

Another Battle Brews in Europe

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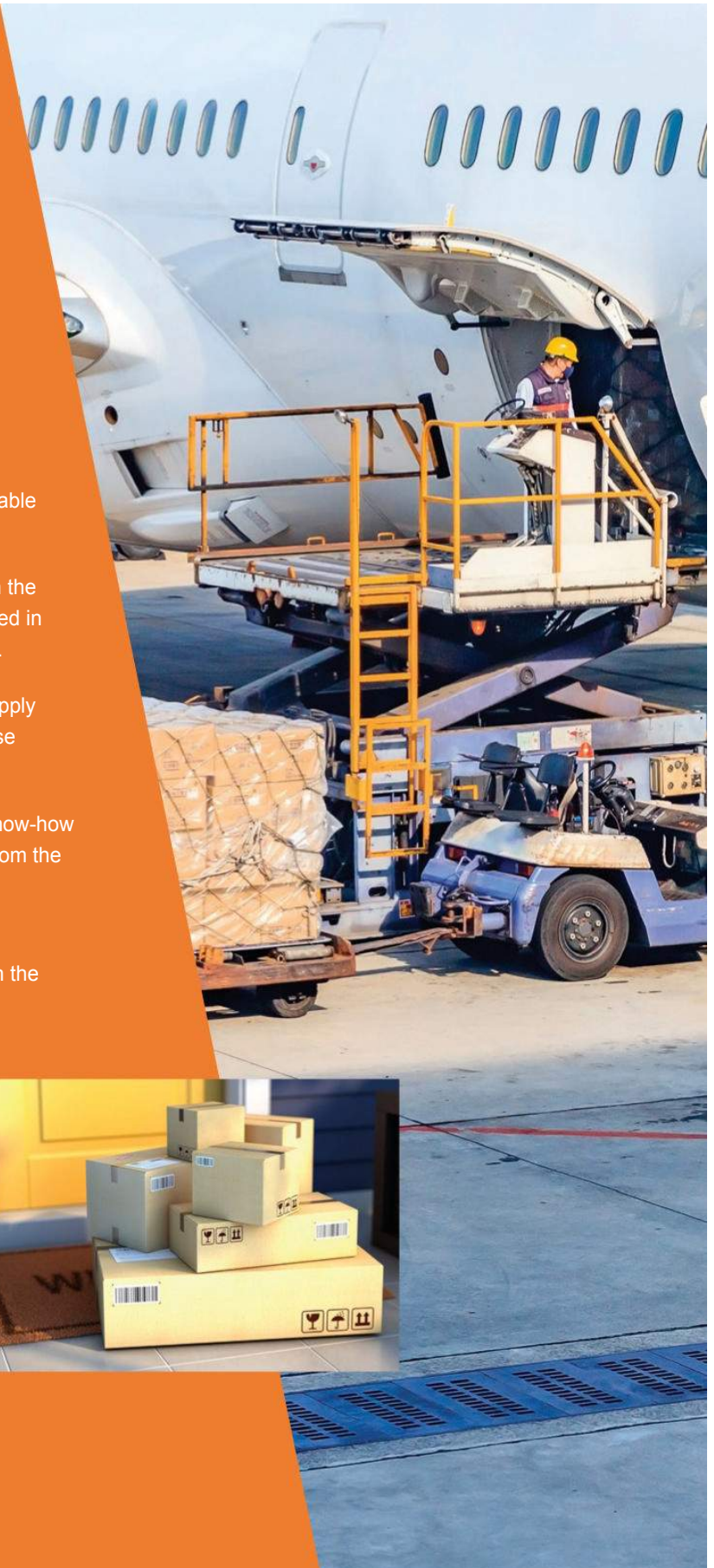
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The Price of Complacency

Even though the public health threat from the pandemic is far from over, the White House and Congress are battling over pocket change to fund the continuing fight against it.

by FRED GUTERL

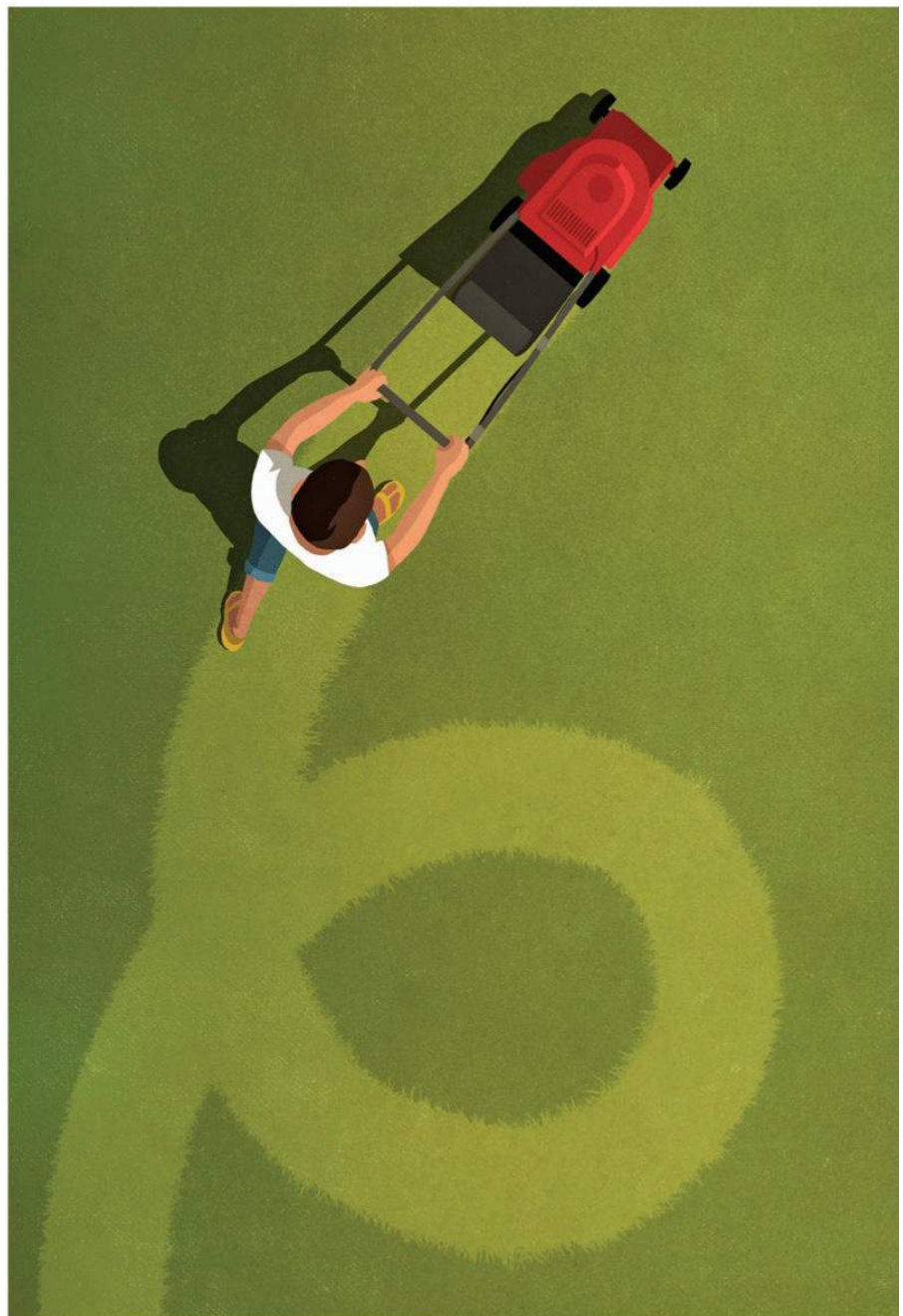
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America's Best Home and Garden Brands 2022

Newsweek and research firm Statista team up to find the leading makers of everything to make your place more comfortable, more attractive and more safe.

GROUNDSKEEPERS Since the pandemic started, Americans have been spending much more time at home and much more money maintaining, repairing and beautifying their homes.

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Illustration by MALTE MUELLER

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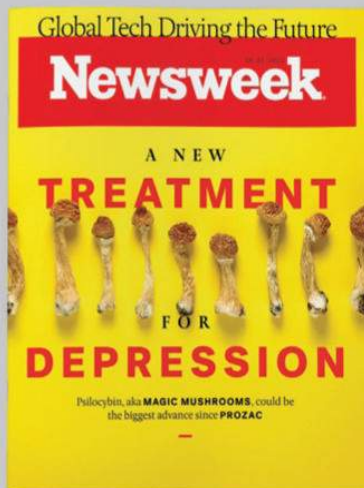
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HOST ▶ Jason Greenblatt, former White House Middle East envoy

IN THEIR WORDS ▶ "Even MBS's critics concede that he has roused Saudi Arabia from an economic and social slumber."



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All the palace news—from Meghan Markle to the Queen

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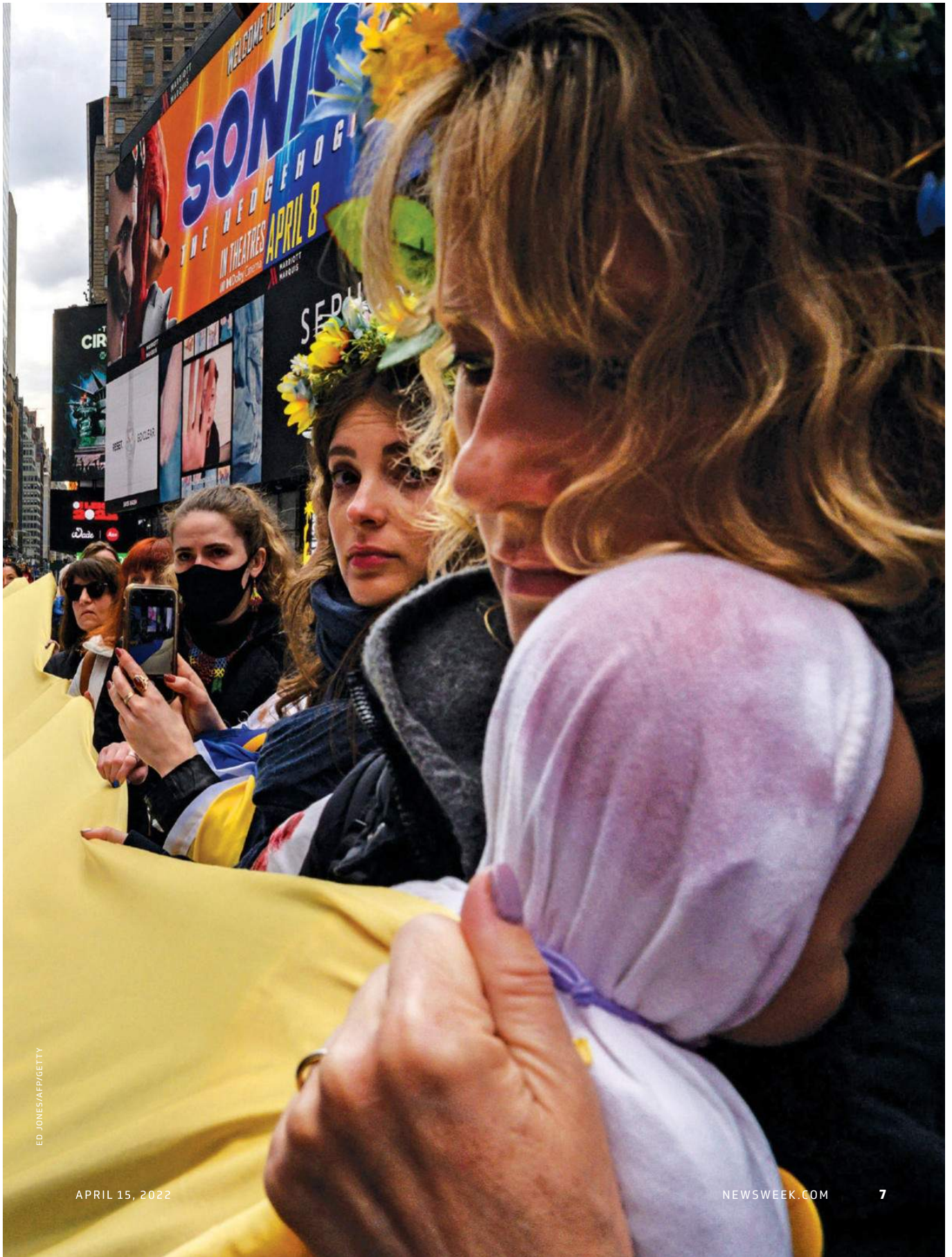
THE NEWS IN PICTURES

NEW YORK

For the Children

A protester weeps as she takes part in a Mothers March for Ukraine on March 26 from United Nations UNICEF headquarters to Times Square. Nonprofit Razom for Ukraine organized the event to raise awareness of the Russian military's treatment of children during its invasion of Ukraine, particularly the March 16 Russian bombing of a theater in Mariupol. The theater was sheltering more than 1,300 people and had the word "children" painted on the ground outside.

