

CITY AM

AUTUMN 24 – THE MAGAZINE – No. 84



BEN HARDY

From Albert Square to Hollywood: In conversation with the brilliant, unlikely superstar

SALLY ROONEY

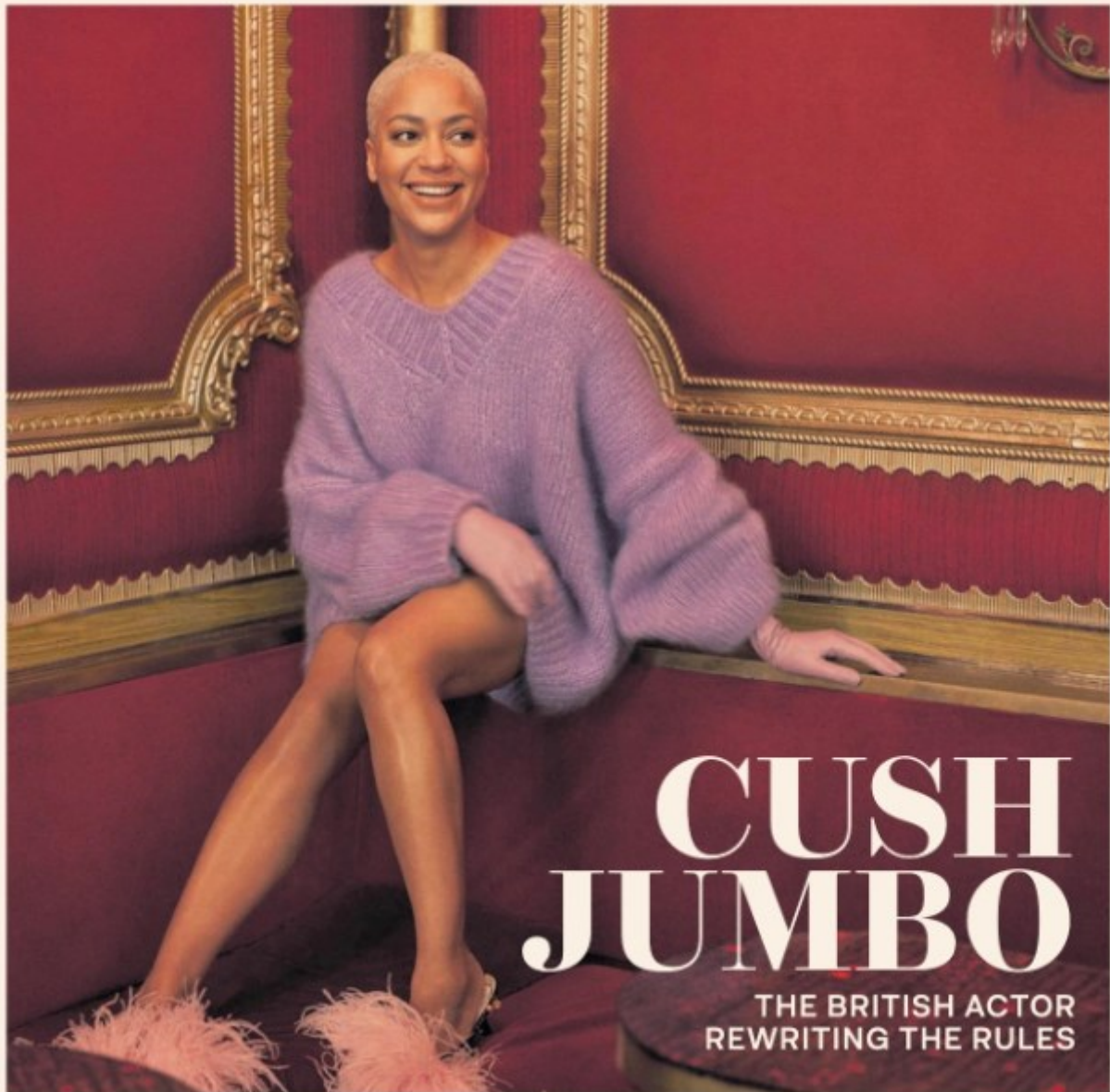
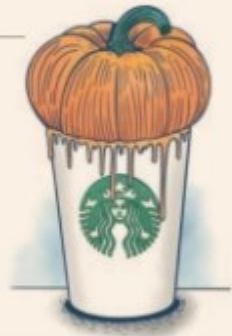
Inside the new novel from the author of *Normal People*

HAPPY DAYS

In search of fulfilment in the 'happiest city on earth'

SPICE OF LIFE

The pumpkin spice latte is more than just a syrupy drink – it's a state of mind



CUSH JUMBO

THE BRITISH ACTOR
REWRITING THE RULES

THE *ULTIMATE* SKI BREAK

Combining service worthy of White Lotus with facilities straight out of Succession, Chalet Inoko in Val D'Isere is among the most spectacularly opulent ski destinations in the world, says **ADAM BLOODWORTH**

Just say yes. This is the mantra demanded of his staff by Armond, the long-suffering hotel manager in the inaugural season of *The White Lotus*. "Just smile and say yes." That satire on the super wealthiness was often exaggerated – staff don't often defecate in guests' suitcases, at least not to my knowledge – but the service principle will be familiar to anyone who's ever stayed at the sort of property so posh that it boasts its own scent.

