilization corrupted us with one fast food conglomerate after another. So, here is some food for thought for this issue: "What is your fondest memory associated with food?"

Maria Sargsyan
Actress
I can be sentimental about sushi. It brings back memories of me and my ex-boyfriend. Sushi actually marks a turning point in my life. My boyfriend taught me to go beyond my comfort zone and try out fish. Before that day I hadn't even been close to fish and eating it was a big no-no. He taught me how to indulge in sushi. Even though he is gone now, my love for sushi is still with me.

Gokor Chivichyan
Judo legend, Hayastan MMA
Remember *kvass* made of rye bread? I love it because it takes me back to my childhood years. I have *kvass* on our table all the time, even though nobody in my family likes it, but to me it is special. I remember myself as a child standing in line for a cup of fresh, cold *kvass* sold right on the street from mobile tanks. It was only three to five Russian *kopeks* and it tasted so great. These days no one in my family shares my passion for *kvass* because I guess, they have no emotional memory attached to it. To me it was a special drink after my training, and I used to save my last pennies to indulge in it.

Emin Avakian
Photographer
Everything about food makes me happy, but the Armenian *nazuk* with tea is the best. I used to eat it when I was a kid and even as a grown-up it brings me happiness and the nostalgia of the younger days.

Vazgen Hovanesian
Cameraman
In 1988, when I came to America, we ordered a pizza with pepperoni, mushrooms and bell peppers on it and we had 7-Up with it. It was my first pizza experience. So, pizza with green peppers to me means "coming to America." It takes me back years and years every time I have it.

Mihran Aghvinyan
Martial Arts Instructor
Karabish, a Lebanese dessert filled with pistachios and cream, triggers the fondest memories. It brings back good memories of me as a carefree child. I remember eating it as a kid in Lebanon and every time I eat it here in America I trip back emotionally and mentally to Lebanon, to my childhood. You forget a lot of things, but *Karabish* is with me to this day.

Nareg Ashikian
Kinesiology Student
Every time I see *noor*, the pomegranate, I remember my homeland Armenia. When we went to Armenia with a class, our T-shirts had a *noor* on it and our teacher talked to us about *noor* representing Armenia. Every time I see someone eating a *noor*, I remember my sweet homeland. It symbolizes my culture. It's dear and sweet.

Taline Ashikian
Speech Therapist
I went to a yoga retreat that led me to being a vegetarian. Whenever I see salads, I think of that yoga retreat and the wellness that vegetables bring. When sprouts are involved, that's even better.

Angineh Ayvazian
Student/Actres
Dolma – that's what my mom makes during family dinners. Every time I eat *dolma*, it means closeness, care and warmth you can only get from your family. *Dolma* by my mama is my thing now and forever.

Arthur Israyelyan
Behavioral Therapist
Sour cream with bread triggers only sweet memories. Russian *pryaniki* brings back nostalgic feelings from my childhood. I remember having these crispy and delicious *pryaniki* as a boy in the small cafeteria at school during the Soviet years. No Soviet Union anymore, but *pryaniki* still smells of the Soviet Union and my boyhood.

Mousheg Hovhannisyan
Tennis Player, Pepperdine
Armenian barbeque and *shish kebabs* bring back the best memories. I was born in Armenia and as a kid, I remember going outdoors for barbeques whenever we had a chance as a family. Years later, every time we do *shish kebabs* as a family in America, it takes me back to my childhood in Armenia. And it's a good feeling to have once in a while.

Mischa Najarian
Banker
Kebab and the Armenian salads remind me of being around family and those big occasions of the table all set, of good times and celebrations.

Maneh Simoni
Marketing Specialist
Vanilla ice cream covered with chocolate brings back the taste of my childhood. In Armenia, as kids we used to play outside, spending a lot of time. Back then there was a guy with ice-creams in the cooler going from one-street to another and selling ice creams. That "Eskimo" ice cream was so delicious, so refreshing and so desirable. There were a few kids on the block that didn't have the money to buy it and I remember the ones that could afford it had such victorious faces with every bite they took.

Gegham Simonyan
Cook
My most delicious memory is about spinach and wild mushrooms. My mother was an expert in eating seasonal and she knew exactly when we could go the mountains to gather mushrooms and greens. My mother would request me to visit her from the city and drive her up to the mountain from our little village to gather mushrooms and greens. Of course, it always turned into a feast. We used to make fire right there. Mushrooms and greens gathering was a wonderful excuse to get everybody together for good times in Mother Nature. It felt even more special up in the mountains in spring. The memories of the fire, the bottle of vodka in the snow are precious.

Armen Gevorgyan
Technician
The potato pie *perashki* is my favorite. It takes me back to my childhood. My grandma made the most delicious ones. She knew I loved it and she used to make many servings. If she made 20, I would get 15 and she'd hide the remaining five. Of course, I immediately would eat the 15 and still be hungry for more. It was the hidden ones that I was after. I remember finding them and eating them secretly. It was such a joy.

Arsen Manoukyan
IT Specialist
Imal bayaldi is special to me to this day. I was a kid when I first had it and I was amused by its name. It tasted great, too. It also reminds me of my grandfather and I sitting bonding at the table.

Virginia Gillooly
Court Reporter
What can possibly be better than my mother's lemon pie? It was made fresh from our backyard lemon tree. My mouth is watering just talking about it.

Annete Saghian
Academic Councilor
I used to live in Lebanon, and when I was pregnant with my son, I was craving strawberries when they were out of season. When we finally found some, I ate two pounds of it all at once. My son is in his twenties now but my craving for strawberries is still very strong.

Manouk Oganesyan
Automotive Sales
I remember my summer vacations all the way through high school, and how my father and I would make it a point to eat at all the best burger joints. Other than not going to school, it was the best three months every year.



PATHWAY TO PERFECTION

GEOFFREY ZAKARIAN LIVES THREE LIVES – ONE AS AN OLD-SCHOOL EXECUTIVE CHEF SEQUESTERED IN THE KITCHEN OF HIGH-CLASS RESTAURANTS, THE SECOND AS A LUMINARY RESTAURATEUR, AND THE THIRD AS A CELEBRATED CHEF ON NATIONAL TELEVISION. HOW DOES THE CHARMING, WORLDLY PROPRIETOR WHO CHALKED UP INTERNATIONAL ACCLAIM AS FOOD NETWORK'S NEWLY CROWNED "IRON CHEF" EXPLAIN HIS LONGSTANDING STRONGHOLD IN THE INDUSTRY? "I'M OLD. YOU HANG AROUND LONG ENOUGH, SHIT HAPPENS. IT JUST DOES."

Text **Manouk Akopyan** | Photo **Armen Poghosyan**

The sophisticated palates of New York have known Geoffrey Zakarian well before Yelp, Twitter, or the blogger down the next table at Starbucks who told you his food was succulent, scrumptious or any other two-cent assessment that triggered you to go and find out for yourself. Zakarian is cut from the cloth of the old school in an era where a chef was either one review away from being sliced and diced or spliced into a patron's eating DNA. It was a time when the industry believed that you had to take ingredients, be honest with them and serve a yummy product to your customer. There was no other derivation of it, or as he says, "we never did cute."

Genteel and sharply dressed, Zakarian is a breath of fresh air in an industry full of scruffy and overly tattooed youngsters. He owns a make-up chair as good as his kitchen. He is suave and slender; his style is refined – note the glasses that recently entered his primped up repertoire. He is spotlessly, almost effortlessly groomed; he is a natural at entertaining; his sophisticated aura attracts legions of middle-aged women who see the silver fox as a kitchen Casanova.

At 53, he is still a romantic with his wife Margaret Anne Williams, twenty years his junior and mother to his three and five year-old girls.

What separates Zakarian from the pack in a cutthroat industry is his obsession for perfection. His approach in the kitchen is best described as New American with roots in French cuisine. His formula is as follows: learn the classics of French tradition, muster all the cultural influences that excite him, and come up with his own versions. Aside from creating a nesting doll of unique recipes for his restaurants, his never-ending quest for flawlessness includes laboring over the meticulous details of his restaurants. He selects and designs everything from the china, tableware to the uniforms of his employees. He believes that the plate should showcase the food, not the other way around. It's just his way of channeling his passion for style, all in the name of creating a comforting ambiance.

"I'm doing it as a natural outlet. It's a lifestyle business; it's not just a restaurant business," Zakarian says as he sips on an espresso while comfortably sitting in the booth of his Manhattan restaurant The Lambs Club. "There's nothing but detail. Anybody can hire fancy people and spend all sorts of money. But when you open up, what are you left with? I'd rather have a four-dollar glass with a story then a twenty-dollar glass that doesn't speak to anyone. You have to have soliloquy."

His fervor for food and fashion is deep-seated. The strong sense of style, other than the fact that he's a public figure in New York, comes from a man who was 52 years his senior – his father George Zakarian. George was a music teacher by day who moonlighted as a trombonist by night. He treated breakfast as if it was a black-tie affair. That made an impression on a young Geoffrey. Working two jobs and with a wide difference in age, father and son never got to hang out much. Geoffrey's fondest memories are of his father introducing him to golf, but more importantly, to pinnacle, a card game they'd play for hours while they shared stories.

Zakarian's childhood wasn't of the silver spoon and expensive wine variety. He says that although the family was poor, he, along with his brother and sister, were lucky to have a great upbringing.

THE RESTAURANTS HE'S COOKED FOR OVER THE LAST 30 YEARS, AND LATER BOTH OPENED AND OWNED, HAVE BEEN ON THE SHORT LIST OF MANHATTAN'S CHIC AND ELITE. THE SEEMINGLY CLAIRVOYANT ZAKARIAN HAS COOKED THE CASH COW THAT IS NEW YORK FINE DINING TO SAVORY PERFECTION.



Born and raised in Worcester, Massachusetts, Geoffrey was exposed to – and somewhat spoiled by – good food at an early age.
"I really got a taste ad nauseam of really, really good Armenian food at an early age. But not because we were snobs, we were poor! Fast food and soda was never allowed. We had to make everything – from ice cream to ketchup and yogurt – all from scratch."
George, who lived to be 96, would go grocery-shopping every day, and his mother Viola would make *kibbe* and *bastec*. Even though Viola had Polish, Russian and Ukrainian roots, her Armenian meals were always prepared tastefully, Geoffrey remembers. So when going to a friend's house, he would have out-of-body experiences when TV dinners and crinkle-cut fries were unleashed from the freezer. After all, Geoffrey's earlier birthdays consisted of all-day expeditions with his father, revolving around the main event of the evening – dinner at a restaurant of Geoffrey's choice. A life bound by food would lead to his career by osmosis.

After receiving a degree in urban studies, Zakarian got a grant to go to France and pursue a graduate degree in economics. In France, Zakarian became a foodaholic, spending his time and grant money on travel and fine dining.
The taste that was left in his mouth meant one thing: a new vocation.
He came back and enrolled in the CIA – not the Central Intelligence Agency, but the Culinary Institute of America, where he would begin a life-long investigation into food.

New York, New York

The palates of South Beach know Geoffrey Zakarian quite well. In 1995, he opened the Blue Door at The Delano Hotel in Miami, and in 2011, Tudor House at Dream South Beach Hotel. The palates of Atlantic City know Geoffrey Zakarian, also. In 2007, he conceptualized the food and beverage program of the 700-room hotel The Water Club at Borgata. But it is the hoards of New York's hungriest that best know Geoffrey Zakarian. ▸



The time was 1982, the year in which Zakarian began his culinary apprenticeship – and rising prominence – at New York's Le Cirque under French master chef Alain Sailhac. As a Pastry Sous Chef, it was Zakarian's first job in the kitchen. In a period of five years, he developed his technical foundation under Sailhac and had his coming-out party as he toured throughout France – Paris, Alsace, Nice, Lyon – as well as London. At Le Cirque, he would eventually work his way up to Chef de Cuisine.

As meteoric as his ascent may seem, Zakarian's road was anything but paved like butter. He remembers a time of brutal berating and emasculation. The pressure-cooking environment filled out the drawers in his arsenal, cultivated his authoritarian attitude, and gave him a sharp tongue.

"When I came up in the early eighties, I worked my ass off. Everyone doesn't have to do that, that's just what I did. Every day, you would have to come up for oxygen. If there were only a couple punches, then it was a good day. If you're serious and passionate about being a chef, you have to go through tough times; you can't just come [to New York] and burst out. You have to do anything you can to get here. Which means you've got to beg, borrow, steal and live in a four-corner room. I didn't worry about anything. I could've cared less if I was paid or not because I was learning so much. We're the sum total of our experiences. My path is just more romantic, if I may say. I'm a hopeless romantic. I romanticize everything."

Zakarian made his name in New York as the Executive Chef at the 21Club in 1987, then a year later as the Executive Chef of 44 at the Royalton Hotel, where he would be for the next ten years. In 1997, as the Executive Chef of Patroon, he was awarded Three Stars by *The New York Times*, their highest rating.

After holding down forts all over town, he finally had one he could call his own when he opened Town in 2001 – as its owner – to much fanfare. The restaurant received Three Stars by *The New York Times* and made Zakarian a staple of New York fine dining.

"Culinary wise, Town put me on top," says Zakarian, who opened the restaurant six months before 9/11. "I have very bittersweet

STIRRING IT UP WITH GEOFFREY ZAKARIAN

ON LIFE...
"Life is short, we're on a timetable. It ends the exact same way for everybody. So you have to determine what's important and what you want to do in life, and how you want to do it."

ON BEING IN CONTROL...
"Absolutely. Except when my wife's around. I have no say."

ON REINVENTING HIMSELF...
"I try to reinvent myself within the context of classical. Every fashion designer or artist, they all go back to go forward. So I try to do that with food."

ON HIS REPUTATION...
"My name is my reputation and I'm only as good as my last meal. Trust me, people stop me and say, 'oh I didn't like my meal last night.' So I have to listen to this shit sometimes, and it's okay. They feel really good about talking to me, and you know what? They turn out to be really good customers and they come back again. If you bust someone's balls, and you're honest about it, then you'll support that person. People think it's the opposite."

ON MAKING IT IN NEW YORK...
"If you really want to learn this business, there's a lot of places you can go to – trust me. But here, it's endless. You just have to constantly reinvent yourself."

ON BRANCHING OUT WEST WITH HIS RESTAURANTS...
"I would never live in the West Coast. It's just that I'm really a homebody. I love my family and hate being away from them. I'm an East Coast guy."

ON THE NEW YORK MEDIA...
"I rarely read *The New York Times*; they're so politically left wing I can't even stand it. Being a libertarian, I've always been tipped to the right. I just try to stick to the food section."

ON TRENDS...
"I don't dabble in trends or things that are in my ear and out the next day, so maybe that helps. I'm very old school. Farm-to-table is a trend that I don't like because it's a trend that's not new. I've been doing farm-to-table since 1981. We called the farm, they brought it, and we cooked it. It's sort of like somebody made it up and thought it sounds cute. I don't come up with cute."

ON HOW CHEFS HAVE CHANGED IN THE BUSINESS...
"We've unfortunately turned into this 'what's in it for me' syndrome instead of like, 'you're teaching me, I'm learning from you, I want to suck your brains.'"

ON FAST FOOD ...
"Every day – every breakfast, lunch and every dinner – you are never going to get it back. To me, if you eat McDonalds, you might as well commit suicide. That's how I think. There's nothing wrong with McDonalds, but are you kidding me? You can go get a cool taco at a taco truck, sit and have lunch at a bar, make something for yourself, or go to some groovy little farm-to-table restaurant. Every situation is a chance to live life, you know what I mean?"

ON DINING OUT...
"I know how hard it is to put a plate of food in front of someone that's warm and targeted properly, so I actually have low expectations. I enjoy simple food like pizza or sushi when I go out. I go to fun, casual and fancy places, but very often I just go to try it. It's more of a 'look up my skirt moment;' it's not like I'm eating. So when I go out, I expect to see a lot of shit, a lot of flaws. If it goes well, I'm like 'wow this is good.' I know how hard it is. I expect absolutely nothing."

ON CRITIQUING...
"If nobody critiqued you, your self-worth is going to be measured with nothing. That's the same way I teach in my kitchen. I'm absolutely fair and straightforward. I shoot from the hip, but I shoot squarely. I never aim at anybody, because we're all in this together. They represent me. They cook my food. I don't cook the food. They cook it. So I teach, they cook.

ON HOW HE'S CHANGED...
"I'm much funnier than I used to be. I've always been lighter; I'm just funnier now because I don't take a lot of things seriously."

ON LESSONS THAT CAN'T BE TAUGHT...
"I can't teach someone self respect, manners, politeness, how to treat people. Sadly there's not enough of that. I can't teach someone integrity. They have to get that from their parents. I can teach just about anything else."

ON DOING ANYTHING DIFFERENT IN HIS CAREER...
"Oh my God, I don't think like that. I live today. I know what I'm going to do, what I want to do, I just don't think about it. Did I make mistakes? Of course. Youth is wasted on the young. The path today led me to my wife and two children and all the nice people that surround me. I feel very, very blessed to be where I am at my age. There's nothing I don't have. Materially, I don't really want anything. Of course we all want more, I want my family to be healthy, and to leave them in a situation where they're confident, with support to fall back on, but I want them to go get it themselves. I did. Nobody did it for me."

ZAKARIAN IS GENTEEL AND SHARPLY DRESSED; HE IS SUAVE AND SLENDER; HIS STYLE IS REFINED; HE IS SPOTLESSLY, ALMOST EFFORTLESSLY GROOMED; HIS SOPHISTICATED AURA ATTRACTS LEGIONS OF MIDDLE-AGED WOMEN WHO SEE THE SILVER FOX AS A KITCHEN CASANOVA.

memories from that restaurant, but it turned out to be a very satisfying ten years."

During his ownership of Town, Zakarian added Country at the Carlton Hotel (Michelin Star, Three Stars by *The New York Times*) in 2005, The Lambs Club at the Chatwal Hotel in 2009, and The National at the Benjamin Hotel in 2010 to his growing proprietorship.

"What's great about working with Geoffrey is that I get to explore myself and he puts his identity on it. It works out for me because it allows me to learn. For me to get a chance to have my boss be somebody who will sit down and eat with me and have a relationship, it's pretty tremendous," says Eric Haugen, Zakarian's Executive Chef at The Lambs Club. "I've learned a lot of life lessons here. I've learned a lot about myself. When he is right, he is right. It's an invaluable experience to be able to work alongside someone like him."

The restaurants Zakarian has cooked for over the course of the last 30 years, and later both opened and owned, have been on the short list of Manhattan's chic and elite. The seemingly clairvoyant chef has cooked the cash cow that is New York to savory perfection.

But he had the darkest moment of his career in 2011 when he filed for personal bankruptcy in order to avoid legal claims from his kitchen staff at Country. Zakarian had closed Country prior to this in 2008 because of the recession, he says. When asked to discuss his personal bankruptcy, his brain is programmed to shut off all talk relating to it. He answers the question before it is finished. "I don't want to talk about it because it's not germane. It's public knowledge." Unfortunately for Zakarian, it is. A simple Google search of his name shows the report above his accolades.

Cruisin' Forward

Very soon, palates from all over the world will get to know Geoffrey Zakarian. Earlier this summer, Zakarian inked a partnership with Norwegian Cruise Lines to open yet another restaurant. This one is called Ocean Blue. The challenge is unlike any other he has seen thus far in his career. He has to prepare seven days of food for the restaurant on the soon-to-debut four-thousand passenger ship, Norwegian Breakaway. On select voyages, he will host meet-and-greets with the passengers and give cooking demonstrations. In addition to the restaurant Ocean Blue, Zakarian will be getting his feet wet by highlighting crustaceans and wines by the glass at The Raw Bar. A more casual dining experience will be offered with Ocean Blue on The Waterfront. The cruise is set to sail waters in May 2013, and Zakarian is the headliner of the seafood smorgasbord.

Anyone with a remote control and an eye for food pornography (television cooking shows) knows the telegenic Zakarian. He is a natural in front of the camera. For deadpan mastery, do yourself a favor and YouTube his video with fellow chef Beau MacMillan.

Armored with a quick-witted personality – and Hello Kitty Band-Aids – he finally emerged from a life sequestered in the kitchen and into the living rooms of millions when he won the recent fourth season of the Food Network's *The Next Iron Chef, Super Chefs*. His showmanship was on full display over the course of a series of one-hour cooking marathons in the stadium-like kitchen setup. In the end, he proved his culinary superiority. Zakarian says that being asked to compete was an honor in itself, and he had no illusions of winning.

"WHAT MAKES ME SUCCESSFUL IS THAT I HAVE A LOT OF DOUBTS. I'M ALWAYS NERVOUS AND WORRYING ABOUT THINGS. I DON'T TAKE ANYTHING FOR GRANTED. I'M VERY CONCERNED AT ALL TIMES ABOUT THINGS; I KNOW WHAT CAN GO WRONG.""



He labels the title of "Iron Chef" as "gratifying" and lists the honor in his top-five list of lifetime accomplishments. Some other not-too-shabby accolades include Manhattan billboards bearing his face, getting to ride on the Macy's Day Parade float with his family this Thanksgiving, appearing on two Food Network shows – ones as a judge on *Chopped*, the other highlighting his favorite dishes on *The Best Thing I Ever Ate*.

He is also building a concept for his upcoming retail line of products. With all of the cooking, filming and launching of restaurants, Zakarian also writes.

In 2006, he wrote the cookbook *Town/Country: 150 Recipes for Life Around the Table*, and has already inked two book deals with Random House.

"What makes me successful is that I have a lot of doubts. I'm always nervous and worrying about things. I know what can go wrong," he says, sipping on a Mad Men Cosmopolitan. "I enjoy finding old and classic restaurants that have always been around and try to modernize them. At the end of the day, it's about great service, a great environment, and really dependable, reliable food. So that's what I try to do. I've been lucky that I haven't gotten put out."

This pinch of insecurity fuels Zakarian's never-ending quest for culinary perfection.

"I'm still not there [with perfection]. I'm not. I've learned a lot of tricks, I'm really good at certain things, but I'm nowhere near where I'm going to be in five years. There's so much to learn in this business, it's incredible."

...And so his path continues. ■

Map of Edible Opulence

"There is no love sincerer than the love of food," said George Bernard Shaw. Over the past few decades, the definition of food has undergone a radical change from being a simple and sober affair to a more extravagant and expensive issue. People are now opting for new tastes and more complex foods to satisfy their taste buds. It is the traditional food from different cultures that can provide that variety. We have compiled a list of ten of the most exotic, expensive and iconic delicacies in the world.



Ishkhan, Armenia

One of the largest high-altitude lakes in the world, alpine Lake Sevan is home to a unique fish prized for its subtle flavor. The Ishkan trout Salmo Ischchan is actually a member of the salmon family. In Armenia, Ishkan trout is referred to as the "prince of fishes," reputed because the spots on its head resemble a crown. Records show that this fish graced many great lords' tables in old times. It was served with its own caviar and accompanied by a sauce made with the cream of water-buffalo milk mixed with freshly peeled walnuts and a touch of horseradish. Ishkan has a mild, delicate flavor. Its pink flesh is virtually boneless.

The FleurBurger, USA

There are few such iconic foods as the American hamburger. Chef Hubert Keller gave this all-American dish a fancy French makeover and a couture price tag. The most expensive hamburger in the world is the FleurBurger for $5000 and is served at Fleur de Lys restaurant in the Mandalay Bay Resort and Casino in Las Vegas. It consists of a Wagyu beef and foie gras burger patty topped with truffle sauce and shaved black truffles, served on a brioche truffle bun. The burger patty is never frozen or grilled prior to your order. The FleurBurger is served with a bottle of Bordeaux: a 1995 Chateau Petrus, which typically goes for about $2,500 a bottle. But that's not all. The wine is served in Ichendorf glasses, which you get to take home at the end of the meal. And in case you were worried that the receipt would not be enough proof that you were able to spring for such a decadent meal, a certificate of authenticity will be mailed to your home.





French Foie Gras, France

Revered as one of the most exquisite foods in the world, foie gras is synonymous with great taste and unabashed elegance. A popular and well-known delicacy in French cuisine, foie gras or "fat liver" is a food product made from the liver of a duck or goose that has been specially fattened. Its flavor is described as rich, buttery and delicate, unlike that of an ordinary duck or goose liver. There are two different types of foie gras: Foie Gras d'Oie, which is goose foie gras that has a very rich and subtle taste, whereas Foie Gras de Canard or duck foie gras, contains less fat and has a stronger flavor and richer aroma. Foie gras is often baked in a crust as pâté de foie gras, which may be served hot or cold. The pâté is lined with jelly and the foie gras is prepared with brandy, seasonings and truffles. French law states that foie gras belongs to the protected cultural and gastronomical heritage of France. Meanwhile, at the beginning of the 21st century, animal rights proponents drew attention to foie gras production, arguing that force-feeding birds through long tubes stuck down their throats was inhumane. California became one of the states in the United States to enact a ban against restaurants serving the dish.



Caviar, Russia

To the true gourmet, the salted eggs of sturgeon from Canada or America cannot compare in perfection with caviar from the Caspian Sea. This is basically to do with the saline quality of the water, with the plankton and with the geographical situation of the Caspian Sea, landlocked and therefore unaffected by oceanic currents. Today we think of caviar as a Russian contribution to the world's list of gourmet foods. Based on flavor, size, consistency and color, prices for caviar range as high as $8,000-$16,000 per kg.



Kobe Beef, Japan

The meat from Wagyu cattle is known worldwide for its unique flavor, tenderness, well-marbled texture and juiciness. The name Kobe is reserved exclusively to describe Wagyu cattle that has been raised in the Kobe region of Japan for more than 1,800 years. Kobe beef is made from the Tajima-ushi breed of the Wagyu cow, which is raised in accordance with the Hyogo Prefecture traditions. According to them, the animal must have been born in Hyogo prefecture and thus raised on the local grasses and water its entire life. It must be a bull or virgin cow.

Saffron, Spain

The spice saffron has built a reputation for being more expensive than gold – authentic, high-quality saffron ranges in price from $1,600 to $5,000 per pound. Saffron comes from the beautifully vivid crocus flower Crocus Sativus. It grows very well and therefore is widely produced in Mediterranean climates. The real reason behind its high price tag begins with cultivation. In order to produce just one pound of saffron, it takes anything from 70,000 to 250,000 flowers to be picked. The stigmas of the crocus flower are then dried to make the actual saffron spice. The aroma and taste of saffron ranges from delicate, flowery and perfume-like to hay-like, musky and earthy. Foods benefiting most from its addition include risotto, eggs, mushrooms, seafood, spinach and potatoes. Saffron is available in two forms, the whole filaments or powdered. The Spanish saffron, La Mancha, is considered the best. Aside from its use in food, saffron is known to have many healing properties as well: it helps to reduce fevers and cramps, and calms nerves. It was also used to treat stomach-aches, smallpox and the bubonic plague. Today, researchers have found saffron to work as an anti-aging remedy and even to help fight against cancer.





Fugu, Japan

Sometimes called the "Russian roulette of sushi," fugu is the Japanese name for the most dangerous fish in the world that, in spite of being extremely poisonous, continues to be a great delicacy in Japan. Fugu is familiarly known as puffer fish, blowfish or globefish and contains a tetrodotoxin that produces critical illness and often death. Therefore it requires delicate preparation for its edible meat to be separated from its toxic internal organs. The restaurant preparation of fugu is strictly controlled by law in Japan and several other countries, and only chefs who have qualified through rigorous training are allowed to deal with the fish. Fugu is served as sashimi and chirinabe. Only the flesh, the skin, the fins and the milt are generally eaten. Gourmets pay tremendous prices for a dinner of fugu. People who have tried puffer dishes describe it as one of the most sublime flavors in the world.

Truffles, France

"The diamond of the kitchen" is the best expression to describe one of the most popular and famous mushrooms of all time. Truffles are the most expensive food in the world, with a price tag that can exceed $3,500 per pound. Found in Italy's Piedmont, Marche and Tuscany regions growing among the roots of poplar, beech, hazelnut, oak and willow trees, the "white truffle" or "Alba Madonna" is very aromatic, with a strong flavor that has been described as earthy, musky or garlicky. Italian white truffles are the most valuable on the market: in 2009 they were being sold at $14,203 per kilogram. The "black truffle" or "black Périgord truffle" (Tuber Melanosporum) is named after the Périgord region in France and grows with oak and hazelnut trees. It's the combination of European red soil and rainy summers that produces an especially rich, earthy flavor. Truffles grow wild underground, usually at the base of an oak tree, and are expensive because they are rare and difficult to find.





Casu Marza, Italy

Coming from Sardinia in Italy, Casu Marzu is rotten sheep's milk cheese that surely wins the title of the strangest cheeses of the world. It contains live insect larvae, which are added to the cheese to aid in the fermentation process. The result is a cheese with a very soft, sometimes liquefied texture that can contain thousands of maggots. The cheese has to be eaten when the maggots are still alive, because when they are dead they are considered to be toxic. When it comes time to consume the cheese, some remove the squirmy worms before they dine, others don't because, not only do the maggots provide a little extra protein and flavor, but they also provide entertainment as the maggots, when disturbed, can jump. Casu marzu is considered a delicacy, and is believed to be an aphrodisiac by local Sardinians.



Bird's Nest Soup, China

Otherwise known as the "Caviar of the East," bird's nest soup is a Chinese delicacy made from the fragile nests of the swiftlet. It's something in the saliva of the bird that gives the nest this unique gelatinous, rubbery texture and it's one of the most expensive animal products consumed by humans. The nests are harvested three times a year and the swiftlets are typically given time to breed and raise their young in the nest before removal. The nests are very expensive, in part because they can only be harvested around three times a year and must be hand-collected. Typically the birds will nest in coastal caves but with a growing demand for the soup, numerous man-made nesting sites are constructed to encourage more birds to nest near suppliers. Harvesters separate the nests into three categories of quality: white nests, also referred to as "white gold," are the most pure of the three because they lack contaminants like feathers and twigs. The original discovery of these nests as a culinary treat is unknown, but it has been considered part of Chinese culture for over 1,500 years. The bird's nest is applauded for its medicinal properties that include improving the complexion and benefitting the immune system. The United States is the largest importer of these birds' nests that cost between $2,000 and $10,000.

They may not be to everyone's tastes, but these foods, while considered weird and bizarre to some of us, are exquisite delicacies in other countries. No doubt, national cuisines and traditional foods are perhaps some of the best ways to understand the local culture.

Dances with Lavash

This ballet of lavash is a dialogue between two generations of village women. The young daughter-in-law rolls the dough and transforms it into parchment-thin sheets. The mother then graciously accepts the thin sheets of dough that helicopter in, and sends them into the tonir – the fire of depth. Each movement of the women is tied to the heat and bread. And just like that, from the depths of the human soul, his or her true essence is extracted, his or her human roots arise, and they strive to regain the time lost and find the goodness that appears. Because people who bake bread in any corner of the world do not think of evil.

Photo **Arnos Martirosyan**



Tonir

The Armenian tonir, in contrast to the tandyr, tandour, tendir or tenir, is dug in the ground. Thus, when people light a fire, or cook food in it, they are actually kneeling to it. This is explained by the fact that in pagan times, fire was considered the symbol of the sun on earth and was used not only for cooking food, warming the dwelling and healing the sick, but in rituals of worship as well. Interestingly enough, the marriage ritual of couples who could not get permission to marry from the priests and the Church, would take place in front of the tonir.













...And Oxtail Soup

When days are short, snow covers the roads, and the only sound is the wind whistling in the valleys, guests are a treasured God-sent gift. For such occasions, families prepared from the early summer days. Preserves were stocked, fruits were sugar-coated, sweet *soujouk* was hung to dry and big bottles were filled with wine. To this day, special winter dishes are prepared in families in all regions of Armenia.



Text **Eleonora Malkhasyan** | Photo **Arnos Martirosyan**

It's no secret that the Armenian people love and know how to treat their guests. Country outings are especially favored with firewood crackling in the grill, the smell of barbecue and *khashlama* wafting through the air, and the picnic participants gathering around impromptu tables. Soon enough their number grows, as any passerby is a welcomed guest. But this is all in summer.

And what if it's snowing outside the window and one cannot sit outside? No problem – at any season of the year there are preserved products which would not only satisfy hunger, but also provide gourmet pleasures.