📷 • ED JONES



ED JONES/AFP/GETTY

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InFocus



SAHARA DESERT, MOROCCO

The Amazing Race

Competitors take part in the second stage of the 36th annual Marathon des Sables between Ouest Aguenoun n'Oumerhiout and Rich Mbirika in the Sahara Desert on March 28. The six-day, 251-kilometer (156-mile) race is about six times the length of a regular marathon and is regarded as one of the toughest foot races in the world thanks to the desert's formidable landscape and hot weather as well as the race's lengthy stages.

📷 ▶ JEAN-PHILIPPE KSIAZEK



TOKYO

In Full Bloom

Two people enjoying cherry blossom season on March 27. The blossoms, also known as sakura, are Japan's national flower and are celebrated at annual festivals where people gather beneath them to eat, drink and sing. Because of their short lifespan—often lasting only a week in late March or early April—the flowers are associated with the impermanence of beauty and the fleeting nature of life.

📷 ▶ CARL COURT



PAGE, ARIZONA

A Rare Sight

A couple takes in a rainbow suspended above Lake Powell on March 28. Because of severe drought throughout parts of the West, the lake's water levels have dropped to their lowest levels since it was created in 1963 by damming the Colorado River. Currently only 25 percent full, the lake forms part of the Colorado River Basin system, which supplies water to 40 million people.

📷 ▶ JUSTIN SULLIVAN





CLOCKWISE FROM BOTTOM LEFT: JEAN-Philippe KSIAZEK/AFR/GETTY; CARL COURT/GETTY; JUSTIN SULLIVAN/GETTY

A SHORT-LIVED PEACE

Azeri service members carry a giant flag in a procession last November marking the one-year anniversary of an end to military conflict with Armenia. Lately, though, tensions between the two countries have been heating up again.




“Companies that excel at personalization generate 40 percent more revenue from those activities.” ▶ P.16



WORLD

Another Battle Brews in Europe

As the war in Ukraine rages, a second conflict is heating up between Russian ally Armenia and neighboring Azerbaijan

 AS THE WAR IN UKRAINE ENTERS ITS SECOND month, Russian ally Armenia worries about a new front erupting on its own border with rival Azerbaijan as unrest builds between the South Caucasus neighbors.

Like Russia and Ukraine, Armenia and Azerbaijan are two post-Soviet nations with a long history of deadly territorial disputes. Their most recent war erupted in September 2020 in the form of a bloody 44-day conflict focused on the region of Nagorno-Karabakh, where ethnic Armenians established a separatist state called the Artsakh Republic three decades ago on land recognized internationally as part of Azerbaijan.

The latest all-out bout of hostilities in the century-long feud over this territory largely ended with an agreement that allowed Russian peacekeeping forces to enter the battlefield. But as Moscow focuses on what it has deemed its

“special military operation” against Ukraine, reports are emerging of new conflict in Europe’s southern boundary with Asia.

“Azeri forces are attacking Armenian soldiers in Artsakh at the moment while I’m speaking,” Hayk Mamijanyan, a deputy of the Armenian parliament told *Newsweek* in late March.

Mamijanyan calls the recent attacks a “clear violation” of a ceasefire deal signed between the two sides on November 9, 2020. Armenians were “not really happy” with the agreement, he says, but “even that treaty is now violated.”

Mamijanyan asserts that Azerbaijan is using the situation in Ukraine as “leverage” to renew its offensive, “to take advantage” of Russia’s war with another neighbor. “I really hope that the world won’t be silent this time,” he says. “The world [and] most of the international organizations were silent during the 44-day war, and I do hope

by
**TOM
O’CONNOR**

Photograph by AZIZ KARIMOV

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GETTY; TOP RIGHT: ERAY KULA/GETTY



that, despite the inefficiency of the Armenian government, international organizations and the world will pay attention to the crimes Azerbaijan is conducting at the moment.”

Mixed Reports of Conflict

Azerbaijan initially downplayed the recent reports of clashes, which the self-proclaimed Artsakh Republic says has killed at least two Armenian troops so far. The Azerbaijan Defense Ministry said in a statement in late March that “the situation is artificially exaggerated by Armenian sources,” although it later acknowledged that some sort of confrontation had taken place after its Russian counterpart announced that Azerbaijani forces had entered the peace-keeping zone and Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu held a call with Armenia’s defense chief, Suren Papikyan, and then with that of Azerbaijan, Zakir Hasanov.

In a statement shared with *Newsweek* by Azerbaijan’s embassy in Washington, the Azerbaijan Defense Ministry said that “members of illegal Armenian armed detachments attempted to sabotage the Azerbaijan Army Units” but were then “forced to

retreat” as a result of countermeasures. And the ministry said Russia’s own account of the events, which backed Armenia’s narrative, “does not reflect the truth.”

“We regret to inform you that the complete withdrawal of the remnants of the Armenian army and illegal Armenian armed detachments from the territory of Azerbaijan in accordance with Article 4 of this Statement has not yet been carried out,” the Azerbaijan Defense Ministry said. “Therefore, it is Armenia, not Azerbaijan, that violates the provisions of the Statement” reached as part of last year’s ceasefire deal.

But many Armenians fear the latest clashes may be just the beginning of something more ominous, especially as the international community’s sights are fixated on the explosive conflict in Ukraine.

“Of course, this coincidence with the Ukrainian crisis cannot be accidental,” Kristine Vardanyan, a deputy of Armenia’s national assembly and a member

WEAPON OF CHOICE The same Bayraktar TB2 drones used by Ukraine to target Russian convoys are said to be involved in Azeri attacks against Armenian troops.

of its “Armenia” bloc, tells *Newsweek*.

She feels that, with Russian troops mired in Ukraine, Azerbaijan is looking to seize the opportunity to reignite an effort “to evict the Armenians from Artsakh by war, to deprive the Armenians of the opportunity to live in their homeland.”

In support of this view, she cites recent reports of the ethnic Armenian residents of Nagorno-Karabakh, the disputed territory that is part of Azerbaijan but mostly governed by the Artsakh Republic, being cut off from utilities by Azerbaijan in addition to the more forceful measures allegedly being taken.

“This is not the only weapon that is used, terrorist tricks are used against about 120,000 people in Nagorno-Karabakh every day,” Vardanyan says. “Civilians are often fired upon, urging them to leave their homes, otherwise promising to seize them by force.”

She also points to another important actor involved in the conflict. While Armenia is allied with Russia as part of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), Azerbaijan shares a close political, cultural and military relationship with Turkey and, she says, Ankara “equally shares all the responsibility for what is happening.”

The same Bayraktar TB2 drones being used by Ukrainian forces to target Russian convoys were previously used by Azerbaijan to take out Armenian positions with great effect. This very weapon was said to be involved in an attack on March 25 that killed two Armenian troops.

Since the latest conflagration, Vardanyan says “the Armenian side has more than 60 victims and dozens of wounded,” marking “the most tense situation after November 9, when Azerbaijan uses heavy artillery.”





INTERESTED PARTIES Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu (center), with President Vladimir Putin (right), have tried to keep a lid on the conflict.

Mediating Forces

Just two days before Russian President Vladimir Putin launched his nation's attack on Ukraine last month, he set out to bolster his country's relationship with Azerbaijan in a series of agreements signed with Azerbaijani counterpart Ilham Aliyev, upgrading their ties to another kind of "alliance." Baku, the capital and government seat of Azerbaijan, has since taken a measured approach to the conflict and Ankara's role has proved even more influential.

While Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has sought to mediate between Kyiv and Moscow, Turkey's role in Ukraine's war represents yet another source of strained, yet complex ties between Ankara and Moscow. Turkey itself is a member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), a 30-state, U.S.-led alliance that is deeply involved in the Ukraine crisis, providing Kyiv with weapons and conducting a global campaign of sanctions against Moscow in response to its attack.

U.S. President Joe Biden wrapped up a four-day trip to Europe at the

end of March that included meetings with fellow NATO leaders as part of a bid to unify the alliance's response to the conflict and its humanitarian consequences.

And while the summit was centered on Ukraine, Vardanyan warns the crisis there only highlighted how escalation between nations anywhere in the world could lead to catastrophe.

"Wars are disasters. They destroy states, sometimes entire nations, destabilize the region, the world in general," Vardanyan says. "Especially in the conditions of such close ties, when there is intensive communication,

close cooperation in different spheres, in any part of the world, the crisis directly affects many people. We see the best example of that now in Ukraine."

"The world needs stability and predictability," she adds. "There must also be stability in our region. But we must understand that this stability and peace must be based on justice."

Azerbaijan is also concerned about the potential return of turmoil to the region but sees its foes as primarily responsible for fanning the flames of war.

Azerbaijan's embassy tells *Newsweek* that the "concern of instability is unfortunately present due to a troika of threats: Armenian forces not withdrawing (though obliged to do so by a trilateral agreement); revanchism on the rise with some radical groups openly calling for aggression against Azerbaijan; and many political and military groups in Armenia trying to involve outside powers on their side."

And here too a tie-in with the conflict in Ukraine and its surrounding geopolitics was established.

"Recent anti-Ukraine demonstrations by those groups in Armenia and within the Azerbaijani territories, where Russian peacekeepers are deployed express those sentiments," the embassy says.

The U.S., for its part, has sought to take a balanced role in the precarious situation between Armenia and Azerbaijan. Secretary of State Antony Blinken recently spoke with Aliyev and Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, and the State Department says that the U.S. has reiterated its

"The conflict is a challenge to the civilized world...a dilemma between values and price, ideals and interest."

position in follow-up conversations with officials of both sides as well.

The summary of the U.S. stance, according to a press briefing from State Department spokesman Ned Price, is calling on “both sides to show restraint and intensify diplomatic engagement to find comprehensive solutions to all of the outstanding issues.”

“Armenia and Azerbaijan just need to use direct communication channels to immediately de-escalate,” Price said.

Price added that the U.S. “remains deeply committed to working with the sides to achieve a long-term political settlement of the conflict” as a member of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Minsk Group, also co-chaired by France and Russia.

Putin has spoken with the Armenian premier twice recently, and the Russian Foreign Ministry issued a statement on March 26 also calling for de-escalation.

“We urge the parties to exercise restraint and ensure strict compliance with the existing trilateral agreements reached at the highest level,” the Russian Foreign Ministry said.

Ukraine Parallels

Just as both Kyiv and Moscow have portrayed their battles as one of not merely territorial but of civilizations, those representing the Armenia-backed Artsakh Republic also see themselves as being on the front line of a larger conflict in history.

