



# Coffee shop of horrors

How Bangkok went cuckoo for crazy themed cafés

# Behind the scenes

**THIS MONTH** we sent writer Nina May to fulfil her dream of a riding holiday with Iceland's beautiful horses, accompanied by photographer Ben Roberts, who took some incredible shots of the wild scenery (p54).

[benrobertsphotography.com](http://benrobertsphotography.com)



Steady for their close-up: Nina and mount Draumur



## Contribs *Just some of the talented people who helped make this issue*



**LOLA AKINMADE ÅKERSTRÖM**  
Stockholm-based writer Lola covers culture, food, tradition, and lifestyle for the likes of *National Geographic Traveller* and *Lonely Planet*. For us, she learned why slowing down could help us all live better (see p66). [lolaakinmade.com](http://lolaakinmade.com)



**AARON JOEL SANTOS**  
Originally from New Orleans, photographer Aaron has travelled the world for *The New York Times*, *Smithsonian* and others. For us, he shot the saccharine subculture of Bangkok's coffee shops (p40). [aaronjoelsantos.com](http://aaronjoelsantos.com)



**ANDREA LAMBE**  
Photographer and musician Andrea works as a creative therapist with elderly people in Dublin. We feature her series of shots that conveys her experience of living with chromesthesia (p86). [andrealambe.com](http://andrealambe.com)