"Armenian cuisine has always been rich with a variety of different dishes which were shaped, balanced and prepared with consideration of the climatic specifics of our region," said Sedrak Mamoulian, chef of the Ararat Hall restaurant and head of the public organization, "Development and Preservation of the Armenian Culinary Traditions." In the spring and summer when it's warm, we use lighter, vegetarian food, and in winter, our body needs calories, which not only give strength and restore our energy, but also regulate the metabolic processes in the body. "

The most popular winter dishes in Armenia are *kyalla*, *khash*, and *harisa*. The preparation of these dishes invariably turns into a true ritual as they should be cooked slowly and thoroughly. It is laborious work, but what a result! Few would decline such food, particularly accompanied with good drink. But Armenian cuisine is not limited to these three winter dishes, of course.

In our country's history, people were always carefully preparing for winter. That tradition is preserved to this day – fruits and vegetables are canned, salted, dried or frozen. Historians claim that we have one of the oldest, if not the most ancient, preserved dish – *thal*, better known as *ghaurma*.

To this day, the traditions of Armenian national cuisine are observed in the







regions of Armenia. For example, in winter, people in Vaik love to pamper themselves with a dish made of dried *karshima*. The dry leaves of this plant are boiled and garnished with a lot of nuts and lentils. The result is a rich winter dinner entree. In Lori in wintertime, people serve kchakhash or tsandil, which is made from wheat, corn and peas. In Syunik and Artsakh, dishes made of legumes such as beans, peas, and lentils, cooked in a special way with various dried herbs and spices, enjoy great popularity in the winter months.

And in Gyumri, a dish with the interesting name of "pochov apur" – literally translated as "tail soup" – is widely popular. It is even served in special pots with tails. A special dish called "Ararat" follows this thick soup. Ararat is an improvisation on the theme of pilaf, which as a rule is served only on special occasions. In fact, the improvisation looks no less appetizing than the main prototype.

"A small hill of rice abundantly covered with dried fruit – plums, apricots, nuts and raisins – symbolizes the image of Mount Ararat, the steak is Armenia, and the sour cream, brandy and butter sauce represent the River Arax," explains Mr. Mamoulian. He adds, "In our interpretation, this dish has evolved a bit. It could not have been otherwise. We took the main theme and improvised, which is more interesting, actually."

And here is another dish that with time has acquired new taste. Two earthenware plates are placed one on another; the bottom one has holes on the side. Lights from little warming candles, intended to keep the dish warm, play through these holes. At the top of the plate is Aghani with chicken. It's impossible to convey accurately with words all the richness of the taste of this dish, which comes from Tavush region. Chicken, nuts, dried walnut, garlic and a little vinegar are the main ingredients. In the past, it was dominated by dried fruits, sweet raisins and sour dogwood. But over time, this bean soup has acquired pieces of dough, which for the simplicity of preparation are now substituted with various types of pasta products.

We have learned many interesting things from Mamoulian at the dinner table. Take, for example the fact that the Armenian word "khoharar" (cook) can be translated as thinker: *Khoher* or *ararel* means to create thoughts. However, seeing the served table, we realized that the cooks had spent quite a time thinking before actually creating this exquisite treat. While we were talking, we did not notice how the small clay pots called *putuk* appeared on the table; the plates gave the name to the original dish of lamb, peas, potatoes, onions, tomato and *albuhari* (sour yellow plums). In the old days, instead of potatoes, chestnuts were added to the dish. In the past, *putuk* was prepared in a *tonir*, or floor furnace, but now it is cooked in the oven. Similarly, this recipe has undergone some changes as well – garlic and vinegar were added to it, which gave it certain piquancy. This dish is usually served for supper because it is easily digested.

Whatever the abundant winter feast could be, few would decline the flavorful homemade noodles called *arishta*. The ingredients for this recipe are simple – flour, water, eggs and salt. In the past, arishta was prepared in the autumn, with the long filaments hung out to dry, and was kept in a dry place. Each family cooks and serves it at the table in their own way – with all kinds of sauces, spices, grated cheese, and tomatoes. This really illustrates that there are no rules in culinary art – solely exceptions. But the classics stay – like *arishta* with homemade butter, yogurt and garlic. What could be better when it is snowing heavily outside, but the house is warm and full of delicious smells.

And as long as we are talking about the classics, the traditional Armenian khashlama can be called a classic as well. There are summer and winter variations of this dish. In the summer *khashlama* includes various vegetables, and in winter only potatoes and beef or lamb. And of course we cannot forget the traditional barbecue with baked potatoes, stuffed with lamb tail fat.

To this day, people in the Armenian villages believe that you can safely spend the winter only if there are sacks of potatoes, pickles, flour and wine stored in the house. It turns out, that with these products, you can prepare anything you wish. ■








GORGED

Love at First Bite

Chef George Duran is a food reformist. His persona both in and out of the kitchen can best be described as effervescent, even quirky. He is overly social and admits he has the knack of being able to start a conversation with anyone he meets because as he says, "everyone loves to eat." Since I love to eat and he loves to talk, our lunch in Manhattan figured to be a win-win situation.

Text **Manouk Akopyan** | Photo **Armen Poghosyan**

For the last ten years, George Duran has been a staple in the ever-growing world of celebrity chefs. He has his own TV shows – Food Network's *The Secret Life Of...* and *Ham on the Street* as well as TLC's *Ultimate Cake Off* – already to his credit. But it's his passion for creating inconceivable recipes as well as cooking and teaching others that makes the affable chef an instant fan favorite.

George Duran – born Kevork Guldalian – has loved cooking knee-weakening meals ever since he was born and raised in Venezuela under his mother's home cooking. His mother Zovig's Armenian cuisine had such a profound influence on him that it eventually led George to pursue his culinary quest in France and inevitably to his present day career.

We meet with George in his Long Island City apartment. Duran's kitchen is his compound for developing mouth-amusing recipes. As he unearths veggies from his jam-packed refrigerator, he speaks with Ursula, babysitter to his 14-month-old son Bodi, in Spanish, and then transitions back to our conversation with a mix of English and Armenian. His cooking interests are mainly comprised of Armenian, French, Mexican and South American dishes. Pick any of those languages from a bowl, and he speaks them fluently as well.

His favorite kitchen utensils – the dough scraper, pickle picker, and laser thermometer gun – speak to his personality. The color scheme of his pots and pans – red, blue and orange – speak to his love for his Armenian heritage.

"My wife Ilana thinks I'm insane sometimes because I do weird things with all of my crazy and stupid tools – like using the laser thermometer to measure the temperature on my son's back," Duran says. "I'm just very passionate about food and cooking."

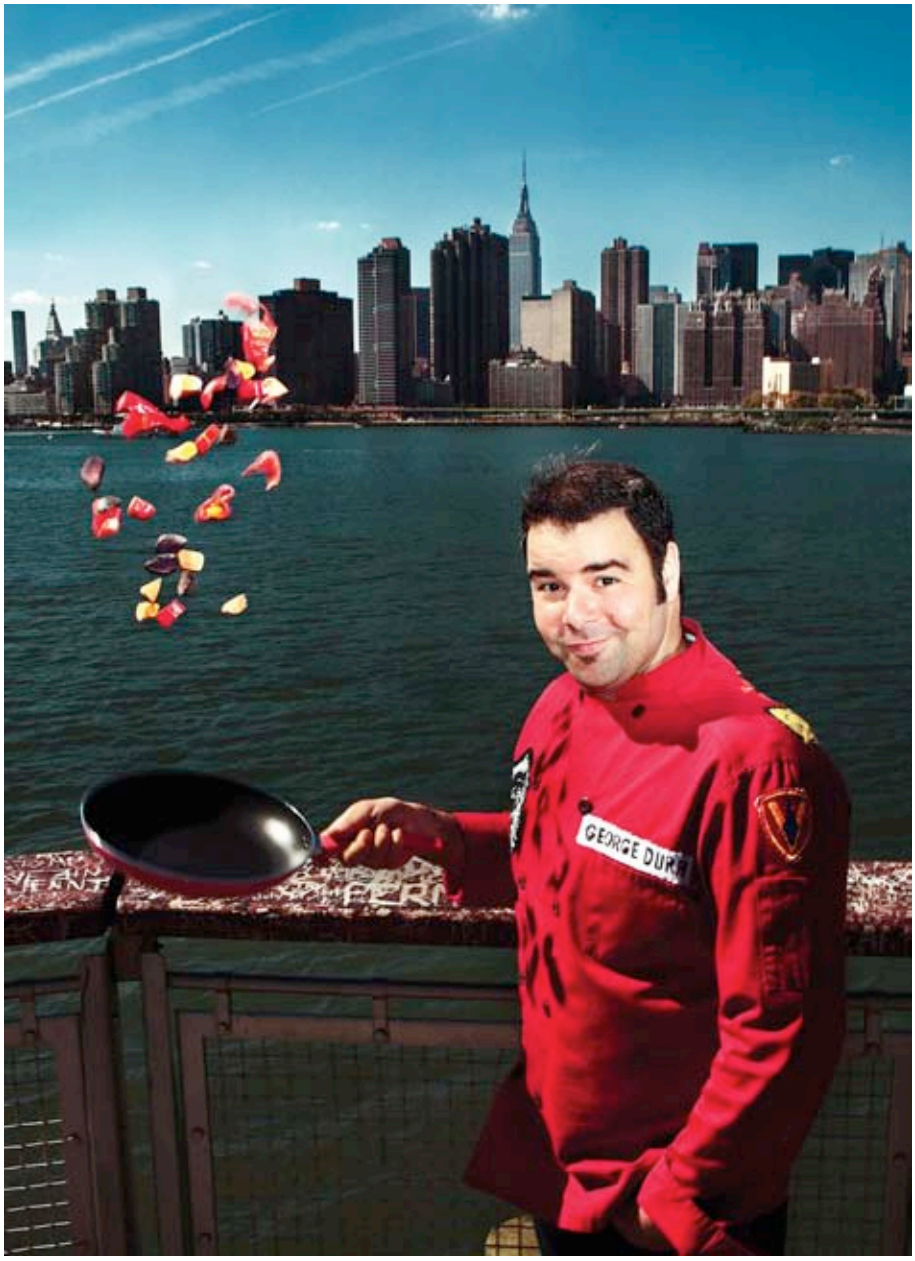
It is for Duran's passion that in 2009 Hunts Tomatoes chose him to be the spokesperson for its tomatoes both nationally and for its Hispanic market. While most chefs have personalities as generic as a store brand box of oatmeal, Duran's energy in his commercial spots makes a can of tomatoes that retails for a dollar appear to be the most succulent can of tomatoes you'll ever taste.

"They see I have a passion for cooking and creating recipes, and that is what's important – to be passionate. This is truly something any chef would love to be a part of. You know, developing recipes while also having the opportunity to bring my humor into it. In fact both campaigns performed so well that they are bringing it back for another six months."

Currently, Duran is working on *Funny Yolk*, a show on YouTube's "Hunger Channel" that lets him loose with a video crew and a fully stocked kitchen as he cooks up wild and mostly unimaginable concoctions. AOL is also looking into *World Eats, USA*, a show where Duran explores world cuisine throughout the states. *Funny Yolk* is largely an extension of Duran's feel for fresh recipes. In one of the segments, he works his imagination to tempt the taste buds of his viewers with a deep fried bacon-wrapped Twinkie bathed in a bowl of chocolate soup.

Duran's loose demeanor is further shown through his comfort food cookbook *Take This Dish and Twist It*. Inside its pages, George wakes up to potato chips, dresses like a grandmother and stuffs handfuls of marshmallows in his mouth. But all high jinks aside, Duran's innovative recipes, tips and witty writing make his cookbook a must-have for anyone looking to revamp their boring variations of their favorite meals. Pizza fondue with grilled banana split sundaes anyone?

But enough with all the mouth-watering teasing already. George Duran answers our questions over some Mediterranean cuisine. ▸



Let's backtrack a little bit. Talk about being born in Venezuela and how you ended up in New York.
I was born and raised in Caracas, Venezuela. When I was 15 years old, we moved to the United Sates. I finished high school and went to New York University. It worked out pretty well. I majored in Communication Studies and worked in radio right afterwards, a little bit in television and then I eventually went to culinary school in France in 2002. In France, I met a producer while I was in culinary school who needed a food network show in French and he said, "Do you have an idea?" I said, "I have a million ideas!" So, we eventually ended up putting a pilot together. They were like, "It's beautiful! It's an American trying to speak French! And it's perfect!" The show was done entirely in French. They loved my accent. So, they signed me up for a few seasons and it went really well, and I eventually won a French Emmy. My problem was that it was getting complicated to get my work visa. So after three years, I came back home and went straight to the Food Network and pitched them a show idea called *Ham on the Street*. We shot a pilot, and again, they loved it and picked it up. It eventually grew from there. We did two seasons of that and then I did another show called *The Secret Life of...* Then from there, I evolved and ended up going to TLC and doing a cake show called *Ultimate Cake Off*.

George Duran

Early 1990s
Leaves Caracas for New York University and majors in Communications Studies, starting his career in production.

1996
Duran's HYE Time Radio Show on WNYU is awarded "Best Radio Talk Show" at the National Association of College Broadcasters.

2000
Production career expands to hosting *Top 21 Videos of 2001* and *Pachanga!* for the Latin music television station HTV in Miami.

2002
George's love for his mother's home cooking resulted in him cooking in his own time, but this hobby quickly turned into an obsession. In this time period, he attends culinary school at the Ecole Superieure de Cuisine Francaise, Groupe Ferrandi in Paris.

2003
This became a merging of his two passions: food and production. In France, he created and hosted a culinary show in French called *Pop Cuisine*. The show garnered a 7 d'Or (French Emmy) for Best Cable Show and a Silver Grape Gastronomic Award.

2005
Returns to New York and creates and hosts the Food Network show *Ham on the Street*. The program showcases his interviewing and culinary skills.

2007
Hosts Food Network's *The Secret Life Of...*, a lighthearted exploration of the history of food.

2008
Releases his first book, *Take this Dish and Twist It* (*www.GeorgeDuran.com*), which features useful tips, extremely amusing anecdotes and recipes.

2010
Begins hosting TLC's *Ultimate Cake Off*, where the nation's top cake artists compete against each other to build the ultimate cake.

2012
Launches new show on YouTube's "Hunger" Channel called *Funny Yolk*.

→
Duran's wife fell in love with him as soon as she took a bite of his burger.

↓
The chef's Armenian pizza, also known as *lahmajun*.





Stereotypically, men are not supposed to be in the kitchen. How did your family react to the career path you took?
I'll tell you, at least in my family, when I told my mother I was going to culinary school, she said, "Voch!" I'm like, "Why?" "A man is never supposed to cook. It's a women's job to cook!" I think if you still ask my mother what would you have liked George to do, she would probably say, "I wish he was a surgeon. He would have been such a great surgeon." But in this day and age, look at all the men who are amazing chefs. Gender has nothing to do with how well you cook. So, it was a tough sell at first with my parents.
Armenian mothers are known to be great cooks. How has your mother influenced your cooking?
I always tell people that my mother overfed me through the umbilical cord, because my entire life, all I've eaten is good Armenian food. A lot of people ask me, "Where do you go for good Armenian food?" I tell them, "My mother's house! Where else?" Over the years, I've learned a lot of my mother's cuisine, but it's very difficult to go to her and suggest making *bouregs* with chocolate chips inside. She usually screams at me! But after I make it, her and my sister are instant believers. It's been quite a trip to push my mother to try and change her food. Now more than ever, she really accepts international foods in the house. Nowadays, I come over and make Korean food, French food, and all these different pastas, and she loves it.
Your career progressed very quickly in a short period of time. By the way, how old are you?
I'm 36...I think. I'm not sure, maybe 37. I think, I'm 37. Seriously, I'm not sure. (Long pause) I'm 37.
I'll confirm with you later! (He is, in fact, 37 years-old) ... Once upon a time, you were Kevork Guldalian. How did your name change come about?
I changed my name, although not legally, a long time ago. I was doing shows for the Latin music television station HTV, and they didn't like my Armenian last name because it was very difficult to pronounce. I had a very close friend whose last name was Duran, so I just went with that. And then I went to France for my cooking show and they said the exact same thing – my last name was hard on the viewers. By the time I got to New York, I had already established myself in different places as George Duran, so I just stuck with it.

"We are in a revolution right now. Celebrity chefs are inspiring people to cook more at home. Viewers look at us and say, 'I want to make that too.' We are pushing people toward better food. It's an excellent thing."

Where does all your creativity come from?
I don't know. I look at food. I taste it and I say, "Wow, I want to try it this way." Sometimes I even dream of it. Sometimes, the dreams come into place. Other times, it's inspiration. I see a lot of things and then I try to combine them. My wife always says, "I feel so bad that you always have to cook." I don't understand that concept. I have a passion for cooking.
What do you consider your best creation?
It's the creation that made my wife fall in love with me. It's my hamburger. She always says, "When I tasted your hamburger, I knew I was going to marry you." It's a cheese-stuffed hamburger. I made it for her when we were dating. A lot of people will say it, but I make the best burger. People come over to my house, they taste my burger and say, "I thought I made the best burger, but no!" Even burger professionals say mine is the best. I take a little cube of cheddar cheese and freeze it. Then I mold the hamburger meat around it. Once you bite into it; you have a warm chunk of cheese right in the center.
When was the last time you had fast food?
It was on Valentine's Day; that's why I love my wife (laughs). She is part Armenian, part Norwegian. But she's becoming more Armenian, she doesn't have a choice. Once a year, my wife gets to have a McDonald's fish filet sandwich, and she wants to have it on Valentine's Day. She doesn't want flowers or restaurants. So we go to McDonald's, and have a fish filet sandwich, fries and a strawberry milkshake. That's wonderful because there's no pressure for me. Except for the rest of the year when I have to go get her flowers and make her food! I am what my wife would say,



the best husband ever, because I don't even watch any sports. For me, sports is a medium to get more food on TV and come up with more ideas, so it works out. Like for the Super Bowl, a lot of people ask me to develop recipes or go on morning shows.

With that being the case, do people ever decline your Super Bowl party invite?

You have no idea. Every time I throw a Super Bowl party, it's massive and I don't think I watch one minute of the game, maybe some of the commercials, but not one minute of the game because I'm in the kitchen with my friends – and there's food galore. Recently, I went to someone's house, it was a potluck, and he ended up doing soft tacos, and all the guys were there, watching TV, and the women were in the other room, talking about babies. I was the only one in a kitchen I had never been to. I have to say, I was happier than anyone else.

So, with all the cooking you do, has there ever come a point where your eating gets out of control?

With access to so much good food, it's very easy to overeat. It is important for you to train yourself, to train your body, to cook better food, to understand what you're cooking, to eat out less. When you cook for yourself, chances are you're eating better. The best way to begin a healthy lifestyle is to start cooking in your house. A lot of people don't cook because they say "I don't know how to." If you can read, you can cook. That's what it comes down to.

It's also about experimentation. A lot of people are afraid to cook because of the possibility of ruining the dish.

Absolutely, there is no doubt about it. Since everyone has a different palate, it also matters if the recipe is well written. Most celebrity chefs hire someone to do their recipes. I make all my own recipes, and I cook them three to four times. Depending on how much I love my guests, I'll try it out on them as well. But the rule of thumb is to first test it out on yourself. If you follow all of my step-by-step directions, it will come out exactly how I said it would, no matter what.

How important is it to gather ingredients from proper sources in order to have a great dish?

It's important that you understand that things are changing in the U.S. I think more and more people are eating local foods. In New York, everything has to be imported. How do you feed the masses

during winter? It's important that you stay in touch with local farmers and see what is in season. I am a part of the CSA (Community Supported Agriculture). I pay a certain amount of money, and every week the farmer brings a big basket full of fruits and vegetables that they've just harvested. This way, I'm supporting the farmer directly; someone who has passion in what they're growing.

Since we're eating right now, have you been thinking about what you can do differently with the *kyufta* and *octopoli*? Is that always the case?

Yesterday, I met people from the California Fig Board. I was the happiest man on Earth. I was also excited because I said "I bet I could make a salty cheesecake with goat cheese and put figs on top of it. They looked at me and said, "Wow, what a great idea!" It's like with every Armenian family. You sit down for lunch and discuss what you're going to have for dinner. You sit down for dinner and discuss what you're going to have for breakfast the next morning. It's non-stop thinking.

There's a heightened interest in celebrity chefs. Is that good or bad for the industry?

We are in a revolution right now. Celebrity chefs are inspiring people to cook more at home. Viewers look at us and say, "I want to make that too." We are pushing people toward better food. It's an excellent thing.

Do you ever plan on getting into the restaurant business?

It would have to be a very specific circumstance, something like a food truck would be very good, a small hole in the wall restaurant, something where they can see me cooking and serving them, but I don't think I would go into it. Maybe I'll consider partnering up with somebody, and advise on the menu. It is tough work. I did it for a while in France and I was miserable. Although the food was amazing, I didn't like the people I worked with; everybody treated each other like shit, and that's not where I wanted to be. It almost made me hate food and cooking. Everybody wants to be in the restaurant business. I tell them to work two weeks straight for free to see what it's really like. Honestly, restaurant chefs do not get as much credit as they deserve. They are truly hard workers and deserve all the credit in the world. What I do is nothing compared to what they do. They are back there cutting, cooking, sweating and burning themselves, and we as customers don't even think about them. We just sit there and take it for granted.

"Most celebrity chefs hire someone to do their recipes. I make all my own recipes, and I cook them three to four times. Depending on how much I love my guests, I'll try it out on them as well."

Are you open to the idea of being a private chef?

Being a private chef is a little tough because it would really take away time from my family. I would certainly cater to one-time events a few times a month. I'm more open to teaching people. I enjoy going to people's homes for private lessons in a very interactive setting. I set up their kitchens and show them and their guests how to cook. I do a lot of private events, but teaching is what I'm good at.

Your cookbook *Take This Dish and Twist It* is an extension of your passion for both teaching and cooking. It is put together in an interesting way, representing your persona.

Absolutely. You need to have a sense of humor. I got mine from my father. That's pretty much what my mantra is. But more importantly, I want to be who I am and be true to myself. I could easily turn into a Gordon Ramsey. I am who I am and some people would say I'm incredible and successful at it. I don't change. The publisher allowed me to be hands-on with the book, and to bring in pretty much who I am, and I am actually working on another cookbook that will be coming out at the end of next year. When you meet me in person or when you go to my house to eat, it's exactly what you see in the cookbook. Nothing changes. It's evolving but it's usually the same.

What are some of your twists on Armenian dishes?

For my *luleh kebab* recipe, which is more of an appetizer version, I call it the "lolli-kebab." I changed the name so it's like lollipops. I think it's more for the fun of it. It's the short version of the luleh kebab so both children and adults can eat it. You don't have to sit and eat a whole *luleh kebab.* You can just eat two or three. Then there's the *lahmajun* recipe where the bread is actually a tortilla. So, again, there's a simple recipe with the choice of different meats.

What is the most essential ingredient in your kitchen?

That's a very good question. For me, it would have to be chipotle hot sauce. I use a batch of chipotle hot sauce on almost everything I cook. I love it on my eggs. There's even an organic olive oil version of it. I love spicy.

What is your favorite Armenian food?

The *sarma* that has bulgur and *sumakh* inside. Man, it's my favorite! It will be the food that I will eat the day before I die – or the moment I die.

You've done a great job combining all of your passions. You must love life right now.

I don't think a lot of people can say you can combine two passions. I think that's the secret of life, to have two things you're very good at and being able to do it at the same time. So, life is good. Things worked out pretty well. ■

↓
Lolli-Kebabs, a sampler-sized version of the *luleh kebab.*



Flavor of the Past

Food connects us all in so many ways. We grow it, we harvest it, we buy or sell it, we cook it – and the savory part – we eat it. It's an ongoing process that is closely tied to human socialization – starting with a baby sucking at its mother's breast. Then, it's daily meals with family, eating with friends at school, enjoying a happy hour after work, or a picnic in the park. Holiday celebrations always include favorite foods, with aromas we learn to associate with the faces of our loved ones, creating indelible memories. Food brings people together and nourishes our relationships – the perfect recipe for a good life.

Photos and text provided **Ruth Thomasian from Project SAVE Armenian Photograph Archives**



Courtesy of Kaspar "Archie" Pilibosian 10-87, Watertown Massachusetts

From Farm...

Produce clerks Myron Kelligian and Kaspar "Archie" Pilibosian served customers at this first Star Market location in Watertown, Massachusetts. With their inviting display of fresh fruits and vegetables, they stand here in 1934 ready to fill customers' requests by weighing and bagging the produce. In 1918, Sarkis Mugar purchased this market, the first of what would become one of many Star Markets serving Greater Boston. Sarkis' untimely death four years later gave ownership to his business-minded son Stephen. In the years following WWII, Steve and his cousin John Mugar developed Star Market into the new concept called the "supermarket." Today, Star Markets – though owned by Shaw's Market, Inc. – continue to be branded with their original name.



Courtesy of Nishan Terzian 11-82, Arlington, Massachusetts

To Table

Mariam "Mary" Heditsian Avedisian and her husband "John" Enesheh Hovaness Avedisian, seated together at the head of the dining room table, celebrate Thanksgiving Day in the early 1950s at their Providence, Rhode Island home. Joining them around the table are other Avedisian and Heditsian family members, as well as Mardirosians and Terzians. Posed with red wine Thanksgiving toasts in hand, these Armenian-Americans have much to be thankful for: their comfortable middle-class lifestyle in a country hospitable to refugees of Genocide, the love of their extended family, and the abundance on their table. With abour (soup) bowls waiting to be filled, this Thanksgiving Day feast is about to begin. What was the menu? Perhaps it was a cultural mélange of traditional American and Armenian harvest foods – foods that pay homage both to their adopted country and the land of their ancestors.



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Tasty Contemplations

For many of us, some of our fondest memories are associated with food. A certain flavor or aroma can take us back to a special time in our lives – the first time we tried something new or exotic, memories of family dinners. These preferences are often shaped by our upbringing, the place where we grew up and the traditions that were passed down to us. At *Yerevan*, we wondered: What is national cuisine, what factors influence and change it? *Yerevan's* Mery Khatchatrian was joined by Andrea Fehring, Gevork Kazanchyan and Lenore Tolegian Hughes in a discussion about our culinary traditions and modern-day trends.

Text **Mery Khatchatrian** | Photo **Tigran Tovmasyan**



Andrea Fehring is a Senior Account Director for Hospitality Sales / C&S Sales. She is a board member of AIWA and past president of Westside Guild for Ararat Home

Mery: Is there such a thing as national cuisine, or it is determined by the available regional food resources and climate?
Kazanchyan: I think cuisine is a dynamic concept and its traits or categorizations are contingent upon how we choose to define the parameters. I feel our definitions of national cuisine morphs from era to era. A myriad of factors will impact what arrives as a commonly offered food for a nation or region. One can invest in an illusion that a certain dish truly captures the essence of a people or tribe. But, then if you pan back long enough in time, some of them can get smeared by or be attributed to influences and contributions from collaborative civilizations, conquerors and co-minglers. A national cuisine can be read like a diary, as it catalogues impressions of what took place and what the nation's people experienced. I feel it is loosely similar to our colloquial inference of "vital signs," as in it really depends on when you decide to pop in and try to define how things are. Much like blood pressure, countless environmental factors can impact it and it can change drastically depending on when and where you decide to take your reading. Certainly, what grows in a region at any one point and recent patterns of climate will affect it, but also other things like socio-political elements that inject a lasting influence even if from a brief occupation.
Tolegian Hughes: I'm sure there is a national cuisine for Armenians – maybe *khash, madzoon, dolma* and *kufta*, rank up there as foods most Armenians think of as their national favorite, but for me, an American born, second-generation Armenian, I think of *pilaf, shish kabob,* Armenian salad and soft chewy *lavash* filled with string cheese, as our national cuisine.



Gevork Kazanchyan is a Professor of Food Safety and Sanitation for College of the Canyons' Culinary Arts Program and a Professor of Environmental Health at CSUN

Lenore Tolegian Hughes is author of the novel *Cups of Fortune* (2012) and the forthcoming cookbook *Come on to My House*.

Fehring: For most Americans many dishes, like mac n'cheese, hamburgers and hot dogs usually labeled as "comfort food" are deemed as "national cuisine." However, contrary to popular stereotype, there are many innovative chefs in the U.S. that are making some very creative regional dishes. For example, we always thought grapes would be grown in Napa, yet we see many other places that are growing grapes successfully and producing some interesting wines – even from the steep sandstone hillsides of Southern California (including a vineyard overlooking one of the busiest freeways in the United States).

Mery: Have our attitudes, expectations and perceptions towards food changed due to globalization and integration of Armenians into the local cultures?

Tolegian Hughes: Due to the pace of American life, our foods have become specialty foods instead of everyday, homemade offerings. When we have a party we go to the Armenian deli and buy *lahmajun*, cheese *bouregs* and *baklava* already made. Besides not having the time needed to make everything at home, many Armenians haven't had the opportunity to watch and help in the kitchen alongside grandmas, and moms to learn how to make our dishes. As I wrote in my book *Cups Of Fortune*, "Secret recipes forever hidden in the grains and cracks of her wooden bowl long to be told." When I make my grandmother's tender *blini perashki* with my young grandchildren, they not only are learning how to make great great grandmother's specialty, but they are developing a yearning for *perashki* they will carry with them for the rest of their lives. That passionate craving for the taste of *perashki* will

make sure that they will re-create it in their own kitchen when they are grown and teach their children to do the same. That's one of the very special ways we keep being Armenian alive.

Fehring: I like to think that people today are more concerned about what they should eat; and of course to limit sugar; eat green and also everything else in moderation. I think as you get older you want to savor more flavors and also learn to eat foods that are different since you might have eliminated them from your diet just because your parents might not have wanted you to have them. I can't remember having sticky rice at all until I was introduced to Japanese food after the age of 30. Yet, I love the simple aspect of Japanese food and that most Japanese chefs strive for very fresh ingredients. I think as you experience different cultures and their foods – you can come to like those things that your parents just didn't consider due to the fact that our world was isolated in the fifties and sixties – which is the time that I grew up in.

Kazanchyan: I agree. It seems availability and awareness tends to foster change in general. In our collective pursuit of what to consume, I believe the broadening of options due to globalization and integration undeniably piqued our interests, expanded our selections and set us on an exploratory pursuit. Another element that supports this is the claiming of the origin of strikingly similar foods. For the sake of avoiding a dissertation, we can look at a commonly adored dessert involving caramelized dairy; the English will erect their flag into their burnt cream, the Spanish have their crema catalana and of course, the French tout innovation with their crème brulee. This particular debate originated in the middle ages and I'm sure "flan" or "crème caramel", a first cousin to the others, strikes heated conversation in lands spanning from Mexico to Eastern Europe. Aside from re-thinking whether a said culture "invented" any certain recipe or technique, an altered perception which comes with broadened global awareness and interaction is that peoples of different lands may have arrived at some similar ideas perhaps completely independent of one another. Conversely, some may perceive that increased travel "cross-pollinated" our respective cuisines. In either case, our "take" on food in general changes, and when received in a rational fashion, it will encourage some from being too "myopic" about their own cuisine.

With regards to altered attitude, expectation and perception, I can share a personal example. I am far from unique in that I enjoy eating lobster. I used to think that a simple lobster tail with a butter dip was a decadent treat. Although I will rarely ever turn away that offering now, I will share the following: When I first experienced lobster prepared at an un-westernized Chinese seafood restaurant, I then realized how relatively "pedestrian" our New England-style lobster presentation can seem sans the crispy batter, broth of sautéed herb medley and drizzle of a tangy, sweet and spicy sauce. That experience has me currently and completely appreciating the classic American-style akin to an excellent, classic film in *Black and White* while also expanding my attitude, expectation and perception of what that crustacean's culinary potential holds when opted for in "full-color HD".



Mery: How have traditions influenced our approach to cooking? Has history influenced our cuisine?

Tolegian Hughes: The most dynamic family tradition is gone in most Armenian homes today – the stay at home Armenian mother. When I was growing up in 1950s Los Angeles, all the Armenian grandmothers and mothers I knew were homemakers, none of them worked outside the house. Instead they worked inside the house, mostly in the kitchen, the center of the Armenian home. Our traditional meals required traditional, stay-at-home moms to prepare them because of the time consuming nature of the recipes and the fact that two people were needed to roll, stuff and fold to make the preparation faster. In those days there was no such thing as *dolma* in the frozen section of the grocery store and even if there had been, it wouldn't have tasted the same as my Russian-Armenian grandmother's cabbage leaf *dolma* she made with the dried basil she grew in her herb garden, tomato sauce, prunes and dried apricots. Nothing can take the place of traditional Armenian grandmothers and mothers making traditional Armenian food. Nothing.

