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A CULTURAL ROADMAP FOR THE CITY GIRL

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WORKIN' IT

Dancer, choreographer and pilates instructor
Janessa Clark loves all her jobs. Meet 28
more blissful self-starters on page 20.

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WORKIN' IT

Brokers, Bakers & Girl Party Makers.
These self-starters have each found their niche.

Shana Fried



Shana Fried

Founder, *snapshot*

Shana Fried arrived at her first day of law school with a faux-hawk that drew stares from the suits. But encouraging diversity in staid environments has always interested Fried. In 2004, bothered by what she saw as the segregated LGBT party scene in New York City, she began *snapshot*, a party that invited folks of all stripes.

"I wanted to start a party where everyone was welcome, there was no gender check at the door, there was no playing toward a certain type of crowd," Fried says. "I wanted to mix that up." *snapshot*'s tagline—"catching you in the act"—grew popular, and Fried projected the crowd's faces on a giant screen at each party. The photos showed up on MySpace and Friendster, a kind of guerilla viral marketing that paid off. *snapshot* now boasts a weekly crowd of 150 to 200, with the 2008 Pride party hosting 1,500. In the interim, Fried trained as an entertainment lawyer and, at age 28 this year, became a partner at Martinez Law. —LF

Janessa Clark

Owner, Kilterbox

Professional dancer, choreographer and Pilates Instructor Janessa Clark moved to New York in 2001 to start her own all women dance company, Kilterbox. The company focuses on incorpo-

Janessa Clark



rating societal and political issues, and providing a platform for sexual and gender equality. Her current project (*inner*)views I-VII uses mixed media of dance, film and theater to give insight into the LGBT community "My passion is dance, and my commitment is to the communities I belong to," says Clark. "I couldn't be happier; I am an out lesbian living, thriving, creating art and making a positive change."

Clark performs for several other companies in addition to her own, and works with choreographer Gina Gibney in facilitating movement and empowerment workshops for domestic violence survivors and individuals living with HIV/AIDS. She teaches Pilates at several NYC studios and privately in the tri-state area. In addition, Clark works as the Theater Programmer at Dance New Amsterdam bringing international dance companies to Lower Manhattan venues. —DP

Stephanie Testa

Founder/owner, One Glass Productions

After an unhappy stint in the corporate world, Stephanie Testa did what most artists would love to be able to do: make her passion her day job. In 2006, Testa founded One Glass Productions, a full-service production and post-production company, in Brooklyn's DUMBO neighborhood. Recent projects include a gay short film directed by Henry Cruz, which will

tour the LGBT film festivals this year. "I've had to work so hard prospecting and networking, and without any immediate pay off, it can be incredibly frustrating," Testa admits. "But I've learned that when you are excited about something, it's contagious."

Testa's newest effort is a documentary series with profiles of environmentally minded artists from the NYC area. One Glass plans to expand its offices to include shared work stations for freelancers, and act as a creative hub and resource for independent media creators. —KL

Ilene C. Shane

Chocolatier, SweetBliss

When Ilene Shane was a personal chef, her boss, Ralph Lauren, asked what he should do to lose weight. Shane replied, "Yard work." Shane's sense of humor served her well throughout the eight-year gig with Lauren, and continues to inform her playful techniques as a high-end chocolatier. In 2001, Shane co-founded a boutique chocolate company, SweetBliss, with her partner, Iris Libby, and Lauren's favorite buttercrunch chocolate biscotti.

