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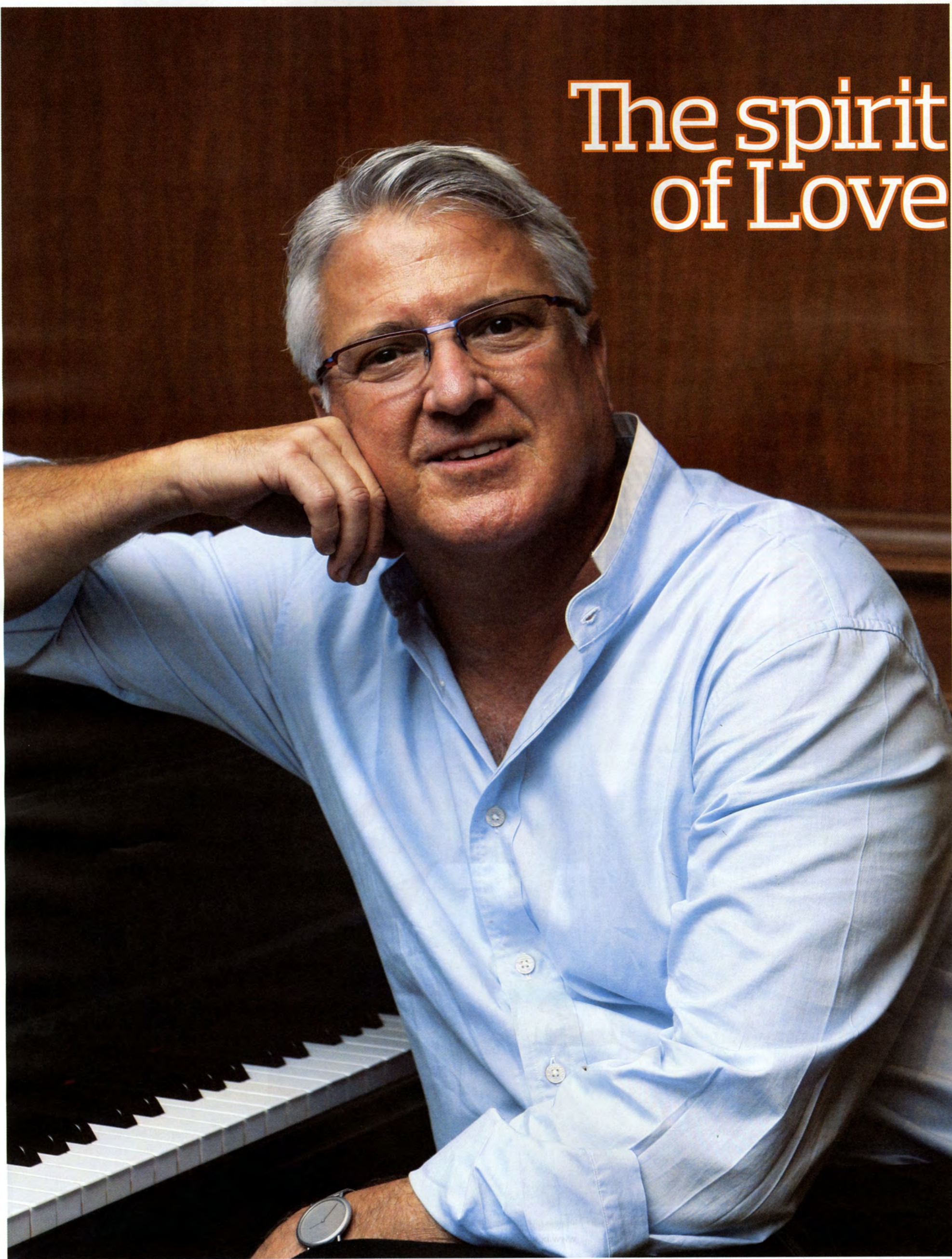
## THINK LIKE THE SUN

Tim Love, group vice-chairman of communications giant Omnicom, reveals the unique manifesto that drives his professional and personal life

**THE ART OF TIME** a collectible tome celebrating Swiss luxury watchmaker IWC's pioneering spirit **INSPIRED & INDIVIDUAL** the pure artistry of Islamic rugs **DESKTOP DOODADS** inject personality into your workstation **EAT, DRINK, LOVE** at KL's latest fine dining destination



# The spirit of Love



Omnicom Group vice-chairman Tim Love is a rarity in the advertising industry. He does not talk adex figures, target groups or media channels. No, he is more interested in the spirit that keeps the communications industry going. The 'guru' introduces **Anandhi Gopinath** to a manifesto called 'Think Like The Sun' which he crafted and uses as a cornerstone of his practice. It takes a holistic approach to business and life and requires people to think beyond their immediate environment when they project ideas and to remain conscious of the possibilities of misinterpretation.

