

Rising  
Canadian actor  
Mouna Traoré  
radiates  
optimism as  
her must-watch  
show *The Porter*  
takes off

*Photography by Lawrence Cortez*

# STAR BRIGHT

THE KIT X GODADDY

# Raise the bar



## Realizing your business goals online is easier than you think

When Jasmine Branderhorst, the creator and designer of Toronto-based home goods store The Underline, felt like she was in a creative and professional rut, she knew it was time to make a change.

"My Oma taught me to sew at a really young age, so it's always been a passion and longtime side hustle for me," she says. "A big part of the creation of The Underline was taking that step and trusting my own potential. I made the big leap and decided to be my own boss."

To get her dream off the ground, Branderhorst launched an online store with GoDaddy—which lets you start a website for free—helping her seamlessly operate her e-commerce platform while empowering her to have complete control over her business. Now, the entrepreneur has teamed up with GoDaddy (and Olympian Andre De Grasse, NBD) for the brand's Don't Stop Being Unstoppable campaign, to encourage other women who own a small business that they can do the same. Here, she shares her story.



## HOW HAS YOUR ONLINE STORE HELPED YOU GROW YOUR BUSINESS?

"The e-commerce aspect of it is huge for me, because I'm constantly creating new products and updating my website. It's also nice to be able to see how many clicks I get per week and have access to information that lets me analyze what is and isn't working. My business is also unique because, right now, it's only me. So, it has been great to create something and showcase it in the way I want without a third party."

## WHY DID YOU GO WITH GODADDY WHEN IT CAME TIME TO CREATE A WEBSITE FOR THE UNDERLINE?

"Creating a website with GoDaddy is so simple and streamlined, and it doesn't take a lot of technical knowledge to make something very good-looking. The fact that they have e-commerce available as well meant I could create a website with an online store and have everything in one place. It was a no-brainer."

## WHAT ADVICE DO YOU HAVE FOR WOMEN WHO ARE THINKING ABOUT STARTING THEIR OWN BUSINESSES?

"Women are more capable of attaining our dreams than we think we are. I took a huge step, and since doing that, opportunities have continued to present themselves. Trust yourself and the universe to follow what you're passionate about and what you truly want, and don't let fear change your mind. Getting out of your comfort zone can be so rewarding."

This content was created by The Kit; GoDaddy funded and approved it.



# In a mood

The design, objects and lighting in your home have the power to make you feel better. Sarah Laing makes a to-do list

This may come as a shock, but... your environment affects your mood. You're perfectly entitled to eye-roll here, because, well, you've lived through the past two years and have likely become all too attuned to the way that existing within the same four walls can make us feel stuck, sad, stir-crazy or just garden-variety bored. What might not be so obvious is that there are plenty of ways, large and small, to manipulate that same environment to make us feel better—calmed, comforted, energized, inspired. "A lot of the work I do feels like therapy," says Nike Onile, founder of Toronto-based spatial design firm Ode. "When people work with me, they're always going through some sort of transition in their life." A recent client had built a home with her husband of 12 years, only to find out that he'd been cheating on her for their whole marriage. "After they broke up, going into that space represented that life," Onile says. She made it her mission to transform it into a place where her client could find happiness again. "She thought she was just doing a renovation, but it really had everything to do with, 'What do I want my life to look like now?'"

This can be as simple as becoming aware of the objects that surround you. "People don't realize that the things they look at every day interact with them back," says Onile. Maybe your dining table reminds you of a great-aunt who wasn't that nice to you, or the half-finished DIY project in the kitchen continues to stress you out. "It's not a coincidence that people go to hotels and have the most incredible sleep," says Onile. "There are no reminders of your life—the things you need to clean or do or that you failed at. It's a neutral state, and you rest."

The first thing Onile does is find out how her clients' homes currently make them feel—chaotic, anxious, lonely—and how they want to feel moving forward. Then she figures out what needs to come into the space to achieve that. Or, most often, what needs to leave it—like that couch you bought with your terrible ex that you can't afford to replace. "You're telling me that every morning, you invest the energy in looking at this couch and hating the fact that you're in this space with this couch? Do you know how expensive that is? Go on Kijiji and find a couch," advises Onile.