Now, Shane and Libby own a chocolate and confection factory in Chelsea, where Shane creates mischievous concoctions like a fizzy Belgian chocolate frog filled with Pop Rocks, or the Kaplunk, which drops a marshmallow-filled



Stephanie Testa



Ilene Shane



Edris Nicholls

Belgian chocolate dome into a mug of cocoa. SweetBliss is sold at Bergdorf Goodman, Saks Fifth Avenue and Dean and DeLuca, high-end vendors that Shane never could have imagined. "I didn't have a clue. I just kept following what seemed right and what seemed comfortable," Shane says before singing, James Brown-style, "I feel good!" —LF

Edris Nicholls

Owner, Edris Salon

She has created looks for Halle Berry, Diana Ross, Lenny Kravitz and Martina Navratilova. Edris Nicholls is hot. After moving to the U.S. from St Vincent, West Indies at age 15, Nicholls was inspired by her grandmother to learn cosmetology, and earned her license at an after-school program. Armed with a trade, Nicholls put herself through Baruch College's computer information systems program by styling hair at fashion shows. She worked as a computer systems analyst for two years before deciding to make hair her full-time gig. "I realized I'm a free spirit," she says. "I like to work where my style won't be judged because I'm wearing green panty hose and an Afro."

Her rise to fashion-circle fame came after proving herself as a talented stylist under the tutelage of Edward Tricomi, then as a freelancer where she attracted the likes of Iman and Naomi Campbell. Not to be deterred by the difficulties she faced being a black woman in a white male dominated industry, she raised the funds, found a supportive landlord, opened her

salon and has since evolved into one of the hottest names in New York fashion circles. She runs the full service Edris Salon with the help of her Aussie GF Toni and a well-trained staff of 11. Nicholls isn't through yet; she'll soon launch what she calls a long overdue styling product for varied types of hair that will most certainly fill a gap in the market. In addition, she'll begin teaching exclusive professional stylist workshops, and is working on closing deals for an advice column as well as her place as a behind-the-scenes host on a fashion TV network. —DP

Kristin Hurd

Realtor, Weichert Realtors

For Kristin Hurd, success is in her blood; her grandfather ran one of the largest real estate firms in Ohio in the '70s. But it was her own hard work that drove her to the top of the New Jersey real estate scene. In 2003, Hurd became the top Hudson County seller for Weichert Realtors, capitalizing on what she saw as the living potential of Jersey City, and won rookie of the year. In 2004, at age 31, she was asked to open her own real estate branch for the firm.

"I love helping couples find their homes," Hurd says. "I love helping gay couples, knowing it's important for people in our community to have a safe home and feel safe with who they're working with." In 2006, she was awarded manager of the year, and in coming years Hurd is looking forward to several green real estate projects. In the meantime, she supports Lambda Legal, the Human Rights Campaign

and Garden State Equality. "You gotta take care of your people," says Hurd. —LF

Lynette Molnar

Founder, Girl Power Productions

Like many self-starting entrepreneurs, Lynette Molnar wears many hats. The Provincetown-based event promoter, professional photographer and LGBT activist has created hundreds of Girl Power Productions events over the past 10-plus years. Her primary motivation is "to give women more of the opportunities gay men have; it's such a man's world, and to create more spaces for people to be who they are."

Molnar says her biggest obstacle is "having enough time to implement all the ideas I have to help connect women, business owners, even couples," she says. "I have a sixth sense for what's missing and the ability to create it."

Activism has long been part of Molnar's life. As an eighth-grader, she convinced her school district to comply with Title IX and offer girls' intramural sports. Soon she'd like to "take the Girl Power show on the road to women in communities that don't have the liberty we do in places like Provincetown, San Francisco, Miami and New York." —KL

Biola Odunewu & Robin Richardson

Co-owners, Pillow Café and Lounge

Biola Odunewu and Robin Richardson both fled the tyranny of 9-to-5 workdays to follow their dream of opening the Pillow Café, and gave

Kristin Hurd



Lynette Molnar



Biola Odunewu & Robin Richardson



Sheryl Smith & Simone Palmer

Brooklyn's Clinton Hill community a flourishing lounge and restaurant—in the process.

