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Contents in This Issue

Why Is Our Health Care System Going Down the Drain And No One Seems to Care?
Your Phone's Dirty Little Secret
How COVID-19 Shaped My View on Neurosurgery: A Medical Student's Insight
Third Quarter 2024 Market and Economic Review
Why EHRS Are Ruining Health Care: A Doctor's Shocking Truth
Best Homemade Apple Cider Recipe
How One Food Truck Saved a Chaotic Hospital Shift
Top Luxury Fall Interior Design Trends for 2024: Transform Your Space with Elegance
The Unlikely Friendship Between a Young Doctor And An Elderly Scholar
Age & Innocence
A Fabulous Fall Weekend in Sonoma Wine Country



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Why Is Our Health Care System Going Down the Drain And No One Seems to Care?

By Michele Luckenbaugh



Since the onset of COVID-19, I've noticed a surge in the number of urgent care centers, similar to the proliferation of convenience stores like Wawa or Dunkin' Donuts. While this in itself is not necessarily negative, the problem arises when patients visit these centers for urgent medical issues and then receive no follow-up care from their primary care providers. This lack of continuity in care hinders efforts to address underlying health issues and prevent potential future problems, in addition to eroding the relationship of trust.

I believe this situation has been exacerbated by the burnout experienced by health care professionals during the pandemic. Many experienced practitioners chose to retire, leaving a significant gap in available care. Furthermore, administrative boards within corporate health systems have often disregarded staff requests for improved working conditions, contributing to the overall strain on health care professionals.

As a result, patients are facing significant challenges in accessing primary care. Waiting times to see a doctor or specialist have increased to two to three months and, in some cases, even longer. Practices are attempting to cope with the shortage of physicians by relying more on nurse practitioners. While nurse practitioners play a valuable role in health care, it's misleading for patients to believe that they are speaking with medical doctors when arranging appointments.

Amidst all these challenges in patient care, corporate health systems continue to thrive, acquiring independent practices and investing in extensive construction projects for high-cost procedures. I am left questioning the prioritization of these endeavors over adequate staffing and supporting existing facilities.

I appreciate the need for progress and expansion in health care, but it is essential to ensure that current facilities are fully staffed and that existing staff are supported in their critical roles. Patients and health care professionals are the lifeblood of the system, and their well-being should take precedence over grandiose construction projects.

I am open to hearing any insights or solutions to these challenges. Until then, I remain one of many frustrated patients who feel lost in a health care system that resembles a business transaction rather than a place of healing and care.

Michele Luckenbaugh is a patient advocate.



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- 2** If for some reason you decide to text me during a game, it had better be to ask me "Did you see that?" to which I will always respond "What the heck do you think?!?"
- 3** If someone is dying call 911 before you call me because they'll probably answer and I won't.
- 4** if someone has already died, do not call me there's obviously nothing I can do, And there's no need for both of us to be sad at the same time.
- 5** If you're confused about my availability until February please check back to rule #1

Your Phone's Dirty Little Secret

By Kim Komando



True or false: If your phone's got all four reception bars lit up and it's displaying the 5G symbol, you've got A+ service.

The answer? False. When you see "5G," all it means is there are 5G connections *nearby*. Whether you're on that network is another story. I know, eye roll. Cell service bars don't mean much, either.

So, should we stop waving our phones in the air to try to get a better connection? I've got the inside scoop.

The 5G hype

The Washington Post just wrote a great piece about the [5G indicator on your phone](#). Even when you see 5G, you might *really* be connected to 4G or LTE. Yes, your phone will still work perfectly fine.

When you start doing something more intensive on your phone, though, like making a video call or playing an online game, your wireless network may automatically switch you to 5G for a better experience.

How do you know you're really on 5G? Look for the letters next to the 5G icon. On Verizon, 5G UW means you're likely connected to a 5G network. On T-Mobile, it'll show up as 5G UC. AT&T displays 5G E, but that just means you're close to a network.

Even the alphabet soup doesn't guarantee your connection is supercharged.

Barhopping

If walking around looking for reception bars isn't the solution, what is? Some of the ol' free standbys still work.

- **Keep your phone's Wi-Fi calling option on.** This way, you'll switch over to known, saved internet networks (like work and home) automatically for calls, if they're within range. On an iPhone, open **Settings**, then scroll and tap **Cellular > Wi-Fi Calling**. Toggle **on** the button next to **Wi-Fi Calling**. On an Android, open the **Phone app**, then tap **More** (or the **three-dot icon**) to open the menu. Tap **Settings** and select **Wi-Fi calling**. If you don't see the option, your carrier may not support it, or the steps may vary on your phone.
- **Look around.** Some building materials can function like a faraday cage, killing your connection. If you're inside, get closer to a window or go outside. Go upstairs if you're on a lower level.
- **Try a cellphone tower search site.** [CellMapper](#) is easy to use and has a ton of filtering options. Set your country, provider and network speed, then enter your address in the **Location Search** field. Hit **Enter** and you'll see the closest cell towers.

By the way, you may notice you get better cell service in the winter, when all the trees are bare. I know, you can't make the leaves fall, but this is good to know!

Boost your signal

Let's say your home is a cellular dead zone. A booster works in any location with an existing cell signal that needs amplification. They're relatively easy to use and install, but they can be a little pricey, given they contain cellular radios.

One popular option is the [weBoost Home Boost signal kit](#). It works with all U.S. carriers, including AT&T, T-Mobile, Verizon and Straight Talk. You simply connect the booster to an outdoor antenna.

At 60 dBm max gain, the booster won't interrupt carriers' signals to and from the cell tower. With 20 dBm in uplink-output power and 12 dBm in downlink-output power, the booster easily reaches cellphone towers.

Alternatively, you can purchase a microcell from your carrier. It uses your internet connection to establish a better cellular connection. Make sure you have a strong internet line before getting one or you're flushing away money.

Set it and forget it

One last thing: Let your phone automatically choose 5G when you need it. To enable this:

- On iPhone, open **Settings > Cellular > Cellular Data Options > Voice & Data > 5G Auto**.
- On Android phones, the process varies. Search your settings for "mobile network" and look for an "auto-connect" option. You can also visit your wireless provider's website for instructions. Here are T-Mobile's [instructions](#) for Samsung phones.

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How COVID-19 Shaped My View on Neurosurgery: A Medical Student's Insight

By Mustafa Farooq

The COVID-19 pandemic has left an indelible mark on every aspect of health care, including neurosurgery. As a fourth-year medical student navigating my neurosurgical rotations during this unprecedented time, I experienced firsthand how the pandemic reshaped our approach to medical education, patient care, and surgical practice. This period has been transformative, challenging my understanding of neurosurgery and reinforcing the need for adaptability and resilience in the face of unforeseen challenges.



Before the pandemic, my neurosurgical training was centered around hands-on experiences—spending hours in the operating room, closely observing and assisting with complex cases, and engaging in face-to-face discussions with mentors. However, when COVID-19 hit, everything changed. Elective surgeries were postponed, in-person learning was restricted, and the traditional model of surgical education was upended.

This abrupt shift forced me to adapt quickly. My learning environment transformed from the physical space of a bustling operating room to virtual case discussions and online lectures. Initially, I worried that the quality of my education would suffer without the immersive, hands-on experience I had anticipated. Yet, I soon realized that this new reality offered unexpected opportunities for growth.

The use of virtual platforms enabled me to attend lectures and case discussions led by neurosurgeons from around the world, something that would have been unimaginable before the pandemic. I gained exposure to diverse surgical perspectives and techniques, which broadened my understanding of the field. I learned to be resourceful in acquiring knowledge, leveraging online tools, and reaching out to mentors remotely for guidance and support.

The pandemic also led to a significant shift in patient care priorities. Hospitals had to focus on urgent and emergency surgeries, often deferring elective cases to conserve resources and minimize the risk of infection. This taught me a great deal about triaging care and what it means to provide patient-centered care in times of crisis. I saw firsthand how neurosurgical teams adapted to these constraints, finding innovative ways to deliver care while minimizing risk.

Telemedicine emerged as a critical tool, enabling neurosurgeons to conduct virtual consultations, follow-ups, and preoperative assessments. For many patients, particularly those in rural or underserved areas, telemedicine offered unprecedented access to specialized neurosurgical care. This experience reshaped my understanding of what is possible in neurosurgery. While there are certainly challenges to practicing virtually, the benefits of increased access and continuity of care were undeniable.

Witnessing the adaptability and resilience of neurosurgeons during the pandemic gave me a deeper appreciation for the field and reinforced my desire to pursue this specialty. I learned that neurosurgery is not just about mastering complex procedures; it is about remaining flexible, creative, and patient-focused, even under the most challenging circumstances.

COVID-19 has shown us that the future of neurosurgery will require more than technical skill alone. It will demand an ability to adapt quickly, think innovatively, and stay committed to delivering the best possible care in the face of adversity. As I prepare to embark on my journey into neurosurgery, I am inspired by the resilience of those who have navigated this difficult period and am determined to carry those lessons forward into my own practice.

The pandemic has reshaped my perspective on what it means to be a neurosurgeon, highlighting the importance of adaptability and continuous learning. I believe that these qualities will not only help us navigate future crises but will also improve the care we provide to patients in all circumstances. For me, this experience has underscored that, while we cannot always control the challenges we face, we can control how we respond to them—and in doing so, continue to grow and evolve as both professionals and individuals.

