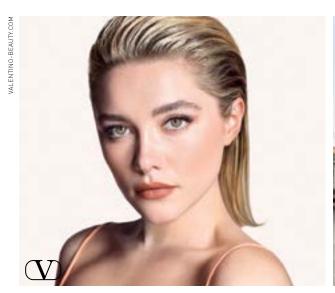
THEKIT

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THE KIT ON THE TOWN

WOMENTALKING

We gathered the game-changing filmmakers from our 2023 Power List to celebrate their achievements and hear their inspiring stories

arlier this month, *The Kit* teamed up with Four Seasons Hotel Toronto to ■ host our second annual Women in Film luncheon. The event brought the pages of our September 7 issue to life through a fascinating panel discussion with the trailblazing directors, writers, producers and documentarians from our 2023 Power List. Joining in conversation with *The Kit* editor-in-chief Laura deCarufel, each of the five women shared how they are challenging what it means to be a woman in the film industry behind the scenes—and how those experiences inspire them to make movie magic onscreen.



From left: Laura deCarfufel, Anubha Momin, Meredith Hama-Brown,



Moderated by The Kit's Laura deCarufel, the panel spoke to their experiences as women



Guests were treated to a three-course lunch from Four Seasons Hotel Toronto chef Fares Alshara.



Ryan Emberley captured stylish guests as they arrived, like legendary ournalist Lisa LaFlamme above left), new Breakfast Television host Meredith Shaw (above) and actor/producer ennifer Podemski (left, vith Hopkins).



Halo & Co., the PR powerhouse behind the event



Etalk senior correspondent Lainey Lui hosted the event.

ilmmaker and Kit cover star Anubha Momin poses with the September 7 issue of *The Kit*.



General Manager Four Seasons





"I want everybody's voice to feel heard,

writer and director

Zoe Hopkins said

on the importance

and responsibility

of storytelling.

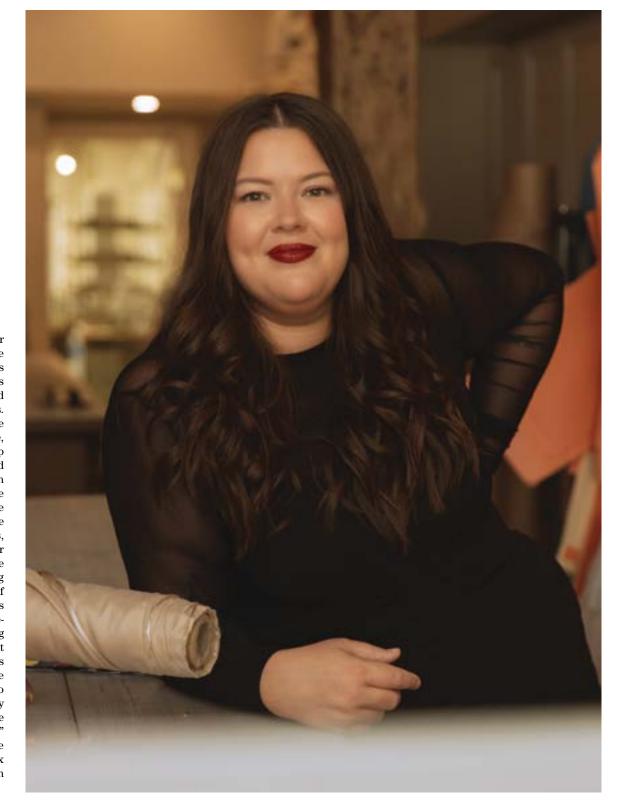








ilary MacMillan has never wanted to blend in. The Toronto-based designer's eponymous fashion line embodies boldness: bright colours, wild patterns, bright-pink Barbie collabs. This year, she celebrates a decade in business. She's been busy of late, opening her first stand-up pop-up store, and launching homewares and swimwear. MacMillan has been an advocate for more compassionate clothing as well. All her pieces are vegan, and MacMillan doesn't use skins, furs, feathers, wools, silks, or any animal byproducts in her designs. She also ensures her line is size-inclusive. "If you're living in a larger body, the simple task of getting clothing can be a struggle: It's not only very frustrating but sometimes impossible," she says. "Making clothing harder to get if you are not what is seen as typical is ridiculous to me. Clothing is supposed to be joyful—it's supposed to be a way to show your personality. We simply want to give more people more options, and that's why we do it." Looking to feel a little bolder, a little brighter? Here, MacMillan shares six lessons in how to boost your own self-confidence to new highs.