Nigerian-born Odunewu graduated from college in Atlanta, Georgia, and began her career as a writer for CNN. In 1997, after moving to New York, she worked in the dot-com industry before jumping ship to open the Pillow Café with Richardson. Richardson, for her part, is a native New Yorker, and was a dropout-prevention counselor before “the bureaucracy sent her running,” she says. Another 10 years in retail and bartending gave Richardson an excellent platform for building the Pillow Café. “We had no money when we started; we crossed our fingers that everything would work out, and it did.”—KL

Sheryl J. Smith & Simone L. Palmer

Founders, Sandcastle on the Beach
Sheryl J. Smith and Simone L. Palmer left the frigid winters of New England and Maine for a two-week vacation in St. Croix, U.S. Virgin Islands, in 1999, and never looked back. Smith, formerly a veteran sales representative with Nabisco Brands and enthusiastic home-remodeler, and Palmer, a physical therapist, created their first successful venture in 1987, a physical therapy clinic serving rural populations. But the strain involved with running an expanding business led them to St. Croix, to a beautiful but dilapidated beachfront resort that they noticed was for sale. The rest, they say, “is her-story.” They sold the practice in New England, and after extensive refurbishment and renovation, opened Sandcastle on the Beach in 2002.

“Our vision was to implement a sustainable philosophy that honors the human mind, body and spirit and to embrace diversity respectfully,” Palmer says. “Our mission is to create the premier beachfront resort destination that we initially were searching for, and to consistently deliver that welcoming atmosphere for both local and global guests to de-stress from the vigorous demands of daily life.”

Sandcastle on the Beach continues to grow by offering wellness classes, spa services and the rejuvenating experience of simply enjoying the sunsets—with a lesbian sensibility. “[We are] in fact a diverse mixture of people, cultures, backgrounds and sexual preferences,” they say. “We are the new niche, diversity, embracing all those who are respectful of one another. Our guests’ feedback is very positive about meeting new friends from all walks of life, whom may not have otherwise crossed paths.”—KL

Denise Marsa

Founder, Key Media PR, WO30, and SongReach

Denise Marsa’s voice has been influential to audiences and clients alike ever since 1978, when it rang out worldwide on the famous single *Lucky Stars*, a top pop song in the U.K. In the ‘80s, Marsa wrote songs under publishing contracts with the major labels Warner Brothers UK Ltd. and Warner/Chappell Music in Los Angeles, then released her first full-length solo album in 1998, *SELF*, and aptly promoted it herself. “I was pretty passionate about it because I really believed in what I was doing,” Marsa says.

Her work promoting her own album gave birth to her firm Key Media Public Relations, which has successfully promoted the clients Marsa believes in, like the Celebration Theatre, the West Hollywood Lesbian Visibility Community/Etheridge award and several independent musicians. Not one to skip a beat, Marsa also began WO30 Records in 2006, a label dedicated to promoting the finished albums of women over 30, and SongReach, an outreach music program for underprivileged teenaged girls. “I never stop the music,” she says. “If I were to stop it, I don’t think I’d be the whole person that I am.”—LF

Shannon Wentworth

CEO and founder, Discover Sweet

With her decade-long experience in LGBT tourism, social justice and “green”-oriented marketing, CEO and founder Shannon Wentworth has created Discover Sweet, the lesbian community’s newest answer to travel, charity and becoming eco-friendly. Says Wentworth, “Sweet aims to blend charitable activities with fun.” As co-founder of her first entrepreneurial venture, her ambition is to “create a profitable, socially responsible, eco-friendly company that enriches and empowers the lesbian community as well as inspires others to follow suit.”