She's also an advocate for spending money on everyday things that delight you, citing a friend who hesitated to buy \$20 plates she adored. "You eat every single day! Sometimes six or seven times, especially during COVID," she told her friend. "If a \$20 plate can bring you joy seven times a day, that's worth it."

By playing with flow, you can update your space without spending a cent. For instance, "move the art in your hallway into your office, because it inspires you," suggests Onile. When she's feeling stuck, it helps her to "create a sense of openness," so she recently moved her coffee table into storage and her rarely used dining table into her spare bedroom, which opened up her living space, making room for friends. "I want my life to feel abundant and full of people," she says. "What limits us is this idea that your space has to be permanent or you have to put things in the space designated by the builder. Your life needs to dictate your space. It's a three-dimensional thing, and it needs to evolve with you."

The first step is setting an intention. "Let's say you want 'adventure,'" says Onile. "You now have to explore what adventure means to you." If watching romantic French movies transports you, you can tweak the space to serve that goal. "Maybe you paint an entire wall white and use a projector to watch those films on this huge wall so you can see them fully," suggests Onile.

If a \$20 plate brings you joy seven times a day, that's worth it.

This, of course, will be very individual—one woman's all-black kitchen dream is another's design nightmare—but there are a few universal things that are almost guaranteed to boost everyone's mood. "Natural light helps us regulate and lift our moods, and not having enough of it can have negative effects on a person," says Amber Dunford, a former therapist turned designer and style director at overstock.com, who lives in Salt Lake City. She notes that "dappled light," similar to the way you'd experience sunshine while sitting under a tree, is optimal and can be mimicked by using basket-weave pendants. If you have limited windows or a smaller space? "A quick fix is to place mirrors on walls across from windows," she says. "The light will reflect the view and make your space appear brighter and larger."

Dunford also suggests opting for warm-toned lighting. "Humans tend to feel more intimate and self-disclose more under warm light, making it a great choice for achieving a calming

and relaxing space," says Dunford. She suggests using small lamps or sconces in a kitchen, all the better for promoting heart-to-hearts across the island. "Our eyes tend to relax more around warm light sources and we actually look better under warm lighting."

The shapes that surround us can also help create that calming feeling. "When choosing furniture pieces, look for curved shapes and rounded edges, which promotes a feeling of relaxation and can help quiet the mind," says Dunford. "This can also be achieved with choosing artwork that has free-flowing shapes or lines."

You can use psychology principles to inform your furniture placement, too. "We don't like to sit with our backs to a door; this ties back to our evolutionary past and survival instincts," says Dunford, who recommends "half-circle" arrangements that subconsciously make us feel safe and encourage conversation.

It's impossible to talk about homes and mood without mentioning colour. We've all heard the old chestnuts—blue for a calming bedroom, green for a productive office—and while colour preference is very subjective, there is some real physiology to consider. Red, for instance, has been found to have a negative impact on humans; Dunford points to studies in which people showed lower cognitive performance on tests when surrounded by the hue. "Red is also a stimulating colour that increases our heart rate, signals rapid breathing and activates our pituitary gland. Our pituitary gland controls our general well-being, so being overly activated can lead to stress," she explains.

If being in a constant state of high alert isn't your thing, Dunford recommends looking into the "biophilic" trend, which involves taking design inspiration from the colours and textures of the natural world. "We're instinctively drawn to elements that feel connected to nature, such as raw woods and earthy colour palettes," she says. "We feel more at peace, creative and balanced in spaces that harmonize with nature."

Onile wanted to feel like she was sleeping under a willow tree, so she covered an entire wall in her bedroom with an image of one. But creating a space that makes you feel good will be utterly unique to you. "Imagine if everybody played with their space, and you could walk into their home and just see them," muses Onile. "How vulnerable that is! What people don't realize is that your space will always tell your story, even if it's bland. You might as well do it intentionally."