Both Russia and Ukraine have set out to portray the other as fascist, with Putin going so far as to justify his war as part of an effort to achieve

the “denazification” of Ukraine. The Russian leader has accused Ukraine of targeting ethnic Russians, especially in the Moscow-backed separatist states of Donetsk and Luhansk, which took up arms against Kyiv after a 2014 uprising that saw a pro-West government take power in Ukraine.

In a similar vein, Artsakh Foreign Minister David Babayan argues Azerbaijan and Turkey are channeling Nazi Germany techniques in an alleged attempt to force out ethnic Armenians from their separatist state.

Now, Babayan tells *Newsweek* that “Azerbaijan is indeed using Russian war in Ukraine as an opportunity to maximize its goals and plans in the region” as part of a project to establish a “pan-Turkic empire.”

“Besides, the Azerbaijani-Karabagh conflict is a challenge to the civilized world, too,” Babayan tells *Newsweek*. “Here we see a dilemma between values and price, ideals and interest. Artsakh was on a brink of destruction, we faced genocide and existential threats, but we have not seen appropriate international response. This is because ‘price’ prevails over ‘values,’ interest prevails over ideals.”

“But this formula sooner or later, it will lead either to degradation or destruction,” he adds, “as the result of aggression by those whose aggression was tolerated as the result of the above-mentioned dilemma.”

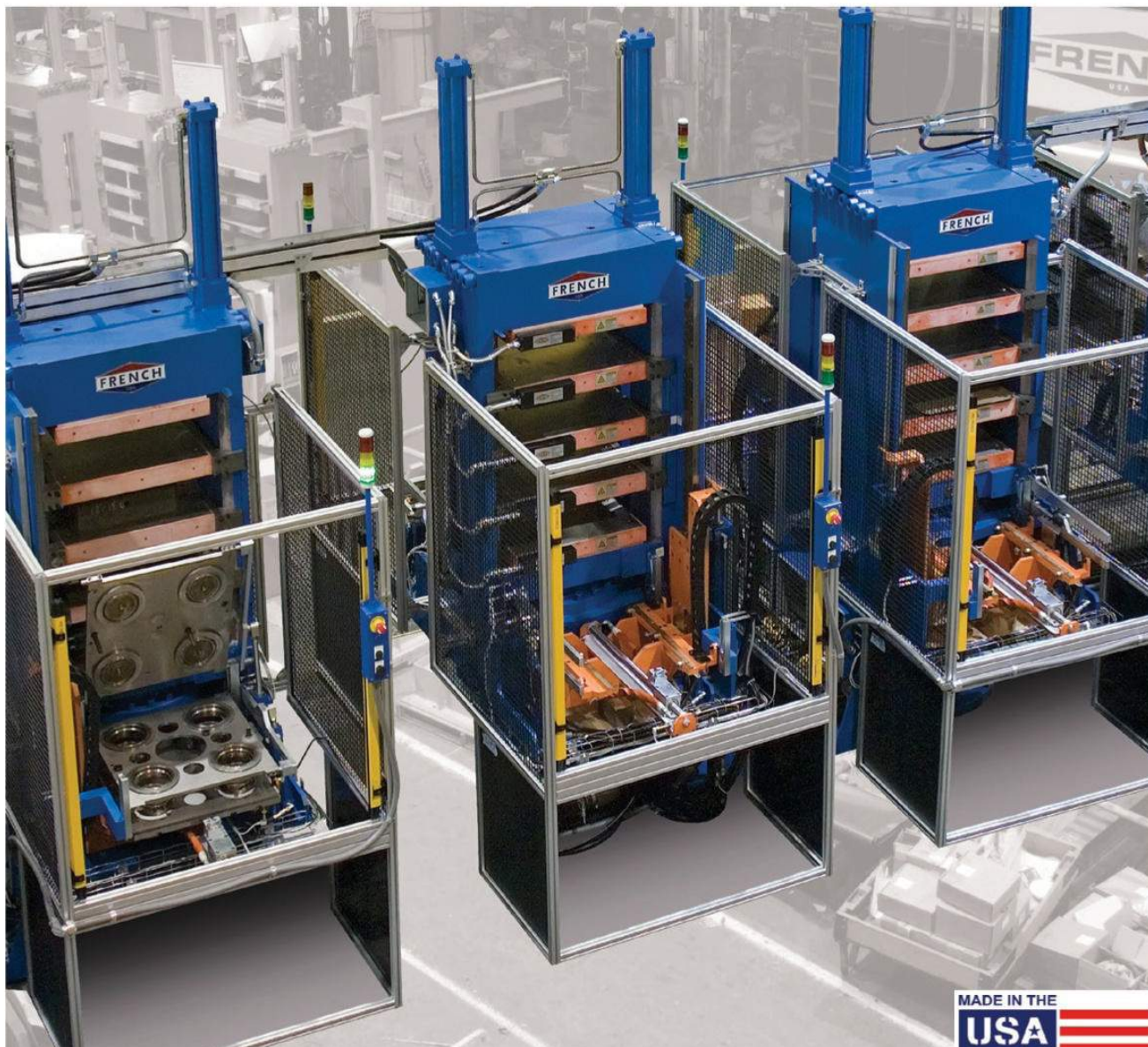
► **Tom O'Connor** is a senior writer at *Newsweek* covering foreign policy. Follow him on Twitter @ShaolinTom.

“The world needs stability and predictability. But this stability and peace must be based on justice.”



CASUALTIES OF WAR Mourners gather at the graves of Armenian soldiers killed during the country's 2020 conflict with Azerbaijan. Will history repeat itself?

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RETAIL

Trying to Stand Out

With customers increasingly willing to stray, brands are upping their game on loyalty programs

BRANDS ARE OFFERING MORE than just freebies and cash rewards to get customers to stay put these days. “Probably the biggest trend has been to go from a strict ‘buy this, get that’ to a more experiential, lifestyle kind of focus,” says Howard Schneider, who has worked in the brand loyalty space for over 20 years and helped pioneer programs at companies like Hilton Hotels and Neiman Marcus.

Over 90 percent of companies now have some type of customer loyalty program, according to a recent Accenture report. The average U.S. household is enrolled in 18 different loyalty programs. Some of those programs are hugely important to company bottom lines. Starbucks Rewards members, for instance, are now responsible for 53 percent of the dollars spent at the coffee chain.

With so many offerings, the question becomes how to stand out and how to engage customers long-term. Jess Huang, a Partner at McKinsey & Company says, “Loyalty has been up for grabs during the pandemic—75 percent of consumers have tried new digital behaviors, channels and brands, and 40 percent switched brands entirely.”

Huang and Schneider agree two things are now key for loyalty

programs: offering one-of-a-kind experiences and personalization.

“You want to give people not just a quid pro quo, but something that differentiates you and gives them an experience they can’t get anywhere else,” Schneider says.

Citibank, for example, not only offers points or cash back for using their credit card, but also things like backstage passes to concerts or front row seats to sports events.

Clothing company The North Face’s XPLR Pass program lets members earn points through things like attending The North Face events and checking in at national parks. Points can then be applied toward travel packages or other “experiential rewards” exclusive to XPLR members.

Besides earning points, cosmetic chain Sephora’s Beauty Insider program offers perks to members like first access to new products, one-on-one meetings with brand founders and exclusive gifts. Sephora’s program also appeals to values-based consumers; the company now lets them donate points to a featured charity, currently National CARES Mentoring.

McKinsey’s Huang says, “Our research found that companies that excel at personalization generate 40 percent more revenue from



those activities than average players.” According to McKinsey research, 71 percent of consumers expect personalized interactions with their brands, and 76 percent get frustrated when it doesn’t happen.

According to Schneider, customers understand the deal behind loyalty programs—handing over data about their buying habits in exchange for rewards—and expect brands to make that worth their while. He says, “I am explicitly saying, ‘In exchange for me sharing data about what I buy and answering other questions you might ask me, I’m going to get special pricing and I’m going to get



offers tailored to me.”

Sephora emails Beauty Insider members when their favorite brands have new products. Starbucks offers deals to Rewards members on specific items they’ve ordered before. Schneider says supermarket chain Kroger is a good example of a brand that knows its customers well and personalizes offers accordingly; they don’t send dog food coupons to shoppers who are cat people.

Meanwhile, paid loyalty programs and subscriptions are also on the rise. Airlines are experimenting with subscription-based loyalty

plans in addition to their traditional point-based programs. This February, for example, Alaska Airlines launched its Flight Pass program, the first subscription-based flight service in the U.S., in which members pay a

“You want to give people not just a quid pro quo, but something that differentiates you.”

THE CUSTOMER IS KING Retailers of all kinds are experimenting with a variety of new and different ways to make their most faithful patrons feel special and rewarded.

fixed membership fee in exchange for six, 12 or 24 nonstop, round trips on routes in the Western U.S. Fly Pass users have to commit to a full year of monthly payments.

One McKinsey survey showed members of paid loyalty programs are 60 percent more likely to increase spending with a brand, while free loyalty programs only increase that likelihood by 30 percent.

However, Huang says, “The bar for value to the customer is high—if you expect the customer to pay, the benefits need to clearly outweigh the fees.” Amazon Prime justifies its \$14.99 monthly fee by offering two-day shipping on a huge variety of goods as well as streaming entertainment options. A subscription program from a retailer with smaller, more specialized offerings may not be such an attractive deal.

What’s on the horizon? “I expect loyalty programs will continue to evolve to be more than static programs with set rules and into more dynamic ecosystems that can grow with the consumer,” Huang says. Experience and personalization will still be important, he says, but partnerships are expected to grow, with multiple companies from different industries developing joint loyalty programs. **N**

► This story is part of a series exploring the latest consumer trends and innovations. For more articles on these topics, go to newsweek.com/oracle. **Meghan Gunn** is a fellow at NEWSWEEK. Twitter @95gunn.

GETTY

Sleep Number Turns Its Loyal Customers Into Brand Advocates

Most people buy a new bed every eight to 10 years, a relatively long sales cycle that challenges traditional brand loyalty and rewards programs. That's one big reason Sleep Number designed its InnerCircle Rewards program to nurture long-term relationships with customers.

“This is not a spend-and-get program, it’s an engagement program...Oracle CrowdTwist is very simple for my team to use and manage all those activities and surveys.”

Lisa Erickson, senior director of customer relationship management and loyalty for the Minneapolis-based leader in high-tech smart beds

To build and run this program, Sleep Number relies on Oracle CrowdTwist Loyalty and Engagement, along with Oracle Responsys Campaign Management and Oracle Infinity Behavioral Intelligence. Oracle CrowdTwist makes it easy for Erickson’s team to set up and post digital content and activities, and for recipients to click on and engage with it. “Oracle CrowdTwist is very simple for my team to use and manage all those activities and surveys,” she said.

The goals of Sleep Number’s InnerCircle Rewards program, now approaching its five-year anniversary, are to help new and returning customers get the most out of their beds and to promote closer ties between them and the company. “We want them to use their Sleep Number 360 Smart Bed features and our SleepIQ program so they get the best possible sleep, which is, after all, a key part of a healthy lifestyle,” Erickson said. Sleep Number’s belief is that the more customers utilize the full capabilities of their beds, the better they will sleep and the happier they will be—both in general and with the company’s service.

The bed is, indeed, smart. The company refers to SleepIQ technology as the bed’s operating system. The technology measures the user’s sleep time and how much of that time is spent restfully (or not so restfully); in-bed sensors also track their heart and respiration rates. Anonymized data culled from over 13 billion hours of sleep informs individual and personalized insights delivered to each sleeper to help all customers get their best rest. Users set their own sleep number based on their preferences, but if the sleeper thrashes around during the night, the bed will also adjust itself to keep them comfortable.