**T**im Love is someone you can correctly label as an advertising guru, a term that is often used to mean someone well versed in an industry or perhaps someone with several years of experience in it. But the mental picture of the word "guru" is a specific one, and rarely does the picture actually match the person.

Love, who is Omnicom Group's vice-chairman, is a perfect fit for the label for many reasons. He has four decades of working experience with the world's best agencies, that too with a varied portfolio of clients in diverse markets across US, Europe and Asia. His name also adds to the guru image. His personality, however, is what cements the deal.

Rather than talk about the numbers that keep the global communications industry afloat, Love is more interested in its spirit. At not a single moment in our 40-minute conversation does he talk about adex (advertising expenditure), demographic psychology (defining the nature of a target market) or new media channels (the Internet, mobile technology and so on). He's not talking about the value of advertising or the future of the print media or the circumstances of public relations. Love talks about communicating. About why humans communicate, and what it is that drives us to do so.

Listening to him speak for the first time is a little overwhelming — the conceptual level at which he speaks is all very heady stuff. It is only after you mull it over does what he said sink in. It is about the driving principles of humanity itself, and how these — many steps down the road — affect the industry of communication.

Omnicom is a New York-based strategic holding company that manages a portfolio of companies that operate in the disciplines of advertising, marketing services, speciality communications, interactive/digital media and media-buying services. The communications conglomerate has offices all over the world, including Malaysia — subsidiary offices include Fleishman-Hillard (public relations), OMD and PHD (media specialists) and TBWA, BBDO and DDB (advertising). Love plays dual roles in the mighty organisation that is Omnicom — vice-chairman of its global operations and CEO of its APIMA (Asia-Pacific India Middle East Africa) region.

It was the managing director of the Malaysian office of Omnicom Media Group, Andreas Vogiatzakis, who introduced Love to *Options*. He said there was something unusual about Love and that "he combines business acumen with a focus on issues that matter to people — real, humane, philosophical but practical".

This did not really say much, but upon meeting Love, it became quite clear that this was not going to be your average advertising industry story. Dressed in a casual blue shirt and simple black trousers, Love does not possess the sort of glamour that people in his industry radiate. His hair is not perfectly coiffed — a lock of white hair tumbles down his forehead.

At first hello, we see a gentle person with a beautiful smile. Despite the punishing heat and his gruelling schedule, Love is more than pleasant and takes an active interest in us — what I studied in university or what camera *The Edge* photographer Kenny Yap was using. The man is likeable in a way that is difficult to explain.

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We begin the interview by clarifying one important thing: what the letters APIMA in his designation stand for. The letters AP clearly stand for Asia-Pacific but the IMA stumps me, and a few others in the office. His reply reveals a charming aspect of Love's personality — he is quite a storyteller.

"I decided that we needed to signal a more enlightened view of the way the world was developing," he begins. "In 1992, when I moved to Europe, my two clients P&G and Mars urged us to get into East Europe. At the time, they also told me to get ready for China, that the Chinese government was getting ready to engage in a global economy and that they wanted to be there. So I asked them, 'Well, what about India?' I knew it had about a billion people, good for consumer brands like theirs,

but they said it was going to take a lot longer because they don't have infrastructure and the government doesn't have the same control China does. So I asked, 'What about Africa? They have a lot of people too.' And they said Africa is going to take decades.

"So here we are, in 2010. China has to be a part of anybody's strategy; you have to include it in your scenario planning. India has come along much faster than anyone imagined, and its size matters. Then I decided to include Africa because of something you don't see as easily from London or New York: Japan, China and India invest heavily in Africa. To them, Africa is what China and India were to the West just 15 years ago. The other reason for Africa is the World Cup this June. Many Americans don't know what the World Cup is, but to the rest of the world, it's probably bigger than the Olympics.

