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GREENING NEWSLETTER

The New Must-Have Yard Accessory: a Feral Cat

Homeowners, plagued by rats, clamor for killer felines, wish they wouldn't stray

Nicolas Cuervo and his neighbors called, texted and pleaded. Finally, after over three months of waiting, their highly coveted order arrived: a crate of stray cats. "It was almost like getting a newborn," said Mr. Cuervo, a 44-year-old copywriter, who had three cats from a street pack delivered to him last month. Now, Mr. Cuervo is waiting some more—to see if he can persuade the beasts to stick around. He has changed his schedule to work from home. He coos to them through the wires of the crate. He feeds them gourmet cat treats. All in the hope that once he lets them out of the crate after several weeks, the cats will warm up to him and turn his backyard—now overrun with rats—into their long-term hunting ground. "I'm a dog guy, I was never even drawn to cats," he said. "But if this is what you have to do, you have to do it."

Chicago is awash in rats. A mild winter last year allowed broods of baby rats to survive, leading to an explosion of the critters, terrorizing residents as they run around their yards and dumpsters. By September, there had been 27,000 rat complaints, a 40% increase from 2015. This is turning the alley cat, once considered a rabid urban menace threatening small children and pets, into a prized possession. Or at least as much of a possession as a stray cat can be.

"I've been offered bribes," said Paul Nickerson, who runs the Tree House Humane Society's Cats at Work program, which places feral cats that have been trapped, microchipped and spayed or neutered with rat-plagued Chicagoans. But he won't budge on the waiting list, which has stretched to six months amid the frenzy.

Once the cats arrive, the new owners face a daunting challenge making a connection with wild versions of animals that are famously standoffish in the best of circumstances. Feral cats are more akin to wild raccoons than cuddly house pets, hissing or scratching if you try to pick them up.

Andrea Swank, a 51-year-old freelance writer, had two of her three strays bolt the first time she opened the crate two winters ago. This only fed into the merriment of local wags who mocked her efforts to employ feral cats to go after the rat problem on her tony Lincoln Park block. "You could hear the college girls screaming, 'Rat!' at 2 a.m." as they walked beneath her bedroom window, she said. She said her neighbors tried high-tech traps, rat-repelling frequencies and a "firecracker-looking thing that essentially smothered [rats] in their tunnels." None of them worked.

After Jeff, the stray that stayed, went to work, things changed. The gray and white feline with steely green eyes started killing off the baby rats and adults began to stay away as Jeff marked his territory with his scent. No one is laughing now. "Two people came back and gave me formal apologies," she said. Jeff now walks her and her children to school, sits on her front porch on a heated seat and greets neighbors.

Victoria Thomas's cats all bolted on the first day she let them out of the crate four years ago, despite her best efforts. "I was feeding them tuna fish out of the can, rather than Whiskas cat food," said Ms. Thomas, a 43-year-old artist and wine distributor. "I just really wanted to spoil them." When Patch, Fluffy and Skinny flew the coop, she was heartbroken. But she dutifully kept putting out food for them at the regular time, and after a few days, they were back for good.

Bill Hurley, owner of Empirical Brewery, thought cats would be too much of a pain to maintain in a battle to keep rats out of the grain bags at the craft brewery. The process of brewing "rings the dinner bell for rodents," he said. But he soon put his team to work designing a multiple-level cat condo, which took a week to build. The tower comes with a separate unit for litter boxes, a front porch where the cats could sit and watch the world and multiple hiding spots. When the cats were first released, Mr. Hurley and his crew never saw them, so they set up night cameras that sent alerts to their phones whenever movement was detected. The cats apparently decided they had a "pretty sweet deal" and haven't left, he said. Now, the rats are gone, and people come on tours of the brewery just to see the cats, Mr. Hurley said. One of the cats, Venkman, is a social media star with his own Twitter page.

Ron Ohren, a partner at a law firm, built a feeding station and installed a double-decker heated cat house, and added a cat door to his bicycle room for the feral cats that arrived from Tree House. All three stuck around in the beginning, but despite the plush setup, Bubbles and Buttercup fled, leaving only Blossom on his Powerpuff Girl-themed team. Now, other strays have shown up, keeping rats from scurrying around his yard, like a Disney movie but "less cute," he said. Last winter, Mr. Ohren put on a parka and snow shoes and trudged out to cut safe passages for the cats in the snow. "Emotionally, I am hugely attached to them," he said. "I obsess about them and am slavishly devoted to them." Still, Mr. Ohren gets little love back. The cats have never let him pet or carry them. He is trying to reach out with treats to get the cats to eat out of his hand, but with limited success. "I'm OK with the bargain we've struck," he said. Keeping the rats away "is enough."

Mr. Cuervo, meanwhile, nervously awaits the day he has to release his cats. He said the once-aloof and shy beasts are now making eye contact with him and don't get skittish even when the family dog is around. He will release them after Halloween, so they don't get spooked by revelers. "I really want the cats to come back," but these are cats after all, he acknowledges. "Who knows what will happen?"

