

## Making the world a beautiful place: The global reach of NARS Cosmetics

by Clare Austin, Associate Editor

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The NARS Cosmetics website describes the brand's eponymous founder as an 'Image-maker; Instigator; Iconoclast'. François Nars is certainly a man with several strings to his bow, not to mention his own paradise island bought from the proceeds of the sale of his company to Shiseido in 2000. Not bad for someone who started out in 1994 with a range of 12 lipsticks sold in Barneys, New York.

Rewind further to when François Nars began his career as a make-up artist before seeing a gap in the market for a high-quality, easy to use cosmetic line worthy of a professional make-up artist. A love of photography led him to become the sole photographer for the NARS Cosmetics campaigns and following the sale of his company, he remains the driving force behind the brand, the official NARS photographer and Creative Director.



The Moodie Davitt Report Associate Editor Clare Austin meets François Nars in Paris

Collaborations, such as the recent collection with French actress and singer [Charlotte Gainsbourg](#) and a range developed with the photographer Sarah Moon, are a signature feature of the NARS Cosmetics brand along with best-sellers including the Multiple Stick (which can be used on eyes, cheeks, lips, body and is famously available in a Multiple Orgasm version); Velvet Matte Lip Pencil; Audacious Lipstick and Sheer Glow Foundation.

The Moodie Davitt Report Associate Editor Clare Austin caught up with François Nars in Paris to find out more.

**The Moodie Davitt Report: What's your opinion of travel retail?**

**François Nars** : I think a good quality airport shopping environment can do wonders in getting people in the mood to shop whilst killing time. And it's not just about having the top luxury brands. It's about inspiring design, the overall look and feel. To me, make-up is about helping women to face the world gracefully, so airports, as the gateways to the world, should be a natural starting point for their make-up journeys.

**How important is travel retail to the NARS business overall?\***

Any channel that helps us get closer to our customers is important and travel retail is great for exposing NARS to those who may not know about the brand. It has been an amazing platform for growing our reach and building our presence. There is a lot of interest from Asian consumers, especially Koreans and Chinese, and we see a lot of potential to expand the business in more travel retail markets.

\*[Ed – Travel retail is one of the fastest growing markets for NARS worldwide and the company has an increased focus on driving the travel retail business].

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**Do you have plans to expand in travel retail?**

You bet. It's a very exciting year for us on that front. We recently expanded into two new markets: Dubai and Kuala Lumpur. At Dubai International Airport, we opened our first travel retail flagship counter in the Middle East region and in the second half of the year we will open at airports in Singapore, London, Macau and China.

**Do you think an airport is the right kind of environment in which to offer a make-up service?**

I don't really think there's a right or wrong kind of environment to get your make-up done. At NARS, we are all about empowering women and giving them the tools to do their own make-up anytime, anywhere. After all, as I've always said: "Don't be so serious; it's only make-up!" Airports may not have the luxury of space and time, but as long as the service offered is professional and makes women feel good about themselves, I believe it can still be an extremely positive experience.



The campaign image for NARS Cosmetics Powermatte Lip Pigment features model Bella Hadid, photographed by François Nars himself



Powermatte Lip Pigment (pictured here in shade 'Don't Stop') will launch in travel retail Asia Pacific and EMEA in September

**Congratulations on being awarded the **Légion d'honneur** (François Nars was awarded France's highest decoration, the Légion d'honneur, in November 2016 in New York). What did it mean to you to receive such a prestigious merit?**

I was surprised and proud. I've actually brought it on this trip to Paris because my parents were not in New York when I got it so I had to bring them the actual medal. They are very proud. It's such an incredible honour, the highest you can get in France. I never thought I would receive the Légion d'honneur even though I tried my best to represent France as well as possible in the United States and all over the world. And it's a beautiful medal on top of that! Once in a while I look at it and say: "Is that really mine?". I must say it's kind of strange because I have got awards before but never anything like the Légion d'honneur. It feels great, definitely feels great.



