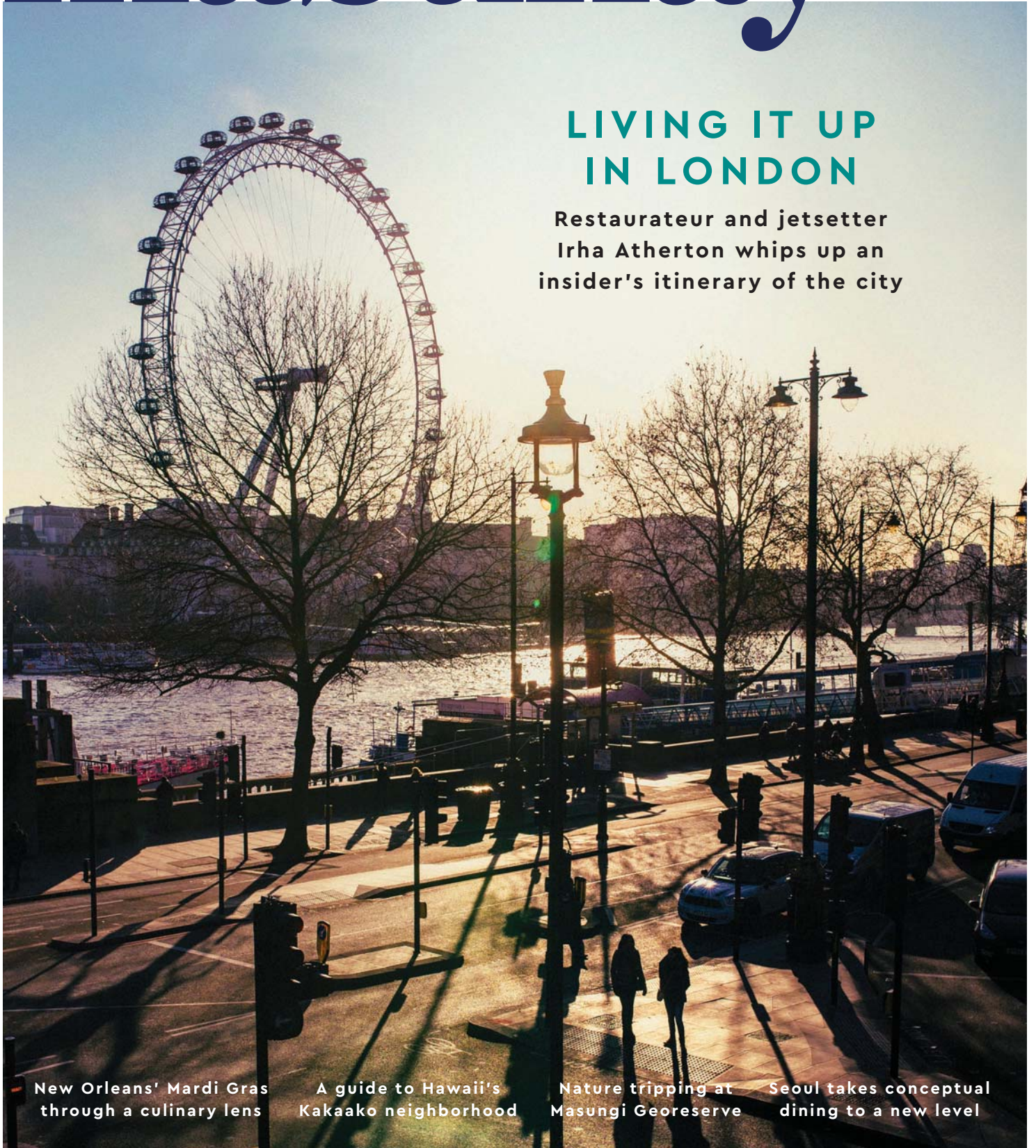


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February 2017

LIVING IT UP IN LONDON

Restaurateur and jetsetter
Irha Atherton whips up an
insider's itinerary of the city

