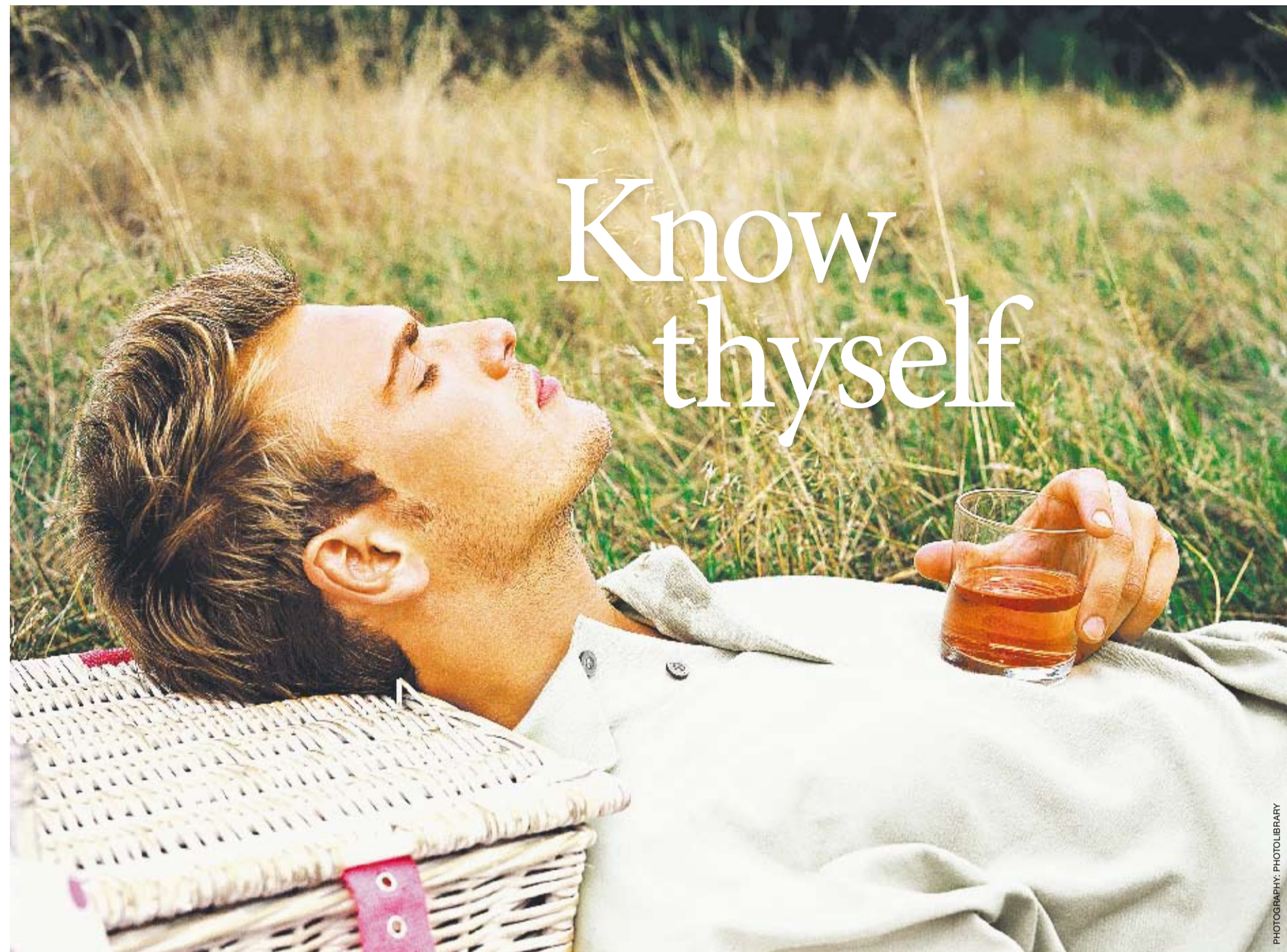


Know thyself



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Our increasingly hectic lifestyles mean we can lose sight of who we really are. Louise Deasey looks at ways to retrieve your authentic self.

Advocates of the latest self-development trend say success will only come when we start following Shakespeare's age-old advice, "to thine own self be true..."

Who are you? Joseph Campbell, an expert on myth and the path of "individuation", wrote once, "The privilege of a lifetime is being who you are."

But what if you don't know who you are? Many experts on self-actualisation, such as Carl Jung and Abraham Maslow, believed we can only access our real genius – and live a life of substance – when we are living authentically.

But in our linear, goal-oriented culture, it's often considered rather self-indulgent to stop and take time to figure out what you want (and who you are), rather than spending the time ticking something more "concrete" off the achievement list.

But advocates of the Know Thyself school of self-actualisation, argue that it's not only essential, it's also economical, and a whole heap of fun.

Style statement

Carrie McCarthy and Danielle LaPorte, the US duo who wrote *Style Statement* (Little Brown), released in Australia in July, had conducted over 600 "style consultations" before the book was written, all based on finding a two-word summary of, well, what makes you, you. They base the format on around 60 questions on your aesthetic, lifestyle and personal preferences. Examples? What's your favourite flower, holiday, piece of music, item of clothing? Who do you admire, and why?

The idea isn't new, but the two-word summary is. Julia Cameron's seminal *The Artist's Way* (Pan Macmillan), is based on a similar line of questioning. In a way, both books are like therapy in fast-forward. Much cheaper than seeing a shrink, and much more enjoyable; just get yourself a pen and lots of paper, set aside an

uninterrupted day (easier said than done), and chip away with honesty until you "find" yourself. The questions – and exercises – in both books, are very enjoyable. List your frequent daydreams. Look at the types of art, design, music, theatre and holidays you like. Soon, say the authors, you will begin to see patterns emerging; this is you.

