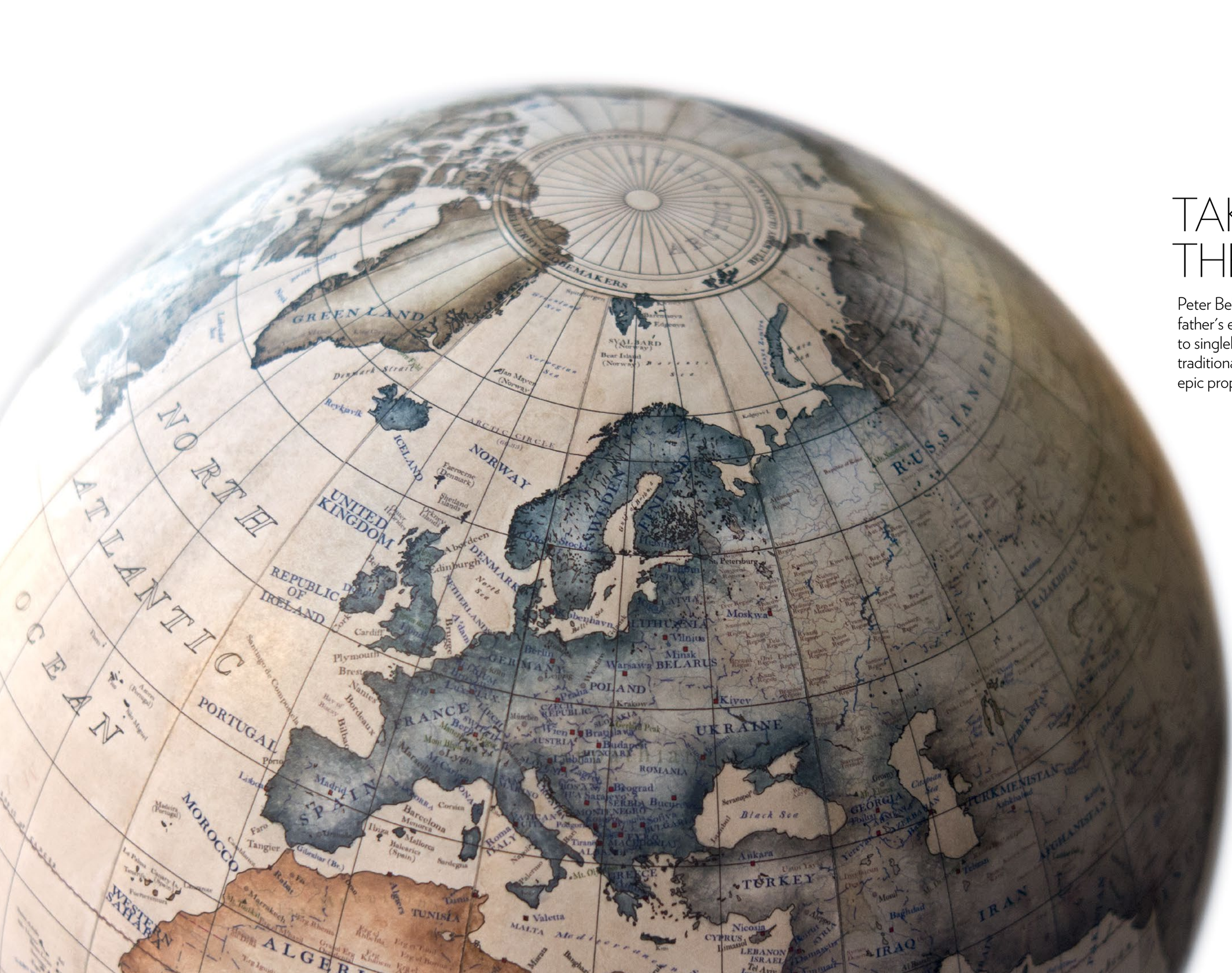
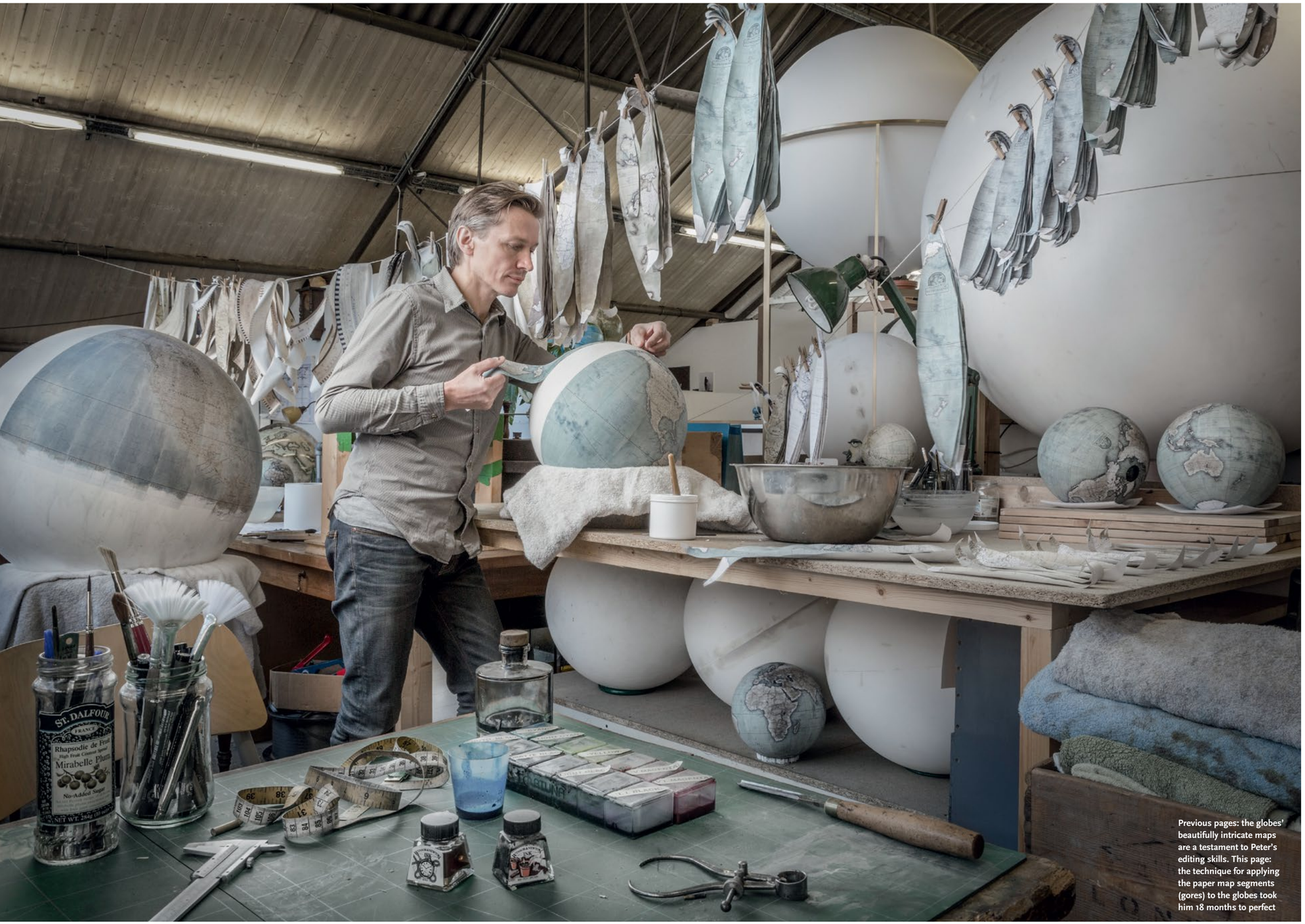