Clockwise from top left: A willow wall in Nike Onile's bedroom; Amber Dunford maximises natural light, a universal joy-enhancer; Dunford adds rattan pendants to mimic dappled light; playful accents add personality to a Studio Ode-designed living space.

PHOTOGRAPHY: OVERSTOCK.COM (TOP RIGHT, BOTTOM RIGHT), STUDIO ODE (TOP LEFT, BOTTOM LEFT)



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# Shining



Mouna Traoré is building an empire. The luminous star of *The Porter* tells Sarah Laing her story

# Light

Photography by Lawrence Cortez

Mouna Traoré is hopeful. “I have to be,” says the Canadian actor and filmmaker thoughtfully. “In order to create the world we want, we have to hold on to hope. It’s almost innate in us to want to love and care for each other. That’s an undercurrent underneath my hope that things will get better, even though there’s a lot of noise and chaos happening. Ultimately, the human spirit wants those things and is working toward collectively creating them.” The lemon-hued spectacles she’s wearing feel like a joyful exclamation point to this optimism. They match her tie-dyed Ulla Johnson tracksuit; she’s an alum of *The Kit*’s 2021 Best Dressed List, after all.

Traoré has reasons to be cheerful beyond a belief in the essential goodness of humanity. Her acting career has gone from strength to strength, with roles in Canadian TV mainstays from *Rookie Blue* to *Murdoch Mysteries*, and more recently Netflix’s *The Umbrella Academy* and *Self Made*, the story of pioneering beauty entrepreneur Madam C.J. Walker, played by Octavia Spencer. But her latest project, *The Porter*, is special. Premiering on CBC on February 21, in time for Black History Month, this show is a must-watch—particularly if, like many Canadians, your knowledge of our country’s Black history is sadly limited.

Set in Montreal’s St. Antoine neighbourhood (but filmed mostly in Winnipeg), *The Porter*’s narrative backbone is the real-life story of the fight by Black train porters on the Canadian and American railways to unionize, after being excluded from the main union because of their race. But the eight episodes encompass a much broader range of Black experience in Canada in 1921. Traoré’s character, Marlene, is married to one of the aforementioned porters, who smuggles booze into Prohibition-era America when his train runs take him south. She is a Black Cross nurse, providing medical care in her community through the Marcus Garvey–founded Universal Negro Improvement Association; we also see her as a friend, a dreamer and mother to a neurodivergent child.

“I think that’s the one thing people are going to walk away from the show with—knowing that Black people are not a monolith,” says Traoré. The cast is filled with fully realized, three-dimensional characters like Queenie, pulling strings in the city’s underworld, and Zeke and Junior, struggling with the trauma of their service in the trenches. “There are so many varied, complex, nuanced, sensitive representations in this show. They’re all representations of Black Canadians that I have yet to see on screen.” Even Traoré, who studied Black and Caribbean history in her undergrad at the University of Toronto, and counts the book *The Hanging of Angelique*, the story of an enslaved woman who burned down a significant part of Montreal, among her favourite student discoveries, found chapters of history she’d known nothing about.

In telling those stories, *The Porter*’s actors had to move through some incredibly tough moments in their characters’ arcs, a process that the production handled with care. “As Black people, we don’t really give ourselves enough space to consider that as we are performing these roles, we’re also possibly re-triggering or re-traumatizing ourselves,” says Traoré. “Even if we haven’t had that specific experience ourselves, our bodies know it, because our ancestors went through some version of it.” There were therapists and intimacy co-ordinators on set to support the actors. “But I don’t want you to get the impression it’s full of Black trauma, because unlike a lot of period shows, this show really is about Black self-determination, Black love, Black joy, Black pride.”

Speaking of pride and joy: If you really want to see Traoré’s face light up, ask her about her home city. While she’s hopped around from sublet to sublet wherever work has taken her, and will likely live in L.A. for the next few years, Toronto-born-and-raised Traoré is proudly Canadian. “My parents met at Lawrence West subway station. My dad is Malian, my mom is Haitian, both francophone, both new immigrants to Canada—I feel like that is such

a Canadian experience,” she says, adding that she has a “double-blended” family, including her step-mother, who is Jewish, like her mom’s first husband. “My family is multi-racial, and there are so many other families like mine in Toronto. The diversity and multiculturalism is so special.” Creative talent runs in the family—Mouna’s sister, Hannah Traoré, is a curator who recently opened her own art gallery in New York City’s Lower East Side.

