

SoulVision®

M A G A Z I N E

A portrait of Chris Denson, a bald Black man with a wide, joyful smile, wearing a tan suede jacket over a blue and yellow patterned t-shirt. He is standing with his arms crossed against a plain white background.

**Chris Denson Has
an Appetite for
Exploration**

July 2022

Nicholas Powell

COMMUNITY

[participation + relationships + empathy]

| “Our power lies in community.”

This will be short and brief: The U.S. Supreme Court overturning Roe v. Wade is shameful. But this shouldn't be a moment to panic. This is a moment to organize. This is a moment to look to our neighbors and community for support. Reproductive choice is freedom. Reproductive choice is economic security and opportunity. We all can do our part by donating to and giving your time to your [local abortion fund](#), participating in a local protest, calling or emailing your representative in the [Senate](#) and [House](#) and letting your voice be heard, it is supporting organizations like [Black Women's Health Imperative](#). This is not meant to be an exhaustive list, but when we come together, the powers that be are forced to listen.

Nicholas Powell July 2022 (continued)

As creatives and visionaries, we must also work together to make society a better place. We must use our art and platforms to speak about injustices wherever they are and rally our audiences to take direct action, whenever they can. Whether we like to admit it or not, politics is personal.

The creatives and visionaries featured in this month's issue are doing their part. Our cover story, innovative advocate and multimedia host Chris Denson's most recent episode of Work in Progress speaks about the importance of women's sexual health. Relationship expert Love McPherson is teaching couples how to strengthen their love. Creative artist Duane Doku is working directly with and speaking out on mental health through fashion. Su-

san Smallwood is making luxury more inclusive. Author and teacher Nia Nicole is using her book sales to fund her nonprofit for our youth. Boys Home of Virginia is creating a space for boys to be themselves. Chef Jacoby Ponder is bringing families back together. The words of late feminist and intellectual bell hooks inspire us to make a community that is inclusive, fair, and loving. What kind of world do you want to live in? Our power lies in community.

“This is a moment to look to our neighbors and community for support.”

CELEBRITY

Chris Denson Has an Appetite for Exploration



Photos by Luc-Richard

| “I don’t know the rules that you live by, so I break them.”

Chris Denson watched a lot of stand-up when he was younger. He was a latchkey kid and when he returned home from school in the afternoon, he would turn the channel to *Caroline’s Comedy Hour* and *Def Comedy Jam*. He didn’t know it then, but he was enamored with the way the comedians used observation to explain universal experiences like romance, food, or the mundane details of everyday life. “I had a lot of guys and women that I liked in that space. Comedy was something I actually ended up doing for about seven years after I graduated high school,” he says. “So it led me to Los Angeles. It led me to California and it set me off on the path I am on now.”

In the early days of his career, after graduating from Michigan State University with a degree in packaging engineering, Chris worked as an engineer for Daimler-Chrysler. It wasn’t too long before he realized it wasn’t the right fit, so he left to pursue a career in the entertainment industry. His coworkers weren’t so understanding about him leaving. “It was this midwest, ‘I can’t believe you are going to change your life’ type of thing,” he jokes. But his boss’ reaction was different. She had a best friend who lived in Los Angeles and had connections within the industry. While this connection didn’t go as planned, Chris was now in the perfect location to express his creativity.

Chris Denson Has an Appetite for Exploration (continued)



In Los Angeles, Chris made a name for himself as a producer, writer, marketer, and host in the media/entertainment space. He worked for companies like Paramount, BET, Playboy Television, Machinima, and Pluto TV and has partnered with platforms like Art Basel and Fast Company on content creation. But one particular moment stood out for Chris and changed his career trajectory. He got a job with the American Film Institute's Digital Content Lab. He describes it as a "think tank for the marriage between technology and entertainment." He admits that he took the job reluctantly, but it allowed him to find his spark. He was working with some of the top networks, content makers, and video game platforms. He found himself around some of the smartest and most creative thinkers he had ever met. This satisfied his attraction to business ingenuity. "The relationships that I have till this day have come out of trying to think outside of the box and being inspired by what other people are doing and finding some connective tissues," Chris says.