TAKING ON THE WORLD

Peter Bellerby's fruitless search for his father's eightieth birthday gift led him to singlehandedly revive the craft of traditional globemaking – a task of epic proportions, discovers Lucy Coles



Previous pages: the globes' beautifully intricate maps are a testament to Peter's editing skills. This page: the technique for applying the paper map segments (gores) to the globes took him 18 months to perfect

There is no manual for traditional globemaking. Peter Bellerby of Bellerby & Co. Globemakers agrees that this is probably what attracted him in the first place.

"I hated school, hated college. I always wanted to work things out for myself. I didn't want to be told. If you asked my mother, she would say that every single toy I possessed I took apart and stripped back to basics, and (mostly) put back together again," he says.

"It was exciting for me to try to work out how to make a globe without instructions," says Peter, who was running an upscale London bowling alley before he ventured into spheres of a different kind. "There were only a few traditional globemakers in history who were any good, and they took their skills to their graves."

Peter believes this might have been because the work was so labor intensive: the next generation decided they had better things to do. "Or it could have been because those past masters wished to go down in history as the last traditional globemakers," he says. We will never know. Meanwhile, Peter, his fiancée, and a small group of artisans have pieced together their own method in a compact converted workshop loft in Stoke Newington, northeast London. Seven years after the company was founded in 2008, they have a growing business making beautiful, bespoke globes to order – mostly for private individuals, sometimes as lavish corporate gifts, and also for the occasional filmmaker (Martin Scorsese ordered a couple for the set of *Hugo*).

The adventure began with Peter's search for a special gift for his father's eightieth birthday. Men's gift departments can be uninspiring places: limp ties, spindly pens, desperate rows of socks. Peter found himself growing ever more despondent. A retired naval architect, his father had worked in all the major ports of the world and been an inspiration to his son. Having finally decided on a globe as his present, Peter couldn't find one that matched his expectations. So he did what every self-respecting born-craftsman would do and set about making one himself – a project that would change his life forever.

