

Begin Again

BEGIN AGAIN is what I find I have to do when I fill out a grid 90% of the way and then uncover a fatal flaw. It's pretty frustrating, but that's puzzle construction. **BEGIN AGAIN** is also related to the theme of this puzzle, which you will determine at 23 Across. In fact, in some early versions, **BEGIN AGAIN** was an entry, until things blew up and I had to . . . **BEGIN AGAIN**.

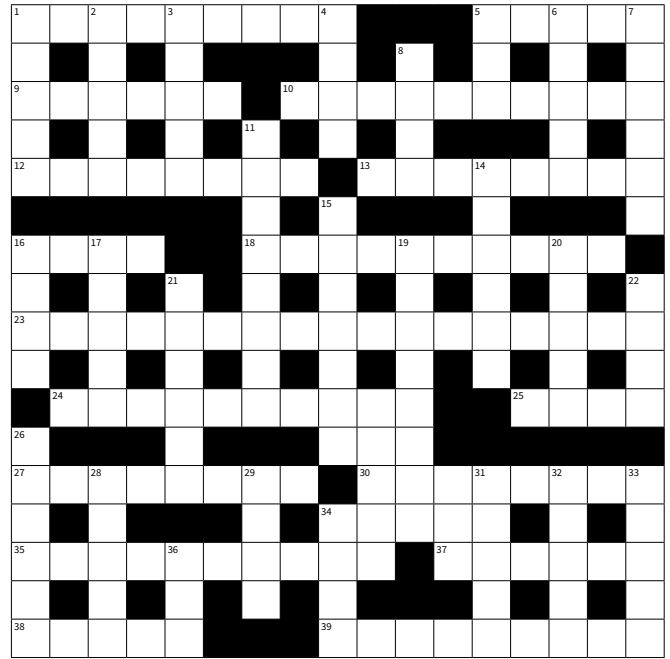
All the across entries are related to the theme. None of the down ones are, at least not intentionally.

The clues lead to eight proper nouns. There is one abbreviation. All the other clued entries are playable in Scrabble, including 3 Down, which is uncommon. Ignore punctuation, which is intended to deceive.

Thanks to Bob Fink and Jerry Miccolis for test-solving and editorial suggestions.

Across clues

1. Twelve o'clock's out of mind and out of sight
5. Banish extravagant infantile outbursts
9. Spectravision's offering a country star you might call "randy"
10. Al, we'll loot at random, without a doubt (3, 3, 4)
12. After a slip, oak floor becomes legend
13. Michael Corleone, for example, is another I mixed up
16. A long time in the recording studio for you and me
18. Get better from hits of fake liquid (5, 2, 3)
23. *See instructions*
24. Dotted line for banks assuming low rate (5, 5)
25. Jazz combo acts crazy
27. Always hiding inside clever mores
30. Enduring "Parsley, sage, rosemary . . ." on the radio?
35. Good name established as fail becomes pass during defense
37. Offkey anthem from outstanding performer (3, 3)
38. Fashion steps given in a podcast
39. Exposed after initially taking in twenty-one hundred plus another thousand, this country star still has faith (3, 6)



Down clues

1. If Tom is out of order, that's a recurring theme
2. Speak slowly and elicit a bit of lugubriousness
3. Relating to the hipbone, Ali is all you need
4. Some would say go easy on marketing
5. Vanity in ancient game played on line?
6. Anger born by the goddess of peace
7. *The Waste Land's* author, describing Pound as a "well-known moose"
8. Big fan of many Arab countries' eastern part
11. Very French attempt at transgression
14. One supremely ingenious in hearing aptitude assessment (2, 4)
15. Three wise guys meet California mystic
16. Unwilling to start late, *expletive*
17. Pronounced upset due to uncommon kind of flush
19. Arcane coteries getting organized
20. Diego's partner occupies most of Friday
21. Emoji structured around new alternative when you can't prevail (4, 2)
22. He gave us a lift to the first performances of *Of Thee I Sing*
26. Earth's spinning, my dears
28. Forsaken by the sound of two letters
29. Tear apart value
31. Counter quote involving high principle
32. Hunter of bugs in extremely remarkable upset
33. Vitality exhibited by immature wines
34. Not hard reusing the ingredients to make toss offs
36. Afternoon gathering said to be a turning point

TOM TOCE is an FCAS and a senior manager at EY. He is a member of the Jeopardy Hall of Fame. Solutions may be emailed to ttoce@nyc.rr.com. In order to make the solver list, you should send him your solutions by June 1, 2024.