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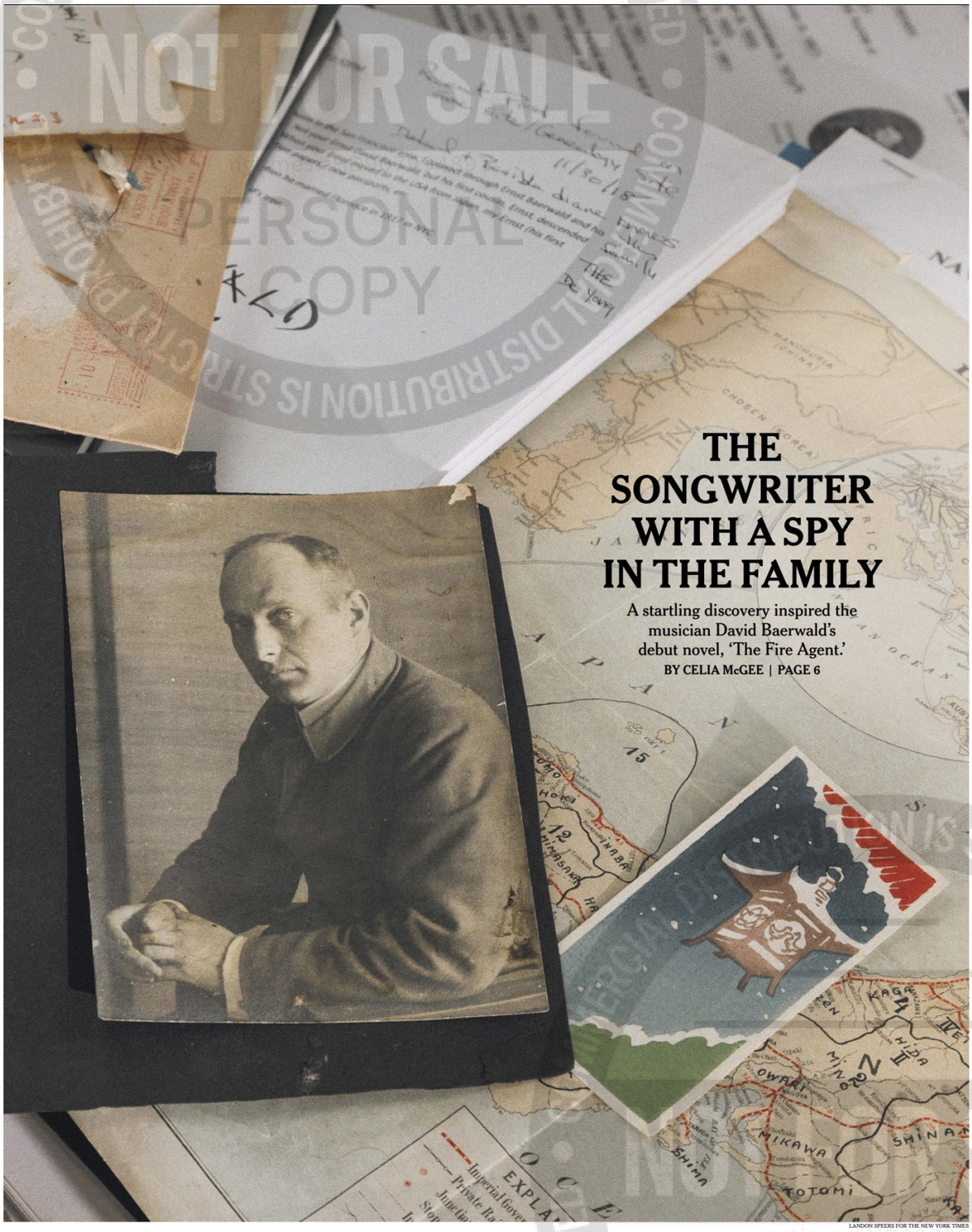

THE SONGWRITER WITH A SPY IN THE FAMILY

A startling discovery inspired the musician David Baerwald's debut novel, 'The Fire Agent.'

BY CELIA McGEE | PAGE 6

LANDON SPEERS FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

David Baerwald's grandfather Ernst Baerwald, above, in a photo David uncovered along with related documents at his childhood home in Los Angeles.

CHRISTOPHER CAPOZZIELLO FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Researchers are looking for ways to help the fastest runners run even faster.