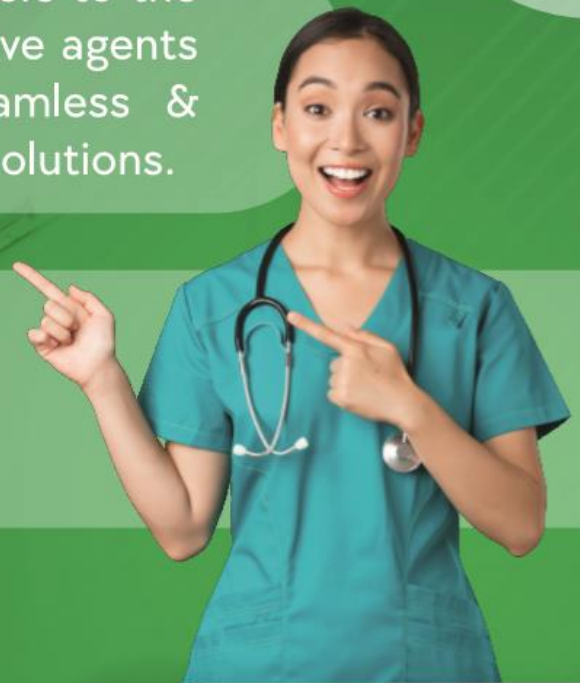
Mustafa Farooq is a medical student with a strong interest in neurosurgery. He focuses on innovative surgical techniques and the application of new technologies in brain tumor management. He is dedicated to advancing patient care through research in areas such as advanced neuroimaging, minimally invasive surgery, and the integration of artificial intelligence in neurosurgical practice. He can be reached on X [@mustafa_frq](#).

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Third Quarter 2024 Market and Economic Review

Courtesy of slaughterinvest.com

For the first time since the first quarter of 2022, there's a different economic story to tell than counter-inflationary tactics – mostly raised or steadied interest rates by the Federal Reserve. On the contrary, following the Fed's September meeting, Chair Jerome Powell announced the Fed's first rate reduction in years, acknowledging that the inflationary rate is comfortably heading towards their target of 2.0 percent.



Though a rate reduction was very much expected, the Fed's decision to shave the rate by a ½-point (when most expected a ¼-point change) did create some buzz across all the media channels. It marked just the fourth period in the past 24 years the Fed cut its rate by that margin. The others occurred in 2001-2003 (during the dot-com bust and 9/11), 2007-2008 (during the financial crisis and housing market crash), and 2020 (triggered by the global covid pandemic). While the media may have reacted a little wide-eyed at the ½-point reduction, the markets took the news in stride and continued a fairly steady growth pattern for the quarter, with an exception in early August, which we'll discuss in more detail shortly.

For the most part, there wasn't much second-guessing from the markets and economists on the ½-point reduction because many have called for the Fed to ease up on its inflationary brake handle for months. And, on the global stage, the U.S. monetary policy has been a little more reserved compared to what some other countries have already done, particularly in Europe where many of the larger economies are reporting inflation in the range of 2.2% and have started cutting rates months ago. U.S. job reports have been healthy for much of the year, and consumer spending and retail sales were also positive, closing out the quarter.

As mentioned above, there was a blip in the markets at the start of August that most people didn't even notice because of how quickly it resolved itself. On August 5, the Tokyo Stock Exchange (Nikkei) plummeted close to 13% and created shockwaves in markets worldwide. Within hours, Japan's markets began course-correcting and were mostly recovered within a week. While economic talking heads kept the story alive for the rest of the week, mainstream media mostly ignored the entire incident. However, the event left global markets looking like a seismograph registering a brief earthquake that no one felt. It was an unusual episode worth discussing as an example of why short-term trading can have painful outcomes.

In the U.S., some of the impact was coincidental in timing. At the tail-end of the prior week, The U.S. Department of Labor and Statistics released a softer-than-expected jobs report. Additionally, news was circulating that Warren Buffett was selling off a significant portion of his Apple holdings, which helped position our markets for an overreaction to virtually any added negative news.

The more global element to the August market nosedive was due to a trading practice called Carry Trades. Essentially, these are large banks, financial institutions, hedge funds, etc., borrowing money in a currency with very low interest rates and then investing those funds in currencies with larger yields. It's a practice that's been around for many years but gains popularity when volatility is relatively steady. In this case, Japan's economy had been battling deflation for many years with essentially a 0.0-percent interest rate (and even

negative interest rates earlier this year), making it a favored currency for borrowers. When Japan announced a ¼-point rate increase (an effort to boost the declining yen) at the same time the U.S. was releasing news that made our economy appear weaker than expected, these Carry Trade holders suddenly had cause for alarm. Subsequently, they began rapidly unwinding their Carry Trades and sent the Nikkei index into its most significant nosedive since 1987. The impact was much less significant in other countries but still left a noticeable imprint on virtually everyone's charts.

What Does A ½-Point Interest Rate Drop Mean?

For individuals, a ½-point change in interest doesn't really mean that much. Mortgages and car loans get a little easier to handle, but not significantly so. And interest changes on credit card debt are even less affected. But in the business world, there can be a genuine benefit for companies borrowing large sums of money with incremental interest reductions, especially when the consensus is that those rates will continue to come down over the next few quarters.

Additionally, for companies that have cash available, those CFOs are facing new decisions to make. As interest rates rose over the past couple of years, cash and bonds made a lot of sense to get a decent return with low risk. It also provided security if the economy dipped into recession.

With interest rates dropping, those same CFOs must now decide where their best investments are. Do you buy bonds with locked-in rates? Do you buy back stocks of your own company? Do you make other capital expenditure investments? Effectively, the Fed's decision to lower rates is a signal to cash-infused companies to start planning new strategies.

A Shift for Markets

Generally speaking, U.S. markets experienced growth for the third quarter, but not without some turbulence. Both small (Russell 2000 index) and large (S&P 500) company indexes posted positive numbers, but the paths were quite different than prior quarters this year. The past few months experienced much more volatility, highlighted by the events experienced in the first week of August discussed above.

For much of the past couple of years, as we've fought through a very stubborn inflationary environment, investors have been cautious, and the very largest stocks have been the primary beneficiaries. The 'Magnificent 7' stocks, which dominate the S&P 500, saw much less growth for the quarter as most were either flat or slightly down by the end of September. Meta was the only member of the group to see significant gains. However, the index still grew by over 4.5% for the quarter, meaning the smaller companies that make up the remainder of the directory captured much more interest from investors.

Similarly, the Russell 2000, which was mostly flat for the first 6 months of the year, is now up 11.02 percent through three quarters; all of that growth coming in the past 3 months.

Perspective

The past quarter has served up some excellent reminders that the best path to investment success is through a well-diversified strategy with long-term goals in mind. All investment opportunities come with risk, and all stock markets experience volatility. At times, that volatility seems to come out of left field.



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Mortgage

Why EHRs Are Ruining Health Care: A Doctor's Shocking Truth

By Amy Walsh, MD

I've been waiting for years to write this. Literally, years.

Ever since 2014, when I was required to attend 30+ hours of unpaid training for this new EHR, I knew this post would be written. I did have the option of 10 additional unpaid training hours to become a "gold star super user." That status would have allowed me to teach every confused doctor in our office how to log in and write their notes. Thanks, but no thanks.

I remember asking administrators, "Why do we need so many hours to learn how to write a SOAP note or document a CPE when we already know how to do that?" I never got a clear answer—just some blah blah babble about increasing efficiency and simpler, more accurate coding.

It's weird because I can't remember training for any other electronic device that "simplified" my life (computer, iPod, phone, or tablet). Do you?

Focus, Amy. Just write the blog.

No one disagrees: medicine is a mess. Health care is chaotic, complicated, and expensive—so damn expensive. There are plenty of problems to fix and enough blame to go around. One thing most doctors and nurses agree on that has been bad for health care is the EHR. Most large networks and hospitals have transitioned to one form of EHR or another. I'd go so far as to say that EHRs are the worst advancement to ever be introduced into medicine.

Let me explain why this is so.

1. Every provider's inefficiency climbs. Let me say first and foremost: EHRs aren't always built for or by physicians; instead, they are built as a coding machine for profit. EHRs are the most cumbersome documentation tool for doctors ever. Click click click click. It never ends. Notes take longer than ever. The result? A bloated note—a three-page strep throat note that now qualifies for a 99214 charge. Many times I get a consult note from a specialist, and I have no idea what they thought. The note is 14 pages of "stuff": an outdated problem list, an incorrect med list, and an assessment and plan I can barely decipher. Did they think my patient had cancer? Did they need surgery or a biopsy? Was my differential diagnosis correct? Sometimes I can't even tell. Sometimes, their note or summary isn't even completed. I don't blame them. I blame their EHR's inefficiencies of documentation.

2. Every physician ineffectively communicates because every physician is inputting codes. EHRs have so many data entry requirements and demands for physicians to check that doctors rarely have time to communicate with their colleagues or patients. Back in the good ol' days, ER doctors called and told me a patient was admitted or treated. Cardiologists let me know my patient was recovering after an acute MI.

Gosh, we used to talk about interesting cases.

With the implementation of EHRs, that all stopped. Everyone is too busy documenting, coding, and whatever else is required. Just get the right info entered in the right place with the right click so the higher charge can be entered.