Cultural Counselor of the French Embassy Bénédicte de Montlaur hosted the ceremony in New York at which François Nars was presented with the Légion d'Honneur

**Your latest collaboration with **Charlotte Gainsbourg** has been very well received. What was it like working with her?**

I am very, very proud of it [the collection] and very happy. There was total trust on her side and on my side so what else can you dream of? She is the perfect muse. I gave her carte blanche, total power so she was able to do anything. I told her: "The collection has to be you Charlotte, it has to resemble you, it has to look like it has come from you. This is not a collaboration that I will just put your name on and then we do everything behind your back and we will just show you it all at the end." No, from day one she decided the colours, the packaging, everything. I mean really everything you saw in that collection was hers even to the names for each colour. I wanted it to be so personal. And that's how, to me, a collaboration with one person has to be.



Creative collaborators François Nars and Charlotte Gainsbourg



French polish: The NARS x Charlotte Gainsbourg collection for Summer 2017

**Why did you decide to choose to create a make-up collection with someone not known for wearing a lot of make-up?**

I love women who don't wear too much make-up. I also love very eccentric women who wear so much, Anna Piaggi for example (the late, celebrated Italian fashion journalist). I love women who really know what they love and have a strong sense of style and what's right for them. Charlotte is not a person who wears lots of make-up but she does love make-up. She knows what looks good on her and that's why I trusted her. She knows what will work for her and will work for many many millions of other women because some women are afraid of make-up. Not everyone is like Kim Kardashian, some women are very scared and afraid.

***"I love women who don't wear too much make-up"***

All the colours and formulas that Charlotte picked are very easy to use for anybody and the collection had an incredible response.

**Of all the NARS collaborations, which has surprised you the most?**

I would say the Sarah Moon collection. It was so feminine and delicate, very different from the previous Andy Warhol, Steven Klein and Guy Bourdin collaborations which were much more colourful. Sarah's collection was so surreal and transparent. I was very thrilled when I saw everything. Also, because Sarah is still with us, thank God, I had that direct contact and we did it together. It maybe wasn't the biggest seller but the result, to me, was fantastic and it looks so beautiful.



Ephemeral Beauty: Sarah Moon for NARS Mind Game Mini Velvet Lip Glide Coffret



Sarah Moon for NARS True Story Cheek and Lip Palette

**When I type N-a-r-s into social media, it automatically auto-corrects to NARS – how does it feel to have your name become so synonymous with make-up?**

Thanks to the women. Really. Thank you to all the women out there on the planet from Asia to South America to the United States to Europe, everywhere. Thanks too to all the people around me that work so hard to make it that way. Thanks to myself a little bit too for having the original idea to do a make-up line I guess! It was a lot of hard work on everybody's part including myself when I first started. It's pretty incredible. It's a very abstract feeling at the same time: When you realise your name is all over the planet and that when you go to sleep, people wake up on another side of the world and start wearing your product. It's a very funny feeling but very thrilling.

***Do you think make-up for men will ever become mainstream? "I believe only a very limited percentage of men want to wear make-up: Actors, rock stars, David Bowie. But, real men, real-life men: Doctors; dentists; workers in factories? I really don't believe they will ever wear make-up"***