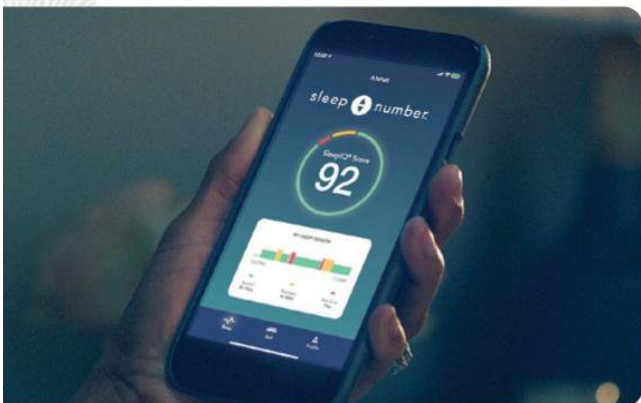
The Loyalty Program Is About More Than Discounts

Sleep Number's InnerCircle Rewards program grew out of an earlier, more traditional discount-and-referral rewards program but, as Erickson noted, was designed to go beyond that to foster a closer-knit relationship with customers. Unlike other loyalty programs that give customers points toward every new purchase, the InnerCircle Rewards program focuses on providing useful and informative content to members. It's not a hard sell.

Topics range far beyond the bed itself. There are articles on health and wellness, including tips on diet and exercise that can help improve sleep quality. There are also articles about the best foods to eat (and when to eat them) to help ensure better sleep. This, in turn, can support a healthy immune system.

As many consumers can attest, there is a fine line between a vendor's communication with them in a meaningful way and being intrusive. "The secret is in being useful," Erickson said.

"What our customers have told us is that as long as we're providing value, they're good," she noted. Top content also includes quizzes and requests for feedback on hot topics—such as whether you let your pets sleep in your bed. And with Oracle CrowdTwist technology, Sleep Number will know if the content is not relevant or interesting to recipients.



InnerCircle Gains Traction

The loyalty program has seen great success: There are now nearly 1 million InnerCircle members, and they are interacting with the content. The 90-day engagement rate—meaning the percentage of consumers who interact with content in that time frame—is about 69 percent, significantly outpacing industry averages. Sleep Number's 30-day engagement rate is about 49 percent, also above industry averages according to data from Oracle.

Erickson is happy about the results to date, but she's not done. She wants to build emotional loyalty to the brand even further. Sleep Number wants its customers to know they are valued partners who recognize that its products and services boost their overall wellness.

Unlike other loyalty programs that give customers points toward every new purchase, the InnerCircle Rewards program focuses on providing useful and informative content to members.

The goal is to create a virtuous circle in which customers feel they get valuable benefits and Sleep Number earns customer loyalty. If customers feel that Sleep Number helps them stay rested and healthy, they are more likely to return in eight to 10 years for a new bed, and to come back when it's time to furnish a vacation home or cabin with a bed they already love. Best of all, they're also more likely to share their great sleep experience with the Sleep Number 360 Smart Bed with family and friends.

That's the kind of reward that gives marketers—and Sleep Number—a good night's sleep.



The White House and Congress are fighting over pocket change

BILL CLARK/CQ ROLL CALL/GETTY

THE PRICE OF

even though **the pandemic** is still a threat

by FRED GUTERL

COMPLACENCY



E

PUBLIC HEALTH

EVERYWHERE YOU LOOK, PEOPLE are coming out from under their pandemic rocks. The masks are off, the bars are crowded, the kids are back in school. Even New York City, home to some of the most stringent mandates, no longer requires proof of vaccination in restaurants or masks in schools. On April 7, the Red Sox and the Yankees will square off on Opening Day in front of a potential crowd of 50,000-plus fans eager to cheer full-throated and (mostly) maskless into the breeze.

Baseball fans aren't the only ones eager to put the pandemic behind them. So, apparently, is Congress. Money for COVID-19 testing, vaccines and therapeutics is running out and new spending harder to find than Putin's conscience. Leading the opposition is Senator Mitt Romney. "While we have supported historic, bipartisan measures in the United States Senate to provide unprecedented investments in vaccines, therapeutics, and testing," he wrote in a letter to President Joe Biden, "*it is not yet clear why additional funding is needed.*" (Emphasis added.) Romney and 35 other signatories first want a full accounting of the \$6 trillion already spent on the pandemic—a task that would likely take months.

or so scientists, doctors and public health experts released a report that lays out possible scenarios for the next 12 months. If the coronavirus winds up staying mild and doesn't get much more contagious, deaths may be as low as 15,000 to 30,000, says the report. If the coronavirus produces a deadly new variant that can evade immune protections, the death toll could rise significantly—in this scenario, the group projects casualties of 100,000 to 300,000 lives in the next 12 months.

Nobody can control what the virus does, but it's possible to plan. The wide range in casualties for the worst-case scenario corresponds to how well the nation handles another outbreak, says Michael Osterholm, director of the Center for Infectious Disease Research and Policy at the University of Minnesota and a contributor to the report. The fate of 200,000 lives could hang on whether the U.S. has a well-funded plan in place, with enough tests, antiviral medications and vaccines for all, or succumbs to the politics of fatigue and pretends the pandemic is over.

"It's very clear that any investment we make right now in terms of improving our ability to respond

"It is absolutely idiotic to say all of a sudden, it's no longer raining, so I think I won't have a roof over my head."

While Congress fiddles, SARS-CoV-2, the virus that has killed more than a million Americans and as many as 18 million people worldwide so far, according to a new estimate, is still at large. Europe's relaxation of pandemic restrictions, together with a more contagious variant of Omicron, BA.2, has triggered a rise in cases and an uptick in the U.S. is expected over the next few weeks. It isn't expected to cause a rise in hospitalizations and deaths in the U.S., but that's not certain. Beyond the variant du jour are more fraught questions: Does the coronavirus have more surprises in store in the months ahead? Will a new variant come along that evades the protection of vaccines and prior infections and sends this weary nation back into the pandemic doldrums? Scientists have no answers.

Last month, while Russia's invasion of Ukraine dominated the news, a committee of two dozen





FROM TOP: ALEXI ROSENFELD/GETTY; CHRISTIANA BOTIC/THE BOSTON GLOBE/GETTY; JEFFREY M. REYNOLDS/BLOOMBERG VIA GETTY IMAGES

SMALL CHANGE
Wrangling over near-term COVID-19 spending ignores the bigger need to overhaul the public health system. **Top to bottom:** Madison Square Park in New York City; Midway Cafe in Boston; and Senator Mitt Romney.

to this virus will save us a lot later,” says Osterholm. “The more we invest, the lower the number of deaths will be. There’s no question about that.”

Which way the virus goes—whether it fades away or returns with a vengeance—is uncertain. It’s clear, though, that assuming the rosier scenario without planning for the worst is foolhardy. That is especially true in light of our history with this coronavirus, which turned more deadly in the Delta surge last summer and more transmissible when Omicron hit in January. “Anyone who has any experience with infectious diseases would have to tell you, ‘don’t bet against this virus,’” says Osterholm.

The longer-term worry is that the nation will forget the miserable performance of its public

health system in the last two traumatic years and acquiesce to the status quo, leaving everyone vulnerable to the next outbreak. What’s needed is a public health overhaul that brings the U.S. up to the level of other advanced nations. Such an overhaul would act as an insurance policy against not just the COVID-19 pandemic but against other biological threats as well—both infectious diseases that emerge from the wild and potential lab-made pathogens intended as weapons, a threat that has grown more likely in recent years by startling advances in low-cost methods of genetic manipulation.

The price tag of such an overhaul would be far steeper than the few billion dollars Congress and the White House are now fighting over. According to the report, “Getting to and Sustaining the Next Normal: A Roadmap to Living with Covid,” it would cost an initial outlay of \$100 billion in public health infrastructure spending and then \$20 billion or so a year to maintain readiness.

If \$100 billion sounds like a lot of money, it’s chicken feed compared to the cost of doing nothing.

Budget Fights

THE WRANGLING BETWEEN THE WHITE HOUSE AND Congress over COVID-19 spending has had nothing to do with the \$100 billion long-term wish list. Rather, the Biden administration wants a more modest amount to keep ongoing pandemic programs running. Those include money to buy booster shots, including Omicron-specific shots now under development; compensating clinicians for testing, treating and vaccinating the uninsured; purchasing antiviral medications; maintaining existing testing capacity and investing in a coronavirus vaccine that might someday work broadly against any variants the virus can produce.

Republicans have opposed new funding for these measures, insisting instead that the Democrats repurpose funds from prior COVID-19 bills that hasn’t yet been spent. That would entail clawing funds back from the states, which Democrats viewed as a nonstarter. The \$1.5 trillion spending bill passed last month by the House or Representatives was only able to get through after the \$15.6 billion in COVID-19 funds were removed. In compromise talks, the amount was whittled further to \$10 billion.

COVID-19 may not seem urgent now. Levels of



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: KENT NISHIMURA/LOS ANGELES TIMES/GETTY; AL D'AGOSTINO/GETTY

virus in circulation are low. Fewer than a quarter-million Americans were infected in early April, and deaths had dropped below 800 per day versus more than 4,000 at the peak in January 2021. The BA.2 variant of Omicron, which is causing an uptick in Europe and in parts of the U.S., isn't expected to have a marked effect on hospitalizations and deaths in part because it's less virulent than Delta and many people have immune protection from vaccination and prior infection.

But as we know from the past two years, COVID-19 infections tend to ebb and flow, with peaks followed by troughs and new peaks. If SARS-CoV-2 doesn't throw any new variants our way, it stands to reason that those waves would get successively smaller, as the virus finds fewer and fewer "naïve" people—

those without any immunity—to infect.

The trouble is, several things can throw this rosy scenario off. For one, the protection offered by vaccines tends to wear off over time. Exactly how much isn't clear, but one study suggested that 95 percent protection degrades to about 78 percent over four or five months. That's still good protection for most healthy people, but the elderly and immunocompromised may require boosters.

Another confounding factor is the virus itself. SARS-CoV-2 has shown a surprising ability to adapt to changing circumstances in ways that spell trouble. A persistent myth is that the coronavirus will gradually become more benign until eventually it's just an annoyance like the common cold. But viral evolution doesn't necessarily work this way. The only

HIGH COST

Clockwise from top left: *In America: Remember* art installation in Washington, D.C. commemorates those who died of COVID-19; Professor Vivian Riefberg; and Senator Chuck Schumer.

thing that matters to a virus, from the standpoint of evolution, is survival—its own. As long as killing more people doesn't interfere with its own ability to spread, the virus would remain indifferent and could grow more virulent.

In the beginning of the pandemic, scientists may have given the public the impression that the coronavirus does not mutate very much, unwittingly creating a false expectation that the threat would not change over time. And at first, that appeared to be true. SARS-CoV-2 was so completely new to humans that it was able to spread unfettered through the world population. When an infected person came into contact with 100 people, the virus could in principle spread to each one of them.

As people acquired immunity to the virus, through vaccines or prior infection, the virus began running into roadblocks. An infected person might meet 100 people, but this time, half, say, might have some immunity. That means it gives the virus half

“Anyone who has any experience with infectious diseases would have to tell you, ‘don’t bet against this virus.’”



the opportunity to spread. Suddenly, variants that are more efficient at jumping from person to person had a big advantage. That's what happened when Delta began to dominate in the latter half of 2021. It was able to produce more copies of itself than its predecessor, and those copies tended to collect in high concentrations in the nose and mouth. Each time an infected person breathed out, more virus particles were carried by tiny air currents out into the room. This enhanced “viral load” helped Delta spread more efficiently and also made it deadlier.