Data, data, data.

I miss the days when real patient care and learning were higher priorities for doctors.



3. Every patient is confused. This is where things really get bad. Because of 1 and 2, patient care suffers because of these EHRs.

Patients can't understand why doctors are constantly looking at the computers or making sure their "scribe" (we now need scribes!) gets the info entered. They can't understand how to get ahold of their doctor. They can't understand why it's so hard to get an appointment, why they never get an answer to an email question, or why an Rx was sent in for them when no one explained the new medicine. Their care is given in silos, with very little communication between doctors and patients. Their care isn't streamlined; it's inefficient and choppy. I blame EHRs.

EHRs are a four-letter word.

There are plenty of four-letter words in medicine: heal, sick, life, call, code.

But I contend EHRs are the most hated in medicine.

Prove me wrong.

[Amy Walsh](#) is a family physician. This article originally appeared in DPC News.

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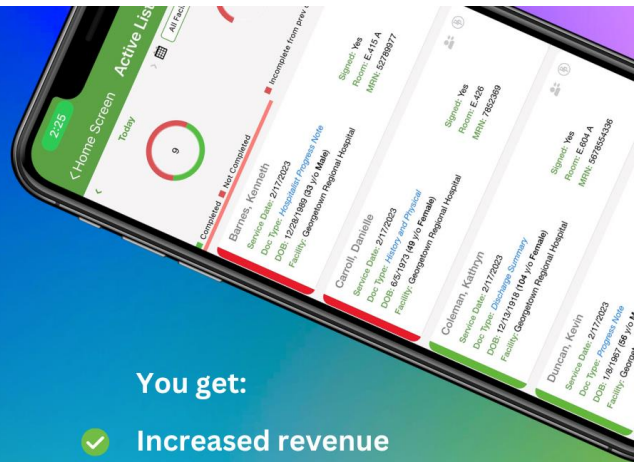
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Best Homemade Apple Cider Recipe

By Makinze Gore



[Hot chocolate](#) has its moment during the winter months, but when the leaves start to change and there's a slight chill in the air, homemade apple cider is the must-have [fall drink](#) I'm reaching for. This easy homemade recipe is filled with warming spices and just enough sweetness, making it the ideal drink to have on the back burner when you're hosting guests for [Thanksgiving](#) or any fall bash. If you've never made apple cider at home before, now is the time to start: it's easy to make, versatile based on what you have on hand, and is the perfect way to use up all of those extra [apples](#) when you just can't bake another [apple pie](#).

How To Make Apple Cider

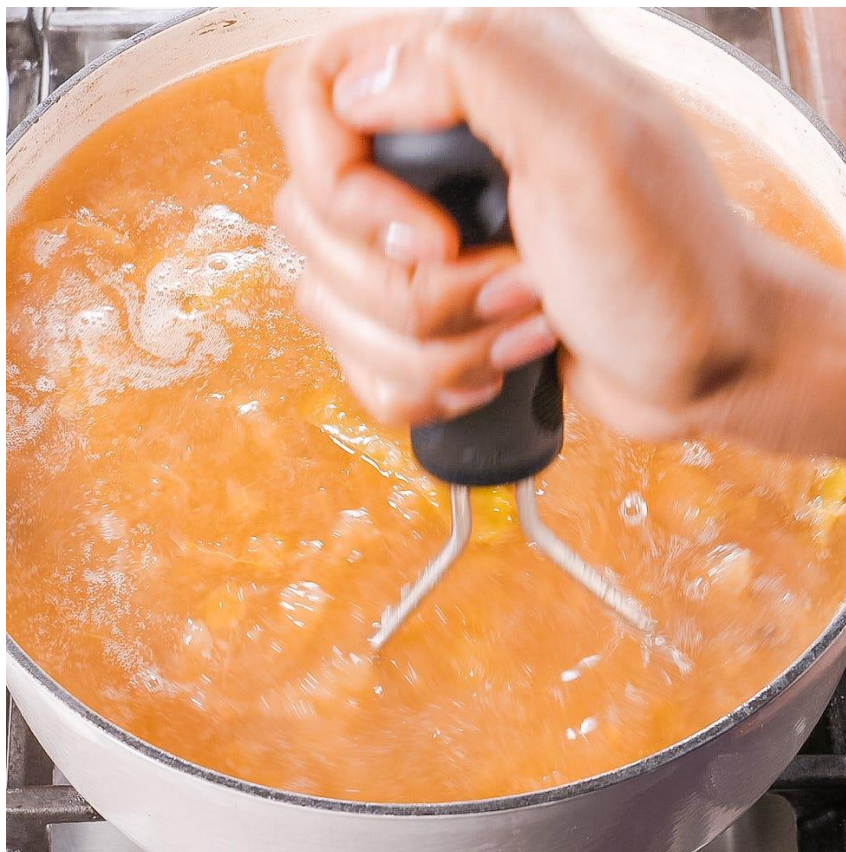
INGREDIENTS

- **Apples:** You can use whatever apples you want to make this apple cider: your favorite [type of apple](#), or whatever you happen to have on hand. Pro tip, though: the stronger flavored apples (such as Granny Smith and Honeycrisp) will give your cider a stronger flavor.
- **Orange:** 1 half of an orange will add a sweet citrus flavor to the cider that it just isn't complete without.
- **Spices:** Cinnamon sticks, whole cloves, whole allspice, and whole nutmeg all combine to create a warming, spiced flavor in this apple cider. Don't worry about the spices being whole—we'll strain them out before serving.
- **Brown Sugar:** Brown sugar adds a slight molasses flavor to the apple cider that makes it perfect for fall.

STEP-BY-STEP INSTRUCTIONS

Grab a large stockpot, and place it over medium heat. This recipe will make a fair amount, so make sure to choose a large pot, or split the ingredients between two pots so that your cider doesn't boil over. Add your previously quartered apples, orange, spices, and brown sugar to the pot, and cover with water by at least 2". Bring the mixture to a boil, then once boiling, reduce the heat and let simmer while covered for around 2 hours.

After 2 hours, remove the orange halves, then grab a potato masher or wooden spoon. Mash the apples, then return the mixture to a simmer and let simmer, now uncovered, for around 1 more hour. Though it might feel weird to smash the apples after they've been cooking for 2 hours, this step is very important—don't skip it. This will help you extract maximum apple flavor. Use a potato masher if you have one, or do the best you can with a large wooden spoon.



After another hour, strain the mixture through a fine mesh strainer to get rid of all of the whole spices and unwanted solids. While straining, press on the solids with a wooden spoon to squeeze all of the wonderful juices out. Then, you can discard the solids.



After the solids have been discarded, it's time to serve the cider! Serve it warm from the pot, and with a cinnamon stick for garnish if you're feeling fancy.



Recipe Tips

- **Do I need to peel my apples?** Absolutely not. Honestly, your cider will have a lot more flavor if you leave the peels on. There's tons of great apple flavor hiding in the skins. Don't worry—you'll strain everything through a fine mesh strainer at the end, which will catch all the solids (including the spices). Be sure to have a ladle on hand to help with this; there will be a lot of liquid!
- **Serving a crowd?** As long as you've got the space, this cider is easy to double (or cut in half!) based on the amount of people you're serving.
- **Can I add anything?** Once you've made this recipe, you can use it as a jumping off point to make your ideal apple cider. Feel free to adjust the spices to taste, add some bourbon or whiskey for a [spiked apple cider](#), or add in some ginger for an extra kick.

Storage

Apple cider will stay good in your refrigerator for 2 weeks. Be sure to let it cool down completely before storing in an airtight container and popping it in the refrigerator.

Ingredients

- **10** large apples, quartered
- **1** orange, halved
- **4** cinnamon sticks
- **1 tsp.** whole cloves
- **1 tsp.** whole allspice
- **1** whole nutmeg
- **1/2 c.** packed brown sugar

Directions

1. **Step 1**In a large stockpot over medium heat, add apples, oranges, spices, and brown sugar. Cover with water by at least 2". Bring to a boil, then reduce heat and simmer, covered, 2 hours.
2. **Step 2**Remove orange halves, then use a potato masher or wooden spoon to mash apples. Return to a simmer and let simmer uncovered for 1 hour more.
3. **Step 3**Strain through a fine mesh strainer, pressing on solids with a wooden spoon to squeeze all juices out. Discard solids.
4. **Step 4**Serve apple cider warm.

Hot Toddy



How One Food Truck Saved a Chaotic Hospital Shift

By Amol Shrikhande, MD



“Thank God for the food truck,” said the charge nurse to no one in particular.

It hadn’t been a great morning at the no-name hospital in Upstate New York. They were short-staffed to begin with, and a nurse had called in sick. Her staff was used to working with bad ratios, but today was worse than usual. Everyone and their mother had decided to come to the ER. She knew not to bother calling her manager. He was a well-dressed guy, but his ideas were a bit wonky. His solution had always been to just shorten treatments.

She knew better, though—he had never worked in the industry. A few shortened treatments could fix a day, but the price would be paid in oxygen—as in respiratory distress. Or cardiac arrest. Like the one they had that morning. The patient had been full of fluid for a week, but they hadn’t been able to offer an extra treatment. In fact, per the manager’s advice, they had turned her usual three-and-a-half hours into three flat. That kept the overtime charges down.