Martani, Shrani and Joe Barrett, The New Must-Have Yard Accessory: a Feral Cat, The Wall Street Journal, October 27, 2016

Can Houseplants Be Unhealthy for Humans?

Your lovely ficus brings more than just a pop of green to a stuffy room: It brings a host of microorganisms, one soil expert says

Houseplants add beauty to a home, but sometimes looks can be deceiving. One expert, Mussie Habteselassie, associate professor in the Crop and Soil Sciences Department at the University of Georgia, explains how a root can act as a colony for microorganisms and how an overwatered fern can be more than just an eyesore.

More Than a Plant - Your lovely ficus does more than add greenery to an enclosed space. It harbors a whole metropolis of bacteria, fungi and other microorganisms. "You are bringing lots of things into your home with a plant," says Dr. Habteselassie, who specializes in soil microbiology.

In a healthy plant that gets lots of sunlight and the right amount of water, fungi help the root system extract more nutrients from its surroundings. But "if it is overwatered or is in a basement that has a moisture issue, the fungi will produce spores, and those spores can cause allergic reactions," Dr. Habteselassie says. For allergic people, symptoms are similar to those of hay fever. Spores can worsen asthma. Plants typically also carry bacteria, though "99% of bacteria in the roots system are beneficial," the scientist says.

When a plant is under stress—whether from overwatering, underwatering, exposure to extreme temperatures or an assault by an unfriendly fungus, bacteria or insect—it will release chemicals in the form of a gas. "One analogy is when a skunk is attacked, it sprays to defend itself," Dr. Habteselassie says. Humans are unable to detect the odorless gasses, though home-detection kits are available online.

The ABCs of VOCs - Gasses released by stressed-out houseplants are in the same family as what Dr. Habteselassie and his colleagues call "volatile organic compounds," or VOCs. VOCs also are emitted by household items such as electronics, carpets and detergents, according to the EPA. "If the house is not very well vented, these can accumulate to a level that can be harmful," he says. Studies have shown VOC levels can be 10 times higher indoors than out. However, Dr. Habteselassie notes, many houseplants also do a great job of scrubbing the air of these toxic compounds. Some common indoor plants that do this include English ivy, Mother-in-law's tongue, Weeping fig, Peace lily, Devil's ivy and Asparagus fern, he says. "On balance, these houseplants remove more of the VOCs than they release."

Potting Soil Isn't What You Think - Houseplant soil "isn't really soil," the professor says. Rather, the "growth medium" you find at your local gardening shop is usually composted materials plus fertilizers. That can be a good thing, he adds, since "the process of composting cleans up some of the pathogens in soil." It is better to use purchased bags of soil in the home than the dirt you dig up in your yard. Garden soil can contain all manner of contaminants. Garden plants can bring in bugs like aphids, "especially on tomato plants," says the professor, which people commonly dig up to grow indoors.

Plant-loving insects won't survive long in the home, as evidenced by the dead bugs you sweep up in the corner. These pests don't pose much of a threat to top-of-the-food-chain humans.

Too Much Green? - During the day, houseplants use sunlight to photosynthesize, splitting carbon dioxide molecules to produce nutritious carbohydrates for the plant and replenishing life-giving oxygen in the air, Dr. Habteselassie says. However, at night, when energy from light isn't available, the process goes into reverse, he says. A plant, depending on the type and conditions in a home, could produce more carbon dioxide than oxygen, thus literally competing with its owner for air.

So don't overdo it with the indoor shrubbery, the soil expert and plant-lover advises. How much of a good thing is too much? "I guess you want to see some walls and some floor," he says.

Mitchell, Heidi, Can Houseplants Be Unhealthy for Humans?, The Wall Street Journal, October 3, 2016

micro greens

A few months ago I bought a grow-light system to grow plants in my garage. I heard that snicker, and I know what you're thinking. No, I didn't buy lights to grow that particularly infamous plant, which is now legal to grow in some states, but remains illegal in Texas.

Instead, I got the lights to begin growing microgreens—a newish trend among chefs and foodies, and a wonderful complement to backyard vegetables or windowsill herbs. Microgreens are 7-to-14-day old seedlings from a variety of plants, including arugula and other lettuces, plants from the brassica family, such as broccoli and cauliflower, and other plants like amaranth, kale, mustard, spinach and peas. The seeds are planted densely in flats and grown under lights or in a sunny windowsill. After a few days, they reach or surpass the sprout stage and continue on to develop their first leaves. By the two-week mark, or even earlier, they are ready to harvest.

Gardeners, especially vegetable gardeners, will find lots to love about growing microgreens. First of all, they are really easy to grow. Whether under lights or in a sunny windowsill, they take very little space, require minimal maintenance and are as pest-free as any houseplant. For a windowsill garden, simply recycle a plastic container from salad greens. Cut the lid off and place it

under the container for a drip pan. Put a few inches of potting soil in the container. Place the seeds onto the soil in a thick concentration and press them into the soil. Cover the seeds with a paper towel and mist it until it's thoroughly wet. Water the paper towel twice a day until the seeds sprout enough to start pushing it up; then remove the towel. Water the seedlings with a spray bottle twice a day until they are about 10-to-14-days old. To harvest, simply snip them with a pair of scissors.