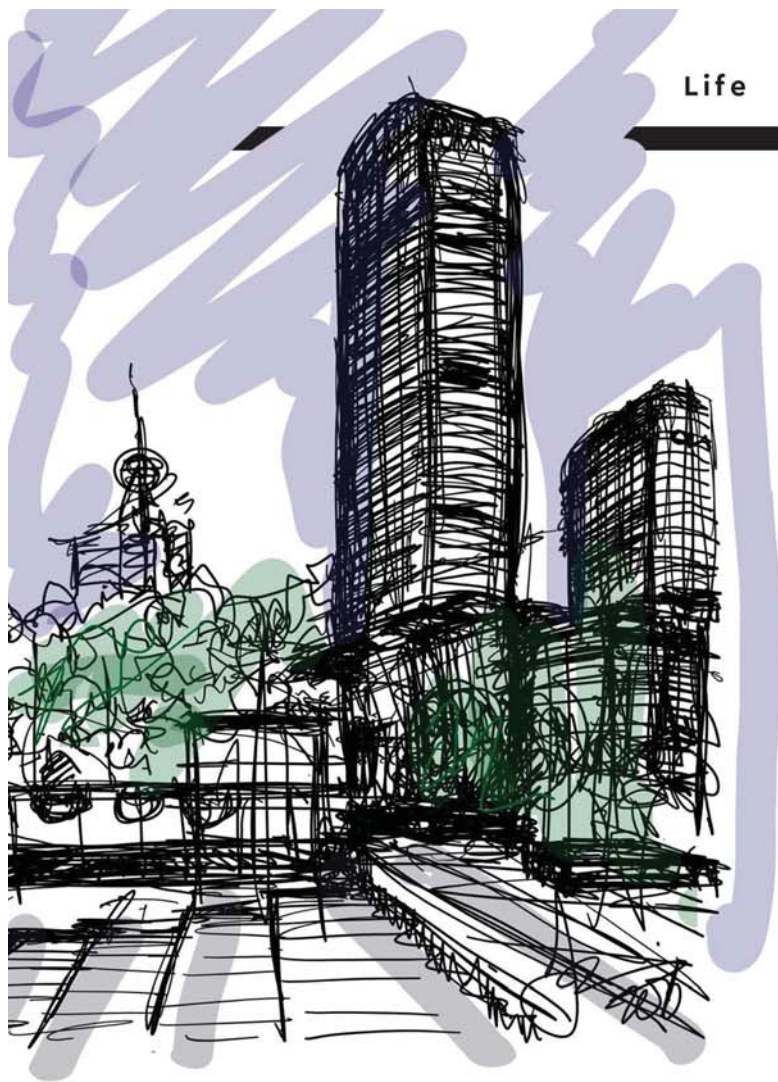


New Orleans' Mardi Gras
through a culinary lens

A guide to Hawaii's
Kakaako neighborhood

Nature tripping at
Masungi Georeserve

Seoul takes conceptual
dining to a new level



Global

Urban dreams

Professor Jason Pomeroy – founder of Singapore-based eco-architecture firm Pomeroy Studio, and host of Channel NewsAsia's *Smart Cities 2.0*, set to air this March – tells how the world's best smart cities incorporate a nation's culture and heritage, and are driven by the unique needs of the urbanite as much as the technology

What are some misconceptions people have about smart cities?

I think the romantic view of a smart city is similar to *The Jetsons*, a US cartoon in which the protagonists lived in a futuristic utopia of robots, flying cars, holograms and inventions. Today, most people would imagine driverless cars, bike-sharing schemes, fridges that talk and Big Data as *Big Brother* – a world that's dominated by technology. While this is true to some extent, it's not the whole story. A city is not defined by technology, but by the way people live.

So what exactly is a smart city?

A smart city acknowledges its unique culture – for instance, Shenzhen's heritage of startup companies or [Japanese city] Higashi-Matsushima's susceptibility to natural disaster. Its "smartness" comes out of embracing such issues, and enhancing the sustainability and efficiency of the city accordingly. Smart cities also empower individuals to work collectively towards common values held by the city – which often include job creation,

crime prevention, reduced pollution, recreation and amenity.

How are culture and context crucial to establishing smart cities that work?

Culture is a vital social function as it fosters a sense of belonging, identity and solidarity. It can manifest itself in various forms, including music, literature, architecture, food, values and beliefs. Furthermore, cultural values are usually influenced by place.

Modern technology, while beneficial in so many ways, tends to ignore the intricacies of individual cultures. An iPhone is the same the world over. Similarly, architecture can be a globalized phenomenon – you have the same glass skyscraper designs from Sydney to Hong Kong to New York. Technology formed the catalyst for globalization, and this has arguably led to the dominance of some cultures over others. Smart cities should not therefore become one-size-fits-all at the expense of a city's soul and culture.

What are some smart cities that have been successful in taking culture and context into consideration?

During filming for *Smart Cities 2.0*, I visited Barcelona. It may not seem like the epitome of a smart city – with its 19th-century Gaudí architecture and narrow backstreets – but it is infused with features designed to make life more efficient, easy and livable.