Can a Sneaker Make You Speedier?

Companies are investing in scientific labs in pursuit of a long-distance 'super shoe.'

By CALUM MARSH

In early 2024, Max Grüttner, the head of performance concepts at Puma, was examining the results of tests conducted by the company's research and sports science department at its lab in southern Germany. His team was developing a new long-distance "super shoe," the Fast-R Nitro Elite 3, with a newly formulated thermoplastic polyurethane foam and a spoon-shaped carbon fiber plate. The early lab results looked promising — almost preposterously so.

Each of the athletes Grüttner's team had hooked up to research-grade treadmills showed improved "running economy" — a measure of the amount of metabolic energy used to maintain a consistent speed — while wearing the Nitro Elite 3, compared with other leading shoes. In theory, this meant someone could run a faster or easier marathon wearing Pumas than competing brands, which is the dream of every running-shoe designer. If this claim were validated, it could make the Nitro Elite 3 a must-buy for marathon runners all over the world.

But Puma had to test it at a lab that wasn't affiliated with the brand, so Grüttner mailed prototypes of the Nitro Elite 3 to the Integrated Locomotion Laboratory at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, run by Wouter Hoogkamer, an expert in bio-

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Her Brand of Hospitality Suits East Hampton

Sarah Wetenhall brings a new look to the Hedges Inn, creating a community buzz.

By LAURA NEILSON

LINDSAY MORRIS FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

'She goes to fund-raisers, to events, and truly is a member of the community.'

Certain things are synonymous with summer in the Hamptons: hydrangeas, rosé wine, the sport of farm-stand shopping and a buzzy new hot spot to see and be seen at. Last summer, it was Swifty's at the Hedges Inn in East Hampton, where the wait list exceeded 1,300 names on a single night.

The restaurant is an outpost of the popular eatery at the Colony Hotel in Palm Beach, Fla. Its owners, Sarah Wetenhall and her husband, Andrew, bought the Hedges last year. Now the stately white clapboard inn itself, along with a revamped Swifty's, has become the reservation to book.

"It's definitely the buzziest opening out east this summer," said Lara Shriftman, a public relations consultant who has spent the past 25 summers in the Hamptons. After a punishingly long winter that has driven the clamor for summer to a near fever pitch, the allure of a new luxury space that's a short walk — or a two-minute drive in the inn's vintage, powder pink Land Rover — from Main Beach is undeniable. Several of Shriftman's friends have already booked stays in one of the inn's 12 rooms, she said.

Between the two hotel properties, Wetenhall now has 103 guest rooms to her name — a vast contrast from when she arrived in New York nearly 30 years ago and lived in a room she rented in dormitory-style housing provided by the Ladies Christian Union.

Now Wetenhall, 49, is the chief executive and the smiling public face behind the Hedges and the pink Colony Hotel, which she and her husband (who maintains a lower profile because of his full-time work as an investment banker) acquired in 2016. They transformed the Colony from an elegant, if sleepy, grande dame that once hosted John F. Kennedy and the Duke and Duchess of Windsor into an award-winning local fixture with a devoted flock of well-heeled guests from the worlds of fashion, design and high society.

"It defines Palm Beach," said Wes Gordon, the creative director at Carolina Herrera and a frequent guest at the Colony. "It really feels like a club or a friend's home. It has a sense of playfulness and fun."

These days, as independent hotels shrink in market share to chain-affiliated properties, hoteliers like André Balazs and Ian Schrager, cultural impresarios known for their exclusive properties, outsize personas and celebrity connections, seem like relics from another era. Wetenhall's particular calling card is her approachability and friendly rapport with guests and locals.

When Caroline Turnipseed, who owns a consulting group for companies founded by women, moved from Manhattan to Palm Beach two years ago, connecting with professional peers was top of mind. Wetenhall's name kept coming up. "She goes to fund-raisers, to events, and truly is a member of the community," she said.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY GLEN ALLSOP

LESLEY UNRUH

Sarah Wetenhall, top, at the reimagined Hedges Inn in East Hampton, N.Y., which she owns with her husband, Andrew Wetenhall. The couple also own the Colony Hotel in Palm Beach, Fla., above, which the Wetenhalls took over in 2016. At far left are interior and exterior details of the Hedges Inn.