What to do with them now? Well, this is the second great thing about microgreens—they are tasty and packed with nutritional value. A recent study published in the *Journal of Agriculture and Food Chemistry* indicated that microgreens can have up to six times more nutrients—especially vitamins A, E and beta carotene—than the mature versions of the same plants. What this means is that a small bundle of microgreens scrambled into eggs, tossed into a smoothie, or layered into a salad automatically boosts the health benefits of your food without increasing volume. Do you hate salad? No problem! Just throw a handful of microgreens onto that barbacoa taco and, suddenly, it becomes more healthful.

Another great benefit of growing microgreens is that it's easy and fun for kids. My 4-year-old son loved helping me set up the light kit in the garage and then placing the soil in each of the tiny containers in the flats I bought. He helped me press down the seeds into the soil and water the paper towels. For the next week, he would declare several times a day, "It's time to check the salad!" and run to the garage to water the seedlings with spray bottles. I let him cut the first harvest with the kitchen shears and proudly take them into the kitchen for my wife to add as a topping for homemade pizza.

Granted, he's been gardening with me in the yard since he could sit up, so it's in his blood. But, microgreens are easy-peasy for little fingers and short attention spans, and the equipment is fun—I mean, really, spray bottles are not that different from water guns. Finally, the results are dramatic and almost instantaneous. Our first seeds sprouted within 24 hours, and in another 24 hours, they were almost an inch tall. No delayed gratification.

To get started, get a few packets of seed mix of salad greens, or other type of leafy plant. Grow in your windowsill using natural light, or buy a grow-light system. Several systems are available online for around $50 that includes the T5 fluorescent bulb, which is the recommended type for growing plants. Position the light about 12-18 inches above the seedlings. Turn it off at night to give the plants a rest. Use the soil and water you would use for other plants, and recycle the six-packs, nine-packs or other such containers most gardeners have laying around from trips to the nursery or grocery store. Give your seedlings about three minutes of attention per day (spilt into two sessions), and within two weeks, you'll have your first crop of healthy, verdant microgreens.

For veteran gardeners, microgreens are a walk in the park, no back-breaking work out in the hot sun, no pests to fight, no long waits for mature fruit at 70, 90 or 120 days. For beginning gardeners, or for those with only a windowsill or a bookshelf for space, microgreens can be the gateway plants into the practice of growing some of your own food. It's fast, inexpensive, healthy and, well, very trendy—and we sweaty gardeners get so few opportunities to be trendy.

Carroll, Jill, micro greens, Houston Chronicle, September 3, 2016

More Developers Kick Parking Lots to the Curb

Cities follow New York, San Francisco in opting to bypass building garages

Bad news for car owners: Developers in more US cities are reducing the amount of parking spaces included in new projects as local authorities seek to encourage the use of mass transit and free up space for parks, housing or other uses. In San Diego's Little Italy neighborhood, architecture and development company Jonathan Segal FAIA ruffled feathers of nearby residents after it revealed plans to build an eight-story, 35-unit apartment complex with no parking spaces. Without the added costs of a garage, the studio units of around 400 sq.ft. apiece would be more affordable, the firm said.

"It's the future. There's a strong demand for people who want to rent units that are efficient," said developer Jonathan Segal, noting that digging underground parking lots for the building would drive up costs and take away space that could be used for more housing. Each car takes up about 350 sq.ft. of parking space, including access lanes, he said. Without these costs, he estimates rents will be $1,300 to $1,500 a month, barely half that of comparable apartments nearby.

At the condominium across the street, residents raised concerns about the lack of parking lots during a meeting with the developer last week. Susan Keating, a resident who was present at that meeting, said most of the concerns centered on the possibility "these micro units might be rented out to people who still drive and they might drive round and round the block looking out for parking more than for pedestrians."

Property developers must adhere to zoning codes that typically include providing a minimum number of parking spaces for a certain amount of space used by tenants. But cities such as New York and San Francisco have been leaders in removing or reducing parking requirements in recent years as part of efforts to curb traffic congestion and encourage more people to use mass transit. Now smaller cities and even some states are following suit.

Nashville is considering proposals to convert parking facilities to housing or other uses. In Oregon, the Transportation Planning Rule requires state, regional and local jurisdictions to reduce parking spaces per capita and improve opportunities for alternatives to the automobile.

Advocates for the removal of parking requirements say they drive up housing costs unnecessarily. In downtown and inner-city projects where buildings cover entire lots, developers have to build costly underground or multistory parking garages. Researchers in Miami and Los Angeles have found the reduction of parking requirements lowered construction costs significantly and spurred development of homes in areas previously deemed unprofitable. Earlier parking requirements had compelled developers to build fewer units than the total permitted because it was too expensive to build the required parking spaces.

Fung, Esther, More Developers Kick Parking Lots to the Curb, The Wall Street Journal, September 13, 2016

Introducing The First Voice-Activated Hotel Room

With Aloft's new system, you'll never need to get out of bed to change the thermostat or switch off the lights again.