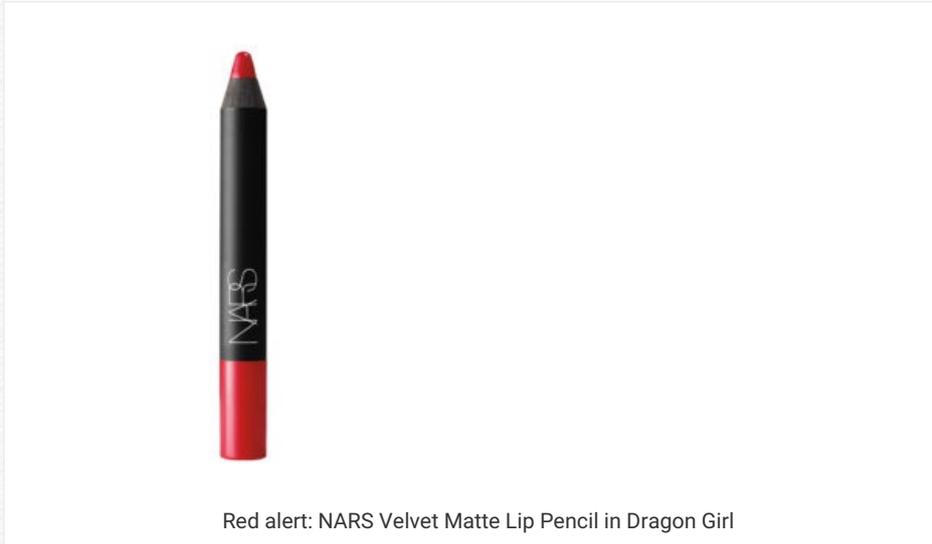
**Which is your favourite NARS product of all time?**

You know, they are all my children, I can't say I love one more than the other but I really love **Velvet Matte Lip Pencil** because I would have loved to have those in my kit when I was working as a make-up artist.

I love the **Liquid Blush** that just came out and is doing so well. Both are amazing because they contain so much pigment and they are so rich and perfectly matte.

I love the **Multiple Stick** because it's such a great product to have: Five minutes to give a great glow. Those are my top three but now we are launching a new matte gloss **Powermatte Lip Pigment** and it's amazing. Fabien Baron has created beautiful packaging for it, model Bella Hadid is the face of it. It's a very velvety matte gloss, not dry, stays on all day and it has every shade from light to neutral to strong red.

That is the good thing about being a make-up artist and having a make-up artist line. It's not just a chemist in a factory creating a product who doesn't test it necessarily on real women. I am very critical, very tough on whatever comes out. If I don't like the texture, the formula, the colours, I make them re-do it until it's perfect. Quality, quality, quality.



Red alert: NARS Velvet Matte Lip Pencil in Dragon Girl

**Has the rise of selfies and social media changed the way you create make-up because you know that women are going to be constantly photographing it?**

No, absolutely not. It doesn't influence me in any way because make-up is universal. I create make-up for women all over the world. The ones who do selfies, the housewives at home who do no selfies, grandmothers who will maybe do a selfie with the grandchildren.

Women inspire me, that's all. I don't ever think about how make-up is going to be photographed when I'm creating it, certainly not for selfies. That's not my job, my goal. What I care about with make-up is how women are going to look in real life.

**How has the rise of the beauty vlogger and online tutorials affected the way you work as a creator?**

There has been an incredible evolution of the access to beauty not only because of social media but also because there are so many more choices in make-up. Women are learning and experimenting more and magazines, professional artists and the freedom of fashion are helping them to explore these options and make fewer mistakes along the way.

**You have talked about make-up being "an enhancement, not a mask". Do you think the current trend for a very artificial look: contouring, Instagram filters etc. has gone too far in camouflaging reality?**

Make-up is to enhance beauty and I believe trends should not be followed blindly because someone tells you to. You should look in the mirror and know what makes you look good. Even if you feel that you don't know what to choose, in the end you always know what's going to make you look and feel great. It is very important that you really believe in yourself, believe in yourself first, but also believe in your own beauty.