Fehring: Personally I don't consider myself a cook or anything close to that due to my work schedule. But my father and his mother were the king and queen of Armenian food in our home. Not only did I have a family dinner every Sunday night with my grandparents; but my dad and my grandmother did all the cooking. My dad and grandmother also did all the holidays meals with *shish kabob* at Christmas with my dad personally selecting the leg of lamb at the store. Then cutting and preparing it on the skewers with additional skewers for tomatoes and green peppers alternating with onions. They also made *tourchi*, *sourg beragi*, *kutfta* and also our own *lavash*. So I do believe that growing up in an Armenian household you do have the family traditions that influence not only the cuisine but your whole life. As you get older you realize how they influenced what you like today.

Kazanchyan: Food and eating can be, in many regards, a very intimate and emotional enterprise for those fortunate enough to be eating for reasons beyond pure biological need. The process of arriving at and experiencing a meal holds endless potential to sculpt a person as they develop and thereby anchor feelings and principles that are summoned later upon recollection. Whether it is harvesting fruit with grandfather, making sauce with grandfather or the priceless communal dining ceremony with the family, many attach feelings and "inner places" to these traditions and maybe even hinge some personal identity elements with entailed experiences.

I believe our history influences our cuisine in countless ways. I think in some instances it is due to an elective process and other times out of simple necessity.

Mery: Recent studies claim that the entire niche of organic food products is nothing more than a myth. What is your opinion on that?

Fehring: I do not think it is a myth – there are many stories by farmers that are working to strive to grow better foods that are not subject to traditional pesticides and therefore have a much better taste. We lived in the city, but my dad put aside a small part of our backyard for his vegetable garden. He grew his own tomatoes and cucumbers because he thought (this is in the fifties before organic was considered "in") most of the store-bought vegetables had no taste.



Personally, I love the fact that you can go to the store and see organic vegetables and note where they are coming from in the country. A great example of this is the small cherry tomatoes. If you can get a good box at the store that is organic... or just grow them yourself.

Tolegian Hughes: I'm not impressed with the findings. I believe the purer the food the healthier it is to eat. It's just common sense to me that if food is produced using industrial solvents, pesticides, chemical fertilizers, chemical additives and irradiated that it's not safe to eat. I won't cook with ingredients that aren't wholesome, especially when there's a choice of purchasing the same food that's been raised organically. A large part of the unique taste of Armenian foods is from the fact that we use only the freshest ingredients and best produce and meats to make our foods. I agree with my aunt who used to say to vendors who tried to sell her obviously inferior produce, "You *tink* I'm crazy?" What saddens me about many young families is that they have developed a "fast-food/take-out" mentality. Some Armenian dishes take longer to prepare, but that's not a reason for serving foods that are loaded with poison. That's why I love producing our ancient recipes today, so people can see they are not beyond their ability to make at home. And so they can also understand the benefits of simply prepared, nutritious and delicious Armenian food. Stuffed vegetables – tomatoes, zucchini, eggplant, squash, onions – are just examples. They can be prepared in so many different ways and they are extremely healthy, easy to make and more delicious than you could ever imagine. I want to share with you something about which I feel very deeply. The Genocide took everything from us. We lost families, friends, our great scholars, musicians, artists, clergy and treasured possessions. I'm committed to spending my life teaching and recording our recipes so we do not lose them, too. If we lose our recipes, we lose what nurtured us for centuries and what will continue to feed our souls, as well as our bodies, in the ancient tradition of what it means to be Armenian. ■



No Small Risk

According to the Center of Disease Control and Prevention, about 48 million people (1 in 6 Americans) get sick, 128,000 are hospitalized and 3,000 die each year from food borne diseases. This is a significant public health problem that is largely preventable. The new FDA Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA) was signed into law by President Obama on January 4, 2011. How the situation will improve and what changes will take place was our discussion with food safety expert, Armen Abajian.

Text **Lianna Zakharian** | Photo **Armen Poghosyan**

What is happening in the food safety area in the U.S. and around the world?
The new FDA Food Safety Modernization Act proposed by President Obama is the most important sweeping reform ever. It gives the FDA more mandates and authority to protect the public health. Presently, each country, or even within a single country like the U.S., has different standards and rules. In addition, there are different food safety control organizations, and each organization has its own standards. Therefore, countries are trying to harmonize all of that. The Global Food Safety Initiative (GFSI) will help with worldwide import and export. A company certified under the GFSI will carry a certificate that will be recognized by other companies. There is a required list of criteria companies must comply with in the area of food safety: pest control management, food keeping, laboratory testing, and so on. The auditors will visit each plant to observe the situation not on paper, but in reality. They'll give the company a score, pass or fail, or they might suggest improvements in certain areas and will not approve the facility as accredited until it removes all the deficiencies found. We're not there yet, but that's the direction the countries are taking. Presently 15-20% of food we consume is imported. Every day our food is entering the U.S. from over 300 ports. So ensuring the safety of imported food is just as important as the safety of domestic produce. Increasingly we have to work with international partners. We are shifting the focus from responding to contamination to preventing it.

Does the FDA have agencies in all importer countries?
I don't think the FDA currently has a presence in all countries. They may have some offices in big importer countries, such as China. I know that they probably have one in Armenia as well. But the problem is that a very small sample of imported food gets inspected.

Is inspecting all imported foods possible, given the large number of distributors?
Usually the food comes through major companies, which then distribute it to smaller ones. It comes in bulk containers to a broker, who is responsible for the safety

of the raw material. That broker submits the paperwork to the FDA saying, for example, "I am going to get five containers of a certain product. Here are the lot numbers and locations." That way the FDA knows where exactly the imported goods are for traceability. Next, the FDA would require statistical sampling from these five containers, a certain number of pounds of samples per lot, per code. These samples are sent to an accredited laboratory, where they would be analyzed for contaminants – radioactivity, pesticides, insect damage and so on. And finally, the FDA would give it a clearance.

Doesn't it mean more bureaucracy?

Not exactly; it means more structure. The FDA has a statistical sampling approach. Now they have another rule – pre-shipment information has to come to the FDA. If I am bringing, let's say, five containers from Ukraine, the FDA has to be advised in advance. Several years ago there was toothpaste, baby formula and pet food from China with a lot of contamination issues, which were widely covered in the press. We didn't know where exactly some of these operations in China took place: in the alleys, in the back doors, or elsewhere. We didn't know the conditions of manufacturing while they were just exporting food ingredients to the entire world. China imports a lot of citric acid which is used in drinks, so there were a lot of concerns at the companies that I worked for. The frequently asked question was, "How do we know that all this citric acid that is coming from China is safe?" Back then, we had to go through a lot of work with our broker – the third party auditors went to China and verified that they were in compliance. As a result, the company issued letters to our customers here in the U.S. to put them at ease.

Our ancestors salted, sugar-coated and dried foods to preserve them. Are the food products of today more safe?

Salt is a preservative, but it also causes high blood pressure. You have to keep these factors in mind when you prepare and conserve products. I think today's produce is safer. Every day, millions of manufactured foods are produced, packaged and served without incidents. We have to feed over 314 million people in the U.S., over seven billion people across the globe and 120 million cats and dogs. This is not an easy task. It requires a complex system of growers, sellers, distributors, operators, consumers. There are opportunities for improper handling to occur at every step. Even with our current food infrastructure, one of the safest in the world, unfortunately contamination remains inevitable. Consumers increasingly are questioning the safety of their food. For example, look at the recent recall of mangoes. Usually such incidents are followed by regulatory concerns and consumer distrust. So there is always a risk factor. We can't make food completely risk free. Microorganisms are all around us, in the air that we breathe, in the soil, we have cross contamination with listeria, E. coli, salmonella. But we have become more proactive since the food safety program which started back in the 1970s and called Hazard Analysis & Critical Control Points (HACCP). It was conceived in the 1960s when NASA asked Pillsbury to design and manufacture the first foods for space flights. Since then, HACCP has been recognized internationally as a logical tool for adapting traditional inspection methods to a modern, science-based food safety system.

But how was food safety conducted before the HACCP?

In the past, we used to make the food and then check the final product to make sure it was safe. You would make 15,000 cans and then inspect them and see that there were problems. So all that food had to be destroyed. Before we focused on the finished product; now with HACCP, we take preventive measures, we look at the raw ingredients, check the processing plant, we see where the risks are involved in making this food. An ingredient that could be biologically risky, like orange juice. Fifteen years ago there was E. coli contamination in orange juice produced in the Fresno area. Back then we were not aware that E. coli could survive in an acid environment. But since then, orange juice has to be pasteurized. Microbes are adapting and becoming resistant. On our part, it's a continuous process of analysis and taking preventive measures.

What do you personally look for when you buy products?

I try to regulate salt intake and eat high fiber foods. By law we must have every ingredient indicated on the label. This is enforced by the National Labeling and Education Act of the 1990s. If enough studies are conducted to show positive effect of the product on health, that also could be included in FDA-approved health claim on the label. The industry and FDA spend millions of dollars on sending the food to laboratories, checking its nutritional composition and providing all this information on the nutritional panel to educate the consumers, but it's not used effectively by the public. Unfortunately, studies show that less than 10-15% of people read labels. So if you read labels carefully, you can decide which product is best for you. ■



Good Food, Good Life

Armen Abajian received a Bachelor's Degree in Biological Sciences from the University of North Carolina and a Masters Degree in Food Science and Technology from the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. He worked at Stokely-Van Camp providing quality assurance and was later promoted to a position of quality control manager at the Gatorade plant. He also worked at the Carnation Company and subsequently at Nestlé Corporation where he was responsible for safety regulations and employee training in food safety and quality. At Nestlé he conducted the auditing of factories to ensure compliance with Nestlé as well as the FDA standards.



An Afternoon in Towne

Towne Food & Drink is like a pair of dark Levi's dressed up with a collared shirt and vest. It's American, timeless, and up for anything. Anybody can go without feeling out of place, and, if you're lucky, maybe even fall in love.

Text **Ara Tahmassian** | Photo **Tigran Tovmasyan**

Sam Cooke's "Bring It on Home To Me," was playing when I stepped into the 7,000-square-foot restaurant that sits on the ground floor of the Watermarke Tower in Downtown, Los Angeles. As colossal a space as it was, the bowl of Dum-Dum lollipops on the hostess' desk sparked a childish grin on my face, the candied aroma of freshly baked pastries embraced me from my right, and the King of Soul singing "bring your sweet lovin," set me in the mood. Little did I know that later on that day, I would be caught up in a love affair with a dessert.

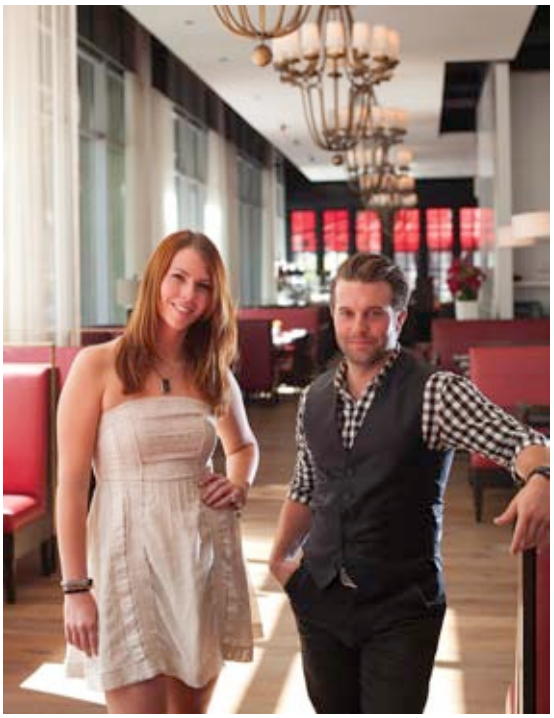
The California sun, envy of photographers around the globe, finds its way through the concrete giants of South Park and into the awaiting arms of Towne. Servers tuck in their shirts and set the tables for those who are about to seek gastronomical refuge on the corner of 9th and Flower. The barista and hostess softly set their opening arguments for and against the recent hype toward the flavor of Red Velvet. But, as a fresh batch of sweets is delivered from the kitchen to the coffee bar, both rest their cases and declare the S'mores Donut champion of desserts at Towne.

↓
Rainbow racked pastries at the coffee bar.



Manager Adam welcomes me, and I quickly compliment the house music selection. Turns out, every detail was conceptualized and fused together by owner Armen Shirvanian. "No song gets played twice a day," Adam tells me. In fact, Armen insists that four days must pass before the same song is played again, and even then, it cannot be at the same time of the day as it was originally played. Shirvanian, who owns Mi Piace in nearby Pasadena, has a passion that manifests itself in every nuance of his creation.

Since Adam is from Chicago, we discuss the way the media has treated Bears' controversial quarterback, Jay Cutler. But before we can talk details, he excuses himself and gathers up his team for a pre-opening huddle. Adam plays the role of quarterback at Towne. It's almost eleven, and in about fifteen minutes the doors will open for brunch. "We got twenty-eight on the books, plus the rush," he calls out. With confidence, he passes forward some uniform rules echoed by Armen and then runs an option play on a pastry. "Replace strawberries with fresh autumn peaches because that's what's in season." Some jokes are exchanged, and then he breaks the huddle. A server walks up to him and asks for some time off for a family reunion; he's happy to adjust the schedule. "Family comes first," he says. ▸



←
Sunshine and smiles awaits brunch time

The scent of burning wood coming from the exposed kitchen is a sign of life in a place that for so long had been devoid of it. What once was the home of a furniture store is now a harbor for hungry urbanites. Students detoured around the Starbucks across the street and came in to pick their favorite pastry from the coffee bar. An anxious fellow who feels unwelcome in his own suit finds solace in a clean martini at the sleek bar. Behind him, a Watermarke resident gets comfortable in her favorite spot at the lounge as she savors a ground brisket burger, which was featured in *The Huffington Post's* "Nine New Burgers to Try in 2012."

And outside, in the open-air terrace, an older, perhaps wiser, couple enjoy a glass of wine. "Make it sexy chef!" his cooks cheer, as Executive Chef Ryan Morrison tosses each ingredient into the pan. "Always sexy!" he responds. "I love the people I work with. I like making stuff and saying, here try this. What do you think of that? It's the instant reaction to what you create." Morrison earned his stripes in the kitchens of Toronto and New York, and among other things has worked with celebrity chef Scott Conant, as part of the opening team for the Scarpetta restaurants. "I knew I wanted to do this the day I made something without the smoke alarm going off."





→ Pastry Chef Tamara Davis sweetens the pot.

It was late in the day, and my own alarm went off. My good friends in management noticed the hungry orchestra trapped in my stomach, so they sat me down for some grub. For the record, a multi-course meal artfully crafted by a top-tier chef is hardly "grub," but for all the grandeur radiating from the chandeliers, lunchtime at Towne is a casual affair. Folks come in with tank tops and flip-flops, and leave with pastries and smiles.

I pull up a chair at the lounge, where I'm forced to endure a perfectly cooked skirt steak, kampachi tacos, wood grilled octopus, and second-to-none house-made mustard relish on fresh pretzel bread. Like a good boy, I sat under the brown-leather arch ceiling that extends from the bar to the lounge and finished up the last of the roasted brussels sprouts. "A typical example of an American vegetable served to us as kids, now modernized," Armen pointed out. The bartender leaned over and asked what I'd like to drink. I looked at the top-shelf vodkas, and thought about their Eastern Mule, served in a copper cup with lime and house five-spice ginger beer. Rumors were whispered among the locals of a Towne Kool-Aid with Tanquery and lime. But before I could make up my mind, it happened.

Of all the food joints in all the cities in all the world, she walked into Towne and onto my table. Seductively plated next to the sour cream caramel sauce and ginger ice cream – The Peanut Butter Crunch Bar.



← Chef Ryan Morrison "makes it sexy" in the open kitchen.

↑ Shaken Martini – serving all secret agents.

Born from the creative mind of self-proclaimed "geek" Pastry Chef Tamara Davis, this silky flavor of romance might have been the very stuff Cupid used to lace his arrow tips. And according to her, the rich taste of this all-parts-amazing dessert was crafted with one purpose in mind – "to reflect childhood memories." Well, you did just that, Chef Davis. I had not fallen in love with a dessert since the second grade when I chased down that ramshackle ice cream truck for a bite of the crunchy Choco Taco.

This Ducati-riding, Wolverine-tattooed, comic book junkie pastry chef, formerly of Aquavit and Bottega Louie, was brought in by Armen to modernize familiar flavors and bring them to Towne. That includes bubble-gum root beer floats, push pops and your pick of chocolate mint, original banana, or red velvet twinkies; all part of a whimsical approach to creative dining. Nostalgia you can taste.

Legend has it that Armen's father used to take him to Bob's Big Boy in Glendale when he was a kid. Something about the restaurant atmosphere planted a bug in him. Towne's menu is inspired by those very childhood memories of intimate coffee shops coupled with high-end New York dining; all with a Modern American twist. ▸



→
Towne General Manager, Matthew Washton

We are Armenian," says Shirvanian. "We enjoy good food, good company, and smiles all around. That's why I love what I do." His goal is to spread a spirit of communal hospitality in all his ventures. "With Towne, we wanted to do something more than just add a list of beers, mediocre food, and hardware imitation," he says, referring to the recent trend of gastro-pubs popping up all over the city. "We wanted to make it a lifestyle destination."

I could get used to this lifestyle, that's for sure, but these calories weren't going to burn themselves, so I asked Matthew Washton, the General Manager, and in some ways the offensive coordinator of Towne, for a tour of the Watermarke Tower. Washton's worked with television personality and restaurateur Gordon Ramsey and the Patina Restaurant Group, and helped open high-end restaurants all around the city. We take the elevator down to the second kitchen, where one secret door reveals a hallway that leads to another secret door in this 35-story luxury high rise equipped with a movie theatre, club, and outdoor entertaining areas. "Our amenities allow us to compete," says Matthew. As a tenant of the Tower, Towne is able take advantage of the building's up-scale amenities to host private dinners and parties. Even with these impressive capabilities, Matthew underscores that what makes Towne unique, is the people who work here.



↑
Cupid's advantage - the Peanut Butter Crunch Bar

"We employee 105 people" he says as the elevator doors open back to the kitchen. "All very nice!" interjects Chef Morrison, passing us by. "Well, Armen sets the tone," says Matthew. "You can teach somebody about the various California wines, about oysters of the Pacific Northwest, but you can't teach hospitality and personality. Customer experience is paramount. Nobody leaves Towne disappointed."

True, but eventually I had to leave, because I had a job to do. I had to write about this place. I'm no good at being noble, but it doesn't take much to see that the desires of one man's belly toward a Peanut Butter Crunch Bar amounts to a hill of beans in this crazy world. Here's looking at you, baby. We'll always have Towne. ■



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Taste of Armenia

As Hayganush Paylyan lays paper-thin lathers of phyllo dough one over the other to serve the thousands of guests expected at the annual Taste of Armenia festival, sonorous clouds conspire to take over Chicago's skyline.







The clouds will go away by tomorrow," the Paylyans comforted each other on the eve of the festival held annually on the last Sunday of August in vibrant downtown Evanston, a trendy northern suburb of Chicago, Illinois.

Now in its twenty-second year, the festival has become a favorite among Chicagoans of all ethnicities. Our family pediatrician, D. Weissbluth, who is Jewish, is a big fan. At my last visit before the festival, he spoke so passionately about the boeregs he once tasted at the festival that I started counting the days until I could taste them again.

The aroma of charcoal-grilled kebabs, the alluring appearance of sarma and hummus are hard to resist. "Don't ask me how we do it, but we still find a way to handpick our own fresh grape leaves for our yalanchi sarma, which is remarkable considering the number of people we serve," explains Gary Rejebian, one of the co-organizers and the cultural chair of the event.

Now, if you grew up in Armenia proper, the names of the dishes sound rather unfamiliar. This is a reflection of the involuntary dispersion of Armenians across a wide spectrum of neighboring countries mainly as a result of the Genocide of 1915. Despite this unfortunate disintegration of our nation, the inherently strong bonds of Armenians as a people helped preserve their cuisine, culture and community.

A prime example of this are the Armenian hamburgers – as oxymoronic as it may sound-half beef and half lamb, seasoned with onion, parsley, paprika and tomato puree, that are especially popular. To satisfy the sweetest tooth, the bountiful baklavas and other pastries filled with cinnamon and nuts are served with a steaming cup of Armenian coffee.

Stretching a block in either direction from the St. James Armenian Church on 816 Clark Street in Evanston, a district just steps away from Northwestern University, the event is the congregation's largest fundraiser. The proceeds help run various programs and sustain the building, which was purchased in 1945 from a Methodist group.

"When people learn that I am the pastor at the St. James Church, our festival is the first thing they talk about," says Fr. Hovhan Khoja-Eynatian with a humble smile on his face. "The people of the city know us and our cuisine, but most importantly our culture, and they wait for the festival every August."

Known in the neighborhood for their hospitality, Armenians also strive to connect their guests to the treasures of Armenian culture and history, both past and present.

Over the years, Gary and his committee have staged a number of exhibits including contemporary art pieces by Matthew Karanian and Robert Kurkjian, authors of the photo book, *Out of Stone* (1995). Another exhibition showcased images of churches across Armenia and Karabakh, historical photos from the Project SAVE archive, paintings by Armenian artists and a large traveling exhibit created by the Armenian Library and Museum in Watertown, MA about the heroism of the Armenian Legion.

Highlighting the festival is the talented cast of the Armenian Dance Company of Chicago. When they take the stage, in this case the street, everything pretty much comes to a halt as the attention of thousands of people is focused on the performance.

In 2012, the festival took it one step further with an exclusive preview of scenes from *Night Over Erzinga*, a play by Adriana Sevahn Nichols.

The Taste of Armenia is more than a church picnic. Over 3,000 people visit the festival every year. It is the most prominent Armenian event in the Chicago area, and one of the most popular outside the West Coast.

Besides its cultural importance, the festival also has a strong emotional significance. Although this August the rain fell incessantly, the crowds continued to stream in and queue up to savor the delicious cuisine, appreciate the collective effort of the parishioners, and embrace the rich traditions of a small yet strong community.

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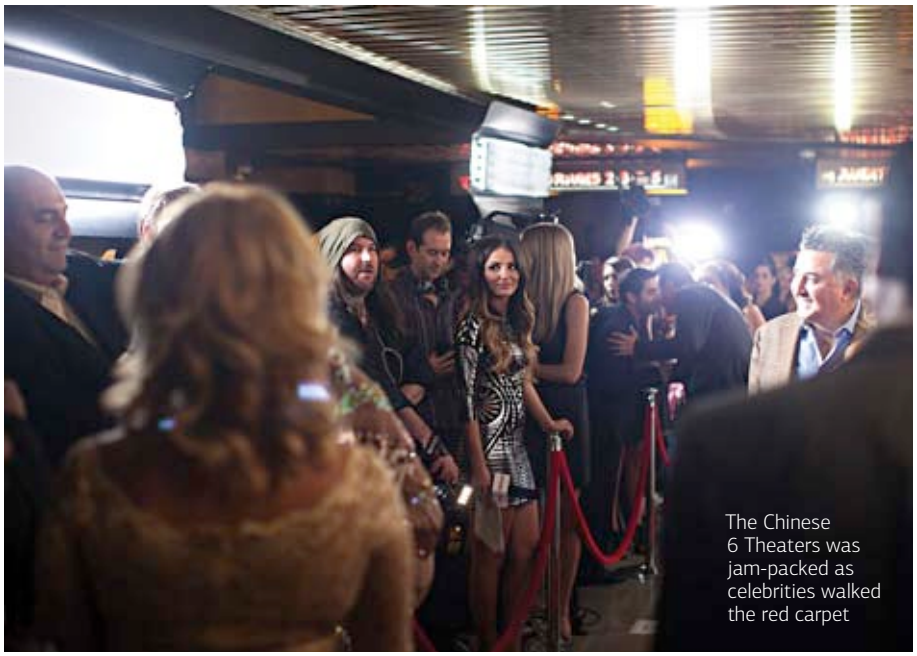
Yerevan Magazine Hosts the World Premiere of *My Uncle Rafael*

The stars were out in full force for the world premiere of the film *My Uncle Rafael* at the famous Chinese 6 Theaters in Hollywood, California.

Celebrities and supporters of *My Uncle Rafael* walked the red carpet for the world premiere that was held just days before its much-anticipated nationwide release. Cast and crew were beaming with pride as they traversed the red carpet. Vahik Pirhamzei, who was the creative force behind the project and plays Uncle Rafael, and co-stars Anahid Avanesian and Ursula Taherian were joined by their American co-stars, Anthony Clark, Carly Chaikin, Sage Ryan and writer Scott Yagermann. Also strutting their star power and showing their support for the film were Ken Davitian, Nikolette Noel, Vahe Berberian and superstar singer Andy. After the glitz and glamour of the red carpet press line, guests listened to director Marc Fusco, producer Michael Garrity and creative mastermind Vahik Pirhamzei describe the journey of taking



The Chinese 6 Theaters was jam-packed as celebrities walked the red carpet





Actress Nikolette Noel



Marc Fusco, Director and Editor of *My Uncle Rafael*



Actor Todd Amirian with sister Dallar Amirian



Senior Editor Azzie Mekhitarian



Actress Ursula Taherian with husband Samir Younis



Actor and Producer Vahik Pirhamzei



After party at Rolling Stone LA

My Uncle Rafael from concept to screen. An after party at Rolling Stone LA followed the star-studded premiere of the award-winning comedy. Guests celebrated with Grey Goose "Hoy, Hoy" cocktails and the luxurious sounds of DJ Raphael Pathé. *My Uncle Rafael* is the first American-made comedy to have a central character who is Armenian. In fact, the entire cultural backdrop of the movie is Armenian, juxtaposed against modern American culture. The movie stars great comedic actors, Missi Pyle, John Michael Higgins, Anthony Clark, Rachel Blanchard and Lupe Ontiveros. *My Uncle Rafael* hit record-breaking numbers with some of the highest grossing opening weekend screenings in Los Angeles. The celebration and support continues in theaters across the country. ■



THE ILLUSIONIST

Michael A. Goorjian's work extends across all borders and media. In his career, he has assumed a number of roles and has been labeled as a dancer, actor, writer, director, producer, and more recently, an author. The contributions he has made in his career place him in a unique position of existing outside of labels as an artist who has a desire for finding projects that challenge him.

Text **Armen Karaoghlanian**

Chung Li

Michael Goorjian began his acting career in junior high school as a way of cutting class by auditioning for the community theater in his hometown of San Francisco. The actor soon realized he enjoyed performing and continued acting throughout high school.

The entertainment industry was the least likely line of work he could have become involved in, considering his mother is a nurse and his father is a mathematician for NASA. "I think I just rebelled against them. I didn't want to be like them," he quips, and so he grew up with very little, if any, exposure to the Armenian culture. "I was not really brought up with an Armenian identity. I was brought up as a California kid." The young actor soon left San Francisco for Los Angeles to enroll in UCLA with the intention of breaking into the industry.

The first role he stumbled upon was for the Disney film, *Newsies* (1992). The actor, who didn't have an agent at the time, came across an open audition for the role of a dancer. I asked him if he had a background in dancing

↓
Goorjian contemplates a shot on the set of *Illusion* (2004)



Nicole Harrison

"I feel drawn to projects that have something that is contributing to humanity, to people, in a greater way than just to titillate and entertain."

and he replied with a deadpan expression, "No. I grew up in Oakland." The only dancing experience he claims he had was at his junior high school prom.

In a surprise move, he landed the role of a street dancer in the film and found himself on the back lot of Universal for six months. The production lasted longer than expected, so during their downtime, he began shooting videos with fellow actor, Max Casella. Their experiences on the production were documented in the form of a 25-minute short horror-comedy film called *Blood Drips Heavily on Newsies Square* (1991) and featured everyone from the actual cast of the film, including Christian Bale. The film showcased Goorjian's talent behind the camera and revealed his interest in expanding his career.

The actor soon signed with an agent and manager and added several guest spots on well-known television series to his resume, which included *Growing Pains* and *Life Goes On*. In addition, he also transitioned into the world of film and appeared alongside accomplished actors such as Robert Downey, Jr. and Mel Gibson. In *Chaplin* (1992), he embodied Charles Chaplin, Jr. and worked under the direction of actor-director, Richard Attenborough.

Goorjian, however, was in search of a role where he could showcase his depth as an actor. In 1994, he was presented with such an opportunity when he appeared in the CBS film, *David's Mother* (1994), which also starred Kirstie Alley and Sam Waterston. The actor took on the role of Kirstie Alley's autistic son, and although he doesn't have a single line of dialogue in the film, he expresses a wide range of emotions in a completely physical performance. In preparation for his role, he drew influence from his cousin's autistic neighbor, whom he had spent time with in Berkeley. "I went at that role with a lot of tenacity and was out to prove something," he says. The hard work he put into the role paid off when he

→
Goorjian rehearses a scene with Hollywood legend Kirk Douglas in *Illusion*.

received a nomination for a Primetime Emmy for his performance. The actor emerged as the winner after having been in competition with acting veterans that included Alan Alda, Richard Gere, Ian McKellen and Matthew Broderick. Goorjian admits that his life has changed since then. "I'm kind of older now and less interested in proving myself," he remarks.

In that same year, he was featured on *Party of Five* and eventually signed-on as a regular after doing several guest spots. These roles laid a solid foundation for his acting career and provided him with steady work. But working on a series for years stunted his creativity. Goorjian admits that being part of a series for six years meant that acting became "monotonous" and "grueling" because such roles meant that he was no longer challenging himself as an artist.

It's no surprise then that he completely switched things up for himself when he took on the role of Heroin Bob in *SLC Punk!* (1998). In the film, portraying one of only a few punk rockers in Utah, his character never does heroin and is actually afraid of drugs and needles. The role showcased his range as an actor as he played against an image he had created for himself.

theatre, Mr. Baines is shown clips of his son's life, as he sees him in various stages throughout his life. The original plan was to shoot the film on video, but his producer and friend, Anahid Nazarian, convinced him otherwise. "She was working for Francis Coppola, and he had a 35mm camera." So she recommended that he shoot on film rather than digital. The goal for them was to shoot the film in parts with each section representing a different style of film. The project was also everything he had hoped for, an entertaining film that would also touch the hearts of its audience. "I feel drawn to projects that have something that is contributing to humanity, to people, in a greater way than just to titillate and entertain."

The first vision of the son's life was shot for under $5,000, and he then raised money locally for the second section of the son's life. The third section, however, was made after he maxed out his credit cards and his father took a loan out on his house. The film follows Christopher's life in sections, as he falls in love, finds himself thrown head first into a punk world and eventually, as he lives in a fantasy world and finds the girl of his dreams. Christopher,

In *David's Mother*, Goorjian transformed into the role of an autistic boy. The reward came in the form of a Primetime Emmy.

His growing success as an actor also provided him with the freedom to work on his own projects. *Beatrice*, an original screenplay he had written, was a film he planned to direct and star in alongside Michelle Williams. The project, however, fell apart two months before production could begin. "It was one of those Hollywood horror stories that probably happens every day now. It really affected me – to have something I cared so much about be pulled apart mostly because of money." That's when he decided that he wanted to find a project he could do outside the studio system and on his own terms. In 2001, he began production on a film called *Illusion* without a finished screenplay and with nothing more than a concept for the story, which was based on Pierre Corneille's *L'Illusion comique*.

The focus of the film is Donald Baines (Kirk Douglas), a retired film director, who is provided with a window for seeing his son, Christopher (Michael Goorjian), through the magic of cinema. In a film

without question, appears to age throughout the film, but all the sections were filmed within several months of each other in 2001. The trick in making him appear older was done with make-up and camera magic.

In speaking of his abandoned project, *Beatrice*, he explains that one of the reasons the film fell through was because of his lack of experience as a director. "They didn't want to give me the money because I had never directed before." The plan he had with *Illusion*, therefore, was that he would shoot the film in several parts, showing potential financiers and agents that he was just as talented behind the camera as he was in front of the camera. In fact, three-quarters of the film was finished before he began searching for a well-known star who would play his father in the film. The star he eventually signed was Hollywood icon Kirk Douglas, who enthusiastically accepted and later declared that *Illusion* would be the last feature film he would appear in.