"Also, last July, Africa got its first broadband cable in the east. Well, we know what happens when a community gets broadband. Plus, more people have mobile phones in Africa than they do electricity. So, Africa should be included in anyone's frame of reference. I also thought the Middle East should be included because I learnt to appreciate the rhythm of the year that was set by the Ramadan month and so on. It's a unique rhythm, which is important from a marketing standpoint," he explains.

His APIMA explanation is the last he talks about anything business-like. Love soon regales me with stories of the world's many time zones, a topic he is very interested in and familiar with, thanks to all the travelling he has done over the years. In fact, after an article Love wrote on the subject was published earlier this year, Russian President Dmitry Medvedev announced a reduction in the number of time zones in the world's largest country from 11 to 9. A colourfully drawn world map and 15 minutes later, Love finally reveals where the conversation is going.

"This is important because we're truly interested in securing the power of the sun and maximising its energy. We would be a lot more scientific about using it," he says, waving his hand over his scrawled map. 'Think Like The Sun' is a manifesto that Love has crafted as a cornerstone of his practice — taking a holistic approach to life and business like the sun shining on the earth. The theory requires people to think beyond their immediate environment when they project ideas and to remain conscious of the possibilities of misinterpretation.

So, this was what Vogiatzakis was talking about — this unusual philosophy of Love's. I had read about 'Think Like The Sun' prior to the interview but didn't know what it was about. So I ask him to tell me about it.

"When I first went to Europe in 1992, the Berlin wall had just come down and the Soviet Republic had just dissolved into Russia," he begins. "I went there with this thought: think global, act local. It was very useful because it made us think of other geographies. It assumed and accepted that there were other geographies than the one we were in. But as I began to see the changing media climate — cable TV was booming, government TV channels increased — I observed that the borders that separated here and there weren't as clear anymore. You used to need a passport to go from Belgium to Germany and gradually that wasn't needed anymore. It was a more borderless world. I kept thinking that I needed a new perspective, a new way to work that would help me."

'Think Like The Sun' dawned on Love in the most natural way — one morning, when the sun rose, he was there to see it. But it was not just about his day or the limitations of his own working hours that caused this Eureka moment.

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"For all intents and purposes, it was like brand building would stop once I switched off my office lights and went home, and then it would resume when the sun rose the next day," Love remarks.

By now, he is on his feet, pinning a piece of paper on the wall and drawing and gesturing animatedly. "But the sun doesn't go up and down. It is us here on earth that move. I thought 'Think Like The Sun' would be corny enough, yet interesting enough, to get people to look at the world not as a homogenous place but as a rich and diverse interconnected place."

'Think Like The Sun', along with two of Love's other manifestos, has been published to critical acclaim and Love was invited by the US State Department to write a White Paper on the issue of rising anti-Americanism following 9/11. Excerpts of this paper, titled *Walk The Talk: Think Like the Sun*, was published in 2003 by *Advertising Age* and featured in 2004 in a book entitled *America The Brand*.

Love shares his ideas with staff members of the Omnicom group through thinking pieces that he sends out via email every once in a while. Vogiatzakis had shared one with *Options* and it was about a recent trip of Love's to Cairo. He described in vivid colour the sandstorms and protective clothing he had to wear and added a photograph from the conference he was there to attend.

But more interesting than that was how his perception of the Middle East changed after this one visit and how he understood better the advertising and marketing challenges there. It's nice for Omnicom staff to receive words of wisdom from their big boss, but when they are inspiring as well, the feeling must be wonderful.

However, 'Think Like The Sun' has had its fair share of disbelievers. Love was even told that it was a tired and oversold idea, from a publicity viewpoint. But this mattered little to Love — publicity was not why he believed so much in 'Think Like The Sun'.

"About eight years ago, this PR guy told me that I had done all I could with 'Think Like The Sun' and that I should come up with something else. But you know, it was still working for me. In art, when you paint or draw, the distance away from the material you're working on is the length of your arm. When you're drawing something, you have to step back and look at it. What 'Think Like The Sun' does is to make you step back mentally from something and look at it with a fresh point of view. So yes, I'm still talking about it," he says with a wide grin.

In the communications industry, the currency that buys success and fame is simple: fresh and powerful ideas. There is a constant race to find new ideas and to make them work for you because an idea is worth nothing unless it is realised. "Think Like The Sun" is more of a creative philosophy that drives the creation of new ideas, providing its practitioners with a compass to examine an idea from as many angles as possible, ensuring that it really works.

