

DANGER ZONE

NEED FOR SPEED

Along with physical skills, respect and acuity are key when moving fast and negotiating the slopes at Olympic competition levels.

Writer — Ester Ledecká

About the writer: Czech Olympic skier and snowboarder Ledecká was born in Prague to a figure-skater mother and musician father and started on the slopes aged just three. She is the first person to win gold in skiing and snowboarding in the same Olympic Games. Ledecká is one of the brand sports partners of Swiss watchmaker Richard Mille.

My earliest ski memory is competing as a three-year-old in the Milka Cup. I remember being motivated by chocolate – I knew that if I won, I would be given a tonne of the stuff. Every time I raced after that, I kept a piece of chocolate at the bottom of my backpack – a prize for myself

when I finished the race. In skiing, there's a special balance between danger and the rush that comes with it. You have to be trained for speed and be physically and mentally ready. Today we usually ski at up to 140km per hour: any mistake at that pace can be fatal. Whenever I switch from snowboarding back to skiing, it's challenging. Everything is faster.

In snowboarding, you face different potential dangers. You might not move so fast (usually at up to about 70km per hour) but you must be aware that just a few metres from you, your opponent is moving at the same speed with a board that's as sharp as a blade. I'll usually just do some straight runs down in my switching routine from snowboarding to skiing, to become accustomed to the pace. Then I'm fine and I start enjoying the speed. Believe me, when you are ready and trained, moving fast on the edge is the greatest feeling in the world.

When you do the sports that I do, it's always dangerous. You need to respect the slope, to be sharp. Respect should be there in every circumstance, on any slope, even if it's really flat. I always respect the mountains and nature. I will never get enough of the feeling of breathing in the fresh mountain air before I start my run or watching the sun rise on my early training sessions. I wish that we all had the reverence and gratefulness for

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these things. After all, they are here – free for us yet priceless.

In skiing and snowboarding, I like to have control. I don't take the risk of trying to push myself over the edge – even without risk, these sports are dangerous enough. I don't believe that risk is something that helps me be at my best consistently. On the other hand, I'm a racer with my whole body and soul. I always do my best and fight with the abilities that I have gained from years of practice.

Time is everything in my sport. Every one-hundredth of a second counts. Whenever I train – even in the summer when I'm preparing for the season and it's the hardest and most exhausting – if it makes me that one-hundredth of a second faster on the slopes, then it's worth it. It hurts that little bit less. I work hard for my dreams and I never give up. ——— κ

Konfekt comment: Danger can inspire deep respect for environments such as the snowy peaks.

TRICK OF THE LIGHT

LIKE A MOTH TO A FLAME

The irresistible allure of candlelight isn't just for Christmas. It improves every situation, bringing romance to less-than-perfect surroundings and joy to doubtful dinner parties.

Writer — Sophie Cecil

About the writer: Cecil pens essays and articles from her candlelit London base, where she writes and consults for luxury fashion and fragrance brands.

It started with my most glamorous aunt, a former Playboy bunny whose semi-subterranean North London flat glowed with candlelight every evening. As a teenager stumbling into adulthood's fearful assembly of secrets and sophistications, I would make pilgrimages to visit her, to make my confessions and to receive welcome instruction. Crossing the rain-slicked winter streets at dusk I'd see the dancing light of a candle set invitingly on her windowsill, held by a burnished brass holder, tied at the base with a yellow satin ribbon. It was a golden beacon beckoning me into a twinkling world of Brahms and Brouilly, and gossip.

There started my lifelong love of candles, and my daily devotion to their soul-soothing glow. As I've trooped gladly on into the freedoms of maturity, I've become increasingly insistent about soft, ambient lighting in general, stubbornly flicking the switch off on anything artificial above head height. At the risk of sounding a touch Blanche DuBois (Tennessee Williams' anti-heroine in *A Streetcar Named Desire*), I've also been known to paint overly harsh lightbulbs with pale-pink nail varnish to bring the Kelvin count closer to a candle's flesh-loving incandescence.

But, back to my true love, the simple candle (and I'm here to argue that this is a pleasure that can and should be simple, rather than the more voluptuous indulgence of expensively scented candles). It was through the tumult of my years at university that my mere fancying of candlelight became a true commitment.

Every rented Bloomsbury interior – no matter how depressingly furnished – could be made homely and even sensuous with the lighting of a few taper candles. Any disparate rabble of fresh, unfamiliar faces could be brought together around a table festooned with candles and my doubtful dinner party cuisine, drawn to the naked flame's mesmerising, primaeval allure. It was perhaps a symbol of hope for greater nourishment and more stable times ahead, like those concentric circles of street candles unifying the huddled masses in Dickens' *A Tale of Two Cities*. Candles anchored us all as we communed, emotionally unmoored, speeding into a new era, a new city and a new life.

Now I'm still passionate about the daily lighting of candles as darkness encroaches, addicted to the point of dependence. And that's because of what candlelight does for my spirit, as much as what it does for my pernicky aesthetic sensibility. The humble lit candle, with its manifold sacred associations of religion, spirituality and ceremony, distils my strictly secular insistence on daily ritual and transformation. On constantly recalibrating my mood and my surroundings. On refusing that the everyday becomes mundane. It's about ushering in an extra, nourishing layer of nostalgia and romance wherever you are, as simply as striking a match.