Wear colour! Sporting

colour brightens your

mood. Try it. It's dopa-

mine dressing: It really

does boost your mood.

MOOD BOOSTERS

Don't hold onto things that make you feel bad about yourself. Fashion is supposed to be fun. It's supposed to make you feel good about yourself. If something doesn't fit, or you're a different size than you thought, who cares? Don't let it have a hold over you. Donate the pieces that don't work. Cut out the tags if they make you feel bad. Buy things that make you feel good. Have fun with the way you dress.

Don't concern yourself with what other people think. This is a hard one. We all have anxiety; we all second-guess how we come off when we meet someone new or in a social interaction. I always remind myself when those thoughts creep in that if I'm not thinking about them, they probably aren't thinking about me. So try not to overanalyze.

Surround yourself with people that lift you up, not drag you down. This is the most important thing. Those you choose to surround yourself with have a direct impact on who you are as a person. Don't be afraid to cut people out of your life that aren't good for you. Yes, you might have known them since elementary school but if that person's dragging you down, drop them. As you get older, you realize you need to keep people close to you that make you smile and feel good about yourself, and support you.

Celebrate differences—be proud of being weird. The greatest people are the weird ones, and I mean that in the best way possible. Our differences are what make us great, so don't be afraid to show that fun, kooky side of yourself. So often we worry about how we come off when we should be focusing on having fun and enjoying life more.

Actively experience things that matter to you. Have a charity you're really passionate about? A cause you're interested in? Go volunteer. Go visit the place you care about. Be present. So often life gets in the way but try and go out into the world and take part in the things you believe in. Go join an organization, be on a board, be actively involved and bring your people to experience these things you're passionate about with you, and be open-minded to learn about their causes, too.

If you're living in a larger body, the simple task of getting clothing can be a struggle—it's not only very frustrating but sometimes impossible.

Clothes for all We asked chic Canadians to share their favourite size-inclusive shopping destinations



JOANIE PIETRACUPA, EDITOR AND WRITER

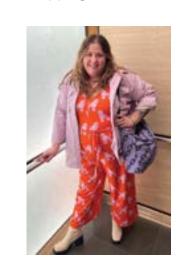
Pietracupa loves vibrant colours, fun fabrics, cool shapes and skin-tight dresses. "I also love to wear crop tops, knee-high boots and super baggy jeans, all of which are supposed to be 'unflattering' for bigger bodies. But guess what? I really don't care. As long as I love what I wear, I feel beautiful and confident." For dreamy dresses: "I'm a huge fan of Montreal designer Eliza Faulkner. Almost all her pieces go up to an XXL now, which fits me perfectly. I have a couple of dresses and a denim jacket that I just adore and wear so often. Her pieces are impeccably cut and amazing quality, and make me feel feminine and trendy.'



BRITTNEE BLAIR, MODEL

For Blair, fashion is a love language. "My style is everevolving. I love to bring new looks to the table, whether it be for an event, a vacation or just a day out on the town. I'm here for comfort, but I'm also here for elegance and a loud statement. It's the first way you introduce yourself without having to use any words.'

For thoughtful designs: "Lesley Hampton is not only an incredible Canadian female designer but she advocates for mental health and is a strong leader in the Indigenous community. Each piece feels so thoughtfully crafted and luxurious, and you feel seen and represented when you wear her clothes. They are strong, stunning and proud."



HAYLEY ELSAESSER, DESIGNER

"I'm a huge fan of over-the-top prints, streetwear and vintage fashion," says Elsaesser of her own wardrobe. "From a very young age, I was drawn to fashion as a means of expression. I was a super-shy kid and I loved the feeling that I could show who I was through fashion. I still feel that way."

