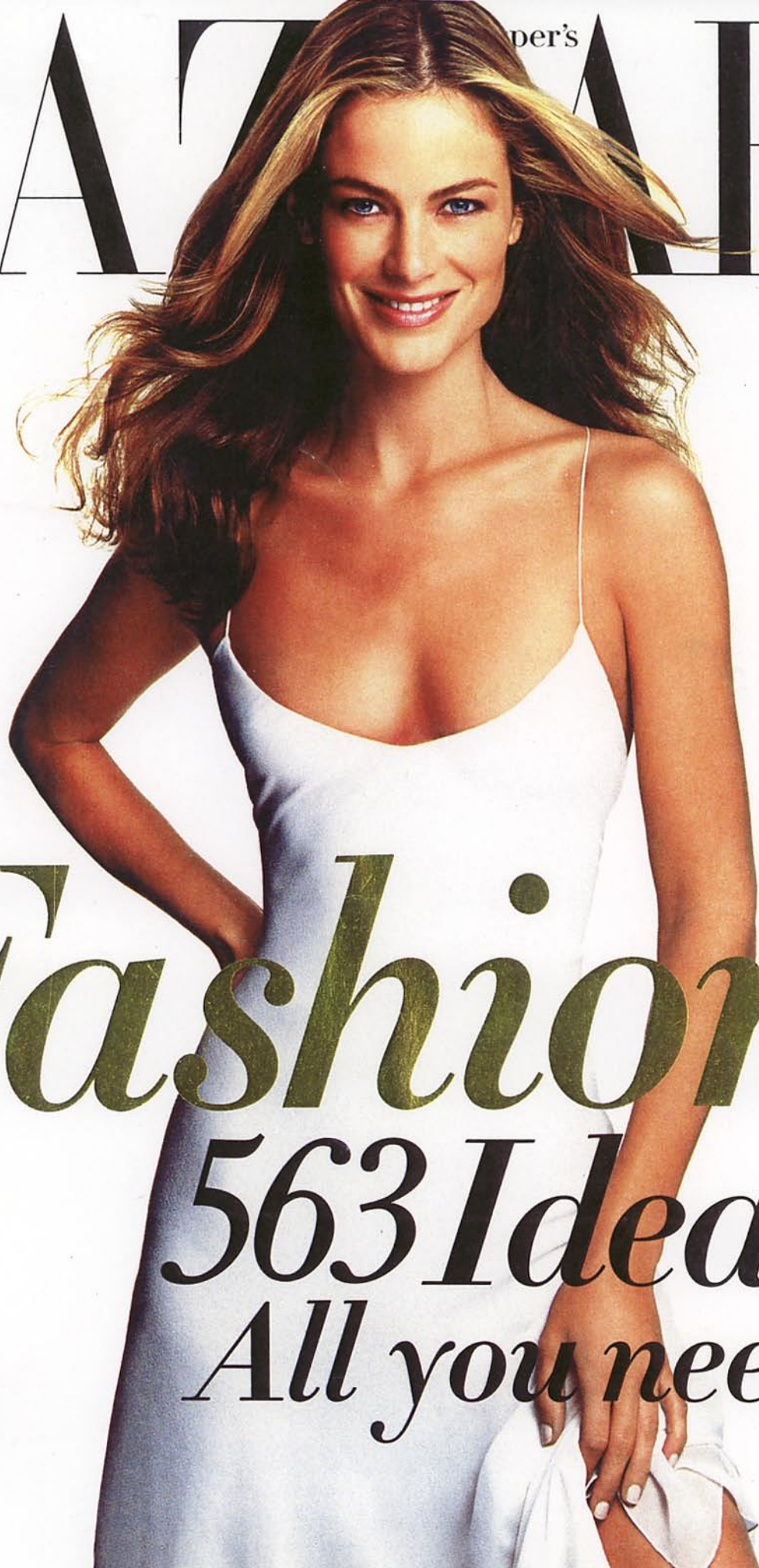


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FORGET THERAPY, GET A PSYCHIC?

Have psychics become the new shrinks? Karen Robinovitz finds out why seeing a fortune-teller is suddenly cool. Photographed by Richard Burbridge

Lauren du Pont, the senior design director at Polo Ralph Lauren women's accessories, considers her psychic part of her family. "My inner network is my husband, my mom, my dad, and my psychic," she says. "My husband has become friends with my psychic; she stays at my house when she's in town; she plays with my 20-month-old daughter and even does readings for her. We do margaritas one day and discuss big decisions the next."

One such decision came a few years ago when du Pont, then single, was having man troubles. "I was in love with someone I hadn't seen or spoken to in two years. I didn't know what to do—call him, pursue him, move on. My psychic told me to hang tight. She said: 'I see a gold ring. He loves you. Be patient and he'll return.'"

Du Pont listened to her guru's advice. Two years later, she bumped into the man again, married him, and had his baby.

"Psychics are today what therapists were in the '90s. It's not just a trend; it's a phenomenon," says Lara Shriftman, a principal of PR firm Harrison & Shriftman, who consults a psychic named Karen Thorne before making certain major business moves. "I supply Karen with the birthdays of people I work with. Then she reads their charts and explains to me the positive ways I can deal with them. She's so good that I gave sessions with her to friends as Christmas gifts."