Residents can check for parking spaces via apps on their smartphone, sensors detect when bins are overflowing, WiFi is available on the beach, and lamp posts can measure traffic levels, pollution, noise and crowds. All this is hidden, so the main attraction remains its beautiful architecture – typified by the iconic Sagrada Familia Basilica – and culture.

How do city planners implement cutting-edge technologies while retaining elements of the city's past?

Policy makers need to realize that you can create a smart city without destroying a city's heritage. In fact, I would argue that a truly smart city is one that retains its sense of heritage, place and past, while incorporating modern technology.

Furthermore, I think planners need to think hard about why they are incorporating the new technologies, and what the end result will be. Will these new technologies improve the

lives of the citizens? Will transforming the city into a smart one make life more bearable, but not make the city more valuable? A city's value goes beyond simply allowing businessmen to get to work on time, or having a seamless shopping experience.

Some negatives of smart cities include increased surveillance, big corporations monopolizing cities and a lack of privacy. How can we make sure that the cities of the future prioritize the well-being of citizens?

A city should not necessarily be a clean, soulless and ruthlessly efficient concrete jungle – it should also have elements of an energetic, cultural melting pot where ideas are born and come to fruition. Technology threatens to reduce the citizen to a pixel, one that moves from A to B in a linear fashion, when in truth we are unpredictable, have emotions and may make decisions that may seem illogical. However, I do see the liberating

hundreds of years to develop, and from which unique cultures were spawned.

When you think of the great cities of the world – Hong Kong, London, New York – these are melting pots of different cultures, religions, ethnicities and languages that have stood the test of time. They are chaotic and disorganized, yet are tremendous sources of ideas, wealth and creativity, and have been able to embrace technology to enhance people's lives – not replace it and kill urban life.

One of the consequences of smart cities is less incidental human interaction. Do you think this is a worthwhile trade-off for freeing up more time for intentional interactions?

There may be less human-to-human interaction, but – as you suggest – this could result in time being spent elsewhere in a more positive way. A new Amazon concept grocery store will open later next year, and it'll be fully automated with not a shop

And this is the key point: I believe that a smart city will only be acceptable if it comes from the bottom up. The solutions to a city's problems need to be provided by the citizens, not imposed on them by the elites. We have seen examples of smart cities that have been built out of nowhere, filled with sensors, monitors, gadgets and other technology, but have failed to take off. Rather, older cities that we cover in *Smart Cities 2.0*, ones that you would not associate with being "smart" – such as Barcelona or Ahmedabad [in north-western India] – have selected technological solutions based on the needs of the people, and this has resulted in much larger benefits.

What do you see for the future development of smart cities?

I think the term "smart cities" is becoming as ubiquitous as the term "green cities". And this is a problem, as it eschews the notion that the former are smart through technology, and not necessarily good for the environment. By a similar token, green cities are considered as being very environmentally responsive, but not necessarily technology embracing. I would prefer to call these *sustainable* cities that are multi-faceted – that provide equal measures of solving social, economic, environmental, spatial, cultural and technological issues holistically. Only then will we be able to create cities that are geared towards the challenges facing the 21st century.

– Rachel Eva Lim

"Modern technology, while beneficial in so many ways, tends to ignore the intricacies of individual cultures"

effects that efficiency can bring to a city dweller. For example, in Singapore, the smart use of technology and government planning has allowed me to pretty much travel anywhere around the island at a moment's notice. I know exactly how long it will take me to get somewhere, and hence have much more freedom to move.

Smart cities can be seen as taking away an element of personality, unpredictability and creativity from the fabric of urban life. How can they work to preserve, or even better, this fundamental aspect of city living?

This is a very good question. One often finds developing countries wishing to propagate smart cities as landmark projects that will capture the media's attention and catapult the economy. The end result is often a generic gated community. Such creations run the risk of not having the benefit of a heritage of trade and commerce that took

assistant or cashier in sight. Many of the reactions to this have centered on the lack of human interaction, and how people would miss chatting with the assistants in their local stores. But such time-saving will allow us to be having more meaningful social interactions elsewhere, and enhance the quality of our lives in different ways. We are, after all, constantly evolving. Machines can do many things, but they cannot build truly meaningful relationships with humans – only other humans can.

Do you think smart cities should be imposed upon a city's population, or should they be driven by the inhabitants themselves?

During my filming for *Smart Cities 2.0*, the best examples I found of a smart city that worked were where technology was used to address a specific problem, and that the driver of this technology came from the bottomup – the people themselves.