Here's my pet peeve when staying at hotels: I hate having to get up in the middle of the night to adjust the thermostat. But the thing is, I really need the room to be the right temperature to get a good night's sleep. Between a cold room and thick, fluffy blankets, it's easy to be off by a few degrees. Then I'm wide awake, fiddling with various knobs on the wall or calling the receptionist to figure out why it's so darn chilly in here.

This might be more information about my hotel sleeping habits than you ever wanted to know. But Aloft has been carefully listening to feedback such as mine, and they've come up with a solution: a voice-activated room. The company's future-gazing technologists have developed an app that runs on an iPad that controls the room using Apple's Homekit and Siri. It allows guests to change the temperature, switch the lights on and off, and turn on the television by using voice commands. Internally, this effort has been dubbed "Project: Jetson" because, once set up, it really does feel like we're in the hotel room of the future.

Eric Marlo, Aloft's global brand manager, has been spearheading this effort. "We're always thinking about ways to integrate technology into the guest experience," he says. "This seemed like an obvious one. How many times have you come out of a hot shower at your hotel and felt super cold? Now you can adjust the AC just by saying, 'Hey, Siri.'"

I had a chance to see a pilot version of this technology in an Aloft property in Boston. When you enter the room, you receive instructions on the TV screen about how to set up voice activation. When you pick up the iPad, it takes about two minutes to say a few sentences so that Siri is able to recognize your voice. But once the system is set up, you can say "Hey, Siri" from anywhere in the room, and she will respond to your commands. (If you decide not to set up the voice activation, you can always just press the start button on the iPad, the way you would do on your iPhone, to speak to Siri.)

The system is already loaded up with several room moods. You can say "reset" for the lights in the room to appear how they were when you stepped in the door. If you say "relax," the lights automatically become warmer and less harsh. "Review" turns on the TV screen, while "revive" gently lights up the room for the morning. On the iPad, you can also sign in to all your media accounts in order to stream movies or listen to music. And Siri also acts like a real concierge, since you can ask her questions about local attractions or nearby bars and restaurants.

This is just the latest initiative to come out of Aloft's tech lab. Other recent inventions include the world's first emoji-only room service menu, which allows you to send a couple of food emojis to the front desk. There's also the Botlr, a robotic butler who is currently employed at Aloft Cupertino and Aloft Silicon Valley. And of course, most hotel rooms can already be opened with your smartphone, without even having to check in.

Aloft is part of the Starwood chain of hotels and resorts that includes Westin, Sheraton, Le Meridien and St. Regis. "We think of the Aloft group as our innovation lab for the entire Starwood group," says Sarah Downing, Aloft's VP of global guest initiatives. "Aloft guests are interested in new things and are eager to give their feedback when we try out something new. Initiatives then trickle down to all the other hotels."

Aloft will continue to refine the Project: Jetson technology over the next few months, and if it is popular with guests, it will become available to the rest of the Aloft hotel network. However, Downing explains that because Aloft hotels are franchised, owners will have to opt in to set up the iPad technologies in the rooms. This will be much easier with brand new hotels, but the Aloft team says it has set up the technology so it will be easy to incorporate into existing hotels.

But if everything goes according to plan, Starwood hotels hope to create an entirely futuristic experience. "Imagine unlocking the hotel door with your smartphone, then ringing the front desk to ask for towels, only to have a robot deliver them to your room, then asking Siri where you should go for dinner," Marlo says, with a twinkle in his eye. It's clear that he's having a ball coming up with these new gizmos.

fastcompany.com/3063118/introducing-the-first-voice-activated-hotel-room

Study Suggests First Soda Tax in US Is Working

As politicians seek ways to combat the obesity epidemic in the US, taxes and even bans on sodas have been floated in cities across the US. When former New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg first tried to tax and then limit the size of sodas in the Big Apple, howls of “the nanny state is here” roared across the country. Beverage industry trade groups screamed bloody murder over the cap on soda sizes that could be sold in NYC, and eventually New York State’s Court of Appeals ruled against the ban, saying the city’s health board lacked any such authority. Now an ex-mayor, Bloomberg has not given up. And a recent study on the effects of a similar policy in Berkeley, CA may give him even more ammunition as a campaign he bankrolled in Philadelphia was approved by its city council earlier this year.

According to the American Journal of Pediatric Health, consumption of sugary drinks such as cola (technically sugar sweetened beverages, or SSBs) in the Bay Area city of 117,000 decreased by 21% since the city implemented the tax in March 2015. Meanwhile, the consumption of these sugary drinks increased in nearby Oakland and San Francisco by 4%. The study’s authors based their conclusions in part on almost 1,000 questionnaires distributed across the city to residents.

This is one of the first studies gauging the effects of a soda tax (as other initiatives have been voted down or repealed), so we are still in the Wild West of sorting out the effectiveness of these measures. Nevertheless, advocates for regulations, bans or taxes on sugary drinks are going to tout this study, giving beverage companies in turn more headaches.

The penny-per-ounce tax was approved by voters by a 3-to-1 margin in November 2014 despite “Big Soda” spending over $2 million to defeat the measure at the ballot box. Supporters of the measure, including Bloomberg, raised $650,000 in their quest to pass the measure.