Traoré’s love of food—“my happiness, my fulfillment, my everything”—is inextricably linked to Toronto. “Rhum Corner is my favourite restaurant for Haitian food,” she says, recommending the oxtail. “For Japanese food, Yasu on Harbord and Shinoku on St. Clair West—the fish is so fresh there.” For Italian, she loves Annabelle Pasta Bar; Pukka is her go-to for Indian food, while Lai Wah Heen is her family’s favourite dim sum.

While her acting is taking her out into the world, it’s writing that gets her going at the moment. “I am writing for the pure joy of it, and it’s so much fun,” says Traoré, who’s taking some time to hone her own voice, particularly in comedy writing. “The whole reason I got into this industry is that I love being silly in front of people. *Mad TV* low-key raised me,” she laughs. “Especially after the heaviness of the past few years, I just want to create things that are stupid funny. I love fart jokes, I love potty humour.” She’s given herself freedom to play in that sandbox again, scribbling ideas down on scraps of paper in hotel lobbies and in the middle of the night. As for when we might see the results of these efforts?

“Rome wasn’t built in a day, and I am building an empire,” she says. “It’s marinating, and I will let you know when the dish is done.” While telling her own stories is important, she also wants to champion others’. “I’m really hopeful about making a difference. As much as the industry is changing and creating space for different stories, I can’t even imagine the stories that have yet to be told. I’m excited to be a part of that.”

STYLIST: SHEILA HURLEY; STYLIST ASSISTANT: ESHIE MCERDEE; HAIR & MAKEUP: JASMINE TRENSKY; PHOTO ASSISTANT: BRANDON MCQUEEN; AUDNEY WICREMO



This show really is about Black self-determination, Black love, Black joy, Black pride.



FACING PAGE: LILLIPUT HAT, \$250, LILLIPUTHATS.COM; MARGIELA TURTLENECK, \$315, HOLTRENFREW.COM; COS CARDIGAN, \$126, COSTORES.COM; AKRIS TRENCH COAT, \$5,050, HOLTRENFREW.COM. THIS PAGE: SID NEIGUM DRESS, \$495, SIDNEIGUM.COM; YUUL YIE SHOES, \$500, YUULYIE.COM; TIFFANY & CO. EARRINGS, \$4,300; RING, \$1,250; BRACELET, \$9,600; TIFFANY CAN COVER: ALEXANDER MCQUEEN DRESS, \$2,290, ALEXANDERMQUEEN.COM

## CAMERA ROLL

Canadian photographers share the pandemic-era pic that lightens their hearts



ERIN LEYDON

“This was taken on my first shoot working with a bigger team since all the restrictions came into effect. Everyone was in good spirits and we had such a great time working together in the early morning, down by the water. It was hopeful to see that, although certain precautions needed to be taken, there’s still a place for a feeling of freedom, getting creative and having fun.”



NELSON HUANG

“The pandemic has been really hard on everyone in so many different ways. This image made me hopeful for the future because I got to work with people I love and adore creating with. I wanted the photograph to feel joyful and fun—to showcase the way that I felt being able to communicate and create with people in person again.”



RENATA KAVEH

“I took this photo of my sister Roya last August, just weeks before she gave birth. I look at this photo and think how lucky I am to witness my little sister become a mother. She’s strong, imaginative, thoughtful, witty and beautiful—only good can come from her garden. It’s women like her, and the children they raise, that give me hope for this world.”



SATY + PRATHA

“We worked with floral artist Hayley O’Byrne, who suggested [featuring] golden ginkgo leaves. We loved this idea as ginkgo are most resilient tree species, here for over 200 million years! We were working on a very grey day, but as we were finishing up, the sun came out and shimmered perfectly across the water. We all felt like we witnessed magic.”