When she showed up that morning, she couldn’t breathe. Then she lost her pulse. It never came back. Just another day in the dialysis unit. Except for the trainee. It was new to her, and she broke down crying. The charge nurse tried to comfort her for a minute, but the overtime rules ... Back to work.

The doctor, like he always did, soaked it all in. He knew what was up, but he had been muzzled long ago. When things started eroding, he had set up meetings with the manager. But he kept getting the same word: budget. He would counter with his own word: quality. But his word didn’t carry the same weight. When he tried a new one—rationing—he was reprimanded.

Human resources came down hard. They said he was harassing the manager. He quieted down. A family. A visa. His options were limited. It was this or back home. The manager knew that. The charge nurse knew it too. That’s why she had stopped asking the doctor to speak the truth. They worked together in silence. Two unsettled souls, just trying to keep things average. They could sleep with average. Below that is where insomnia kicked in.

But despite the problems, the charge nurse knew that, deep down, the administration cared. No amount of staffing issues, budgetary constraints, cardiac arrests, or human resource reports could overshadow the love coming from the boardroom. Because on that day, in the beautiful asphalt parking lot, there was a food truck.

[Amol Shrikhande](#) is a nephrologist.



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Top Luxury Fall Interior Design Trends for 2024: Transform Your Space with Elegance

As the autumn season rolls in, it's the perfect time to refresh your home's look with the latest **luxury fall interior design trends for 2024**. This year's design themes focus on creating warm, inviting spaces while incorporating rich textures, earthy colors, and high-end finishes. Whether you're looking to redesign your home or simply add seasonal flair, these luxury fall design ideas will transform your space into a cozy, sophisticated retreat.

1. Earthy Fall Color Palettes with Bold Accents

This fall, *interior design trends* embrace warm, earthy tones like terracotta, taupe, and forest green, creating a natural, calming atmosphere. For an elevated look, pair these with bold accents in jewel tones such as emerald green, sapphire blue, or burgundy. These deep hues add sophistication and contrast, perfect for luxurious fall interiors.

Pro Tip: Add jewel-toned accessories like velvet throw pillows or rich drapery to balance out neutral tones in your living space.



2. Layered Textures for Cozy Luxury

One of the standout *fall interior design trends for 2024* is textural layering. Combining materials like wool, cashmere, leather, and velvet is a key element in creating a luxurious, cozy vibe. By mixing natural fibers with high-end finishes, you can achieve a tactile experience that feels both warm and elegant.

Pro Tip: Layer a faux fur throw over a leather sofa or combine a chunky knit blanket with velvet cushions to create depth and warmth in your design.



3. Statement Lighting for Fall 2024

Lighting plays a pivotal role in ****luxury interior design****, especially during fall when days become shorter. In 2024, expect to see bold, artistic lighting fixtures like oversized chandeliers, geometric pendants, and sculptural floor lamps. These pieces not only provide functional lighting but also serve as standout features in a room's décor.

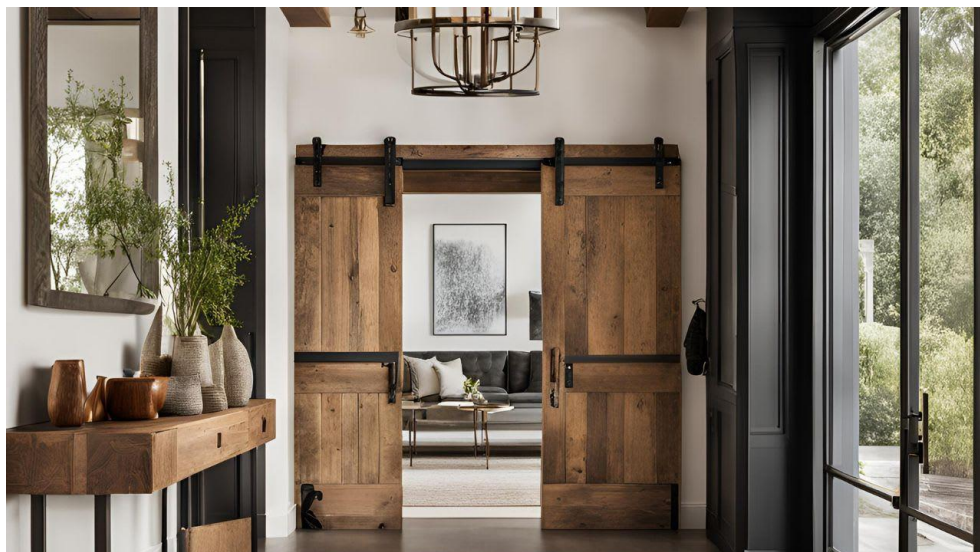
Pro Tip: Install a modern chandelier with brass or gold accents in your dining room to elevate your space and create an intimate, luxurious atmosphere.



4. Sustainable Luxury Design

Sustainability continues to influence luxury design trends, and this fall is no exception. Eco-conscious consumers are seeking high-end, sustainable materials like reclaimed wood, recycled metals, and organic textiles for their interiors. Handcrafted furniture and décor not only reduce environmental impact but also add a unique, artisanal touch to luxury homes.

****Pro Tip:**** Opt for sustainable furniture made from eco-friendly materials to create an elegant yet environmentally responsible interior.



5. Maximalist Fall Décor

Minimalism takes a backseat this season as maximalism rises in popularity for ****fall 2024 décor trends****. Luxurious spaces will feature richly decorated mantles, vignettes, and tablescape that combine multiple elements such as candles, floral arrangements, and ornate seasonal items. When done right, this curated clutter adds depth and personality to your space.

****Pro Tip:**** Create a maximalist vignette using items like decorative pumpkins, candles, and crystal accents to add a lavish touch to your fall décor.



6. Natural Stone and Warm Woods

Bringing natural elements into your home is a major theme for ****luxury fall interiors in 2024****. Warm woods such as walnut and oak, along with natural stone like marble, offer timeless sophistication while grounding your space in nature. These materials are perfect for adding texture and an organic feel to any room.

****Pro Tip:**** Incorporate a marble-topped coffee table or a wood-paneled accent wall to create a focal point in your living area.



7. Bespoke Furniture and Customization

True luxury is found in personalization, and bespoke furniture is at the forefront of **luxury interior design trends for fall 2024**. High-end homeowners are turning to custom-made pieces to reflect their unique style and preferences. From handcrafted armchairs to one-of-a-kind dining tables, bespoke furniture ensures your space feels tailored and exclusive.

Pro Tip: Invest in a custom-built piece, like a statement dining table, to add both luxury and individuality to your home.



8. Cozy Nooks and Luxe Retreats

As the weather cools down, cozy retreats become a must-have in luxury homes. Creating intimate, comfortable nooks—whether it's a window seat, a reading corner, or an indoor lounge—is a top trend for fall 2024. These spaces, filled with plush cushions, throws, and soft lighting, offer a serene escape from the outside world.

Pro Tip: Transform a small area of your bedroom into a cozy reading nook with a luxurious armchair, soft blankets, and ambient lighting.



Incorporating these **luxury fall interior design trends** into your home will not only elevate your space but also create a warm and inviting environment that embraces the beauty of the season. Whether you're drawn to rich color palettes, textured layers, or bespoke pieces, these trends ensure your home exudes elegance and comfort throughout the fall.

The Unlikely Friendship Between a Young Doctor And An Elderly Scholar

Dr. Damane Zehra



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He is 75 years old, and I am 30. Wondering how we met? It was a very casual meeting in a park.

I live in a four-story building with numerous flats. There is a long walking and jogging track and a playground in front of my building.

On the opposite side of this ground, there are huge bungalows and fancy houses.

People from both sides of the road come here to walk and jog with their spouses or children.

Some people come to walk their dogs.

I started going for a walk in the evening just out of boredom. The track is approximately two kilometers long.

Initially, it was a bit difficult to walk after just sitting for many years, but it was refreshing.

The ground is full of greenery; there are tall trees—the tallest pine trees I have ever seen.

There are different flowers on the sides of the track. I saw these many-colored flowers for the first time in my life.

At first, I livened up my walks by putting on my headphones and enjoying my favorite songs. The music helped me ignore the fact that I was walking slowly, so I started walking for longer periods just to keep listening to more music each day. This went on for many weeks.

Over time, I started observing people around me. Young boys jogged while listening to music. Middle-aged and elderly men and women came for a walk. Most of them had rosaries in their hands and kept reciting various prayers and verses from the holy Quran throughout the walk. It embarrassed me that I had been listening to music all this time.

Gradually, I got bored of listening to music. Music made me live inside my head. It did not help me concentrate on the present moment. Now I just leave my cell phone at home and take a water bottle along with me.

The environment of this area is different from my previous residence. People who visit this park don't like to socialize much, so I adopted the same behavior. But I could not resist for long.

How can you just ignore greeting the other person without constantly looking at his or her face?

Over time, I started greeting people, but whenever the aunties met me, they started asking me for details about my non-existent husband and children. And why have I not gotten married yet? This question triggers me every time. It makes me sad. But once everyone got their answers, they stopped bothering me.

That's the reason I am allergic to women, especially aunties.

Whenever I go out with my younger brother, who is 17 years younger than me, aunties always ask me if he is my son. Initially, I used to explain to everyone that he was my younger brother, but I feel tired now. Although my brother accompanies me rarely, as I aim to do at least three rounds and he gets tired, now I don't try to explain to anyone that he is not my son.