Kaye, Leon, Study Suggests First Soda Tax in US Is Working, August 26, 2016

D.C. stormwater credit could be a role model for other cities

Using D.C.'s unique credit-trading program, the Nature Conservancy is taking steps to protect the capital's water from pollution with stormwater management. Taking advantage of a unique credit-trading program in Washington, D.C., that could be replicated in other cities, the Nature Conservancy (TNC) has partnered with Encourage Capital and Prudential Financial to set up a $1.7-million loan for stormwater management to protect the Potomac and Anacostia rivers. The investment will reduce water pollution, develop rain gardens and cool urban heat islands. It also will prevent flooding due to climate change and severe weather.

"We sized the loan as it was because it's where supply meets demand in the marketplace today," said Craig Holland, director of program development at NatureVest at TNC. "We thought it was prudent to not take on too much capital at the outset. However, we think there might be 10-to-15-times that demand coming online in the market." To carry out the work, the partners created District Stormwater LLC, an enterprise owned jointly by Encourage Capital and TNC. It is a 50/50 partnership. Holland said the company will stay open and initiate more work if this project succeeds.

The need for education is the main challenge this project has faced so far, Holland said: "Whenever you have a new marketplace, there's financing education. It's part of any new market—you're going to have to spend a lot of time educating the partners. What we want to prove is that this kind of market can work and can expand to cities regionally and nationally," said Kahlil Kettering, urban conservation director of the Maryland/D.C. chapter of TNC. "Over 700 cities are trying to deal with their stormwater challenges."

"A couple years ago, D.C. made a new rule that for development or redevelopment over 5,000 sq.ft., they have to build in stormwater retention," Kettering said. Property owners are required to do at least half of this retention onsite, but they also can buy credits from offsite locations within the city. The idea of trading stormwater credits emerged from a discussion in Philadelphia, Holland said. These conversations resulted in a report, "*Creating Clean Water Cash Flows: Developing Private Markets for Green Stormwater Infrastructure in Philadelphia* (PDF)," which NRDC published in 2013. The Stormwater Retention Credit Trading Program has created an opportunity to bring in private-equity investment. Credits that this funding creates can be sold on the open market.

According to Kettering, the program can fund green roofs that are covered with vegetation. Green roofs absorb rainwater. Rain gardens and wetlands also can be used to absorb stormwater in urban areas. Cisterns can catch and store the rainwater. The program also can fund bioretention installations, permeable paving material and landscaped bioswales that remove pollution and sediments from stormwater.

"Stormwater runoff is the second-largest source of pollution in the Chesapeake Bay," Kettering said. This bay, he said, "is one of the most productive estuaries in North America." It generates billions of dollars every year through a variety of ecosystem services—including support for tourism, aquaculture and fishing. The pollution stems from a wide variety of sources. It contains petroleum, nutrients, pet waste, nitrogen, sediments, fertilizers and phosphorus, Kettering said. With so many potentially toxic ingredients in the runoff that enters the bay, filtration is highly valuable. Managing stormwater will help the city be more climate-resilient. Climate and health effects also help to justify the investment. Managing stormwater will help the city be more climate-resilient, Kettering said. Projects such as this also may benefit public health by increasing urban green space and reducing heat islands.

Next, the developers will identify a site to begin construction, Kettering said: "We see it as vital to tackle the stormwater runoff challenge." District of Columbia Water and Sewer Authority also issued a green bond in 2014 with a term of 100 years to maturity.

Friedrich, Kat, D.C. stormwater credit could be a role model for other cities, https://www.greenbiz.com/article/dc-stormwater-credit-could-be-role-model-other-cities, August 31, 2016

Hotels Rush to Embrace Wellness Trends, Like 'Forest Bathing'

Hotels are racing to help you unwind. At least, that's what you'd be led to believe if you've been following the flurry of wellness news that is suddenly dominating the high-end travel industry. And that doesn't just mean that they're looking to make an extra buck in the spa. (Wellness tourism is poised to become a $678.5 billion business by 2017, according to the most recent *Global Wellness Tourism Economy* report.)

All around the world, properties are rolling out programs that help you stick to your fitness routine, preserve your sleep schedule, or tap into local wellness traditions—some quirkier than others. Here, the trends to try (or avoid) on your next trip.

The Big Chill

You've heard of cryotherapy: You step into a chamber half-naked and get smacked with air that's as cold as -240ºF. for up to three minutes. Athletes and celebs have embraced it as a way to bounce back from tough workouts or combat the effects of aging. So it's no wonder that hotel spas are finding less clinical, and less extreme, ways to get in on the action.