Since its inception early this year, Wentworth has been true to her word, organizing teams for the San Francisco AIDS Walks, the AIDS Lifecycle and a breast cancer awareness triathlon. On the travel front, Wentworth has arranged lesbian-exclusive trips to re-plant the



Denise Marsa



Shannon Wentworth



Heather Carruthers & Leslie Leonelli



Tracey Robinson & Tonja Jordan

wetlands destroyed by Hurricane Katrina, clean up beaches, work with wildlife habitats and improve underprivileged schools. Here, Wentworth's motivation is twofold: to "preserve an area's natural beauty, while at the same time, help the communities we visit learn more about lesbians." And for Shannon Wentworth, her job couldn't be Sweeter! —ML

Tracey M. Robinson & Tonja F. Jordan

Founders, Lipstick + Wildflowers

Boredom with corporate politics was the impetus behind the clothing start-up Lipstick + Wildflowers, but creativity and innovation sustain the company. Newark, New Jersey native Tracey M. Robinson and Queens-born Tonja F. Jordan started the company in 2005 after recognizing "a growing need for fashionable, edgy clothing for gay women," they say. "Our ultimate goal is to create clothes that have a 'Masculine Attitude, Feminine Fit'™ for the androgynous and masculine woman."

Robinson is the creative force, and gleans artistic inspiration from her world travels as well as the vibrant neighborhoods of Brooklyn. Jordan, a lawyer who represents artists and independent businesspeople, oversees Lipstick + Wildflowers' operations. Their Web site will relaunch with the fall season. In addition to an online store, the site will feature content about LGBT arts, entertainment and social responsibility.

"Gay women want clothing that allows them to express their own personal style without shop-

ping in the men's department," says Jordan. "This is Lipstick + Wildflowers' ultimate goal—to bring tailored, textured, colorful fitted clothing to the LGBT woman." —KL

Heather Carruthers & Leslie Leonelli

Co-owners, Pearl's Rainbow

Heather Carruthers and Leslie Leonelli knew to open the door when opportunity came knocking. "We were ready for a change of lifestyle, ready to leave Manhattan and have a different pace of life," Carruthers says. While vacationing in Key West in February 2000, they found their answer: The women's guesthouse at which they stayed, Rainbow House, was for sale.

Later that year, they bought and re-opened the guesthouse as Pearl's Rainbow—a luxurious lesbian resort just two blocks from the Atlantic Ocean, with a main guesthouse that used to be a 19th-century cigar factory. Over the past eight years, Pearl's has become one of the premier lesbian resorts in the world. "Seeing women relax in a safe environment and make lasting friendships has been incredibly rewarding," Carruthers says. "Knowing we've given them a beautiful and comfortable place where they can be themselves is the most gratifying part of this business." —KL

Jen Armstrong and Tanya Alsberg

Founders, JAK Designs

In 1995, Jen Armstrong and Tanya Alsberg were coworkers at a sandwich shop in San Francisco; Armstrong was saving up for a knitting machine. Since then, the pair has woven their

romantic and professional lives by founding JAK Designs in 1997, a mom-and-mom company that produces handmade, wearable knits with urban elegance and a green conscience.

JAK's office supplies are recycled, their yarns are natural and organic, and Armstrong and Alsberg always look for ways to make their business more local. "It's just part of my world," says Armstrong. "I'm really passionate about it not being destroyed." Having moved from a small studio in San Francisco to a spacious workshop home in Ohio, Armstrong and Alsberg now knit and travel to sell full-time. Their scarves and shawls are sold at 60 stores around the country. —LF

Stacy Alldredge

Owner, Who's Walking Who:

Dog Obedience and Behavioral Training

An advocate for dogs and their caregivers for more than 20 years, Stacy Alldredge has successfully trained thousands of canines using a holistic, positive approach. Her background in crisis counseling and social work dovetails ideally with her talent in winning the devotion and trust of animals.

A certified canine nutritionist, Alldredge created the recipes for *Throw Me A Bone: 50 Healthy, Canine Taste-Tested Recipes for Snacks, Meals, and Treats*, and several introductions for breed-specific books. She's been featured on *ABC's Good Morning America*, *Good Day NY*, *NBC's Today in New York*, *New York 1*, *VH1*, *MTV*, *Animal Planet* and numerous international networks.