For the comfiest jeans: "Universal Standard is my go-to brand for basics. Their inclusivity is incredible with sizing from 00 to 40. Their jeans have amazing stretch—I could literally do yoga in them—but they also have support and don't lose their shape. The quality of their items is fantastic, so I love shopping them for items I know I'll need and wear for years."

As breast cancer rates rise, this renowned surgeon is on a (successful!) quest to promote early detection

physician father, soaking up everything she could about a surgeon's life. "We would round up all the mice and rats that he would operate on, and I really played into my career." Today, Zhong is a fourth-generation doctor, surgeon at University Health Network with University of Toronto, and the and lasting. Belinda Stronach Chair in Breast Cancer Reconstructive Surgery at UHN.

She has reconstructed countless breasts and flat chests and ducts and know the kind of quality of life changes that you've made for a patient." improvement in some way."

One of the things Hove is you can tell the profound difference you make.

Zhong did, however, notice a disturbing trend in her patients. More and more folks in their 30s and 40s were coming to her with advanced breast cancer. (She has a patient right now in her early 20s.) What could she do about this? Zhong decided to go after the guidelines. Canada's current mammogram protocol recommends screening starting at age 50. The protocol also is based on 30-year-old data. Even more terrifyingly, Zhong says, the health authority stopped urging folks to perform breast self-exams, since they, apparently, may do it wrong and misdiagnose themselves, causing "anxiety." (Who's to blame for this pivot? "The patriarchy," Zhong sighs.) Zhong set a mission for herself: advocate for lowering the recommended screening age from 50 to 40, and keep advocating until the rules changed.

She posted about it on social media. All. The. Time. She advised breast cancer advocacy groups. She spread the word to her fellow medical staff. And, finally, they listened. In June, the Canadian task force on preventative health care announced that it will fast-track its plans to update the current breast cancer screening guidelines. Zhong was elated. "We all know that how well you do after breast cancer has so much to do with how early you catch it, or it becomes more widespread in your body. So early detection is really the key to providing a good prognosis," she says.

The quest for better early detection isn't / hile other kids may have spent their weekends frolicking in field over. She has taken up the charge to try and bring back more breast selfor stream, or feeding the machine at the local arcade, little Toni exams, patriarchy be damned. "That's one of the things that I'm working Zhong spent her Saturdays at the hospital. She shadowed her on with a number of different colleagues and medical students from our medical school, is how to properly teach people to do their own self breast exam," she says. "You can start doing that early, and I think that we have would actually observe him do transplantation in mice and rats under the a long way to go to teach people how to perform properly their own self microscope with the most delicate instruments and delicate sutures," she breast exam." She's trying to get the word out about personal breast cancer says. "I think that's where plastic surgery and then eventually microsurgery risk and who really needs to start testing at 40, and lesser-known risk factors like breast density as well. Accessibility is another Zhong passion and followed her father's footsteps into the surgical suite. She put her project: How can we provide screening to patients who live in more remote early interest in microsurgery to good use as a plastic and reconstructive areas. And what about breast cancer subtypes?! Her advocacy is loud

And in her time off, she jets overseas with Reconstructing Women International, a non-profit of female plastic surgeons from all over the world nerve pathways, helping folks who have experienced breast cancer feel who volunteer their time to visit low-income countries where women and a little more themselves again. "One of the things that I love about breast children lack access to surgical care. She is, as always, inspired by her reconstruction is that you can tell the profound difference you can make in father, who performed all kinds of surgery on folks in remote rural China one's life, and the kind of relationship you can develop with your patients," during the Cultural Revolution. Today, he would be proud of his famous she says, "I like understanding a patient, understanding their values, and daughter, "It's always been important to me to have a career where I feel helping them through surgery, and then in the post-operative recovery passionate about the work that I do," Zhong says. "And I feel that at the period, you can see the result, like visually right then and there, and also end of the day, or at the end of the week, I have made a difference and an



When this performer's MS worsened, she devoted her life to honest, empathetic disability representation

with disability representation; in addition to her popular blog, Tripping On the disability community has made me more empathetic to what others are Air, she created and hosts Fashion Dis, a makeover show for folks with disabilities (you can catch it on AMI.ca), and co-hosts the AMI podcast. Oh, and she also has a memoir coming out and a sitcom in development. Here, she shares how she created the change she wanted to see in the world.

needed someone to say, 'This shit is hard,

here's what you can do about it." Today

she has created a mini-media empire filled

"2015 was a time of transition for me. My disease became less invisible wrong with you?' and 'Why are you walking like that?' My identity as a singer was being threatened. Even before I was no longer physically able to perform,

Ardra Shephard

I stopped getting hired for gigs once I started using a cane. People's first impression of me was that I was someone to feel sorry for and my sense of self was rattled. That's when I started my blog.

