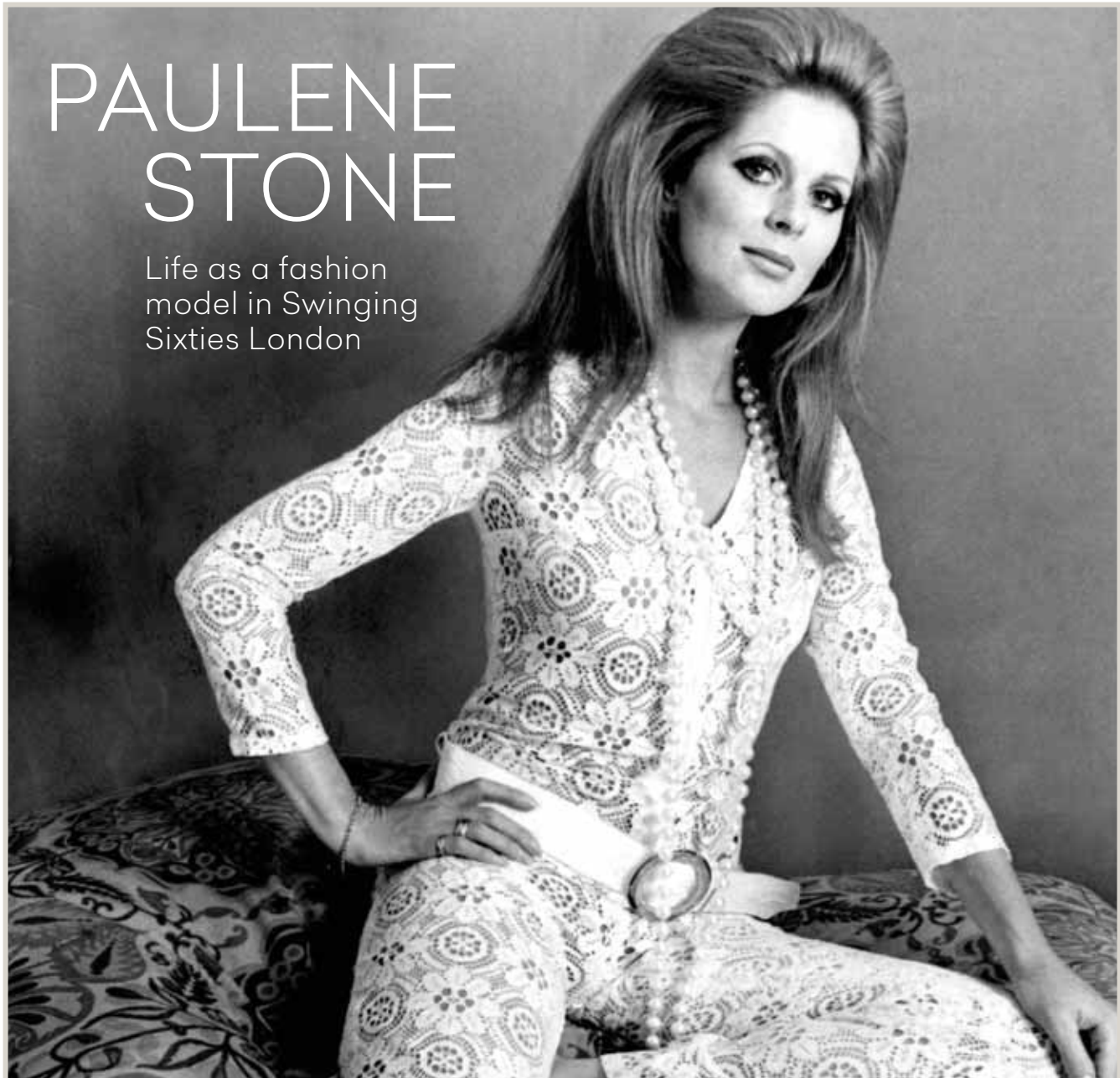


# Belgravia

DECEMBER 2019 #158

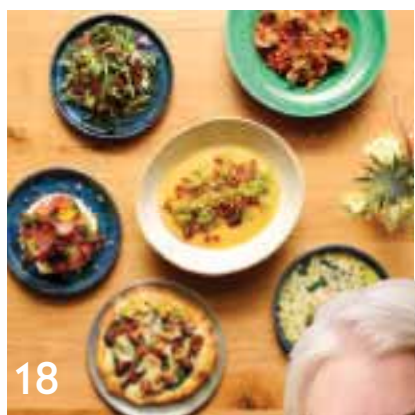
## PAULENE STONE

Life as a fashion  
model in Swinging  
Sixties London



ALSO INSIDE: The gripping new novel inspired by local life  
Tamara Beckwith's debut handbag collection  
Christmas gifts to buy in Belgravia

# December



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**E**ven when Anita Choudhrie – matriarch of one of India’s most eminent and wealthy UK-based families – was 10 years old, there were signs of her philanthropic endeavours to come.

“As a little girl, I used to bring homeless dogs home and look after them,” says Anita, tucked into a corner table at The Thomas Cubitt on Elizabeth Street.

“My mother used to be so upset and she would tell me to keep them outside, but I would put them on a terrace or in the garden area and look after them.”

