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**Birk Risa**

**From New York with love.**

**Vol. 4**



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# foreword.

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Towards the end of spring, as the first rays of summer were slowly beginning to appear, we were sipping our coffee at "Le Café" near Zurich's Paradeplatz. It was here, at "Le Café," where we mulled over the setting of our fourth issue of Clos Normand. Zurich, Amsterdam, Geneva—each city had left its mark, each one a fine challenge. Now, though, it felt different. The bar had been raised, and the next step seemed uncertain.

We spoke of cities, of continents, as if they were cards in our hands, turning them over and considering their weight. Then Marco, the café owner, came over with his usual ease. We asked him what life was like in New York, because we had heard he'd spent years in that sleepless city. "Man," he said, his voice low and steady, "it's gigantic. Like they say, it never sleeps. Always something happening."

"And what about art?" one of us asked. "Any hidden gems?" Marco leaned in closer "Casa Cruz," he said. "A restaurant on 61st Street. Real Harings, Warhols, Boteros. They hang on the walls like old friends. You'd be impressed."

Marco, Marco. Why New York? Why slip that idea into our heads? The thought of the flight, the hours in the air, and then the days after, fighting off jet lag, felt like a weight. But his words lingered.

The answer was simple, really. It was New York. The city that moves, breathes, and doesn't ask permission. It's not just a place; it's a state of mind. It pulls you in and won't let go until you've seen something that changes you, something bigger than you imagined. The city is relentless, alive, and always asking you to step forward, even when you think you've had enough.

So here we are. We're flying to New York, to the Big Apple, and with it comes the fourth issue of Clos Normand.





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## main part.

Identifying the ideal protagonist for this issue proved to be particularly challenging. New York is full of characters—people who have come from all over the world to make something of themselves, to start fresh, to gamble on something bigger. There are so many fascinating personalities, but one name lingered in our minds. He is European, and he has that look about him—the look of someone who has taken a leap, left the old world behind, and plunged into something new. Birk Risa.

He is twenty-six years old, born in Norway, where the air is cold, and the nights are long. He starts playing football (or 'soccer,' as it's called in the U.S.) in his hometown of Sola, kicking the ball around on wet grass. But his talent carries him across borders. At sixteen, he leaves for Germany, a teenager among men, to play for 1. FC Köln.

It is there that he learns what it means to be tough, to push through when the odds are against him. He moves again, back to Norway, playing for Odd and then Molde, where he hones his craft. And then, in 2023, he crosses the ocean, heading to New York City to play for NYCFC. Another leap. Another challenge.

We had arranged to meet Birk at Casa Cruz at 2:00 PM, after his morning training session. Without the pressure of time, we decided to walk from our hotel in Bowery to 36 East 61st Street, heading uptown.

We started our journey through the city streets, moving past Madison Square Park. The park's quiet corners were a contrast to the bustling energy of the city. We walked through Grand Central, where the grand architecture loomed above us, a testament to the city's ambition. We paused briefly, then continued, passing the Trump Tower at 725 Fifth Avenue.

As we turned right at the corner skirting the edge of Central Park, the streets began to narrow, and the tall buildings gave way to more intimate spaces. Finally, we arrived at our destination: Casa Cruz.





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Gazing up at the six-story Beaux-Arts townhouse, it felt timeless, steeped in history and grace. Manhattan's Upper East Side enclosed it, with the distant hum of the city lingering in the background. Yet here, in front of Casa Cruz, time seemed to slow, moving to its own rhythm, detached from the bustling world beyond.

The interiors were inspired by Casa Cruz in Buenos Aires and London, woven together with the soul of old Manhattan. There was tradition here, but also something sharp, something modern. Technology hidden behind elegant surfaces, and light that seemed to carve out its own space in every room. Each floor offered something different, all tied together by a single cherry wood staircase.

It was Juan Santa Cruz, the owner's vision made real. Every corner, every surface spoke to you, from the fine art on the walls—originals by Keith Haring, Warhol, and Giovanelli—to the fragrance in the air. The wallpapers told stories, too, of Chile, of the Atacama desert, of distant volcanoes. Nothing was left to chance. Every detail had been touched, thought over, handpicked by Santa Cruz himself. And when you stood inside, you could feel it. It wasn't just a place; it was an experience, a feast for the senses, and it drew you in, step by step.