***"I think make-up as an art form is more prevalent now than ever"***

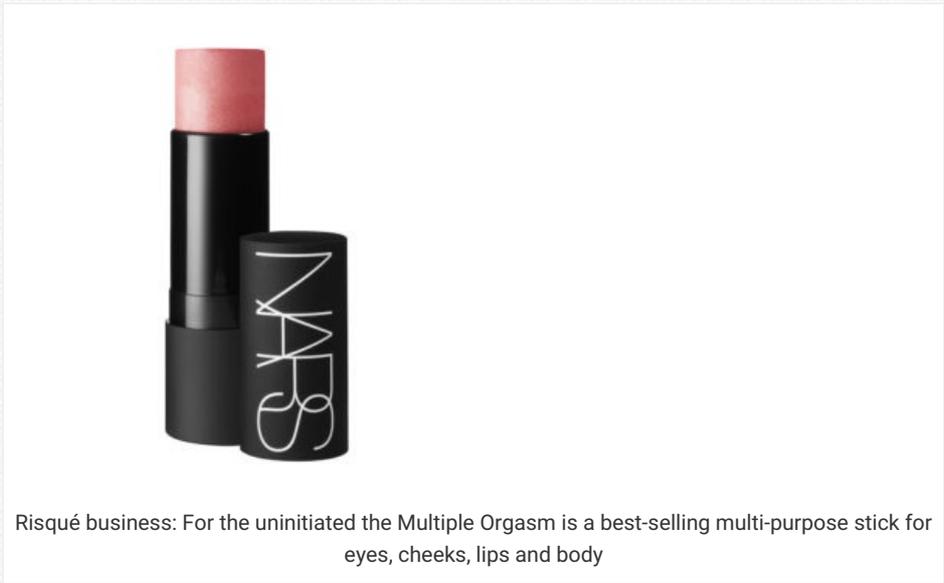
**Do you think make-up for men will ever become mainstream?**

It's hard to tell but I believe only a very limited percentage of men want to wear make-up: Actors, rock stars, David Bowie. But, real men, real-life men: Doctors; dentists; workers in factories? I really don't believe they will ever wear make-up. The only make-up I think they would wear would be tinted moisturisers. An easy, single product for evening out skin tone. Maybe a lip balm, neutral, no colour so it's not really make-up.

I might be wrong. The Egyptians wore make-up like crazy regardless of their sexual orientation or anything else so you never know. Anything could be possible. But I don't see it happening. All the make-up lines that have been created for men have failed so I think that's the proof that it's probably the wrong thing to do. I do believe in skincare for men, that is a great market as men become more and more aware of their skin and want to make their skin look great.

**How do you come up with the names of your products?**

I keep a little Hermès book that I write in 24 hours a day, even in the middle of the night. It is important that the colours have an identity and the names help give them that identity. It makes you dream a little bit.



**Make-up is an art form steeped in history and utterly creative. As an art form do you think it is understated?**

No, not at all. I remember seeing Guy Bourdin’s work at a very young age, around when I was ten or 11 years old in the French Vogue magazines my mother read in the late 60s, early 70s. The magazine was extremely creative with works by fabulous photographers such as Helmut Newton and Man Ray. All those images woke me up to a certain sense of colour, make-up and artistry. I didn’t know anything about art at the time, but I had a very, very strong attraction to those images because of the strong colours and make-up looks. It was around that time that I knew that the fashion/beauty world was something I wanted to be a part of and make mine. It was from that age that I knew I wanted to become a photographer or make-up artist. Today, I would say that there has been even more of an evolution in make-up in everything we do and the art form is more prevalent now than ever.

**You have described yourself as a shy person: Do you see make-up as a way of creating an armour to face the world?**

Yes, in a way. Make-up is a great tool for transforming yourself. It’s fun to play with, you can become somebody else or find yourself in a look. There are so many different ways to achieve a look, so many tools and colours to use and play with. You can always take it off, so play with it, it’s fun.

**Of all the photographers you have worked with, who has had the most profound impact on you?**

It’s hard to choose only one! I have already worked with so many incredible photographers that inspire me, most recently Steven Klein and Sarah Moon. I loved working with Avedon, Penn, Newton, Meisel. Many times (Steven) Meisel would invite me behind the camera and that helped me when I began photographing our campaigns.