One day, I saw a very cute gentleman with white hair and a mustache. He was slightly bulky. He had a smiling face—very warm—the kind of face you could not resist talking to. The kind of person who gives good vibes. I greeted him, and he answered so sweetly.

Then I kept on greeting him every day.

I did not see him for almost two weeks. One day, I saw him walking far away. I increased my pace to catch him. I reached near him and greeted him; he asked, "Where have you been all these days?" I told him I had been coming every day. Then I asked him the same, and both of us realized that we had been coming at different times.

I started walking with him, and we started talking. He was very soft-spoken and quite well-versed in both English and Urdu. He introduced himself and asked me what I did. He was quite impressed that I did my residency in oncology. After a detailed introduction, he started telling me about himself. The good thing about him was that he was not the type of person who just kept on talking or bragging about himself or his accomplishments. He involved the other person in the conversation as well.

He told me that he was a professor at a well-known university. He did not give me more details.

He told me that all of his children lived abroad, and he and his wife lived here. Both of them were quite old but were healthy and fit. They did all of the household things themselves and did not need a servant, although they had a security guard.

He was saddened by the fact that modernization and urbanization have made us isolated. He did not even know much about his neighbors because people do not like to socialize these days and get offended if anyone invades their privacy.

I was thankful for the fact that I live in flats, where everyone knows everything about each other and people live like a family.

I asked him about his hobbies, and he expressed that he had nothing to do. He just read research papers in his free time. He was still actively supervising some educational projects. He was involved in the establishment of a new private medical college in the city.

He asked about my future plans, and I told him that I was not quite sure. We discussed all the aspects of staying here and going abroad.

He told me that he usually does one round of the track. He even showed me his street, so I realized he might be aiming to go home now. But he kept on walking, saying that he was enjoying talking to me. He had come in his car that he had parked on the nearby road.

After two rounds, he said he would go home.

He said, "Let's exchange numbers," but interestingly, none of us had brought our phones.

We decided to exchange numbers the next time, and I realized that I had forgotten to ask him his name. He told me his name. He told me that I had a very innocent face, and he enjoyed the walk. He told me to stay in touch and caressed my head, as our elders do in our culture. He is so sweet that he said we would be friends forever. We said goodbye to each other.

When I reached home, I googled his name and his university. I was shocked to see that he was a PhD holder. He was a renowned professor and had held different administrative positions. He had multiple publications to his name, starting from the year before I was born.

The very next day, I looked all over the park for him. When I was leaving for home, I spotted him coming toward me. He handed me his business card and two candies. Interestingly, he had brought his cell phone as well. He told me that he had completed two rounds and was looking all around to see me. His gesture melted my heart, and I was pleased to see that even today, such kind people exist in such busy cities.

Since that day, we have been going for a walk at the same time. Sometimes he shares the most recent articles on the projects he has been working on. Interestingly, his field is microbiology and stem cell transplant. We discuss a lot of things, and I enjoy his company.

I have slowed down my pace, and he walks much more distance every day.

Our friendship grew stronger over time.

We have planned to go hiking and visit his medical college as well. He has plans to offer me a faculty post if I decide to teach anytime in the future, although I have no such plans. He is there to offer me a ride because he knows that I don't have a car. He becomes angry and always says, "You don't need to worry when my car is there. I will drop you myself." He always assures me that he can do everything in his power to send me abroad whenever I want to.

He says I should try everything in life. I should aim for everything in life. He disagrees whenever he notices that I am not as ambitious as other people my age. He says, "You are young and have a long way to go." He argues every time I tell him that I feel tired and old. He encourages me to excel in life, not settle for less, and stop thinking too much.

I found a great friend in him, a person who loves beyond expectations. His children are so lucky that they have such an amazing dad. For the first time in my life, I found a friend who expects nothing from me. I see kindness and purity in his smile.

I pray for his health, happiness, and long life every day.

People always advise me to make friends in my age group. How can I do that when all the girls my age are busy with their marriages, jobs, in-laws, and children? On the other hand, most of the guys I meet, even if I am meeting them to explore possible marriage prospects, usually suggest whether I can go to a faraway place for a holiday with them. Some guys ask me to visit their homes, even when they live alone. Some run away when they guess in the first meeting that they have different intentions and I have different interests. That's the reason I find it comfortable to be with people even older than my parents.

Friendship between two people is regardless of age, sect, socioeconomic status, cultural background, or educational background. It's based on sincerity, respect, and genuine communication. It means taking care of each other and being there for each other in difficult times. It is beyond judgment and means considering the same things for the other person as you would like for yourself. One-sided friendship exhausts you in the end. It always brings resentment and pain, especially for the person who makes all the effort.

"The great thing about getting older is that you don't lose all the other ages you've been."

—Madeleine L'Engle

Damane Zehra is a radiation oncology resident in Pakistan.

Age & Innocence

By Richard Schickel, Photographed by Annie Leibovitz

With his innate ability as a visual storyteller and boundless curiosity, Steven Spielberg has created a remarkable gallery of movie moments. And he's still finding ways to challenge himself.

Over the past three decades I've conducted 19 very extensive interviews with the great American directors, ranging from Alfred Hitchcock to Martin Scorsese. All of them have been, for me, delightful experiences, none more so than the latest of them with Steven Spielberg, from which this story is excerpted.

Steven is a wonderful subject. He's smart, self-amused, occasionally self-deprecating—yet justifiably proud of the journey he's made from the delicious entertainments of his youth to the kind of thoughtful questing movies that have marked his later career.

He recently turned 60, but there is about him a boyishness—even a kind of innocence—that is ineluctable. He is all enthusiasm—for his next project, for the works of his fellow directors, about which he is remarkably knowledgeable, as you will see below.

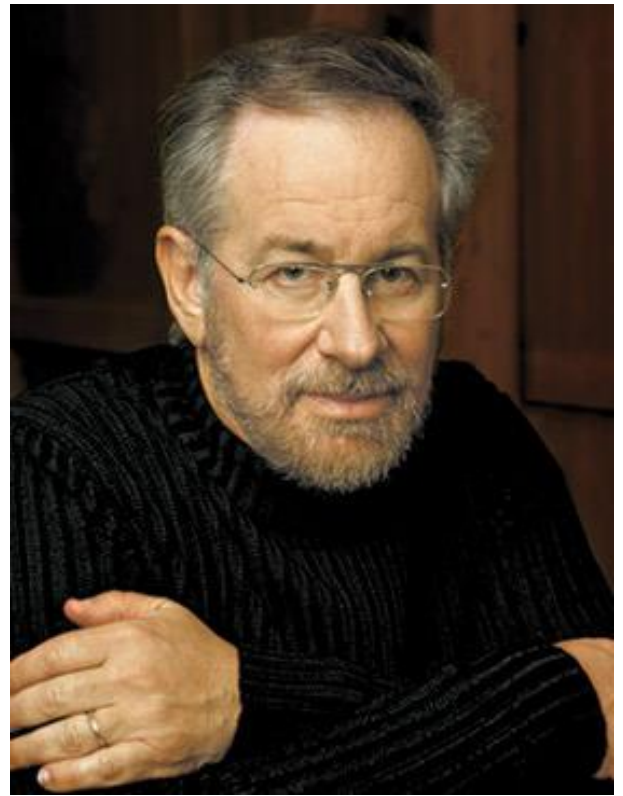
His relationship with the Directors Guild mirrors his own personal history—as a sort of coming to consciousness. He joined the DGA when he was 22, making television programs as a Universal contract director. That's when he became hooked on the DGA screenings of new films. "They didn't have popcorn or Dots or soft drinks," he remembers, "but they did have the best projection and sound in town." Later, as he met more colleagues, the Guild became for him, "a sort of postgraduate USC experience for a young man who was," as he admits, "only a USC wannabe." It was in that period, as his own films became more challenging and aspiring, that he "grew into a knowledge of Guild history," and began to see that "in foul weather" the Guild "surrounded you with friends." He is a member of the Western Directors Council, and, as the DGA celebrates its 70th anniversary, he hopes to become even more involved. The Guild, he says, is "protecting our backs while developing a vision of our future."

RICHARD SCHICKEL: There's a popular myth that you got started in the film business when you snuck on to the Universal lot. Is that true?

STEVEN SPIELBERG: No, that was before they hired me. I was in high school in Arizona and visiting some cousins and I took a tour one day—you know, they had the old Gray Line Tours—and they gave everybody a bathroom break about midday. So I got off to go to the bathroom and I hid in the stall, and I waited until everybody had left. I came out a half an hour later and I was free. I was on the Universal Studios lot.

Q: No one stopped you?

A: Nobody stopped me. I met the film librarian, a man named Chuck Silvers, and he thought I had a lot of chutzpa and showed ambition, so he gave me



The Sugarland Express (1974)

a three-day pass on his own name. So I did that for three days, and then I took a shot that maybe the guard would recognize me without having to show him my papers. And so on the fourth day I walked onto the lot and waved at Scotty, the guard. Scotty waved back and I spent the next two and a half months on the lot five days a week until school began and I had to go back to Phoenix.

Q: Did you know at that time you wanted to be a director?

