

THE ART OF LIVING

MARIANKA SWAIN SHARES HER CAPITAL CULTURAL HIGHLIGHTS

PICK OF THE MONTH

GOOD WOOD

"We take plywood for granted – it surrounds us and yet people barely notice it," says Christopher Wilk. As co-curator of a new V&A exhibition and author of an accompanying book, he's aiming to change all of that.

Plywood was once burdened with a bad reputation, notes Christopher. "It's made from veneers or thin slabs of wood glued together at right angles – it's more stable, as opposed to normal wood that splits along the grain.

"But in the 19th century the advent of machine cutting of logs meant the price of veneers lowered and furniture became cheaper, so people looked down on it or were suspicious about what was beneath. That actually brought about the pejorative use of the word 'veneer'."

Plywood's reputation was rescued "by its use in Second World War aircraft, like the British Mosquito bomber – we're displaying a giant fuselage. In fact, the basic form of an airplane today, with a long tapering cylinder in a single shell not requiring any under-structure, was first created in plywood in 1911.

"Because of its success in the war, it became this miracle material – 1940s ads say 'Plywood for peace'. Then when DIY became popular, it was one of the four P's: paint, power tools, plywood and plastic."

The exhibition features an incredible range, from canoes, surfboards and skateboards to furniture, ice skating shelters, Frank Lloyd Wright's Kaufmann Office, and vehicles like a Formula 2 racing car. "I hope it opens up a whole new world and shows the cultural history of plywood, as well as its engineering and design importance.

"It was supplanted temporarily by cheaper material, like MDF, but with the rise of environmentally friendly practice it came back into fashion, as it looks more natural. Then recently we've had the rise of digital cutting of materials, both in factories and makerspaces like fab labs, where anyone can design or customise,

bring in a digital file, and get a product made to their specifications.

"Plywood really suits the global nature of digital design. If you're a company and you want an interior full of new furniture, they'll find you a local manufacturer of plywood, so it cuts out shipping, plus the standards of plywood are global so you get the same material everywhere – and it's a sustainable mode of production.

"The exhibition really tells a story, like you find out Britain was the largest importer of plywood in the world from the end of the 19th century to the 1940s because tea was shipped in collapsible plywood boxes. When I started researching I had no idea where this would lead – it's been very exciting making all these discoveries. I hope visitors can share that too."

PLYWOOD JULY 15-NOVEMBER 12

Victoria and Albert Museum, South Kensington SW7
Free admission
www.vam.ac.uk



Patkau Architects' Skating Shelters, Winnipeg, 2012



DCM chair, designed by Charles and Ray Eames, 1947



Cross-section of a prefabricated house, 1937



Workman carrying a complete Deperdussin monocoque fuselage, Deperdussin factory, Paris, about 1912

DON'T MISS

THE FINAL FRONTIER

The Barbican takes a deep dive into science fiction, with historian and writer Patrick Gyger curating a vast festival-style exhibition. *Into the Unknown* celebrates the boundless imagination of this experimental genre, from space exploration to futuristic and dystopian worlds, bodily mutations, and the realms of human consciousness.

There are 800 works on display – some never before seen in the UK – ranging from books, artwork, games, artefacts and rare film footage to specially commissioned pieces. Highlights include original Jules Verne manuscripts, Soviet visions of space, work by visual effects supremo Ray Harryhausen, spacesuits from blockbusters like *Interstellar*, and an immersive installation from the creators of *Black Mirror*.

INTO THE UNKNOWN UNTIL SEPTEMBER 1

Barbican EC2Y
Adults £14.50, under-14s £5
www.royalacademy.org.uk
www.britishmuseum.org

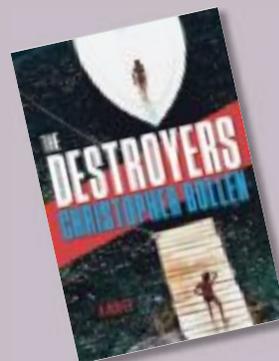


'On the first lunar cosmodrome', Andrey Sokolov and Aleksey Leonov, 1968



Film still from 'Star Wars: Episode IV - A New Hope', 1977

COMMUTER CORNER



Looking for a good summer read? Even those opting for a staycation can join the jet set thanks to Christopher Bollen's *The Destroyers* (£14.99, Kindle £9.99). This stylish thriller luxuriates in high-end Greek island life – shades of Patricia Highsmith (*The Talented Mr Ripley*) and Graham Greene.

Or if you're fed up with dubious summer blockbuster offerings, try free podcast How Did



This *Get Made?* As the name suggests, hosts Paul Scheer, June Diane Raphael and Jason Mantzoukas dissect bewilderingly bad films – from famous flops like *Gigli* and *Catwoman* to the brilliantly named *Stop! Or My Mom Will Shoot* – with both insightful and hilarious results.

How are you living up your commute?
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