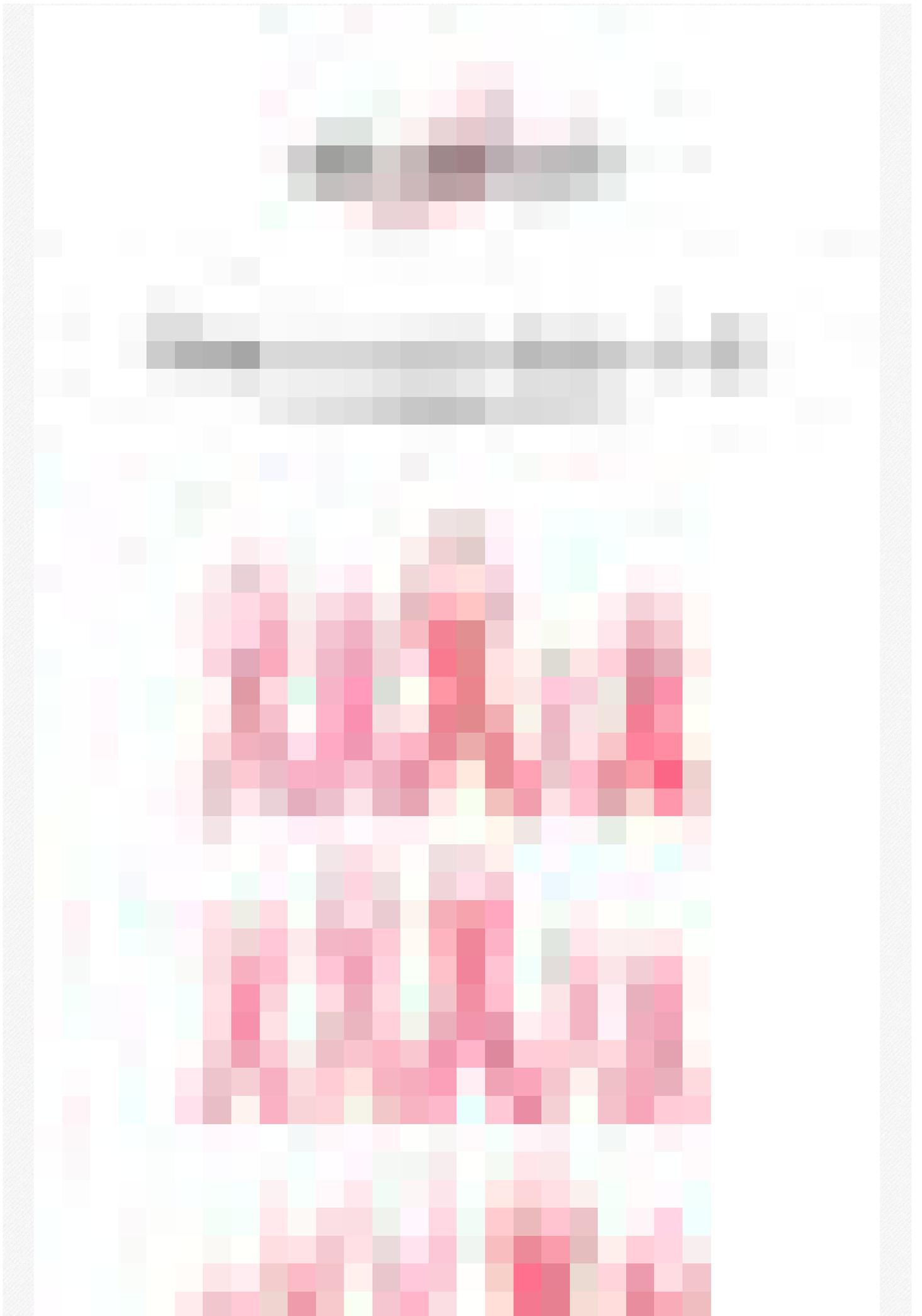
**You said that you are very inspired by travel. Is it the journey or the destination that inspires you the most?**