However, certain inelegant efforts are required to feed this craving away from hearth and home. I always take sturdy glass candleholders and a couple of tapers with me on holiday, which my husband, who likes to pack light, deplores. Even the most sterile hotel rooms on work trips can be transformed with a box of matches and a carry-on-sanctioned 60g travel candle. I confess



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to plundering corner shops in Rio de Janeiro, to buy up devotional candles emblazoned with the Virgin Mary, for transgressively lighting rainy evenings spent playing cards and drinking *cachaça*.

I'm continually enchanted by candlelight's power to transform quotidian moments. For example, my good friend, who is Swiss, lights a candelabra to preside over the magnificent feasts she serves for weekend family breakfast. It's a gesture of joy that magnifies the cosiness of her sheepskin rugs, creamy hot chocolate and warm, toasty brioche. She tells me it's not strictly a cultural practice but I can't help seeing in it the influence of her homeland. Why not recover from the spiritual dislocation of deep sleep in the same way you would a mad, adrenaline-fuelled dash down snowy slopes? Candles are a delightful symbol of healing, gathering and togetherness, even in daylight.

So while I believe that there's no time of intimacy that isn't spiritually enhanced by candlelight, there is a season in which it is of course inextricably bound up, and that is Christmas. I have a box that comes out every December, clinking with practical and impractical receptacles for candles: a collection that is growing year on year. I'm obsessed with those kitsch, white ceramic tealight holders in the shape of Amsterdam's canal houses, inspired by little bottles of genever given away on KLM business class flights.

This takes me full circle to my aunt, who was not only a Playboy bunny but also a flight attendant, albeit on Concorde rather than KLM. That footnote might be totally coincidental but it plays to my conviction that the glittering light glimmering from those tiny windows emanates from a world of eternal whimsy and joy. And it's everyone's right to switch into that mode whenever the mood takes them – not just at Christmas. ——— κ

Konfekt comment: Candlelight isn't just an aesthetic choice. The simple act of lighting a candle can be a near-sacred ritual and one that can be enjoyed as often as you like.

PAST TIMES

CABINET OF CURIOSITIES

A collection of Roman glass and clay lamps handed down through the family is a connection to the past and to those who collected and preserved them for others to appreciate.

Writer — Alexandra de Cramer

About the writer: De Cramer is a journalist based in Istanbul, where she reports on current affairs and culture.

In the 17th century my ancestors arrived from the Austro-Hungarian empire and settled in the Aegean city of Izmir. Collecting artefacts became a family hobby. They went on excursions all over Anatolia, documenting relics, painting landscapes and gathering antiquities. This collection passed from generation to generation and recently made its way to me. Sadly, it is a fraction of what it was. Most items disappeared over the years, given out as gifts, sold or stolen. The biggest share was “got rid of” during the military junta regime of 1980. The then government deemed it illegal to be in possession of antiquities and this was often used as an opportunity to denounce minorities. After his friend was imprisoned for six months, my grandfather, like many Levantines, destroyed the items that he couldn't hide away and scattered the pieces in the Gulf of Izmir.

It wasn't until 1990, when collectorship came under the control of museums, that a wooden box stored in the back corner of a tobacco warehouse was brought back to light. It was bestowed on my mother, an art historian, as a wedding gift and it was in her care until 2022. The 42 items now in my cabinet of curiosities aren't much but they are my heritage.

The expert assigned by the Istanbul Archaeology Museums to record my entry deemed the small terracotta rectangle from the Hittite Empire as the most valuable item. It is a sealed envelope. Inside, it still carries a letter that makes a light clicking sound when rattled. Two lines of cuneiform circle the outer shell, suggesting that the content of the letter is a business agreement of sorts. Then there are a dozen earthy red oil lamps with embossed designs that are a mix of Roman and Hellenistic. My favourite item is an elegant blue-green glass Roman bottle with a long tubular neck. It was probably used to store oils for perfume making. Another rare piece is a cobalt-blue Roman glass bracelet believed to be from Ephesus, decorated with six circles featuring octopus-like images within.

The world we live in today seems unimaginable without museums yet they are a fairly modern concept. Collecting, on the other hand, is not. In her book *Possession*, Erin Thompson traces early collectors as far back as the Kingdom of Pergamon, a Greek state during the Hellenistic period, in the region of Izmir. Nowadays, the idea of ownership is evolving and curators, collectors and governments are responding to new cultural norms. They have inherited a complex legacy. But one way or another, the art of collecting has called out to all of us. It is a child's favourite pastime. My first collection was of garden snails that I kept outside in an open box. As I grew older my passion for things transitioned to more concrete items. Today, collecting for me is a form of guardianship, an act of care. It is a humbling recognition of those who came before us and a remembrance of family. ——— κ

Konfekt comment: Collecting can be a lifelong hobby, a pursuit of beauty, whimsy or something deeper that touches on matters of identity and preservation.