Crucially, killing more people didn't affect Delta's ability to spread. A characteristic of COVID-19 is that those who are infected walk around for a long time spreading the virus before they develop symptoms that send them to bed or to the hospital. “The moment of high virulence for COVID-19 comes very late in the infection, usually a lot later than the typical transmission time,” says Peter Markov, an evolutionary virologist at the European Commission's Joint Research Centre in Ispra, Italy. “If an infected person has already infected 100 others, it doesn't matter from the standpoint of the virus if that person then dies.” A similar dynamic is found in other viruses, such as HIV, Hepatitis-C and influenza. “With Hep C, you can be infectious and die 20 years later of liver cancer,” he says.

Omicron superseded Delta for two reasons. First, it was far more transmissible. Whereas Delta tends to infect deep in the lungs, Omicron stays high in the throat, which makes it easier to escape through the mouth and nose. (The BA.2 variant of Omicron is 30 percent more contagious still.) Thankfully, this feature happens to make it less virulent than Delta. The next variant won't necessarily follow this trajectory.

The second reason for Omicron's success is its skill at evading immune protection, compared to Delta.

As more and more people get immunity to the coronavirus, the variants that wind up succeeding are more likely to be those that developed ways of getting around that immunity.

Every time the virus makes copies of itself in the body of an infected person, it spins off mutation after mutation, searching for the one that is better adapted for the current environment. (Omicron is thought to have been gestated in the body of someone with a compromised immune system, which gave the virus time to spin off mutations.) Going forward, longer the virus keeps replicating in millions of people, who each have billions of cells, the more likely it is that we'll see vaccine-resistant strains. Even this late in the pandemic, the coronavirus virus still has plenty of genetic possibilities—new ways of mutating—to adapt to its environment.

"It's like a slot machine," says Markov. "The more you pull the handle, the higher the chance that you'll get four apples—something beneficial for the virus that we don't like. The larger the number of these viruses, the higher the chance we have of a bad combination of mutations."

In recent months, the virus has revealed a new technique for morphing into new forms. It has shown a propensity for making "reassortants"—a combination of two different viruses that swap genetic material. That gave rise a few months ago to "Deltacron"—a combination of Delta and Omicron. That particular variant didn't get very far, but it demonstrated that the coronavirus had yet another avenue to produce troubling spinoffs.

How long vaccine protection lasts is closely related to how much virus continues to circulate. "There are now more people who have immunity or at least some kind of immunity," says Osterholm, "but I don't know what the variants or reassortants are going to do, and I don't think we have a clue yet what long-term durable immunity means."

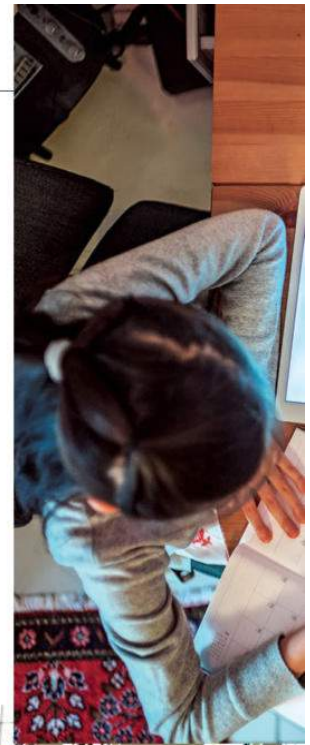
As long as the virus poses a threat, letting down our guard is unwise, says Vivian Riefberg, a business professor at the University of Virginia's Darden School of Business. "It is absolutely idiotic to say all of a sudden, it's no longer raining, so I think I won't have a roof over my head."

The Price of Complacency

THE SHORT ANSWER TO SENATOR ROMNEY'S QUESTION—why is more spending needed?—is that the

pandemic may not yet be over. SARS-CoV-2 may still have some ability to set the world back on its heels. What this means, in purely economic terms, is that \$10 billion is a paltry expenditure, and even a \$100-billion overhaul may be a bargain.

There are many ways of estimating the cost of a pandemic. The most obvious is its toll in human lives. More than six million people worldwide are known to have died from the coronavirus, and the true figure may be much higher. A group of scientists gathered data on "excess deaths"—the number of deaths that have occurred over and above what would otherwise be expected—in nations around the world for 2020 and 2021 and used computer





“What is the cost of economic decline? You don’t have to have a perfect model to know that it’s in the trillions.”

FROM TOP: TANG MING TUNG/GETTY; DAVID L. RYAN/THE BOSTON GLOBE/GETTY; SAUL LOEB/AFP/GETTY

KEEPING COUNT
Since a pandemic costs trillions of dollars, a \$100 billion investment in public health seems like a bargain. Top to bottom: Parents and schoolchildren work side-by-side; volunteers distribute food; and President Joe Biden.

models to estimate the true death toll of COVID-19. The study, published in March in *The Lancet*, a medical journal, concluded that the human cost of the pandemic is closer to 18 million deaths worldwide.

In the U.S., the count of COVID-19 deaths comes to nearly one million. *The Lancet* study estimates that deaths attributable to the pandemic were 31 percent to 44 percent higher still.

Most people may think of a human life as invaluable, but economists who work for the U.S. government can’t afford that luxury. To them, the “economic value of a statistical life”—the contribution an average person makes to the economy in a lifetime—comes to about \$10 million dollars. By that grim accounting, one million lives lost to COVID-19 amounts to a \$10 trillion loss in productivity to the U.S. economy.

What does that astonishingly high number tell us about the next chapter of the pandemic? One clue lies in the comparative performance of nations in handling the past two years of the pandemic. For each 100,000 people, the U.S. has lost 294 to COVID-19. By contrast, Norway lost 44, Israel lost

116 and the U.K. lost 246. If the U.S. had done as well as the U.K.—which didn’t do particularly well, either—159,000 fewer people would have died.

There are other ways of looking at the pandemic’s impact on the economy. For instance, the U.S. gross domestic product is \$2 trillion to \$3 trillion smaller than it might have been had the pandemic not occurred, estimates Anton Korinek, an economist at the University of Virginia. (He arrived at this figure by extrapolating the growth of GDP before the pandemic.) The management consulting firm McKinsey arrived at \$16 trillion in a July 2020 report. Whatever the accuracy of these methods, it’s obvious that the cost is large. “What is the cost of economic decline?” asks Riefberg, who was an executive at McKinsey when the report came out. “You don’t have to have a perfect model to know that it’s in the trillions.”

These calculations do not capture many intangible costs, of course. They don’t take into account the suffering of millions of people who survived long hospital stays, sometimes on ventilators or the toll on their families. Nor does it include millions more long-COVID victims who live with chronic ailments of the nervous system, heart and lungs. There’s also the impact on job losses, children who missed out on school, rising drug addiction, mental illness, loneliness and stress on parents, children and caretakers.

What Is the Fix?

THE U.S. HEALTH CARE SYSTEM HAS MANY GAPS, particularly from the standpoint of public health. Much of the responsibility for administering health care belongs with the states, which lends itself to a Balkanization of approaches. What’s more, the system is weak at the center. Among the various federal agencies, such as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, and the White House, lines of responsibilities are blurry and coordination is often lacking. The U.S. health care system is a disorganized patchwork.

One of the most glaring shortcomings is the lack of a disease-surveillance capability—the gathering of real-time data about disease outbreaks and using that information to make informed decisions. For instance, a rise in SARS-CoV-2 was recently detected in wastewater systems, which is considered a leading indicator for a rise in COVID-19 cases. The use of wastewater monitoring is a potential boon



to infectious disease surveillance, and many states have taken it up. But there is no standard way to take the measurements and no nationwide, comprehensive system for gathering the information and analyzing it. The Roadmap report calls for building such an integrated system.

The lack of surveillance capability is why, throughout the pandemic, U.S. public health authorities were relying on data from Israel and the U.K., which both have better disease-surveillance systems than the U.S. does. It's also why so many studies of the coronavirus seemed to come from Israeli and British scientists, who have a wealth of data to draw on that simply does not exist in the U.S. Relying on other nations was useful, to a point, but absent such a system in the U.S., public health authorities had little information on the disease's progress at home. "If you don't have the data, and a common way to analyze it, you're often flying blind," says Rieffberg. "You find out about the problem when everybody is rushing to the ER, as opposed to people saying, 'we see where this is going.'"

The only unequivocal success in the U.S. pandemic response was Operation Warp Speed, in which the government threw money at the pharmaceutical companies for vaccine development, guaranteeing a market for the mRNA vaccines even though nobody knew how effective they were going to be. The policy fell short, however, when it came time to administer the vaccines and so many people were reluctant to take the shots. Vaccinations are

"If an infected person has already infected 100 others, it doesn't matter from the standpoint of the virus if that person then dies."

now tapering off even though only three-quarters of eligible Americans have gotten at least one shot, and less than a third have gotten booster shots. In some states, fewer than half of residents over the age of 65 have gotten boosters.

Widespread public buy-in for vaccines is essential for reducing the chance that the coronavirus comes back again to bite us. If many people are reluctant to accept vaccines and others don't stay up to date with their shots, the virus has more opportunity to try and hit the genetic lottery with a new variant. Like it or not, the battle against the evolving coronavirus—against any viral pathogen—is a never-ending war of measures, countermeasures and counter-countermeasures. One lesson from the past two years is that education and outreach for vaccination should be a much bigger part of public health going forward.

Promoting vaccination is an expensive proposition. The push to increase vaccination rates, say behavioral scientists, has to address the attitudes of myriad groups of people, shaped by their own histories. Religious people tend to take a fatalistic attitude toward illness. Black Americans tend to be skeptical of the medical establishment. Some people don't get vaccinated because they tend not to go to the doctor anyway, or because they're out of work and depressed, or because they can't afford medical treatment or have poor options for transport. When a public health measure requires the participation of nearly everyone, what's needed are strategies and networks designed to reach them.

Education may be an effective way to push back against the politicization of public health measures,





CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: GRAEME JENNINGS/BLOOMBERG/GETTY; ANDREW HARRER/BLOOMBERG/GETTY; KYLE CASSIDY/UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA

PUSHING BACK
The politicization of public health is big factor in resistance to vaccines. Clockwise from top left: NIH's Francis Collins; nurses protest the shortage of personal protective equipment in April 2020; and Dolores Albarracín.

which is a big factor in public resistance, says Dolores Albarracín, a professor of psychology at the University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign and a Roadmap contributor. It proposes more intensive education and outreach on public health.

"The K-12 system could be having more impact in making sure that by the time you get out of high school, you're a convert," she says. "Really changing the health education curriculum is long-term investment, but it's probably worth it. When the next pandemic comes, you'd have a population that understands what a virus is. This is a way to push back against the politicization of public health."

The Roadmap report includes other reforms that would have helped greatly over the past two years and could help cope with the next outbreak. The committee suggests improving ventilation in schools, which could cut down on illness from COVID-19 and other respiratory diseases. It includes

a system of monitoring and coordinating hospitals to avoid overwhelmed emergency-rooms. It includes many steps designed to avoid lockdown measures when outbreaks occur, steps to prevent the spread of infectious diseases. A well-functioning pandemic response would serve as a hedge against bioterrorism, which grows more likely each year, experts say.

After two years of fretting over an invisible virus and avoiding contact with friends, neighbors and loved ones, it's natural to want to put the pandemic to rest. That holds for everyone—nurses and doctors, schoolkids and parents, and politicians.

"There's this desire to think that the pandemic is over and everything's going to be great, and therefore we don't need to spend any more money because there aren't going to be further problems," says John Moore, a professor of microbiology and immunology at Weill Cornell Medical College.

"Well, yeah, maybe. And maybe not." **N**



Newsweek

AMERICA'S

BEST HOME

AND

GARDEN

BRANDS

2022



Americans have been spending much more time at home over the last couple of years. COVID-19 made our homes not only our accustomed refuges from the world—the places where we live, sleep, eat and relax with family and friends—but also our workplaces and classrooms. We are spending more time in our homes and we are spending more money on our homes. In 2020, for instance, average annual spending per U.S. household on lawn and garden supplies jumped to a record \$155 from \$120 in 2019. Last year, total U.S. home improvement sales, including building supplies, appliances and decor as well as the services of contractors and other tradespeople, reached \$538 billion and is expected to hit \$620 billion by 2025.