Rebecca Bausher

In 2003, after having worked on the film for two years and having accrued a lot of debt, he started filming Kirk Douglas' portion for the film. "I was literally taking the bus to Beverly Hills to go rehearse with him," Goorjian admits, after having put everything he had into this project. The making of *Illusion* became his film school. In some sense, he was provided with an understanding of the process of producing a film that he couldn't obtain from being on set as an actor. "I cut my teeth on that film. I learned the hard way."

The film also allowed him to focus on performances, which he feels is a certain aspect of cinema that is often ignored. In his opinion, acting has become so sterilized that actors have become models and directors have essentially become puppets for writers or producers. Goorjian explains that because film schools focus on the technical side of filmmaking and students have the option of choosing an emphasis in cinematography or screenwriting, relationships between directors and actors are often neglected. Goorjian believes that directors are often more concerned with what the camera is doing rather than with their actor's performances.

Illusion eventually worked its way into film festivals and premiered at the Golden Apricot International Film Festival in Yerevan. Goorjian, who says he didn't become involved with his Armenian culture until his 30s, visited Yerevan and finally connected with his lost cultural roots. In speaking about producing a film that deals with the culture, he remarks, "I feel like I haven't been ready to do that. I need to first find who I am as an artist of Armenian descent before expressing something that important."

The fact that he switches back and forth from one role to the other has proven to be a disadvantage in his career. "It's harder doing that, because if you can stick to one thing, you can get enough recognition for it and build on it, but I've been starting over and starting over." It's easier for an actor or filmmaker to be labeled as one thing over the other, so Goorjian admits, "I want to be labeled!"

However, the desire for switching from one line of work to another prevails, because he has an ability to work on projects that interest and excite him, regardless of his role. "I don't think I have a preference. I just get antsy and enjoy trying different new things." He believes in challenging himself and working on projects that inspire him, whether that means performing for the stage, directing a film or writing a novel. Michael Goorjian has now been offered a book deal – instead of adapting a novel into a film, he is working backwards and is adapting his original screenplay for *Beatrice* into a novel.

It's time for him to start a new chapter in his life; this time quite literally. ■



Not Your Mother's **Jewelry**

Fashion icons like Jennifer Lopez and Sofia Vergara have walked out on the town in these jewels. Even country singers like Kimberly Perry of The Band Perry and LeAnn Rimes have donned the stunning pieces designed by the beautiful Jacqueline Nerguizian. Whether it's on a red carpet or an episode of *American Idol*, you have most likely seen a Jacqueline piece.

Text **Violet Kanian** | Photo **Michael Franco**

Made with stunning black and white diamonds, Jacqueline Nerguizian's unique fine jewelry makes a statement with every piece, and every piece is one of a kind. "This isn't your mother's jewelry," as she puts it. Every single piece is made with either white gold or yellow gold – as Jacqueline isn't a fan of platinum. She says that because platinum is such a soft metal, it tends to wear easily and gets ruined after time. "My jewelry is not typical fine jewelry," says Jacqueline. "It has an edge to it, a twist – a lot of black and white diamonds." Jacqueline's line comes from what is available, what is already trendy or even traditional, mixed with her own unique flare. "You can wear your fine jewelry on a daily basis because it's not just all white diamonds and all this bling. It's mixed in with black and white, and it's young and it's hip and it's edgy," explains Jacqueline. Women usually keep their fine jewels hidden away until a special occasion calls for them, possibly once a year.



"When my name is stamped on something, I want it to carry some sort of pride in what I do. I want to make sure the client is 100 percent happy."



The Jacqueline Nerguizian line allows women to have fun with their special pieces and show them off all the time. Jacqueline's artistic mind rarely ever takes a break. With a sketch book at her bedside for those moments when she wakes up from a dream and is suddenly inspired to design, Jacqueline never stops working. Even a simple drive down the street to her 4,000 square foot office can be the beginning of a new design. A single tree leaf can be turned into a pair of earrings almost instantaneously. However, Jacqueline is a perfectionist in implementing all her ideas. "It's almost like a double-edged sword because I want everything to be perfect," says Jacqueline. "When my name is stamped on something, I want it to carry some sort of pride in what I do. I want to make sure the client is 100 percent happy." She pulls every design apart until it reaches absolute perfection. Sometimes, making a piece can take days and she still wouldn't be satisfied with it. But regardless of the length of time certain pieces may take to design, if she isn't happy with it, it isn't going to be made. She also says that every piece she's made was most likely designed in the midst of the night. No two Jacqueline Nerguizian clients are walking around with the same piece of jewelry because Jacqueline believes two women shouldn't be wearing the same piece. It's simple – just like two women wouldn't want to be wearing the same

dress at an event, why would they wear the same accessories? Jacqueline begins creating a piece for a client from the moment they call her. She asks for their height, their hair color, what styles they usually wear in clothing. Although most clients laugh at all of the questions, Jacqueline explains it's necessary so she can create the perfect piece. She usually designs two or three different versions of what they're looking for.

When you're this good at designing jewelry, you're likely to run into problems. Jacqueline's problem? Creating too gorgeous of a piece for a client in Beverly Hills. "I finished it and thought, 'Oh my God, this is gorgeous!'" says Jacqueline. "Then my husband suggested I keep it, and I thought 'Yes, you're right, I need to have it; this is mine!' So there are pieces I keep for myself – which gets me in trouble all the time." Rest assured, she does create pieces strictly for herself. Her favorites include a black, gold and diamond initial that hangs really low, down to the bottom torso. Jacqueline designed a two and a half inch long chain with a black diamond 'J' in a bed of brushed gold and eight carats of rose cut diamonds that surround it. She calls it her 'ghetto piece' and wears it with black diamonds. Jacqueline believes that yellow gold is going to make a huge come-back. She says that mixing up white and yellow gold isn't a sin. "Don't be afraid to add a little bit more color in your jewelry." Nerguizian's pieces aren't for those who like dainty things. Her clients usually want the pieces to be bigger, thicker, heavier and more sparkly. It's for those who want to make a statement walking down the street. Jacqueline has a long list of clients looking for pieces that have her special touch. Some A-list celebrities are included in that group. Her first celebrity client was Sofia Vergara who wore long diamond chandelier earrings and a Super Bowl-like ring to a premiere, and didn't even want to give the ring back because she loved it so much. "She became a huge fan," laughs Jacqueline. Jennifer Lopez is another fan who wore Jacqueline's pieces throughout the entire season of *American Idol*. Once the season was over, she continued wearing the pieces to award shows and premieres. Jacqueline even designed a pinky ring just for JLo. "I actually made it for myself because I thought, 'Well, a lot of older men wear pinky rings, women need pinky rings too,'" says Jacqueline. "I took this marquise diamond and put pave diamonds all the way around it and Jennifer kept saying she needed to have this piece." Sandra Bullock is another star Jacqueline designs for. "Sandra Bullock is very conservative," says Jacqueline. "I was showing her huge pieces, and she wanted the small studs and the small snake ring and just very conservative pieces." Jacqueline says that she is very fortunate to be working with such talented people. However, make no mistake because she doesn't see herself done yet. She recently finished working with Kris Jenner of E!'s *Keeping Up With The Kardashians* for a magazine shoot.



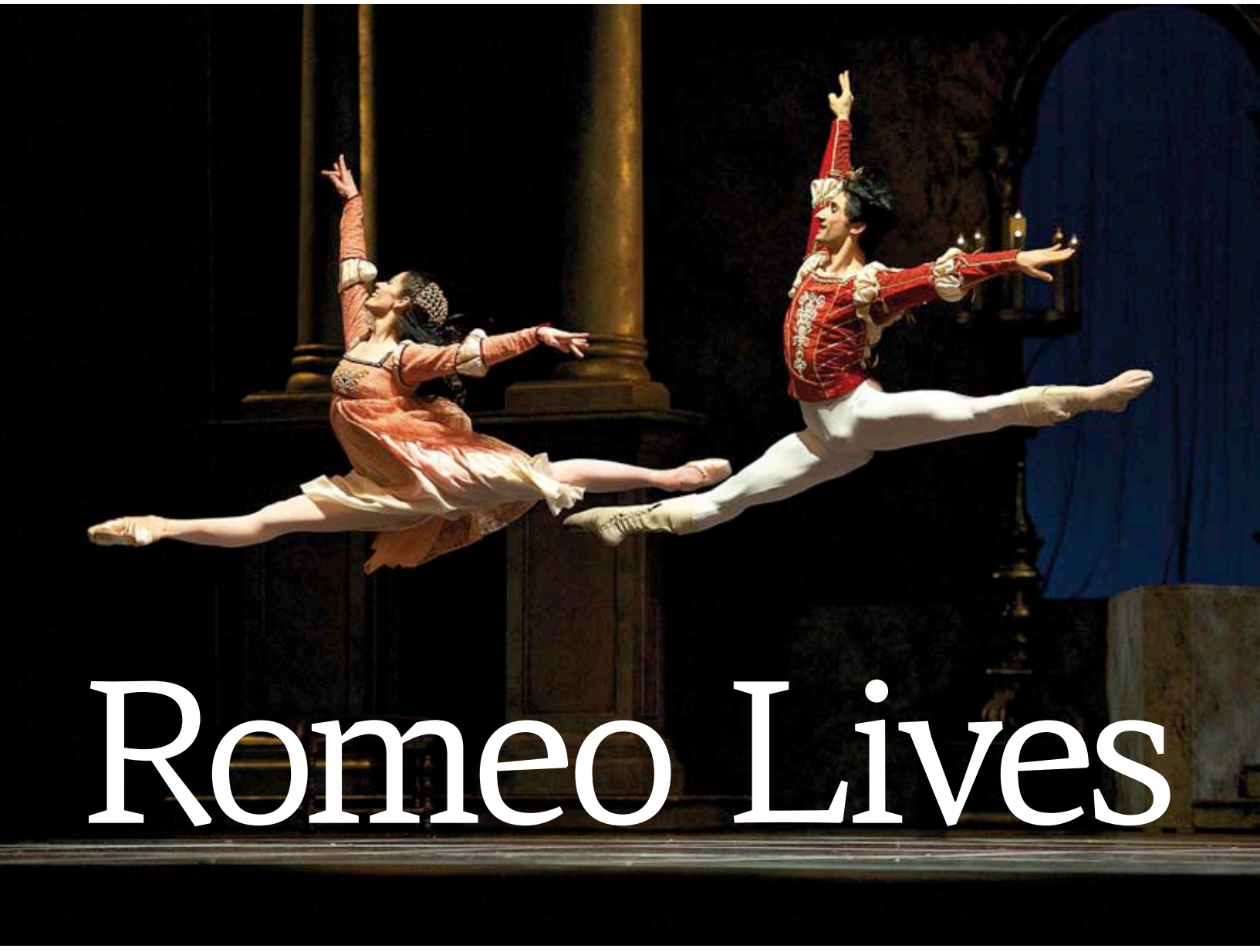


Aside from working with celebrities, Jacqueline will have a new engagement ring line out by the end of 2012. She says it is something that has never been done before, and it will still have her edgy and trendy flare, and, you guessed it — black diamonds. "Your mom wants to pass down her wedding dress, but you don't really want to wear it. Then they give you their ring," says Jacqueline. "That is an heirloom piece. Why not take something like that and make it where it's young and hip and not the traditional engagement ring." Other than the engagement ring line, which will become much bigger in spring 2013, better known as wedding season, Jacqueline is also spicing up shoes. You can take your heels to her, and she can add as many diamonds to them as you would like. One pair of Yves Saint Laurent stilettos Jacqueline redesigned included 40 carats of black and white diamonds, including a gold buckle and diamonds down the heel. Aside from her designing duties, Jacqueline just recently signed on to be an expert jeweler for the Steve Harvey Show in Chicago. His day time talk show will have a segment where guys who messed up proposing to their loved ones will get a second chance. This time around, Jacqueline helps the guy pick out the ring and guides him to the perfect proposal. She is also in the process of creating her own reality show about her glamorous and stressful life with the family and the jewelry line. If you haven't gotten the picture yet, Jacqueline Nerguizian is a woman who enjoys the finer things in life and also calls herself an extremist. Her personal style is glamorous, and although she enjoys wearing regular T-shirts and jeans at times, you can usually find her dressed to kill. However, this glam-queen and her loving husband are raising five children. With a two-year-old all the way up to an 18-year-old, Jacqueline does everything she can to spend time with her family. Whether they stop by the office after work to play in the office nursery, or she drives the couple miles back home to eat lunch with her kids, or the family is jetting off to Disneyland on their private plane because her four-year-old daughter wants to see Mickey, Jacqueline is always busy and making the best of life. Her husband works with her – he is usually in the north end of the office while Jacqueline is in the south end. During lunch time, the couple meets in the middle for quality time, then goes off to their separate corners to continue working. She jokingly calls the office with its eight-foot cement walls Fort Knox. Jacqueline doesn't take what she has for granted, either. She loves designing pieces for charity. "What I like to do is make special pieces that I can donate, and the charity can give them away for free or they can certainly make money from them with a silent auction or something," explains Jacqueline. "God is always watching; give what you can and it will always come back." Nerguizian's approach to jewelry making is very serious, as she is a certified gemologist from the Gemological Institute of America. Although she learned a lot from GIA, Jacqueline says, "I learned more from my father and uncle than I did from any school possible. It was their hard work that guided me through life. They came from Lebanon without a dime in their pockets and worked until the crack of dawn." Her family's hard work and dedication to the jewelry industry inspired Jacqueline to begin her own line and continue the family skills. "They came from nothing, running from the Genocide. They had to hide and be strong. My grandmother taught me how to be a strong and independent woman," explains Jacqueline. "I am very fortunate to have the knowledge and expertise from my family." ■



Jacqueline Nerguizian
Jacqueline Nerguizian has accessorized Jennifer Lopez, Julianne Hough, Lily Collins, Sofia Vergara, Louise Roe, Rachel McAdams, Kimberly Perry of The Band Perry, Kris Jenner and just recently created an engagement ring for Christy Michaels. Jacqueline grew up in Los Angeles but resides in Scottsdale, Arizona with her husband and five children where she continues to run her growing business.

"I took this marquise diamond and put pave diamonds all the way around it, and Jennifer (Lopez) kept saying she needed to have this piece."



Romeo Lives

In the year 2010, Romeo and Juliet didn't die. Instead, the last performance of Helgi Tomasson's critically acclaimed ballet adaptation of Shakespeare's tragedy on the stage of the San Francisco Ballet ended in a fairy tale romance, complete with global headlines. Davit Karapetyan, in the lead role of Romeo, surprised everyone, including his on-and-offstage dancing partner Vanessa Zahorian (dancing the role of Juliet) on closing night when he dropped down on one knee, pulled out a ring and asked her to marry him with a packed house as his witnesses.

Text **Gohar Barseghyan** | Photo **Erik Tomasson**

More surprises are forthcoming. Two years later, Karapetyan is exploring new areas of his identity as a creator and an artist. Beyond dancing, there is an energetic spirit that moves through him in order to find expression, searching for investment. Zahorian, a native of Allentown, Pennsylvania explained it by saying that he wants to know about all the things that life has to offer. He says he wants to try everything once and if he likes it then he will want to be the best at it, putting his mind and body and heart and soul in it.

But let me start back in time when I first met Davit Karapetyan. One April morning several years ago, I got a call from my dentist, Doctor Okuji. He had just witnessed a great performer at the San Francisco Ballet and suggested I consider interviewing him. At the time I was directing a film documentary on the San Francisco Armenian community and Dr. Okuji thought Davit Karapetyan, SF Ballet's new principal dancer, could be important to the work.

It took me a while to get an actual meeting with him, but the minute Karapetyan and I met, we clicked. When the office coordinator expressed her genuine amazement at our warm embrace, Karapetyan laughed and said enthusiastically, "We are from the same city, Yerevan."

And there he stood, so full of the warmth of our land and our people; charismatic, charming and unpretentious, so genuinely Armenian.

That first meeting grew into a warm friendship over the past years. During this time, I have had the chance to witness his professional growth and personal achievements, while rejoicing in his successes. And through it all, it is the language of his dance that has brought these great accomplishments to fruition.

Karapetyan's extraordinary talents as a dancer have undergone an evolution of great interest. Born into a family of professional and recognized dancers, Rashid and Melanya Karapetyans, it was a natural choice for him to be a dancer. But it wasn't the choice he made at first. Instead, as an overly active kid, Karapetyan devised various games to play indoors to entertain himself. He would tie ropes in the house over the chairs and jump over the ropes, like exercise gymnastics. The downstairs neighbors frequently complained.

Later, Tae Kwan Do, gymnastics and diving became ways for him to channel his incredible range for expressive body movement. Curious and constantly inspired by grace, strength, flexibility and agility, Davit brought his entire attention to his sports and athleticisms, turning them into a personal language, which now forms the basis of his dancing. His sister and only sibling, Anna, fourteen years his senior, remembers fondly when he was nine or ten years old, a television crew came to interview the family. Not wanting to be seen as a member of a "dancing family," Davit hid under the sofa and wouldn't come out under any circumstances. She recalls that "there was no way to get him out of there and the show was filmed and aired without him."

At the age of sixteen, David Karapetyan won at Prix de Lausanne after only three years of instruction.

But all along, underlying his athletic journeys through a variety of sports, there were awards and recognition of his prowess and physical intelligence.

Anna remembers how she would take him to all the dance productions staged in Yerevan when he was a child. Their age difference allowed her to introduce him to many different physical pursuits. Thanks to this exposure by his older sister, Davit had a marvelous advantage as he was able to see the movement and method of others' athletic successes and styles. Then, on the day of his sister's wedding, Davit, who had been observing the dancing crowd at the celebration, suddenly leaped into the middle of the dance floor and performed a solo dance. He amazed everyone with his passion and performance, and this time he asked his parents if he could attend dance school.

Starting in an Armenian folk dance class for his first year, Davit was the first student to transfer from folk dancing into classical ballet. But the principal of the school saw his talent and his interest in performing the movements of ballet. Putting the movements into fluid motion became Davit's first challenge – tying together this new language of the body. After two years of intensive ballet training, Davit was sent to St. Petersburg to compete. He practiced very hard. He rehearsed at home, jumping so high and so vigorously that the chandelier broke and fell and a piece of glass cut his hand. Unfortunately, he lost in the second rounds. The experience was a wakeup call to the idea that the world was bigger than Yerevan, and the world of dance was full of talented and accomplished performers hungry to push the boundaries of dance.

But he was inspired. He'd seen their bodies and now knew the level of strength and agility and accomplishment that he wanted for himself. "In St. Petersburg, I freaked out when I saw all the professional dancers and how well-prepared they were for the competition – their bodies, their muscles, their movements and confidence." It was a whole new plateau.

At the age of sixteen, Karapetyan won at Prix de Lausanne after only three years of instruction. At the time, Armenia had no modern ballet choreographer, so Karapetyan danced it on his own without assistance. All participants were to dance the same movements, and the judges chose Karapetyan for his passion and the way in

which he stood out from the other dancers – the language of his movement spoke louder and more clearly. He had fully identified himself as a dancer who would reinvent for himself a place among world dancers.
Ricardo Bustamante, Ballet Master and Assistant to the Artistic Director at the SF Ballet, remembers: "I was also a judge at the Prix de Lausanne. It was the first time I saw him , and he was awarded a prize. Right then and there you could witness his innate talent; he did a tango solo that was very revealing of his many talents. Most of all, his vast amount of energy. His training and approach were rather Soviet – which is a very distinguished form of training. In the years he's worked with SFB, he's transformed himself into a very versatile dancer – which makes for great material for any choreographer who works with him."
And the world responded. After the competition in Lausanne, he started receiving queries of interest from major ballet companies. He got offers from Boston Ballet, American Ballet Theater, The Royal Ballet and others. Instead, he decided to make Zurich his home and joined the corps de ballet for the Swiss Ballet where he was soon promoted to demi-soloist. This proved to be a wise decision. Davit could still visit his family quite easily, and the touring schedule gave him experience and knowledge in what a professional life would require of him. He was able to travel the world with the Swiss Ballet and gain vital, first-hand information about who and what he would want to become someday.
One of Karapetyan's dreams was to work with a U.S. company. In the summer of 2005, he decided to make the bold step and audition to work with the SF Ballet. They responded favorably after viewing his video submission, but were concerned about his height. Nevertheless, they invited him to take a company class. After his first class, Helgi Tomasson, the artistic director encouraged him to come back for a few more days. At the end of the fourth day, Tomasson invited Karapetyan back to his office and offered him a contract as a principal dancer. Karapetyan was overjoyed. A childhood dream to be a member of an American dance company had finally materialized.
Karapetyan's first two seasons at SF Ballet caused unusual excitement and interest among the ballet lovers and critics. His impressively controlled and executed jumps and multiple pirouettes, his great stage presence and personal charm earned him the title of a remarkable dancer in the press.
A quite accomplished dancer herself, Vanessa thinks that, "What makes him a unique artist is the way it comes so easy. He doesn't have to think about it. It's in his blood – art and his artistry. You can't learn it, it's deep within yourself and you just bring it out. He has a God-given talent for ballet and dance that runs in his family and blood. He has his own unique style and easy approach. It falls into place when he dances. He's versatile too. He can fit any role."
With his natural-born ability to express emotion in dance, he absorbs the music as it comes out of the orchestra pit and projects it out through his powerful body's artistic movements; the audience understands and responds to the instinctive communication of feeling.
Ballet Master Bustamente explains: "Davit possesses a solid classical dance technique. You can tell by the way he works in class that he's been taught carefully – and not only the technique, but also the style, the nuances that relate to musicality, and the clarity with which he dances. All of this is based on his training. There's an infusing energy about him because he comes from a place of purity and technique, stylistically speaking. He's very good at making smart choices and accommodating what suits him and what doesn't; he's always trying out a step that wasn't at first his forte, but he ventures into discovering something new that ultimately makes him better. What's also rewarding is how solid of a performer he is. The reward culminates when you see what you've worked on together take flight and come to fruition, when you sit down and leave him to perform for you."
Karapetyan not only constantly works on his skills but also creates his own works of choreography. A group of Armenian friends regularly perform Karapetyan's original choreography in the framework of their performances as a Forceful Feelings dance team.
Karapetyan has always been very collaborative and outspoken – and this works because receiving suggestions from individual dancers is important for a choreographer. It also allows the dancer's involvement in the creation of the dance work.



Davit Karapetyan

Davit Karapetyan has danced a variety of lead roles, including Prince Siegfried in Tomasson's *Swan Lake*, Prince Desiré in Tomasson's *The Sleeping Beauty*, Nutcracker Prince in Tomasson's *Nutcracker*, Romeo in Tomasson's *Romeo & Juliet*; Basilio in Tomasson/Posskhov's *Don Quixote*, and the Sea Witch in Neumeier's *The Little Mermaid*.
His repertory also includes lead roles in Tomasson's *On a Theme of Paganini*, *7 for Eight*, *Chi-Lin*, *Chaconne for Piano* and *Two Dancers*, among others. Karapetyan won Best Couple with Vanessa Zahorian, senior division, at the USA International Ballet Competition in 2006.
He received the gold and silver medals at the Armenian Ballet Competition in 1997 and 1998, respectively, and was a prizewinner at the Prix de Lausanne in 1999.
He has been a guest artist with the Armenian Opera House, and has performed internationally.
Karapetyan was featured in PBS *Great Performances* broadcast as the Nutcracker Prince in Tomasson's *Nutcracker*mand as the sea-witch in John Neumeir's acclaimed production of *The Little Mermaid*, a unique interpretation of a classic Hans Christian Andersen's tale.



↑
Davit Karapetyan and wife Vanessa Zahorian in Balanchine's *Theme and Variations.*



→
Davit Karapetyan at the San Francisco Ballet in Neumeier's *The Little Mermaid.*

According to Bustamante, "It's good to be in a rehearsal when you have a 'thinking' dancer. You can always try to find tricks and nuances through the way somebody executes a step. He's excellent at communicating and talking about how he discovers what works for him and why it works. This allows me to learn a lot from him, also." The psychological state is one of the decisive factors for each of his performances.

Karapetyan says, "When I perform in front of a live audience, I feel a rush of adrenaline and some nervousness which is a good thing, because when I am nervous I am completely aware of what's going on around me. If I am somehow not nervous, which happens very rarely, I am calm and something is missing. I don't panic before each performance like I did when I first performed on stage. When you get used to the stage you feel like you're somewhere familiar and feel safe."

In 2010, San Francisco Ballet presented the *The Little Mermaid*, based on Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tale and originally created and choreographed for the Royal Danish Ballet in 2005 by Neumeier. He also did the ballet's lighting, sets and costume design. Karapetyan's character was a show-stealing sea witch. Working with the choreographer, Karapetyan remembers, was an amazing experience. "Developing the sea witch character was something new for me as it was my first time being cast in an evil role, and it took some time until the character grew on me."

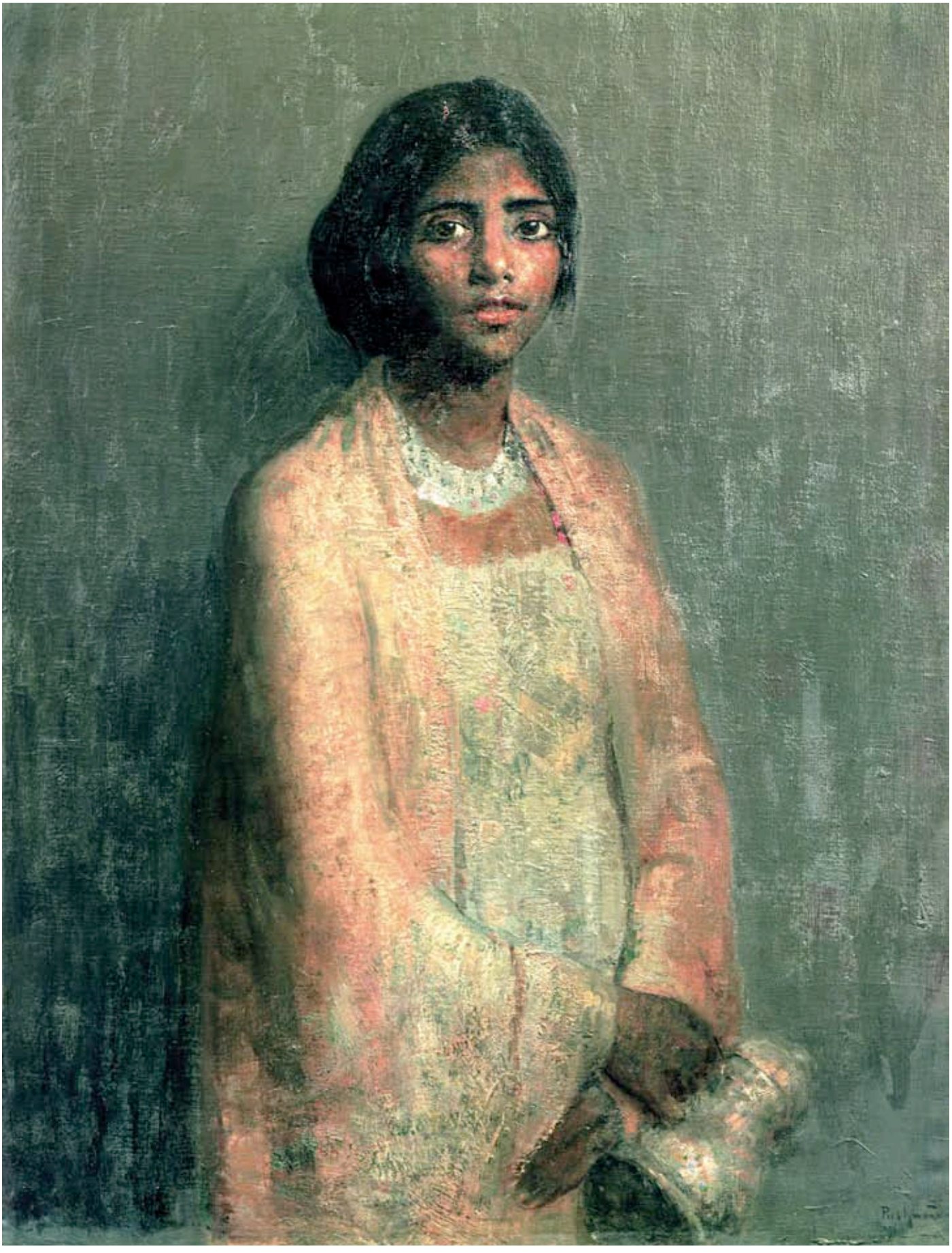
There's an infusing energy about him because he comes from a place of purity and technique.

I ask Vanessa and Davit to tell me about their romance and the famous proposal incident, which they gladly share. "When we first worked on *Afternoon of a Faun* by Jerome Robbins, he had to kiss my cheek, and this was when we first met and he was shy. I said it's OK, you can kiss my cheek. I was shy too because deep down I had feelings for him. Then we started dating after that ballet. I think the sparks were happening then," smiles Vanessa.

"Vanessa and I lived together during that time I realized that she's become so dear to me that proposing to her was the natural progression of events. When I found out that we would be cast in *Romeo and Juliet*, I realized that it was the perfect opportunity. Being away from home, the theater is like a family to me, and I wanted to propose to her with friends and relatives around us, in a place that felt like home. Vanessa's parents had arranged to come see us dance, and I invited my relatives and friends to the same performance. I had ordered the ring a few weeks earlier, and I was ready for the big date."

On June 11, 2011, in Yerevan, Vanessa Zahorian and Davit Karapetyan began a new chapter in their life as husband and wife. Vanessa surprised all the guests by speaking Armenian during the ceremony. Vanessa shares her side of the story and her life with Davit. "I've learned a lot about my awareness of structure. I've become very open, sometimes forgetting the correct head, arm and shoulder positioning that are best for me, and Davit has helped me find the correct placement. I've learned a lot about life and how I can focus on many things at once – having a relationship, acquiring a college degree, dancing full time, having an outside life together."

With an intense devotion to his art and genuine passion Davit enjoys every minute on stage despite being constantly reminded of the strains the profession puts on his body. But unless one has felt the power of being on stage in front of a live audience it's impossible to explain. With his beautiful wife and great onstage partner Vanessa Zahorian, our "dashing Armenian" Davit Karapetyan will continue to impress and captivate ballet-loving audiences worldwide, for the language of dance speaks louder than words. ■



Joseph Fontana

Tangible Light

Hovsep Pushman captures the contradictory essence of light, airy with a quality of permanence, delicately defining contours and nuances, where light, as if sun kissed, becomes tangible. Pushman's tangible light is evident in his portraitures and still-life paintings. Arshag Chobanian, Hovsep's contemporary and close friend, commented that his art is "soulful, like delicate poetry." Pushman was able to express the deep, inner spirit of each human subject or still-life object he portrayed.

Text **Nare Garibyan**

The sensitive quality that manifests upon the Hovsep Pushman canvas is strengthened because "he uses color as though he was working with light rather than paint. There is something spiritual about his handling of tone that is unlike the treatment of any other modern painter. The mysterious charm of color is blended and interwoven in intricate and significant schemes. It pervades every one of his works, thrilling us like the play of light in the rainbow, the glitter of a serpents scales, or the flash and fire of many jewels" (The Armenian Spirit in Art, *The Fine Arts Journal*, September, 1919).

One of Pushman's portraitures known as, "The Wedding Veil," features a beautiful girl adorned in a vibrant red shawl sprinkled with specks of yellow and gold; light radiates from the folds of the garment covering her dark tresses. Her expressive eyes intensely gaze forward; her crimson lips are steady, a juxtaposition of light, color, and composition. In his portraitures of women, Pushman carefully adhered to the details of origin, garment, hairstyle, and gaze. Each model became a subtle emblem of the country named in the title, which were portrayed with culturally specific colors and spirit.

