

CLEAN fight

THE PROFITABLE CLEAN-LIVING MOVEMENT DOMINATES MODERN LIFE. BUT IS IT HEALTHY, ASKS CHRISTA D'SOUZA

Cast your mind back to the early Noughties, if you can. The days when Moby was the only vegan, yeast was the enemy and all the milk at Starbucks came from cows. A time before coconut oil. And what about coconut water? At the last count we had five large cartons in our kitchen cupboard. Not because anyone is particularly fond of it, but because in this era of clean eating, it has become a staple. Which worries me slightly. How can there possibly be enough in the world to sustain the demand? Will coconuts, thanks to “Deliciously” Ella Mills and the Hemsley sisters, become

the new cod? And whither, for that matter, the sweet potato? Do brownies even get made without them any more?

The cult of clean. If you haven't succumbed, hats off to you. The movement, for want of a better word, has been around for a while, but never before has it felt this pervasive (thanks, Gwyneth, by the way, for teaching us how to steam-clean our lady parts). “Low fat”, “organic”, “biodynamic” – they are nothing compared with the ruthlessly binary power of “clean”. If you're not clean, you're dirty, right?

No wonder the word has such terrific branding clout. From tequila to coffee,

from fragrance to memes (yes, they're a thing, with “hecking” and “dang” in place of swearwords), there's nothing to which “clean” cannot be profitably tacked. Even weed. Actually, especially weed, now it's gone legit in parts of the USA. Take Buds & Roses in California, where cannabis is grown without synthetic pesticides or animal products. Or Honest Marijuana from Colorado, grown with the help of freeze-dried coconut water, aloe vera and aerated worm-cast tea. Both are approved by Clean Green, “the number-one certifier nationwide for cannabis cultivated using sustainable, natural and organically-based practices”, as its website proclaims.

The race to be cleaner continues apace with some unlikely products. Take “clean” bacon, sold through the American sandwich-shop chain Panera Bread – recently bought out by the owners of Krispy Kreme, and doubtless on its way to us. It has the ingredient count of bacon down to six: pork, water, sea salt, celery powder and thyme extract, which supposedly gives it a pleasant, woody taste. The pigs are reared without antibiotics or gestation crates, and fast turnover (115 million slices served in 2015) means there's no need to use nitrates to cure the meat.

But is our obsession with “clean” making us healthier? It isn't making us thinner, as anyone with a thing for Deliciously Ella's vegan, gluten-free, sugar-free bircher muesli (323 more calories per serving than a Starbucks cheesecake muffin) knows.

“We survived as a species for thousands of years before ‘clean’ came along,” says Pierre Chandon, a professor of marketing at Insead-Sorbonne. “We are omnivores, after all. From algae to insects to animal fat, we can eat almost everything – great from an evolutionary point of view, but hard for us as eaters

to know what is best. As conscious beings, we need rules to navigate. Eating ‘clean’ gives us the semblance of autonomy.” In fact, he says, it doesn't really mean anything. “Marketers aren't lying when they claim that, say, bacon is gluten-free, but the overriding thing to remember >



From smoothies to skincare, there's nothing to which “clean” cannot be tacked

is that truly clean food, like fruit and vegetables, need make no claims at all."

Cleanliness has always been next to godliness, but in a world full of murky politics and diesel fumes, the idea of keeping ourselves and our homes pure makes perfect Freudian sense. "Mental and physical health are no longer seen as separate disciplines," says Sarah Housley, a lifestyle trend forecaster at WGSN. "The belief now is that purifying your home or body can have a positive effect on your mind, your spirit or your mood. This is what we're buying into. If the world is out of control, what can I personally control? Well, I can control what I eat and what I surround myself with." She sees an evolution from clean eating to clean living, as consumers increasingly search for toxin-free products, buy air purifiers to reduce allergens and even choose wall or floor tiles that claim to reduce bacteria and toxins in the air.

But what of the clutter one accumulates over the years? How do all those characters in Scandi-noir box sets get by on so little stuff? As one who is by nature messy, I cling to that famous quote of Einstein's: "If a cluttered desk is a sign of a cluttered mind, of what, then, is an empty desk a sign?"

