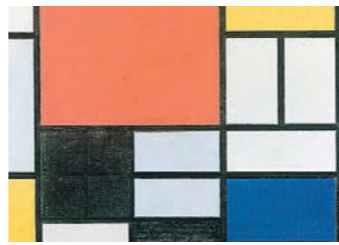


# Life & Arts

FTWeekend



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For many – or at least many of the 54 per cent of women who voted for her – Clinton's loss eviscerated certain notions of women's progress. Mainstream feminism during Barack Obama's presidency was often associated with a careerist mantra of empowerment, typified by the Facebook executive Sheryl Sandberg. Ivanka Trump's own attempt to market herself as a bastion of the working woman is an offshoot of this feminism. But it's a message that depends on structures that were taken for granted under Obama, and on policies, such as abortion rights guaranteed by the Supreme Court, that Trump senior threatens to tear apart.

As the administration pushes legislation that could allow insurance companies to charge higher fees for those with trauma related to sexual assault, the shiny lean-in doctrine as promoted by

At times *The Wing* makes me feel like I'm living in a chic feminist version of 'The Truman Show'

Sandberg feels outdated, even out of touch. By contrast, today's incarnation of feminism is "the most politically charged since the 1960s", says Karen Blair, a professor at Central Washington University who specialises in women's associations. She believes that the centuries-old tradition of women's clubs "bubbles up more vehemently at certain times in history... this is one of those moments."

At times *The Wing* veers into caricature, making me feel like I'm living in a chic feminist version of *The Truman Show*. One woman, speaking on the phone to an "Instagram influencer", gushes that the space is the "best thing to ever happen to me personally or professionally". Another struts into the room wearing sweeping olive green culottes and a group hisses: "God, your outfit!"

Other moments are familiar in the best way. One woman walks in just after 6pm, orders a glass of white wine and

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# The start-up sisterhood

Women-only clubs in the US have had a new lease of life in the age of Trump.

Anna Nicolaou reports on the boom in the business of gender politics

I'm on a nondescript block of New York's Flatiron District, searching for a glimpse into the resistance against Donald Trump – or at least one version of it.

At the top of the elevator in a bland, 12-storey office building, concrete gives way to a rose-tinted penthouse filled with pastel rugs and hanging plants. Women type on laptops, sipping lime-infused water as sunlight cascades through industrial windows with striking views of the Empire State building.

The space is drenched in varying shades of dusty rose – the palette dubbed "millennial pink". It is defiantly feminine. Posters of Hillary Clinton, captioned "Hillz Yaaas", line mint green walls. There's a feminist library organised by colour and a "freak out" room that doubles as a breastfeeding centre. On a taupe couch, Tavi Gevinson, the 21-year-old editor and blogger who Lady Gaga declared "the future of journalism", is hunched over a MacBook.

I am in *The Wing*. In January the then recently opened women's club hosted some of the organisers of what would be the largest protest in recent US history – the women's march that followed the inauguration of President Trump. It was also here that the firebrand Democratic senator Kirsten Gillibrand recently spoke about the future of women in America and "how to resist" in 2017.

But *The Wing* was founded with a decidedly less existential vision. Tired of changing clothes in Starbucks bathrooms in between meetings across New York, Audrey Gelman, a public relations consultant and former press aide to Clinton, dreamt up a place where women could work, network and hang out – without men. With co-founder Lauren Kassan, she raised \$2.4m to

Above: the editor and blogger Tavi Gevinson (right) with Laia Garcia, deputy editor of *Lenny Letter*, at the New York women's club *The Wing*, photographed for the FT by Martine Fougeron  
Below: inside the club



create a place that "wasn't just the Costco of co-working", with aspirations to resurrect the atmosphere of the women's clubs of the late 19th and early 20th century suffrage movement. Amy Woodside, a website founder from New Zealand and club member, explains the appeal. "There are other places in New York that have more of a dude vibe. Coming here, there's a sense of comfort, you can fully relax. It's hard to articulate without demonising men – which is obviously a stigma attached to feminism – but it is very true and, for me, preferable."

*The Wing* opened its doors last October, a few weeks before the US presidential election, when Clinton still seemed the most likely winner. At the time, says Gelman, she expected it would be a "nice-to-have" as the first woman

president entered the White House.

Things have turned out differently. On election night, what had been a planned victory party at *The Wing* turned into a funeral. "It felt like everyone took bad drugs," Gelman says. In the months that followed, under a male president who has bragged on tape about assaulting women, the space has become a "need-to-have" for many women. A waiting list of 8,000 is willing to pay \$2,250 a year for a spot at the club. Its 700 members range from robot engineers and police officers to the first female secretary to the governor of New York. Flower-arranging tutorials and Beyoncé dance lessons have been supplemented by sessions with a psychologist to deal with "Trump hangovers" and parties to write letters to senators.

Gelman herself admits, "I didn't necessarily think that we would be using this space weekly for political purposes. But the thing that we see from our members is that they're so interested right now in activism and getting involved." Trump's election "uncorked a lot of ugliness", she adds, "And I think any woman who has a professional life feels it".

In the wake of an election that morphed into a battle of the sexes, the popularity of a club like *The Wing* should not come as a surprise. The January women's march spanned all seven continents. Since election day, more than 4,000 women have told Democratic groups they want to run for office – four times higher than in the prior 22 months combined.

Theda Skocpol, a Harvard professor who spent the past four decades writing books on political uprisings ranging from the Tea Party to the Russian Revolution, is now studying post-Trump activism in swing states. She calls me less than a minute after I email her: "I can tell you so far, the evidence is just overwhelming. Women are leading these so-called resist groups and networks. In pockets across the country, there's movement happening everywhere, and women are overwhelmingly in the lead."

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