You're really got to push your luck not to hear an immediate 'yes' after checking into Purple Ski's Chalet Inoko in Val D'Isere. Last season they allowed a guest to fly in their own personal mattress, anything to ensure you're match fit for the slopes after a night on the schnapps. Another time, a member of staff pushed through a heaving nightclub to relieve a guest of their ski boots, delivering evening shoes after they got too carried away on kir royales and let the afternoon slip into night. Why bother going home to change when someone will bring the pearls to you?

There was one moment when the 'just say yes' formula was challenged: we'd been fantasising over Alpine clichés and requested our private chef make cheese fondue for dinner that evening. But Pierre, who's been cooking for royalty and the A-List for 30 years, wasn't into the idea. "I can make it, but it's not gastronomically interesting." There was no way back. Fondue was out.

Ordinary is not the word to describe anything about Chalet Inoko or Val D'Isere, other than its guests and their sub-par fondue demands (good news, we realised Pierre wouldn't know if we had fondue on the slopes at lunchtime so everyone ended up happy). Like all good chalets, Inoko is invisible to anyone without the front door key, cloaked halfway up a mountain in a mess of fir trees, its driveway a sufficient amount of twists and turns upwards from town so as to prohibit onlookers. From the hot tub on the balcony you get the opposite effect, with the village dating back to the 1600s sprawled promiscuously in front of us. Not that we went: why would you when you have a decent sound system, floor-to-ceiling glass windows onto the valley and an entertaining space big enough for 14 guests and 10 staff to get comfy?

After a day on the slopes there was further intrepid exploration to do in Chalet Inoko. There is an indoor pool, sauna, cinema room and lounge with a floor plan big enough for every Val D'Isere local to take a snooze on if they laid down side-by-side. When we explored we took glasses of the unlimited (and very decent) wine and champagne. We got so spoiled that by the end of the holiday we were upset when the staff poured us flutes of Veuve Clicquot instead of Taittinger. Staff silently wait

for guests to rise; I popped into the dining area the first morning and my room had been read minutes later with machine-like precision. On the first day it was unnerving but it's even more unnerving how quickly you can get used to service like this.

My friends and I decided we'd better go skiing before we started demanding croissants with our names baked into the tops. You mightn't be surprised to know that blacked-out Mercs are parked on the drive and staff pack your equipment for you. I considered lifting my feet up and asking the team to place them into my skis; perhaps they could slide down the mountain for me too? I had begun to question everything. Now I understand why celebrities can be such prima donnas.

Val D'Isere is increasingly the place to go. It has always had a reputation as a serious skier's resort, with a challenging selection of red and black runs. But at 1,850 metres above sea level and with 60 percent of the skiing above 2,500 metres, it is also more immune to the effects of climate change than nearby resorts like Meribel and Val Thorens. It's where the ski pros go on holiday: Ski Sunday presenter and Olympian Graham Bell was knocking back beer peche in apres hangout Rosee Blanche when we visited, a fitting spot to watch the sun descend over the foot of the slope leading from La Folie Douce, where live saxophonists riff on radio-friendly songs and dancers wearing revealing outfits entertain groups of families cutting shapes on table tops.

New for 2024 is a faster gondola to reach the Pissillas Glacier, ascending 3,185 metres to get you to that Kodak moment at the top in under seven minutes.

If you fancy eating out, Airelles Val D'Isere, at the foot of the slopes, has an imaginative new Italian menu. This restaurant is one of the oldest in town and inside black and white photos of the venue in the 1940s celebrate the restaurant's halcyon days as a nightclub. Elsewhere, resort staple Les Fils à Maman is opening an on-slope outpost in an old ski chalet serving a nostalgic menu of mountain classics (finally, fondue).

If you can't bear the wait then make the most of the resort's First Tracks scheme on opening weekend between 30 November and 1 December, when ski passes are priced at the reduced cost of €61 Euros a day (the season runs through until 4 May 2025).

Or don't ski at all – just sit in Chalet Inoko and drink champagne for a week while your every whim is catered for. Such is the luxury of being a member of the elite set.

● A seven-night stay at Purple Ski's Chalet Inoko, Val D'Isere starts from €35,870 on a catered basis. For more information and to book visit purplelks.com. Oogvne ski (oogvne-ski) arranged Adam's ski lesson and the Val d'Isere tourist office (valdlsere.com) assisted with his ski pass.



These alpine chalets are fit for a king, or indeed a slab of the slopes – expect your every whim to be catered to