

# For the jet set, nothing beats playing it by ear

Holly Peterson

Wheels Up!



**H**ear that starting gun popping off? It's Memorial Day Friday, the moment American summer communities turn from monochrome to Technicolor. While the 99 per cent dip their toes into still-chilly azure waters, and brush blood-coloured sauce on ribs over the BBQ, the 1 per cent herald the season in their own manner that is, as with everything that defines them, mindbogglingly peculiar. It is the season, starting today, for the wealthy to show off their priciest wares.

For years, I've written about and studied rich people. With the rising temperatures, I've observed that the antics of the wealthy become increasingly turbocharged. At a candlelit dinner I attended in the colder month of March, two bankers sparred over whose contractor was building the better wine cellar and outdoor kitchen in their oceanfront estates in Martha's Vineyard. This Saturday, they will finally be able to swagger over to the Margaux they wrangled at the Sotheby's fine and rare wine auction.

Eric Ripert, chef of New York's top-ranked restaurant Le Bernardin, knows all about men who become a little too excited about their summertime toys. "Men chew my ears for hours on how they grill and I say, 'It's OK, give it up.' But, for them it's the great celebration."

Park Avenue women who rarely touch pavement and are ferried by drivers from Bergdorf's to the outstretched arms of doormen now — amazingly enough — drive themselves on summer weekends.

Last year, one woman I see at SoulCycle in the Hamptons received a gleaming clementine orange convertible vintage Porsche Targa for Easter, the keys hidden in a basket of eggs (what fun!). As she showed it off, I noted it matched the exact orange of her Hermès Garden tote on the seat.

Remember, in crowded Manhattan, it's not easy to display in physical terms

the 4x gains on that stock you pumped and dumped. These people never drive their own cars around the city, which means that they have had to wait for a holiday weekend to finally speed away in the new BMW M5 Hurricane.

Off in the distance, a distinct roar is also heard at "charming" little airports from Napa Valley to Nantucket, as pilots deploy the thrust reversers on spanking new G-4s. Around cocktail parties and galas, I've noticed this year the chattering class shifting their private plane lingo.

Mothers at school drop-off used to fish for information about each other's wealth by discussing travel plans. I remember one woman mentioning her imminent weekend trip to Maine: "It's *wheels up* at 3pm." We all rolled our

## Entitlement increases in direct proportion to the rise in income, and under Trump, it's boom time

eyes, because we knew what she wanted us to know: "I use the NetJets pilot's vocab to denote we are lifting off at 3pm on a \$30,000 round trip private plane instead of, God forbid, a \$600 commercial ticket from JFK."

Of course, there's another level up. As one player offered when I asked when he was leaving Palm Beach: "I'm not sure exactly — we're going to play it by ear." Playing it by ear conveys ownership of the whole damn plane.

Commercial jets certainly won't wait for you. Likewise, NetJets jaunts for a single leg of travel don't allow wriggle room on departure times; exorbitant fees are incurred with each late minute. The NetJets plane must pick up someone else someplace else afterwards, which sounds like a cattle-stuffed 18-wheeler to those who now own.

When I went ahead and asked the guy in Palm Beach, "All right, what

flying toy did you buy?" he gladly told me, a Cessna Citation X, and couldn't help but add: "With my wife's initials as part of the official tail number."

Planting a peg firmly on any competitive totem pole is human nature. Dropping into conversation "It's wheels up at 3pm", or opening that Margaux 1959, is the same innate impulse any teenage boy has in lacing up his *cooler* new Nikes.

Still, since Donald Trump's ascendancy I have noticed a rise in the brazenness of the gloating. In the wake of the 2008 crash, women insisted Bergdorf's carry plain brown shopping bags for discretion. For years afterwards, people tended to entertain with less sparkly Buccellati jewels and dress with less flashy Dolce.

The social ethos seems to be changing. The reason? Entitlement increases in direct proportion to the rise of an income, and under Trump so far, it's boom time.

Yes, at those charming little airports, plutocrats feel their planes are earned. I promise you: that's the demented way people who have enough cash to spend \$9m on a "copter" or \$60m on a plane see it.

Most people who now fly private didn't inherit wealth; they worked "hard" for it at hedge funds and venture capital firms. Good old American sweat equity, right? The super-rich believe they somehow deserve the travel toys that allow them to change plans as they decide to have another glass of Domaines Ott rosé. After all, the landscaper charged a small country's GDP for it.

Entitlement is never something to be emulated. Yet, playing it by ear at the last minute on a glorious warm Sunday may be the only lesson one should learn from the rich. It's Memorial Day weekend, after all.

*Holly Peterson is a journalist and author of 'It's Hot in the Hamptons — A Novel' (William Morrow)*

*Jo Ellison is away*