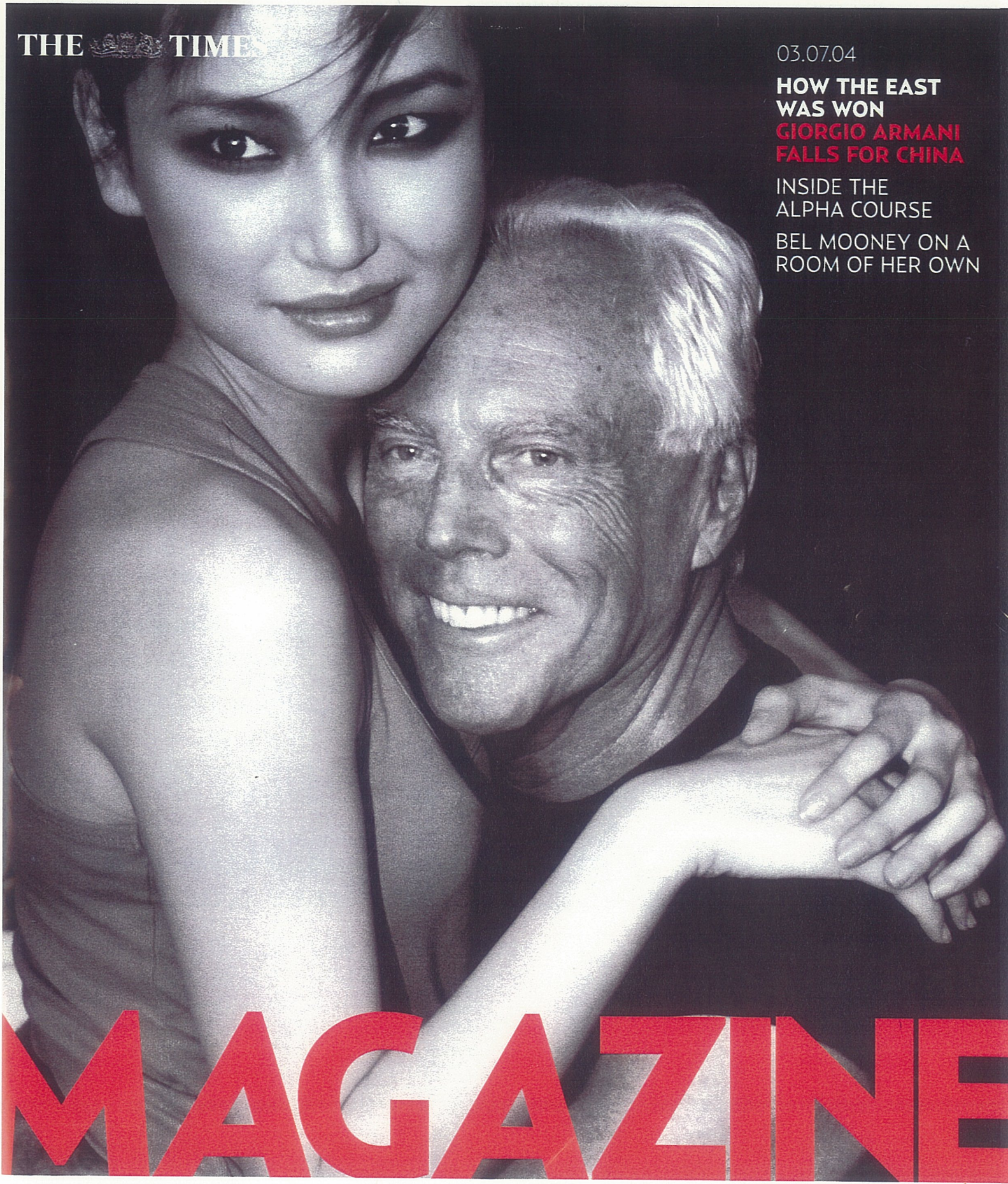




THE  TIMES

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**HOW THE EAST
WAS WON**
**GIORGIO ARMANI
FALLS FOR CHINA**

INSIDE THE
ALPHA COURSE

BEL MOONEY ON A
ROOM OF HER OWN

MAGAZINE

PLUS HERBERT YPMA ★ JANE MACQUITTY ★ GORDON RAMSAY ★ ROBERT CRAMPTON

For all its over-the-top glamour, New York's annual Costume Institute Gala can be an utter zoo. Come spring, hundreds of celebrities, socialites, fashionistas and paparazzi ascend the hallowed steps of the Metropolitan Museum for New York's premiere society event of the season. So it was ever-so-convenient that luminaries ranging from Tom Ford to Karl Lagerfeld could repair afterwards to the cosy confines of Bungalow 8, which became the evening's unofficial after-party venue.

In one corner of the intimate *boîte* huddled Stella McCartney, Scarlett Johansson and Balenciaga's Nicolas Ghesquière. Michael Kors, Lauren Bush and Famke Janssen hung out at the bar, while tunes such as *Rock the Casbah* and *Superfreak* blasted in the background. And nestled in at her usual corner table, nursing a Chopin vodka, was perhaps the happiest reveller of all: Bungalow 8's Valkyrian proprietress, Amy Sacco, a voluptuous 6ft 1in, Gucci-clad Glamazon (6ft 6in with her customary sky-high heels).