Putting these connective tissues together, Chris launched the podcast *Innovation Crush* in 2014. He describes the podcast as a mix between Fast Company and the Daily Show. It went on for nearly seven years and amassed 750,000 subscribers and inspired a #1 best-selling book on Amazon. "I got to be silly and goofy but also have really smart conversations with some of the best people in the world like Janice Bryant Howroyd, Steve Wozniak, Jean Case, Nolan Bushnell, and a lot of pioneers in their respective industries," he recalls.

"The relationships that I have till this day have come out of trying to think outside of the box and being inspired by what other people are doing and finding some connective tissues."

Looking over his career, Chris feels like 33 is the age when you reconnect with your inner thirteen-year-old. He thinks about his mother who met his dad at 13, got married at 18, and was married for 16 years. At 33, his mother's curiosity resurfaced again. She took belly dancing lessons, eventually taught at colleges, went roller skating, and as an elder, participated in the Senior Olympics as a dancer. Chris calls this curiosity an "appetite for exploration" and this appetite developed in him as well.

However, his "appetite for exploration" came with a sense of otherness. "Along the way you sometimes feel like you don't belong, especially on paper in certain environments," Chris says. In 2020, his 48-hour think tank GovCity was honorably mentioned as a Fast Company World Changing Idea. Chris and Molly Cain, who was director of ventures and innovation for Homeland Security at the time, came together to create a "curated society" between government, business, and community.

At GovCity, Chris found himself working with government agencies, companies, and the Los Angeles and New York City mayor's offices. He had never worked in government, so he wondered how he would fit into all of this. But he

Chris Denson Has an Appetite for Exploration (continued)

used this to his advantage. “I don’t know the rules that you live by, so I break them,” Chris explains. “And to the right teams and individuals that is a very exciting value proposition, but it doesn’t work for everyone. It can be a low percentage of conversion but the ones that do convert, become really amazing opportunities. My confidence came from an ‘I don’t know exactly what you do but I know what I do’ mentality.”



Being an outsider has led Chris to relate to those who move in spaces that are not necessarily thought of with them in mind. Chris’ first celebrity interview for *Innovation Crush* was with rapper and entrepreneur Chamillionaire. They discussed Chamillionaire’s “graduation” from hip hop to business. He was the first entrepreneur-in-residence at Upfront Venture in Los Angeles. He was one of the earlier investors of Maker Studios and is an owner of a host of car lots and beauty salons. Chamillionaire

explained to Chris how there was a public perception that he fell off career-wise. But Chamillionaire simply pivoted in a new direction. “This kind of response happens when you evolve and innovate,” Chris says. “Which is something we all want to do. We all have some aspiration that doesn’t necessarily align with what our past history may indicate.”

In Chris’ many interviews, there is always a lesson to be learned. A lesson he and his audience can take with them. He recalls his interview with author, mentor, and criminal justice advocate Shaka Senghor, a fellow Detroiter. At the age of 19, Shaka Senghor was convicted of second-degree murder. Turning his life around, his story of spiritual redemption has led to him becoming a *New York Times* best-selling author, calling Oprah a best friend, and talks at universities to tell his story about ways to fix our criminal justice system.

“You are not going to be the same person you are tomorrow as you were ten years ago, five years ago, or sometimes even last week.”

“We have sons that are around the same age. And come to find out he lives around the corner from me,” Chris says. “He was saying as a parent, there is a generational difference between us and our kids. In today’s culture, kids are exposed to so much all of the time. And so they have different entry points. I even picked up on a lesson on how to be a better Dad by chatting with Shaka. In his case, he is applying the fatherly wisdom he didn’t have with his older son to his younger one, age 9, because he was in prison for most of his older son’s life. I have an older child and I have a younger child. I think about what I would do differently and how I can show up differently and still make an impact. How do I abandon my own beliefs? What have we unconsciously agreed to as an operating system for ourselves that may not fit or work in today’s society and who you are as a person?”