To help consumers make smart decisions when spending on their homes, *Newsweek* and Statista are proud to announce our first annual ranking of America's Best Home and Garden Brands. The

products behind those brands are items ranging from refrigerators and washing machines to power saws, inflatable pools and trampolines.

The top 299 brands were ranked in 93 categories, 67 home categories and 26 garden categories. Some brands were awarded in more than one category, so 179 unique brands were awarded. For most categories, we've listed the top three brands. In some categories of very common items (microwave ovens, smart TVs, coffee makers and others) we've listed the top five. Many of the brand names here, like BLACK+DECKER, Whirlpool, Samsung and others will be very familiar to American shoppers. Hamilton Beach was awarded in 12 different categories, the most of any brand.

Whatever you might be looking for to make your home safer, more comfortable, more attractive or more fun, we hope you'll find our rankings useful. ▶ **Nancy Cooper**, *Global Editor in Chief*



Instant Pot

RANK	SCORE	COMPANY
AIR FRYERS		
1	96.37	Ninja
2	95.35	Instant Pot
3	88.85	COSORI
BEAUTY & SKIN CARE FRIDGES		
1	96.65	Cooluli
2	79.27	FaceTory
3	77.10	Frigidaire
BEGINNER SEWING MACHINES		
1	89.75	SINGER
2	78.83	Brother
3	67.21	Janome
BEVERAGE COOLERS & FRIDGES		
1	93.24	NewAir
2	89.83	Frigidaire
3	77.68	Hisense
BIKES		
1	93.21	Schwinn
2	77.01	ANCHEER
3	74.73	JOYSTAR

AIR FRYERS

1	96.37	Ninja
2	95.35	Instant Pot
3	88.85	COSORI

BEAUTY & SKIN CARE FRIDGES

1	96.65	Cooluli
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BEGINNER SEWING MACHINES

1	89.75	SINGER
2	78.83	Brother
3	67.21	Janome

BEVERAGE COOLERS & FRIDGES

1	93.24	NewAir
2	89.83	Frigidaire
3	77.68	Hisense

BIKES

1	93.21	Schwinn
2	77.01	ANCHEER
3	74.73	JOYSTAR

INSTANT POT

RANK	SCORE	COMPANY
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BLENDERS

1	96.56	Ninja
2	77.56	Oster
3	77.12	Vitamix

BREAD MAKERS

1	96.00	Zojirushi
2	87.68	Hamilton Beach
3	87.46	Cuisinart

BUILT-IN DISHWASHERS

1	89.80	Samsung
2	77.36	GE
3	68.38	LG
4	64.03	Bosch
5	57.12	Frigidaire

CHAINSAWS

1	94.08	BLACK+DECKER
2	90.17	Greenworks
3	80.18	Sun Joe

CHARCOAL GRILLS

1	89.90	Weber
2	71.43	Char-Griller
3	65.17	Dyna-Glo

COFFEE MAKERS

1	83.49	Mr. Coffee
2	77.05	Hamilton Beach
3	70.96	Cuisinart
4	65.53	Ninja
5	63.66	BLACK+DECKER

COMBO GRILLS

1	88.62	Camp Chef
2	85.94	Z GRILLS
3	84.60	Char-Broil



RANK	SCORE	COMPANY
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COMPUTERIZED SEWING MACHINES

1	92.13	Janome
2	79.68	Brother
3	72.95	SINGER

COOKTOPS

1	84.80	Empava
2	70.48	Frigidaire
3	69.00	NutriChef

CORDLESS ELECTRIC LAWN MOWERS

1	95.35	Greenworks
2	79.57	Sun Joe
3	62.82	AchiForce

COUNTERTOP DISHWASHERS

1	89.65	Danby
2	84.84	Magic Chef
3	81.84	SPT

CURTAINS

1	97.58	NICETOWN
2	90.49	Deconovo
3	78.89	H.VERSAILTEX

RANK	SCORE	COMPANY
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DEEP FREEZERS

1	91.87	Koolatron
2	77.38	Frigidaire
3	73.35	Arctic King

DEEP FRYERS

1	82.41	T-fal
2	82.18	Chefman
3	71.94	Hamilton Beach

DEHUMIDIFIERS

1	93.52	Kesnos
2	91.54	Waykar
3	76.27	Pro Breeze

E-BIKES

1	94.24	ANCHEER
2	65.61	Jasion
3	61.50	ECOTRIC

ELECTRIC HEATERS

1	90.15	Lasko
2	88.70	Dreo
3	79.94	Dr Infrared Heater

RANK	SCORE	COMPANY
EMBROIDERY SEWING MACHINES		
1	82.34	SINGER
2	71.94	Brother
3	64.39	Janome
ESPRESSO MACHINES		
1	95.99	Breville
2	84.17	De'Longhi
3	70.01	Café
FLAT-TOP GRILLS & OUTDOOR GRIDDLES		
1	95.84	Blackstone
2	67.75	Camp Chef
3	60.13	Royal Gourmet
FOOD PROCESSORS		
1	93.49	Hamilton Beach
2	85.81	Cuisinart
3	69.07	MagicCo

RANK	SCORE	COMPANY
FULL-SIZE DRYERS		
1	91.36	GE
2	90.29	Samsung
3	84.29	Whirlpool
4	65.77	LG
5	64.27	Maytag
GAS FIRE PITTS		
1	97.41	Outland Living
2	73.85	Endless Summer
3	69.99	Best Choice Products
GAS GRILLS		
1	91.18	Weber
2	81.15	Blackstone
3	80.89	Char-Broil
4	76.70	Cuisinart
5	74.32	Monument Grills

RANK	SCORE	COMPANY
GAS HEATERS		
1	88.03	Mr. Heater
2	82.37	Rinnai
3	72.09	CAMPLUX
GAS LAWN MOWERS		
1	97.40	Greenworks
2	72.84	Sun Joe
3	66.81	WORX
GREENHOUSES		
1	95.57	Quictent
2	79.09	EAGLE PEAK
3	65.88	KING BIRD FARM
HAND MIXERS		
1	94.61	Hamilton Beach
2	77.63	KitchenAid
3	68.08	BLACK+DECKER
HEAVY-DUTY SEWING MACHINES		
1	94.52	SINGER
2	67.77	Brother
3	67.32	Janome
HOUSEHOLD SENSORS & ALARMS		
1	95.73	YoLink
2	93.29	Govee
3	76.73	Ring
HOVERBOARDS		
1	92.24	TOMOLOO
2	75.23	Hover-1
3	74.53	Gotrax
HUMIDIFIERS		
1	99.06	Pure Enrichment
2	85.32	LEVOIT
3	70.85	AIRCARE



De'Longhi

DE'LONGHI



RANK	SCORE	COMPANY
ICE-CREAM MAKERS		
1	92.84	Cuisinart
2	72.34	Musso
3	71.28	Yonanas
ICE MAKERS		
1	95.41	Frigidaire
2	77.73	CROWNFUL
3	76.79	COSTWAY
INDOOR GRILLS		
1	96.21	Hamilton Beach
2	82.03	Ninja
3	77.64	MegaChef
INFLATABLE POOLS		
1	87.59	Intex
2	75.13	Jasonwell
3	60.65	Aqua LEISURE



Methodology

► **America's Best Home and Garden Brands** for 2022 have been chosen based on over 1.5 million relevant online reviews and ratings that were written between January 2019 and January 2022. The top 299 brands are awarded across 93 unique home and garden categories.

The ranking was created using both ratings and written online reviews about a variety of home and garden products. The written reviews were analyzed with a sentiment analysis that identified and extracted relevant information from the

written reviews and examined the expressed opinions and feelings about the products. This type of analysis dives deeper into reviews than ratings alone by identifying keywords and phrases that indicate specific attitudes, emotions and opinions toward a product.

Then, a text analysis categorized the reviews as positive, neutral or negative.

For each category, nine product-specific aspects were selected and analyzed to create an overall score for each distinct brand.

The weight of each aspect in the overall score differed between categories depending on the importance of the aspect (e.g., safety was given more weight in the power saw category than in coffee makers).

THE NINE PRODUCT-SPECIFIC ASPECTS ARE:

- 1 _ Performance
- 2 _ Convenience
- 3 _ Experience
- 4 _ Value for Money
- 5 _ Quality
- 6 _ Design
- 7 _ Service
- 8 _ Safety
- 9 _ Setup

RANKINGS ARE BASED ON A THREE-STEP PROCESS:

1 _ Data Collection

Collection of over 4 million online reviews and star ratings was done between January and February 2022 and reviews were written between January 2019 and January, 2022. Data collection and analysis used ReQiew: a tool that interprets online reviews, providing valuable insights.

2 _ Review Analysis

Analysis of written reviews based on the nine different product aspects. The importance

of each aspect is individualized for each category and based on aspect frequency in all reviews within a category.

3 _ Scoring

Scoring each brand within each category. The overall score combined the final rating of the product, the weighted sentiment average and the satisfaction significance in the review dataset.

The top 299 brands in 93 categories were awarded a final ranking of America's Best Home and Garden Brands.

GETTY

► VIEW THE LIST ONLINE AT [Newsweek.com/bhgb-2022](https://www.newsweek.com/bhgb-2022)



RANK	SCORE	COMPANY
INVERTER GENERATORS		
1	97.80	Jackery
2	82.41	Westinghouse
3	71.65	Champion Power Equipment
IRONS		
1	90.23	Rowenta
2	85.96	PurSteam
3	84.27	BLACK+DECKER

RANK	SCORE	COMPANY
JUICERS		
1	78.71	Hamilton Beach
2	71.64	KOIOS
3	68.86	Breville
LAWN MOWER ROBOTS		
1	94.00	Greenworks
2	72.48	WORX
3	69.99	Snapper

RANK	SCORE	COMPANY
LEAF BLOWERS		
1	94.42	WORX
2	84.77	EGO Power+
3	83.03	Greenworks
MEAT GRINDERS		
1	96.78	STX INTERNATIONAL
2	84.79	Weston
3	77.71	MegaChef

5

RANK	SCORE	COMPANY
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MESH NETWORKING

1	92.08	TP-Link
2	89.44	NETGEAR
3	74.04	eero

MICROWAVES

1	87.15	GE
2	70.67	Panasonic
3	70.09	Insignia
4	63.09	Toshiba
5	62.08	Sharp

MINI FOOD PROCESSORS

1	84.14	KitchenAid
2	82.92	Cuisinart
3	80.94	Hamilton Beach

PELLET GRILLS

1	91.68	Z GRILLS
2	80.99	Camp Chef
3	72.04	Traeger

PORTABLE AIR CONDITIONERS

1	97.74	BLACK+DECKER
2	80.63	SereneLife
3	78.81	Midea

PORTABLE FREEZERS

1	88.41	ICECO
2	84.21	Alpicool
3	78.89	Whynter

RANK	SCORE	COMPANY
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PORTABLE GENERATORS

1	96.12	Westinghouse
2	85.87	Jackery
3	77.64	WEN

POWER DRILLS

1	84.65	BLACK+DECKER
2	81.66	DeWalt
3	65.09	KIMO

POWER SAWS

1	94.56	DeWalt
2	71.63	BLACK+DECKER
3	67.39	Makita

PRESSURE COOKERS

1	91.85	Instant Pot
2	69.20	Ninja
3	67.11	Crockpot

RANGE HOODS

1	90.04	COSMO
2	71.79	Broan-NuTone
3	60.94	Hauslane

RANGE OVENS

1	92.27	GE
2	76.82	Samsung
3	74.18	Frigidaire
4	71.68	Verona
5	70.59	COSMO

RANK	SCORE	COMPANY
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REFRIGERATORS (Bottom-Freezer)