A: I didn't. I never had a big thought about what I could do with movies in those days. I was infatuated with the control that movies gave me in creating a sequence of events or a feeling, stuff like a train wreck with two Lionel trains that I could then repeat and see over and over again. I think it was just a realization that I could change the way I perceived life through another medium to make it come out better for me. I was making these little 8mm rinky-dink movies and I knew that made me feel really good about my life, and possibly I could bring some other people into this amazing medium, to enjoy what I was putting together.

Q: Then, based on a short film you had made, you came back to Universal to direct episodic TV. How much more exponentially did that increase your skills?

A: Sid Sheinberg offered me a seven-year contract to direct television. I felt like I had come home. The fact that I was doing TV was going to be a postgraduate program on the way to making feature films; that's how I regarded television. It was a learning process. I had never directed anything professionally. [Growing up] the crew on my films numbered nine or ten kids my own age. Now, I was doing my first television show [*Night Gallery*], starring Joan Crawford, no less. And the crew numbered well over 75, and the average age was 50. And when I showed up with my acne and my long hair and the viewfinder pretentiously around my neck, like some kind of a talisman that would protect me from all evil, I think they took one look at me and they said, this kid better prove himself quickly or he's out of here. The rank and file of the crew was just sending daggers my way, working as slowly as they could—not to get themselves fired, but maybe to get me pushed off the show. It was a real baptism by fire.

Q: So what was the lesson you took away from this trauma?

A: I learned immediately that I needed to get final cut someday because a director in television loses control the second that he walks off the sound stage and postproduction begins and editorial takes over. Then the producers get very involved and kind of over-cut you or re-cut you or second-guess the cutting of the film. And I realized that my goal was at some point in my life to have control over the movies I made.

Q: Only two years later you made your first movie, *Duel*. It seems a sophisticated piece of filmmaking, given your age. How did you get that assignment?

A: I lobbied for it very, very hard. I had just finished directing *Colombo*, the very first show of the series, and it turned out really well. So I showed George Eckstein, who was producing *Duel*, my rough cut and he liked it and then represented me to the network, and I believe he went to Barry Diller, who was then head of ABC, and Barry approved me. And so I got this amazing gig.



Jaws (1975) (© AMPAS)



Raiders of the Lost Ark (1981)
(© Courtesy Spielberg)



The Color Purple (1985)
(© David James/Universal)



Jurassic Park (1993) (© Paramount)



War of the Worlds (2005) (© Paramount)

Q: Were you nervous? What kind of prep did you do?

A: I had done about seven or eight episodes of different series, so it was like, 'Please, I hope this experience serves me well,' because I had only 11 days to shoot a 74-minute TV movie. I went out into the desert and I didn't storyboard, but I had the art department actually draw a map of the story, where all the set pieces were to take place. And I put little inverted V's all over this map to help myself realize where I was going to put the A, B, C, D and E cameras, because I had five cameras on some of these truck and car chases. So within one mile of highway, I could get a whole lot of shots, at least five angles, then turn the vehicles around, simply turn the cameras around, change lenses and have them go the other way, and be able to use that footage, going not only from right to left, but from left to right.

Q: The script was also very effective.

A: I get a lot of credit for figuring out how to make *Duel* a very suspenseful, Hitchcockian story, but Richard Matheson's script was already Hitchcockian and suspenseful. I think that was the first time I realized, 'Hey, if I have a good script, and I'm a good director, I can make a pretty terrific movie.' I think that was the first time I really embraced the idea that directors need great screenplays to look good.

Q: Your first feature, *The Sugarland Express*, has the theme of the isolated child that became familiar in your work. Were you aware of that yet?

A: I'm really not sure how conscious I was of that when I was making *The Sugarland Express*. I wrote the story based on this newspaper article I read about an actual couple that was going to get their baby back from child welfare and this led to a crazy, hullabaloo of a chase throughout Texas. It did not escape me that Billy Wilder had made one of my favorite movies of all time, which was *Ace in the Hole*, and that really affected me and the whole carnival atmosphere of an ongoing tragic situation and the capitalization and sensationalizing and exploitation of that.

Q: *Jaws* was such a big movie in your career, but you had a lot of difficulties making it. Do you have good memories of that period?

A: I credit *Jaws* with everything, being a movie director, having final cut. *Jaws* gave me freedom, and I've never lost my freedom. But the experience of making *Jaws* was horrendous for me. And it was partially because the script was unfinished and we were all making it up as we went along, not unlike the whole experience with *Casablanca*.

Q: The common wisdom is 'don't shoot on water.' Bob Wise once told me that making *The Sand Pebbles* almost drove him crazy.

A: Yeah, everybody told me not to shoot on water. I mean, everybody. Sid Sheinberg even said, 'Why don't you build a tank on the back lot? We'll pay for it.' And I said, no, I want to go out and I want to battle the elements, I want people to think this is really happening, that the shark is really in the ocean. I don't want this to look like *The Old Man and the Sea*, with the obvious painted background and all of that.

Q: *Jaws* was like a prehistoric character, the shark being an attack out of prehistoric times. Is that the idea that attracted you to *Jurassic Park*?

A: I really believe that when I read Michael Crichton's book, I flashed back to *Jaws* and I flashed back to *Duel*. Look, I'd wanted to make a dinosaur picture all my life because I was a huge fan of Ray Harryhausen.

Q: *Jurassic Park* was the primary CGI film. Were you aware of what was looming in that world of CGI?

A: The very first CGI ever used in a commercial movie was in a film that I produced and Barry Levinson directed, called *Young Sherlock Holmes*. ILM had generated a stained glass window of a knight that comes to life, jumps out of the stained glass window and threatens our cast. That was maybe the first commercial use ever of a digital effect. Of course, the second effective use was when Jim Cameron made *The Abyss* and he had the water tendril and that was an extraordinary digital effect. But a digital dinosaur, a main character, had never been done before for the movies. So, in a way, *Jurassic Park* was the first movie where the entire success or failure of the story was dependent on these digital characters.

Q: Indiana Jones is an archeologist, another character whose business it is to study the past. How developed was the story when you and George Lucas were sitting on the beach in Hawaii talking about this?

A: Well, I came to Hawaii to sort of hold George's hand the day *Star Wars* opened in 1977. When the phone rang and he found out that every single 10:30 a.m. show throughout the entire nation had been sold out, George became euphoric, to say the least, and, in his euphoria, immediately began thinking about the future. And he asked me what I was doing next. I said I wasn't sure, but I wanted to try again to get Cubby Broccoli to let me direct one of the James Bond films. Cubby, by the way, had twice turned me down when I asked if I could direct a James Bond film. And George said I've got something better than James Bond, it's called *Raiders of the Lost Ark*.

Q: After *Jaws* and *Close Encounters*, both enormously successful movies, you made *1941*, what went wrong with that?

A: I wanted to make a really, really funny movie, I had never done a comedy before. And I haven't really made one since either [laughs]. But I wanted to try this. It was a big demolition derby. I have to tell you, when I made *1941*, I felt like I was made of Teflon. I felt that anything I put on film was going to succeed; that every laugh I set up would receive not only a laugh, but huge applause; that everybody was going to win an Academy Award. It was my longest shooting schedule, and I actually went over schedule further on *1941* than I had on *Jaws*. I sobered up so quickly after that was over. And I look back, and it's not that I misbehaved, I didn't, but I just became so precious and indulgent about getting everything right. I did 20 takes on inserts that should have been done by a second unit. I couldn't let go. I couldn't share the workload with anyone. And I learned the greatest lesson of my career, just from the experience of *1941*, and by the time I did *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, my next picture, I was humbled. Every single shot was storyboarded. I was 14 days under schedule.

Q: Later on, *Empire of the Sun* was a totally different take on World War II. How did you come to do that film?

A: I had become friends with David Lean, and David called me and said, 'There's a book I fancy directing called *Empire of the Sun* by J. G. Ballard. I understand that the rights might be tied up at Warner Bros. Could you investigate it for me?' And I did. I called Terry Semel, the head of Warner Bros., and Terry confirmed that there was a director attached to it, and Tom Stoppard was working on the screenplay. So I called David back and told him that it was indeed spoken for. And then six, seven months later, Semel called me and said, the elements have changed. And I called David back, and, in the time that had passed, he had changed his mind. And he said, 'You should do it. I think this is right up your alley.'



Schindler's List (1993) (© Universal City Studios)

Q: *Schindler's List* seems like the most difficult film you ever did, even just technically. Did you resist the movie when it was presented to you?

A: Sid Sheinberg found it. He said, 'I think you need to tell the story.' So he bought the book for me. But, frankly, I didn't think I was ready to tackle the Holocaust in 1982 and I actually had more films to make and more steppingstones. I couldn't have gone from *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* to *Schindler's List*. That would have been impossible. I didn't have the maturity, both the craft and emotional information to be able to acquit the Holocaust in an honorable way. So I kept trying to give it away to people who kept giving it back to me.

Q: One of the most talked about moments in the film was when Schindler looks down and sees the girl in the red coat. Was that pure fiction?

A: No, it's true. Oscar Schindler witnessed, with his girlfriend, the liquidation of the Krakow Ghetto that morning. He was horseback riding. He heard all the noise. He heard all the vehicles moving in through the Ghetto. We actually shot the entire sequence on the same spot where Schindler was sitting atop his horse, and what the audience sees is exactly what he saw looking down from his point of view 56 or so years ago from the time we shot the sequence.