That good will made Wetenhall something of an East Hampton homecoming queen when news spread in early 2025 that she had bought the Hedges Inn. Especially given that two years ago, a very different buyer had designs on the property: Scott Sartiano of Zero Bond sought to turn it into an East End outpost of his sceney private club in Lower Manhattan.

Locals, appalled over the potential of idling cars, late-night noise and gangs of paparazzi trailing the club's celebrity guests, wouldn't have it.

"That's why we went to battle against Zero Bond," Jerry Larson, East Hampton's mayor, said at his office. "Neighbors were very concerned about it — rightfully so." In June 2024, the town passed legislation banning "members only" nightlife spots from operating between 11 p.m. and 5 a.m., effectively torpedoing the plan.

The Wetenhalls, who owned a house not far from the Hedges for 15 years before moving to nearby Sag Harbor in 2021, have longstanding ties to the community. "We introduced ourselves, and we tried to come in with care and effectively communicate our goals," Wetenhall explained over lunch at Tutto Caffe in East Hampton. Petite and blond, she was dressed discreetly in jeans and a white button-down — a contrast to the bright colors and floral patterns she tends to favor in Palm Beach.

She said they courted the community early — meeting local leaders, hosting preview dinners and opening the doors to neighbors and media — to build trust and explain their plans.

Wetenhall praised other family-owned properties like Passalacqua on Lake Como in Italy and Blackberry Farm in Tennessee for their service models despite very different aesthetics. "Ironically enough, they tend to be female-led," she said. "They offer the type of hospitality that speaks to me."

When the Wetenhalls acquired the Colony in 2016, they were novices in hotel operations. "We knew next to nothing, other than having been guests at that property," she said.

A native of Kansas City, Mo., Wetenhall came to New York in 1998 to pursue fashion. "I would have probably taken anything, just to get my foot in the door," she recalled. She was hired as a receptionist at Calvin Klein, and then quickly landed in the public relations department. She went on to work at the marketing firm Harrison & Shriftman, where Lara Shriftman was her boss, followed by stints at Hugo Boss and Dolce & Gabbana. Shriftman recalled how, even then, Wetenhall's "likable" nature was an asset. "She was a natural P.R. person in terms of how she connected with people," she said.

Occasionally she and Andrew Wetenhall, then her boyfriend, traveled to Palm Beach to visit his father, a former co-owner of the Colony Hotel, who still lived there in one of the apartments. When the opportunity to buy the hotel arose in 2016, Wetenhall's father persuaded the pair to take the leap. "It was terrifying," she said.

Wetenhall hired Susan Ricci, a hotel management expert, to come on board as a consultant and teach her the ins and outs of the business. Throughout her career, Ricci had worked with only a few female hotel owners.

"It was wonderful to see a woman in that role, who I think sees things a little differently," she said. "She was very collaborative, and not all hotel owners are."

It was a notable coup when, in 2019, Wetenhall revived the recently shuttered, clubby Upper East Side restaurant Swifty's in the form of a pop-up at the Colony, figuring it would attract those familiar with the original. It worked, and Swifty's is now at the hotel permanently. When travel stalled during the pandemic, Wetenhall turned the Colony into a bastion for the socially starved with weekly poolside events, many of which have endured.

In 2024, the Colony was named Florida's No. 1 hotel by Condé Nast Traveler.

When the Hedges reopens next week, it will have a new look by the designer David Netto. Upstairs, the 12 uniquely designed guest rooms have a classic New England sensibility — toile wallpaper and matching curtains, quilted coverlets and burled walnut furniture — that complements the uneven floors and slanted ceilings characteristic of many a centuries-old house. The objective was to create a place that looked as if it had always been there, Netto said. Nightly rates range from $800 to $3,000.

Assuming that some of the same guests who winter in Palm Beach summer in the Hamptons — and by Wetenhall's estimation, that's a lot — she's tasked Bruce Seigel, the general manager of the Colony, and a legion of 60 other employees from the hotel to oversee the inn's opening season.

"That's a major part of Sarah's genius," Seigel said. "When you walk into the restaurant, you see Joe or Mary, the server you had in Palm Beach. They know you like your turkey club without mayo, and it doesn't have to be asked."

For her part, Wetenhall is excited to offer her particular brand of hospitality at a smaller property.

"We're a 12-room hotel," she said. "You know where everyone is on campus, you know what they're doing. You can really hold everyone in the palm of your hand."