1	91.37	GE
2	85.38	Samsung
3	72.63	Whirlpool
4	70.96	LG
5	65.91	Frigidaire

REFRIGERATORS (Side-by-Side)

1	88.61	Samsung
2	86.51	GE
3	73.78	LG

ROBOTIC VACUUMS

1	97.14	iRobot
2	74.62	Roborock
3	69.90	eufy

ROUTERS

1	96.68	TP-Link
2	83.72	NETGEAR
3	76.47	ASUS

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► VIEW THE LIST ONLINE AT [Newsweek.com/bhgb-2022](https://www.newsweek.com/bhgb-2022)

RANK	SCORE	COMPANY
SANDWICH MAKERS		
1	96.98	Hamilton Beach
2	79.90	DASH
3	70.94	Proctor Silex
SCOOTERS & E-SCOOTERS		
1	92.65	Razor
2	85.36	Segway
3	84.24	LaScoota
SECURITY CAMERAS		
1	93.73	REOLINK
2	93.04	Blink Home Security
3	79.24	Wansview
SHOP LIGHTS		
1	97.85	Barrina
2	79.96	Hykolity
3	75.62	Sunco Lighting

RANK	SCORE	COMPANY
SHUTTERS		
1	89.50	Coavas
2	83.64	Redi Shade
3	77.44	Exterior Solutions
SINGLE-SERVE COFFEE MAKERS		
1	94.01	Keurig
2	71.50	Hamilton Beach
3	66.43	Tru
SKATEBOARDS & SKATES		
1	92.67	Gonex
2	92.18	JBM International
3	86.87	BELEEV
SMART DETECTORS & SENSORS		
1	93.37	YoLink
2	86.11	Govee
3	75.54	Airthings

RANK	SCORE	COMPANY
SMART ENERGY & LIGHTING		
1	93.41	TORCHSTAR
2	82.65	EMPORIA ENERGY
3	78.21	Sengled
SMART HOME ACCESS		
1	77.63	SMONET
2	75.60	ULTRALOQ
3	74.36	WYZE
SMART HOME ASSISTANTS		
1	89.52	Amazon
2	88.05	Kasa Smart
3	85.08	Govee
SMART THERMOSTATS		
1	95.81	Honeywell Home
2	76.96	Emerson
3	75.00	Cielo Breez
SMART TVS		
1	90.43	TCL
2	89.06	Hisense
3	87.46	Samsung
4	80.10	Insignia
5	73.08	VIZIO
SNOW BLOWERS		
1	98.43	Snow Joe
2	72.38	Earthwise
3	68.74	WEN
STAND MIXERS		
1	91.73	Cuisinart
2	82.81	KitchenAid
3	71.51	Hamilton Beach



SAMSUNG



RANK	SCORE	COMPANY
STEAM CLEANERS		
1	95.62	Bissell
2	81.46	Hoover
3	68.25	Dupray
STEAMERS		
1	94.12	Bissell
2	89.44	PurSteam
3	79.81	Dupray
STICK VACUUMS		
1	96.43	Shark
2	71.10	LG
3	68.09	Tineco
STORAGE SYSTEMS		
1	90.61	FLEXIMOUNTS
2	78.61	Rubbermaid
3	76.01	Seville Classics

RANK	SCORE	COMPANY
STREAMING DEVICES		
1	98.24	Amazon
2	71.96	Roku
3	65.90	NVIDIA
TOASTER OVENS		
1	94.42	BLACK+DECKER
2	89.84	Cuisinart
3	82.44	Hamilton Beach
TOASTERS		
1	80.24	Cuisinart
2	74.64	Bella
3	65.43	BLACK+DECKER
TOWER HEATERS		
1	94.67	Lasko
2	80.27	Dreo
3	76.36	Heat Storm

RANK	SCORE	COMPANY
TRAMPOLINES		
1	88.91	Zupapa
2	86.26	Skywalker Trampolines
3	76.34	Merax
UPRIGHT FREEZERS		
1	91.82	Whynter
2	82.53	Arctic King
3	75.72	Midea
UPRIGHT VACUUMS		
1	85.24	Shark
2	85.07	Bissell
3	80.79	Hoover
4	63.01	Dirt Devil
5	61.58	Kenmore
WALL OVENS		
1	94.31	GE
2	74.89	Samsung
3	63.97	Frigidaire
WASHER-DRYER COMBOS		
1	85.32	GE
2	77.48	LG
3	71.05	Magic Chef
WASHING MACHINES		
1	89.16	GE
2	86.25	LG
3	84.36	Samsung
4	66.89	Maytag
5	66.26	Whirlpool
WINDOW AIR CONDITIONERS		
1	91.34	Midea
2	72.15	Frigidaire
3	64.85	SereneLife

GETTY

Culture

HIGH, LOW + EVERYTHING IN BETWEEN

Biang Biang Noodles

SHAANXI PROVINCE, CHINA

(See #10 on following spread)

"Snakes have been getting a bad rap"

Craig Robinson on his new series, *Killing It*, based on a real-life Florida snake hunt. ▶ P.48



UNCHARTED

Noodles Around the World

For some people, noodles are a comforting bowl of chicken noodle soup; for others, they're a crazy-exotic spice bomb. Whether they are long or short, loopy or straight, noodles may be one of the most common food items in the world. Nearly every culture has a celebrated homegrown noodle dish—from macaroni to lasagna and from udon to pho—meaning there's a very good chance that most of us have tucked into a heap of incredible noodles at some point. Here are some of our favorite noodle dishes from cultures across the world. —MIKE AND STEPHANIE LE



**Lasagna alla
Bolognese**
BOLOGNA, ITALY

Lasagna is the ultimate noodle—big, wide, noodle heaven. And this is our ultimate lasagna. With layers of tender noodles, silky rich extra umami-filled Bolognese sauce (thanks to our special secret ingredient, fish sauce), creamy besciamella and a generous amount of Parmigiano, this is baked noodle perfection. (See #7 on following spread)

TOP RIGHT: ROBBY KLEIN/CONTOUR/GETTY

Photographs by MICHAEL LE

NEWSWEEK.COM

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Culture



Adapted from **THAT NOODLE LIFE** by Mike and Stephanie Le, published by Workman Publishing © 2022.



03

Philly Cheesesteak Instant Mazemen

PHILADELPHIA

We paired two favorites, Philly cheesesteak and noodles, for this dish. We chose mazemen ramen—a “dry” (soupless) style popular in Japan—as the ideal base; we season the instant noodles with soy and oyster sauces and pair it with well-seared steak, green peppers, red onion and Cheez Whiz, which melts into the noodles perfectly.

04

Pumpkin Sage Mac and Cheese

ENGLAND

Macaroni cheese—as it is known in its birthplace, the U.K.—is just as popular there as it is in America. This mac and cheese nods its head to England with mustard and cheddar, while giving it a decidedly American flair with the much-loved addition of pumpkin.



4

6

5

01

Southwest Ramen

TUCSON, ARIZONA

This meal in a bowl is inspired by *carne adovada*, an ever-present stew in Colorado, Arizona and New Mexico. In this version, it's a soup flavored with a base of smoked chiles and served with chewy ramen noodles for a deeply savory noodle crossover. Roasted vegetables add extra comfort and baby arugula adds a peppery freshness.



2



02

Yakiudon Al Pastor

MEXICO CITY

The hardest part of making great tacos at home is finding high-quality tortillas like those made in Sonora, California or Mexico. This yakiudon al pastor does away with that problem entirely, combining chewy fried udon noodles with our smoky slow-roasted pork al pastor. It's a fairy-tale marriage for the ages.

05

Bone Marrow and Squid Mafalda

MALAGA, SPAIN

The real inspiration for this dish is one beautifully lazy summer we spent in Spain. It was a blissful, squid-filled summer of homemade calamari, squid paella and, of course, squid pasta. Anytime we want to remember those balmy carefree summer days, we make this pasta. It tastes like you have all the time in the world to sit back and watch life go by.



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06

Casarecce Moules Frites BRUSSELS

Our take on classic Belgian mussels and fries. We switched out the fries for casarecce noodles (short twists of pasta that kind of look like fries if you squint), but kept the white wine, shallots and butter that traditionally sauce the mussels. A bit of saffron adds a gorgeous golden-orange color to the dish.

7

07

Lasagna alla Bolognese BOLOGNA, ITALY

(See previous spread)



08

Laksa MALAYSIA

At its heart, laksa is about the play between savory stock, noodles and toppings—rice noodles swimming in a rice and spicy coconut broth, seasoned with lemongrass, dried shrimp, chilies and turmeric and finished with cooked meats, seafoods and fresh herbs. The vibrant yellow ochre broth packs huge umami flavor, with hints of sweet, sour and savory.

Biang Biang Noodles SHAANXI PROVINCE, CHINA

The birthplace of these thick, wide chewy noodles is in central China, where they originated as a peasant-type noodle. There are a bunch of theories on the name—that it comes from the sound the noodles made when you bang them on the table or the sound that people make when they eat them—and even more theories on why the Chinese character for biang is so complex (it's made up of 58 strokes). But really, all you need to know is that they're good. They're hearty and hold up well when fried, tossed and added to soups.



11

Ramen TOKYO

More than 100 billion packages of instant noodles are eaten yearly, making Momofuku Ando's invention one of the most influential foods of our day and age. For those times when you want authentic noodles but are nowhere near a noodle shop, the right instant noodles can save the day—many come with flavor packs that taste surprisingly close to the real deal. From their humble origins as a subsistence food, instant noodles have taken on a life of their own, becoming beloved and celebrated—even inspiring an instant noodle museum in Yokohama.





MUSIC

Wet Leg Gets the Joke

The hot British indie duo have been riding high since their single “Chaise Longue” became a smash. They’re not taking their success too seriously

■ SOMETIMES EVEN THE MOST-talked-about indie rock acts need to decompress. Take, for instance, the British duo Wet Leg—Rhian Teasdale and Hester Chambers—currently on the second leg of a tour in America.

“Me and Hester did yoga the other day,” Teasdale tells *Newsweek*, laughing. “The bus expands on the front lounge, so there’s enough room to do like a YouTube

yoga session diagonally.”

In a span of less than a year, the duo from the Isle of Wight have generated tremendous buzz from their singles—most notably the extremely catchy disco/punk/New Wave number “Chaise Longue,” which has

garnered over 11 million streams so far on Spotify. The attention brought Wet Leg widespread press coverage, sold-out shows, and American TV

by
**DAVID
CHIU**

“You just kind of have to take it day by day. It’s pretty fun, just having a really nice time with our friends.”

appearances on *Late Night With Seth Meyers* and *The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon*.

Yet on a recent day after Wet Leg’s performance before a packed crowd at New York City’s Brooklyn Steel, Teasdale and Chambers seem non-plussed about the attention “We’re so busy,” Teasdale says. “Our calendar is so full. You just kind of have to take it day by day. It’s pretty fun, just having a really nice time with our friends.”

Amid much anticipation, Wet Leg is releasing its self-titled first LP via indie label Domino on April 8. “We’re really stoked. [It’s] nice to have all of our cards laid out. We’re excited,” says Teasdale about the release of the record, which was recorded in London in April 2021. Adds Chambers, “We went in with Dan Carey, [who produced most of the album], and we just spent two weeks being guided by his wisdom. He was really the magic man. We were so lucky. I can’t imagine what we would’ve made [with anyone else].”

With their charmingly down-to-earth demeanor and funny rapport, Teasdale and Chambers, longtime friends before they became musical partners, behave more like a comedy duo than your typically serious and brooding indie rock act. They joke around, laugh and finish each other’s sentences.