One of Pushman's dearest and most respected friends was Arshag Chobanian, who in his own right, was a brilliant writer, translator, literary critic, and activist. He expressed that Pushman was able to authentically translate the cultures of the Far East and Asia onto the canvas where many famous European artists had failed. Pushman read the Koran and extensively explored art forms and delved deep

← "Turkestan-Hindu Girl" oil on canvas 36x28 inches Andreas Roubian Collection

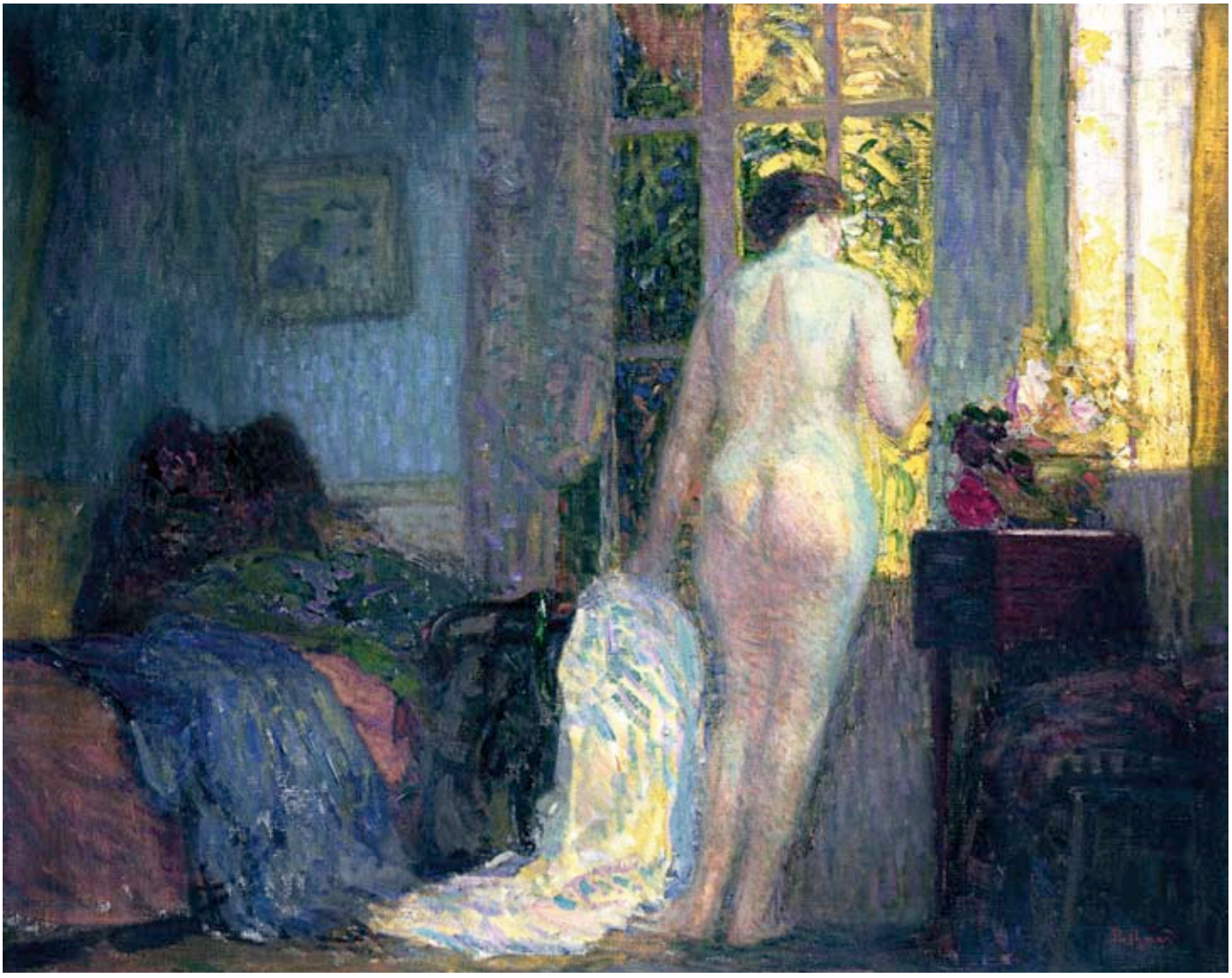
→
"Portrait of Hovsep Pushman"
Painted by Adolphe Dechenaud, oil on canvas, 24x27 inches

into the heart of the non-European artist, excavating genuine colors of that specific culture, its unique fragrance of life, and its mindset connected to bountiful nature.

Hovsep Pushman's oriental still-life genre of painting were compositions using objects of antiquity, statues of Buddha, gods and goddesses, carved figures of saints from the 13th and 14th centuries from France, the Sultanabad plate (Persian) and books, using for backgrounds Buddhist spiritual art from temples, as well as antique tapestries and textiles from his collection.

"Roses of Yesterday" is a still-life in motion. A beam of light gently stretches across the ancient tapestry, illuminating a turquoise plate leaning against the

Hovsep Pushman's oriental still-life genre of painting were compositions using objects of antiquity, statues of Buddha, gods and goddesses, carved figures of saints from the 13th and 14th centuries.



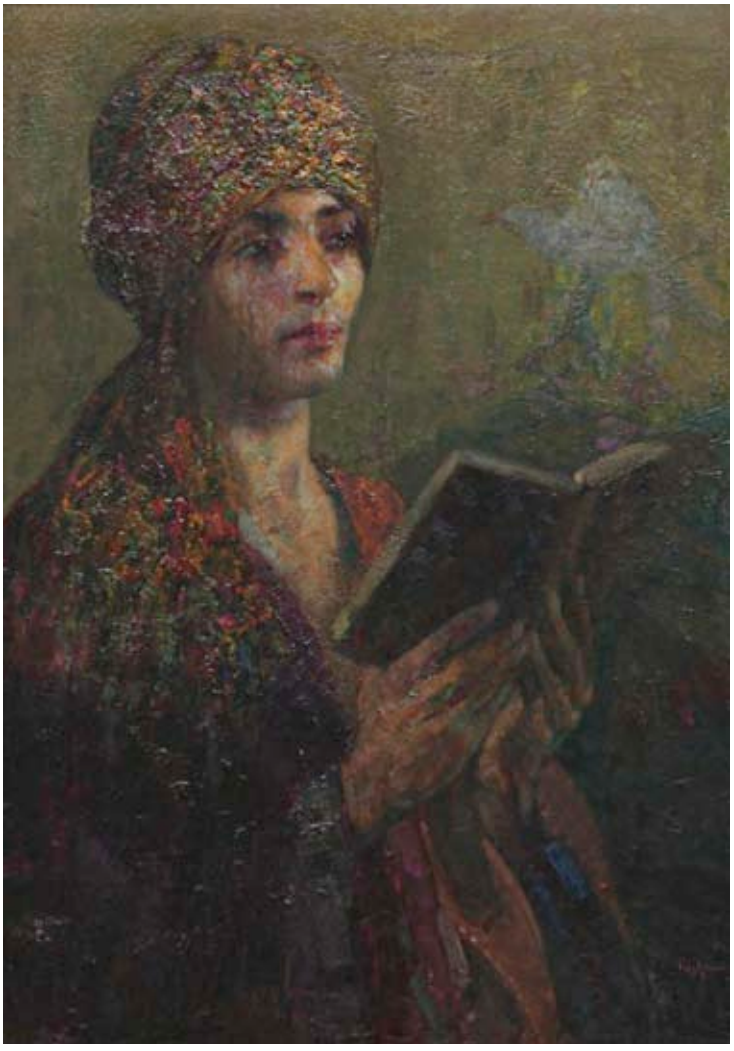
Courtesy of Lucy Ishanian



Joseph Fontana from the Andreas Roubian Collection

Pushman vs. New York Graphic Society Inc.

The New York Supreme Court, in the Appellate Division, heard the case of Pushman vs. New York Graphic Society, Inc on December 8, 1941 and issued a decision on January 15, 1942. Hovsep Pushman presented one of his paintings: "When Autumn is Here," to the Grand Central Art Galleries in New York, in order to sell to the University of Illinois for $3,600. In turn the University of Illinois sold reproduction rights to New York Graphic Society Inc, without Pushman's permission. Pushman sued to prevent the reproduction of his painting. The original court decision ruled against the artist. After Pushman's death in 1966, the case was reheard and the decision was reversed; thus Pushman's law created the precedent for the Copyright Act of 1976, which established copyright standards for artists and publishers.



Edik Oghasian, Talin Film



Tigran Tovmasyan

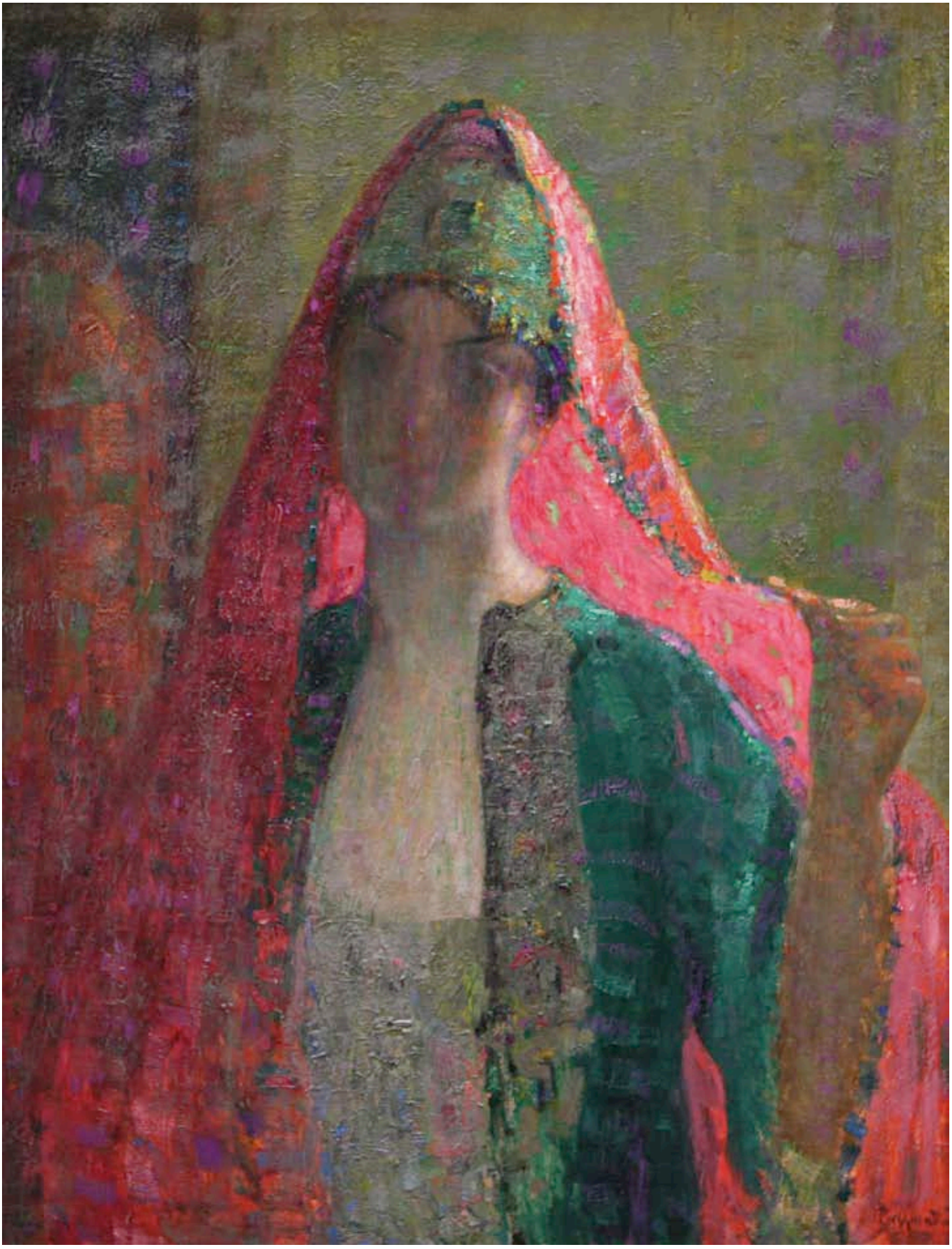
←
"Book of Omar"
oil on canvas
23x32 inches
Kazarian Collection

↑
"Eternal Compassion"
oil on board
28x18inches
Private Collection

←
"Rayon de Soleil"
oil on canvas
84x105 inches
National Gallery
of Armenia

wall, a small figurine appears slightly hidden in the shadows, and the eye is lead to the focal point, a glass vase with a pair of wilting roses, the petals about to depart. He dedicated two of his still-life paintings to the Persian poet, Omar Khayyam, "Old Persian Book," (a Page from Omar Khayyam's) and "Book of Omar," (The Book of Omar Khayyam), a larger work.

Hovsep Pushman was born in Tigranakert, in Western Armenia, on May 9, 1877. At an early age, the Pushman family relocated to Constantinople (present day Istanbul) where at the age of eleven he was accepted into the Imperial Academy of Fine Arts for the study of painting and sculpture. The Pushman family immigrated to America in 1896 to escape the Hamidian Massacres. They settled in Chicago, where the older sons had already migrated for a better life and had established the Oriental rug firm, "Pushman Brothers of Chicago." Hovsep worked for his brothers in the family rug business and continued his studies in painting and also taught at the Smith's Academy of Chicago. He



Edik Oghusian, Talin Film

←
"The Wedding Veil"
(Hulia, Pushman's wife)
oil on canvas
25x32 inches
Kazarian Collection



Tigran Tovmasyan

→
"Immortality"
oil on board
24x28 inches
Private Collection

received highest honors, many prizes, and the gold medal at the Academy's competition in 1903. In 1910 he left Chicago for Paris together with his wife, Hulia and two young sons Arsene and Armand, to devote his life to painting under the guidance of master teachers at the Academie Julian. Pushman's artistic talent to dexterously work with light and color quickly came to fruition, winning numerous prizes and acceptance to the Annual Paris Salon des Artistes Français where his paintings were awarded Bronze, Silver, and Gold medals.

Once again, life was disturbed when the family had to flee the First World War. They returned to Chicago, where Pushman established a studio and began preparing for future exhibitions. His first exhibition in 1915 at the Milwaukee Art Institute was a tremendous success, which was followed by tours throughout the United States. Due to health reasons and fatigue the Pushman family moved to Riverside, California where they lived for three years. The picturesque Mission Inn became the center of his artistic life and two portraits, that of Ann Richardson and Henry Miller, brother and sister owners of the Mission Inn, are on permanent exhibit at the Mission Inn Museum. After the war, the Pushman family returned to Paris, where they had left all their possessions and paintings, to resume an active artistic life with successful exhibitions at the Georges Petit and Bernheim Jeune galleries.

During the years that the Pushman family lived in Paris in the 1920s, their home was the center of Armenian cultural activity. Many respected writers such as Arshag Chobanian, Zabelle Essayan,

The picturesque Mission Inn became the center of his artistic life and two portraits, that of Ann Richardson and Henry Miller, are on permanent exhibit at the Mission Inn Museum.



Tigran Tovmasyan



Steve J. Sherman

Lucy Ishkanian Tankian

Lucy Ishkanian Tankian is curator and archivist of the Pushman Art Estate. More than thirty years ago she began her collaboration with Pushman's sons. Together, they prepared Pushman's archives. Ishkanian is an award-winning concert pianist, a community activist and an active supporter of artists. She will soon issue two books about Pushman. The publications include the entire catalogue of Pushman's work and a biography. In June 2012, Iskhanian was invited by the Mission Inn Museum, in Riverside, California to lecture on Pushman.

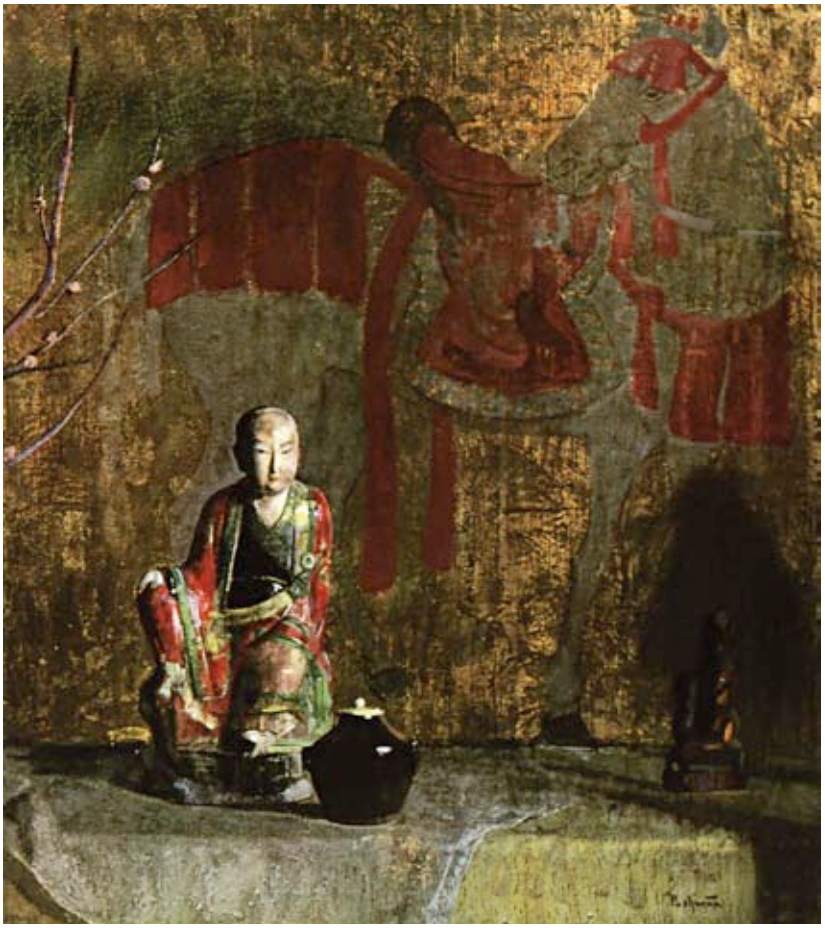
At age five, Lucy became the youngest student at the Juilliard Preparatory department; she continued her studies at the Juiliard School. Lucy and her husband, Hagop Tankian, co-founded and edited the *Armenian Digest*, a monthly English language magazine from 1969-1976. The couple actively promoted Armenian musical talent and educated the community by sponsoring trips to Armenia, inviting American musicians to explore the country's musical traditions. Ishkanian toured with composer Aram Khatchaturian and his wife, composer Nina Makarova. She is currently the vice-president of the International Aram Khatchaturian Competition.

←
"Note of Life's Music", oil on board, 26x28 inches, Private Collection



Courtesy of Lucy Ikhanian

→
"The Prince and his Horse" oil on board 19x16 inches



Courtesy of Lucy Ikhanian

↑
"My Past Dreams" oil on board 19x14 inches

Shirvanzade and others, as well as Armenian painters residing and creating in Paris: Edgar Chahine, Sarkis Khachaturian, Alkhazian, Atamian, Martiros Saryan and many others were regular weekly or monthly visitors. Martiros Saryan was greatly impressed by Pushman's Paris exhibitions and the subtleties in his paintings.

When the plea came from Armenia for painting materials to aid the artists in Yerevan, with Hovsep Pushman's inspiration and leadership, the "Groupement Ani" (Ani Association) was formed, with the purpose of sending a large supply of important items, paints, brushes and other essentials to their colleagues in Yerevan. The members of the Ani Association were Hulia and Hovsep Pushman, Vava and Sarkis Khachaturian, Edgar Chahine, Edward Atamian, Alkhazian, and Martiros Saryan.

In 1926 Hovsep Pushman returned to the United States to continue his work as an artist in New York City; he became associated with the Grand Central Art Galleries. As was recorded in the September 28, 1942 *Time Magazine* issue, "In 1932, at 'Depressions' depth, sixteen Pushman paintings were put on sale at the Grand Central Art Galleries in Manhattan. Within twenty-four hours all sixteen were sold at Pushman prices ($3,500 to $10,000), sometimes called the highest paid painter per square inch in the U.S."

Hovsep Pushman shared with Martiros Saryan his dream of one day building his own house in Armenia. Soon thereafter, Saryan wrote a letter advising the Armenian authorities, in Yerevan, to purchase Pushman's paintings. After his death in 1966, Pushman's sons, Arsene and Armand, donated four of their father's paintings to Armenia's National Art Gallery. Pushman had at last returned home; imagine a still-life with a miniature artist's palette leaning against a woven Armenian carpet, surrounded with a burst of light, in kin to a pomegranate bough in a slender terracotta vase. ■

Pushman shared with Saryan his dream of one day building his own house in Armenia. Soon thereafter, Saryan wrote a letter advising the Armenian authorities, in Yerevan, to purchase Pushman's paintings.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The Coach That Blew Out of the Water

There are very few athletes in the world who can have a profound impact on their sport both as a player and as a coach. In the grandest stage of his professional career, Adam Krikorian, head coach of the United States Women's Water Polo National Team, showed the world how it's done by leading his team to Olympic gold this past summer in the London games.

Text **Edgar Melik-Stepanyan** | Photo **Armen Poghosyan**

Adam Krikorian's list of awards and championships is staggering. He's won an unprecedented 15 national titles in the UCLA water polo program as a player and coach. He's led the Bruins women's water polo team to two perfect seasons. He's been recognized as the national Coach of the Year five times. But his most impressive accomplishment may have occurred this past summer when he coached the U.S. Women's Water Polo team to its first ever Olympic gold medal. Moments after his team beat Spain in the gold medal match, Krikorian was pulled into the pool where he soaked in the joys and memories of an "unbelievable" experience.

Two months later, fresh off of a congratulatory gathering at the White House with President Obama and company, Krikorian reflects on the experience in London and his tenure at UCLA from his Manhattan Beach living room. He thinks about the championships at the world level and the gold medal game, and the accolades and the praises that never seem to end.

News flash: none of the above is the apex of his sporting career. "Winning the Most Inspirational Award at UCLA during my sophomore, junior, and senior years...that's the highlight," says Krikorian, 38, who is from Northern California and whose great grandparents escaped the Armenian Genocide to find refuge in America.

The most inspirational award topped all his other honors and titles? Even the 2007 UCLA women's water polo that won the school's 100th national title? Even the 1995 UCLA men's water polo team that he was a part of that won its first title since 1972? "Yes," he assures.

One has to spend time with Krikorian to understand why a simple inspirational award meant so much more than the championship rings and watches that are packed somewhere in his garage.

"I was given the award by my teammates, and those are people I worked so hard with, day in and day out," he says. "There isn't anything that will top that."

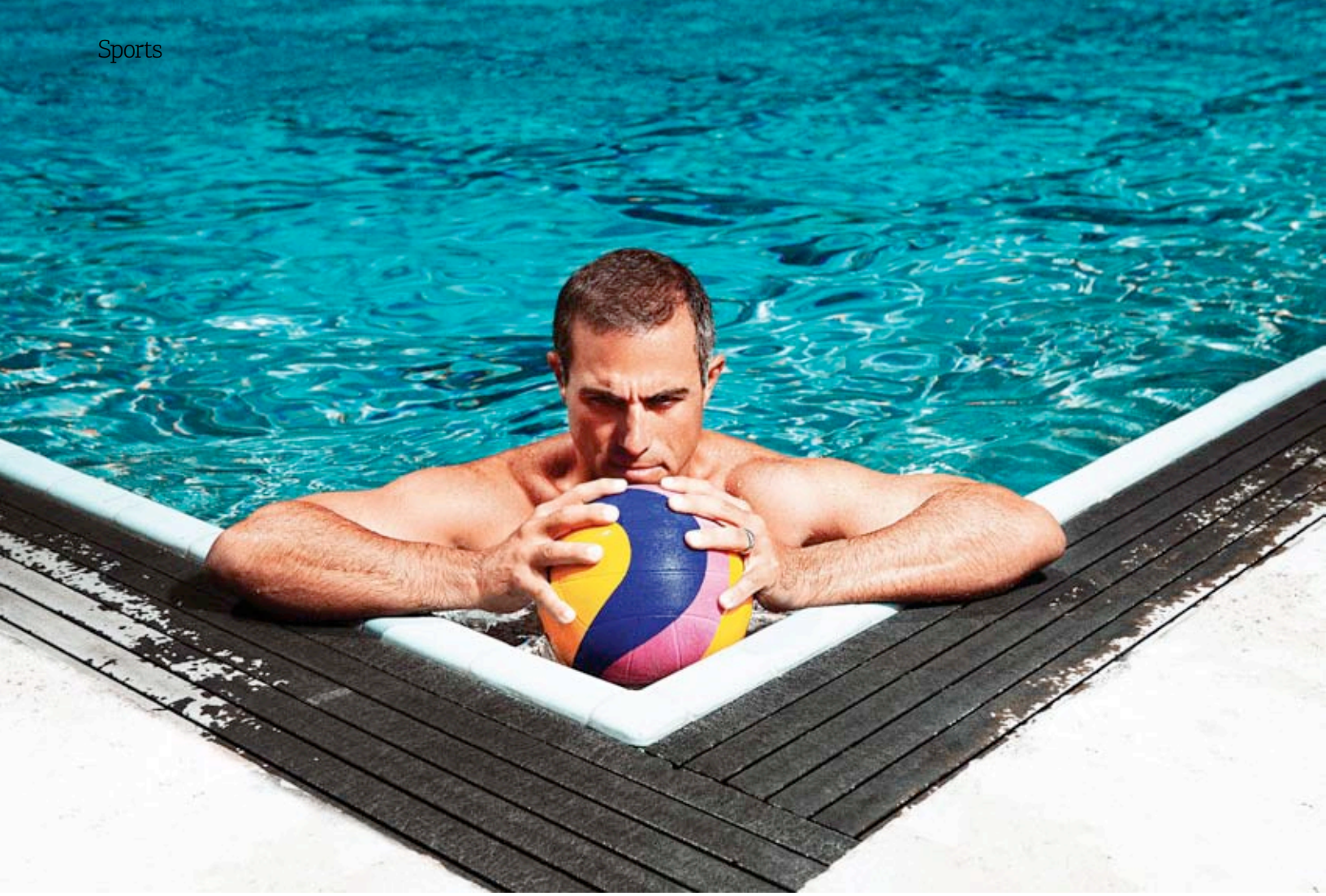
"I'm a believer in things happening for a reason. You're put on this planet for a reason. I believe I have a gift. I believe in coaching and helping others is what I'm supposed to be doing."

Gold Strike

The record books show the results of the London games in black and white. You either won, or you didn't. Although Adam Krikorian figuratively won a gold medal, literally, he didn't.

"Coaches don't get one," he says.

"It is sort of unfortunate that coaches don't get a



gold medal," Courtney Mathewson, a leader on the American water polo team, tells *Yerevan Magazine*. Mathewson and her teammates made sure to honor their coach after the Spain victory. As Krikorian looked on, each of the 13 Americans took their place on the top podium and watched as the American flag was raised. Immediately after the ceremony, his players draped their medals around their coach's neck. Krikorian stood in awe of having 13 gold medals around his neck, appreciating the journey that took his team from finishing sixth in the world championships, a year earlier to being the best in the world in 2012.

There is also the Krikorian footnote in the 2012 Olympics' box scores that will soon be a distant memory. It was during the semi-final contest against Australia when for a split second everything seemed to be slipping out of the grasp of him and his team. This was when Krikorian made "the biggest mistake of his coaching career," as he calls it. With his team leading 9-8 and only seconds remaining, Krikorian called a timeout believing that his goalkeeper had possession of the ball. She did not have possession; the Australians took it in a mad dash to try to tie the score. Krikorian's timeout call resulted in an automatic penalty shot for Australia. Australia easily converted the penalty shot to send the match into overtime.

"I made a huge mistake in one of the biggest moments of my coaching career," Krikorian says. He thought his blunder might cost his team a chance at playing for the gold medal. "I couldn't say anything. I needed to gather myself. I almost kind of laughed, and I told myself to get it together. There was a longer break between the fourth quarter and overtime than usual, and that break gave me a chance to regroup."

As his players were returning for the overtime period, Krikorian called them back once more. "I knew in their eyes right there that we were not only going to win that match, but we were also going to win the gold medal," he said.

His players allowed him to turn the worst mistake of his coaching tenure to one of the proudest moments of his life. His players regrouped because of what Krikorian had entrenched in their minds months earlier.

"I try to build a sense of ownership in my team," he said. "A sense of ownership where all of us – coaches and athletes – have the same vision, same mindset."

As Krikorian expected, the Americans beat Australia 11-9, and two days later, defeated Spain 8-5.

"It all happens for a reason," he said. "I'm a believer in things happening for a reason. You're put on this planet for a reason. I believe I have a gift. I believe in coaching and helping others is what I'm supposed to be doing."

↑ Krikorian was a winner as a player too. In 1995, he scored two goals in the NCAA championship game, lifting the Bruins to a national title.

→ Krikorian coaching the women's water polo team in the 2012 London Games

Natural Born Winner

The U.S. Olympic Committee chose Adam Krikorian because it knew he could lead. It also knew he could win. As a player. As a men's coach. And as a women's coach. He had to give up his post at UCLA in order to coach the women's national team. Letting go of his position was a tough decision to make, but one he did because of the "great opportunity" with the national team. "They picked me because I had proven success at the collegiate level," Krikorian said. "We had five national championships in a row at UCLA with the women's team. I was very lucky to have coached at UCLA and coached against the best players and the best coaches in the world."

Krikorian was the best water polo coach in the world while at UCLA. As the women's coach, he guided UCLA to eight national titles and an astonishing .867 winning percentage. As the men's coach, he led the Bruins to the 2004 national title.

Ten years earlier, when he majored in psychology with an emphasis in business administration while at UCLA, he had no plans of being a coach. In 1995, he scored two goals in the Bruins' 10-8 win against California in the NCAA championship game, lifting the Bruins to the national title five years after UCLA dropped its program. "I knew UCLA was starting from Ground Zero when I went there," said the 5-foot-9 inch Krikorian, whose older brother Blake also played at UCLA with his other older sibling, Jason, swimming at the University of California, Berkeley. "I wanted to be a part of the change. The first two years were horrible. There were some rough games, but winning the 1995 national championship was the greatest thrill in my sports career. When you dig a program out of a hole, to win as a player is something special."

During the 1996-97 school year, while an undergraduate he was asked to serve as a student assistant coach for the men's and women's teams. This is where he showed his potential to thrive as a coach when both the men's and women's teams won national titles in his first year as an assistant.

His plans of leaving UCLA after graduation were now gone, and he was hooked on building the program.

"It was more about how are we going to play and find creativity," said Krikorian, who was promoted to Co-Head Coach of the women's team prior to the 1999 season. "I needed to focus on that. It was about can I become a better coach? Can we become a better team? Can I create a better atmosphere and environment?"

In the midst of his coaching, he learned how to balance coaching men's and women's teams. "It's different coaching men and women," he says. "I'm definitely a different coach with the way I handle men and women. With men, there is a larger emphasis on discipline. They don't lack creativity and a sense of confidence. They can be very challenging and much more difficult to harness in. You want them to play within the system. With the women, they're great listeners, sometimes to a fault. At times, it's more difficult to get them to think outside the box. I'm more nurturing to the women. That's not to say I'm gentle. It has forced me to analyze what I do, how I do it, and why I do it. They've forced me to be a better coach."

Krikorian is a coach who has too many awards to keep track of. Some of his awards have become toys for his kids, Jack, six, and Annabel, three. Others are stored, which is great for him because they don't serve as reminders of his accomplishments.

