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to a brilliant  
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of living!”  
—Oprah**

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MAGAZI

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# Sea Change

Colleen Flanigan's underwater sculptures help bring the ocean's dying reefs back to life.



"GROWING UP IN Monterey, California, I marveled at corals' natural beauty," says artist, metalsmith, and lifelong ocean lover Colleen Flanigan, 43. "They seem so magical—it's beyond anything you could make." But in 2003, at a sustainable architecture conference, she heard news that crushed her: The world's coral reefs—the most diverse of marine ecosystems, which roughly a quarter of the ocean's species depend on—were dying from climate change, pollution, overfishing, and tourism. (It's estimated that most will be threatened by 2050.)

But the news wasn't all bad. At the conference, Flanigan also learned about a promising solution to reverse corals' fate: the Biorock process, a method that uses metal frames and low-voltage electric currents to raise the pH level of seawater, which helps generate coral nurseries. (Biorock corals have been found to better withstand environmental stressors than naturally occurring ones.) "I *had* to create with this material," Flanigan says. "It was a way to use my background in metalwork and make living art that could help save corals." To install her sculptures underwater, she first needed to learn to scuba dive. "It was terrifying—and freezing," she says. "But I had to override my fear."

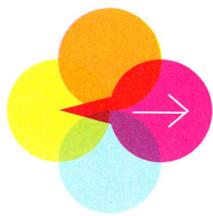
The next year, Flanigan headed to the Bali Sea for her first project. After constructing and welding the



Clockwise from top: Flanigan welding her latest sculpture in Cancún, 2011; a three-year-old Biorock coral nursery; the first project Flanigan installed, in Bali.

steel structure (*left*) on land, she and fellow team members suited up, attached floats to the sculpture, and swam out with it to the reef; then they removed the floats and submerged the piece 20 feet below the surface to the seafloor. Over the next week, Flanigan spent hours underwater wiring baby coral fragments to the steel, where, once electrified, they would grow more rapidly. "I was high on adrenaline," she says. "I didn't want to get out of the water!" A decade later, her Bali project is part of the largest coral nursery of its kind—nearly 1,000 feet long.

Today the TED senior fellow is awaiting the final permits to install her most ambitious piece yet, for the Cancún Underwater Museum: a 15-foot sculpture inspired by DNA helices that will become part of the seriously endangered Mesoamerican Reef. "People always say it's too late for corals," Flanigan says. "Not if I can help it!" —DIANA RICO



# Contributors

## Free to Be...

Five of the creative minds behind this month's issue talk about getting unstuck.



### CRISTIN WOOD

Health coach,  
"They're Incremental"  
page 106



*For years I couldn't figure out how to... love myself. I was too concerned with what others thought about me. **But then one day...** I realized most of those people won't show up at my funeral. They don't let me control their lives, so why should I let them control mine? **When I need a creative breakthrough, I...** unplug, pray, and run. No devices—just me and a conversation with my Maker. **I hope my next aha moment will help me...** inspire others experiencing what I've been through. I was insecure, but once I learned self-love, it was easier to love others.*



### VIVIAN HOWARD

Chef, "Way to Grow"  
page 119



*For years I couldn't figure out how to... trust my restaurant staff to make decisions. **But then one day...** I was unexpectedly put on bed rest while pregnant with my twins. I tried to micromanage via phone and e-mail until I became too exhausted. When I returned, everything was great—I should have trusted their judgment all along. **When I need a creative breakthrough, I...** go to bed early and wake up a few hours before anyone else in my house so I can have some quiet. **I hope my next aha moment will help me...** relax.*



### NAOMI BARR

Writer, "Sometimes You Have to Fail—Hard—to Figure Things Out"  
page 101



*For years I couldn't figure out how to... say no. I never wanted to disappoint anyone. **But then one day...** a friend pointed out there is power in saying no. By acknowledging what I don't want, I'm stating what I do want. **When I need a creative breakthrough, I...** go for a walk. Movement stimulates thoughts that stay stuck in my head when I'm sitting at my computer. **I hope my next aha moment will help me...** figure out how to decorate better. I read fabulous design blogs, yet my home always looks like I just moved my couch from one wall to another.*



### DIANA RICO

Writer, "Sea Change"  
page 36



*For years I couldn't figure out how to... get my unathletic body to do what I wanted it to do. I was the classic bookish, wimpy kid. **But then one day...** I took a modern jazz dance class. I was astonished to discover that there's something called "technique" that's learnable. **When I need a creative breakthrough, I...** plant my feet on the red earth outside my New Mexico home, get very still, and soak in the energy of the mountains. **I hope my next aha moment will help me...** master a beautiful *molinete*, a complicated grapevine step in Argentine tango.*



### THERESA WILLIAMSON, MD

Writer, "Call the Shots on Your Own Care"  
page 83



*For years I couldn't figure out how to... combine my passions for healthcare, neuroscience, and community service into one career. **But then one day...** I realized I could work in neurosurgery, travel to promote health and wellness to people in need, and write articles to share patients' stories. **When I need a creative breakthrough, I...** pick up paper and pencil (no computer!) and write furiously about whatever comes to mind. **I hope my next aha moment will help me...** impact the lives of others in a small but lasting way.*