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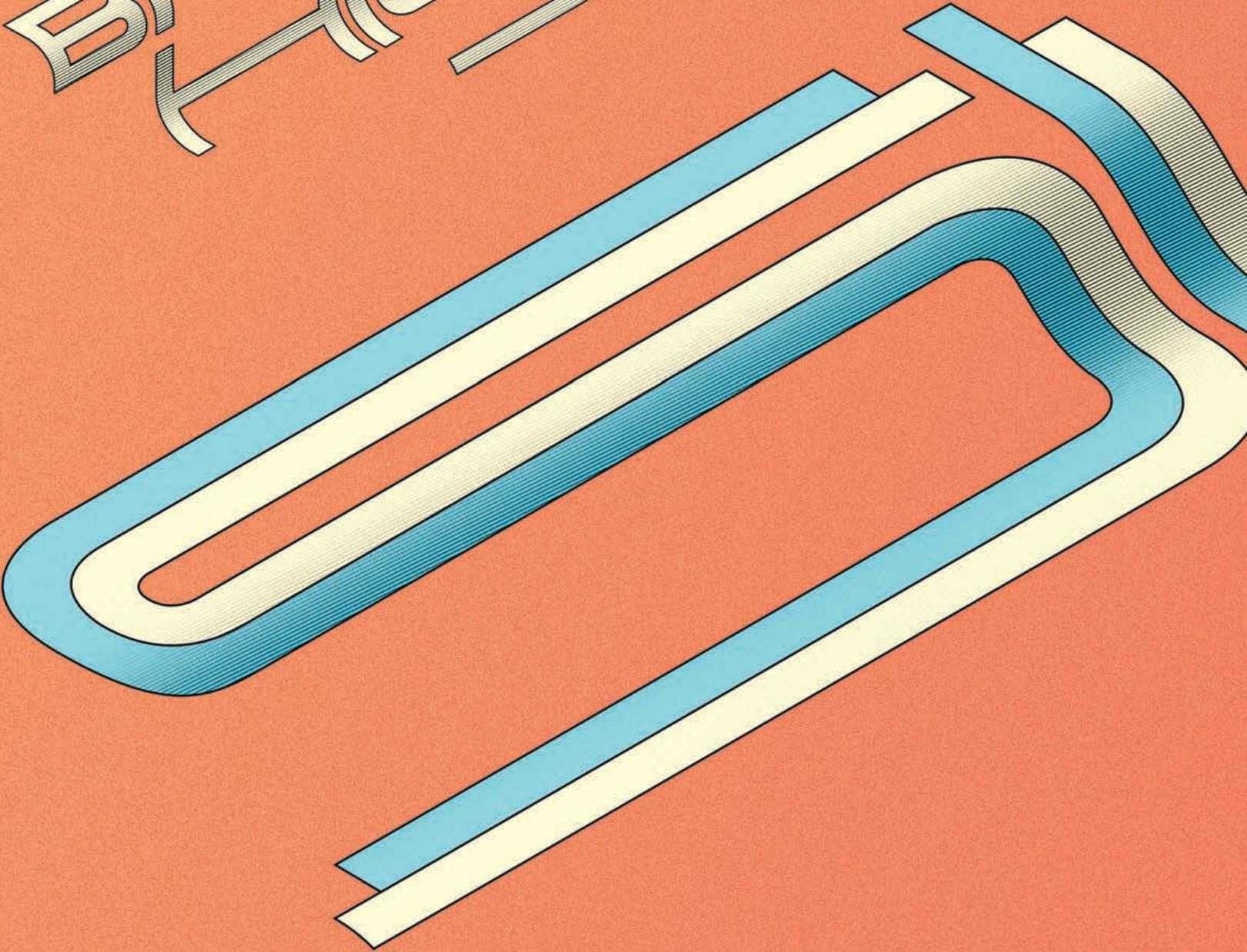
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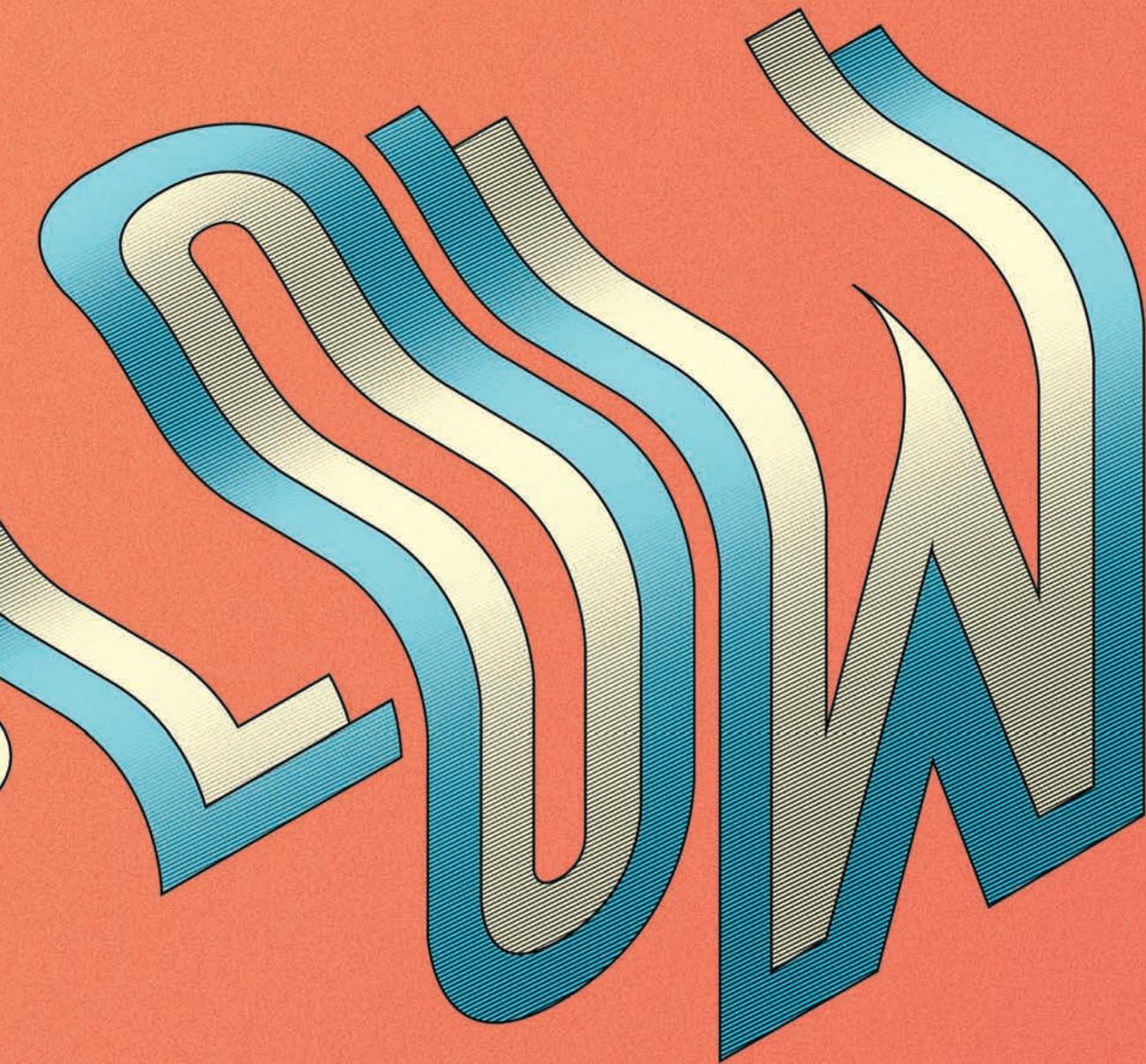
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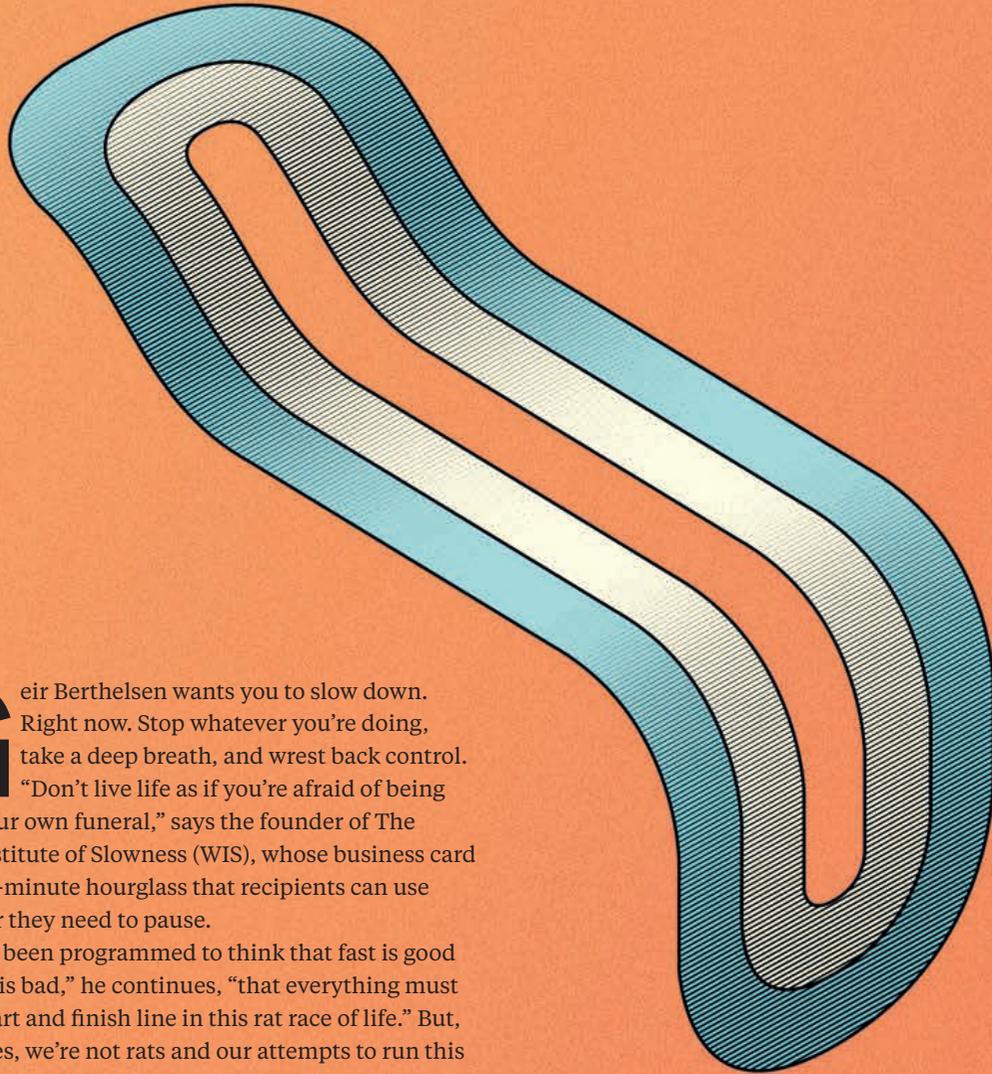
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It's almost 20 years since Geir Berthelsen founded The World Institute of Slowness. We spoke to him about how thinking of time differently can help us all live better