Even seated, Sacco, 35, towers above this heady crowd. She is ostensibly chatting with Linda Evangelista, Natalia Vodianova with hubby Justin Portman, and Domenico Dolce, but Sacco is constantly surveying the scene. "I'm always watching with one eye on every table," she says in her gravelly voice. "I just sit there and quietly freak. You wonder why I wear five-inch stilettos – I can see the whole place at one time. It's like standing on a stepladder."

Sacco is always a step ahead of the rest. Like the time she noticed a female frenzy breaking out and personally escorted Hugh

and LA-style murals, is modelled on the infamous bungalow 8 at the Beverly Hills Hotel, a hideaway for Marilyn Monroe and Howard Hughes. There is no VIP room. "If they're in the door, they're VIP," Sacco says. "Everybody has to be treated the same." Nevertheless, getting past Armin the doorman – without owning a coveted "key" – is a social triumph. "You need all colours, all body types, all kinds of personalities," Sacco insists. "Some suits, some in black tie, some of the hip-hop kids all dressed up in baggy jeans. But you only want a certain amount of everybody. Otherwise, it's b-o-r-i-n-g."

Sacco's own story is anything but dull. She has five brothers and two sisters, and her father owned a trucking company in suburban New Jersey, where she learnt to drive trucks when she was 12. After moving to New York, where she worked as a hostess in some of the city's most prestigious restaurants (Jean Georges, Bouley), she and fellow hostess Yvonne Force made a pact one night over a bottle of Veuve Clicquot that whoever struck it big first would help the other. When Force, her best friend to this day, hit pay dirt in the international art world, she introduced Sacco to would-be investors so that she could pursue her own dream of opening a club, and she raised the necessary \$1.2 million to open Lot 61 in 1998. Three years ago, she unveiled Bungalow 8, also in West Chelsea.

"I'm no Park Avenue Princess," Sacco proudly asserts. "I'm totally self-made. It's not where you're from, it's who you are." Sacco is now a New York somebody, a society fixture swathed in

QUEEN OF CLUBS

Everyone's treated like a VIP at Amy Sacco's nightclubs, and that's why New York's starriest names keep on coming

INTERVIEW JEFFREY PODOLSKY PORTRAIT DERRICK SANTINI

Grant to the loo. Hugh couldn't have asked for a better bodyguard. "My height's very intimidating," she says. "It evokes a sense of power. Because of my deep voice, I've been mistaken for a drag queen, but that's OK."

But, with her clubs Bungalow 8, the just-opened Cabana on the rooftop of the Maritime Hotel (which has already seen the likes of Brad Pitt) and the still popular Lot 61, there's no mistaking her as the reigning nightclub queen of New York, holding sway in a world dominated by men. "It's something you have to fight for every day," she says. "I don't stress because I'm a girl. I have advantages that the men don't have. Women feel more comfortable in my space." Women such as Kirsten Dunst, Kate Moss, Sophie Dahl, Donna Karan and Heather Graham, not to mention gents like Bruce Willis, Sean Penn, Prince, Dougray Scott – and that's just in the last couple of weeks. Unlike some Manhattan club moguls who open and close a trendy venue every few years and barely set foot in their own club, Sacco's managed to keep Bungalow 8 as the lounge du jour for three years because of her nightly presence and refusal to delegate. "I add a more personal twist to it," Sacco says. "I don't believe in opening something and then running off to the next and leaving it to someone else."

The snug lounge, with its Sixties poolside lounge chairs, polka-dot banquettes, palm trees

Gucci and YSL, who counts Bill and Hillary Clinton among her friends, and who is also a soon-to-be restaurateur, with the opening this autumn of Bette (named after her mother).

Bungalow 8's limited but scrumptious fare – legendary lobster clubs and grilled cheese sandwiches – bodes well for Bette, and Sacco, of course, is an expert hostess: the club's concierge service offers everything from games (Whoopi Goldberg as well as Demi Moore and Ashton Kutcher break out the backgammon boards) to arranging limos and plane tickets. And then there's the notorious "Walk of Shame" prevention night kits, which include condoms, sunglasses, assorted toiletries and a pair of panties.

Sacco herself is a devotee of Agent Provocateur, but, being a nocturnal workaholic, it's not easy finding a beau who will appreciate them. "I don't worry about my dating life," she claims. "I prefer quality over quantity. Everyone always says you look gorgeous, but you can't buy into that. You can't ever think you're so fabulous that you're bigger or better than your customers."

But this New Jersey "broad", who once considered herself a "klutzy geek", still can't digest the starry names she has stored in her Vertu Platinum mobile phone. "My reality is surreal," she admits. "I pinch myself all the time – and I'd pinch harder if I didn't bruise so easily." ■

Left: Amy Sacco at Bungalow 8, with decor inspired by one of Marilyn Monroe's hideaways