One of the first posts I wrote was called 'Honey, I peed the bed.' I thought, 'If I'm going to do this, I have to be sure that I can be vulnerable and real and talk about the stuff that doesn't get talked about.' Healthcare is so tragically under-resourced that so much of living well with a chronic illness means self-advocacy and hacking it on your own. A lot of blogging is just sharing what I wish someone had told me. Being active in

dealing with. Sharing my experience with MS has empowered me to claim my own narrative, to be able to say to myself and the world, disability isn't what you think it is.

Then, in 2022, AMI approached me about doing a podcast. So much of disability is shrouded in mystery. As much as I regularly hear mind-blowwhen I started to need mobility aids. People started asking things like 'What's ingly clueless and inappropriate comments and unsolicited advice ('have you tried kale?'), there are questions that need answering that people are afraid to ask.

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STYLE MADE SIMPLE

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style is always full and bouncy. DOVE STYLE+CARE \$7.79 EA

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mendations. Here's how the quiz

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hair's texture is key for setting the

The grand finale

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blowout, embracing your natural

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rocking the sleekest updos.

foundation of a great hair routine.

increasing definition.

ucts are right for you?



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continued from page 12

Frank conversations about MS, chronic illness and disability are normalizing. The things we're all afraid of are way less scary when we talk about them. When we take away the mystery, we take away the power.

It's important to create entertainment where people with disabilities can see themselves. For so long disability stories have been told in a way that hasn't always served the community. $Fashion\ Dis$ is different from other makeover shows in that all of our makeover participants have a disability, the show has a disabled host and some additional cast and crew also have disabilities. Rather than erase disability from the fashion and beauty space, Fashion Dis acknowledges that the industry has created barriers that people with disabilities face, but also showcases the adaptive and universal designers and brands that have exploded onto the scene in the past few years. It understands that there's more than one way to be beautiful, cool and stylish—that our differences are what make us interesting, and that fashion belongs to every body.

Disability pride isn't about loving MS: It's about refusing to accept that Thave less value because of it.

Fashion Dis is different from other disability-centric shows in that we don't seek to fix anyone. There's no sad soundtrack or b-roll hospital footage.

There's this idea that people with disabilities don't care about style and self-care. Many believe that people with disabilities don't have the same interest or capacity for romantic relationships, sex and partnerships. We're often infantilized or thought less capable. While there are lots of misconceptions around disability, representation in the style and selfcare space can help correct some of these specific assumptions.

Having this type of representation on TV is also important because it can cultivate a sense of disability pride. To me, disability pride isn't about loving MS: It's about refusing to accept that I deserve less access or have less value because of it. A collective pride in identity is what allows us to demand change. The general public is not yet angry enough about how inaccessible the world is, if they are even aware of the barriers we face. Our society has a high tolerance for how much we are willing to exclude the disability community and that has to change.

Thankfully, we're at least moving in the right direction. It's kind of mind-blowing to witness the evolution of disability representation over the past few years. Social media has levelled the playing field, and I expect we will see more and more mainstream inclusion and representation ahead. It's no longer about teachable moments and after-school specials, it's about realizing that disability is different, but that it's not that different. Disability is just another way to be human."—As told to Briony Smith



Deepa Mehta

The celebrated filmmaker's latest project is a unique collaboration and a radical portrait of trans joy

cclaimed director Deepa Mehta has made a career out of brave, bold films, tackling topics from closeted queerness to child brides. She, however, never meant to be a messenger. "I don't think I've ever been motivated by the need to send a message through my films," she says. "It's curiosity that drives me." Now, Mehta's curiosity has driven her to co-direct I Am Sirat, a poignant yet ultimately uplifting documentary, with subject Sirat Taneja, an Indian trans government worker. The film debuted at TIFF and follows Taneja's everyday life in New Delhi as she experiences both prejudice (Taneja's mother still sees Taneja as her son) and hope (she celebrates her trans identity via joyful club outings, Instagram reels and receiving her transgender identity card). We quizzed Mehta and her co-director Taneja about pushing the boundaries of traditional documentary filmmaking and the importance of bringing authentic trans stories to the screen.