Words / Lola Akinmade Åkerström →  
Illustration / Charles Williams



**G**eir Berthelsen wants you to slow down. Right now. Stop whatever you're doing, take a deep breath, and wrest back control. "Don't live life as if you're afraid of being late to your own funeral," says the founder of The World Institute of Slowness (WIS), whose business card is a three-minute hourglass that recipients can use whenever they need to pause.

"We've been programmed to think that fast is good and slow is bad," he continues, "that everything must have a start and finish line in this rat race of life." But, he stresses, we're not rats and our attempts to run this race don't do anything for our health or our sanity.

By 2018, this is a common refrain, echoed by mindfulness teachers and wellness professionals, but back in 1999 – when Berthelsen founded WIS, with the aim of recalibrating and de-ratting our approach to life – he was in the minority.

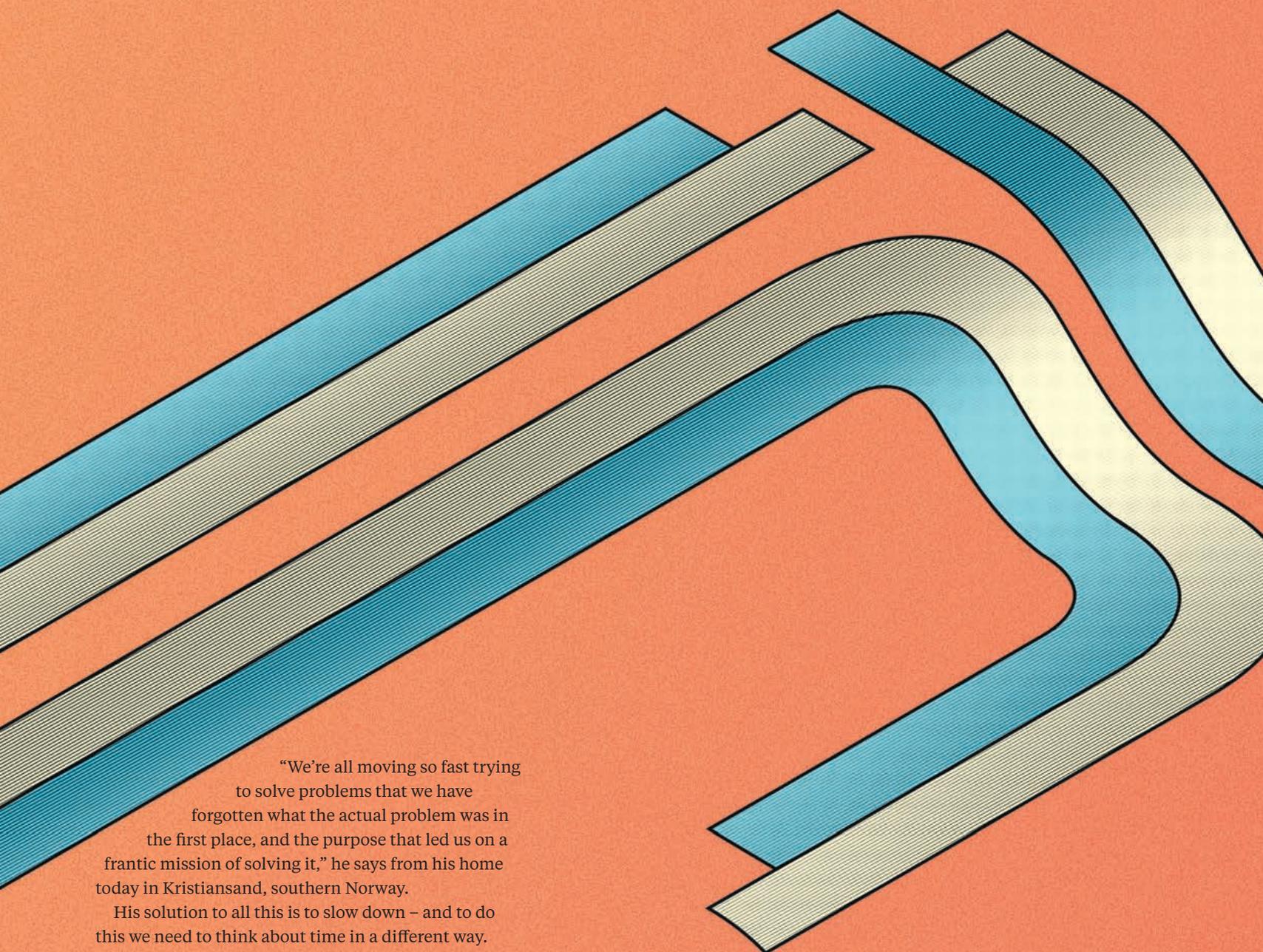
He decided at a relatively young age that one of the problems of the modern world was that we were all moving and thinking too quickly, and this caused unnecessary stress. Growing up in the idyllic seaside town of Lillesand in southern Norway, his part-time