Arriving with Birk at the reception, dressed in a crisp beige Armani suit with his golden-blond hair slicked back, we took the private elevator up to the Botero Room on the fifth floor. When the doors opened, we stepped into a space that felt both exclusive and welcoming, a perfect prelude to our photo session.

At 6'2", Birk has the kind of presence that makes attackers think twice. He isn't just tall, though. He is athletic, quick on his feet, and aggressive when it comes to winning the ball. He confronts aerial challenges head-on, meeting them in the air like an old friend. He defends with purpose, always on the front foot, never waiting for the game to come to him.

But Birk is not just a solid defensive asset. When he pushes forward, he brings with him the ability to send a ball into the box with precision, to deliver a cross that can turn a game. He isn't just there to keep the other team out—he is there to help his team get in. That is what sets him apart, what makes him valuable.

Reflecting on his career, Birk shared how playing in Norway laid the foundation for his love of football, but it was his move to Germany that truly shaped him—both athletically and personally:

"The German way is very tactical, disciplined and strict. These are all qualities that leave a lasting impact on your life, enhancing your mentality both on and off the pitch."

The move from Norway to a big city like Cologne, leaving family behind, also shapes a young 16-year-old athlete personally facing new challenges and experiences.





"In Norway, everything is cold and small, and coming from such a place, you don't realize how big the world really is. But when I moved to Germany, I started discovering things I hadn't before—like fashion, architecture, and art."

With his move to New York, everything reached a new level. In places like Soho, he encountered endless new styles and vibrant expressions. It wasn't just the people he saw, but the creativity behind them. He noticed the effort that went into every outfit, the artistry in the pictures that surrounded him, and how all of it influenced the rhythm of daily life.

"In New York, there's a strong sense of how much people care about their appearance and style. It's different from just seeing a brand like Supreme in Europe because here, you feel the energy and inspiration that drives the trends. This is where it all starts before it spreads elsewhere", he adds.

From the bright lights of Broadway to the gritty streets of the Bronx, New York has always been a place where dreams are not only born but realized. For generations, this city has been the wellspring of innovation in fashion, art, music, and sports, inspiring some of the world's most iconic figures to create work that transcends boundaries.

Going back to the 1960s, a young Andy Warhol arrived in New York, drawn by its electric energy. He found his home in a studio he called "The Factory," a place that became the epicenter of a new kind of art. Surrounded by creatives, Warhol turned the ordinary into the extraordinary, pulling inspiration from the everyday scenes of New York. The buzzing streets, bustling diners, and consumer culture fascinated him, and he transformed these everyday objects—soup cans, soda bottles—into symbols of modern art.

But Warhol wasn't just about art. His Factory also became a hub for fashion, where cutting-edge designers and trendsetters mingled. New York's streets have always been runways in their own right, where the latest styles are born not just in the studios of designers but in the neighborhoods of the city. The city's unique mix of cultures and lifestyles has given rise to a fashion scene that's as diverse as the people who live there.

And exactly this type of diversity Birk embraces every day, living it fully and making it an integral part of his life in the city—without prejudice or bias, but with an open heart and mind, welcoming the endless possibilities that New York offers at every turn:

"I have my designers I like, like Armani. But living in this city, I'm right at the source of inspiration, always discovering more. I watch the trends, see what people are bringing out, how things are shifting. My wife's deep into fashion, and she helps. She shows me what she thinks is good, what's cool. That's where I find my inspiration. People who dress sharp but know how to play with it. Simple, clean, with their own twist. That's how it goes."

When it comes to art Birk is also invested in some pieces, by adding to it:

"I like art. I've invested in some pieces, and I enjoy looking at them. But I have my own style. Not everything speaks to me, and I think that's normal. But when something does catch my eye—when it gives me a feeling—that's when it matters. It's a quiet, strong thing, living with art. Yeah."

As we watched Birk pose in front of the painting by Fernando Botero's "Cardinal", we all felt the weight of its impact. It commanded attention, cutting through age and experience. The piece spoke to us, leaving no one indifferent.