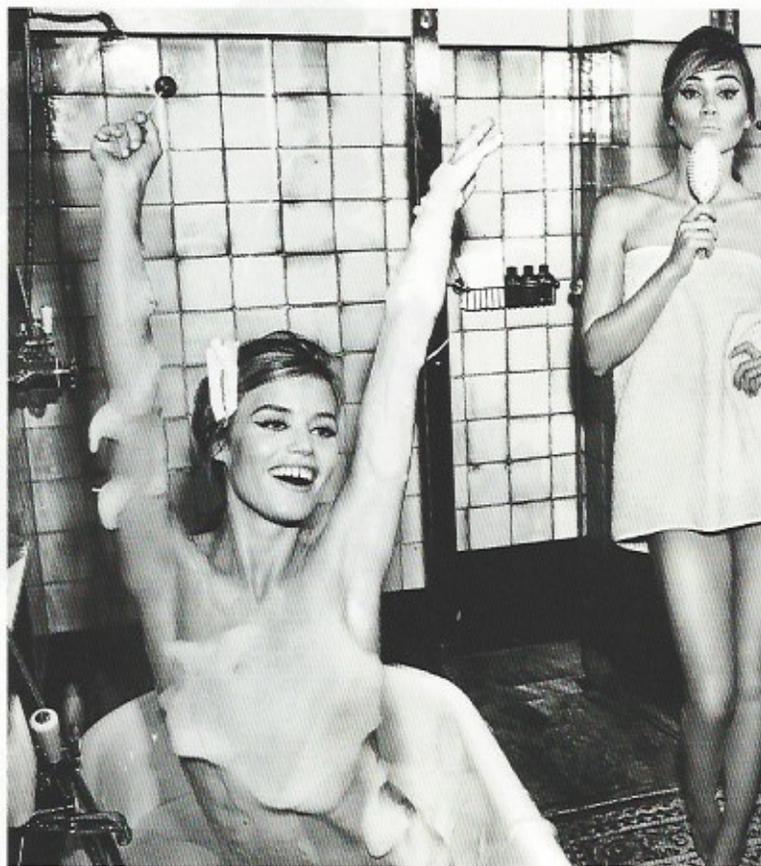
"A friend asked me what we actually do with our clutter, and I told her we store it in our minds," says Bodil Bjerkvik Blain, former model and co-founder of the organic, ethical coffee brand Cru Kafe, who lives in west London with her two children. She's just returned from her log cabin in Molde, on the remote north-west shore of Norway, where she grew up, and she's off to New York to promote the latest addition to her line: gluten-free coffee flour made from the discarded husks of the beans. With more iron per gram than spinach and less fat per gram than coconut flour, it will, she hopes, be the new kale.

Clean, sparse, stripped down, she says, is in her DNA. "As a child, it really was all about picking berries and raking crabs and eating plain boiled fish and the bread my mother made fresh that day. It was a ridiculously 'clean' upbringing – Amish, almost – but Norwegians are like that. It's to do with our Lutheran heritage. It doesn't matter how much money you have, the aim is to be humble and dignified."

actually, it has long been aspirational to own less stuff. Or to be seen to. Perhaps the point of large, open-plan, hyper-clean spaces devoid of clutter is to show the world you have the money for a round-the-clock cleaner? And that possessions don't matter as much as "experiences". The things we do hold on to, meanwhile, have to mean something to us – they have to "spark joy", as Marie Kondo, the queen of decluttering, would say. If material goods aren't to be fetishised any more, the implicit message is that we should fetishise the act of caring for them.

"Cleaning has become a ritual, a way to slow down and live in the present, to be mindful of your actions," says Housley. "As a result, the packaging, branding and scent of cleaning products have become more luxurious."

In other words, if ever there were a time to get in touch with your inner Mrs Mop, it's now. Kitchen sinks and laundry rooms are the new shrines of cool, with designers such as Tom Dixon, whose new line of household products is titled Washing!, getting in on the act. Ditto German brand L'Eaundry, which has come out with perfumed detergent in what look like heavy glass scent bottles. Taking dry-cleaning to the next level is Blanc, a London company using biodegradable water-based detergents that recognise individual stains' pH levels in specially designed washing machines. On the other side of the Atlantic is The Laundress, a brand of eco-friendly cleaning products developed by two Cornell graduates, which has its own Manhattan boutique.



Scrubs up nicely: the "cult of clean" has infiltrated everything from Scandi interiors, *below left*, to recipes from the likes of Deliciously Ella. *right*

The vogue for squeaky-clean homes opens up all sorts of avenues. What about a Space NK dedicated to household products? Washing-up liquid that smells of lime, basil and mandarin? Or scent dressed up like cleaning product? Moschino's Fresh Couture eau de toilette comes in a mini cleaning-spray-style bottle, complete with plastic pump. How Andy Warhol would have approved. And then – be still my beating heart – there are actual white goods. Such as the Fifties-style washer-dryer I spied in Samsung 837 (the brand's interactive "un-store" in New York's Meatpacking District) – a thing of such beauty I might ask for one for my next birthday instead of a frock.