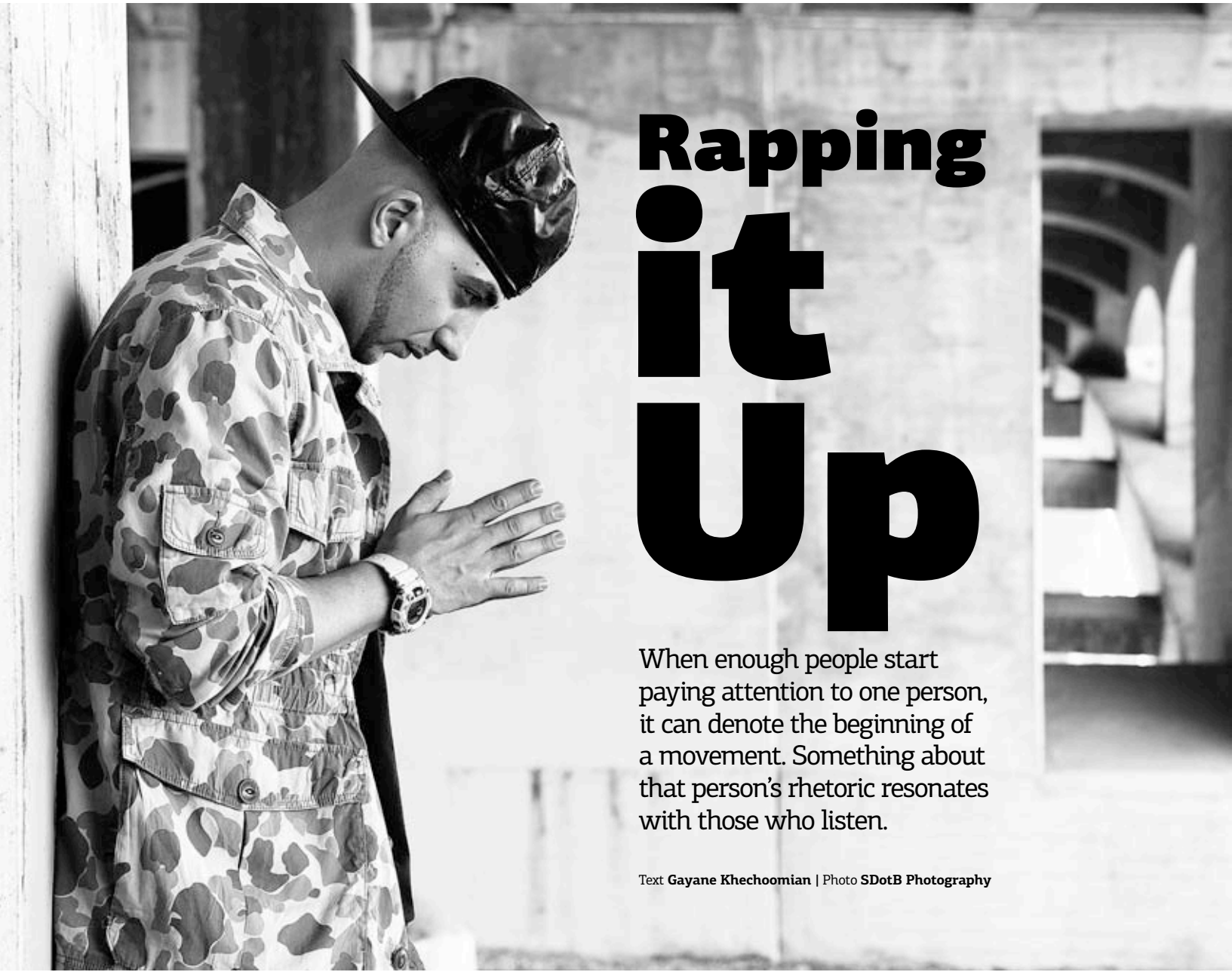
In four summers at the Olympics Games in Rio de Janeiro, Krikorian might be on the pool deck directing the women's team once more. Or he might not. He said he will not make a decision on his future with the American team until the end of this year. He won't be returning for the accolades, that much is sure.

"If you spend too much time thinking about your accomplishments, you're not improving," he says. "I don't do it for the awards. I do it for the challenge to improve myself and create positive experiences for those I'm fortunate enough to surround myself with." ■

"I try to build a sense of ownership in my team," Krikorian says. "A sense of ownership where all of us – coaches and athletes – have the same vision, same mindset."



GettyImages



Rapping it Up

When enough people start paying attention to one person, it can denote the beginning of a movement. Something about that person's rhetoric resonates with those who listen.

Text **Gayane Khechoomian** | Photo **SDotB Photography**

A skilled rapper, R-Mean (Armin Hariri) tells stories to a beat straight from his heart. He describes his family, socio-political angst and cultural phenomena in the form of sincere poetry to a beat. "I'm not supposed to think/ We buildin' fancy houses for broken homes, there's no control with broken wings/ A lonely soul that only drinks and copes by holding pens until his emotions flow through ink," R-Mean raps in "Vice Versa," a self-expressive song about society. "That's what hip-hop is about, keeping true to yourself," R-Mean says.

I met R-Mean years ago through my involvement with Armenian student groups. He was on every shortlist of potential performers at fundraisers and important cultural events organized at universities in Southern California. He drew Armenian youth to events like no other underground artist. He was always happy to perform as long as there was an audience.

R-Mean has a seemingly lighthearted personality. He likes to joke around and talk to the people around him. In the years I have known him, I have never seen the man visibly upset. It is obvious that he takes to the pen to express his woes.

This he does through his style, which is insightful, deep, and sometimes dark. "I see my moms starin' at me in that open hurse/ that's when I knew we could get out of these confinements/ don't ever shush me, I am the opposite of silence" he expresses in "Opposite of Silence."

The Roots

Much of his character can be attributed to his interesting background. Raised by a single mother due to the untimely death of his father, R-Mean's family struggled to maintain their culture in Amsterdam, where he grew up. He describes Amsterdam as being bereft of Armenians, and as such, he was always looking to connect to his kind. "We used to drive an hour and a half on Saturdays to take Armenian classes," he told me. "And not at a school, but a place where the moms came together, taking turns teaching us the language."

Los Angeles

R-Mean finally connected to his roots when he moved back to Los Angeles, the city where he was born. L.A. is where he came out with the song that made him a hit in the Armenian community. It was called "Open Wounds," and dealt with the events of 1915: "A bit of mystery lies in history's eyes/ 'Cuz in time the facts and the figures get twisted with lies."

The song was not popular simply because it touched upon a topic dear to many, but also because it had a professional quality and an authentic sound. Armenians everywhere responded, culminating in a total number of 13,000 record sales for the independent artist.

Despite the success, R-Mean's path was met with resistance. Back in the nineties, hip-hop was not as globalized as it is today where there are lyricists in almost every culture, voicing the struggles of their people. Many countries, including Armenia, have their own niche of disgruntled youth expressing their discontent with society, or simply providing social commentary. However, while there are plenty of artists rapping in the Armenian language in the Armenian mainstream, there are not many Armenians rapping in English in Los Angeles. "When I first started, I would hear 'what are you doing, Armenians are not supposed to rap,'" R-Mean recalls. Looking back, it is clear that he never took the criticism to heart.



R-Mean

▸ New song "Lost Angels" features multi platinum hip-hop artist, The Game. The song made the the "Amazon Best Sellers" list.

▸ Other new material includes collaborations with Joe Budden, who is signed to Eminem's Shady Records, and Glasses Malone, signed to Lil' Wayne's YMCMB.

▸ Has been featured as opening acts for Nas and Bone Thugs n' Harmony, both inspirations for the rapper.

▸ Born in L.A., he moved to Holland, grew up in Amsterdam then moved back to L.A. to pursue his music career.

"It's a healing process when I'm honest with these words. It's insane – light bulbs start to spark in my brain. Great minds think alike. That explains why our thoughts ain't the same."

"Crocodile Tearz"
— Nah Mean Mixtape

Mainstream Exposure

R-Mean went from performing at school events to rapping in front of national audiences. His success is highlighted by appearances on mainstream shows such as Power 106's *Wake Up Show*, one of the most respected and popular hip-hop shows of all time. "Growing up, I always wanted to be on the *Wake Up show*," R-Mean says. As part of the program, which has featured all the legendary artists in the industry, R-Mean performed live lyrics over a beat.

The program hosts were so impressed by his sound that they personally invited R-Mean to another top hip-hop radio show in New York, *Sway in the Morning*. After blowing them away once more, R-Mean was connected to the MTV show *Rapfix*, where up-and-comers get a chance to have their music heard.

A Professionial Opinion

As s UCLA graduate, R-Mean pursued pharmacy school at Loma Linda University. By day, R-Mean is a doctor of pharmaceuticals, and by night, he spends his time prescribing lyrics to the ills of modern music. R-Mean describes today's mainstream music as being too much bubblegum pop. "It's not timeless. We're going to forget what the 'hot' song is by next year." That is because it is simply catchy party music, he says.

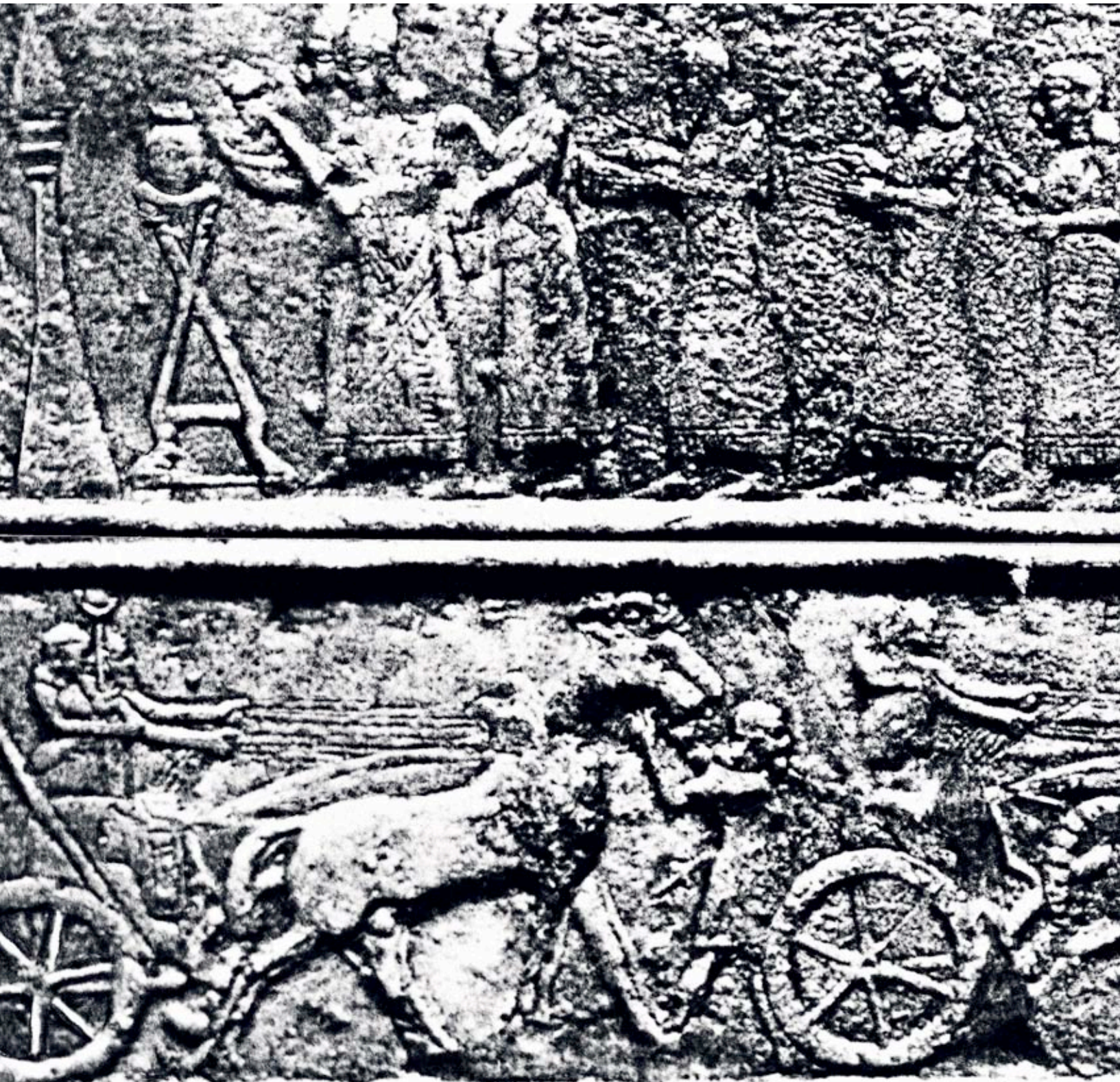
Though he is in the underground of the hip-hop scene, he has no problem with making catchy radio tunes that talk about parties and girls, so long as it's creative and balanced out by meaningful music.

His Story Told

One can sometimes tell what an artist is striving to accomplish based on what he admires in others. To that end, R-Mean has always been into lyrics and storytelling, especially that of artists such as Nas and Eminem. He feels that the artist Tupac had the most heart, remarking that despite the legend's simple lyrics, he really touched people.

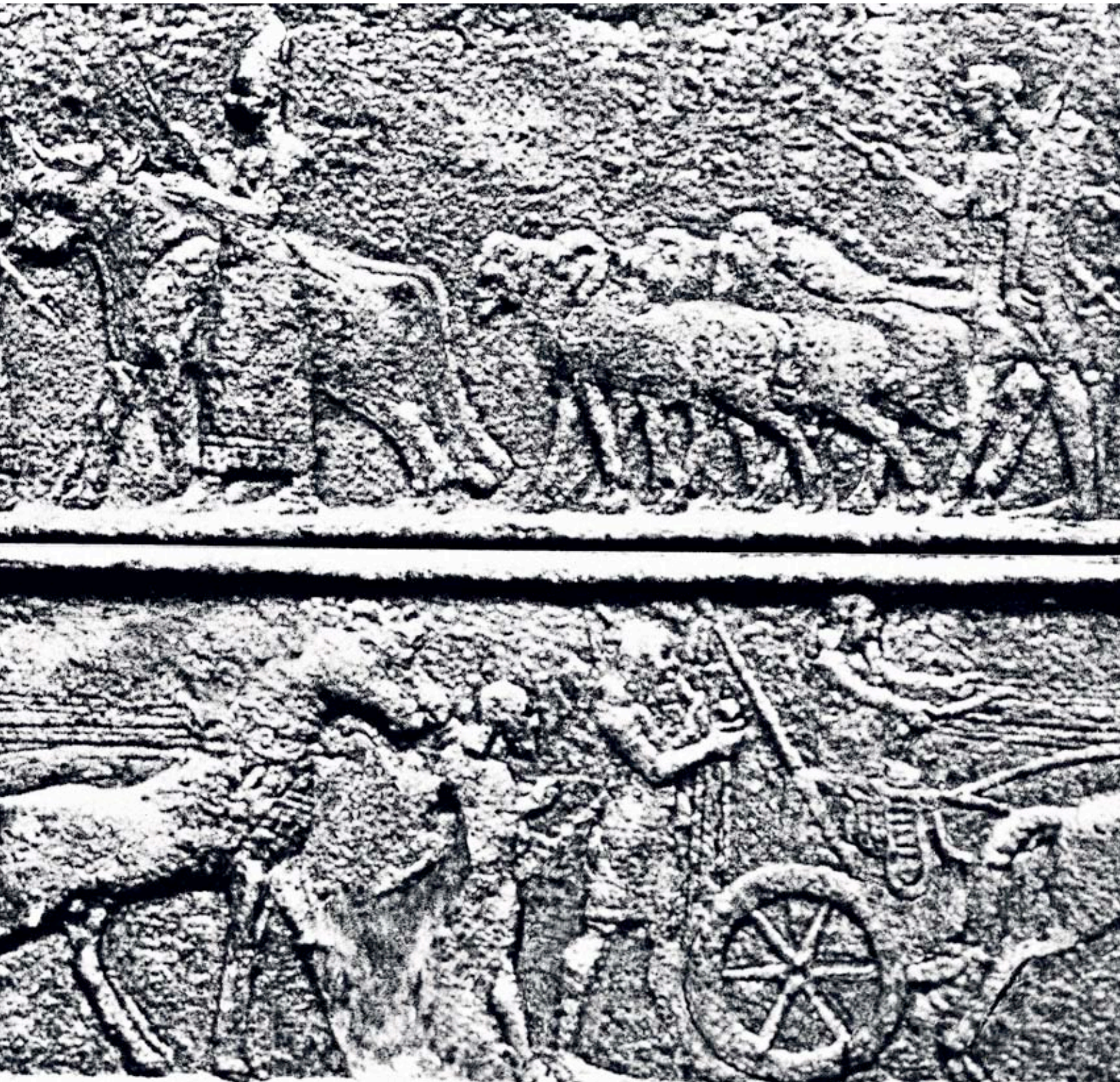
I have seen people crowd around a stage to see R-Mean at work. I have felt the excitement over his upcoming shows, and read the countless lyrics reposted by his avid fans. If R-Mean wishes to accomplish what Tupac achieved – to touch people – the man is succeeding at it. ■

Sun City



The first capital of Armenia is known by several names: Tushpa, Tosp, Van-Tosp, Yervandavan, and Shamiramakert. But its most recognizable name is Van. Carrying this name, the city flourished, collapsed, and was revived to fall once again under pressures of the enemy.

Text **Sergey Vardanyan** | Photos from the archives of **Sergey Vardanyan, from the book *Armenian Iconography***



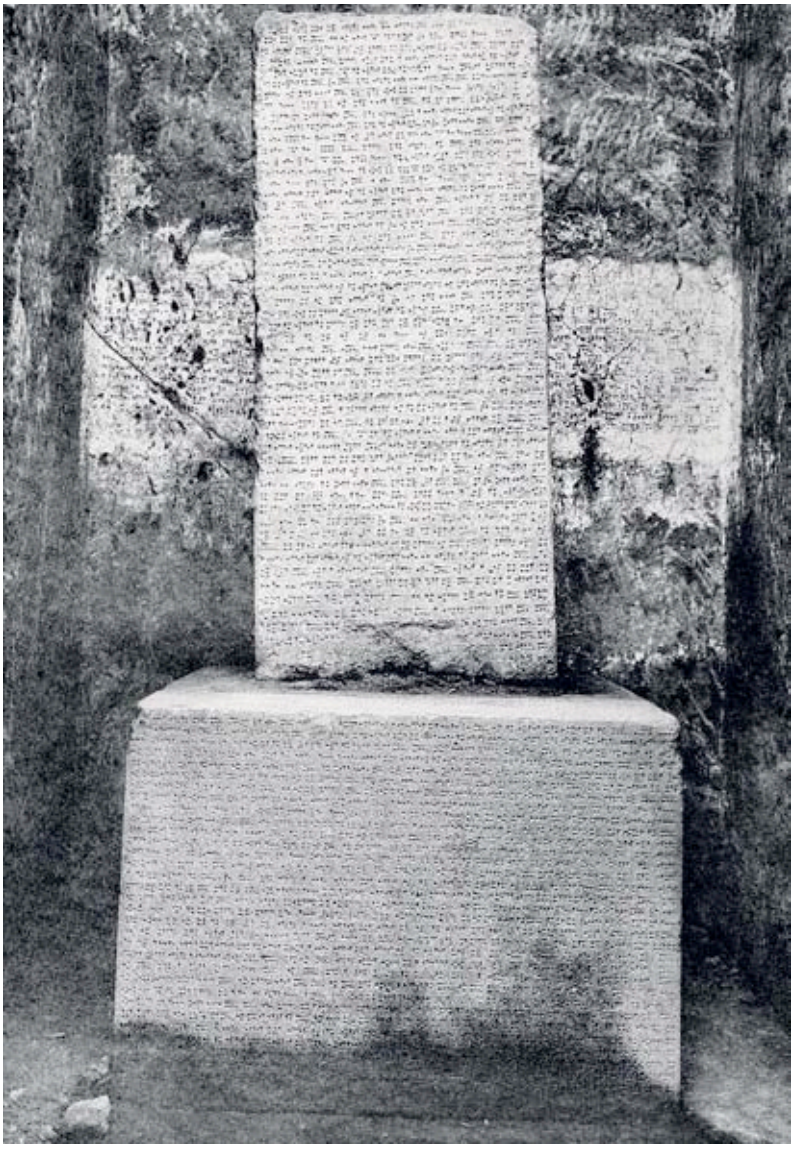
The legendary city Tushpa is considered to be the first Armenian capital. The city was named in honor of the winged goddess of Tushpuea, the wife of the solar god Shivini. His temple was built here after the ruler of the Van Kingdom (Ararat kingdom of Urartu), Sarduri I (840-825 B.C.), settled in Tushpa. In this city, King Sarduri built not only a church but, according to his decree, thousands of slaves worked day and night hollowing dwellings, stables, and weapons stockpiles in the rocks. A popular rumor attributed all this to the Assyrian queen Semiramis. The father of Armenian historiography, Movses Khorenatsi, mistakenly assigned the laurels of King Sarduri to this "voluptuous person with a male heart." In the city that sprawled along the blue waters of Lake Van, the most outstanding building was the imperial residence built on a rock. Khorenatsi was also mistaken when attributing the construction of the palace to Semiramis, "the terrible secret royal abode with inaccessible entrances and hellishly difficult exits." Many people flocked to the capital which was under protective city walls and a garrison. The city was in need of water. In the 8th century B.C., during the reign of Menua I, a canal was built with the length of approximately 50 miles, a width of 15 feet and a depth of 5 feet, which brought water from mountain springs. It flowed along a bed carved in the cliffs where in some places it was fortified with stone barriers. Builders even constructed special bridges over the canal. Here is what Khorenatsi wrote about the waterway: "A river dam of incredible width and height made from the debris of rocks and huge stones and held together with lime and sand ... no matter how hard he tried, fruitless would be the efforts to break out of masonry dam a piece of stone suitable for at least a sling. And the skillfully made fill, which bonds the rocks, perhaps looks like melted fat." Part of the river water was directed to the capitol while the remainder was used to irrigate gardens on the shores of the lake "on the right and left sides of the city." According to the Assyrian king Sargon II, in Van "bunches of grapes and fruits fell like showers of rain." A small prototype of one of the Seven Wonders of the World – the Hanging Gardens of Babylon – could be found in Van. It's worth mentioning that even 28 centuries later, the waters of king Menua's canal powers 40 water mills.

At the Gates of Armageddon

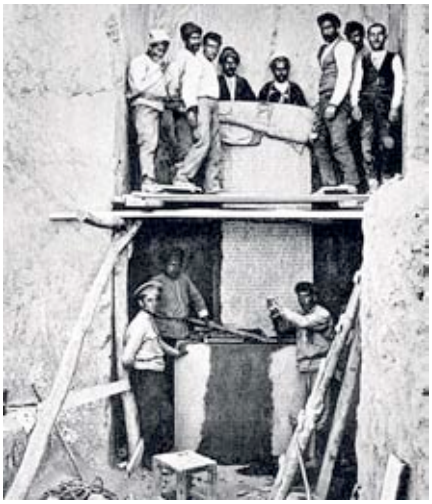
Menua's grandson, King Sarduri II (764-735 B.C.), was defeated in a battle against the Assyrian king Tiglath-Pileser III in 743 B.C. With what was left from his army, Sarduri took refuge in the fortress. Assyrians besieged Tushpa but were not able to conquer the city. They then destroyed several regions, and, while retreating, Tiglath-Pileser left a cuneiform inscription on the stone: "I arranged an Armageddon in front of the city gates and set the image of my majesty in front of it. I victoriously crossed the vast country from top to bottom and never met an opponent." Sarduri's son, Rusa I, (735-713 B.C.) moved his residence to the northwestern region of Van to the fortified hill Rusahinili (Agravakar). More than 5,000 people lived here, including 1113 men of noble birth and soldiers, 3784 officials, 152 servants, ten winemakers and 400 "other people." Like his ancestors, the new king took care of the capital's water supply. He ordered the construction of an artificial lake 20 miles from Van from which two canals supplied the city with fresh water. The hydraulic structure of Rusa I was intact for almost 2,500 years; it was destroyed by severe flooding in 1891.

Into the Ashes of History

The decline of the kingdom of Van began after Sarduri II, and around 590-585 B.C. the kingdom briefly lost its independence. Duke Yervand Sakavakyats (approx. 570-560 B.C.) was the person who, two decades later, regained Armenia's independence. He founded the new Yervanduni dynasty and renamed the capital Yervandavan. When Armenia fell under the reign of the Achaemenid Empire, the country was divided into two broad provinces and Van became the center of one of them. But when in 331 B.C. Armenia regained its independence, Armavir, and not Van, was proclaimed the new Armenian capital. The heyday of Van refers to the reign of Artashesid Dynasty. Tigran the Great (95-55 B.C.), for example, moved a lot of artisans and merchants here from the territories he occupied. Afterwards Van was ravaged and rebuilt many times. In 368-369 B.C. Shapur II, Shah of Persia, passed through the city with his warriors. The historian Pavstos Buzand mentioned this military campaign: "They occupied the fortified city of Van in Tosp region as well; burned and razed it. Five thousand Armenian families were taken captive." Where exactly those families were taken is described in the work of the 9th century historian Tovma Artsruni: "They were moved to Aspahan (Isfahan)."



Annals of King Sarduri II, found in Van, 1915





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Carved figurine made of bone found during the excavations in Van.

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View of the fortress of Van in the engraving by Charles Texier, 1842.



Forfeited Treasures

Having lived through the decline of Arab domination, Van was revived in the years 908-1021. As the capital of the Vaspurakan Kingdom, it became one of the largest cities in Armenia once more. The first king of Vaspurakan, Gagik Artsruni, scoring several important victories, secured peace in the lands subject to him. He strengthened the old fortresses and ordered the construction of new ones. On his order, architect Manvel began the construction of the monastery on the island of Akhtamar. Gagik had already founded a new city there from which only the monastery is preserved to this day. The erection of this grandiose building is described in the annals of the Artsruni Dynasty: "Following Gagik's orders, many workers were breaking heavy boulders and throwing them into the deep sea. Thanks to the continuous efforts of the great king, a stone dam was built rising five cubits above the sea surface. A number of large boulders were fixed to the dam to serve as a solid foundation. On this base he built a wall five stages long." There was a quiet harbor where ships from the sea (the Armenians called Lake Van "a sea") could enter through a strong gate beyond the ramparts with its high towers. It is a pity that the royal residence has not survived, "from the foundation to the skyward peaks, the palace stood without pillars. It was indeed a pinnacle of human ideas and an object of admiration. To look at the high dome decorated with gold, one had to remove one's hat so that it did not fall to the ground." If the country seat of the Vaspurakan kings was so richly decorated, one can only imagine what the main palace in the capital city of Van may have looked like. But time passed. Being unable to resist the raids of nomadic barbarians, the last king of Vaspurakan, Senekerim Artsruni, accepted the offer of the Byzantine emperor Basil II; in 1021, he handed over his kingdom to the Empire. It included ten cities, 72 fortresses and 4000 villages, for which he received the city and the region of Sebastia where he moved with 70-80 thousand of his subjects, including part of the population of Van.

Perpetual Siege

Information about the "great and impregnable" fortress of Van in the 12-13th centuries is preserved in the writings of the Arab geographer Ibn al-Asir. However, the city was not destined to have a peaceful existence even under the protection of its strong walls; invasions followed one another – first came the Seljuks, then the Mongols, then the Tatars, and later the Persians. In 1387, the population of Van stood firm under the 26 days and night's siege of the Tamerlan troops. Nevertheless, the invaders managed to overcome their resistance and break into the city. They tied up the men and threw them down from the high walls. About 7000 citizens of Van died at that time. In the poetic commemorative book Hishatakaran, Grigor Khlatetsi recorded that those who were dropped last survived because they fell on a pile of bodies. The Mongols took the women and children captive.

In 1424 the city was besieged again – this time by the army of Iskander, the chief of the Turkmen nomadic tribe Kara Koyunlu. The siege lasted fifty days but Van survived. Iskander returned in the spring, once again besieged the city, and this time got his way.

Conquerors succeeded each other but they could not kill the desire of the Armenians to be independent. The heirs of Armenian royal and *Nakharar* dynasties, who sought to restore statehood, led the struggle against the invaders. The descendants of the

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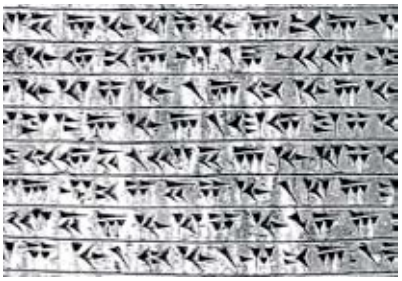
View of Van before the tragic events of 1915





Cuneiform

Garegin Srvandztyan also gave evidence of the large number of cuneiform inscriptions in the vicinity of Van: "Mher's door is the hardest stone, hewn smooth like a big door with clear cuneiform inscription." There are many rock fragments with similar inscriptions in the villages and monasteries. A perfectly preserved inscription could be seen on one of the stones of the internal wall of the church of St. Arakyal in Qaghakamech District. They can also be seen on the stones used for the construction of the main church of the Monastery of Varag, Karmravor Monastery and elsewhere. Many round and square stones with inscriptions were found during excavations. A round stone with a hole in the center and inscriptions around it lies in the base of the altar in the church of Lezk village, a stone similar to it also exists in Varag."

Artsruni Dynasty, Sefedinyans, who had a great influence in Vaspurakan, also made such an attempt. In 1466, the head of the Akhtamar Catholicate, Stepannos Sefedinyan IV (1465-1489), crowned his brother Smbat as the King of Armenia. Although his authority extended only to the island and the surrounding area and his reign did not last long, Akhtamar was called the "royal throne" in the Armenian manuscripts of 15-16th centuries (almost 1500 manuscripts were created in Vaspurakan), and Akhtamar catholicoi were called "royal," for they were the descendants of King Gagik.

Incidentally, in the 1490s, the island was the refuge for the young Ismail, whose father was Rustam's rival, the Sultan of the Ak Koyunlu tribes. A few years later, Ismail conquered Tabriz with his army, established his power in Persia, and proclaimed himself Shah Ismail I, thus founding the famous Safavid Dynasty.

Cultural Oscillations

In the 16-17th centuries, Van repeatedly passed back and forth from the Turks to the Persians. Back in 1533, when the city was first occupied by the Turks then the Persians, 16 thousand people were killed. In 1548, Sultan Suleyman Kanuni restored his reign in Van and hastily informed the French king. In the letter he calls the fortress of Van "invincible" and "ascended to heaven." "The most impregnable in Persia," is how the French ambassador and military adviser d'Aramo describes it. Solak Zadeh, a Turkish historian writes: "This fortress is the key to the Persian country, a strengthened wall on its outskirts." The erring Shah bragged: "As long as the yellow rock (Van) is under my authority, I need not fear the Ottoman Sultans." Still another Turkish historian of the 17th century, Çelebi, described how Van looked before the great earthquake of 1648 which decimated it to the ground: "The city is protected by internal and external walls. The internal wall passes along the high steep cliff in the western part. The town is situated on its one side, a fortified castle on the other. When the great Tamarlane seized Van, he ordered his emirs to destroy the city. They tried to fulfill his order in every possible way but could not succeed. Unable to shake the stone foundation of the fortress, they satisfied themselves with the destruction of several towers and ramparts that were built later. This damage did not shake the strength of the fortress.

The earthquake succeeded where barbarian invaders had failed. Here is what Arakel Davrizheci, a historian who lived at that period, wrote: "The internal wall of the city of Van collapsed, from Tabriz gate to Igar tower. And even where it did not, it was so damaged that later they had to break it down to build a new one." Many residents of the



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Catholicos of All Armenians, Khrimyan Hayrik





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A typical meal of wealthy Armenians of Van. 1881

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Ruins of Van after 1915



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Cover of the magazine *Artsvi Vaspurakan*



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A squadron of Armenian volunteers in Van



city perished during those eight days when "the earth was constantly shaking." Churches in the city and in nearby villages were destroyed. Noragegh Church, for example, "was first thrown to the other end of the field and then collapsed." The church of St. Sahak was ruined, the temple of Echmiadzin was damaged, the roof of St. Arakelots church collapsed, and the dome of the church of St. Poghos was destroyed. When the dust had settled and the surviving residents had mourned their loved ones, they began thinking about the restoration of the churches and monasteries. The wealthy citizens of Van had the money but without the consent of the Sultan they could not proceed with the restoration of churches.

A resident of Van, Khoja Rahidzhan, was the one who convinced the ruler to sign the decree.

The Villains Curse

Three years had not passed since the earthquake when Turkish and Kurdish bandits from the vicinity of Van set their eyes on the treasures of the restored monastery of Varag. Attacking it, they subjected the brethren to severe tortures but did not succeed in finding out the location of the hidden treasure. Then they started to break the stones of the monastic walls until they found its hiding place.

Marhas Çelebi, the son of Khoja Tuma Hanents, went to the robbers with rich gifts in an attempt to persuade their leader, Suleiman Bek, to return the relics. Çelebi promised to pay seven thousand qurush for them, but he did not agree. However, the villains, who desecrated the holy walls, did not escape punishment; all of them suffered a mysterious death. Interestingly, woes also covered their lands: the harvest did not come, the animals did not breed, riots pulled the land apart, and "in the summer it snowed immensely" (Davrizheci). Local residents began to beseech Ibrahim Bek, who at that time owned the relics, to give them back to the Armenians. The people of Van, on the other hand, raised the money and four years later the relics were restored to the monastery. The main one, the pice of the True Cross, was placed in the church of St. Astvatsatsin from where it disappeared without a trace in 1915.

Among Princes and Thieves

At the end of the 17th century the fortress of Van belonged to the Ter-Barsegents princely family. Many of the princes of Van ruled numerous villages, and the "Prince of Princes," Hakop Garaseferyan, even "managed to become the supreme Prince of Van country." The princes often put up armed resistance to the Turks and the Kurds. In order to keep them in check, the Sultan took a son from each family to Istanbul as hostage.