Q: At the time, a lot was made of the fact that you made the coat red in a black-and- white movie. What was your thinking behind that?

A: The Holocaust was known about in very small secret circles, but certainly Roosevelt and Eisenhower knew. Nothing was being done to slow down the industrialized progress the Nazis were making in the total annihilation of European Jewry. The Allies did nothing except they were pursuing the war effort. So that was my message in letting that scene be in color. It was as obvious as a little girl wearing a red coat walking down the street.

Q: Let's turn to *Saving Private Ryan*. Although it's a tragic story also, it's a much more open picture than *Schindler's List*. How did that project come about?

A: I was looking for a World War II story to direct. I read many books, many screenplays, many short stories, and then Robert Rodat's screenplay for *Saving Private Ryan* was sent to me by my agency. As a matter of fact, it was the only time in my several decades of having an agent that they actually gave me a screenplay that I wound up directing. (Laughs)



Saving Private Ryan (© Amblin Entertainment)

Q: At the beginning of the movie, you start with this incredible D-Day sequence. Had you planned out the whole thing?

A: I didn't quite know what that opening sequence was going to be because I shot the whole movie in continuity, and I certainly shot the whole first sequence in continuity. The first shot of the movie is Tom Hanks' hand shaking, and I went right through to the end of the picture in continuity, which meant that I was making up the entire opening attack of the landings at Omaha Beach. I did the whole thing stream of consciousness. I had no storyboards, no pre-visualization on the computer, did the whole thing from actually up here [points to his head], in a weird way being informed by all the literature I had read about the up-close-and-personal experience of what it was like to survive that day on Omaha Beach. I didn't know it was going to take four weeks to shoot 26 minutes of movie. When people would come over to me and say, 'Are we going to be done next week?' I'd say, 'I don't know.' Because the whole thing was being improvised, in a very safe, rational, controlled way, but improvised nonetheless, and I think if anything gave that scene its impact, its first person, in-your-face impact, it was because I didn't know what was going to happen next, just like real combat.

Q: There was some criticism of *Private Ryan* as being 'too Hollywood.' What was your response to that?

A: I've always wanted to make a war movie, and I had a chance to make a realistic war movie, as opposed to an apocryphal Hollywood war movie. Actually, I was beating away the impulses to go Hollywood. People who found fault with *Private Ryan* always picked on it because I had a guy from Brooklyn, I had a Jewish guy, and they said, 'Oh, you're using the same mix that Lewis Milestone used in *A Walk in the Sun*. You're mixing ethnicities and cultures and showing that Americans are from all over the world.' That doesn't bother me at all because you can't have seen as many World War II movies as I've seen, and not have some of that rub off on *Saving Private Ryan*.

Q: One of the things that give your films their power is John Williams' score. Can you talk about that?

A: John Williams has made the most remarkable contribution to all of my movies. With the exception of one film, he's scored every film I've ever directed. He's made contributions that you can't quantify because they reach the heart before they ever go anywhere near the brain. With *E.T.*, especially, at the end, ILM and I can make those bicycles lift off and get off the ground, but John Williams is the only one who can make them truly airborne, because the audience lifts off the ground on his violins. And the audience is carried across the moon or the sun with his string section and his horns later on when they land. I think the last 15 minutes of *E.T.* is as close to an opera, because of John Williams' contributions, as anything I've ever done before in my life.

Q: You've said you couldn't have made *Schindler's List* or *Private Ryan* if you hadn't had the experience of *The Color Purple*. What did you mean by that?

A: I think of all my movies, *The Color Purple* was my first grown-up film. It was the first movie that doesn't go better with popcorn. The audience has to find their own space and experience and empathize with those characters. The story was told through the words and experiences of these characters, not through the bigger concept of a shark attacking a summer resort or a truck going after a car. I had a tone in my mind about *The Color Purple*, and there were going to be moments of sheer horror between characters, but set in a beautiful tapestry of purple flowers and beautiful farmland and growing corn, just the beauty of a la John Ford, and an unbearably heartbreaking story inside this bucolic picture frame.

Q: I know you considered shooting it in black and white.

A: My first instinct was to shoot the film in black and white, and when I gave Whoopi Goldberg her first screen test, I shot her in New York that way with Gordon Willis, the great cinematographer of *The Godfather*. I was flirting with telling the story in black and white because I was afraid of myself. I was afraid that I was going to sugarcoat the book and if I at least shot it in black and white, there would be no sugar to coat anything with. And maybe the first time I chickened out was the decision to make the film look beautiful. Allen Daviau, who ultimately shot the film, and I decided to make this look beautiful—faces, interiors, exteriors—and I think that beauty might have overwhelmed people's memory of the violent poetry of Alice Walker's book.

Q: Your last film about communication between people was *The Terminal*, perhaps your starkest example of alienation, but it was also a wonderful little fantasy.

A: I thought of two directors when I made *Terminal*. I thought this was a tribute to Frank Capra and his honest sentiment, and it was a tribute to Jacques Tati and the way he allowed his scenes to go on and on and on. The character he played in *Mr. Hulot's Holiday* and *Mon Oncle* was all about resourcefulness and using what's around him to make us laugh.

Q: *Munich* strikes me as different from all your other films. I don't see any lost child or the themes normally in your films. Is it more on your futuristic level but with terrorists?

A: I never imagined *Munich* as an aberration from all the films I've made. I kind of saw it as a story that I felt needed to be told. I just saw it as a film whose time had come. It satisfied a need in me to discuss something that was important to me as someone who supports Israel, and also as someone who supports the process of achieving a lasting peace in that region through honest, non-violent discourse.

Q: Did you anticipate the controversy that film would stir up?

A: Well, I knew *Munich* was the most intentionally political film I've ever made. When we were making the film, Tony Kushner and I would sit around waiting for the shot to be lit and talk about how people were going to have a real tough time understanding and reconciling what this film is. And Tony was the one, more than even me, who said, 'We're going to make a lot of noise with this movie, and it's not all going to be good.' And I would say, 'Is any of it going to be good?' And he said, 'Maybe 10 years from now, but I think when this film comes out it's going to be swift-boated.'

Q: The other thing that's fascinating about this movie is that, setting all politics aside, it really functions as an absolutely first-class thriller.

A: I was thinking about *Munich* not just politically, but I had Fred Zinneman on my mind with *Day of the Jackal*, and I had Costa-Gavras on my mind with *Z*. And also Pontecorvo's *The Battle of Algiers*. I had the thriller aspect of these movies banging around inside my brain while I was making *Munich*.



FUTURE SHOCK: Even the androids pay attention when Spielberg directs on *A.I.* (2001). (© AMPAS)

Q: I'm sure you get asked this a lot, in *A.I.*, what's yours and what's Kubrick's?

A: People assume the exact opposite of what the truth is. People assume that Stanley ended *A.I.* with David and Teddy underwater, trapped by the Ferris wheel, and that they're going to be down there until their batteries run out. And I, of course, get criticized for carrying the film 2,000 years into the future, and they assume that that's how I wrecked Stanley's movie, when in fact every single beat that I put in my version was first in Stanley's 95-page treatment. The whole superstructure of *A.I.* is Stanley Kubrick's vision, and I got as close to his vision as was humanely possible.

Q: Did you ever discuss this with him?

A: We'd talk hours on the telephone. One day we talked eight hours, with a break for lunch. Stanley used to say in the '80s, 'You should make this, not me, this is more your sensibility than mine.' He told me that a dozen times. The only thing Stanley ever really actively involved me in of any of his projects was *A.I.* For the first time he said, 'I want you to read a treatment that I've written.' He had never sent me treatments for *Full Metal Jacket* or anything he had done before that in all the years I knew him.

Q: *Minority Report*, a post-9/11 movie parable of a super security state, raises questions about free will. What appealed to you about this story?

A: I always wanted to do a George Orwell-style story because I had loved *1984* when I was young, and then when *Minority Report* came along, which was a screenplay by John Cohen and then Scott Frank, we worked on the script for a long time. It was also going to be a throwback to a Humphrey Bogart/Lauren Bacall film noir detective story. So aside from all of the political parallels, it's also stylistically, cinematically informed by *To Have or Have Not* and *The Maltese Falcon*, so it was a hybrid movie for me, about my love of film noir and, at the same time, my love of good, old-fashioned murder mystery yarns.

Q: Technically, the film does have a noir look.

A: Well, what happened was [cinematographer] Janusz Kaminski did a very heavy E and R process on the film. The film has a very blue wash to the whole thing. We shot it on Super 35, which means that for your release prints you have to blow it up a little bit, which increases the grain and makes it a little more textural, so you can almost feel the images. And that was all something that Janusz brought to the look of the picture.

Q: Let's talk about your last two pictures. *War of the Worlds* had been told before, most sensationally by Orson Welles on radio, and George Pal on film. Was there something new or different you were trying to add?

A: I was always wanting to make *War of the Worlds*, but when Roland Emmerich came along with *Independence Day*, he kind of took all the steam out of [my plans] and I needed to find another angle to tell the story of a Martian invasion without the Martians. The way David Koepp and I and Tom Cruise envisioned doing that was through the point of view of a kind of deadbeat father who's not very good with his kids, and has to become in a couple of days the greatest dad of his life in order to save their lives. I thought that brought the audience into the film more than it would have, had it been told through the point of view of the joint chiefs of staff or the vice president of the United States or field commander.