Chris jokingly advises young people who want to work within media and entertainment to not do it. In all seri-

Chris Denson Has an Appetite for Exploration (continued)

ousness, he advises young people to be smart with their money because when starting out, they will hear a lot of no's that can set them back financially. "There is a lot of waiting and hurrying up and waiting," Chris explains, "No matter your craft or skill level or whether you are in development or in front of or behind the camera, creative projects come and go. I've worked on pilots of shows that didn't go anywhere. I worked on seasons of programs that suddenly ended. You have to make sure that you are being smart about this kind of thing."



Chris admits that the entertainment industry is subjective when it comes to what content gets the green light and what doesn't. "I've gone through multiple bouts of imposter syndrome and the need to reconcile and be very deliberate in how I want to show up," he explains. "Because you can get lost in someone else's expectations or some-

one else's feedback. Feedback is great. You have to learn how to be able to adjust, but you also have to do what feels right for you, in the end, no matter what feedback or response you get from the industry."

But he also wants young people to be open to change. "You are not going to be the same person you are tomorrow as you were ten years ago, five years ago, or sometimes even last week," Chris says. "Your appetite or approach might change. Emotional intelligence is not as often addressed as it should be."

"I really get inspired by people who don't have any business doing what they are doing and they do it anyway."

With a new season of the video series [The Work In Progress](#) with Fast Company now available to watch, Chris is proud of the work that he has done. "We had a bunch of really great guests from the CEO of PayPal and celebs like Taraji P. Henson to a bunch of really great folks at Nike and so on and so forth," he says. "We went into production in February and I am excited about it."

Earlier this year, Chris interviewed former professional baseball player Micah Johnson. After retiring from professional baseball in 2018, Micah pursued a career as an artist. After learning about how to sell his art as an NFT from a patron who bought one of his first art pieces, Micah created and sold the NFT *Aku*, a Black boy in an astronaut helmet, to inspire kids to dream big. In 2021, *Aku* was the first NFT to be optioned for TV and film. In a way, Micah Johnson is the epitome of why Chris does what he does. "How do you keep learning and keep evolving and finding new passions?" he asks rhetorically. "Yes, there are pioneers of the industry. But I really get inspired by people who don't have any business doing what they are doing and they do it anyway."

To learn more about Chris Denson, visit his [website](#) and follow him on [Instagram](#) and [Twitter](#).

Love McPherson's Relationship Wisdom



Photos by Blake Martin

| “I want my clients to achieve their relationship goals.”

Love McPherson is constantly asked if her real name is Love. She is a certified marriage counselor and relationship expert, so she understands why they ask. Her parents were married for 60 years and her mother named her Love because of the love she had for her father. With 26 years in the clinical field, Love borrowed her parents' relationship wisdom to help couples do the work needed to have the kind of love her parents had. “Now that I have been married for 39 years to my college sweetheart, I appreciate much more the work they did to retain their love over decades and why they gave me that name,” she says. “I like to say that I was born for this.”

Love McPherson's Relationship Wisdom (continued)



Love says 2022 has been a great year for her. She launched three new group programs to great success: *The Couples' Sauna*, *The Dating Gym*, and *The Inner Workout*. Because of the drastic effects COVID had on relationships and people's mental health, demand for her services has tripled. At the time, Love couldn't keep up and was forced to close her schedule to new clients in 2020. Her waiting list has over 1000 people. "In August, I will take an entire month off to recharge," Love says. "I will practice self-care, travel, and come back healthier and more in love with myself. My calendar will open up again for the first time since 2020. Nothing has more soul than me practicing what I preach to others."

Following her sabbatical, Love will begin offering her *Couples* and *Individual Relationship* sessions. In 2023, she will offer more of her *Group* programs and *MasterClass* classes. "Also, keep a look out for our life-transforming Love and Relationship Conference 2023," she says. "It will be an experience like nothing you have ever had before."

To learn more about Love McPherson, visit her [website](#) and follow her on [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#).

BUSINESS

Susan Smallwood Is Changing the Complexion of Luxury



Photo by Phelan Marc

| “Redefine the rules.”