The way the world is developing — with increasing choices for people to make every day — is making "Think Like The Sun" even more relevant. With more choices comes more power, but as Love points out, such power comes at a price. "I think freedom of choice is very important because it empowers people. But the freedom to have more choices brings with it a responsibility; something I call the penalty of freedom. It requires us to be more accountable for our words and our behaviours because it is more observable, more transparent."

Love uses Viktor Frankl's 1946 book *Man's Search for Meaning* to explain what he means. The book was about Frankl's time while interred at the Auschwitz concentration camp and is a psychological recollection of what the other inmates there were going through mentally. Frankl, a psychologist, neurologist and Holocaust survivor, concludes from his experience that a prisoner's psychological reactions are not solely the result of the conditions of his life, but also the freedom of choice he always has even in severe suffering.



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It becomes immediately clear how 'Think Like The Sun' applies to our day-to-day lives. The world we live in is not the simple place our parents inhabited. Today, it is overwhelmed by so much information from a multitude of sources, thanks to the proliferation of new media channels. "There's more information that people have to make choices about, which is good, but we need to be better at making those choices," Love observes.

Vogiatzakis signals to me and I know that I have just a few minutes left with Love. He is on a whirlwind trip to Kuala Lumpur, part of a tough traveling schedule that keeps him in and out of airports all over the region. Love splits his time between a recently joined office in Singapore — "Oh my God,

that little island is really hot" — and Omnicom's office in New York.

The jetsetting lifestyle Love leads today is a far cry from his formative years as a young boy in Ohio, Connecticut. The son of a television repairman who had a passion for airplanes, Love remembers admiring an older cousin who worked with Exxon in Indonesia. After marrying his boss's daughter in far-off Singapore, this cousin continued to impress the young Love with stories of his travels and the art that he brought home. Yes, there was much of the world to see and Love wanted to see it.

He spent time in university studying art and playing baseball, although later on he switched majors to marketing and continued art as an elective. Although his art teacher in university berates him to his day for turning art into a mere elective, the balance of the two subjects has worked out well for Love. "I've used art to communicate with people from different cultures all over the world," he says. "It helps to have a common reference point; it takes some of the tension away between two people."

Love received a scholarship to continue his studies as a result of a copywriting competition he won by sheer accident. The year was 1969 and Love created an advertisement featuring a bearded young man ostensibly smoking marijuana with a caption that read: "Check your stats, man. It's a felony in most of our states. If for no other reason than that, don't sacrifice the freedom you may ever hope to achieve." A year and a half later, Love found out that the ad had won third prize and he received a full scholarship to finish graduate school. At the time, his prize-winning advertisement was also one of the earliest anti-drug public service announcements in the country.

His career landed him in New York eventually and his first assignment in advertising was for a public service campaign for the Peace Corps. "I was lucky," Love remarks. "Working on the Peace Corps was a really good thing and it made me believe that what we do in this business is really noble. It would've been different if I had started on something else, I think. But like I said ... I was really lucky."

Ethics in advertising is something Love is very passionate about, although he is unable to go into it with me. The advertising industry's visible social and economic presence attracts much commentary — critics constantly question its value, focusing on its pervasive intrusion into the general consciousness of everyday public perception. But it is also a well-acknowledged fact that advertising has been a fulcrum point of economic development and a mirror of societal change.

In a lecture entitled *Does Advertising Have A Moral Conscience* — one of many Love has delivered on the subject — he suggests that advertising could well be one of the freedoms to promote freedoms of other kinds. Based on an economic theory expounded by Nobel Prize winner Amartya Sen, Love's premise is that advertisers share the responsibility of creating freedoms from problems of poverty, violations of political freedom, encouraging gender equality, helping ensure clean air and safe drinking water and even ridding the world of slavery.

Global brand building is an industry that is constantly evolving and completely volatile because of the unpredictable nature and interconnectivity of its audience — the human race. We are the very people we communicate to and as the world continues to develop, we need to be increasingly aware that the global population is today more interconnected than it has ever been before. What each of us chooses to say and do has an impact on other people and we owe it to them — and to ourselves — to be responsible about it.

It's a tough time to be in this business, but Love says there has never been a better time either. "We are in the idea exchange between people; we live in that idea exchange," he says excitedly. "It's about listening, understanding, entertaining and creating ideas that change the world. That's what we're in the business for. This is a good time." ■