Q: Your last few films have been pretty grim, do you think your future films will continue in this same dark vein?

A: I'm not consciously planning anything. I don't say, okay, now I just have to make light popcorn movies to give people relief from the subconscious demons that have pushed me into more historical, darker subjects. I do whatever comes along when I think its time has come. When it's the time for *Lincoln*, I'll make *Lincoln*. When it's the time for *Indiana Jones, Part Four*, I'll make that film. I'm just saying that when a film's time has come, I know it. And I know when it isn't right for me to direct, but maybe it's okay for me to co-produce and to mentor a director, something like *Memoirs of a Geisha*. I intuitively know those things, and I think my intuition has been about 75 percent right on and 25 percent not right on. So I'm just going with the odds.

Q: Is there a particular lesson you've learned about storytelling?

A: I think there's a little moment of mystery that occurs in a movie where two people don't quite understand each other, and then suddenly understand what they mean to each other and what their lives are all about. The audience has these epiphanies that often go unheralded, but it gives them a chance to say, 'I'm part of this story. Thank you, you've included me in your story.' It invites the audience into the process. Film is a visual language, and then there's the great art of the spoken word. And my job is to put the audience inside the movie. My job is to reduce the aesthetic distance between the audience and the experience, so they are lost for two hours and they only wake up when they walk out of the theater and the sunlight hits them in the face. I think all of us are either successes or failures based on how far inside the experience of the story we can put the audience.

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A Fabulous Fall Weekend in Sonoma Wine Country

Written by Sonoma Insider Patricia Lynn Henley

For a true fall getaway, follow scenic two-lane highways to the incomparable Sonoma Valley, nestled on the eastern edge of Northern California's Sonoma County. With fewer visitors on the roads and the gentle perfume of fermenting grapes in the air, autumn makes an ideal time to sample Sonoma's beauty and abundance.

In October and November the valley's grapevines slowly change from summer's deep greens to shades of bright yellow, dusty gold, rusty red, and deep burgundy. Soft daylight often bathes the rolling hills and gentle fields with a golden glow. Daytime temperatures are typically mild to warm, even a bit hot at times, but cool nights prevail.

Restaurant menus reflect the change of season, highlighting the delights of autumn vegetables. And in the wineries, the frantic pace of harvest gives way to slightly less harried cellar work. The last of this year's grapes are crushed, processed, and put into barrels, while vintages from a few years ago are taken out of barrels and onto the bottling line.

This two-day itinerary lets you explore Sonoma Valley from south to north, but feel free to reverse the direction, and to pick and choose from these activities to create your perfect weekend adventure.

DAY ONE

For a morning nosh before settling in for some serious sipping, nibbling, exploring, and relaxing, pick up coffee and a breakfast sandwich or breakfast burrito at the [Carneros Deli](#), at the intersections of highways 121 and 116.



Carneros AVA

You're in the [Carneros wine region](#), at the southern end of the Sonoma Valley. Here, sparsely wooded, windswept hills rise above a wide, flat plain, creating broad vistas and a fertile home for Pinot Noir and Chardonnay winegrapes, often used to make elegant sparkling wines.

For a bird's-eye view, go aloft in a vintage biplane at the [Sonoma Valley Airport](#) (also known as the Schellville Airport) where the [Vintage Aircraft Company](#) offers air tours.



Schug Carneros Estate Winery

To get an up-close look at grapevines in autumn, take the free self-guided vineyard tour at [Schug Carneros Estate Winery](#). Check in at the tasting room for a map of this half-mile trail through vineyard rows of Chardonnay and Pinot Noir.

Next, head up Highway 12 to the town of [Sonoma](#) (pop. 10,648). Park your car in the center of town and stretch your legs in the eight-acre Sonoma Plaza, the largest town square in California.

Do you enjoy history? [Sonoma State Historic Park](#) offers several sites around and near the plaza, including [Mission San Francisco Solano](#), the 21st and northernmost of the California missions.

Are shopping, nibbling, and sipping more your style? You'll find an intriguing variety of stores, galleries, tasting rooms, and restaurants ringing the plaza.

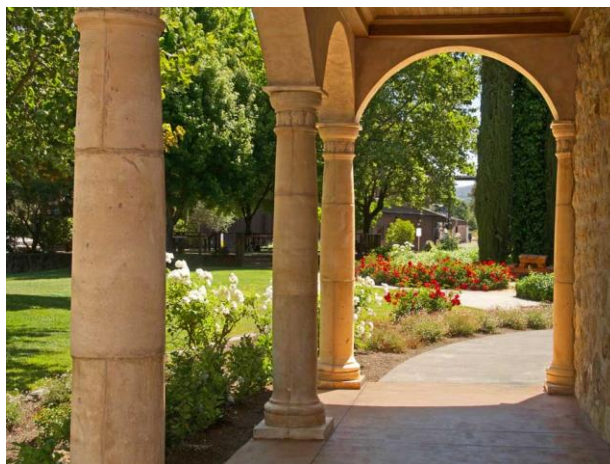


Basque Boulangerie Cafe

For a bite to eat, on the east side of the Plaza the [Basque Boulangerie Café](#) offers mouth-watering sourdough and sweet French bread, pastries, baked goods, and a light breakfast and lunch menu.

If drinks and small plates are what you crave, drop in at [Oso Sonoma](#), where fans rave about the deviled eggs topped with fresh crab or braised short ribs with gouda polenta. For the ultimate Oso experience, enjoy the five-course tasting menu with optional wine pairings.

You can explore downtown Sonoma on your own, but if you'd like a more focused approach, both [Sonoma Food Tour](#) and [Gourmet Food and Wine Tours-Sonoma](#) offer guided walking tours, giving you an insider's understanding of the town's history, architecture, and inner workings, while sampling its delectable food and wine.



Sebastiani Vineyards & Winery

For even more tasting opportunities, get back in your car and follow the signposts pointing the way to the area's many wineries. Just a few blocks east of the Plaza, [Sebastiani Vineyards & Winery](#) has been crafting wines for more than 100 years. And about two miles farther east, you'll find [Buena Vista Winery](#), founded in 1857. This carefully restored historic winery includes a unique [wine tool museum](#).

If you want to have someone else handle the details, decisions, and driving, you can choose from a number of guided tours. [Artisan Wine Tours](#) offers highly customized luxury excursions for wine and culinary enthusiasts, working primarily with couples or very small groups. Or, hop aboard the [Sonoma Valley Wine Trolley](#) (a hand-built replica of an 1890s San Francisco cable car, with a top-notch sound system and on-board refreshments) for a six-hour field trip to top wineries.



the girl & the fig

Ready for dinner? On Sonoma Plaza [the girl and the fig](#) presents innovative country food with a French passion. Or for fine dining slightly north of the Sonoma city limits, the [Santé Restaurant at the Fairmont Sonoma Mission Inn](#) uses freshest local produce, meats, poultry, and seafood to create elegantly simple dishes that let the natural flavors speak for themselves.

For a bit of nightlife, [Hopmonk Tavern](#), [Murphy's Irish Pub](#) and [Olde Sonoma Public House](#) all typically feature live acoustic music and a variety of brews in relaxed, neighborhood-pub atmospheres. In an alley off the Plaza, you can catch blues, country, and Americana musicians performing in the cozy [Sonoma Speakeasy](#). On Highway 12 several blocks west of the Plaza, [Starling Bar Sonoma](#) offers classic cocktails and craft beers in a casual, friendly setting. Or enjoy a quiet nightcap in the sleek [38 Degrees North](#) lounge at the [Fairmont Sonoma Mission Inn](#).

DAY TWO

Start the day at the [Fairmont Sonoma Mission Inn](#), where the [Santé](#) restaurant is known for its breakfasts, especially the lemon and cottage cheese pancakes with crème fraîche. Or, at [Les Pascals](#) French pâtisserie in the folksy town of [Glen Ellen](#) (pop. 784), chef Pascal Merle and his wife Pascale offer croissants, brioche, Khun Amun (a morning bun), and assorted quiches, as well as a variety of other pastries, breads, French cookies, and more.



Jack London State Historic Park

To stretch your legs a bit, head to [Jack London State Historic Park](#), which combines 1,400 acres of trails and pristine vistas with historic buildings.

For more of a workout, across the valley you can hike beside a creek, across a meadow floor, and through a gorge and canyon along some of the 25 miles' worth of trails at [Sugarloaf Ridge State Park](#).

For a luxurious lunch, consider the five-course Wine & Food Pairing at [St. Francis Winery & Vineyards](#), featuring a multi-course tasting menu with wines from St. Francis' artisan collection; enjoy fine dining in a relaxed and casual atmosphere, with stunning vineyard views.

There are many other wineries to explore in this area. Both [Ledson Winery & Vineyards](#) and [Chateau St. Jean](#) are housed in what can only be described as castle-style architecture. And in addition to wine, [VJB Vineyards, Cellars & Marketplace](#) produces estate-grown olive oil, pasta sauces, pestos, and homemade pastas.

When it's time for dinner, the [Glen Ellen Star](#) presents a seasonal menu of California-Mediterranean cuisine that celebrates a fire-fed wood oven. Of course, this is just a sampling of the autumnal delights you can discover in the Sonoma Valley at this bountiful time of year!

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