**"Don't live as if you're afraid of being late to your own funeral"**

work as a gravedigger had given him a profound understanding of life and death, and studying physics at university had helped him to understand time. (As Einstein said, "The only reason for time is so that everything doesn't happen at once.")

All this came into context when he studied for a master's degree in organisational psychology under Benjamin Weybrew – founder of the ABC model of stress. Weybrew's research on personnel living in nuclear submarines showed that stress (C) is the result of activating events (A) exacerbated by beliefs (B).

"I was fascinated with how his findings are highly relevant in reducing stress within the modern organisation," says Berthelsen, who drew on them for his work in leadership consulting. He soon had his own company across Norway, Germany, the UK and the US, helping large organisations remove the "firefighting" mindset to increase productivity and pleasure. His SlowConsulting approach advises companies to work smarter, not faster or harder. »



“We’re all moving so fast trying to solve problems that we have forgotten what the actual problem was in the first place, and the purpose that led us on a frantic mission of solving it,” he says from his home today in Kristiansand, southern Norway.

His solution to all this is to slow down – and to do this we need to think about time in a different way. In the West, we tend to think about being slow as the opposite of fast, with the implications of sluggishness or inefficiency. But, he says, we might be better off thinking of slowness as a different kind of time.

Take the metaphor of the hare and the tortoise, from the Ancient Greek fable. Its moral was about the slow and steady tortoise winning the race, while the fast and speedy hare burned out. This parable mirrors the way the Ancient Greeks considered time – as not one thing but two: the linear *chronos* but also *kairos* – the time when special events happen. So, rather than thinking about slowness in terms of chronological time, Berthelsen says we’d do better to think of it as a different sort of time – the “forgotten dimension” of *kairos*.

“Our current understanding of time is an invention of the 19th-century Industrial Revolution, when the conception of time zones such as Greenwich Meridian Time was crucial in introducing work shifts,” he says. “Treasuring the here and now is a lesson we seem to have lost in the modern world of constant connectivity and instant gratification.” Basically, we should all be more tortoise.

Berthelsen isn’t the only person to have pushed for us to appreciate and invest “quality time”. The Slow Food movement, which is now well established, began in 1986 when food writer and activist Carlo Petrini protested the opening of a McDonald’s restaurant in an iconic piazza in Rome, and set out to promote local Italian producers instead. His work in turn inspired the Cittaslow or slow-town movement, where productivity is judged on people-friendly infrastructure and ecological successes rather than economic output or speedy efficiency.