The new Canyon Ranch Kaplankaya, on Turkey's west coast, and the Carillon in Miami Beach both have igloos in their spas. At the latter, you can choose from three scented mists—menthol, mint and eucalyptus—that are meant to cool you down, like an olfactory trip from South Beach to the South Pole. At the Dolder Grand, in Zurich, the 43,000 sq.ft. spa includes a so-called Snow Paradise Room, which invites guests to swap body lotion for an icy mixture that feels more like—you guessed it—fresh snow. The reward for your polar plunge? Improved circulation, says a rep for the Dolder Grand. **Verdict:** Bizarre

Intravenous Recovery

You can't make this stuff up: These days it's possible to treat hangovers and exhaustion—or just get a concentrate dose of antioxidants—by getting hooked up to an IV in the spa. The therapies, created by a company called Reviv, have popped up at the Underground Spa at the MGM Grand in Las Vegas (hangover central) as well as the business-oriented Maslow Hotel in Johannesburg. Naturally, they're administered by medical professionals rather than aesthe-

ticians. **Verdict:** Beyond Bizarre

Breathe Out the Jet Lag
Jet lag is an equal opportunity handicap, whether you're an occasional long-haul traveler or have gained entry into the million-mile club. But some hotels are trying to make their guests the exceptions. The Fairmont Scottsdale Princess, in Arizona, has zero-gravity nap pods that can reduce jet lag-related fatigue in a half-hour session. At the Viceroy Snowmass, there's complimentary Oxygen Inhalation Therapy—it sounds like a huge gimmick, but the company's chief executive officer swears by the power of pure oxygen to cure jet lag and altitude sickness. Another Colorado resort, the Broadmoor, also buys in to the theory: Its spa has a dedicated Oxygen Room where you can inhale 88% pure oxygen.

Meanwhile, Delos, a wellness-oriented design company, has started installing Stay Well rooms at hotels around the country—including Marriott properties in Atlanta, Orlando and Charlotte. They include a lighting scheme that changes tonalities throughout the day in order to help regulate your circadian rhythm. **Verdict:** Brilliant yet Bizarre

Ritual Healing
In 2014, I took a walking tour of Quito, Ecuador with Metropolitan Touring. My guide insisted I visit a traditional witch doctor for a limpia ("cleansing")—just for the experience. I was beyond skeptical as she whacked thorny branches and herbs against my forearm. But then her diagnosis was spot on.

In the years since, spiritual healing has trickled into spa services. At the newly-opened JW Marriott in Los Cabos and at the Viceroy Riviera Maya, you can join a shaman for traditional ceremonies in a temazcal, a type of indigenous sweat lodge that, among other things, is meant to cleanse the respiratory and digestive systems. At Vana Malsi, in India's Himalayan foothills, Tibetan healing therapies espoused by the Dalai Lama—like Tibetan acupressure massages and water baths—are a key part of the experience. And in Phuket, Amanpuri is even introducing entire retreats dedicated to a fully immersive Ayurvedic practice; they can span from three days to two weeks.

Whether it all works as promised or not, it provides a fascinating, authentic look into local culture. But often times, you'll walk away with much more than that. **Verdict:** Surprisingly Brilliant

Forest "Bathing"
The Japanese practice of shinrin yoku—which gets loosely translated to "forest bathing"—suggests that meditative, leisurely walking, rather than hiking, in the woods can have medicinal effects. Scientific studies seem to agree: A wide array of researchers have indicated that forest "bathing" lowers blood pressure, cortisol, and sympathetic nerve activity. You can partake in the activity at such hotels as Trout Point Lodge in Nova Scotia; the new Six Senses Duoro Valley in Portugal; or the dramatic-looking Treehotel in Sweden, where you're given reindeer skins to stay warm while you "soak" in your forest surroundings.

I recently became convinced at Blackberry Farm, the legendary culinary retreat in Tennessee—it's where I took a "Deep Healing Woods" yoga class on a platform in the middle of the Great Smoky Mountains, surrounded by tall, slender trees. Keeping balance in the wind, watching the swaying trees—it was a contemplative, almost therapeutic experience I'll never forget. **Verdict:** Bizarre yet Brilliant

A Moment of Zen
Westin was the first hotel brand to roll out a meditation program at urban properties when it partnered with popular startup Headspace in 2014. But now meditation is becoming a universal offering, as travelers feel the need to thoroughly unplug.

At the Connaught, in London, the Aman-branded spa offers lunchtime meditation sessions that are free and open to the public (it's great for the local business crowd). The Park Hyatt New York has put one-on-one meditation workshops with experts from MNDFL, a buzzy boutique meditation studio, on its spa menu—they go for $250 for 60 minutes when paired with a treatment.

But when you head to a proper wellness resort, things get kicked up to a whole other level. Last year, the Ojai Valley Inn & Spa installed a state-of-the-art Somadome personal meditation pod—the first of its kind. It employs a "choreographed sensory experience" of colored lights and energy healing tiles that "introduce guests to intense new levels of relaxation and meditation." **Verdict:** Brilliant, usually

Work Out Where You Sleep
Don't want to hit the boring hotel gym? Don't have time for a run? No problem. Hotels are making it possible to squeeze in a workout without leaving your room. That very premise is at the core of InterContinental's new Even Hotels brand, which so far has locations in New York, Maryland and Connecticut; each room is stocked with kettlebells, TRX equipment, and yoga mats. At the New York Hilton Midtown, you can now order a trainer on demand from a partner app called PRIV. And Kimpton hotels try to add on a layer of (admittedly unnecessary) white glove service. They'll roll out your custom-designed Gaiam brand yoga mat and send up extra towels if you want to practice your trikonasana. Think of it as room service for the active set. **Verdict:** Mostly Brilliant