"I started off with a budget of a few thousand, for materials and labor," he says. "Before I knew it I was way over £100,000 (US$150,000) and still hadn't fully worked out how to do it. By the end, the cost was close to £200,000. I ended up selling my car and then my house." Peter's fiancée, Jade, looks rueful. "I didn't mind about the car, but the house..." She sits at a desk next to Peter's in a corner of their loft, working on the P.R. for the business. "The trial and error was important," he says. "I had several eureka moments, things happening that I didn't realize would or could. That allowed me to make advances by sheer fluke."

Peter's first task was to make a sphere; this was his introduction to the terrifying world of tolerance. "You might as well multiply any error by pi. It's vital that it's perfect." Many attempts later, he settled on commissioning Formula One manufacturers to make molds

for his spheres, which are fabricated from fiberglass (glass-reinforced plastic) and resin composite or, for the larger globes, plaster of Paris inlaid with hessian fibers for strength.

The next challenge was sourcing a trustworthy map. Peter had no idea of the problems he would face at this point. All of the world maps he initially came across were littered with errors; whole archipelagoes had disappeared, rivers meandered off course, Middle Eastern town spellings were guesstimates at best. He finally found a useful map, bought it, stripped it back, and spent six hours per day for a year editing it using Google Maps. Why not use Google Maps in the first place? "Google Maps is amazing, but it's not inspirational. It doesn't give you the impetus to want to travel. My globe needed to be correct – and to reflect today's world, not some sepia antique version – but it was never meant to be a navigational tool. It is an object for admiring the world."

The process of map editing continues for each globe that Peter creates – as the world changes, but also as customers request personal touches. "With the small globes," Peter says, "we can fit on country names and capitals but not every town. One Swiss gentleman wanted us to include his home, Zurich. Another customer asked us to highlight in red everywhere she and her husband had lived, which turned out to be a lot of places. It looked beautiful."

Probably the most difficult task of all in globemaking is applying the long oval sections of map to the sphere. This process, known as goring, took him 18 months of painful endeavor to perfect. "It's possible to wipe out whole countries with a tiny slip of the hand," says Peter.

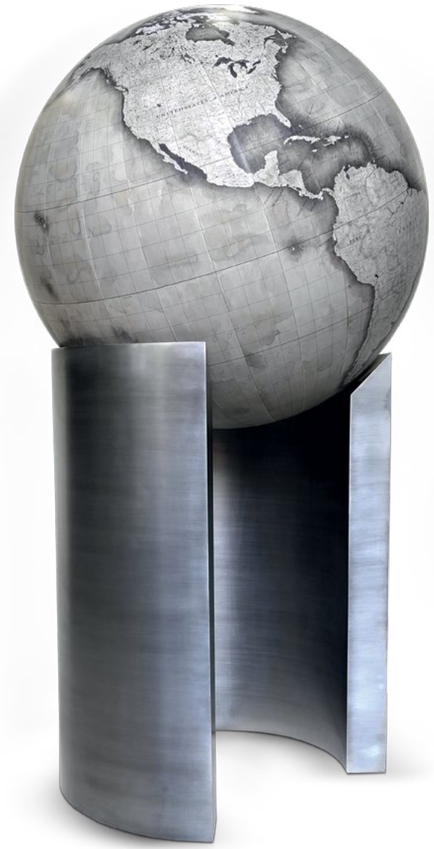
The day I visited the workshops, Peter's newest apprentice, Kirsty, was practicing on the smallest globe. In her sixth week, she still wasn't close to matching the gores without ripping, overlapping, or creating gaps. Jade calculates it'll be around six months before she can make a globe of salable quality. Luckily, Kirsty relishes the challenge and copes remarkably well with the fact that at the end of every day she has to peel off her hard work in preparation to start again the next day. Sisyphus himself would be impressed.

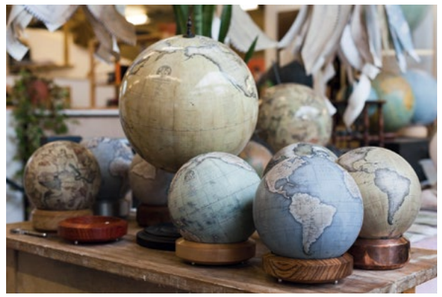
This patience does not come naturally to Peter. "When I was younger, I didn't actually realize you needed to spend time to become good at something, to get to a certain level. That was my biggest fault. I tried to learn several instruments, but gave them all up. But I eventually found joy in the completion of tasks. There's nothing better than placing the final piece of map," he says. "Up until then it's just a sphere with bits of paper on it. When the final piece is on, it comes alive." Now, he is a man at peace with the idea that he is going to spend many hours perfecting the weighting of a globe so that it spins elegantly on its stand. A man who won't rest until every mountain, river, and island is exactly where it should be.

