

Photography by
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PERFECT FOIL

THE ART OF FENCING

Looking for a challenge to both body and mind? Want to learn the everyday skills for success like patience, determination, discipline and competitiveness? Why not try the ancient art of, well, sword fighting? »





Fencing is a traditional martial art offering a physical and mental challenge with a touch of glamour. It combines speed and fitness with the need to be completely focused on out-thinking your opponent. As a result of this emphasis on speed and skill rather than brute strength, fencing is a good sport for men as well as women. It has been part of the Olympic Games since their revival in 1896.

The origins of modern fencing date from the 16th century when the rapier became an item of fashion among the nobility. The first sporting fencing »

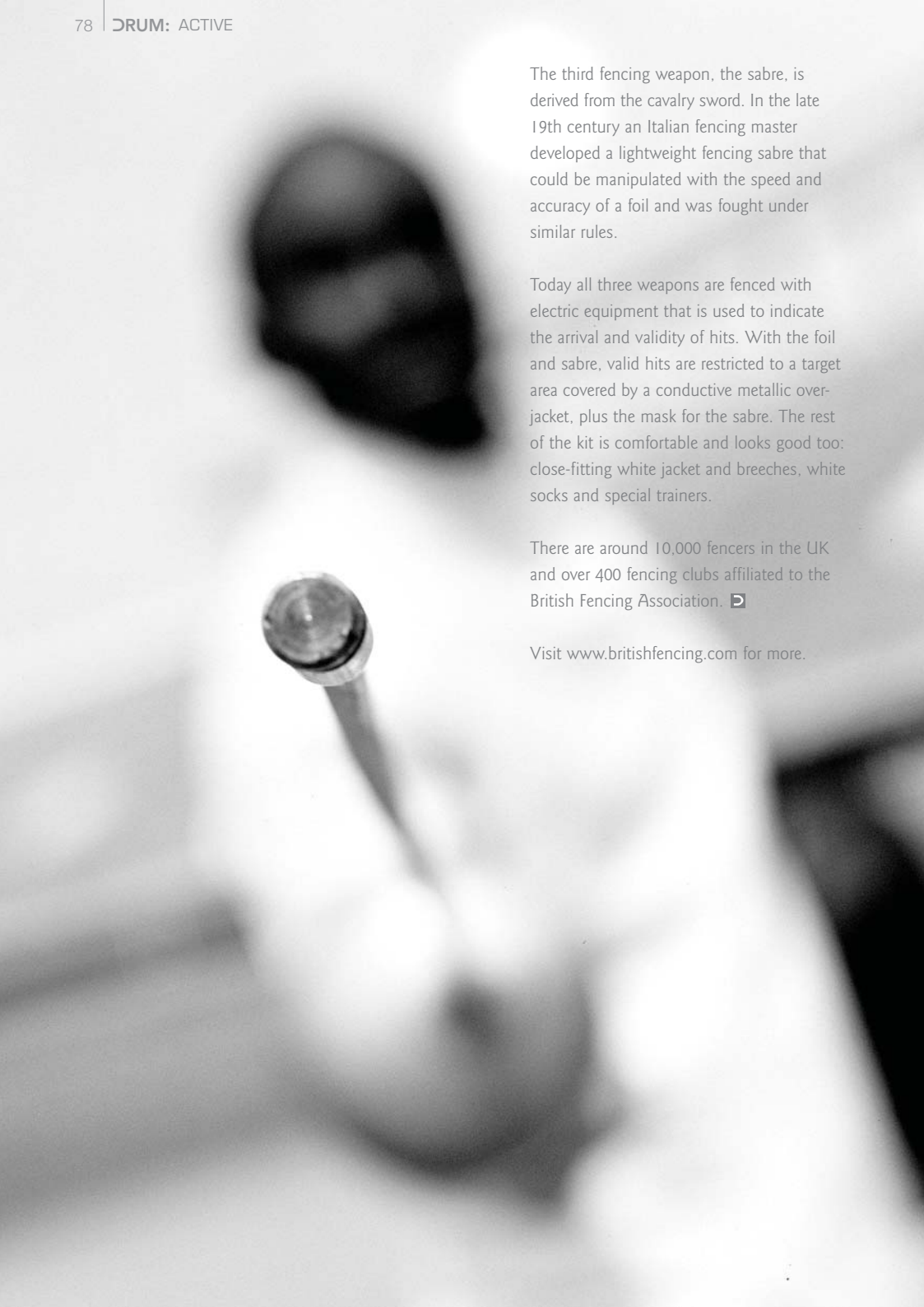


weapon was the foil, which was introduced in mid-17th century France. Its rules, which restrict valid hits to the trunk of the body, were developed to allow the skills of sword-play to be demonstrated in safety.

Until the invention of the wire mask in the mid-18th century, fencing was a rather static exercise, with fencers taking it in turns to make attacks. Masks changed this, allowing the instant parry-riposte and a much more mobile style of fencing.

The épée, the second fencing weapon, was introduced in France in the 1860s as a reaction against the artificial conventions of foil. It was intended to recreate the conditions of a duel as closely as possible and the target is any part of the body. »





The third fencing weapon, the sabre, is derived from the cavalry sword. In the late 19th century an Italian fencing master developed a lightweight fencing sabre that could be manipulated with the speed and accuracy of a foil and was fought under similar rules.

Today all three weapons are fenced with electric equipment that is used to indicate the arrival and validity of hits. With the foil and sabre, valid hits are restricted to a target area covered by a conductive metallic over-jacket, plus the mask for the sabre. The rest of the kit is comfortable and looks good too: close-fitting white jacket and breeches, white socks and special trainers.

There are around 10,000 fencers in the UK and over 400 fencing clubs affiliated to the British Fencing Association. ▶

Visit www.britishfencing.com for more.



Models: Mame Coura Gueye and unknown male sparring partner. Shot on Location at Stade Leopold Senghor, Dakar, built in 1985 (capacity 60,000).