HADI MOURAD

“This photo was taken right when the pandemic started and there was so much uncertainty about the future. I finally decided to take some photos with this fabric I had bought. I laid it out in my mother’s backyard in the countryside and snapped some shots. It reminds me of a time where everything stopped, around me but also around the world.”



WADE HUDSON

“This image is of my friend and her mother. They started sharing space for the first time since [my friend] moved out. They told me how beautiful it was to get this opportunity to learn more about each other and how it helped them to be more kind and patient with each other. Their example gives me hope that we can refocus our energies on what’s really important to us.”



BRIAN RANKIN

“I spent the first lockdown with my parents. After a few weeks of cabin fever, I pieced together a darkroom in my parents’ basement. This was from the first roll I developed and was the first print I made that I was happy with. It’s the first bloom off of one of my dad’s apple trees, taken on the first real sunny day of spring—a bit of life peeking out from behind the clouds.”



KRISTINA DITTMAR

“This photo is of two people that gave me a lot of light during the pandemic, a time where I’ve been outside more than I have since I was a child. The combination of being in nature with people that deeply care for each other is what keeps the current climate bearable. Small acts of tenderness bring me hope: cutting your partner’s hair, holding your friend’s hand.”



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BEAUTY AHEAD OF TIME



DISCOVER  
AND TEST

THE KIT X STAPLES

Down to business



Everything you need to give your home office a glow-up

What's something that could probably use a refresh as we prepare to take on the rest of 2022? Our WFH setup. Whether you need a new stock of supplies for the winter semester, or just want to liven up your home office, Staples Canada—and Staples.ca, which offers free next-day delivery and curbside pickup—has you covered as your one-stop-shop for smart and stylish work-from-anywhere essentials. So what are you waiting for? These picks will make any space feel like brand new.



**For all-day comfort**  
It's okay to admit it: We're all guilty of occasionally spending too much time seated at our desks with posture that's probably the root of our back pain. Enjoy long-lasting comfort in this appealing mesh chair, which has an adjustable seat, arms, height, headrest, lumbar support and tilt. It will be the perfect match for all those back-to-back meetings.

FLEXFIT HYKEN MESH TASK CHAIR, \$330, STAPLES.CA



**For do-it-all multitasking**  
Whether you need to upgrade your current setup or want to add a second screen for, say, DMing your work bestie on the sly, it's hard to go wrong with this 27-inch Asus monitor. Offering full HD resolution, the ultra-sleek screen also boasts flicker-free and low blue light tech so it will be gentle on your eyes even after hours in front of it.

ASUS 27" IPS FRAMELESS MONITOR, \$240, STAPLES.CA



**For a sleeker space**  
How are you going to drag your self out of bed to work at your desk if said desk feels, well, drab and uninspiring? That won't ever be a problem with this cozy desk, which features a sturdy metal frame, oak tabletop and a couple of deep storage nooks. There's also a handy stationary hutch, so you can hang to-do lists or anything that will make your space feel more like you.

SIMPLY STUDY DESK, \$150, STAPLES.CA

This content was created by The Kit; Staples funded and approved it.