In 2004, Canadian journalist Carl Honoré was inspired by feeling “stuck in roadrunner mode” to write *In Praise of Slowness*, coining the phrase “slow movement” and bringing techniques for slow living to the masses. Since then, slowness has infiltrated everything from fashion to parenting, money to travel – triggering spin-off trends into craft food and drink, “living like a local” and downshifting. In Norway, there’s even slow TV; the Norwegian Broadcasting



## “We’re all moving so fast trying to solve problems we have forgotten what the problem was”

Corporation (NRK) regularly treats its viewers to broadcasts featuring whole train and ferry journeys.

“Nowadays, putting the word ‘slow’ in front of any word forces you to stop and think about the true meaning of that word,” says Berthelsen, who notes that the larger slow movement probably has deeper roots linked to the Roman Empire and Emperor Augustus, whose mantra was *festina lente* – “make haste slowly”.

As global understanding and traction of slowness grew, Berthelsen created The World Institute of Slowness, “a Think-Tank for the Slow Revolution”, which aims to teach brands to take a more considered approach to their business. By connecting with customers on a deeper level through stories, he believes they can benefit from a better relationship and a stronger market position for longer.

Love them or hate them, he believes big brands are inadvertently role models within society in terms of fostering work culture, and they can permeate slow thinking faster through society from the top down. “Brands harness magic,” he says, “and magic itself is nothing more than changing someone’s perception.”

Think of it as advertising versus art. They both have the power to change our perception through “magic”, but conventional advertising makes consumers out of people through quick manipulation while viewing art in a gallery slows us down to study its meaning and change our perception.

The biggest advantages of slowness can be found on the individual level. Between work, family and personal obligations, we’ve all wished for extra hours in the day at some point. Our collective stress is now making time a valuable resource. For Berthelsen, the antidote is simple, really: it’s not about having more time, but about thinking differently about the time you have. »

### How to slow down

The WIS manifesto suggests ways to slow down and feel better...

1. Set your alarm clock 10 minutes before you need to get up. You’ll never run late.
2. Prepare and eat a structured breakfast. Let all parties talk and say what they think the highlight of the coming day will be. Listen.
3. Hug each other before leaving the house.
4. Smile.
5. Don’t skip lunch.
6. At 2pm each day, ask yourself: “How am I feeling?”
7. Prepare and eat dinner with the family and without TV or screens – and listen to everyone recount the highlights of their day.
8. A hobby a day keeps the shrink away! Hobbies help us appreciate life here and now.
9. Exercise for at least 20 minutes per day. Take a short walk, even if it’s raining.
10. Spend five minutes before bed reviewing the day and plan tomorrow’s highlights.
11. Don’t live life as if you are afraid of being late to your own funeral. »

# “Our problems have nothing to do with a lack of time but rather, the way we perceive time”

“Slow thought is immunisation against the stress virus,” he says. “Our problems have nothing to do with a lack of time but rather, the way we perceive time. Fast thinking is your autopilot – your automatic responses that dictate your thoughts, feelings and actions. Slow thinking is what happens to you when you turn off your autopilot. Slow thinking is the understanding of our innate thinking process and how our thoughts make our reality.”

In the future, anything that can be digitalised will be digitalised, as that’s what our society’s emphasis on speed requires. Therefore, Berthelsen believes, the greatest value will be placed on things we can’t digitalise – because there are no algorithms for human imagination, purpose, intrinsic creativity and love.

“We want the things we don’t like doing to be accomplished as quickly as possible through technology, so that we have more time for the things we like to do slowly,” he says. Our prized values will begin to revolve around experiences and spaces that foster quality kairos time.

That means your simple task in this rat race should be to facilitate a good life for yourself and others. The WIS manifesto recommends taking time out to consider your day’s activities and “highlights” with your loved ones – anything “as long as its recipe includes smiling often, dreaming big, laughing out loud and acknowledging what you already have.” That way he says we can be consciously present in the moment and revel in that very special dimension.

[theworldinstituteofslowness.com](http://theworldinstituteofslowness.com)

*Norwegian flies to Kristiansand from Oslo. Book flights, a hotel and a rental car at [Norwegian.com](http://Norwegian.com)*