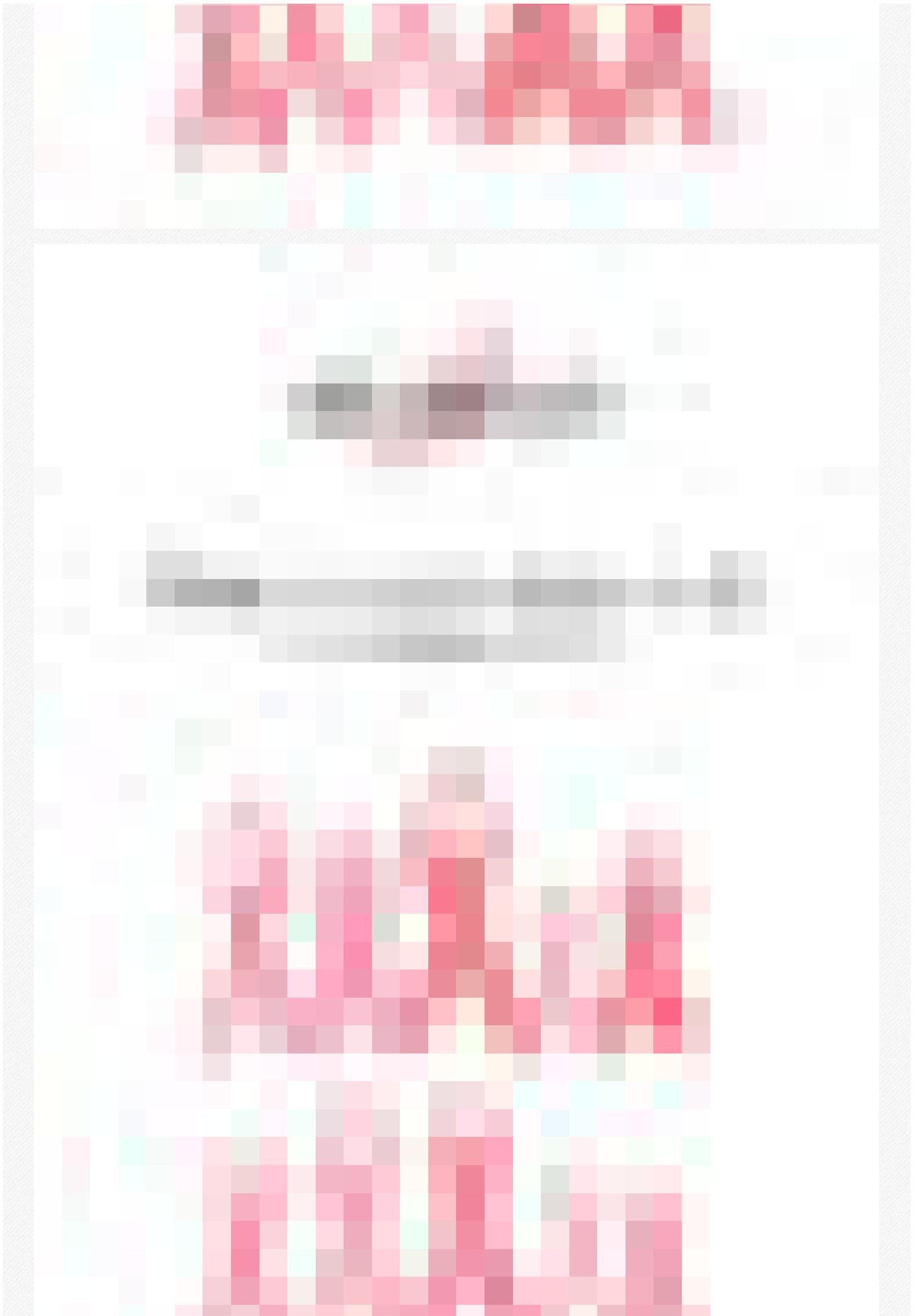
I would say both. There is so much inspiration in my life that comes from so many different sources. I do love travelling: I pick up many different ideas from all over the world. I love learning from unique cultures in each city that I visit.