In the 18th century the fortress passed into the possession of Dankovyan family. In the 19th century, its whole garrison, according to Frederick Schultz (the first European who studied the famous Van cuneiforms), consisted of an elderly soldier, his pet bear and a few old bronze cannons which were more fit for a museum than a military unit. Ottoman rulers levied exorbitant taxes on the Armenian population of the city, and many residents of Van – both noble and common people – chose to leave their native city if not the empire. In the second half of the 19th century the economy in Van began to develop; the culture and the national liberation ideas were revived. In 1858, the abbot of the monastery of Varag, the future Patriarch of Armenia Khrimyan Hayrik, began to publish the first magazine in Western Armenia – *Artsvi Vaspurakan* (The Vaspurakan Eagle).

In 1862 an incident that caused an armed uprising occurred. Christians in the Ottoman Empire were forbidden to carry the cross in front of a coffin during funerals. Armenians of Van generally ignored the ban but once, when two funeral processions – a Turkish and Armenian one – met on the street, a brawl ensued and the Turks started shooting. In response, Armenians took up arms. The newspapers reported that fighting was going on in the fortress but it remained under Armenian authority, for they had advantage in numbers. In 1872, the Armenians of Van organized the secret society "Miutyun i Prkutyun" (Union for Salvation), whose members tried to draw the attention of world powers to the desperate situation of the Armenians of Van and the surrounding villages. After the terrible fire of 1876, over 20 thousand Armenians left for Constantinople to find work. A year later, when the Russian-Turkish war broke out, the Ottoman Government demanded that the Armenians of Van pay huge sums of money to the army. In June of 1877, the Armenians of Vaspurakan paid 230,000 gold, 1,377,000 qurush for the maintenance of the Turkish army, not including food, clothing, horses, pack and domestic animals. In 1896, the executioners organized bloody massacres in the city and the surrounding villages. But it was the First World War that put an end to the Armenian history of Van. Armenians of Van heroically resisted the Turks during the Genocide of 1915. In 1918, they were forced to leave the city. Today, the 360,000 population of Van consists mostly of Kurds and Turks. ■



In Search of a Legend

"I am an explorer." How often do you hear this response when asking someone about their occupation? Considering how widely available the world has become to us, often it is hard to believe that there are areas on this planet that are off the map and still unexplored. It is thanks to explorers like Gregory Deyermenjian who have guided curiosity, determination, courage and patience, that little by little, the lost corners of the world are revealed to us.

Text **Ani Nazaretyan**

There is an age old Inca legend that tells about a mythical cult hero by the name of Inkarri who was sent together with his wife Kollarri from the Lake Titicaca region between Peru and Bolivia to bring civilization to the people and to establish a city that would become the most civilized center of the greatest empire in the Andean world: the City of Cusco. Inkarri carried with him a rod of gold, and as they headed north, he first plunged the rod into a place now known as Q'ero, where to this day the Incan language Qechua is still spoken, and the people in this area consider themselves the last descendents of the Inca. Inkarri and his wife then continued on from there and came to a broad valley between the mountains where he founded the city of Cusco. According to the legend, after spending many decades in Cusco, Inkarri headed back to Q'ero and then followed the Road of Stone (Camino de Piedra) northward across the crest of the mountains towards the Pantiacolla Plateau, where he eventually settled down in his refuge city of Paititi. Although this is just one out of dozens of legends about the mysterious Paititi, until now no one could really verify the truth about Paititi. A handful of travelers and explorers have crossed thousands of miles following the ancient Road of Stone, facing inhumane challenges, armed only with one goal – to discover Paititi. Yet none of them have embarked on more expeditions nor gone farther in search of Paititi than one man, who has dedicated more than 25 years of his life to this unique mission. In that search he has uncovered and identified a number of other sites and areas that were previously unknown to the world. That man is Gregory Deyermenjian.

"If some explorer tells me, 'I know what Paititi is,' I know immediately that he doesn't know what he's talking about because no one could identify Paititi," says Deyermenjian. "Let's say he comes across some particular ruin; how is he going to identify it as Paititi? There's not going to be a big "P" on it! So really what we are seeking is the farthest ruin to be found directly to the north of Cusco in the unexplored Pantiacolla Plateau at the end of the Road of Stone that appears and disappears and that is related to the legend of Inkarri going to Paititi. Pantiacolla is very remote and extremely difficult to get to. That is why up to this point in 2012, it

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Paulino, Gregory Deyermenjian, Goyo. Meseta de Pantiacolla, June 2004



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"Inca Chaca" portion of the "Camino de Piedra" in the Cordillera de Paucartambo



is still unexplored and no one has reached the end of the road that we are traversing a little farther with each expedition."

Deyermenjian embarked on his first expedition in search of Paititi back in 1984. Ten years prior to that, he first traveled to South America. "After traveling through Colombia, Ecuador, Guatemala and Mexico, my next step was to go to Peru. In 1980, I finally got to Peru and walked the Inca trail to Machu Picchu. In doing that, I realized that in reality it was Vilcabamba (the last refuge of the Inca Empire, conquered by the Spaniards in 1572) that Hiram Bingham was seeking when he happened to come upon Machu Picchu in 1911, and misidentified Machu Picchu as Vilcabamba. During my expedition to Vilcabamba in 1981, I learned about sites further to the east all associated with Paititi. So all the subsequent expeditions have been involved with piecing together the story of Paititi. There were areas that had never been entered by anyone before, yet they needed to be explored and documented. Those sites were unknown even to the Indians themselves.

Generally an expedition takes about a month. The dry season in Peru lasts from July through September, and while many people around the world pack their suitcases, get on a plane and prepare to spend their summer vacations relaxing at luxurious hotels, Gregory Deyermenjian packs his backpacks and equipment into duffel bags and gets ready for another adventure that awaits him in the high-altitude jungles of Peru where the conditions are very far from comfortable, and rest itself is a luxury.

Deyermenjian always travels alone and his main assistants during the expeditions are the local people and the campesinos – the highland descendents of the Incas in the area. Indeed, one needs to have a skilled guide in order to survive in the highlands and jungles where the conditions often are almost unbearable.

In one of his travel notes, Deyermenjian describes a typical day during the expedition: "Once in the cordillera, we headed ever north, traversing its ridge, trudging interminably through a succession of uncomfortable phenomena, which followed the same basic pattern day after day: ice on the tents in the morning; slogs up and over various tundra-like rises in the high puna at an average of over 12,000 feet altitude; penetrating neblina; an enveloping mist; and llovizna, a chilling drizzle; a searing mid-afternoon sun that makes one long for a return of the mist and drizzle that one had just been cursing a half hour before; and finally the paralyzing cold that descends over everything as soon as darkness falls at 6:10 every evening.

"Throughout the past 10 years, we have reached the farthest extensions of the Inca Road of Stone that we believe is the road of Inkarri leading to the Pantiacolla plateau."

"The topography is so strange that it is very difficult to describe," continues Deyermenjian as I ask about the flora and fauna in those remote areas across the Amazon basin. "The incline from the highlands down through the cloud forest into the high-altitude jungle is extremely steep, and it faces the Amazon basin. It is one of the heaviest rainfall areas in the world and has constant clouds that are blowing across the Amazon basin from the east. The plant life is amazingly prolific. You have plants growing on plants, and you have trees growing on trees, the trunks of these trees snaking their

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Lago de Angel



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Deyermenjian at Pusharo Petroglyphs in the jungles of Manu, October 1991



way up the hillside so that there were times when we were actually walking along the tops of trees that had their trunks and roots further down the hillside below us. Your legs burst through some of them and you find yourself in up to your armpits. You thought it was the ground, yet this is just another mat of vegetation growing over another mat of vegetation, where the natural surface is 10 feet below that. Those areas are very uncomfortable for the animals to live in."

In the years 1984, 1985, 1986 and 1989, Deyermenjian's guide, interpreter and right hand man during the Paititi expeditions was a native by the name of Goyo Toledo. A few years prior to the 1984 expedition, Goyo had been just a campesino, a peasant in the highlands living with his father Don Tomas Toledo and brother Gavino. In 1979, a group of French explorers in their search of Paititi decided to find Mameria, the jungle area with Machiguenga Indian tribes. They needed a native to guide them to Mameria. Goyo had never been there before, but he realized it was a good opportunity to visit the area and got into the helicopter with the French explorers. They found the sought-after area, and Goyo stayed, spending time with the Machiguenga. After coming back, he realized that he preferred the life of a free-living jungle Indian to that of an impoverished peasant, and he decided to stay. Thus, Goyo became the first person since Incan times to make his way to Mameria by foot. Within the course of two months, he finally reached Mameria and became one of the Machiguenga.

"That year in 1984, when I was negotiating with Don Tomas for mules, Goyo came out of the jungle to visit his father. Since then and for many years, he was my key guide during the expeditions through the jungles. He spoke the Machiguenga language so I could communicate with them, and he guided me to the ruins in this area. The person who was second to Goyo, as far as the most skilled person in all of Peru in conducting expeditions, was Paulino. Goyo lived in such a remote area that he wouldn't even become available for years, so throughout the 1990s Paulino was my guide. And then it wasn't until 2004, one of the years that we had a helicopter, that Paulino was able to make contact with Goyo, and he came out of the jungles in order to do the helicopter expedition with us. That was the last time he did an expedition."

The first records about the Machiguenga date back to the 16th century. Early Spanish chronicles refer to the Chunchos, who were Indians from the jungle. Part of the Incan army consisted of volunteer groups of Chunchos who were skillful archers. The Machiguenga people established themselves in the area of the high-altitude jungle known as Mameria in the 1960s. Fleeing slavery, they headed north-east and almost died of hunger and cold until they came upon a number eight-shaped lake and some strange Inca ruins. When they finally escaped, they settled in this particular area of Mameria, which is also believed to be one of the regions that once provided the sacred coca to the Inca nobility. Since the environment is so difficult, the population in Mameria is always very low and very widely dispersed. "You'll have one hilltop where there'll be someone like Goyo with his two Machiguenga wives and various children and maybe a mother-in-law," explains Deyermenjian. "And then two or three days' walk away from them, there will be another hillside with a Machiguenga man with his two or three wives and their children.

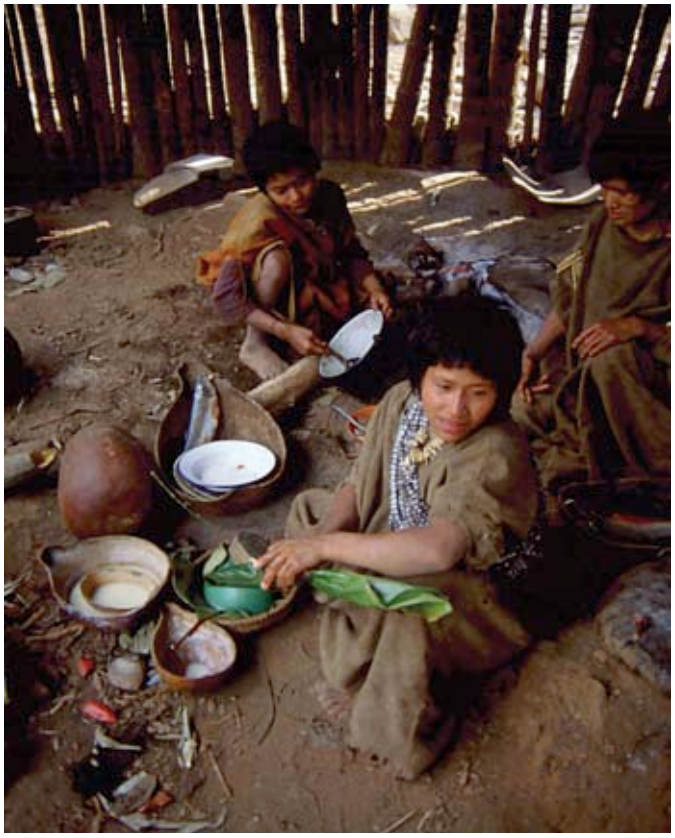
Life there is so difficult that there is a void of spiritual life, and most of the energy goes into just surviving, taking care of the kids, doing the hunting and fishing, and when they have time in the evening, they spend it on enjoying each other and interacting: wives teasing with their husbands, and husbands playing with the kids. Once every month or every few weeks, a man will go with some of his kids and one of his wives to the next Machiguenga settlement and just enjoy his time there. So when they are not doing what is required to survive, they are simply enjoying each other, there are no special customs. Throughout their whole lives, they might just see and know only 10-14 people. Typically the Machiguenga don't have names for each other. But now with Goyo going there, he has set a custom of putting names on people. One of his wives' name is Carmen, the other is Josefina (they are sisters). The Machiguenga language is very unique and is not related to any other. It sounds like sort of a whining Japanese, and it is not related to Quechua. Every valley and every tribal group in South America has its own language. Though the life in the high-altitude jungle is hard, the Machiguenga do not intend to leave the area. The most highly-prized aspect of their personality is getting along with each other. Somebody who is really feared and disliked is a man who is hot tempered. When you live in such isolation, a hot temper can mean that someone can get killed. So they just have a natural way of getting along with each other and being very hospitable, whereas the Kugapacori, another tribal group living in those areas, are known for raiding and even killing. Unlike the Machiguenga, who make kushma, which are long cotton gowns like the togas of the Romans, the Kugapacori don't have clothing. Thus there was a time when they wanted to take *kushmas* from the Machiguenga, as well as enslave their women. One of the improvements that resulted from Goyo being there and from us making expeditions



↑ Goyo Toledo and Deyermenian at the Incan "barracks" at the Meseta de Toporake, October 1989

↓ Goyo Toledo and his two Machiguenga wives.





→ Machiguenga women, Mameria, July 1985

Typically the Machiguenga don't have names for each other. But now with Goyo going there, he has set a custom of putting names on people.

and visiting the Machiguenga throughout the 1980s was that the Kugapacoris gradually retreated and ceased their raids. They realized that Goyo was someone who was going to fight back. "Throughout the past 10 years we have reached the furthest extensions of the Inca Road of Stone that we believe is the road that led Inkarri to the Pantiacolla Plateau. There we came upon the eight-shaped lake that the Machiguenga spent some time at in the 1960s. This lake had never been photographed, and no one knew that it existed. The lake now is known as "Lago de Angel." It was named after the particular Machiguenga man who died from the bite of a poisonous snake. Throughout the 1980s, he was one of the Machiguenga who accompanied me during the expeditions. In 1999, Paulino, his brother Ignacio and I kept descending the river following the main branch of the Road of Stone until we realized that after two weeks we'd gone only 12 km. We realized we would need a lifetime to make it, and so we went back to the highlands where we ran across some renegade cowboys who told us a story that further on there was a strange lake shaped like the number eight that Pacha Mama (Mother Goddess) wouldn't let anyone approach. Anyone who came near the lake was hit by lightning and snow. He told us that near this lake there were some strange ancient remains. Upon hearing this, we immediately realized that this sounded like what the Machiguenga Angel used to tell us about back in 1986. Though we had used all our energy, we knew that we would regret it if we didn't investigate it. So we headed on using my GPS and Paulino's natural instincts and the satellite photo-generated topographical map of the area. And we found it! That was one of the sites that was previously unknown to the world, and we identified it trying to make our own maps as accurate as possible to publicize them later on. Another one of our discoveries was the site known as Último Punto."

In the June 2004 "Quest for Paititi," Deyermenjian's exploration team discovered several Inca ruins along branches of the Inca Road of Stone at the peak known as Último Punto. It is the most remote

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Deyermenjian in the middle of cloud-forest, June 2006



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Above the valley of the Río Ch´unchosmayu, September 2011



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Family of mush-rooms in the sub-tropical forest.



"I get irritated by explorers' accounts that do not acknowledge that the locals are the true 'tough guys' and pivotal characters in achieving success."

Inca remain yet identified that lies to the north of Cusco. Up to this day no one has ever gone farther following the Road of Stone. Gregory Deyermenjian is a long time member of the Explorers club, which promotes the scientific exploration of land, sea, air, and space by supporting research and education in these fields. Its headquarters are in Manhattan in a gorgeous eccentric Georgian-style building full of artifacts from explorations. It has a worldwide membership of 2700 that includes people who have not only embarked on expeditions, but also added to the field of exploration through their writing and books.

"Many people think that I must be a masochist or an ascetic, by my year-long training with wind-sprints, weights, long walks in the heat wearing a weight vest, but it really is not so. I endure the training so as not to suffer unduly while trying to keep up with the native peoples with whom I do the expeditions. Also, I have seen that it is especially while in the areas "off the map" in the company of my Peruvian highland companions and among the forest-dwelling peoples such as the Machiguenga, that any acts of generosity, kindness, sharing, and concern are just naturally repaid by the locals one-hundred-fold, sooner or later. When they know and trust you, they will go out of their way to help. In 1984, the two Machiguenga women, Josefina and her sister Carmen, spent a long time skillfully picking off each and every one of hundreds of little red parasites that were clinging to my body after we had returned to their jungle settlement from the ruins of Mameria. I get irritated by explorers' accounts that do not acknowledge that it is the locals – those who are skillfully wielding the machetes, those with the instinctual and unerring sense of direction, those who have all their lives heard the tales passed down through the generations about ruins that lie just over this or that mountain, and who labor on with the heaviest loads and the most difficult tasks – these are the true "tough guys." They are also pivotal characters in achieving success as an explorer, especially in these vast and wild labyrinths of jungle-covered mountains, hills, and ravines.

"My father's people came from Adana, and my mother's side was from Calabria in Italy. My parents met in Watertown, Massachusetts," says Deyermenjian. As an undergraduate in the University of Massachusetts, majoring in Anthropology, Deyermenjian's initial interest was Central Asia. However, after his first journey to South America one thing led to another, and he ended up organizing dozens of expeditions to the countries of this continent. Deyermenjian's most recent trip in search of Paititi took place in October of 2012, and he is planning another expedition in 2013. It is also in his future plans to embark on a trip to Brazil, accompanied by a Chilean researcher Roland Stevenson, in hopes of finding the real origin of the legendary El Dorado.

"Although the majority of the world has been photographed and explored, there are still vast areas that are hard to access. These areas need to be seen and investigated. One doesn't need to rely only on outer space or the underwater world to find new challenges. There are geographical and archaeological explorations still to be done in plenty of unknown areas all over the world, especially in the Amazon Basin," concludes Deyermenjian. ■

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Passing the Torch

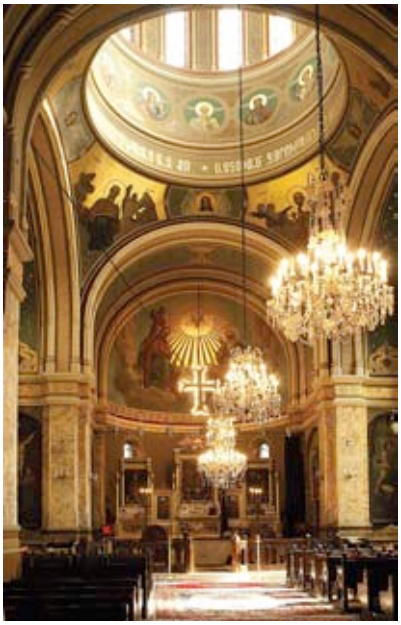


The tales about Ani have always been cherished and treasured but there were a few who carried the bright memory of this medieval capital city of Armenia in their hearts, passing the torch from generation to generation. Ani stayed alive in them and among them.

Text **Verzhine Nikoghosyan**

Suceava was the new Ani for the Armenian-Romanian community in Romania who erected churches from the memories of their ancestors. Reconstructing and reliving their lost homeland, the Armenian community continues to live their dream in a foreign land that has become home.
"Armenian-Romanians have kept in their hearts the pride of being from Ani," said Bishop Datev Hagopian, the Primate of the Armenian Diocese of the Armenian Apostolic Church of Romania. Coming from a city of 1001 churches, these people constructed their own churches in a remote country. Because they were surrounded with the spirit of the Armenian ancient heritage and pure faith, the only lifestyle they knew, they decided to rebuild it. In 1350, the community erected the first Armenian Apostolic Church dedicated to the Virgin Mary in Botusha; more churches were built in the 1500s, still more in the 1600s and 1700s, and the last church was built in 1915 to show the world that the Genocide was not the end of the Armenian nation. This was a message of faith and hope toward the bright future of all Armenians.
In the middle of the 19th century, there were 21,000 Armenians living throughout Romania. Most of them were concentrated in Transylvania, the central area of modern-day Romania. The Armenian community flourished in this country throughout the years. They have been a significant part of Romania, giving birth to key historic figures and enriching its culture with their unique customs.

Many outstanding Armenian-Romanians not only were devoted to their Armenian roots but also played important role in the Romanian political, cultural and social life. One of these was Spiru Haret. Born in 1851 to an Armenian family, he became an outstanding mathematician, astronomer and politician. He served three terms as Minister of Education, where he established reforms to improve the Romanian education system. He also founded the astronomical observatory in Bucharest and was a member of the Romanian Academy in 1892. Today there is a Spiru Haret University in Bucharest, Romania.
Among Armenians who had a significant and irreplaceable contribution to Romanian history and culture was Garabet Ibrăileanu. Born in 1871, he was a literary critic, writer, theorist, translator and sociologist at Iai University. Other famous Armenian-Romanians were: Vasile Conta, born in 1845, was a philosopher, poet and politician and Virgil Traian N. Madgearu, born in 1887, who was an economist, sociologist and a politician.
Romanian-Armenian businessmen continued the trades of their ancestors who traditionally succeeded in the field. There are records in Romanian trading books of Armenian salesman living in Bucharest in 1832. The list includes all the people who were allowed to work and have their own businesses or worked as craftsmen. The list includes 111 Armenians, many of whom owned their businesses while others were carpenters, coffee traders and so on.



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The cathedral of Holy Archangel is the diocesan cathedral of the Armenian Apostolic Church in Romania.



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The altar of Hajigadar, the ancient Armenian monastery.



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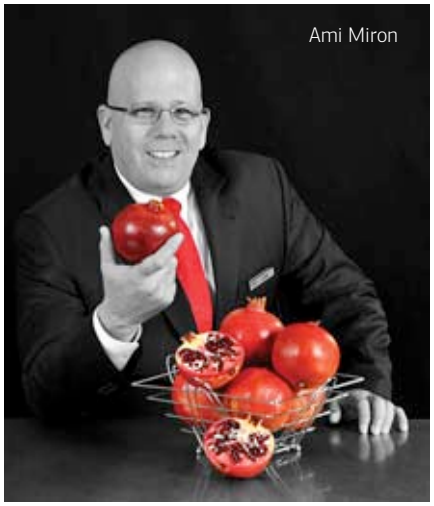
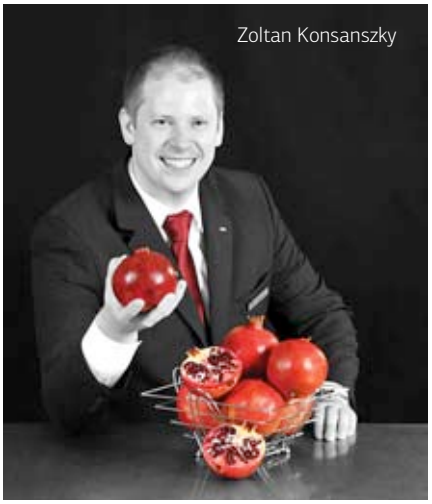
Every icon around the altar is a treasure form the Middle Ages.

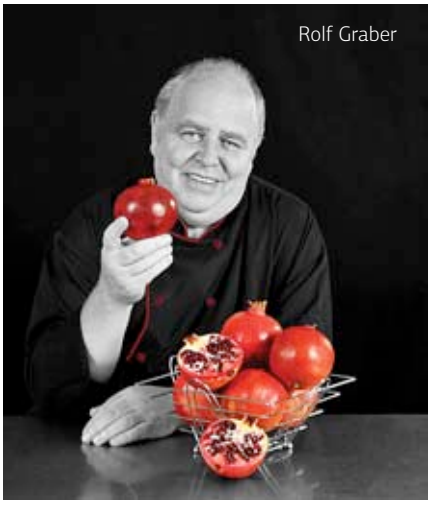
It wasn't until the middle of the 19th century when Armenian schools and educational establishments opened their doors for the Armenian youth. Here the students could learn Romanian, the Armenian language, history and much more. The 40s and 50s of the 19th century are known as a Renaissance of the Armenian community in Romania. Education became more accessible for Armenians, and the first Armenian printing house was established in 1847, in the city of Iași. The typography house was named Ani and soon the Armenian media flourished along with it. In 1913 there were Armenian communities in over 14 cities throughout Romania. In three of them there were large Armenian schools, Mesropyan, Haykazian, and Ghevondyanc. Most of the communities, however, had small schools close to the churches.
Today the Armenian community of Romania is proud of their large and rich library, ancient Armenian iconography, the over three centuries-old archive and a large number of church artifacts. Although the Romanian-Armenian community is still vibrant, they face many challenges.
"In order to keep our heritage, we need to fight on two fronts," said Bishop Datev. "One of them is to preserve the Armenian heritage and the other is to prepare the new generation of Armenians to carry on their heritage into the future. It is really hard for us to sustain this enormous cultural treasury with which we have been entrusted."
From time to time the diocese organizes events to bring Armenian youth together around their common cultural heritage, language and faith. Last year 87 young people gathered in the monastery of Hagigadar to discuss and learn about the Armenian Church, the liturgy and our language. "We prayed together, we had liturgy, we arranged pilgrimages to different churches, and most importantly, had an opportunity to get to know each other."
This was the first time the youth participated in a pilgrimage. Afterwards, they were proud to join the demonstration dedicated to the Armenian Genocide. The enthusiastic response of the participants of these kinds of events inspired the community to continue the tradition of gathering the youth and teaching them about their Armenian heritage in the future. Among these events, the consecration of Hagigadar, the ancient Armenian monastery in Europe, was the highlight of this year's Armenian-Romanian community events. The All Armenians Catholicos, His Holiness Karekin II, made a Pontifical visit to the Armenian Diocese of Romania to re-consecrate the monastery.
Hagigadar is not merely an Armenian house of worship, it has also gained fame as an all-Christian sanctuary. People from different Christian denominations make pilgrimages to Hagigadar because they believe that God will answer their prayers here. This miraculous place has a mysterious history. Two Armenian merchants traveled to Austria, and on their way they stopped at this site for a night's rest. Here they saw visions of angels praying and worshipping God all night long. Driven by this spiritual experience, they promised to build a church on the site if their business was successful. Their prayers were answered and they built the monastery, calling it Hagigadar, which means "answered prayer." During the past 500 years, there was not a day when the prayer stopped in this location. Constructed in 1512, the monastery celebrated its 500th anniversary in August. Today the church is restored to its original magnificence. Pilgrims from all over the world came to Romania to celebrate this occasion.
"We raise praises to God for granting us this meeting on this joyous and wonderful day. I am glad to see you all gathered, strong in faith and unified with your brothers who have arrived from different parts of the world to share these festive days with you," said his Holiness Karekin II, All Armenian Catholicos.
This event was a momentous occasion for the Armenian-Romanian community. "This is an opportunity for us to say that we celebrate our history by affirming that we are going to mold our history for another 500 years," said Bishop Datev. "It is very important for us to tell the coming generation that they are the future of this community, and they will be molding it for the years to come. If there is only 10% Armenian blood in any person, then I surely will consider them Armenian. I saw the Armenian blood to be so powerful that even that much is enough for them to care," he concluded.
Even though Romania is far from the motherland, the Armenian-Romanian community lives and prospers today. The memory, connectedness and pride of being from Ani is still there, keeping the Armenian traditions alive. ■

Marriott: Recipe for Success

The Armenia Marriott Hotel Yerevan, being a vibrant blend of the cultural and commercial life of Yerevan, shares the secrets of success and high level service with Yerevan magazine.


Ami Miron


Zoltan Konsanszky


Rolf Graber

Ami Miron

General Manager

1. **It's so hard to surprise customers with amenities and comfort. What services that Marriott offers can surprise us?**

Being the only internationally-managed brand in Armenia, we combine the special Armenian touch and Marriott philosophy in our operation and standards. This includes the blend of famous Armenian hospitality and the high level of international service standards, which are audited on a yearly basis. The brand standard audit is also linked to several other international standards of the hotel, many of which are still unique and unrepeated in other hotels of the country, such as:

- Fire Safety and Security
- Hygiene and Food Safety Standards
- Payment Card Industry — guest folio and credit card security information protection
- The in-room coffee/tea station is a new fresh touch to fully cater to the comfort of our guests in their rooms, they can use our food outlets any time of the day, or use room service during the day or at night.

2. **What are some signature features for all Marriott hotels, and are there absolutely unique Marriott features for certain international Marriott hotels?**

The word Marriott has opened a new era in the world of hospitality and the constant development and unique approach to service are the key lines for Marriott. In any part of the world, upon entering a Marriott hotel, the traveler is able to single out the signature of Marriott whether it is associated with the special brand-related design or our famous Marriott hospitality. No matter if the guest is traveling for business or leisure, with 18 different brands, Marriott has it all to fulfill the needs of any traveler.

The best known signature feature for Marriott is by all means the special hospitality program Marriott Rewards. The leading recognition program in the industry, it allows guests to earn points and miles during their traveling and use them in the future to receive special amenities such as free-of-charge upgrades, usage of the Business and Executive Lounge and free-of-charge rooms using only accumulated points!

Among the special initiatives that Marriott features is the bedding initiative — in no other hotel is the sleeping comfort of the guest so important and an "initiative" for the hotel. Since 2007, Marriott has been working on a special program — a great room concept, which includes a unique design for the lobby to support the guests' full comfort and the ability to work day or night, including the special social zone, an individual work zone, and a day and night bar and restaurant with the Marriott signature dishes and drinks.

Zoltan Konsanszky

Director of Sales and Marketing

3. **Marriott has a vacation club. What locations do you have around world and the greater Los Angeles area? What is the best way to use it, if you are a member?**

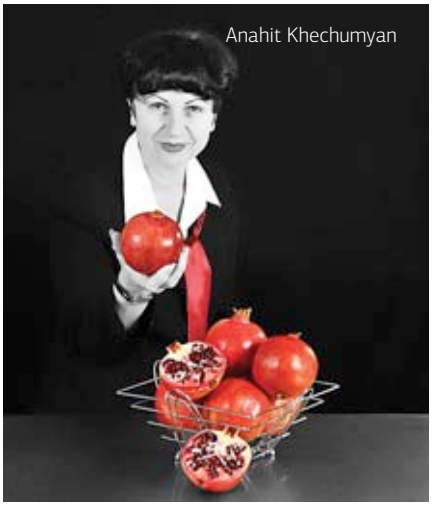
The Marriott Vacation Club is a global leader in the vacation ownership industry. More than 413,000 families around the world own their vacations "the Marriott way" through a program that is well-regarded for its quality management and exceptional flexibility. The brand boasts 53 resorts and over 11,600 timeshare villas throughout the U.S., Caribbean, Europe and Asia. Marriott Vacation Club resorts are located in beautiful beach, ski, golf, theme park and urban destinations worldwide. Villas range from studios to three-bedroom floor plans with 900 to 2,100 square feet of space. Designer decor and architectural accents reflect the ambiance of the destination throughout the spacious villas.

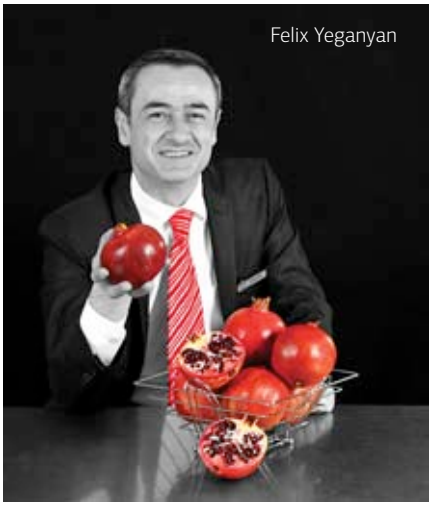
Points owners in the Marriott Vacation Club Destinations program choose the amount of points they want to purchase, then apply their points toward travel in the four Vacation Collections. To plan a vacation, they simply contact the Vacation Ownership Advisor team. We have wonderful venues in the Los Angeles area and throughout California — beach resorts, golf resorts, theme park resorts etc.

4. **What makes the Armenia Marriott Hotel Yerevan different from other hotels in Yerevan?**

We are the only internationally-managed brand in Armenia; we are located in the heart of the city, right on Republic Square and all rooms have a wonderful view of mount Ararat and Republic Square. We also have five different food outlets that provide our guests with different experiences, and we provide complimentary Wi-Fi in all our public areas. The unique experience of the famous Marriott bed will also surprise our guests with style and comfort.