Two years ago, Susan Smallwood was interested in hosting her Champagne x Caviar event at a new caviar lounge that was opening in Ft. Lauderdale. The general manager of the lounge introduced Susan to the owner’s grandson, who was open to the idea of her hosting her event there. But when Susan began looking for images to market and promote the event, she had a hard time finding images of people of color enjoying caviar. In her own turn of a phrase, it was time to “change the complexion.”

Susan knew her business would benefit from becoming an affiliate of a strong caviar brand, so she reached out to a caviar purveyor. “After investing thousands of dollars purchasing caviar from a particular purveyor, they finally answered my emails and took me seriously. Prior to that, I had been ignored for months,” Susan recalls.

When Susan visited DC to present her caviar brand affiliation, things changed when two men encouraged her to venture out on her own. “Two gentlemen said ‘Susan, why are you advertising their brand? Start your own caviar brand,’” Susan recalls. “At first I had trepidations, but as an entrepreneur, I’m a risk-taker. I then consulted with a caviar purveyor that had a caviar plant in the US and in Belgium.” A match was made. Susan would go on to call her brand La Grande Caviar, becoming the first woman of color to own a premium quality caviar brand.

Susan Smallwood Is Changing the Complexion of Luxury (continued)



Photo by Phelan Marc

With La Grande Caviar, Susan is the first woman of color to own a premium quality caviar brand. Photos by Dante Byrd.

Along with La Grande Caviar, Susan is the owner of Grandiosity Events. “Our mission is to bring cultures together for grand experiences, exposure, and education through entertainment and philanthropy in our community,” Susan says. On September 24, 2022, Susan will be celebrating Grandiosity Events’ 6th annual *Celebrity Charity Polo x Jazz* event. The charity event will benefit

the Black Mental Health Alliance and will be hosted by actress LisaRaye. “She will be celebrating her 55th birthday in grand style and so will I! The event will celebrate 110 years of collective wisdom and beauty on the same stage,” Susan says.

To learn more about Susan Smallwood, follow her on [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#). To learn more about La Grande Caviar, visit their [website](#). To learn more about Grandiosity Events, visit their [website](#).

Duane Doku Defies Expectations



Photo courtesy of Duane Doku

| “I’m pushing the societal norm to reconsider what is dope.”

Duane Doku is a creative artist born and raised in Alexandria, Virginia. He is a graduate of Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) with a degree in fine arts. He’s been drawing since he was 3 years old. “My craft consists of concept design, illustration, product development as well as branding,” he says. “My main influences are Michelangelo, Daniel Sprick, and Kanye West.”

He is currently working on an apparel design/brand called The Sad Boy Saga, based in Atlanta, Georgia, and is a “fashion platform for mental health awareness.” “This is one of the avenues of my craft that I considered to be loud, experimental, and just ‘me,’” Duane says. “The concept and drive behind the brand itself is creating a fresh feel to streetwear and fashion in its entirety and pushes societal norms to reconsider what is dope.”

Along with creating for himself, Duane is the art director for The Spot, a multi-purpose creative studio, located in the Arts District of Richmond, Virginia. He finds the creative community to be supportive and collaborative. “I appreciate the cohesive and diverse culture circulating the city,” Duane says. “You can tell there’s a strong sense of unity down here.”

Giving back to the community is important to Duane. He was a program lead at ART 180, a Richmond-based nonprofit that provides a space for youth to find their voices through creativity. After his participation with ART 180, Duane has continued to mentor youth and participates in community service of his own. “My work with ART 180 was an absolute blessing,” he says. “The organization not only opened countless doors for me but also gave me the opportunity to engage and guide the youth through the various forms of community service and outreach and provide forms of self-advocacy for temperament and communication through art. I’m grateful to have met some amazing people along the way.”

To learn more about Duane Doku, follow him on [Instagram](#).

Duane Doku Defies Expectations (continued)



Marvin Gaye – Illustrative Piece for Utmost Co.



Exhibit C



Model wearing The Sad Boy Saga Forbidden Feelings hoodie. Photo by Atlanta Streetwear Market.