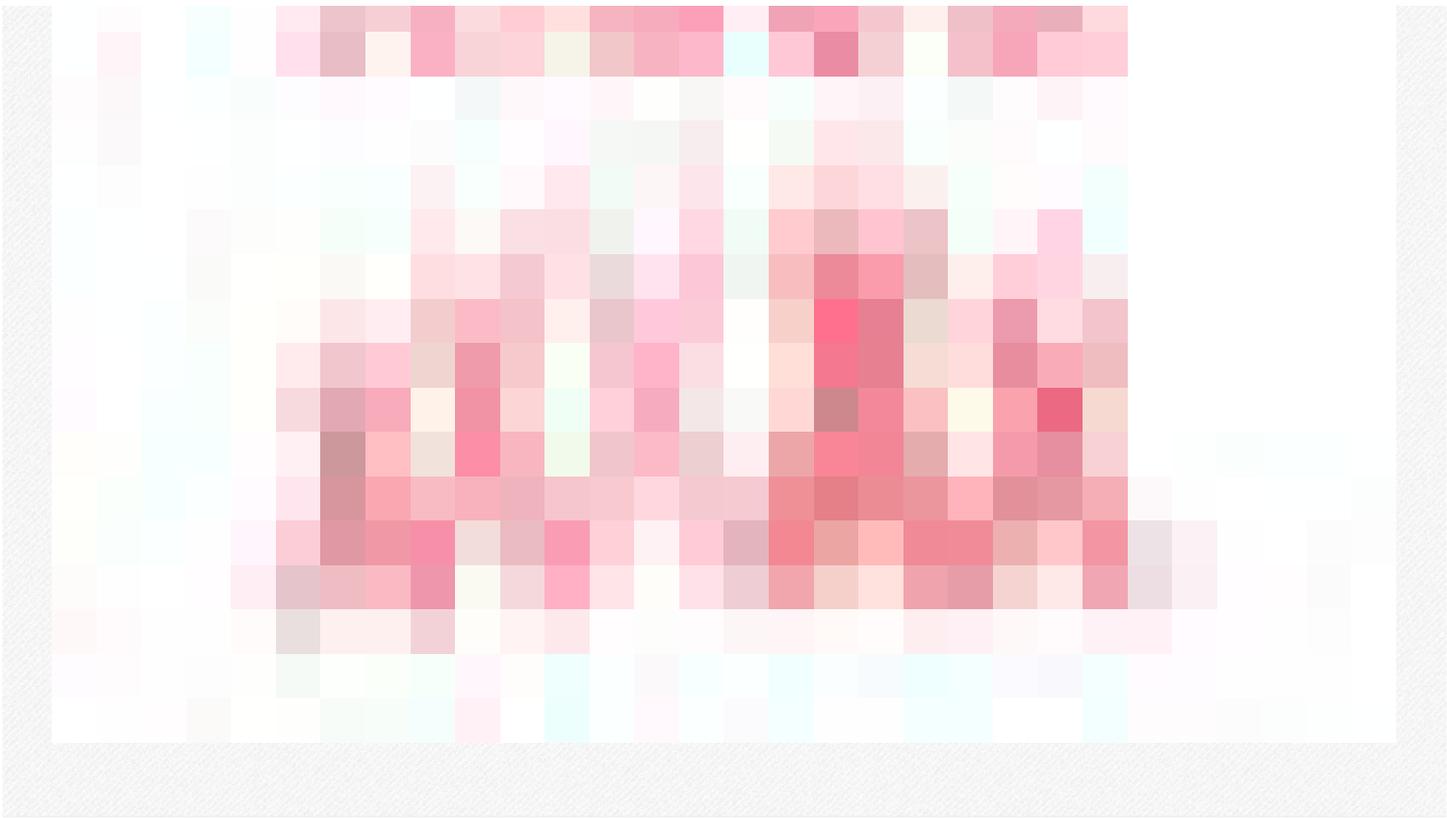


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