ANASTASIA BEVERLY HILLS NORVINA CHROMA STIX MAKEUP PENCIL IN YELLOW, \$24, SEPHORA.CA

ARAKS BRALETTE, \$180, PANTY, \$100, ARAKS.COM

BANANA REPUBLIC PANTS, \$150, BANANAREPUBLIC.CA

LOEWE JACKET, \$3,750, LOEWE.COM

BOTTEGA VENETA SANDALS, \$1,520, FARFETCH.COM

WARBY PARKER SUNGLASSES, \$275, WARBYPARKER.COM

MCM WALLET, \$440, MCMWORLDWIDE.COM

PRADA BAG, \$3,100, PRADA.COM

CECILIE BAHNSEN DRESS, \$7,597, MATCHESFASHION.COM

HERMES NAIL ENAMEL IN JAUNE IMPERIAL, \$63, HERMES.COM

VALENTINO DONNA BORN IN ROMA YELLOW DREAM EAU DE PARFUM, \$123 (50 ML), HUDSON'S BAY

ALEXANDER MCQUEEN

Sunny disposition

Canary yellow is having a moment, and it's like wearing a drop of sunshine

The world's fashion designers collectively decided we were in need of soul-joltingly bright colour for Spring 2022, splashing the most vivid shades Pantone has to offer across their collections. But it was juicy, joyful shades of yellow that shone through like beams of tropical high-noon sunshine. The colour of hope, happiness and spontaneity proved itself far more versatile than you might imagine, making its way onto an ethereal tulle gown at Alexander McQueen, a smooth-like-butter tank dress at Loewe and a reimaged classic tweed suit at Chanel. However you don this power primary, it will surely brighten your mood—and that of everyone around you. Consider it a fashion PSA. —Renée Tse

Slick moves

Juicy, shiny, yummy... These oils are practically begging to glide across your lips  
By Melissa Perdigo

Combining the conditioning powers of a balm with the shine of a gloss—sans goopy feel—oils have arrived to level up your lip care. Tucked in the baguette bags of countless influencers, the Dior Lip Glow Oil put the trend on the map after reaching viral status on TikTok. It's since sold out pretty much everywhere (if you see it, jump!), but here, for your puckering pleasure, are seven dupes equally worthy of praise.

BOBBI BROWN CRUSHED OIL-IN-FUSED GLOSS, \$36, THEBAY.COM

CLARINS LIP COMFORT OIL, \$28, CLARINS.CA

LISE WATIER LOVE MY LIPS CARLING LIP OIL, \$24, SEPHORA.CA

BURT'S BEES TINTED LIP OIL, \$12, AMAZON.CA

CHARLOTTE TILBURY MAGIC LIP OIL, \$45, SEPHORA.CA

ILIA Balm, \$12, ILIA.COM

SISLEY PARIS PHYTO-LIP DELIGHT, \$75, NORDSTROM.CA

Like a grown-up version of the twist-up glosses of your tween years (fear that satisfying click option from Canadian beauty brand Lise Watier offers a lightweight feel and high-shine finish. Try the Cantaloup shade if you're fond of peachy hues, or opt for Framboise (a.k.a. raspberry) if you're partial to pink.

Brimming with moisture-boosting ingredients like tsukaki oil and vitamin E, this reasonably priced option from Canadian beauty brand Lise Watier offers a lightweight feel and high-shine finish. Try the Cantaloup shade if you're fond of peachy hues, or opt for Framboise (a.k.a. raspberry) if you're partial to pink.

Designed with a roller ball applicator to dispense the perfect amount of product, this thick (but never sticky) formula swatches lips in a coddling cocoon of moisture. Slather it on before bed and wake up to smoother, softer lips, or layer it over your favourite lipstick to impart mirror-like shine.

Want an instant mood-booster? Opt for this buttery number by Canadian clean beauty brand Ilia, which features a delightful ginger yuzu scent that's pretty much guaranteed to melt away your winter blues. Its star ingredient—an extract from a sea succulent—can increase moisture levels by up to 6,000 per cent!

If you really want to elevate your lip oil game, it doesn't get much better than this luxe tube from Sisley Paris. Infused with a comforting cocktail of shea, jojoba and plum oils, the gel-like balm transforms into a silky, scrumptious oil and tops lips with a stunning yet subtle kiss of colour.



Stolen identity

The pandemic changed our lives beyond recognition, to the point where we can hardly recognize ourselves. Katherine Lalancette looks for the person she used to be

Back in December, before Omicron decided to ruin the holidays, I was invited to a small press dinner at a hotel. I found myself seated with three perfect strangers and, well, it was hell. Water glasses ferried their way to and from the table as the four of us, clearly out of practice in the art of generating conversation, searched for ways to busy our mouths.

But then the wine came and I relaxed and even started enjoying the absurd novelty of it all. Here I was, out on a Monday, wearing heeled boots and wide-leg trousers like a person who didn't have a tendency to spend several days in the same pyjamas.

"Mexico City isn't dangerous as long as you don't get drugs or hookers," one man said to the guy planning a trip there. "Well that's no fun at all!" I quipped. "What kind of vacation is that?" Everyone thought I was a hoot and I inhaled their laughs like a smoker taking a drag after a 10-hour flight.