The irreverent and sarcastic humor of their lyrics is complemented by their catchy post-punk

rock sound. Their music videos have a similarly absurdist bent recalling Monty Python’s *Flying Circus* and The Monkees. However, the lyrics on the *Wet Leg* album sometimes show a serious side, tackling such things as the trials and tribulations of relationships (“Piece of S***,” “Loving You”), and the angst of being a young outsider (“I Don’t Wanna Go Out,” “Too Late Now”).

“Looking back on it, I don’t think we really intended to write with any theme or thread running through,” says Teasdale “because we were like, ‘They’re giving us this opportunity to write an album? How the f*** are we gonna make an album?’ So we weren’t very objective about it.” She adds with a laugh, “It just so happens there is a running theme of disenchantment—like being sad at parties.”

Teasdale acknowledges that the lyrics on *Wet Leg* are about 99 percent autobiographical. The single “Wet Dream,” which was based on an interaction with an ex-boyfriend. “We broke up,” she recalls, “and I would receive messages after the breakup, saying, ‘Oh, I had a dream about you and we were married.’ So it was like that. But mainly, it was describing that kind of character, that kind of person [who] will try to pick up girls by being like, ‘Oh hey, do you know this band?’ ‘Oh hey, do you know this indie cult film?’ They kind of use that as currency.”

The pile-driving rocker “Oh No,” a previously released single, captures society’s fixation on doom scrolling. “Some of our songs have a lot of inside jokes, and that is one of them,” Teasdale explains. “When me and Hester were hanging out quite a lot, we would be lying around her flat on the floor with our phones in front of us. One of us would realize that we’ve been [scrolling for] an hour

past—we hadn’t spoken to each other. So to break the spell, you have to be like [shouting], ‘I’m scrolling! I’m scrolling!’”

Chambers and Teasdale also included their signature hit on *Wet Leg*. “Chaise Longue” is a deadpan look at 20-something boredom and angst. It begins “Mummy, Daddy, look at me/I went to school and I got a degree/All my friends call it the big D/I went to school and I got the big D,” then proceeds to, “Is your muffin buttered?” a line from the movie *Mean Girls* before getting to the chorus: “On the chaise longue, on the chaise longue, on the chaise longue/All day long on the chaise longue.” The track was actually written on a chaise longue. “It’s where Rhian sleeps when she comes around for a sleepover,” Teasdale says. “So it’s there. It’s real.”

“‘Chaise Longue’ has a lot of sarcasm in it,” she adds. “It’s such a lighthearted, funny song. We got asked the other day in an interview if ‘Chaise Longue’ is a political song. We were like, ‘No, it’s just about a chaise longue.’”

The two admit the viral reaction to the song, whose accompanying video has been seen over 3 million times on YouTube so far, caught them off guard. “It was a big surprise,” Chambers admits. “It wasn’t what we were expecting. It doesn’t make any sense.”

“It hit like 10 million streams the other day, which is just so silly,” Teasdale chimes in.

Chambers and Teasdale hail from the Isle of Wight, located off the south coast of England, population just over 140,000. The two first met in 2012 at the Isle of Wight College in their late teens, and then later dropped out, according to Chambers. “We had musician friends,” she recalls, “so we would do little bits

POKER FACES Wet Leg's Rhian Teasdale (left) and Hester Chambers. The band's sense of humor is as deadpan as their music is catchy.

of singing here and there together. And then one day Rhian blew up my phone and being like, 'Hester, you have to play guitar with me!' And I would say, 'Sure, I'll do that,' just to make her calm down."

"I was really blowing up your phone," Teasdale says. "I was incessantly calling and texting you, and then I'd call your boyfriend and get him to pass the message on."

"You even put notes under my door," Chambers responds.

"And then during that time playing together," says Teasdale, "we were like, 'Why don't we make this like a band thing?'" They hit on a name for the band when they started looking for a name that could be conveyed via emoji.

Wet Leg made their live debut in 2018 at the local stage of the Isle of Wight Festival. "We played to about six people because we were on very early in the day," says Chambers. "It was our very first gig. So they did us a massive favor by putting us on at all. We had fun. It was scary."

Since then, the crowds and venues have certainly gotten bigger for Wet Leg after the overwhelming reception to "Chaise Longue" and the follow-up single "Wet Dream." The duo have also been name-checked by Iggy Pop, Hayley Williams of Paramore, Florence Welch of Florence + the Machine, and Simon Le Bon of Duran Duran, who told Sky News in 2021, "Wet Leg is definitely my artist of the year."

"It's changed our lives entirely," says Teasdale about the public's reaction, "because we're never at home anymore. We're away a heck of a lot. So yeah, a big change—especially

coming out of lockdown where we were all indoors for 18 months. It's great. It's such a fun experience."

They still have trouble believing all of this attention is happening to them. Teasdale explains, "Everything that we do and everywhere that we go, we're like, 'We're not supposed to be here.' When are we gonna get found out? They're gonna kick us out.' Especially the TV things—they're so funny. I'm pretty sure the tour bus we're in right now

"Everything that we do and everywhere that we go, we're like, 'We're not supposed to be here. When are we gonna get found out?'"

is not [for] us, but we accidentally commandeered it."

"Let Weg," jokes Chambers, to which Teasdale responds, "Let Weg want their bus back."

"None of it really makes sense," says Chambers. "We're just flying by the seat of our pants."

Following the U.S. tour, the remainder of this year for Wet Leg will include show dates in the U.K. and parts of Europe. As for what she would like people to feel listening to their debut album, Teasdale kiddingly says "distraught and anger" and then adds, "Probably the opposite of that. I hope that they enjoy it if they want to. I hope that they're not disappointed in us."

"You can't do it all," Chambers admits.

"I want people to say, 'I'm not angry. I'm just disappointed,' when they listen to the album," adds Teasdale. **■**

► **David Chiu** @newbeats is a NEWSWEEK associate editor who writes frequently about popular music.



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Photo By
FRED SIEGEL

PARTING SHOT

Craig Robinson

WHAT DO SNAKES AND THE AMERICAN DREAM HAVE IN COMMON? FOR Craig Robinson, it's the basis of his new Peacock original series *Killing It* (April 14). Robinson plays Craig, a recently fired security guard who decides to take part in a Florida snake hunt for a windfall of money. "Snakes have been getting a bad rap in the Bible, they get a bad rap in the Indiana Jones movies." The premise for the series is based on a real-life annual hunt for big snakes in Florida. "People had them as pets and they got out of control and they just let them loose. And nothing eats snakes, but *they* eat everything." While this writer desperately hoped *Killing It* would be an extension of Robinson's character Darryl from *The Office* (which Robinson says it's definitely not "because Darryl would be an athlete"), he says the show "opened every door" for him. "I remember going to an audition and the lady is like, 'What's Jim like?' She just kept talking about John Krasinski. I'm like, 'He's great. Can I do this?'" [laughs]



"It's never a bad time to see the little guy win."



This show is all about the little guy succeeding. Was that something you responded to?

It's never a bad time to see the little guy win. [Showrunners] Dan Goor and Luke Del Tredici, they're from *Brooklyn Nine-Nine*, we all met to create this show. This one sounded just so different. So unexplored territory. That's what really excited us all.

Most people try to stay away from snakes. Did you have a fear of them?

I had that fear of snakes for so long, until probably about six or seven years ago. I was with my band and we went to Australia. We went to one of these sanctuaries. I ended up holding a snake on my neck. I was like, wow, that's really nice. We're taught to be afraid of snakes, so it made them an easy villain for this series, but in reality, I'm like, oh, nice."

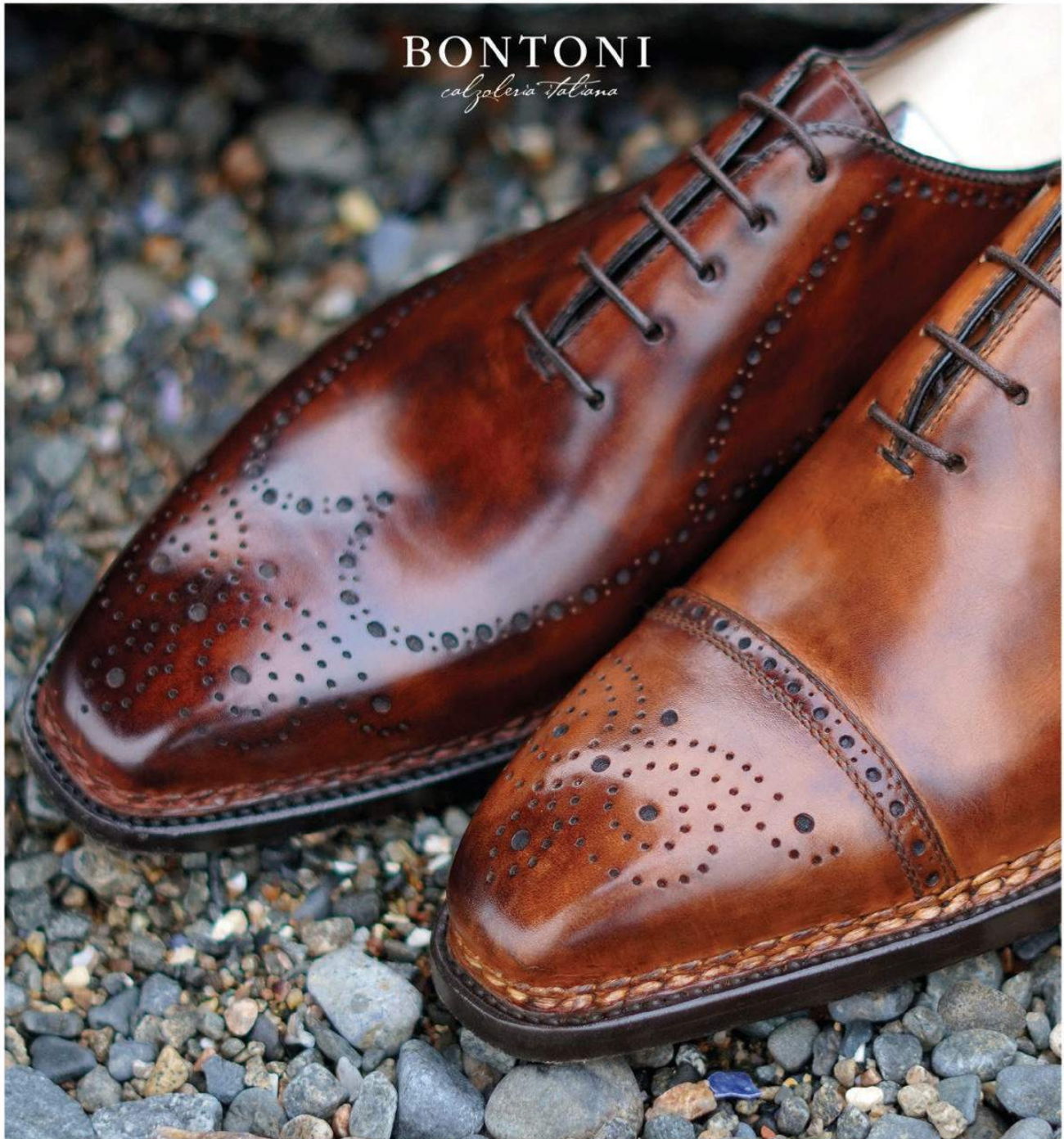
Because of your work, you've kind of become America's best friend. Do you see that in how fans react to you?

I like that, America's friend. I call myself America's teddy bear. Being on *The Office*, I've always said everywhere you go, you have friends.

How do you think fans of *The Office* will respond to *Killing It*?

Office fans are incredible. The whole show is like a friend to somebody. Whether a family member had a disease or a divorce, *The Office* has been there for them. Hopefully they'll get into [*Killing It*].—H. Alan Scott

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