Not Just Another Pretty Facial
What works for one person's skin doesn't necessarily work for another's. That's why some spas are letting you customize far more than the scent of your essential oils. The My Blend facial by Claris can be booked at Le Royal Monceau, in Paris, and the Ritz Carlton Toronto—it starts with a diagnostic scan of your face and uses the results to custom-blend products that will suit your specific needs. A similar treatment by Dermalogica recently came online at the Four Seasons Hotel Sydney, as well—it requires you to place your entire head in an analysis machine that then maps your face in 14 distinct zones. You can get the tech-free version at the Sisley Spa at New York's Carlyle Hotel, where aestheticians create something that's akin to personal skincare prescription, no machines needed.

And as you might expect, your individual formula is almost always made available for purchase when you get a custom facial—so you can get back to your dewy and rejuvenated state whenever you want. **Verdict:** Brilliant

Just Add Salt
You've heard of salt scrubs and bath salts, but halotherapy? This nascent phenomenon, which espouses the curative properties of your most-used seasoning, is on display at the just-opened Four Seasons Oahu, where the spa has two

detoxifying Himalayan salt chambers so that you can breathe in dry salt air. (The property claims this has a positive effect on your immune, nervous and lymphatic systems.) It's also available at the Westin La Paloma Resort & Spa in Tucson, AZ. The latter goes the extra mile: It has a mineral pool that's spiked with salt from the Dead Sea.

Nikki Ekstein, nekstein@bloomberg.net, Bloomberg, https://skift.com/2016/07/28/hotels-rush-to-embrace-wellness-trends-like-forest-bathing/, July 28, 2016

As LED Streetlights Spread, Some Critics Look for Dimmer Switch

Concerns about bright, bluish lights and impact on sleep lead some cities to reconsider their plans

Cities around the world are replacing old streetlights with energy-efficient LEDs. Not everyone is happy about it. Streetlights that use light-emitting diodes have a lot of appeal. They require roughly 50% less energy than the common high-pressure sodium and metal-halide lamps. And they last much longer, resulting in big cost savings.

The number of LED streetlights in the US grew to 5.7 million in 2014, or about 13% of all streetlights, from 1.3 million in 2012, according to the US Energy Department. But some concerns have arisen about the LEDs most commonly used in streetlights.

Most LEDs in street lamps emit a bluish light, and some research has shown that humans see that light as brighter than other light sources, prompting some city residents to complain that the lights are keeping them up at night. Studies also have suggested that the bluish light in LEDs can suppress melatonin, a hormone that helps regulate sleep cycles.

In June, the American Medical Association said that poorly designed LED streetlights in the US today can increase glare and disrupt sleep—which can lead to chronic health problems—and confuse animals. The AMA supports installation of LEDs, but says cities should use LEDs that cast a more yellow light and are fully shielded to direct their light downward.

About 500 New York City residents signed a petition urging the city to stop installing certain kinds of LEDs. "It's turning NYC into a bad Wal-Mart parking lot," read one complaint. The petition asked for fully shielded lights that would decrease light pollution and for LED lights of a warmer color—meaning more yellow.

New York has installed mostly LED street lamps of the bluer variety, but plans to switch to LEDs of a more yellow color for the 116,000 LED streetlights still to be installed, a Transportation Department spokesman says. Once the current installation of LED street lamps is complete, it is expected to save the city about $6 million a year on electricity and $8 million on maintenance. "The energy savings are a mathematical fact," the spokesman says.

John Bullough, director of transportation and safety lighting programs at the Lighting Research Center at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, says the effect of outdoor LEDs on human health hasn't been clearly established; in fact, he says, the use of computer screens at night might have a stronger effect on sleep disruption than outdoor streetlights. But his research does show that people see many LEDs as brighter than other light sources at the same measured intensity, and he says the best way to reduce problems from early LED installations is to replace older, brighter models with LEDs of lower intensity.

Some cities are revising streetlight-replacement plans in response to residents' protests. In Phoenix, opposition to plans for 90,000 bluish LED streetlights led the city to request that bidders propose a wider range of colors for the LEDs. In an online survey conducted by the city, citizens preferred the lights with the more yellow hue. Phoenix officials say they will decide on the color of the lamps this fall. While the citizen input will be taken into account, says Monica Hernandez, a spokeswoman for the city's Street Transportation Department, the city will also consider feasibility, sustainability and dollar savings.

In Lake Worth, FL, town officials chose the more yellow light when they decided to convert some 5,300 streetlights to LEDs earlier this year. The color temperature of the lights was measured at 2,700 Kelvins. The Florida Transportation Department, however, specifies bluer, 4,000K lights for major roadways.

After analyzing the intensity of the new lamps, the town found that the more yellow lights produced as much brightness as the state required. The results persuaded the state to allow the town to go with the lower-Kelvin LEDs, says Michael Bornstein, Lake Worth's city manager.