During the lockdown that followed, I replayed this scene an embarrassing number of times. It was as though my self-esteem had developed a kind of survival mechanism, clinging onto the memory as proof that I had once been witty and charming. Might as well scrawl "moved" on the mail, because that person didn't live here anymore.

There was a *Harvard Business Review* article that a lot of people shared at the start of the pandemic. It posited that the discomfort many of us were feeling was actually grief. We were mourning the before, life as we'd known it. Maybe part of that was grieving ourselves, too.

I, for one, miss Coworker Banter Me and Night Out With Friends Me. I miss the Me who took pleasure in dressing up every day and came home with stories to tell. From what I remember, people liked those "Me's." I liked those "Me's." The new ones—Tired Me, Not Excited About Anything Me, Can't Seem to Focus Me—are a drag to carry.

A colleague of mine, Oana Cazan, recently recounted a park hang she had with friends over the summer. She was sitting in the sunshine with people she'd sorely missed yet all she could think was, "Man, I feel like I'm a boring person now—I've got nothing to say."

For the record, I've known Cazan, a brilliant graphic designer, for nearly four years now and she is the furthest thing from boring. But she felt "flat, one-dimensional," she says. "I was this person who worked and sometimes made food, and that was about it. And it really started to affect my confidence."

So, being the creative that she is, she devised a most delightful way to get out of the slump: a persona she's christened "Weekend Oana." "I was like, 'I need a new version of me' and it's Weekend Oana. Weekend Oana is fun. She doesn't just stay on the couch and watch TV. She actually gets up and does stuff."

The alter ego has even begun making appearances on weeknights. Come 5 p.m., Cazan shuts the door to her home office, making sure Work Oana doesn't get her serious, no-fun paws all over the house. Sometimes she knits or goes for a walk or has a glass of wine. A few months ago, she even tried learning guitar. ("Turns out I'm not Guitar Oana," she jokes.) Anything to break up the monotony and feel like a full-fledged person again.

She's definitely got the right idea, says Piotrowski. "What we know is that action precedes motivation. So sometimes we have to act as if we're an optimist rather than a pessimist." Or you know, actually *do* interesting things in order to feel interesting. Or connect with humans other than those we live with to feel multifaceted.

Of course, in a context where we're all exhausted and hanging on by a Wordle, that can be easier said than done. "Identity crises are never fun no matter what stage of life you're in," says Speakman. "But then let's add a global pandemic on top of that—it's really hard to navigate."

Not knowing who we are causes distress, which is why both experts encourage anyone feeling depressed or anxious to seek help. But there can also be some good that comes out of it, they insist, namely an opportunity to try some new identities on for size and let go of ones that no longer fit. Refresh the hat wardrobe, if you will. "It can be a kind of kick in the butt," says Speakman.

I've often imagined a day when we would all come out of hiding when this is over. A parade of pancake people blinking into the light. An arm, then a leg, then a foot would puff up, as though someone were blowing the air back into our bodies. And then slowly, we'd start to feel like ourselves again.

Now, I try to pump the air back in myself. I switch off the screens and attempt my best Weekend Katherine on a Wednesday. I reach out to friends I haven't talked to in months and call my mom way more often. I can't say I fully feel like the person I was before. But maybe that's okay. Maybe this can be the start of New and Improved Me. Just think of all the great hats.

THE KIT X WHIRLPOOL



Dramatization. Washer does not have a front-facing window.

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When it's time to change out the comforters, and your load needs a little more space to move, simply remove the agitator to maximize washing space. With 6.0 cu. ft. of flexible capacity, you'll get more room when you need it.

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**For delicates**  
When it comes to pieces that require a gentler touch like wool sweaters and silk blouses, you can feel confident that they'll come out of the washing machine just like new. For daintier items, remove the agitator to ensure a gentle clean. The impeller wash action cleans by gently rubbing fabrics against each other. It also helps drive clothes from the outer rim to the centre, where the deepest cleaning happens.

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THE KIT

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