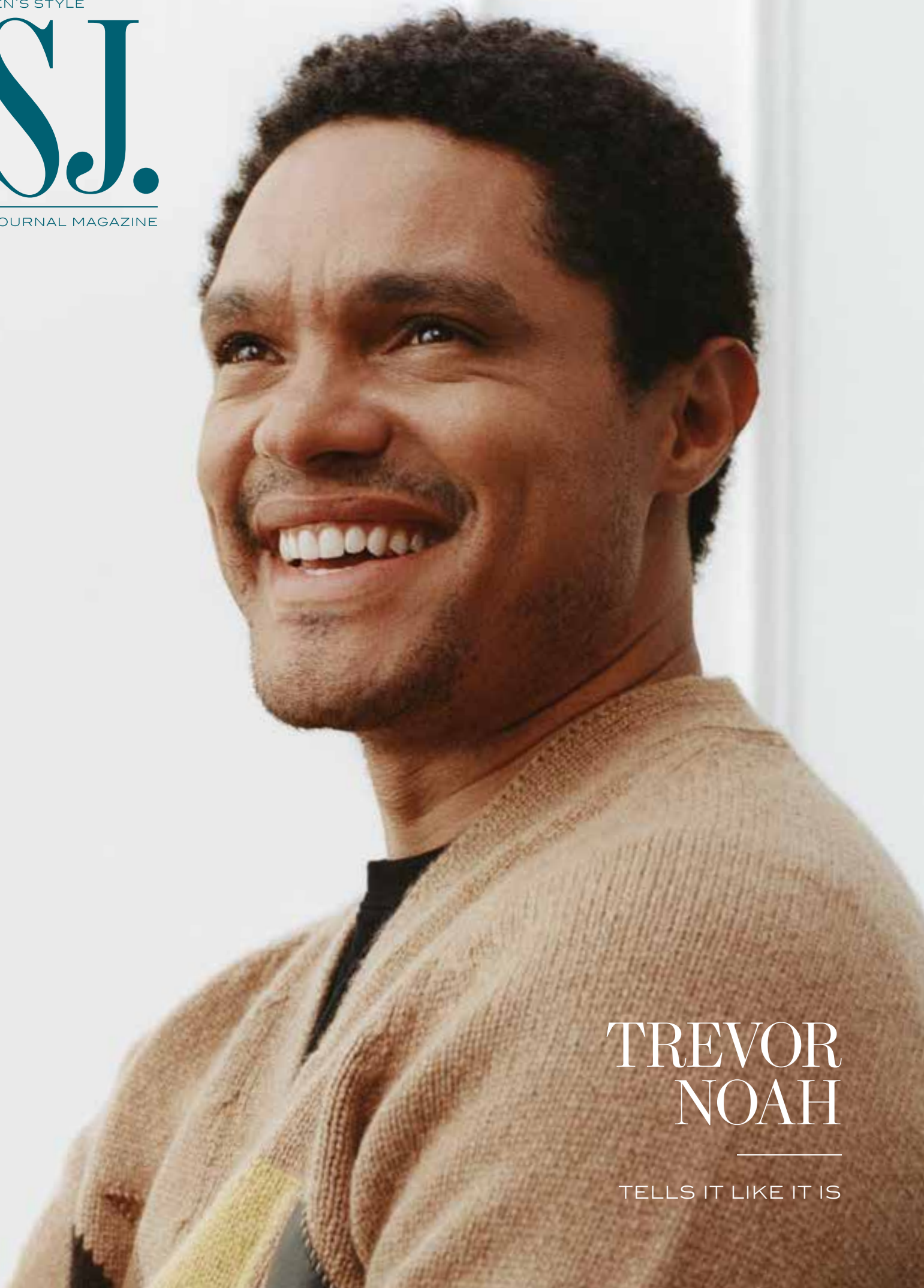


SEPTEMBER 2020 MEN'S STYLE

WSJ.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL MAGAZINE



TREVOR
NOAH

TELLS IT LIKE IT IS

THE CULT OF
USM FURNITURE

Newly restored, the house Fritz Haller created for the family behind USM showcases his designs for the company's classic steel case goods.



GROWING UP near Bern, Switzerland, within sight of his family's metalworking business, Alex Schärer had an early introduction to the power of modern architecture. One day after kindergarten, some friends came over to play and wouldn't stop ribbing him: How can you live in a house like this? There are no walls, only windows!

"The house was very particular for 1969," says Schärer, now 55, with a laugh. Hovering on steel columns, with an open-plan interior, it was the work of Swiss modernist Fritz Haller (1924–2012), a pioneer of modular construction who had already designed a factory and office building for USM, the Schärer family firm. USM specialized in machining sheet steel; it marketed Haller's system of industrial architecture to other companies, and soon the Swiss countryside was dotted with hyperfunctional Haller boxes. A much bigger smash, though, was the architect's modular furniture system. Made of steel panels, chromed tubes and ball connectors, USM Haller, as it has become known, would revolutionize the look of design and architecture offices worldwide, gaining a following among aesthetes and

neatnik modernists. Rolex and the Louis Vuitton Foundation are a few of its fans.

As the Schärer house approached its 50th birthday, in 2019, the family opted to restore it for USM's private use, a three-plus-year project completed this summer. It involved upgrading load-bearing columns, installing high-energy-absorption glass and making other technical improvements. Like Jean Prouvé's demountable houses or the prefabricated Case Study home of Ray and Charles Eames, it's an admirable kit of parts, says Alex Schärer, now USM's CEO and president. He believes the Schärer house has the potential to stand for ingenuity and flexibility in a post-pandemic world. "It's often said that the Haller furniture system is a bit like the Swiss Army knife of the furniture industry—it has really become an icon," Schärer says. The same now goes for his childhood home. *usm.com*. —Sarah Medford



STEELY LOOK

From top: The newly restored Schärer house, near Bern, Switzerland, designed by Fritz Haller for the family that founded USM; a cabinet from the USM Haller furniture line.



MUMBAI MORSELS

A staple of Indian childhoods is the local *mithaiwala*, or candymaker: "He would dole out sweet treats in the shop, giving you tastes of everything, making you really happy," recalls Sameer Seth, a partner in Mumbai's Bombay Sweet Shop. "We thought, What if Willy Wonka had a *mithai* factory?" Here, a few reimagined delicacies from the confectionery's "chief mithaiwala," Girish Nayak. *bombaysweetshop.com*. —Sarah Khan



Coconut-caramel *patisa* fingers

The flakiness of *soan papdi*, a North Indian sweet, is veiled in caramel, chocolate and coconut fluff. "We thought, Why not make it like Twix or Bounty?" says Seth.



Indian gummies

"*Karachi halwa* has a ghee-laden, dense texture," explains Seth. "So how do you lighten it? These are like jujubes that you can pop at any time."



Smoked-almond *chikki* thins

A lighter alternative to *chikki* (a dense brittle), these squares are packed with smoked almond, saffron, orange zest, rose petals, magaz seeds and jaggery. "They're inspired by After Eights, actually," says Seth.