(From left) Models are wearing the following apparel/brands: The Spot RVA's Original Players Sade Tee, Selah Studios/Art by Doku's Erykah Badu hoodie, [insert name]'s Black Queen's Tee, The Spot RVA's Black Original Players Sade Tee. Photo by Creative Beauty Photography.

Nia Nicole Presses Towards Her Purpose



Pressing Through to My Purpose (Covenant Books, Inc.). Photos by JNM Creative Agency.

! “I believe that everyone’s misery is their ministry.”

Nia Nicole is a mother, 5th-grade math teacher, entrepreneur, and author. She believes everyone has at least one book in them. Her debut book *Pressing Through to My Purpose* details the painful yet unique journey that led her to discover her purpose. “I started writing *Pressing Through to My Purpose* as a release from everything I was going through,” Nia says. “While reading through my journal I thought that my story could help someone else who is going through similar situations, to let them know, hey, you are not alone, and you can get through this.”

In *Pressing Through to My Purpose*, Nia writes about her unique journey as an educator, being a victim of stalking, and dealing with depression and panic attacks—which was new for her. “I am very transparent in my book because I believe that everyone’s misery is their ministry,” she explains. “After reading my book, I want people to have the will to put their trust in the Lord.”

Nia Nicole Presses Towards Her Purpose (continued)



Nia will use a portion of her book sales to help launch her nonprofit We Build Up, Inc., a program that inspires K-12 youth to become future leaders. “While in the classroom I saw a need to expose our kids to culture and the arts, etiquette, and social-emotional learning,” she says. “I want to show our kids that they can make a difference now through various service learning projects. I am looking forward to creating exciting opportunities for our future leaders.”

To learn more about Nia Nicole, visit her [website](#) and follow her on [Instagram](#).



CHEF'S CORNER

Chef Jacoby Ponder



Photo by Keith Saunders

“This recipe is one of my favorites to make. The very slow and safe process called ‘dry aging’ creates a flavor that brings forth the true beefy flavor of ribeye. To match the boldness of the beef, I created a delicious wild mushroom sauce.”

Pan-Seared Aged Bone-In Ribeye w/ Sauce Forestiere

Course: Dinner

Cuisine: American

Prep Time: 3 – 7 days for aging process (1-hour prep time)

Cook Time: 15 – 20 mins

Total Time: 1 hour 35 minutes

Serving Size: 2-3

Ingredients

Ribeye

- 2 large aged bone-in ribeye steak
- 3 tbsp kosher salt and freshly cracked black pepper
- 1/4 cup Smokey Mesquite Emblem Olive Oil
- 3 tablespoons unsalted butter
- 6 sprigs of thyme or rosemary (diced and combined)
- 1/2 cup finely diced shallots

Sauce

- 1/4 pound wild mushrooms
- 1/4 pound fresh mushrooms
- Salt to taste if desired
- 1 tablespoon butter
- 3/4 cup heavy cream
- Freshly ground pepper to taste
- 1/8 teaspoon cayenne pepper

Preparation

Ribeye

1. Be sure to blot the steak dry with paper towels.
2. Season very well on both sides, including edges, with salt and pepper.
3. Allow steak to rest at room temperature for 60 minutes, or refrigerated, loosely covered for up to 2 days.



Photo by Joshie Photos

To learn more about Chef Jacoby Ponder, watch him on [YouTube](#) and follow him on [Instagram](#).

Chef Jacoby Ponder (continued)

4. In a large heavy-bottomed cast-iron skillet, heat olive oil and butter to high heat until just beginning to smoke.
5. Place dry steak to pan and sear, until golden-brown crust starts to develop, about 3-4 minutes total.
6. Add remaining butter, herbs, and shallot to skillet and continue to cook. Baste steak with herb and butter mixture. If butter begins to smoke excessively or steak begins to burn, reduce heat to medium.
7. To baste, tilt the pan slightly to a 45-degree angle so that butter collects by the handle.
8. Use a spoon to toss the butter and pour it over the steak.
9. Continue basting until an instant-read thermometer inserted into the thickest part of the tenderloin side registers 120 to 125°F (for medium-rare or 130°F)
10. Immediately transfer steak to a plate and allow steak to rest for 5 to 10 minutes.