Yet for anyone brought up in the Seventies like me, with a hippy-dippy mother like mine, there was something dodgy, twee – dare I say it, *suburban* – about being cleanliness-obsessed. And in truth, there's a big difference between how clean we profess to be and how clean we actually are. In a 2014 survey of more than 2,000 women, it was found that four out of five of us don't shower every day; a third admitted they could go a whopping three days without washing their bodies. People gasp when I tell them I shampoo my hair only every 10 days or so, but as any hairdresser will tell you, dirty hair is easier to style than clean, and washing it too often not only makes it greasy



MARIO TESTINO, ZOO HOME, GETTY, CLARE WINFIELD FROM DELICIOUSLY ELLA WITH FRIENDS, BY ELLA MILLS (YELLOW KITE)



Garden with Ben Milligan, the dashing founder of the consultancy Citadelle Environmental Health, about to discover how much I really care about being clean. He has with him a portable contraption called a luminometer with a packet of special swabs that pick up traces of a molecule called adenosine triphosphate. It's basically a dirt detector. The meter can put a precise number on how clean something is; over 20 is a fail. He passes the swab over the glass table, which looks

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sparkling and grime-free: 162. A big, big fail. Then he squirts some UV "glitterbug" gel on my hands and tells me to wash them. Well. My hands look like the ceiling at a planetarium: my

faster, but strips it of natural oils. The test, apparently, of properly loving a person is if you prefer their hair unwashed to washed. Clean in its most literal sense doesn't always win out.

Washing less, eating your salad off your dirty dinner plate, not laundering napkins the moment they get stained – from an ecological point of view these are a much truer definition of clean. But then, what means clean for you may not mean clean for me. The beauty of the word is that because it cannot be certified, like "organic" or "biodynamic", it means nothing and everything at the same time. Daily visits to a communal sweat lodge (the latest thing in LA) may do it for some of us; never pressing the ground-floor button in a lift (on the basis that it's the most-touched button) may do it for others. It reportedly does it for Donald Trump, the biggest mysophobe of all. But then in a culture that normalises, even celebrates, OCD-like behaviour, is that so weird? So what if you eat your Pret lunch with an M&S fork because they come individually sealed in cellophane? Or wash bagged salad? Or hold your breath if someone blows their nose as they pass you on the street? And what of loo-door handles? It's all very well washing your hands after going, but what about getting out of there? On and on it can go.

I'm sitting in the small boardroom of the office I work out of in Covent

bacteria in our gastrointestinal tracts that support our immune systems) could be killing us. Modern plagues such as obesity, diabetes and even bowel cancer have all been linked to antibiotic overuse. New research from Bristol University and Imperial College London suggests up to half of children are resistant to some routinely used antibiotics. American children reportedly take approximately 17 courses of antibiotics by the age of 20. By 2050, 300 million people will be killed by bacterial resistance according to a recent report by *Scientific American*.

Not to put too fine a point on it, we need to get down and dirty, reacquaint ourselves with what scientists call our "old friends": the bacteria that have lived within us for thousands of years. Hence the interest in the trend of swabbing babies delivered by caesarean with "good" vaginal bacteria from the mother and, yes, the growing popularity of "faecal microbiota transplants". Then there are the "helminth hackers", sufferers from inflammatory bowel disease who experiment on themselves by consuming worm eggs (\$1,500 for a three-month dose from a company in Thailand, according to one follower).

The backlash against clean is already in full swing, as anyone who saw the BBC documentary *Clean Eating: The Dirty Truth* will know. Even KFC has got on the bandwagon, launching its Louisiana Dirty Burger by enlisting the services of spoof Instagrammer Figgy Poppleton Rice to construct a #cleaneating burger, with a head of cauliflower for the bap, boiled chicken for the "patty" and ice-chip relish. The pursuit of flawlessness, bred by the digital world, has brought us oleophobic touchscreens, immaculate selfies and pitch-perfect sound, not to mention the impending threat of AI. A corrective is surely due. It's no coincidence that live music, live performance, improvisation – all that is human and therefore by definition fallible – is in the ascendancy.

It seems unlikely that the smell of laundry cupboard will turn us on indefinitely. Frédéric Malle's new scent for bed linen, *Dans Mon Lit*, is all musk and rosewater, not starch. Then there's Swedish brand Tangent GC, with its juniper-scented Gin & Tonic detergent. *Vodka, tignanello...* the possibilities are endless. How about *Eau de Strongbow*, for that truly authentic, human, worn-in vibe? The cult of grubby – now there's a thing. ■



nail beds, thumbs, the webbing between my fingers are teeming with dayglo dots.

Did we shake hands when we met? I'm sure we didn't. Though Milligan doesn't come across at all Health & Safety, you'd want to give your kitchen a good going-over before he came for supper. "Yes," he sighs, "I have that effect. And no, shaking hands does not come naturally." He admits that neither he nor anyone working for him opens a door with their bare hand. "You can tell by the pile of tissues on the floor by the office doors."

Meanwhile, mounting evidence suggests being too clean (not just avoiding germs, but getting rid of the