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Tomorrow's Living Room

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ANNIVERSARY

This was a time when if it wasn't one thing, it was another. If you wanted a bike (I select here a random example; hundreds of others come to mind), it wasn't enough to go to a bike store and select a model. Certain formalities had to be observed, involving forms, lunch invitations, afternoon teas, and frequent phone conversations with an adviser, whose offer of help felt more sinister by the day. (Truth be told, buying a bike isn't even the most extreme example.) And the amount of bikes to choose from changed without notice, ranging from the vast—dozens of variations in handlebars, tires, and colors—to the miniscule, where two wheels and red paint was almost too much to ask. (Finding a wife, for example, was a whole order of difficulty beyond buying a bike. Perhaps that makes sense, though, considering that the bike, unlike the wife, was not also trying to find you, and thus filling out its own forms, fielding calls from its own advisers, and warily negotiating its own terms of engagement.)