What do you love?

LaPorte, half of the *Style Statement* duo, says, "There is one simple question which will crack open your reality: what do I love, and why do I love it?"

Except, perhaps, on our birthdays, this question doesn't really raise itself in our daily life. Instead, we can easily get caught up in a to-do list of musts, shoulds and have-tos, which eventually see us forgetting what we wanted in the first place.

In *The Artist's Way*, Cameron advocates two exercises for getting back the authentic self we lost from years of censorship, conditioning, responsibilities and other people's opinions.

The first is to write three pages of stream-of-consciousness journaling upon

“One question will crack open your reality: what do I love, and why do I love it?”

Try these exercises...

- **Set aside a day each fortnight for what Cameron terms an "Artist's Date", where you spend an entire day replenishing yourself with creative inspiration.**

It needn't be expensive, but you must do it alone. Some ideas? An afternoon at a library, a drive to the country, seeing a play.

- **Start journaling, each morning or each night.**

Write anything – observations, thoughts, quotes. Wait until you have been journaling for a month, and see what themes emerge when you re-read what you've recorded. What do you repeat?

- **Think of five objects in your home which you absolutely adore.**

Where did they come from? What do they symbolise? Why are they so important to you?

- **Write a list of your five favourite movies, and look for recurring themes in their storylines.**

Is it the location? The job the hero or heroine does?

- **Write down your three deepest values.**

Keep them in your wallet, and look at them every time you need to make a purchase or a key decision for the next week. Is it in line with your values?

waking each morning, “about anything, and without re-reading it”. The second is to install a weekly (or fortnightly) “Artist’s Date” into your schedule. “You must do it alone, and it must inspire you,” she writes. It can be a visit to a gallery, a trip to a bookstore, a movie, a picnic in the park, a visit to the zoo.

To the outside world, taking the time out by ourselves, may seem selfish. But as Jungian psychotherapist Dr Bud Harris writes in Sacred Selfishness (Inner Ocean), “The confusion and uneasiness we feel about investing in the subjective values of honouring ourselves as human beings... reflect how we have become estranged, not only from ourselves, but from the value of life.”

Coming home

Cameron puts it aptly: “We strive to be good, to be nice, to be helpful, to be unselfish... when we can’t get others to leave us alone, we eventually abandon ourselves. To others, we may look like we’re there. We may act like we’re there. But our true self has gone to ground.”

McCarthy, the other half of the Style Statement duo, says it’s this sense of people

losing their true selves which led them to create their system of questioning, which people can use to find their true selves.

“We wanted to start a revolution in people being authentic.”

She continues: “Your style statement is two words which act as an anchor to help you make more powerful choices in your life. We define a more powerful choice as one which aligns your body, your mind and your spirit.”

“You can’t know what you want to do unless you know yourself.”

The duo say there are many reasons people have come to them for “style psychotherapy” sessions, which cost \$US500 (\$A722) a pop (but now, you can DIY with the book). “It’s the bad-hair days, the closet full of clothes you never wear, the job you show up to but aren’t really present at... in essence, it’s not really feeling at home in your life.”

Authentic lives

McCarthy and LaPorte say clients who have found their Style Statement report positive changes in everything from relationships to career.

“We get emails every day from women who say their Style Statement really got them on track. One of our favourites was from a

woman who did the Style Statement book on the weekend and on Monday morning went in and quit her job, because it wasn’t grooving with what she wanted from her life. We’ve had reports of people getting back into dating again, going back to school, starting their hobbies again, renovating their homes... mostly we hear, ‘I’m not comparing myself to other women any more’, or ‘Shopping is much less stressful’, or, ‘I’m giving myself permission to be me’.”

Authentic business

But does living authentically automatically mean you need to quit your job? According to Kate Forster, author of Spiritual Business: Creating A Business From The Heart (Dogma), it means you can eventually meld what service you long to give others, with how you earn your money. “You can’t know what you want to do unless you know yourself,” she says, and so her book, like Style Statement, is a series of exercises and fun ways to do that. One of Forster’s favourite exercises is the Spiritual Style Guide: “This was a pin board of images of all the things I love. To look at it is almost meditative. I had it above my desk when I wrote the book and it never failed to inspire me.”

This is why her book – which is, essentially, a business plan for the soul – emphasises

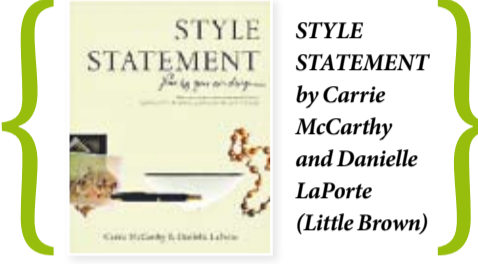
creative passions, lists of inspiration and adherence to our basic values.

Forster says: “On a business level, knowing yourself makes life easier.”

McCarthy says the Style Statement is ultimately about clarity: “You receive ownership of who you are and then you can create a business, a marriage, a date or a partner, which looks like you...”

And if you’re not sure if you’re living a life aligned with your authentic self?

Forster says: “When you say ‘no’ without guilt you know you are being authentic. It means we know what we want and we know who we are.”



Find out more

- www.carrieanddanielle.com
- www.spiritualbusiness.com.au
- www.theartistsway.com