The town also chose LEDs with several brightness settings and is letting homeowners associations or residents choose the setting at the time of installation. The town is also installing shields when residents request them. The more-yellow LEDs cost as much to install as the bluer variety, says Jack Borsch, electric utilities director at Lake Worth. The shields added a tiny fraction to the cost of each light.

Eversource Energy, a Connecticut utility, has installed about 889 LEDs of 4,000K—the industry standard last year—in 25 towns, but now will install 3,000K LEDs. "We will make any modifications or replacements necessary to ensure the protection of public health and welfare," says Tricia Taskey Modifica, a spokeswoman for the company.

The Connecticut Conference of Municipalities, which helps cities make joint purchases and other decisions, says its towns are satisfied with the LED streetlights they have. "If you look at why cities and towns are changing to LEDs, the main driver is economic," says Andy Merola, energy and program development manager for the association. The AMA report "doesn't change the economics," he says. "I don't think anyone is second-guessing their LED installation.

Chernova, Yuliya, As LED Streetlights Spread, Some Critics Look for Dimmer Switch, http://www.wsj.com/articles/as-led-streetlights-spread-some-critics-look-for-dimmer-switch-1473818463, The Wall Street Journal, September 13, 2016

TIPS FOR CHOOSING TABLEWARE

Buy plates that have chip protection: With some suppliers, if your plate is chipped, they'll replace it for you. That's huge!

Don't over-purchase: It's easy to say, "We've got 100 seats,

we're going to need 100 of this plate plus 100 backup in case of breakage." Don't pack your storeroom with plates you're never going to use.

Don't be too cost-conscious: When cost is concerned, one area you should never skimp on is amazing china.

Tips for Choosing Tableware, Hotelier Magazine, March/April 2016, p.65

WELCOME AMBA PRODUCTS' TOWEL WARMERS!

Luxury Heated Towel Racks warm things up in Hotel Bathrooms

ALLY MEMBER Amba Products, supplier of heated towel racks / towel warmers has released a new shelf model aimed at providing hotels with an affordable way to reduce energy, water and laundry costs while greatly improving guest satisfaction.

AmbaProducts.com supplies a wide variety of heated towel rack designs across North and Central America—for bathrooms, pool houses, spas and even yachts. "Anywhere you use a towel, you can use a towel warmer," Amba Product's Fred Salati clarifies. "By hanging your towel over these heated bars, you are making sure it gets dry far quicker than simply air drying. This is a huge help for interior bathrooms which often have limited ventilation—and by keeping towels dry and warm, hotels can expect guests to be exceptionally satisfied in reusing their towels."

Heated towel racks are relatively new to the USA—more frequently seen in upscale renovation projects or in designer bathroom projects. They are quickly becoming a focus in bathroom renovations.

Amba Product's latest offering, the Radiant Shelf (RSH) provides a classic wall-mounted heated towel rack priced for large-scale projects with the added benefit of additional heated shelf space for stacking towels. "Whether you're the owner of a small boutique hotel or a specifier at a world-wide hotel chain, we're confident that the benefits of heated towel racks will make them a must-have element in your bathrooms," continues Fred. "Who doesn't love a warm, dry towel?"

Sustainability is the keyword

Increasing awareness and changing industry norms have made eco-friendly choices a standard rather than a brand-building exercise. With 5 billion feet of hospitality space that consumes around $4 billion energy in the US alone, the need for green practices and sustainability standards is imperative.

The good news is that 62% of users now expect hotels to be environmentally responsible and have solid environmental programs in place. These programs have to make deep-seated impact to lessen their carbon footprints and not just make cosmetic changes to impress the crowd. One must remember that the consumer is aware and informed these days, and only the best efforts will bring in results

Majumdar, Archita Datta, 7 key trends emerging in the hospitality industry, http://exclusive.multibriefs.com/content/7-key-trends-in-the-hospitality-industry/travel-hospitality-event-management , April 1, 2014

BATH FAUCET IMPROVEMENT

On a recent trip, we discovered that a new bath faucet has its water stream angled out into the sink rather than pouring straight down. A simple, very helpful improvement! Patty Griffin

CHANDELIER CLEANING

Hang an open umbrella from the chandelier before starting cleaning to catch the dust, drips, etc. Hagerty Chandelier Cleaner is specially formulated to make crystal fixtures and prisms sparkle like new. No wiping and rubbing. Simply spray on and watch the dirt and grime dissolve and drip off, leaving your chandelier sparkling.

AIRPORT OR CROWD PARKING TIPS

When you park your car in an airport or crowd situation, **take a photo** of it along with any location markers. You'll be able to find it more easily when you return, especially if you need help.

When you try to find your car in a crowded or airport situation, and you're driving a SUV with a rear door that opens upward, do this. Press the unlock button and the rear door button. Your **open rear door** can be seen from a long distance, and you'll be able to walk right to your car.

FINAL WORDS . . .

It is sufficiently clear that all things are changed, and nothing really perishes, and that the sum of matter remains absolutely the same.

Francis Bacon, De Natura Rer,