Jen Armstrong & Tanya Alsberg

Between triathlons, yoga and meditation, Alldredge is also working on a children's book series and opening a doggie day care. "It's all about being true to yourself and loving what you do," she says. "I couldn't be closeted doing what I do, and I couldn't be out doing anything else; it all goes together."

Catherine Angiel

Owner, West Village Gallery Eclectic

Lindsay Lohan, Christian Slater and Ethan Hawke are a few of jewelry designer Catherine Angiel's clients; *Glamour*, *Cosmopolitan* and *New York* are some of the magazines who've noticed her hip, avant-garde pieces. Though she became accustomed to misogynistic bosses telling her to leave her crafting ambitions to men, Angiel's personal integrity and style won in the end.

In 1993, she opened her own retail jewelry gallery, Catherine Angiel Gallery Eclectic. That same year, she agreed to be the first lesbian ever on the cover of *Newsweek*, representing a mainstream lesbian "coming out strong" in their piece "Lesbian Chic." She helped add the term "commitment ring" to the public's vocabulary in an early '90s publicity tour where her goal was to communicate that unions between gay people are honorable and valid. "I like to think that it was somewhat my contribution," Angiel, 47, says. "We should really have a life without limitations. Just do what you feel. You have to do what's in your heart, and everything will follow." —LF



Stacy Alldredge



Catherine Angiel

Farika & Mandy Misagal



Farika & Mandy Misagal

Co-founders, Trophy Bar

Las Vegas native Farika and San Diego-born Mandy Misagal, co-owners of Trophy Bar in Williamsburg, Brooklyn, are combining their respective talents in the fashion/art world and hospitality industry in a new venture. Farika, a fine arts photographer and event promoter, and Misagal, who managed several restaurants and hotels while earning a degree in psychology, both moved to Williamsburg in 2002 to open the Stay Gold art gallery, to showcase "local, national and international artists and musicians, while fostering a creative community in the resident studio spaces behind the gallery," Farika says.

In 2007, they began planning Trophy Bar. "We were planning on expanding Stay Gold into a bar/gallery space," they say. "When we lost our lease, it felt like a natural transition to open a bar." With a Wednesday night party for queers bringing in stylish crowds, they plan to expand the space. "More importantly, we hope Trophy continues to offer something new and inspiring to people." —KL

Christie Hardwick

Founder, Spirited Contribution

After 22 years moving up the ranks of the corporate world, Christie Hardwick had gained professional status, but she felt something missing. So she left her position as vice president of human resources at Silicon Graphics to pursue a vocation that would fill her spiritual longing. Now Hardwick, 49, is a certified minister and the



Christie Hardwick

founder of Spirited Contribution, a coaching company to assist executives in becoming leaders who promote and foster passionate, inspired contributions from people they guide.

Hardwick's interest in creating fulfilling atmospheres informed her efforts as the founding chair of *greatschools.net*, a nonprofit Web site that grew into a definitive guide to the nation's public schools. Hardwick also uses her voice to inspire listeners on the airwaves—she released a full-length CD of her original soulful songs, titled *Keep the Lights On*, in 2004. "There's an expression I love," she says. "As you are lifted, others are lifted." —LF

Dawn Ackerman

Co-founder, OutSmart Office Solutions

For Dawn Ackerman, a jill-of-all-trades who once worked as a hardware store manager, a bar manager and a caseworker for heroin addicts, starting EcoToner in 1997 united two of her loves: working for LGBT equality and saving the environment. EcoToner helps offices recycle and dispose of ink toner and printing equipment, and in 2005, Ackerman created the Los Angeles Gay and Lesbian Chamber of Commerce (LAGLCC) to connect and advise LGBT business owners.

