



# PRIMAL DREAM

*From haute scavenging to FIERCE furs and chipped manis, we're WILD for the season's rawest trend.*

BY JOANA LOURENÇO



“Pretend you’re jumping from stone to stone to cross a river,” shouts fitness trainer and owner Greg Carver as he leaps across the StrengthBox gym in Toronto. In the next hour, seven other participants and I will, among other exercises, hang from a real tree branch suspended from the ceiling and lug kettlebells outdoors in our bare feet. These grunt-inducing exercises are routine at “natural movement” gyms, which recreate the movements (and loincloth-worthy physiques) of our hunter-gatherer ancestors.

Trying to embrace the challenge with primal prowess, I pretend I’m fighting for survival as I crawl through ditches and somersault over obstacles. It’s a painful kind of fun, but who doesn’t want to take a walk on the wild side every now and then?

The idea behind Paleo fitness—and other Paleo-isms, such as the ubiquitous diet—is that returning to our primal selves will nurture better health, greater vitality and a connection with the earth. “It’s all about embracing the untamed part of ourselves and getting back to our essential humanness,” explains Jen Chamberlain, a trend and beauty expert for P&G Beauty.

BERNARDO DORAL



In fact, sartorial references to the Stone Age were as obvious as a woolly mammoth in this season's collections. Jean Paul Gaultier showed animal pelts and feathered, furry coats and completed the look with panther-print hair tattoos; Zuhair Murad played with fierce fur skirts and mantles; Versace got wild with zebra-print fur coats with blood-red collars; Michael Kors roared with camo fur; and Prada featured fur coats over sleeveless dresses with plunging necklines. (Basically, there was a lot of fur—a trend first seen in the fall/winter collections of 10,000 B.C., which was also, coincidentally, a big year for loincloths.)

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Other caveman-chic looks include pastel-chalked and paint-streaked hair and eyeshadow smudged above and below the eye—makeup for that just-rolled-out-of-a-stone-bed look. Likewise, CND nail designer Jan Arnold created a roughed-up manicure for Alexander Wang's fall/winter 2013 show—perfect for the woman who crawls out of caves. “We used an ‘erosion’ technique,” she explained backstage. “The goal is to make the nails look a little weathered—like this is a girl who really lives life.”

It's certainly easier to dress like a modern Queen of the Stone Age than to eat like one, though. Hunting animals in the city is unappetizing (“Pigeon I killed with a slingshot, anyone?”) and likely illegal for good reason. (Slingshots are no one's friend.) On the other hand, scavenging for wild edibles is becoming increasingly popular among urbanites.

Robin Kort has been foraging for decades and has led tours in Vancouver for the past three years with her company, Swallow Tail. A chef by trade, Kort searches out delicious foods like unusual mushrooms, wild herbs, seaweeds and crabs. In fact, foraged ingredients are popping up on restaurant menus across Canada, with cool chefs choosing to build their dishes around native greens and seasonal edibles. Case in point: the aptly named Forage, in Vancouver, which serves up scavenged mushrooms and chimichurri



# ELLE TREND



made from foraged herbs, alongside greens with spruce-tip dressing and alpine-juniper duck confit frittatas.

These inventive meals are mouth-watering. But Kort sees another force behind her in-demand foraging tours and the fascination with hunting and gathering. “I think the interest is a strange sort of knee-jerk response to a world seeming to go down the tubes lately,” she says. “I just want to be able to fend for myself if I have to.”

John Durant, author of *The Paleo Manifesto*, agrees. “One of the



most common ways to have a sense of control of your life and to feel prepared is to take small steps to prepare for the future.” Durant believes that natural-movement programs, like the wildly popular CrossFit, adventure races and mud runs, tap into our most basic human drives. “The way that people work out now lacks purpose and meaning,” he explains. “Saving someone from drowning, hunting a wild animal so the girl you like will notice you: These are timeless motivations.”

So forget the days when glamping was *de rigueur*; now, it’s all about gruelling camping (grumping?) as more and more people take to roughing it during an intense sojourn in the wilderness. (“Have you heard about that new cave retreat in Patagonia? I hear it’s super-Cro-Magnon.”) Durant attended a natural-movement retreat in Mexico that literally transformed the exotic locale into a jungle gym. With a flush of enthusiasm, he describes getting “dirty, bloody, wet, bitten, bruised and sore,” adding, “I had never felt so alive.”



It’s probably no coincidence that the rise of functional fitness has come when we’re learning about the damage our sedentary lives are wreaking on our bodies. (A 30-minute cardio session three times a week should cut it, right? Think again.) You could invest in a standing or treadmill desk, but merely being upright may not be enough; many believe we have to reach out and touch the earth too.

To earthing enthusiasts, whose ranks are on the rise, walking barefoot is just one of many ways to link ourselves to the surface of the earth. These unshod flâneurs believe that direct connection with the ground is essential for good health. Terrified of what lies nestled



The winner of the High Line for London competition imagined the city's unused tunnels as green spaces.

## LONDON GETS DOWN LOW

Inspired by the wildly successful High Line elevated Park in New York, the High Line for London competition sought proposals for unused green space in the city. The winner was the “Pop Down” project, which imagined the unused tunnels under London’s streets as an urban mushroom garden, with sculptural glass-fibre “mushrooms” at street level. Harvested fungi would then be served at restaurants at the park entrances.

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in the grass of your local park? Chain-mail shoes let you feel the grass but not broken glass. (What about dog poop, though, I wonder?) Earthing sheets and pillows, which are woven with silver thread and plug into an electric wall outlet, are also supposed to help link you to the ground.

Treadmill desks, chain-mail shoes, animal hides—it all sounds so rough (and itchy). “People now find it a rarity to feel pain in their lives or experience emotions that are uncomfortable,” says Chamberlain. “What

does that mean when you go through those processes? And what do you discover when you get in touch with your base emotions and your base humanity?”

Getting in touch with my wild side at the gym did make me feel tough. (Though I’m still waiting to “discover” my six-pack.) Most of the time, I feel hopelessly unequipped to deal with real-world scenarios. I mean, I struggle with revolving doors and tight-lidded jars. My grandfather fed his whole family by farming, but I can’t even keep a cactus alive.

“This raw-human space is really more about self-reliance versus technology-reliance,” says Chamberlain. The idea of being able to trust our instincts and acquire knowledge that has been forgotten—and can’t just be looked up on an iPhone—is really appealing. And think how impressed your friends will be by your tales of slogging through a bog while grumping.

After my bare-basics workout, I was pumped up enough to take my primal experiment a step further by trying on a pair of minimalist five-toed shoes. Oh, the historic horror. Forget man-repellent; these abominations are mugger-repellent. One look at my odd soles—coupled, perhaps, with a few couture pelts, some smudged eyeshadow and crazy tangled cave hair—and any would-be attacker would reconsider. (And, yes, actress Shailene Woodley can get away with wearing them on the red carpet, but with a face like that, no one’s looking at her feet.) So while I’m now on the hunt for some fun faux fur to add to my wardrobe this fall, I’ll be sticking with my leather-shoe-wearing tribe. Even cavewomen have their limits. □

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