Admitting you use a psychic to guide you through life may be a bit taboo and still seen by some as New Age-y, yet the trend is rampant—especially in A-list circles. Rumors persist that Calista Flockhart, Courtney Love, and Milla Jovovich consult "readers" (as psychics are sometimes called). ►

TREND TALK

At Warren-Tricomi Salon in Manhattan, there is even a resident fortune-teller who does tarot-card readings for clients. And at the recent star-studded reopening party of Morgans Bar in New York City, all eyes were on Karen Thorne, who held court at a corner table doing astrological readings. When a petite blonde in a Gucci baby-doll dress asked Thorne to tell her when she'd get engaged, the Boston-based clairvoyant, who travels the globe to do readings, said: "This is not about fortune-telling. It's about changing the way you think and see things, so your life is meaningful."

Since there is zero scientific proof that psychic predictions are anything more than educated guesses, the question is: Why is everyone suddenly turning to some kind of higher power for direction?

Alexandra Bellak, a real estate agent at Manhattan's Corcoran Group who sees her psychic weekly, says, "Since September 11, everything is unsure in the world. Meeting with someone who can help me make sense of the future makes me feel more stable. Besides, who doesn't want to believe a psychic when she tells you everything will be okay? And at \$120 per hour, it's the same price as a shrink, only better. Seeing a therapist is a process. It takes a long time to work through each issue. With a psychic, you get instant gratification. You immediately know what to do."

Lynne White, coanchor of the *WB11 Morning News* in New York City, has a more philosophical explanation for the nation's sudden psychic addiction. "It's comforting to understand that there are forces out there greater than yourself," she says. "Forces that make the world go round."

Desiree Gruber, fiancée of Kyle MacLachlan and founder of Full Picture, a PR firm that represents Ian Schrager Hotels, has a slightly different take: "When you have friends who've had success with a psychic, it's appealing to seek the same kind of guidance. It's like seeing a friend's hairstylist."

According to Thorne, psychics "put us on track." One of her clients, an actress, called her weekly during a rough period, when her career was on a downward slope. "I looked at her chart and said that if she could keep at her craft for 10 months, she would make it," Thorne remembers. Ten months later, the client landed a starring role in a weekly NBC drama. Today, the actress calls Thorne religiously before every film audition.

Mandie Erickson, who owns Seventh House Public Relations, a fashion events firm, also hesitates to make a move without first getting input from her psychic Roxanne Uselman. Erickson generally consults Uselman every other day via phone. But because the pair have become "like family," and Erickson no longer has to pay the \$100-plus fee, she occasionally calls her spiritual sage even more often.

Not content to rely on just one clairvoyant, Erickson also reg-

ularly consults psychic Yehuda Berg. Before organizing any parties for work, she finds out from Berg "what is a positive or negative night to hold an event." Erickson has even been known to phone Berg in the middle of the night. "Once, I called him at 3:00 A.M. from Paris because I was nervous about locking down a business deal," she admits. "Yehuda gave me a meditation to do to promote a smooth transaction. The next morning, I found a signed contract waiting for me at the hotel's front desk."

Not surprisingly, women also turn to fortune-tellers for personal reasons. Milly de Cabrol, an interior designer in Manhattan, confesses to calling her psychic as often as once a month for a dose of confidence regarding a variety of issues. "It seems silly, but I'm so afraid of flying that I call my psychic before any flight to ask if I'll be okay," she confesses. "I trust him. Some may say his predictions are just lucky, but he's been right so far—with everything he's foreseen."

Melissa de la Cruz, author of *Cat's Meow*, also puts all of her faith in her psychic, whom she "instant messages" on the Internet—sometimes a few times a day." De la Cruz even went so far as to bring her psychic with her and her fiancé when they looked at possible venues for their upcoming fall wedding reception. "I want it to be in a place that has the right

energy, to ensure a perfect evening and future," she explains. With her psychic's approval, de la Cruz booked a spot in Chelsea that overlooks the water.

Not all clients are 100 percent believers, however. Last year, Karen Lynn, a journalist, met a handsome investment banker and instantly fell for him. She took his photo to her psychic and asked for feedback. "This is it," he said enthusiastically,

before predicting the two would get married and have children. "It was exactly what I wanted to hear," Lynn says. "But just as I started imagining us furniture shopping, the guy told me he didn't want a serious relationship. If I hadn't seen my psychic, I might not have gotten dreamily excited and then been so hurt when the relationship failed." Now, though she still goes to her psychic, she takes what he says "with a grain of salt."

Perhaps Kidada Jones, an actress and daughter of Quincy, has found a happy medium. She typically turns to her psychic once a week, mainly to help her through the mundane things of everyday life. Still, she did once call on her during a "crisis." "I was at the Four Seasons in Maui and one of my diamond earrings went missing," says Jones. "Convinced someone at the hotel had stolen it, I was about to raise hell at the front desk and then I thought, *I'd better call my psychic.*" Her psychic told her the earring was on the bathroom floor. Though Jones had already searched the area, when she inspected it more intensely, she found her flawless rock in a corner by the tub.

Recently, Jones's psychic has been giving her insights about her dog, Penny, a mini dachshund. Apparently, the canine has been extremely bored lately. Perhaps we're onto the next trend—psychics for pets. ■

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