Ackerman was awarded PlanetOut's 2006 Entrepreneur of the Year award, and in 2007 she co-founded OutSmart Office Solutions. "Our goal is to work with LGBT businesses, professionals and nonprofits so that we may move toward equality," she says, and she's planning

Dawn Ackerman



Malissa Boles



Rachael Sage



Mary Seton Corboy



Stacy Lentz

another startup, CandidateFive, an LGBT recruitment firm for corporations in the U.S. —LF

Malissa Boles

CEO, Studville Apparel

As CEO of her own clothing line, Malissa Boles, 38, wears the term Stud with pride—literally. She was working as a billing specialist for an attorney in 2005 when, inspired by the business and fashion savvy of Jay-Z and Russell Simmons, she launched Studville, her line of urban apparel.

"I created Studville specifically for the LGBT community," she says, "filling a need for Proud folks to see themselves reflected in fashion." With a grant from enthusiastic family members, Boles made Studville her full-time gig in 2006. She has her sights on becoming an internationally recognized brand. Hoodies, shirts, hats, cufflinks and a lock-and-key pendant make up her inventory, much of which was snapped up recently by Charlotte Black Pride attendees in July 2008. "When I'm up for days at a time at a Pride festival, my body gets tired, but mentally I'm super charged," she says, "because I'm doing something I love." —LF

Rachael Sage

Founder, MPress Records

Rachael Sage's entrepreneurship began early—with her mail-order barrette business in the seventh grade. She had also written and recorded her own songs since age 12, and eventually combined her business acumen with the creative impulse to found MPress Records.

In addition to Sage's own prolific output, MPress has released the *New Arrivals* series of compilation albums, with proceeds going to a different charity each year. "Since we started doing [the series], my sense of purpose is much clearer: to use music help make the world a more positive place, as much as to entertain," she says. This year's *New Arrivals III* will benefit the National Eating Disorders Association, which deals with a subject close to Sage's heart. "I have seen eating disorders ravage a number of friends and devastate their loved ones, destroying potential and in worst cases, taking lives," she relates. "We hope this project will cast some light on the important advocacy work they're doing, and just get people talking!" —KL

Mary Seton Corboy

Co-founder, Greensgrow Farms

"I was literally looking for a good tomato," says Mary Seton Corboy, former chef and co-founder of Philadelphia's urban Greensgrow Farms. "I knew how far tomatoes were being shipped though it was growing season in the northeast, and I thought it was absurd." In 1997, she and co-founder Tom Sereduk began an urban farm in an unlikely area: a derelict lot in an industrial section of Philadelphia, across the street from a chemical plant. Without any background in business or urban farming, she saw an opportunity to grow better food locally and reclaim control over how and where food is grown.

Empowering local residents and small businesses is part of Corboy's philosophy. "We've seen that certain businesses can become driv-

ers in a neighborhood's economic revitalization, and I believe that food businesses are one of those," she says. Corboy believes that, as food and energy prices rise, other cities will have no choice but to adopt urban farming ventures like Greensgrow. Urban agriculture provides two core things in the food paradigm: access to food and education about food." —KL

Stacy Lentz

Investor, Stonewall Inn

Stonewall Inn is iconic, having been the site of the riots that set off the modern gay rights movement. But in 2006, the Inn had fallen into disrepair, a no-man's-land of crime and drugs that risked closing for good. Then Stacy Lentz stepped in. The managing director of Taylor Grey, a top recruitment firm that hires a high number of LGBT employees, she saw an opportunity to save Stonewall by becoming the sole active lesbian investor in the bar's history. "I am very blessed in my professional life, so I wanted to give back to the community," Lentz said.

Stonewall has since enjoyed a rebirth, hosting fundraisers for organizations like GLAAD and the Hetrick-Martin Institute. A lesbian pool team, the Stonewall Riots, has taken root, and GirlNation and Victoria are two of the parties hosted regularly there, along with Stonewall 69, a weekly party honoring the 1969 riots that started them all. "At Stonewall, we created a vision of what we wanted it to look like," Lentz says, "and everyone in the community has gotten behind that vision." —LF ■