What was an early triumph in your film career that showed you that this is how you wanted to spend your life? Why did it make you feel so alive?

Mehta: "No triumph has...propelled me to pursue my career, but instead it has been innate curiosity, revelation, the development of characters, unexpected gestures, unexplored situations and perhaps the inequality in life in all its myriad states

Many of your films explore human-rights issues via storytelling. How do you pick your films' subject

Mehta: "Every film that I have made has been the result of my desire for inquiry about a certain subject and the impulse to unravel its mystery all the way down to its core. The want to explore sectarian war—after hearing stories from my family—led to *Earth*. The lives of widows in India-after encountering one in Varanasi-led to Water, and so forth."

How can film explore these types of human-rights issues in a way that other media or information cannot? How can they perhaps change hearts and

Mehta: "The advantage of film as a medium is that it provides a more tangible experience than most. It doesn't leave things up to your interpretation but lays down a path into a new world at your feet. We've been told stories, by our parents and grandparents, since birth and that is how we have learnt a lot about the world. Film takes that one step further to immerse you so deeply in those stories, that you feel like you're a part of that world and can touch it, if only you extend your hand and try. And this vivid visual imprint stays within you for a long time, impacting the mind and body for many years beyond the actual moment of

Some of your films have caused controversies. How do you remain steady and strong in the face of outrage? Mehta: "I don't think I would have made any of those films if I'd have known they would cause controversies. It hasn't been strength that has motivated me to keep going on, but curiosity about the world we live in. Or maybe I'm just a sucker for punishment!"

I Am Sirat is a story of trans experience. Deepa, as a cis person, how did you set up the collaborative filmmaking process with Sirat?

Mehta: "Long-time trust and respect for each other has gotten us where we are. I really love her. Sometimes she calls me 'Ma,' and I guess that's what it's about. I am not her mother, but I think she hopes her mother will love her for who she is, the way I do.'

Many trans stories told by cis filmmakers have not been well-received by the trans community. Sirat, what made you comfortable enough to share your story alongside Deepa?

Taneja: "Whenever I spoke to Deepa, I felt a sense of kinship with her. I never felt like I was talking to a stranger but to someone close to me. We built a strong bond, and I felt like I could share anything with her. I felt a sense of comfort around her. I feel like we're connected somehow. Maybe it's because we're both searching for our sense of belonging. I talked to her like she was my mom. I have one mother, who gave birth to me, and a second mother in Deepa. That's why I was able to entrust her with my life story."

Every film I've made has been the result of my desire for inquiry.

What are you hopeful that audiences will take away from this film? How do you hope it could help improve trans representation in the overly cis film-

Taneja: "My hope from society, and people that watch this film, is that they will understand the lives of trans people. And that they will accept and understand not only me, but all trans people. Acceptance doesn't mean that they have to bring trans people as guests to stay in their homes, but to give them respect. The same respect that people give to one another within society—that boys and girls give their friends, others around them and to family. I hope that trans people also get the same respect and aren't harassed while walking on the street. I hope they're treated in the same way others are. But my main hope is that my

What were some of your favourite moments making this movie with Sirat? What made them so memorable

mom, family and society understand me.

Mehta: "Interviewing her mom, with Sirat sitting next to her, and her mom constantly referring to Sirat as a ne." Sirat's generosity and equilibrium as she dealt with this was heartbreaking and yet so generous toward her mother. Her duty as her mother's son, made her and this is huge-put her own identity aside while the conversation lasted."

Why is it more important than ever to showcase trans

Mehta: "It is important and has always been, in my view—being a woman of colour—that we expose our essential humanity to each other. Whether it's race, caste or gender. Peace in an angry, disintegrating world is more essential than ever. We all need to know, understand and embrace a Sirat.'

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