Sauce

1. Melt butter in a saucepan and add mushrooms, until mushrooms become tender.
2. Add heavy cream, salt, pepper, and cayenne pepper. Let simmer for 5 minutes. Serve with roast meats.

COMMUNITY

Boys Home of Virginia Plants Seeds for a Lifetime



Linda Angle has been on staff since 2011 and assumed the role of farm manager for Boys Home of Virginia in 2021. She initiated a community garden in April 2022. Photos by Laura Robertson

“[We] want the garden and the surrounding area to be a place where staff and students gather to share a meal, sit and talk and have a moment of serenity.”

By Laura Robertson

Boys Home of Virginia is situated on 1,400 acres of land in Covington, Virginia. The property features rolling mountains and a beautiful creek, creating a haven for all who visit or call it home. This non-profit organization originated in 1906, serving at-risk male youth. The mission is simple: help each student become a productive and successful member of society. Upon arrival, each young man is welcomed into a mission-driven, nurturing community of staff and students.

Boys Home of Virginia Plants Seeds for a Lifetime (continued)



Linda Angle has been on staff since 2011 and assumed the role of farm manager in 2021. She initiated a community garden in April 2022. She wanted to actively involve students from the concept of the gardening project to the execution. Students assisted with measuring and building plant beds, selecting which vegetables to grow, planting the vegetables and now maintaining the plants. The project incorporated several lessons for the students, beginning with the elements it takes to build and maintain a successful garden. In addition, Linda wanted to teach the students the importance of sustainability. The students are growing onions, carrots, tomatoes, green beans, potatoes, squash, zucchini, and bell peppers. Many of the vegetables grown will be used by the dining hall staff to prepare meals for the students and staff. Linda stated, “It is incredible to watch the students’ excitement as they see their hard work grow. They take pride in their effort and the results.”



Linda would eventually like to take a group of students to the farmer’s market with the garden’s vegetables. Linda stated, “It would be a valuable lesson for the students to see the process of growing and selling produce.” Her last objective expresses her compassion for the Boys Home community. “I want the garden and the surrounding area to be a place where staff and students gather to share a meal, sit and talk and have a moment of serenity. It is about so much more than just a garden. I am planting seeds for a lifetime.”



To learn more about Boys Home of Virginia, follow us on [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#). To make an online donation, please use this [link](#). For a donation via a check, send a check to Boys Home of Virginia, 414 Boys Home Road, Covington, VA 24426.

LEGENDS

bell hooks



Photo courtesy of The Bell Hooks Institute

The words of feminist, cultural critic and intellectual bell hooks have the power to stick with you. Her words touched and healed generations of women and men. In her more than 30 published works, she discussed the intersections between gender, race, love, capitalism, and class, and made her perspective accessible to a general audience. She gave Black women a voice and helped us all understand how the personal is political. Born Gloria Jean Watkins in the segregated town of Hopkinsville, Kentucky, bell's upbringing informed her work. Under the watch of white supremacy, bell found hope and support in her community. The pen name bell hooks honored her great-grandmother, Bell Blair Hooks. bell lowercased her name so that the public would focus on her work and not herself.

bell graduated from Stanford University with a degree in English in 1973, earned a master's degree in English at the University of Wisconsin in 1976, and earned her doctorate in literature at the University of California-Santa Cruz in 1983. She would go on to teach at the University of Southern California, Stanford University, Yale, and Berea College in Kentucky, where the bell hooks center is housed. In December of 2021, she passed away at the age of 69. bell's works like *Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism*, *The Will to Change: Men, Masculinity, and Love*, and *Feminism Is For Everybody*, helped readers think critically about how their personal and public history affected their lives.

No matter your background, reading bell hooks is liberation from the systems that hold us down. It is liberation from past traumas. It is liberation that tells us we have the power to change our communities and the world around us.

“Dominator culture has tried to keep us all afraid, to make us choose safety instead of risk, sameness instead of diversity. Moving through that fear, finding out what connects us, revelling in our differences; this is the process that brings us closer, that gives us a world of shared values, of meaningful community.” – bell hooks