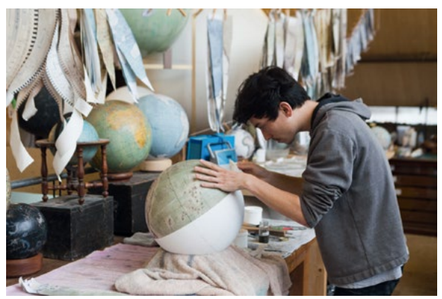
As I leave, Peter allows me a spin of his largest globe, The Churchill, which stands at nearly five feet tall and is based on a globe made for the British prime minister in the 1940s. A year in the making, it's now by the door, ready for delivery to its new owner. With due reverence, I turn it, and it glides gracefully from America to China. Peter's fatherly pride is palpable.

"It's really hard to let them go. We all sigh when they go."

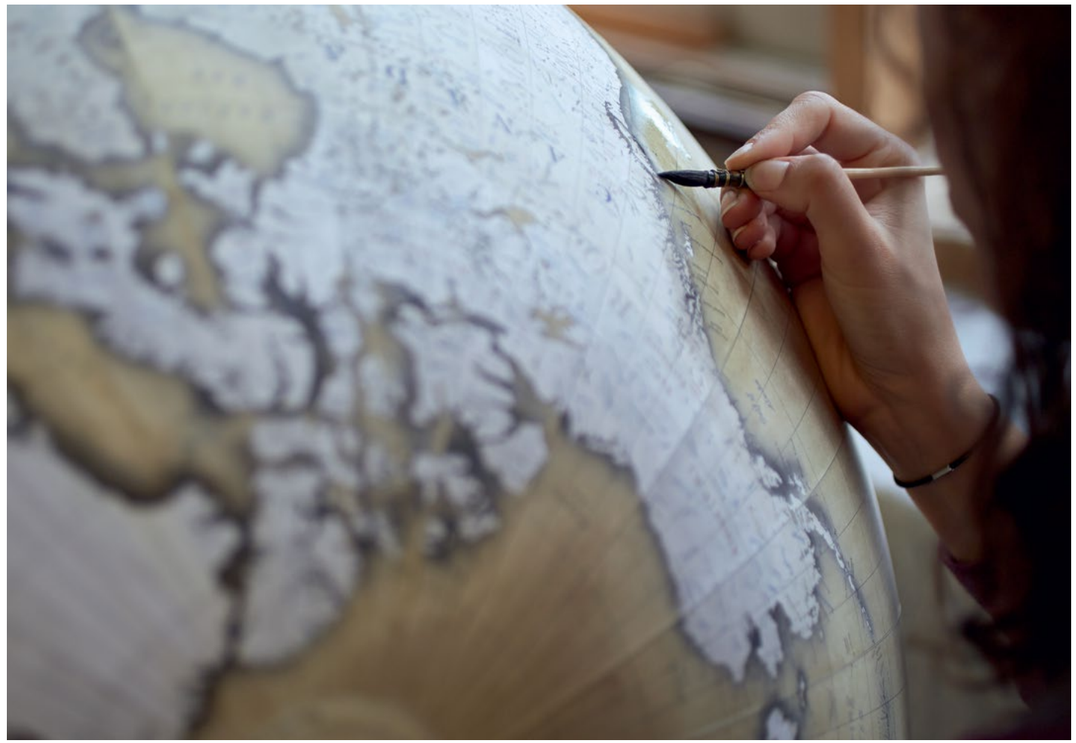
For more on this subject, see the exclusive content on Patek Philippe Magazine Extra at patek.com/owners

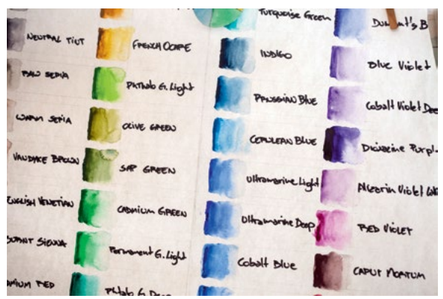






PHOTOGRAPHS: JULIAN LOVE (PREVIOUS SPREAD) ANA SANTL TOM BUNNING GARETH PON





Opposite, from top: the Curve's striking aluminum stand is made by heritage technicians from Aston Martin; Mini Desk Globes and the larger Livingstone, based on a traditional Philips globe; the head of production, Jon, working on a Reed Green Livingstone. This page, clockwise from left: gores for a Mini Desk Globe with the first layer of olive color; a color chart of the myriad hues that can be combined; after applying many layers of watercolor, the painter Isis adds shading and detail