Memories of her early years in India depict a life of simplicity; no television meant that books, family and friends were her priority. Anita’s grandfather was a doctor and something of an inspiration, helping poorer people in the area by providing free medical treatment.

“There were always queues,” says Anita, whose father served in the British army. “He was doing so well and could afford to help them.”

Anita isn’t doing too bad either, with the Belgravia-based family presiding over a global business empire that spans hotels, healthcare and aviation.

Most of her energy is channelled into philanthropy, having established Path to Success in 2005, a charity focused on helping disabled women in sport by “turning inability into ability”.

“We were [conceived as] an umbrella charity and we supported other charities,” Anita says. “Anything to do with disabilities, education, homelessness, but the big thing was children with mental disabilities.”

They also launched their own appeal, donating wheelchairs to 60 NHS hospitals in 2012. “A couple of young patients were in hospital, immigrants from needy homes, and they didn’t have the funds to leave the hospital because they needed a particular kind of specialised wheelchair,” she says.

“It was so wonderful to see this immigrant boy from South America leave the hospital and go home. He had been an extra six months in hospital because he didn’t have a wheelchair to leave.”

A fundraising gala now takes place every two years (“we decided to do it every other year, due to Brexit”) with their most recent event taking place at Church House in Westminster in October.

The charity’s current campaign is focused on supporting female disabled athletes on their path to the Olympic Games in Tokyo next year and beyond. While the charity’s work is certainly helping – funding for wheelchair basketball club London Titans has proved fruitful with 10 GB players from the club – Anita says there is work to be done.

“There has to be more support for sports and especially women athletes and Paralympians, they don’t get enough,” she says. “CSR [corporate social responsibility] should be incorporated into companies, where they should all have a percentage of their profits that go into CSR.”

Anita believes that her reluctance to involve celebrities with the charity has made fundraising a more challenging proposition.

“If you don’t have the celebrities involved, you will find people are not so enthusiastic to support you,” she says. “I had resisted that because it’s a lot of expense when you are entertaining and involving celebrities. If they

# Empowering others

Philanthropist Anita Choudhrie's charity Path to Success is on a mission to support female disabled athletes on their path to Tokyo 2020 and beyond

WORDS: JONATHAN WHILEY





“

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come in voluntary then great, but if they don't then there is a payment involved and expenses. How do you cope with that? A charity is meant to give away, not spend it on itself.”

A brave decision perhaps, but in keeping with her genteel, yet no-nonsense approach. Has she always been a strong woman? “I hope so! I don't know how I come across. I think a few circumstances in my life have given me that strength.”

The circumstances involve her husband, Sudhir, who has a lifelong heart condition that he discovered during childhood. The 70-year-old had a transplant in 1999 and is considered one of the “world's longest surviving heart transplant patients” (two years ago he released a book, aptly titled *From My Heart*).

“I [have] supported him in a very, very serious physical, medical condition,” says Anita. The heart condition? “Yes, a major one. At that time there was nobody else to make those decisions. Even the doctors' reports and everything had to be analysed and I had to take some hard pressed decisions.”

Anita puts on a brave face, but understandably it remains an emotionally charged topic. We don't linger; she is keen to talk about her Stellar Arts Foundation, established in 2008 and based on the family's private collection with more than 800 works dating from the 19th century to the present day.

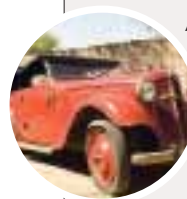
“I think art is as important as jewellery, which you always keep forever and you can pass it down as heirlooms. We want to start a museum and I think in the next two or three years it will happen in one of the hotel properties in India.”

As for Belgravia, Anita is a big fan. “I love this area,” she says. “I like it because it's not modern like other parts of London. It's quaint and I love that feeling of it being real England.”

For the past seven years she has lived in Chester Square and her two sons, aged 41 and 37, are also in the neighbourhood. She says one of them takes his little boy to Tomtom Coffee House on Ebury Street for a babyccino every day and they enjoy Olivomare for the pizza. She smiles. “We don't need anything else.”

[pathtosuccess.org.uk](http://pathtosuccess.org.uk), [stellararts.org](http://stellararts.org)

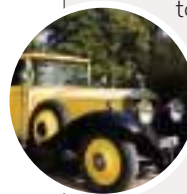
### Cars, cars, cars



Anita's other passion – or rather her husband's passion – is vintage cars. They have 37 in India that date from 1904 to 1938 (to be considered “vintage” they have to pre-date 1940).

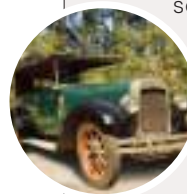
“I've driven them, when my kids were younger,” says Anita. “They are wonderful, it's a beautiful collection of French, Italian, British, American and German cars.

“It comes from my husband's childhood. He had a big collection of model cars and then, when he could afford it, we used to search them out in the country and find these dilapidated, broken-down cars. They were in a junk condition and we would buy them for little sums of money and bring them into the house and get mechanics and upholsterers in to restore them back to their original condition.”



They have a Mercedes that dates from 1938 that belonged to the Maharaja of Kashmir and a 1904 Rover previously owned by a British coffee plantation owner.

“We have spent a lot of money on restoring them,” says Anita, who is planning to put together a book on the cars in the next year.



Sadly they can't leave the country to make their appearance in Belgravia.