# cardenal - niño de guevara.

Mateo, the photographer and creative director, shared a bond with Botero through their Colombian roots—Mateo from Bogotá, Botero from Medellín. As Mateo captured the moments with his RZ67, perched on the tripod like an altar piece, he infused the scene with a special charm.

Fernando Botero, born in Medellín in 1932, created a world where excess and grace meet in a strikingly unique style. His figures are grand and round, rendered with both humor and depth. Imagine a gallery where every piece breathes with its own rhythm. There, in Botero's world, the ordinary becomes extraordinary. His saints, aristocrats, and dancers are all infused with a rotund charm that transforms the everyday into something magnificent.

Botero's exaggerated proportions are more than an aesthetic choice; they're a commentary on society and humanity. Each curve and contour invite a deeper look. His rich colors and textured layers create a warm, almost tactile sense of presence.

Standing before a Botero piece, you feel drawn into its voluminous forms, challenged to see beyond the surface. His work celebrates existence itself—a grand display that pushes the boundaries and connects deeply with the human experience.

Fernando Botero's art reveals truth through exaggeration. It's a vibrant dance of form and color, showing that the most profound messages often come in unexpected forms.



*Fernando Botero  
Cardenal (Niño de Guevara), 1964  
Oil on Canvas  
170.8 x 177.8 cm cm  
Casa Cruz, New York*



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After the first half of the shoot, we made our way to the drawing room on the fourth floor. On the way down the cherry wood staircase, we caught a glimpse of Birk's "Naomi" tattoo, etched on his skin like a quiet reminder.

On his distal forearm was a Cross tattoo, marked with the word “Family”—a simple yet profound testament. Above it, on the upper part of his forearm, a Viking ship sailed, a nod to his heritage, its presence as steadfast and enduring as the sea itself. On the backside of his arm, the word “Loyalty” completed the narrative, a silent pledge etched into his skin.

We had known Birk for just an hour, but we understood the true meaning not only of his tattoos, but also his values in life. He was a quiet, decent man who devoted his life to his family and found joy in the small things. Yet beneath that calm exterior, as he demonstrated on the field, there was a force capable of making the sea tremble – though always in a measured, serene way. Comparing the strength of MLS to that of European leagues, he goes:

“The MLS’s strength is undeniable. The quality of play is high, with skillful players and a competitive edge that stands up well against European standards. There’s a raw, energetic style here that holds its own, and the league doesn’t always get the credit it deserves. It’s often underestimated, but it’s clear that the talent and intensity are real.”

He had offers from European teams too, but New York felt like the right choice. The league and the team offered exactly what he was looking for in terms of play, but the city itself was a further pull. There wasn’t much more to say—New York was a city of dreams, and being there felt like a dream come true in so many ways.

For the final part of the shoot, we decided to step outside—to the street where the city hums its relentless song. We wanted to merge with New York, to feel the traffic's pulse and the noise of people passing by, to watch the smoke rise from the ground. Birk, juggling the ball with a grace that recalled Maradona's finest moments, struck a frame that spoke of more than just a picture.

It spoke of soccer’s rising significance in the US, of a Norwegian father embracing his new home with open arms, a man who now sees New York as his town. It captured the young Birk within, who had dreamed of being a professional soccer player, worked tirelessly through setbacks, and never faltered. Now, he was in the heart of one of the world’s greatest cities, where lifestyle and culture meld into something extraordinary.

This was the memory we aimed to leave behind—a testament to a journey of dreams and determination, played out against the backdrop of a city that never stops evolving.

And if you can make it there, you’ll make it anywhere.

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Project Manager / Interview: Marcel Nalyan  
Talent: Birk Risa  
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partners.

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Occupying an entire six-story Beaux-Arts townhouse on Manhattan’s Upper East Side, just a stone’s throw from Central Park, Casa Cruz New York is an exquisitely designed restaurant featuring multiple dining rooms, bars, special event spaces, and a year-round rooftop terrace, Frances at Casa Cruz. A menu designed by Michelin Star chef John Fraser, masterful cocktails, and posh interiors decked with original artworks by Keith Haring, Andy Warhol, and Louise Giovanelli, Casa Cruz sets the stage for a glamorous dining experience like none other in Manhattan.