The Armenia Marriott is the only hotel in Yerevan with an Executive Lounge. It has the biggest area of meeting rooms for any type of business or personal event, as well certified event associates







to arrange the meetings and special occasions on the highest possible level.

Rolf Graber

Executive Chef

5. **Please describe the dining experience at the Armenia Marriott Hotel Yerevan.**

The credo in our kitchen is: "Deliver simple, fresh, chef-crafted food."

We follow the Marriott CookSmart philosophy. This consists of focusing on four points:

- Perfect Execution

  Correctly seasoned food, served at the right temperature, and cooked as near as possible to the time of service.
- Great Ingredients

  Our food is treated with care and respect and is purchased only from authorized vendors.
- Guest Focus

  We are open and responsive to our guests' requests; we follow standard recipes and do not deviate from guests' expectations.
- Kitchen Technique

  We follow the fundamentals of cooking techniques. We are kitchen professionals with integrity and pride, and we practice safe food handling techniques at all times. This allows us to deliver consistently enjoyable food in our outlets and banqueting services.

6. **What amazed you from the culinary offerings in Armenia?**

During the summer time, Armenia is a paradise for every cook; the offerings on diversity and quality vegetables are fantastic. The vegetables are so fresh and tasty that it doesn't take a lot to make them into fantastic dishes. The variety of dairy products and meat is also outstanding. Traditional Armenian cuisine is based on this freshness and quality of products. I consider Armenian cuisine as simple tasty food to share with the family or in a group.

Anahit Khechumyan

Director of Engineering

7. **The Armenia Hotel was refurbished to meet the Marriott standards. What was the biggest challenge to meet the requirements?**

The construction of the the Armenia Hotel started in 1954, and it was opened for business in July, 1958. It was built by the famous Armenian architect Mark Grigoryan. The building is a historical monument and is protected by the government of Armenia. From 1958 up to this day, the Armenia Hotel complex has never stopped operating, which is why it's listed in "The Most Famous Hotels In The World" catalogue.

During the refurbishment period between 2000-2004, the biggest challenge in meeting the Marriott standards was that any changes in the interior or exterior of the building had to be coordinated with the Historical and Cultural Monuments Protection Committee. For example, the design for the cover of the main entrance was never approved by the above-mentioned committee in order to not change the original façade.

8. **What makes the engineering of this hotel special?**

Engineering is the basis for the proper and safe functioning of the hotel. One of the special points is the regular inspection for the Legionella bacteria that causes Legionnaire's disease. The Armenia Marriott Hotel Yerevan has the only engineering department in the city that conducts this examination.

Karine Hakobyan

Director of Human Resources

9. **Talent is important but smiles also make an impression on foreign visitors. What does Marriott do extra to train its employees?**

As part of Marriott's "associate first" philosophy, training is seen as a key ingredient in ensuring that both our guests and associates are satisfied. Training and development mean more than just sending participants to classes. It comes in many forms... coaching, ongoing communication, department meetings, one-on-ones, job shadowing, on and off property training. Marriott's Motto is "Train to retain" — Mr. Marriott stated that "training is the key to our success as a brand and to our competitive advantage in finding and keeping our best associates".

10. **If you want to make a trip around the world, you can become a Marriott vacation club member and get accommodations in all countries. Which would be best destinations from a continent to a continent, in various countries?**

First, Aruba Island — a paradise of endless sunshine, crystal clear seas and white sandy beaches. Second, Australia and New Zealand — from the tropical splendor of the Great Barrier Reef on Australia's northern coast to the ethereal beauty of glacial fjords on New Zealand's South Island.

Felix Yeganyan

Director of Finance

11. **If operations are the heart of a hotel, finance is the brain of it. Are there Armenians elsewhere in financial disciplines at Marriott?**

Samvel Manukian at the Warsaw Marriott; Vahe Khachartryan at the Renaissance Samara; Artak Gevorgyan at the Courtyad Irkutsk.

12. **Tell us about your personal favorite Marriott hotel? Where is it located? Why is it you favorite?**

At Marriott, we generally don't have favorites, but I have to admit that my favorite one is the Berlin Marriott. Berlin is a great vibrant, green and dynamic city and the location, services, atmosphere, food and facilities of the Berlin Marriott Hotel are unforgettable.



Tsakhkadzor Tap Dance

Yerevan has a real winter this year. Full of snow. Yet, I am heading to Tsakhkadzor. "What's the point of wasting time and money?" wonder my friends. "There is enough snow in the city." But as the saying goes, "Rabbits are not just precious fur..." Similarly, snow is not just a kind of precipitation, but also skiing, snowboarding, quadrocycling, snowmobiling, ski lifts, and many other similarly risky-sounding endeavors. And all that adrenaline is awaiting me in the Tsakhkadzor, the Valley of Flowers.

Text **Anahit Grigoryan** | Photo **Suren Manvelyan**



Which is the most delicious coffee? Parisian? Eastern? Arabica? Absolutely not. It is the canned coffee in my car. I am driving early in the morning on a frozen highway to the countryside, cursing everything in the world for the preposterously early hour displayed on the clock. But as soon as I take a sip of the coffee, I cheer up a little. Suddenly I notice a rather strange road sign on the way to Tsakhkadzor. It states "Kecharis" – a monastery in Tsakhkadzor – with an arrow pointing to a 180 degree turn. People. Ignore that sign and don't side turn. A bit farther ahead, there will be another sign. And what kind of clone of Kecharis is hidden in the parallel reality there is quite unclear. So I finish my coffee. Maybe now things will come a bit to order.

My decision regarding the coffee was absolutely the right one. I can't say that all was clarified, but after entering Tsakhkadzor, I stopped worrying about anything else. And here is the ski lift. It looks rather civilized and safe. It's just the insurance companies' billboards around that seem somewhat too relevant. Well, they can't scare me. The ski track is clearly visible from the lift. Little figures are going down the slope at quite a high speed. What's that? Has someone fallen down? Does it mean that it isn't so easy to snowboard? Hmm... maybe at first I should take a sled ride. Sleds or tubes at high speeds would not be so embarrassing. They actually seem rather exciting – just another way of getting an adrenalin rush. The snowboards can wait for now. The sled slope is only 300 meters long – a fact that, frankly, takes my fears away. I just have to sit, slide down and get up. Heck, this is fun. However, as it turns out, the path back is not so pleasant; a simple mechanism is







pulling me, sitting in the bottomless tube, up the snowy slope. After just one round of polishing someone's footprints with my bottom, the tube-sliding fun is over. Nevertheless, I don't regret the time spent; at this point I am done with my fear of the ski track, snowboards and skis.

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A break for the night. Then up the snow slope again. You can surely drive or walk around in Tsakhkadzor. But the most enjoyable way is to travel on a snowmobile or a quadrocycle. Every size and color of them are lined up for rent by the Kecharis Church. If you can drive a car, motorcycle or scooter, you won't have any problem operating these either. And if you don't have these skills, don't worry – the owners will accompany you and provide necessary instructions. First, I climbed onto a snowmobile, which was an experience of pure joy. For one thing, neither wind nor snow reaches your face and hands, thanks to the plastic shield; and secondly, snow or icy roads are not a problem. Besides, even riding at a low speed, you feel like flying. After returning to the base, I instantly switched to a quadrocycle. Riding a quadrocycle turned out to be even easier than riding a snowmobile – the wheel is less flexible, which leaves less room for mistakes. But take my advice: never turn away offered gloves, goggles and other accessories. There is no plastic shield on a quadrocycle. And if you don't want to come back to Kecharis with a frozen smile on your face, you will need the right outfit. Riding on a snowmobile can be scored 10 on a ten-point adrenalin rush scale, whereas riding a quadrocycle will get an 11 and a half. The snow and the ice will not frighten you, but at the same time, you will get an immediate experience with them. You feel the speed, and it becomes harder to avoid various obstacles springing up on the road. And that, of course, adds to the excitement of the ride.

After I paid my quadrocycle instructor, he asked me which ride I liked most. Of course, I answered that his ride was much better, and noted to myself that I participated in the ongoing contest for customer satisfaction.

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After twenty-minutes of sharing the excitement of my snowmobile and quadrocycle rides, I took the ski lift again. The goal was clear: I had to stand on skis and a snowboard. It was the zero hour I was waiting for and feared most of all. "It is easy to learn to ski, but rather difficult to master it, while a snowboard will make you fall down for the first three days, but then you will become a



skilled rider," explained the instructor. "Easy" is not interesting. But standing on the skis together with my instructor makes it more attractive. Obviously, such a ride couldn't last long. Soon enough my feet – I was the one behind – started splitting apart, and the man with ski poles (let's call him the skier who agreed to such a crazy adventure) found it difficult to make turns with an extra fifty kilograms behind him. On the other hand, we entertained all the tourists and skiers around. I even noticed that we generated a small crowd of followers, who were clever enough to practice not on a steep slope, but in safer terrain. Old friends and married couples displayed miracles of mutual understanding, steering a single pair of skis together. Perhaps this will become a new kind of sport one day – Armenian skiing. Happiness – no matter what philosophers say – is when there is plenty of clean snow around and nothing prevents you from experiencing it first-hand. However, the bonding with snow should be alternated by frequent and brief hot tea breaks in the ski lounge between the second and third ski lift lines. Most importantly, it is warm in here. As soon as my frozen extremities thawed out, I looked around. Black-and-white photos of skiers were displayed under the glass tables tops, and skis and snowboard boots decorated the walls. All this could have been great had they not resembled hunting trophies on display. I certainly hope that after a day of skiing, my skis won't hang like this. The lounge was noisy and cheerful: cheerful because everyone was sharing their snowy adventures and heroic acts; noisy because everyone was walking in skis and snowboard boots. Each was beating its own rhythm, and taken all together – the Tsakhkadzor tap dance.

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On the third day, it was decided that I should try to stand on a snowboard. Instinctively I tried my best to get ready for a more serious ride down. Thus, the needed outfit: along with water- and windproof jacket and pants, I



had a ski-mask, goggles and ski gloves. Interestingly enough, on top of all this equipment, a player was also needed. That detail was emphasized several times. Moreover, it was recommended to go on a snowboard ride while listening to house or rock music, and in no circumstances should it be the music of Enrique Iglesias – as if the snow under the snowboard would melt. It was hard even to imagine what sort of natural disasters would result if one was listening to Britney Spears. The necessity of having cool music in one's headphones apparently ensures greater fun on the slopes. You can snowboard without gloves only if you are an experienced snowboarder and can avoid falling down. And if there is no music, your ride will be thirty, if not forty percent ruined. I got my snowboard and the boots, three sizes bigger than my feet, at the rental office. The offered explanation was that while the ski boot must fit like a glove, in the case of a snowboard, it doesn't matter. That was the start of my real adventures. A young man, who agreed to accompany me on my extreme ride, explained the basics of snowboarding, and after that I – feeling rather confident – jumped on the snowboard. Falling down for the first three days? Not me. I am not such a fool. However, after the first ten minutes, my confidence faded. It turned out; there were more details in real life snowboarding than in a videogame. First of all, don't believe that your boot









can be three sizes bigger than your feet. Never. One size, at the most. For when you try to rise after falling down, you have to pull yourself forward. And my pull was nothing more than an attempt to overcome those five centimeters in the boot. Secondly, if you are a left-handed person, don't be shy – inform the instructor. A left-handy cannot ride a snowboard for the right-handed – a personal experience. And thirdly, snowboarding is one of the sports where proper equipment is clearly essential. Obviously, neither jacket nor pants would protect you from injuries (zero armor), but they rather raise your spirit. Because when one is wet, nothing but a warm bath and hot tea comes to one's mind. Half-way down the slope, I realized how right the instructor was. For the first three days, it is virtually impossible to snowboard without falling. After riding down 400 meters with eight falls in total, I ran out of the entire store of energy I had accumulated for many weeks. After my optimistic attempts to master the snowboard, I spent the next fifteen minutes sliding down the hill on the softest part of my body, and walking the rest of the track. Bent forward, I shuffled in the snow carrying the snowboard and feeling silly. The picture was compounded with children joyfully flying by me on their snowboards. Yet at least, I was following someone else's footprints, which meant that although I was a loser, I was not the only one.

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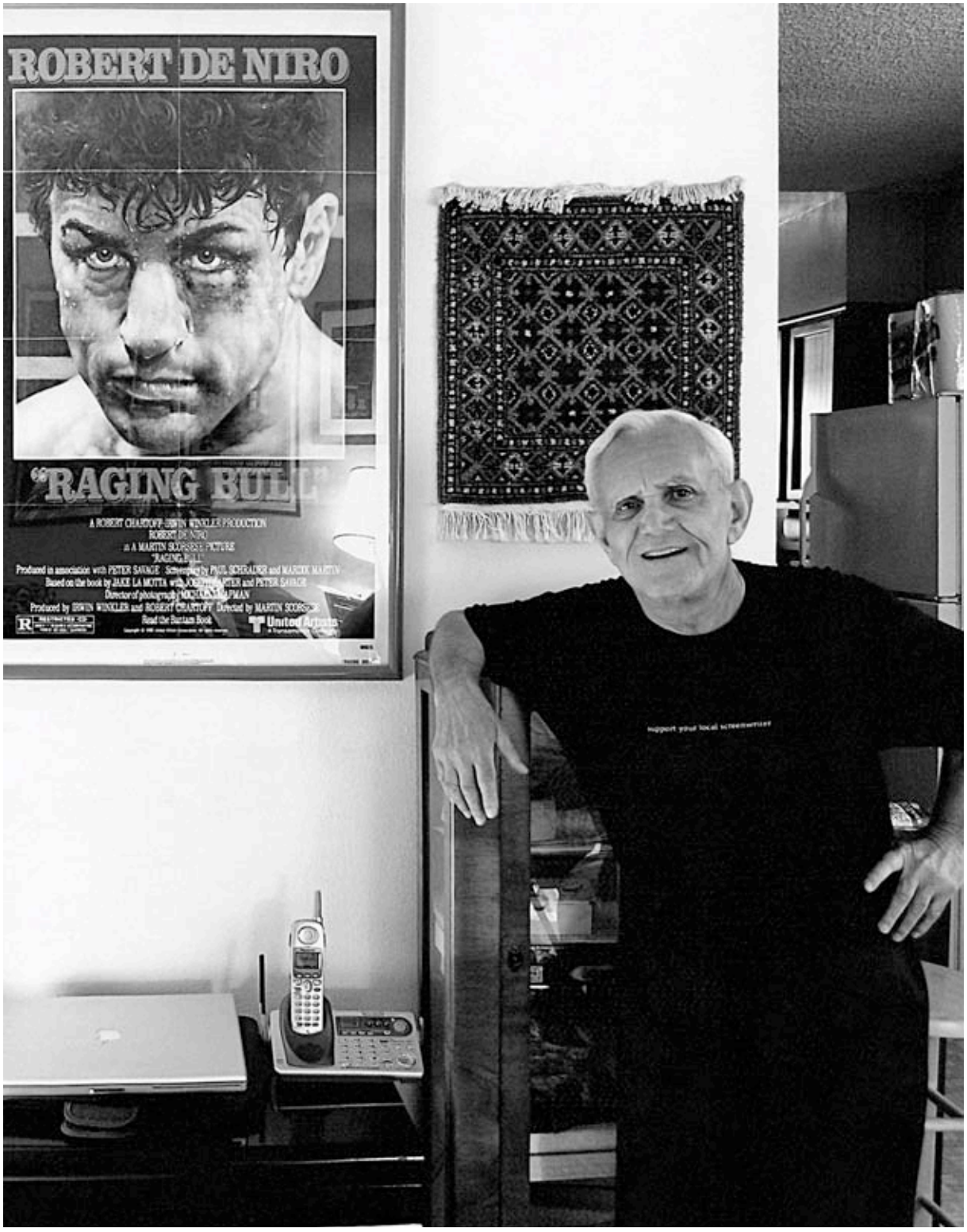
I have learned three simple but important truths from this trip. First, in every tomboy-girl, even the toughest one, there is a hidden fragile girl, silly and insecure, and in order to bring her out, all that's required is for her to stand on a snowboard. Second, any guy who saves you from the inevitable catastrophe, by default becomes handsome and attractive. And third, the fact that at this very moment I am headed to the hotel, tired and wet, in no way means that tomorrow I won't stand on a snowboard again. Like they said, the most difficult are the first three days. And the third truth is the most important one – the adrenaline hunt is not a vacation activity. It is a hobby for a lifetime. ■


ROBERT DE NIRO
"RAGING BULL"
A ROBERT CHARTOFF-IRWIN WINKLER PRODUCTION
ROBERT DE NIRO
in A MARTIN SCORSESE PICTURE
"RAGING BULL"
Produced in association with PETER SAVAGE Screenplay by PAUL SCHRADER and MARDIK MARTIN
Based on the book by JAKE LA MOTTA with JOSEPH CARTER and PETER SAVAGE
Director of photography MICHAEL CHAPMAN
Produced by IRWIN WINKLER and ROBERT CHARTOFF Directed by MARTIN SCORSESE
Read the Bantam Book
United Artists

Playing God

The end of the 1960s and beginning of the 1970s came as a turning point for the American movie industry. It was the time when a new generation of daring young artists emerged – those who decided that movies should be made differently and who were later dubbed Easy Riders and Raging Bulls after the iconic films of that epoch. The creators of *Raging Bull* – director Martin Scorsese and his devoted comrade-in-arms – screenwriter Mardik Martin – were right in the center of this Hollywood maelstrom.

Text **Artavazd Yeghiazaryan** | Photo **from Mardik Martin archives**

Invitation to a Dream

Having fled their native land after the Armenian Genocide in Ottoman Turkey, the ancestors of Mardik Martin settled in Baghdad. Life for the Armenian family in this big, noisy and hot Middle Eastern city was far from ideal. Mardik once said that the years he spent in Baghdad were "like a nightmare you could hardly see the world through the dust and endless stream of cars and camels." But the unattractive reality had its advantages – big screen movie theaters. On hot Baghdad nights, the boy went to the roof of their house and, before falling asleep, watched movies shown in an open-air theater across the street. The screen revealed to him a glamorous life of thrilling adventures, fearless heroes and chic beauties. Mardik once even wrote a letter to film star Esther Williams, saying he was prepared to leave Baghdad and swim across the ocean to live with her. Strange as it may seem, his letter was answered – in the form of a photograph with her autograph.

"Back then for me it was an invitation to a dream, and I knew I had to be there," Mardik says in recollection.

So, the goal was set. The first step to its implementation was a courier job at the Baghdad distribution office of Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer. The film reels passing through Mardik's hands were often missing several frames at the end of the day – the future scriptwriter had cut them out as a souvenir. Later there was a long journey across the ocean and life in Manhattan. The formal reason for his departure was to evade being drafted into the Iraqi army, but it was assumed that the eighteen-year-old Mardik would be studying to be an economist. And indeed, for a couple of years, he attended business school, moonlighting as a waiter in a restaurant. But after the revolution, his father's shop in Baghdad had been confiscated, and Mardik had to make a living for himself, with some help from local Armenians. ▸

As a child Mardik wrote a letter to film star Esther Williams, saying that he was ready to leave Baghdad and swim across the ocean to live with her. Ironically, his letter was answered in the form of an autographed photo.



→ Moonlighting as a bartender

Armenian-Sicilian Clan

Mardik did not forget his long-standing dream and the "invitation" to Hollywood. One day, having said goodbye to the prospect of becoming an economist, Mardik joined the newly-opened film department at New York University. Mardik chose a major in screenwriting, and his first tutor was his compatriot Haig Manoogian. Soon the teacher advised another talented student, novice director Martin Scorsese, to work together with Mardik.

"We quickly found a common language, largely because of our roots," Scorsese recalled many years later in the 2008 documentary *Mardik: Baghdad to Hollywood*. "My family came from a small village in Sicily; Mardik was from Armenia. We, the young people from places far distant from New York, were very comfortable together."

Soon the tandem began working on the documentary *Italianamerican*. Scorsese's parents became main characters in the film. "Mardik managed to get my folks talking to such an extent that after a while they completely forgot about the camera," says Scorsese.

Before their successful debut, Mardik Martin and Martin Scorsese had written dozens of unrealized scripts, from dramas and historical plots to a parody on Swedish porn.



← The car in which Mardik and Scorsese wrote the script of *Mean Streets*

LA Confidential

Mardik's debut in a full-length feature film came earlier than Scorsese's – in 1971. Although the drama *Revenge Is My Destiny* had little success, he received a fee of $10,000 for the story of a Vietnam War veteran, written in six weeks in Miami. But the real breakthrough came two years later, after the release of *Mean Streets*. Before beginning to work on this film, Mardik and Scorsese had written dozens of unrealized scripts – from dramas and historical plots to a parody on Swedish porn. But with *Mean Streets*, everything was different, and the friends set to work in earnest. Even the lack of normal working conditions did not stop them. Neither Mardik, hosting relatives from Iraq, nor Scorsese, who already had a wife and daughter, could use their home for work. So they wrote the script in the car, periodically jogging in the snowy streets to a nearby cafe for a cup of coffee and warmth.

Mean Streets was like a documentary – the viewers saw on the screen, if not themselves but definitely regular folks just like them. Characters in the film (the main roles were played by then virtually unknown Harvey Keitel and Robert De Niro) used ordinary language, spoke about topics that ordinary people talk about and popular songs played behind the scenes. After the premiere in New York City, the life of Mardik Martin, as well as the lives of Martin Scorsese, Harvey Keitel and Robert De Niro, drastically changed.

A couple of years later the whole company found themselves in the very heart of the Hollywood

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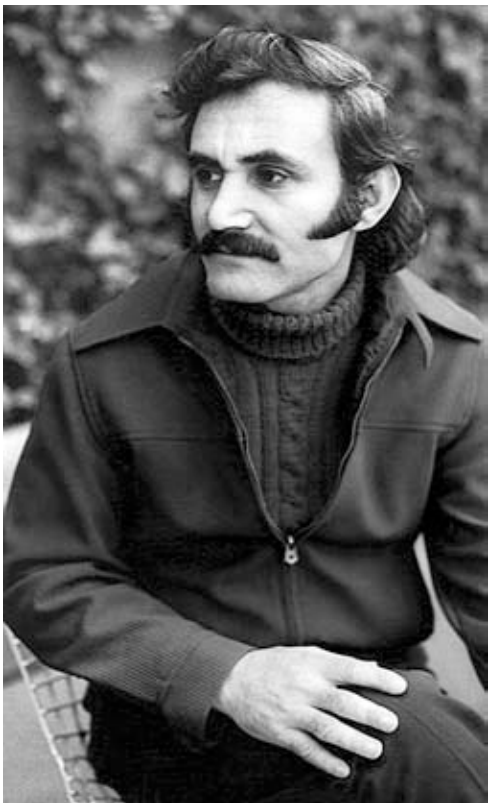
Studying at New York University



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From left to right: Martin Scorsese, Harvey Keitel and Mardik Martin



machine – the offices of Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer in Los Angeles. Mardik became a staff screenwriter. He not only wrote, but he had to read everything that came to the studio. It all seemed incredible. "If someone told me when I was 15 that in 20 years I'd be working at MGM, I would have said the guy was nuts," reminisces Mardik.

A Dance to Remember

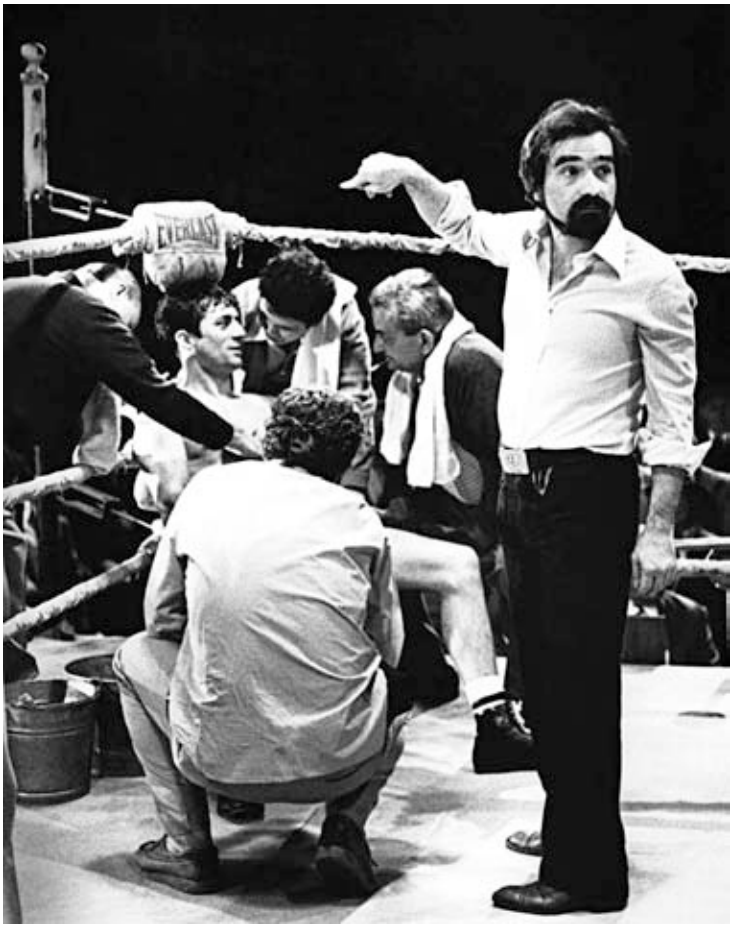
Despite the success, he felt himself as a stranger throughout his life in Iraq; he was an expatriate from Armenia and in America, an immigrant from Iraq. "Probably because of this, the story of Rudolph Valentino was so familiar and close to me. He came to the U.S. almost at the same age as I did and also had a very difficult path in the beginning, doing whatever he had to, before fame came to him." Unfortunately, the biopic about this legendary actor of silent film directed by Ken Russell with another famous emigrant, Rudolf Nureyev, playing the leading role, had little success. But this failure did not prevent Martin from becoming one of the most respected writers of his generation.

Mardik is convinced that the main problem with bad screen scenarios is that their authors draw inspiration from other movies, forgetting about real life. To collect such "life" information, he spared no effort and time. He would stop his car by New York hookers, offering them a hundred dollars for a talk with the recorder on. "Some of them flatly refused, it seemed too strange an opportunity to get a hundred bucks without sex!" Even the smallest details could later help with creating yet another story. "When you write a script you are playing God," says Mardik. "There are absolutely no boundaries. You create characters, places, and weather – in short, a whole world. But the problem is you are not God. And on your way there you have thousands and thousands of traps that can cause you to mess up and not deliver your whole creation to the audience, but only three or four right points."

Mardik would offer New York hookers a hundred dollars for a talk with the recorder on: "Some of them flatly refused, it seemed too strange an opportunity to get a hundred bucks without sex!"

Mardik' ability to communicate with people also came in handy during the filming of the documentary, *The Last Waltz* about the rock group, The Band. In the beginning, it was Scorsese's intention to just shoot their last concert for video archives. But during the montage editing, an idea was born to turn the material into a documentary. Mardik tooled up with





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Mardik in the streets of London

the audio recorder, and soon a new feature film was ready with the music performances interspersed with talk by musicians and guests, Bob Dylan as the most famous of them. Today, the film is regarded as a classic of the concert film genre. Even before the completion of *The Last Waltz*, Mardik, Scorsese and De Niro again joined forces to shoot a musical about post-war New York and received the largest budget then amassed for a new film – $15 million. "It was very difficult to write and film it," reminisces Mardik. "I don't even remember how many times exactly we rewrote the script. But just the simple fact that we were shooting a musical about New York for MGM gave us a boost!" The film, however, did not have much success – small ticket sales and unflattering reviews. Even Liza Minnelli, who played opposite De Niro, did not save it. But the film did give something to the world: the unforgettable song "New York, New York" that soon entered the repertoire of Frank Sinatra and began its own life. Their next joint project turned into perhaps the best film for all three.

"To tell you the truth, I hate boxing," the screenwriter smiles, remembering the time when his best known film, which also became his last completed project, was created.

Raging Bull

"To tell you the truth, I hate boxing," the screenwriter smiles, remembering the time when his best known film, which also became his last completed project, was created. The idea of *Raging Bull* was offered to the friends by De Niro, who came across the autobiography of the famous 1950s boxer, Jake La Motta. The team set to work. To begin, they watched films about boxers, and it was decided to avoid the clichés – a talented athlete, the gangsters, the problems with his wife, a happy ending, and so on. Mardik spent the next few months talking to La Motta himself and anyone else who had the slightest connection with the life and career of the nicknamed "Raging Bull." He set a goal to make it as real as possible. However, after a year of work and three drafts, he grew really tired. "I was too long submerged into this world and needed someone with a fresh and rational outlook." *Taxi Driver* scriptwriter Paul Schrader came to help and assisted in completing the text.

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Robert De Niro and Martin Scorsese at the filming of *Raging Bull*





Mardik Martin's Filmography

1971 — *Revenge is My Destiny*
1973 — *Mean Streets*
1974 — *Italianamerican*
1977 — *New York, New York*
1977 — *Valentino*
1978 — *The Last Waltz*
1978 — *American Boy*
1980 — *Raging Bull*

It Is Difficult to Be God

Immediately after writing *Raging Bull*, Mardik was ordered to do another script. *Insomnia* was about the wild bohemian life of the late 1970's – the filmmakers, rock musicians and other creative personalities. Following his own main rule, the screenwriter based his work on real life. But when the text got to an agent, Mardik was warned about imminent scandal – people would recognize themselves, and they would not be happy. The script was put on the shelf. Then came the comedy *Strike and Hide*. For the first time, Mardik ventured into producing. The director was one of the new generation of filmmakers, Peter Bogdanovich. The process advanced to the planning stage, but eventually there was no funding. Another script was about a famous photo reporter, a master of criminal news that Widgey and Mardik had been working on for two and a half years. In some cases, the writer himself created his own problems: "I had a chance to fix the draft of Brian de Palma's *Carlito's Way*. But somehow, when the three of us were sitting with the producer in his house, I remembered his *Scarface* and went on explaining why this was a bad movie. De Palma froze for a moment, and then, without saying a word, went into the bedroom and closed the door. It turned out he was mortally offended, because *Scarface* was his favorite film. I was close to getting back into the big leagues but opened my mouth at the wrong time."

In 1988, when he completed a script called *Rock 'n' Roll History* (which also did not get to a filming location), Mardik was already at the bottom: he failed to handle fame and the stressful life of a Hollywood artist, a side effect of which were drugs. And while Scorsese was able in time to turn from the harmful ways and plunge again into work, Mardik couldn't do it. His pregnant girlfriend had left him, he had no money, no scripts were sold, and his once loyal friend Scorsese was busy with his own successful career. "Of course, it was sad to lose everything I had, but it turned out to be the time when I gave up drugs forever," recalls Mardik.

Soon he also gave up attempts to write a new script and decided to share his experiences and knowledge with novice writers. From 1990 to this day he has been teaching at the School of Cinematic Arts of the University of Southern California. "I'm old, I do not have enough energy to get back into the business, but my students are achieving a lot and have essentially replaced for me the work in movies and family. It is now their turn to play God and create worlds." ■

snow* — ձյուն *[dzyun]



Winter lace

The observation wheel in Yerevan's Victory Park has one of the best views of Armenia's capital. A park surrounds the Ferris wheel with a variety of attractions for children, numerous cafés, and a picturesque pond. It is most busy during the summertime. During the winter, the park and the Ferris wheel are abandoned, waiting for the occasional photographer to notice their exquisite beauty.



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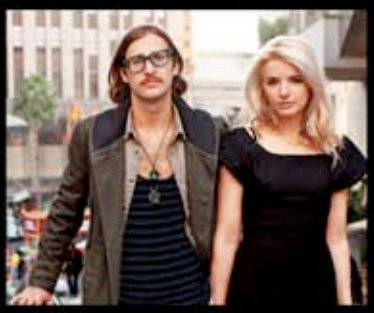



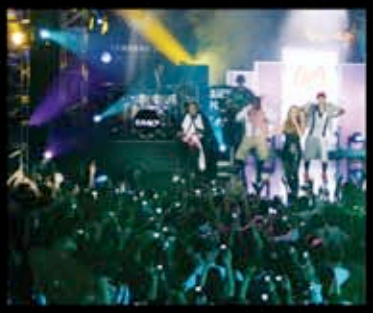



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